

Barley Mow, Dogmersfield and Tundry Pond

A favourite walk, varied farmland, woodland, Tundry Pond's birds and some of the best of the Basingstoke Canal

Start at the Sprat's Hatch Lane canal car park. Nearest Postcode RG27 8ZZ. Alternatively, book yourself in for lunch or dinner at The Barley Mow across the road and ask to use their car park. Leave the canal car park, cross The Hurst and turn into Pale Lane in front of The Barley Mow. At the first bend take the footpath through the gate on the right and pass through the fields of grazing horses. In late summer there will be Starlings and Jackdaws in the fields, earlier in the year probably Pied Wagtails picking flies off the ground.

This path follows the fields and then passes into woodland. There's a stile but by bearing right you can pass it without climbing. Nice old oaks here and a field on the left is devoted to solar power with panels covering it. After this nice belt of mainly oak trees with good understory the path appears to divide but a sign tells you to go right (or not to go left!) Follow the right-hand path through young woodland with field maple, ash, and oak. Hawthorn, holly and trees clad in ivy are in the hedgerow. Lots of birdlife here if you listen and watch.

Passing the young woodland skirt the field where wildflowers bloom in summer and follow the footpath signs slightly to the left. Then right over a ditch. And follow the sign through the middle of more young plantations of native trees, again wildflowers appear on the ride edges. Next you see a gate in front of you, go through and turn sharp right along the field edge. Livestock may be grazing here. At the end of this path you meet a stile and track with an old thatched barn with a cart ahead, where you turn left. Go over the stream and turn right in front of the gate.

Follow this small stream now on a narrow path with a few roots and branches to contend with. You emerge onto a minor road into Dogmersfield and turn left and immediately right down a farm track. Follow this passing left in front of the bungalow past a vehicle graveyard! The path then turns left in front of a container and through a field gate. This paddock, at the gate, has historically been a quagmire but in recent times it has had a lot of material added to make passage easier. The path crosses the paddock to a stile visible on the other side. Climb the stile and follow the fence line past more horse fields to Crondall Road in front of the impressive Grade II listed Brook House with its Dutch gable.

Turn right here keeping close to the edge as it's a fairly busy narrow road. You pass an amazing number of properties with the word 'brook' appearing in their names! Go over a small level bridge and turn right along the driveway with a footpath sign. The footpath passes to the left of the house at the end and you use a footbridge through the hedgerow to enter a field with a large dead oak proudly standing and providing food for birds, insects, fungi and other nature. The obvious path goes right into an arable field. Keep to the right hand edge until the field edge turns to the right. The path then goes left across the field – see the angle of the footpath sign. Here you would hope to see and hear skylarks in spring

and summer. You are also likely to see buzzards, red kites and crows plus possibly, hear a raven 'croaking' nearby.

On the other side of the field the path is obvious as you drop down, through a piece of woodland with the sound of birds and goldcrests, siskin and redpolls likely in winter. You cross a sleeper bridge and follow the path right up between two houses. Just after the driveway of the house on the right look left and you'll see what we call 'Heather's gate' in the hedgerow. Cross the field to the right and another 'Heather's gate'. (Heather complained about the state of the previous stiles and they were replaced due to her determined efforts.) Cross the track and another stile is the next obstacle.

Follow the narrow path around the edge of field and woodland until it exits into the field and clearly crosses the middle again. More skylarks should be here. On the other side at a gate and log, cross the road carefully and take the path to the right of the drive. This leads onto a track betwixt hedgerow and woodland. This track also has a lot of birdsong as it bends left and up over the first Basingstoke Canal bridge.

Now drop down to the gate to The Dower Estate. Enter here, turn right and head to Tundry Pond. There is a lot of nature to deal with here! The water will have birds at all times of the year, expect geese, ducks like tufted, mallard, gadwall, great crested grebes, coot, moorhens, grey herons and cormorants (often on the big trees). There are plenty of flowers and insects like butterflies and grasshoppers in season. Altogether a very pleasant place.

Follow the edge of the Pond towards the left-hand bridge and turn left here through the gate. Take this roadway about a hundred meters and turn right along another roadway. Apart from some impressive cattle in the fields the birdlife can be good and linnets and goldfinches may well be seen. At the gates ahead take the path to the right along which there is some land apparently given over to wildflower meadow and worth stopping to look. At the end drop down to the road, turn left and follow the track around to the right and the path to another canal bridge. Go over and turn right to join the towpath.

The towpath here is a lovely peaceful stretch of the canal again with a rich plant and flower border. Children will want to spot the horse statue in a garden opposite. Finally, the towpath takes you to the attractive Barley Mow bridge and your car park having earned at least a rest or refreshments across the road at The Barley Mow.