



Six Ponds and a River Bank Esher West End and River Mole

Distance: 5½ km=3½ miles

easy walking: 1 or 2 slopes and steps

Region: Surrey

Date written: 19-nov-2010

Refreshments: West End Village

Date revised: 23-may-2020

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Last update: 12-nov-2020

Map: Explorer 161 (London South) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? *We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org*

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Woodland, river, heath, ponds

In Brief

This woodland walk begins by a quiet village pond near Esher, Surrey and quickly develops into a wild ramble along the River Mole and then over beech- and pine-clad hills. It also takes in **all six** ponds of this part of Esher Common, some hidden deep in the woods. The woodland, river and ponds are attractive at any time of the year.

The walk begins beside the **Prince of Wales Pond**, grid ref 129639, **postcode KT10 8LJ**. To get there from the A3 road, turn off for Cobham or Esher, take the A307 Portsmouth Road that runs between Esher and Cobham and turn onto Hawkshill Way or West End Lane to reach the village pond. Alternatively, if you know the area, take Lammas Lane from the centre of Esher. Park in Winterdown Road where there is plenty of off-road parking. There is more parking space further up Winterdown Road, past the entrance to *Garsons*.

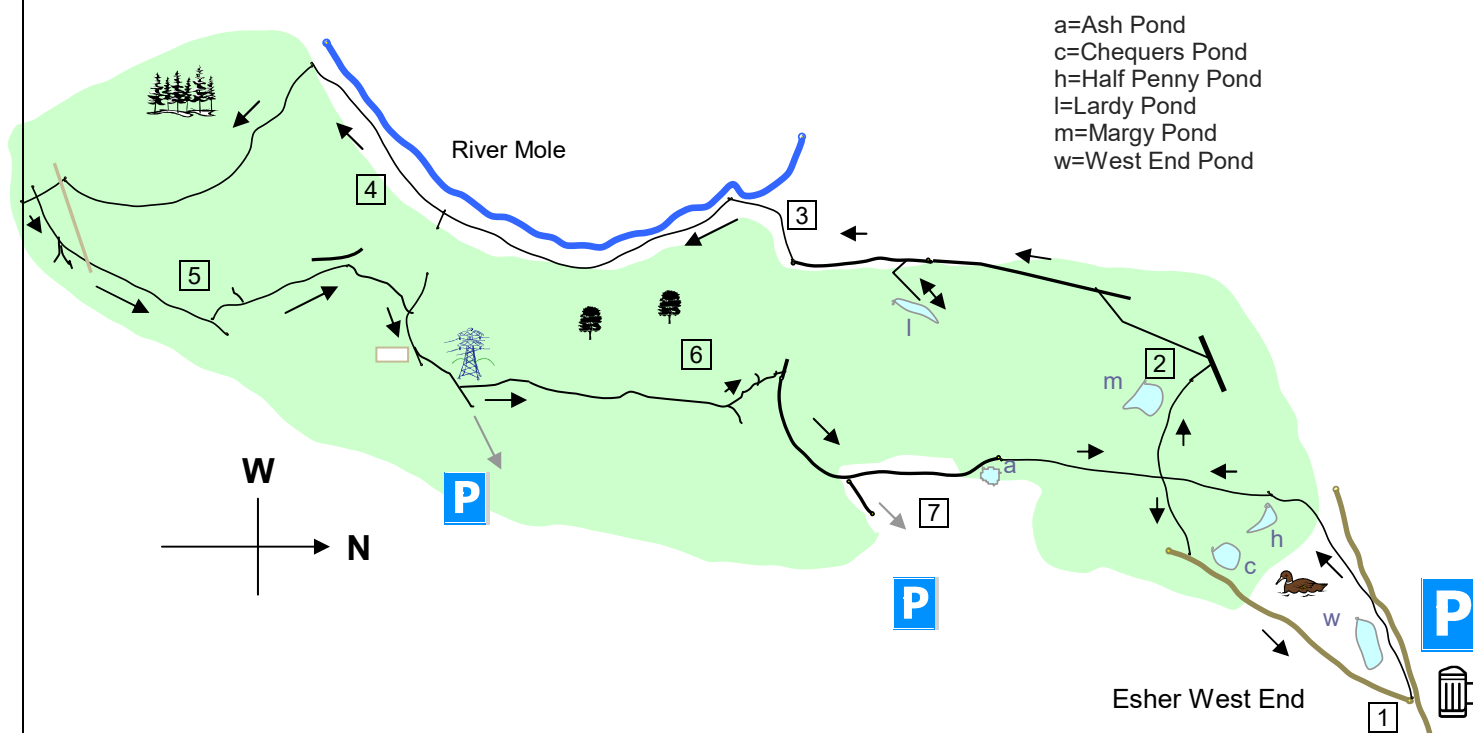
An alternative start is the **West End Lane** car park which is on the left just off a side road from the A307 opposite the entrance to Claremont, postcode **KT10 9JG**. If you start here, leave by a small path between uprights in the fence (not the wide path by the noticeboard on its left), follow it to a T-junction and turn **right**, joining the walk at section 7. You could combine this walk with a visit to the picturesque **Claremont Landscape Garden** and Lake (entry charge to non-National Trust members) with its wonderful landscaping and a good café / restaurant on one side. Simply exit the car park and turn right to the main road.

Another possible starting point is the **Horseshoe Clump** car park, on the A307, opposite the entrance to *Black Hills*, very *approximate* postcode **KT10 9JW**, grid ref TQ 124 627 (go up steps on *either* path at the back and turn **right** on the *second* crossing path).




The route has a few steep sections with board walks where slipperiness can be a problem. Good solid waterproof footwear should be fine and there are no nettles or stiles. Dogs are very welcome.

The Walk



- 1 Head along the green next to Winterdown Road beside the **Prince of Wales Pond** with its huge population of ducks, that sometimes roil around your feet hoping for bread. After the pond, diverge gradually away from Winterdown Road aiming for a bench seat visible at the treeline ahead and, as you begin to make out details, for a path going **left** into the woods, past an info board, by a large pond, 30m to the left of the seat. The pond on your left is the large **Half Penny Pond**, one of six in this area, all skimmed by dragonflies in summer and hosting numerous protected types of wildlife. Just after the pond, keep ahead through a wooden barrier on a very long straight path that runs beside a ditch. Exactly 200m on, you reach a very obvious crossing path with a culvert and lining stones. Turn **right** here. Ignore all minor paths leading off and keep to the main winding path as it runs along the right-hand edge of a well-lit area of tall thin oak trees and curves right. Soon you have the filmy **Margy Pond** (very reduced in summer) on your left.
- 2 Just after the pond, avoid a narrow left fork. (The left fork, over a 2-plank bridge, is a short cut to the Lardy Pond but it was removed from these notes because the ground is often waterlogged and the ground heavily overgrown.) Keep to the main path which soon has a ditch on its left. It leads to a tarmac lane. Turn **left** and immediately fork **left** over a 3-plank bridge on a wide forest path. Continue to the end where there is a T-junction and a noticeboard. Turn **left**, going past a wooden barrier with a sign for *The Ledges*, on the wide track which runs along the edge of the common with crops on the other side. In about 400m you will see a little 2-plank bridge. Fork **left** over the bridge and go sharp **left** over a 4-plank bridge to the **Lardy Pond**, another beautiful hidden-in-the-forest pond. Now retrace your steps back to the wide track, staying on the right next to the crop field and going gently up a slope. As the field ends and the track begins to enter the deep forest ahead, turn **right** on a good side path so that you still have the fence on your right.

3  The path leads up to a promontory with a bench with a fine view of the Mole Valley below. Just before the promontory, veer **left** towards wooden barriers and steps. The steps are supported by railings and they lead down to the bank of the river. *(For more information on the River Mole, see the walk in this series "Box Hill, Mole Valley, Mickleham Downs".)* Turn **left** along the river side and follow it for some distance. You pass a bench and you need to traverse several steps and beautifully restored boardwalks. They may be slippery after wet weather, so special care is needed. The path runs past a memorial bench under grid lines (possibly unseen above the trees) and reaches a wide junction on your left. *(There used to be a fingerpost here with the words "steps and carpark" but it has disappeared; you can clearly see the steps.)* Keep straight ahead ignoring the junction, staying as close as you can to the river.

4 The path goes over a sunken ditch and finally terminates at another watery ditch with a fence ahead. Turn **left** here. The path now goes over an awkward ditch (where an old bridge was washed away, now a chaos of a fallen birch and debris) and climbs. This section may also be slippery. You now reach a sloping beechwood. Go straight up the steepest part of the beechwood and continue through rhododendrons, reaching a fence. Keep the fence on your left, with a steep drop visible on your right. Finally, the path descends steeply with the fence and goes over a little bridge. After the bridge, your path goes slightly uphill with a wire fence on your left. Your route is generally straight ahead but fallen trees have created a wide right-left zigzag in the path. Your path winds to the **right** away from the fence and goes over a low bank. Keep straight ahead for just 10m, and then wheel **left**, so you regain your direction. About 20m to your left you see a wooden ranch fence around a private enclosure. *(You can avoid the invigorating climb over the hill by turning left here, with the wooden fence of your right, along the tarmac drive by the house, turning left at the crossing at the start of the next section.)* Keeping within sight of the wooden fence, your path goes uphill on a snaking path, over a diagonal crossing path and continues uphill. In 30m you meet a wider crossing path by a grotesquely twisted trunk. Turn **left** uphill through a gap in a bank. This path goes up over a high point and then down, passing the fenced enclosure again. At a fingerpost, keep straight ahead in the direction *horse ride West End Common*.

5 You cross a tarmac drive. In 200m, the path goes over another tarmac drive, curves left, goes over a stream and winds uphill, touching the drive again. Veer **right** away from the drive, staying on the horse ride. The path passes a junction on your left and reaches a wide crossing path and a post with a red-white badge and "No. 32", the first of several of these marker posts. On your right is a large white studio-style modern house, *The Homewood*. Turn **right** on the path passing the house on your right.

The Homewood is an early masterpiece (1938-39) by the modernist architect Patrick Gwynne who acknowledged Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe as his influences in its lean lines and its use of modern materials. Before his death, he gave the house to the National Trust. The Homewood can be visited by a pre-booked guided tour on certain Fridays and Saturdays in the warmer months, by mini-bus from Claremont.

Soon you see overhead grid wires. Keep straight on till you are practically underneath the wires in an open space. (The path straight ahead leads to the **Horseshoe Clump** car park.) Fork **left** here, passing marker post "No. 31", and, in 20m, fork **right** directly into trees. This narrow path winds its way uphill before widening and levelling out to run through beech woods with various branching paths.

6 About 200m after the grid wires, you come over a crossing path with post “No. 40”. In another 100m you reach a Y-junction by a post with a red-white badge “No. 36”. Keep **left** on the main path which suddenly curves away **left** down into the valley. Keep straight on at a left-pointing fingerpost [2019: propped up on a tree], to reach a T-junction at the bottom. Turn **right** here on a wide path. The path goes over a hump and gradually curves left, being joined by several paths coming down from the right, entering an open space. 50m into the open space, you reach a major fork. (If you parked in the **West End Lane** car park, take the **right** fork; otherwise ...) Take the **left** fork, the more grassy option.

7 Soon you reach a gap in a fence with steps down to the **Ash Pond**, now only a large puddle identifiable from the reeds. Continue along a straight path running into the distance between two ditches. In about 200m, you reach a wide crossing path, which will be familiar if you started in the village. Turn **right** here. The path leads to West End Lane. Turn **left** on the road, beside the final pond, **Chequers Pond**, leading to the village green where the walk began. At the end of the green, the *Prince of Wales* pub is a possible refreshment stop. *The Prince of Wales* has an appealing Regency look with a view of the pond and the green. For food, Esher town centre, Hersham or Cobham are also good prospects.



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Getting there

By car: see introduction.

By train and bus: bus 458 goes to the Princess Alice Hospice Roundabout, ten minutes from the walk; bus 515 stops at the end of West End Lane, on the A307 opposite Claremont Landscape Garden, five minutes from the walk.