

Blackbushe, Yateley Common and Castle Bottom - Step by Step

Yateley Common, Castle Bottom National Nature Reserve for dragonflies, gravel pits, beautiful heathland

Start at the car park at Blackbushe. Leave by the gate at the east end of the car park and follow the main track in front of you as it winds along and becomes a long concrete stretch flanked by vegetation from heath to bramble and woodland. Wildflowers are here in abundance e.g. agrimony, mullein and stonecrop in summer. Green Woodpeckers are to be found here.

At the end of the concrete track the path narrows and briefly turns to earth and back to concrete again. Follow this path crossing open ground twice, the second part wider than the first. Turn left at the next path crossroads and follow the old vehicle ruts and path until you reach some earth 'bumps' you can cross on the right then follow the wide track beyond them, over more bumps. This will eventually lead you to the end of the old runways. Keep going along the edge of the wide tarmac until it starts to turn left. On this bend you should take a dirt track turning off to the right.

After a hundred metres or so you will see the gate to Castle Bottom to your left. Go through the gate, pass or sit on the bench and admire the beautiful view in all seasons. The path leads downhill, a bit steep and slippery for a few metres before you get to wooden steps. There are different types of heather here. Cross-leaved Heath and Common Ling are easy to find, Bell Heather is also present at Castle Bottom. At the bottom of the hill is a small stream and a place to rest and enjoy the views.

The Reserve is famous for dragonflies and many may be seen here. Next, cross the bridge and climb the hill again. Numerous Grayling butterflies are found on the edges of the tracks in summer. Keep going on the same path bending slightly right as you climb.

You pass a group of tall pine trees on your right, climb a small hill and stay on this main winding track all the way through the pretty reserve until you reach gates. Exit the first and then the second on your left and turn right.

Follow this path for 100 metres and at the T junction turn left. Pass a lot of open stony ground with pools, good for birdlife in winter. Pass the first pool, exit the gate and cross to the path right of the yellow barrier. Stay on this along the gorse edged path turning left at the end. Stay on this occasionally muddy path in the same direction all the way back to the entrance to Castle Bottom where you turn right onto the path you came in on.

(Emerging at the tarmac here you have a choice. If you turn right and explore the common you will find many birds, flowers and butterflies, maybe even the rare Silver-studded blue. You can't get lost because you will always end up on the edge of the airfield and by turning left, keeping close to the airport edge you will get back to the first path going right and the way back to the airport and the car park)

Assuming no exploration you should cross to the old runway ahead of you and walk towards the airfield. About a third of the way along turn left onto the grass of the Common. Turn right and enjoy the plants, birds like Whitethroat and Linnets until you reach the next old runway. Head right and at the next tarmac turn left and head for the end. Go right up to the airfield edge and turn left along a narrow path. This leads you back to the earth bumps you crossed earlier. Turn right before them along a path and when you meet a path cross roads with an old oak tree in front of you turn right.

You are on the way home now but may want to stop at the end of the runway to see the aircraft landing or taking off. Keep on the path next to the perimeter fence and return to the car park.

