

Frimley Lodge Park, Mytchett Heath and Basingstoke Canal

A nice park, plenty of canalside walking, heathland, mature mainly conifer woodland and a great view point!

Start at Frimley Lodge Park at GU16 6HY. From the car park head for the pavilion/café and in front, turn right and follow the wide path past the buildings and the children's play park. Continue across the grass area and take the left-hand option as the path splits when you approach the road. Continue on this path as it winds gently through the woodland, past some trim trail equipment and into the grass field beyond. Keep to the right hand path by the side of the grass area, which can be unmown at times to encourage the wildflowers, and after a while, keeping right enter the next area of woodland. You are now sandwiched between the Frimley/Aldershot railway line and the canal which is beyond the trees.

Keep right and when the track turns left to the canal bank follow that turning right or continue on a less defined, less busy track to the right. Either way you will end up on the canal bank. In the distance you should see the footbridge across to the Canal Centre and café. Cross the bridge and go straight ahead into the car park in front of you. If the footbridge is closed you will need to walk on to the road bridge, go up the steps, turn left and walk down to the road entrance to the Canal Centre. Turn left, then pass the buildings until you reach the dirt car park where you turn right and join the route from the footbridge.

At the top of the car park you enter a gate into military land which at the time of writing is always open (public access to MoD land is under review). Of the four tracks facing you take the second from the left. This soon passes over another wide track and then another where you continue straight on angling slightly to the right but not up the hill. Follow this path through the woodland until it meets yet another big track crossing your path. Continue across keeping to the right of the woodland but aiming into the open heath.

This heathland appears to be regenerating and while not of the highest quality is still attractive in season. August to October should see the best blooming of the heather and the ferns are changing colour to make a colourful scene. Stay on the path through the middle ignoring cross tracks. You pass a lone Douglas Fir on your left, then in front of you is a steep but very short hill full of gorse flowering nicely in spring. This is worth a climb on the wide track just for the great view from the top back across the heath and for many miles to the west. (At dusk this is a great place to view the sunset and Nightjars can be heard nearby in summer). Turn left at the top following the wide track down the hill. (If you don't fancy climbing the small hill you can follow the path to your left at the bottom of the hill and then turn right and left where you join the track from the top).

Now don't follow the wide track around to the left but go slightly right on the narrower path up the hill. Soon you meet a wider track, turn right and follow this to a T junction where you turn left. At the next junction keep right and you should see some gates crossing the rough trail of Old Guildford Road. Cross here and stay on the main track heading slightly left. In

this area, through pine woodland, at all times of the year you are likely to be accompanied by the sounds of goldcrests, coal tits, nuthatches and treecreepers. All but nuthatches will test the hearing of those with less than optimal aural capabilities!

You meet a T junction where you go left and follow this for a while, keeping right at the fork with a left turn. You will now start to head downhill and meet a nice open area of mixed heath on the right. This is good for heath plants, butterflies and insects and worthy of a short exploration. Keeping on the same path you go over the crossroad and rise through the next section of forest. From the top the path drops down winding towards the road with some nice grassy areas making this an attractive stretch. Butterflies and small meadow flowers will be visible in summer.

You now come to the only road you need to cross known as Gapemouth Road. This is one of the better points where you can cross safely but take care! Head to the right of the gate on the other side to avoid a ditch! This nice path now drops down through woodland to the railway bridge that serves a couple of properties on the other side. Cross the bridge, enter the gate and follow the tarmac roadway or the grass as you please, the public footpath is not defined. The right-hand side of the drive has been planted with loads of bamboo, sadly no pandas live here! On the left is a path to another small patch of heather and gorse on a small hill where butterflies and bees are busy in the summer months. Chiffchaffs call and sing here for many months of the year. If you take this hill route carry on and rejoin the driveway at the end of your small diversion. Otherwise just carry on using the tarmac drive.

There is a rather formal, manicured garden in the house to the right, worth a look from the drive. Carry on along the drive until you reach a bungalow and gate where you turn right down the hill past an ash tree and find a short footpath down the hill to the canal towpath. Don't run down here! On the right a very small diversion, will be Frimley Lock, a place for Grey Wagtails and possible Kingfishers and you can rest on the lock gates and maybe see birds on the Lock Cottage feeders. But you will be turning left along the towpath from the bottom of the footpath. Now the walk is all along the canal towpath. The first mile is straight and has wildflowers, blackberries in season and a nice view of the attractive mainly beech woodland on the other side.

You pass under Deepcut Bridge carrying on along a section that is lined with a lot of holly and can be a bit muddy after a lot of rain. In summer it's fine. You pass the rather sad sight of fenced off Wharfenden Lake on the right and carry on until you meet a driveway and the aqueduct over the railway. Go either right on the narrow path or stay on the drive until you get to Frimley Green Bridge where a right turn takes you down to the Harvester pub but cross here and take the path on the left back to the canal bank. Here you should always find ducks and geese, coots and moorhens as people from the park often feed them.

Take the first path on your right and follow it back to the Frimley Lodge Park pavilion where a cup of tea, ice cream or other reward may await!