

Bullswater and Pirbright Commons and Fox Corner

An easy trail across two heaths and through a lovely local nature reserve.

Start from the layby (space for about 5 cars) on Bullswater Common Road GU24 0LZ or roadside at the end of Chapel Lane, Pirbright GU24 0JZ (no defined parking spaces).

These instructions apply from Bullswater Common Road in a clockwise direction. Walk along the road past the houses to the end of the cul-de-sac. Take the bridleway angling left through to the main road. Cross carefully and turn right and immediately left along Bullswater Lane.

The grass verge here has many snowdrops in winter. There is mixed woodland to your right. You should quickly see a footpath sign now pointing left up a lane between two properties. Follow this as it becomes an enclosed path and eventually reaches a side road. Continue along the side road a few yards and turn right at the next lane to White's Farm. On both sides will be fields often with jackdaws (grey heads) that probably breed in some of the mature trees in the hedgerow. This quiet lane past some attractive properties and sights eventually turns into a footpath and you reach a T junction where you turn left.

This short stretch leads you to the end of Chapel Lane but don't go as far as the made-up road. Turn back on yourself sharp right and you'll see an "Unsuitable for Motor Vehicles" sign. This is a Byway. Follow this now through Pirbright Common. I suggest diverting either side of the track to explore for nature. There are said to be digger wasps and the tiny, insectivorous plants of the sundew family. Those to be found here are likely to be round-leaved sundew one of three species in the UK. They flower from June to August.

Expect Chiffchaffs and even Willow Warblers to be singing in spring and summer and possibly other heathland species like tree pipits, stonechats or possibly Dartford warblers in the better heathland patches. The heather will also be blooming in summer July/August or even September. Gorse will bloom variably much of the year.

Following the Byway track it passes through birch woodland and then a more mature hedgerow, eventually becoming a lane servicing a number of houses. Go to the end of the lane and carry on down the busier road in the same direction to the roundabout at the bottom. Cross carefully here to the right and enter Fox Corner Nature Reserve. There is a signboard with a little information there. Follow the made-up path and the tiny Stanford Brook will appear on your left, it's not a large stream for most of the year.

After a while you will see a pond on the left with reedmace on the fringes. This could hold dragonflies and damselflies in the summer. Turning left and following the path along the boardwalk you reach the Brook and continue along the grassy path. In winter snowdrops are everywhere across the Brook and in the reserve. The path eventually meets the made-up path and you turn left there across the attractive rustic bridge with a plaque.

Very soon a green space opens up in front of you. I suggest turning right here for a very small diversion and enjoying the woodland path where birdsong should be evident and

butterflies like speckled wood could be showing from April to September. The path soon leads back to the one passing the green space and turn right here and exit the reserve via the side of the metal gate.

Follow this path to the lane and turn right. Your nose will tell you that a sewage farm is across the road on the left. If you sneak a look through the fence you may see wagtails, pied and grey, possibly jackdaws, magpies and crows on the revolving pipes on the treatment beds. Continue along the lane across two driveways and you should see a bin store for Hockford Cottage. Look right here and you will see a gate onto the southern section of Bullswater Common. Enter the Common and there will be a choice of paths but take the main one in front of you onto the middle of the common. Expect stonechats here perched up on the gorse and chiffchaffs and possibly willow warblers. The Surrey Wildlife Trust grazes animals on many local heaths so don't be surprised to find Icelandic ponies, or cattle at various times.

You soon reach the road and cross straight over into the northern part of Bullswater Common. Again, there are a few choices of paths and I suggest you take the main wider one angled right across the middle of the Common. Again stonechats and probably some linnets will be seen and heard, they both nest here. Possibly silver-studded blue butterflies may be seen. Blackcaps may also be singing around the edges. When you have largely crossed the Common a path comes from behind on the left. You should turn back on this path and it will take you back to where your car was parked. You will see a choice of gates through the trees on the right. If you started from the end of Chapel Lane, exit onto the road and turn right and follow the instructions from the start of these notes.