

Wishmoor, Mill Pond, Rapley Lake and Old Dean Common Step by Step

A brilliant mixture of prime heathland, woodlands, acidic water bodies and forest tracks.

Start at the end of Kings Ride, Camberley, nearest postcode GU15 4NG. Park roadside, you may find it busy as this is a popular walking spot. Pass the gates with cattle grid onto the tracks beyond and **take the first track on the left**.

Follow this track and soon you will pass over the Wish Stream that will eventually join the River Blackwater at The Meadows Shopping Park. After a short way there is a junction of tracks, one from the left, one going past a gate uphill and the one you're on bending off to the right. **Take the one with the gate and cattle grid** with woodland on your left and partly obscured heathland on your right. There will be spots with great views on the right but the enormous power lines might spoil the photos. You will pass a five way junction but keep going straight on up through the trees. This path is a bit of a mix of trees with young woodland, conifers and birch but there are some old oaks and chestnuts and some big Douglas Firs to see. Woodpeckers and Nuthatches will be around here. Before long at the top of the hill you reach a tarmac roadway with the fenced Range Danger Area (RDA) in front of you. This is where a lot of the training takes place and is also a most valuable wildlife sanctuary. **Turn right**.

This road serves military vehicles but is extremely quiet for most of the time. You can take a gate on the left onto a softer surface running parallel, I do this for a better view over the RDA where stonechats, buzzards, green woodpeckers, jays and many other birds may be seen. I enjoyed dragonflies following me on the top of the fence in the summer. On this route along the fence side you may notice a change in the oak trees. There are two primary types of native oaks in our country, sessile and pendunculate. Most of the trees we see in our area are pendunculate (known as English Oaks), The sessile oaks are often more stunted trees found in more northerly locations, clinging to hillsides, rocky landscapes. I used to see many of them when I lived near the Peak District. I will post some information on the website about these. After about a kilometre, at the end of the RDA, you will **go straight on through a pedestrian gate** and the track carries on into woodland.

Very soon after you reach Lower Star Post. The reason for its name will be obvious. Eight or nine paths and tracks meet here. **Go to the middle of the opening and count from but not including the track you entered on clockwise and the fifth track is the one you want!** This is the one after the signposted 'Windsor Ride' and has woodland edge on the left and more open ground to the right.

Follow this nice wide track to where the woodland is both sides. There is a large cut down tree here, someone with foresight created socially distanced cut out seats along it! There are a few substantial, very old chestnut trees here. Carry on, **go down the hill and cross the next junction** and keep going in the same direction. You will pass a recently created conifer plantation on your left, then up another hill crossing more tracks. You are on New England Hill although you feel it more than see it! **Coming down the hill you reach another junction with a major track coming from the left and right, this is known as Bracknell Road. Cross it, continuing on your own direction and turn right at the T junction onto**

another nice track. After just a few yards a path appears on the left. It has a sign saying No Cyclists or Horses. Judging by the path cyclists can't read! **Take this path noting some short fencing both sides of the path.** Continue straight along here and soon it opens out and Mill Pond may become visible on the right. An area of mire is on both sides and a small stream passes under the path. This sort of area is likely to hold snipe and jack snipe in winter. There will be newts and dragonflies here too! **Very soon you will see the sign to Mill Pond on the right. Take this path** through the trees and you will soon be alongside the pond.

It's a bit too small and acidic to attract many birds but mallard, coot, moorhen and possibly mandarin may be in the shallows. This should be a dragonfly and damselfly place in summer and water always attracts a variety of small colourful birds like finches. The large pines will have goldcrests and coal tits all year round and probably siskin in winter. At the end of the pond **find the path to the right along the bank** and walk past the trees and over the bridge and fallen tree at the end. **Carry on this path and before long you will join a track and see the fencing I mentioned earlier on your left. Go back this way and turn left at the end onto the wide track.**

This now leads into a nice open area with trees on the right but a new plantation of oaks (and conifers behind) on the left. In the distance beyond the big trees you can see the green fields of Rapley Farm. Follow this track over the small stream and bend right. **When the gravelled track turns right you carry straight on in a straight line with the fields and line of old trees, gorse etc on your left. Take the next right turn** towards the woodland and carry on through the trees **to the next big track and turn left.**

This track has been opened up by large tree harvesting! Carry on here. If you're a birdwatcher it's worth stumbling quietly through the rough ground on the left to get close to the lake edge and get a view of the birds. There is a small reedbed which has held reed warblers in past summers. Whichever you decide to do carry on this track until you get a nice view of the lake from the bridge. Behind you is a nice little pond and waterfall. Again, with acidic water the birdlife may be limited here but cormorant, pochard, tufted duck, possibly mandarin and very likely little grebe have been recorded on the lake. In the trees you may see treecreeper and crossbills, especially in winter. **After a stop, return the way you came and turn left at the first junction.**

This track then bends left and right. Then the track seems to narrow a little with a line of Norway spruce trees (Christmas trees) and some silver birch on the right and a large pine tree and holly on the left all before the grass which is becoming visible in front of you. **Turn right immediately here, before the grass, on the narrow path.** Follow this narrow path to a T junction and turn right. You reach a small bridge over an old brick culvert called Cobbler's Hole. Cross this and turn left. On your left the view will open up to largely cleared woodland where, I suspect, many nightjars come in summer. **You will reach a major junction so cross here** going in exactly the same direction you were following before. Climb the gentle hill and at the top you will **take a path with a ramp for cyclists on the right.** Note there is a slight risk of clashing with cyclists here so warily, take this path to the top of the hill. This area is good for singing woodlarks in spring, there is room on top to stand and enjoy good views although the trees are growing fast. **Carry on down the hill on the other side until you meet another track where you turn left.**

In front of you is a fairly steep hill, the second from last you will encounter. At the top is another old log cut to provide a seat! **Turn right (or left if you're seated!)** when you have

your breath back and go down the hill and up your last one to the top. **At the top, on the left are two large logs in the undergrowth. You can take the right or left side of the logs to clamber up on the tree roots to the footpath beyond. Turn left** and when things open up look for the communications tower ahead that should keep you on the right track. This path leads to one of my favourite areas to spot birds. Woodlarks, tree pipits and stonechats can be found here, further along, Dartford warblers and, in summer, whitethroats may be heard or seen. Look on the wires for the pipits and birds of prey, even a hobby may be here in summer. Keep on the path until you **find the WWII pillbox and turn right onto the track there**. This track leads to a gate onto the area known as Barossa Common. **Cross over in exactly the same direction.**

(NOTE: If you want to see ravens, most easily done in the spring and summer, turn left here and walk down to the gate, exit and look at the top of the tower on your left. You may hear their deep croaking from a long way away. After this retrace your steps to where you emerged onto Barossa Common and turn left)

This is a military training area but open to the public. On your left the communications tower has had raven's nesting for a couple of years. On your right is a superb area for looking for the heathland birds often also crossbills – there are wide tracks to follow if you want to explore here. Our walk now follows the main path with the woodland on the left and open heath on the right. At the end of the young woodland on the left you will see mature pines on the right and this strip of trees often has redstarts in summer. This wide strong track is now going to get you home. It slopes down after Barossa and offers lovely open views on the right of Wishmoor Bottom, another popular birdwatching area where hen harriers, great grey shrikes and heathland birds are occasionally seen. On the left is Saddleback Hill, a bit of a climb you could take if you have the energy. **Staying on the main track you reach some dense younger woodland on the right and when that ends, at a big track crossing, look left and you will see the gate you entered when you started this walk.**

Well done, I hope you enjoyed it as much as I do!