Lakeside, Hollybush and Camp Farm Step by Step

You can start anywhere but there is free parking available at Lakeside Nature Reserve, Ash so that's where these instructions commence.

Walk through the children's play area heading to the right side (save the play until you return!). This path and all side paths eventually reach the Blackwater Valley path and either some ponds or the river which is very small here. Turn right along the path.

You will reach the road soon but instead use the small footbridge on the left, and a short way along, after the bridge, cross the road and enter Hollybush and a tarmac track. You will soon find a measure of quiet and a nice wild area on both sides with plenty of blackberries in late summer to collect for pies or maybe some bramble Jelly! You will find Warblers here, Blackcaps, Garden Warblers, Chiffchaffs amongst them.

You have a choice here,  follow the Blackwater Valley Path sign to the left along the pleasant river side path or continue straight on, off the tarmac track, into a wildflower meadow full of flowers, butterflies and bees. Following the main track slightly right in the meadow you will soon enter the scrub area and meet the Blackwater Valley Path at the footbridge (see picture above).

Cross the footbridge and head straight up the hill onto Hollybush Hill. Here, if you're lucky, in June or July you may find bee orchids in flower. It's worth a search around the small hill. Following the path over the hill takes you to a footbridge over the A331.

Crossing the bridge follow the main permissive path through some mixed woodland full of birdsong and a few hundred metres later emerge into a car park for the Connaught Centre, a military service building. Turn left and after passing the end of the Centre building, turn left along Alanbrooke Road.

Follow Alanbrooke Road until it becomes Camp Farm Road and soon, on the left, you will see a signboard for Camp Farm SANGS. Enter here and follow the sign posts for the Sycamore trail (red colour) around the lake. This is a good place to stop for a break, there is a nice picnic area after you've walked about three-quarters of the way around.

Return to the road and cross to the other side. Take the first opportunity to step up onto the Canal towpath which runs parallel to the road. The bullrushes and waterside vegetation is interesting holding many butterflies and pollinating insects on a variety flowers.

You pass Ash Lock and can go down the steps to avoid having to cross the road. Continue along the canal towpath until the brightly painted A331 bridge and follow the signs for the Blackwater Valley path. When you have descended the slope you will see you have returned to Lakeside Nature Reserve. Take the first path on your right opposite a pond, and soon you will emerge at the play area and car park.

If you still have some energy the lake area is interesting with a phragmites reedbed that holds Reed Warblers in Summer, possibly Water Rail in winter.