

Frensham and Dockenfield – 7.4 miles of great countryside

A walk with just about everything! Ponds, river, ridges, views, fields and some beautiful heathland. Dogs must be kept under close control on all the heathland areas that are part of the Special Protection Area for wildlife.

I will start these directions from the main National Trust Car park at Frensham but you can see multiple possible parking options on the map. My personal preference is to get permission from the Bluebell Inn, Batt's Corner, Dockenfield GU10 4EX (01252 792801) and stop there for lunch or after an afternoon walk for a drink or meal.

From the main Great Pond car park at Frensham walk down towards the water's edge and turn right along any convenient path. Follow the water's edge as best you can, as far as you can. There will be some views across Frensham Great Pond, a few little patches of phragmites reeds and over to your right some heathland managed for sand lizards, one of our rarest reptiles. The path gets a bit more enclosed as you walk along and watch for butterflies, dragonflies and birds all the way.

You will reach the road, take great care turn left and take a short walk to a footpath just before some railings on the right-hand side. Turn right onto the footpath. Follow this now past a pond with geese, ducks and moorhens, possibly a heron and soon you'll find yourself alongside the beautiful river Wey. This is sheltered by lovely old alder trees but on the right are some lovely oaks and a fern covered hillside. This path follows the meandering river, look for grey wagtails and kingfisher and many other birds like blackcaps, chiffchaffs and nuthatches. You will see a bridge across the river with a footpath sign – ignore it and carry on along the river bank. At the end of this lovely path you rise slightly, pass some lovely properties and emerge onto a lane.

Cross the lane and enjoy the view as the river gushes out of the old mill bridge into a pool beyond. A nice spot to spend a moment or two looking at some ornamental animals and for birds and the open fields often grazed by real farm animals. **Turn left along the lane, over the bridge then cross the road at the T junction and join the narrow path up the grass bank on the left. Follow this path along the side of the lane until you reach some cottages and turn right onto a bridleway.** In spring you may see lambs in the fields here, possibly swallows from the local stables, goldfinches and crows. The sides of the path will have the stitchwort, celandine and other flowers in spring.

This bridleway eventually turns into a lane. **Follow the lane as it bends right and goes up the hill, turning into a rougher track.** Stay on this and eventually, after passing a small nature reserve for wildflowers (Bealeswood Common) you will reach the Bluebell pub. **The next step, if you don't stop, is to pass the pub along the lane, joining another lane to the right and very shortly, turning into a track to the right.** Follow this track a short way until the big trees start a horse chestnut is on the left and Ash trees beyond that. **After reaching the trees, turn right on a sleeper bridge across a ditch onto the narrow footpath that runs parallel to the track.**

You will now follow this path for quite a while. There are one or two stiles but often there are ways around them. You will enter some lovely woodland resplendent with bluebells and wood anemones and then the path will open up with great views on both sides as you follow the path along ridge. You enter more woodland full of flowers and birds and soon suddenly find yourself in a field. **Turn left and continue to the next woodland, ignore the paths to the right and left and climb the stile into the next woodland.** After a while, this opens out on the left with views across the valley (you should see Frensham Heights school on the left) and the path skirts the woodland. After a property on your right take the footpath to your right and passing some habitation join the lane. **Dropping down the lane you are in Spreakley, a tiny place. Meet another lane at a crossroads and go straight over onto Hammondswood Road.** Pass the entrances on the right and a big tree on the left which is absolutely full of mistletoe and carry on in the same direction on this track with a young hedge on the right.

Don't follow the farm track when it goes through a hedge on the left - just continue on the footpath in the same direction as before. The path soon meets another path coming from the right with a garden hedge in front of you so **turn left following the footpath between the fields.** I like this old path which is deep and has obviously been used for many years. The few remaining trees were probably once part of a dense hedgerow which is now sparse. Flowers have spread on the banks and are worth checking for something different.

The path meets some woodland and a footbridge crosses a small stream. **Immediately after the bridge turn right,** you may need to easily step over a fallen tree and follow the path up the hill at an angle and after the next few trees turn right with the fence and then a sports field on your left. The path then goes through a gate and descends fairly steeply down a hillside then with fencing on both sides before reaching a property, a driveway and then the A287 road.

Turn right down the A287 using the tarmac footpath stopping at the bridge at the bottom with lovely views of the River Wey and always the possibility of a kingfisher on one of the overhanging branches. Cross the road when safe and turn left into Priory Lane towards Frensham Little Pond. (A little aside, on the left is a George VII postbox, a fairly rare thing as his reign was so short). You pass some lovely old buildings and continue carefully along the narrow lane, which can be busy on a weekend or nice summer's day, until you reach a car park on the right. This is a **free car park** (marked on the map) holding maybe 20 cars but it is very popular and if you're lucky you may find it a good place to start from. **From the lane enter the car park and turn left at the end where you see the information sign – don't climb up the hill.** Take the wide track with heath on the right and trees on the left. Here redstarts can be found in summer.

This nice track soon passes a **large National Trust car park**, another option if you're a National Trust member or willing to pay but it's popular and fills quickly on busy days. Continue walking past the car park following signs to the Café and Pond Walk. You then have a choice to stop at the café where, if you choose your seat carefully, you may have a lovely view over the pond. You may hear reed warblers and see common terns from here and many geese on the pond. If you don't want to stop at the café, you can still visit the pond edge if you like. Otherwise, **continue past the second sign with the grassy area on**

your right and then keeping the road on your left, **the path bends right past a 250 year old oak tree with a sign**. This path will take you to the pond's 13th century dam and a good view across the water. The phragmites reeds should be full of reed warblers all around the pond, fish visible in the water and in winter even a bittern may turn up and at times of passage rarer gulls and terns may appear.

Pass the dam and turn right on the wide path when you reach the other side of the pond. Follow this path and take the opportunity to look at the birds on the water as you walk around, a couple of old rafts have nesting black-headed gulls and in winter many duck species can be spotted. Canada geese, greylag and Egyptian geese are also seen here. The path follows the pond edge and soon you are faced with **a post with a footpath sign on a pole**. **Take this path keeping left along the fenced conifers** until you reach a junction with three options. **Take the third option by turning right** along a wide track with open heath on the left. This now leads to some wet woodland (alder carr) with a boardwalk through the trees, a delightful shady spot where you should hear great spotted woodpeckers, maybe see redpoll and siskin in winter and perhaps grey wagtail, nuthatch, treecreeper and other woodland birds. At the end you emerge onto the main open heath.

Take the main track to your left. This opens out with heath on both sides and will be a lovely sight when the heather flowers in the summer months. Stay on this main track ignoring any smaller paths or tracks leading off it. Watch for silver-studded blue butterflies. It bends around to the right and carries on to a crossroads, the cross track is a yellow sand. Cross straight over on white sand and continue until a small block of trees appears on the right-hand side of the track. **Take the path skirting the right-hand side of the trees and turn right up the slope towards the top of the hill.** Linnets are common here in the yellow gorse bushes where they nest in the summer. When you reach the top of the hill many tracks merge. You will see a bench opposite, if it's free take a breather for a minute or two to check the view, it's wonderful. **To the right of the bench you can now see your path dropping down the hill.** (Effectively, this is crossing straight over from the path up the hill).

Follow this path, we found Dartford warbler here in spring singing from the gorse. At the bottom of the hill enter the woodland and **keep right (straight on) – don't turn left!** This path leads to the main road which cross, carefully. This is a bridleway so follow the signs and it will lead you to the main Frensham Great Pond car park from where these instructions started. If you started at The Bluebell, or one of the Frensham Little Pond car parks continue with these instructions from the top.