

## Hazeley Heath, River Whitewater and Mattingley

Rare heathland habitat, traditional parkland, streams and miles of countryside

The place to start this walk could be up to you. If the pubs are open you could try the Leather Bottle at Mattingley or Shoulder of Mutton at Hazeley (both only a short walk away). The easiest place is roadside on the B3011 Bracknell Lane at the top of the hill as you leave Hartley Wintney towards Heckfield and Reading (nearest postcode is RG27 8NR). On the right-hand side, opposite the water tower and Arrow Lane, are about 6 or more free car parking spots.

Go through the path entrance way on a good solid track until you reach a T junction with an information board. Turn left at this junction and walk along the top of the heath until you meet the vehicle track. Turn right here. Follow this down and when you reach Purdies Farm turn left. Follow this track and path now for about a mile or 1.5kms. If there is a lot of mud you may see paths running parallel you can use, closer to the heath. When you meet a track or lane crossing your path just turn right and go to the woodland at the edge of the heath and keep the open country on your right. There is no reason you cannot explore the heath where there should be stonechats, Dartford warblers, woodlarks, tree pipits, nightjars (at night) and silver-studded blue butterflies in summer, there are many paths and you just need to get to the woodland edge when the heath runs out.

Along the way you will pass the entrance to what was Bramshill Police College but is now in the hands of a property developer. This is surrounded by parkland with old trees where barn owls may be seen especially early or late in the day and early in the year when feeding young. There are also badger setts along the woodland edge. At the end of the heath you will see a house appearing and the path splits. Take the right fork keeping the fields behind the trees to your right, stay on this line ignoring other paths. You will meet Plough Lane and keeping right follow this a short way. At Lea Farm you need to turn left on the path to the left of the gate of the house but before you do, it is worth walking a little further along the lane to stand on the bridge over the River Whitewater with nice views in all seasons. So, retrace your steps and turn up the path with the ditch on your left and the gate on your right. Soon this crosses the ditch and you are in a more open area of woodland. Look slightly right and at the top of the slope you will see the metal kiss gate on your path.

This next stretch has fairly obvious paths and gates, stiles across fields but also passes a nice pond with a clump of Pampas grass and a duck house. Soon after you drop down across a big field where I saw at least six red kites wheeling in the air. At the bottom at the pedestrian gate, cross the busy road carefully onto the wide track to Alder Moor Farm. This area has many alder trees, a species I love mainly due to their attraction to siskin, lesser redpoll and goldfinches in winter. Watch out for them eating the tiny seeds in the alder cones. You also know spring is coming when the alder catkins appear.

Follow this track past the house and tatty buildings and stables and sadly, a bit of a fly tipping place! The track bends left but you stay on the path heading straight on down to a small bridge over a stream. Soon there is another much better footbridge over the river Whitewater and some great examples of alder trees at the water's edge. Over the bridge

turn right and soon climb gently up the slope to the top following the path to Hound Green. For safety cross the road here and cross the sports field diagonally and you will see a stand of old oaks and a nice sculpted picnic bench with a friendly frog! This is roughly half way around so not a bad place to stop and have a rest if you wish.

Set off right along the lane from the end of the recreation area and enjoy the nice housing. After the last house on the left you will see a footpath across a field. Take this path all the way to the left-hand end of the woodland where the path turns sharply right and then left up the right-hand side of a field. Follow this and through the gap on the right at the end then keeping left in the next field.

It then seems complicated but it's easy really. Enter the gate onto the drive of a property passing with the property on your left side. As you round the property the path you want is right in front of you through a stile in the hedge. There are a few paths here so don't be sidetracked. Go through here and cross the field to the large gate. Exit here and go straight across then turn left after the gate. Down the side of the field to the end and turn right at the corner. Follow this path and track to the bottom, then follow the fence line left. Turn right onto the old tarmac drive and after short way you exit to Bottle Lane. Turn left here.

This lane will now take you almost to Mattingley. It's quiet and has nice hedgerows and open fields to enjoy. When you reach Mattingley there are 40 mph road signs. Just in front of the speed signs enter the driveway on the right and take the signposted path to the left of the property. Follow this path all the way to the main road past 'The Old Post Office' building, now a residence, on your right. (The Leather Bottle pub is just a few yards to the left).

Cross the road carefully here to the gated entrances opposite to Bartlett's Farm. The path is obvious to the left of the right-hand driveway. Follow this and after a turn it puts you along an avenue of trees and finally a patch of woodland on your left. At the end of this path (it was very muddy when I visited in January) exit the gate and turn right. Follow the edge of this field and enjoy the massive oak tree at the end. There is a gate and a bridge on the left to cross here over the Whitewater. I noted an old Alder here with much orange bracket fungus right on the water's edge.

Next cross the field to the bottom corner opposite and then climb up the slope across the next. These paths were a bit muddy but obvious. At the top of the hill on the left is an old pit. It's purpose is unknown to me but there is a lot of sedge growing and it is worth a little time looking for insect and plant life before taking the right turn along the nice wide, solid track. Part way along here is a lovely old tree trunk laying rotting away on its side.

At the end of the track, turn left up the lane to the corner and where the road bends right you carry straight on following the footpath sign. After the woodland and an open patch, a footpath crosses and you turn right following this up the slope, across the open field. The path drops down onto West Green Road where you turn left and then soon turn right onto Stoken Lane.

At the end of the woodland on the right-hand side of Stoken Lane there is a path to the right through a gate. Take this up the short hill and drop down to Hazeley Bottom. Turn right and you're almost home! (NOTE: Turn left here if you chose to park at the Shoulder of Mutton).

This village has very old houses, some as old as the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. They may distract you from the uphill slope as you walk through the village and up onto the B3011 close to where you started. Cross the road to the narrow path on the right of the bus shelter and follow this. It crosses a lane and then a track and now it's just a few yards along and you will see the noticeboard where you started your walk. Turn right and a few steps and you will be back at your car.