

Ash and Normandy

A walk of two distinct parts - farmland via country lanes and paths and precious heathland

Follow the footpath out of the back of the car park (GU12 6BX) between the fields. For some way the fields are primarily horse pasture. Keep going crossing all tracks. When you reach a road turn left onto Wyke Lane.

Turn right at the T junction and right again at the traffic lights onto a Byway. This does not look promising to start with, urban litter and deep tractor ruts but it's passable. Soon you pass a housing estate on the right where numerous swifts were screaming in July, clearly liking the type of housing for nesting in the roof spaces. About ten Red Kites also circled above the area.

After the gap to the housing the track improves and many butterflies are evident. Follow this track straight but tending keeping left where the option exists. It's a delightful journey along a quiet 'green lane' with old hedgerows, pasture and some arable fields. Stands of old oak and younger woodland offer a variety of birdlife all the way. A good display of summer wildflowers can be seen along the hedgerows.

When you reach Westwood Lane, turn left and pass South Lodge on the left then turn right over a stile onto a new path. Follow this country track along the fields until you reach Glaziers Lane, where you turn left. You are now on the Fox Way for a mile or so of our route - the signs should help you. Just a few houses along on the right, alongside the United Reformed Church, you take The Fox Way, a narrow footpath. At the end of the field turn left and cross the lane at the end going through a gate.

Follow the field edge, full of blackberries, birds and insects in summer, until you meet a small tree in the field then head off at 45 degrees right, towards some tumbledown barns. Keep left of the barns and you will see a stile. Cross the stile and keep forward, not left, to another stile. In the next field keep left along the field edge and cross the next stile and footbridge. Cattle may graze here. Follow this path to the A323.

Cross the road carefully, immediately turn right and then a few yards along, left again on The Fox Way. There are a lot of Alder trees here as much of the land is fairly wet in winter. You should find Goldfinches all year plus Siskin and Lesser Redpoll in winter. Green Woodpeckers and Buzzards are also here. The fairly obvious path crosses several fields used as cattle pasture, you cross a brick footbridge, before finally reaching a manicured, mown path up to a path T junction where we depart from the Fox Way by turning left.

Soon you reach a gate and turn immediately right over a stile. Roe Deer can be seen anywhere here. This path leads you straight to the road, in summer the ferns can grow into a bit of a jungle here - beware of losing children!!

Cross the road and join the path to the left alongside the boundary to Ash Ranges. If the flags are up you will not be able to get inside the fence but if they are down, you will be able to enter via a pedestrian gate behind Vine Farm.

Keep going along your side of the fence line for about a mile. Enjoy the views and watch out for common lizards on the track and birds like Stonechat and Dartford Warbler. Heather flowers from late July to October and makes a beautiful picture. At the top of Normandy Hill exit via the pedestrian gate, if you were lucky enough to get inside, and take the track into the woodland. Follow this straight until a bit of a clearing and take the track to the left at the end of the clearing. This emerges onto a steep downhill taking you to the A323.

Cross here and over the stile and back to the start!

