



Horsell Common from the Fishpool Heather Farm, Wetlands, Stanners Hill

Distance: 11 km=7 miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: Heather Farm

Map: Explorer 160 (Windsor) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Long woodland trails, wetlands with boardwalks, lake, heath, grassy plains

In Brief

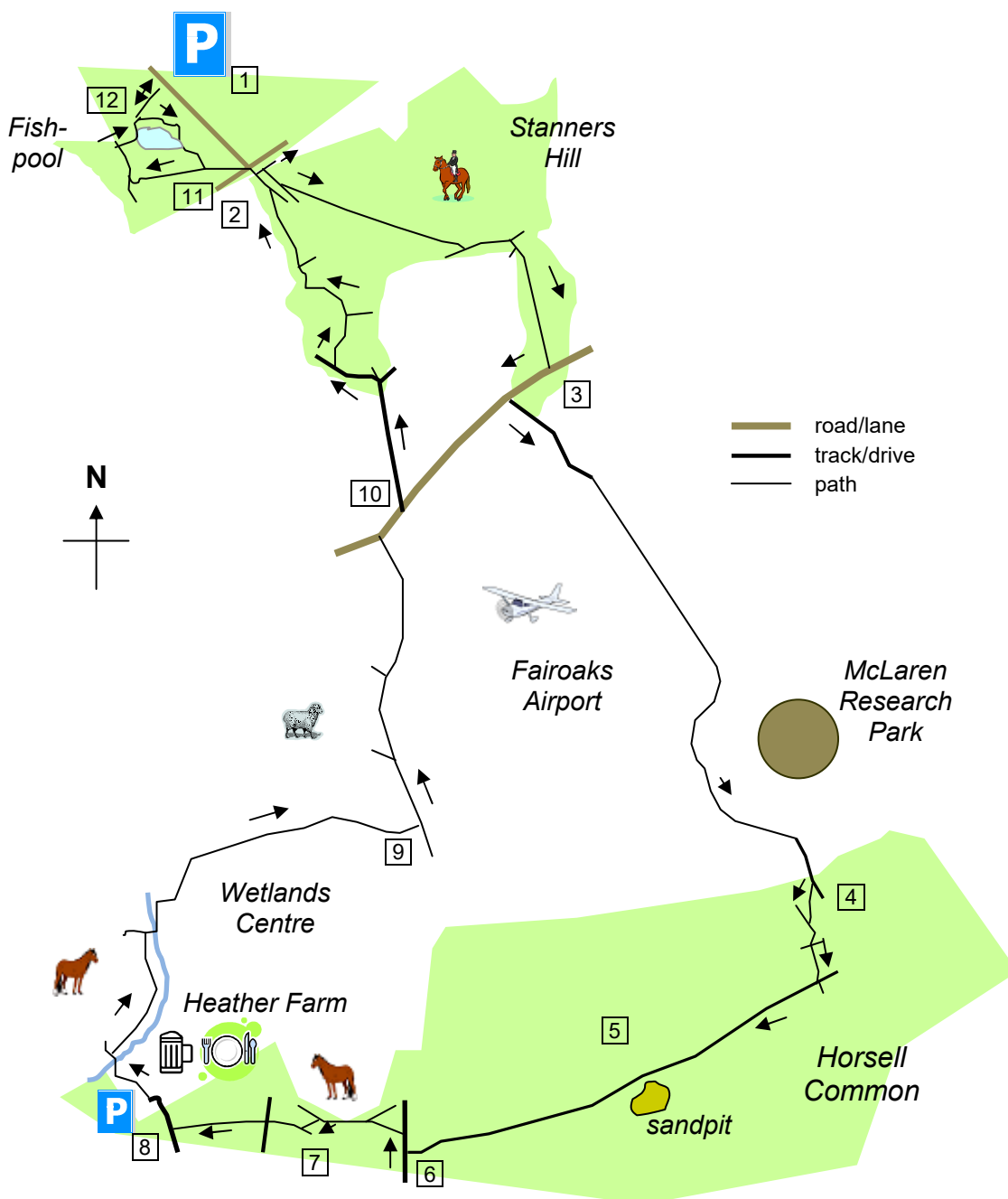
This is a fascinating walk of great variety, featuring long woodland trails, many of them unsigned, punctuated by some considerable surprises. The most notable of these is the Wetlands Centre where a boardwalk and good sandy paths keep you dry-shod, and where food and drink is available at the *Heather Farm Café*.



There are no nettles and no troublesome undergrowth on this walk. Some of the paths on the north side are muddy in a wet winter but the lack of fencing means you can usually skip to either side. Provided you have good boots, you will enjoy this walk even (or especially) in winter. With very little road walking (*and no stiles!*), your dog will be very welcome on this walk.

The walk begins at the **Fishpool** car park on Chobham Common, Surrey. The car park is just off The Gracious Pond Road. The not-very-near post-code is **GU24 8HN**, www.w3w.co/mime.guards.candy, grid-ref: SU994636. From 1 Apr 2020, parking will be *free*, the all-day parking charge having been abolished in favour of a voluntary donation. Starting and ending at the Fishpool gives you the frisson of a round trip to a distant forest, with lunch at the midpoint. There is plenty of free parking by the café at Heather Farm, but it seems unfair to deprive visitors of a parking spot. Besides, it rather spoils the idea of the excursion from remote Chobham Common. Don't try parking at Horsell Common. The free car park near the roundabout has a limit of **two hours!** The central *Sandy Tracks* car park is exclusively for members of the *Horsell Common Preservation Society* which owns and runs the Common. (With an annual membership of only £12.50, or £15 for two, you might like to join a very worthy cause and get the benefits). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 Starting in the Fishpool car park, go past a one-bar barrier and a notice-board, and continue down to the waterside.

There was a watermill here from medieval times and the fish were a welcome dietary supplement for the monks of Chertsey Abbey. For a detailed history, see the neighbouring walk "Chobham Common".

Turn **left** along the edge, passing a useful bench seat. At a T-junction, turn **right** on a path which leads back to the pond side. Keep **left** beside the water and then **right** through a wooden barrier, to pass the short end of the pond. After a second wooden barrier, keep **left**, leaving the pond, crossing a ditch and heading up onto the pine-clad heath. Your path veers a fraction left, crossing a felled area, and meets a wider path at an oblique T-junction. Veer **left** on this wide path. Just before a main road, fork **left**, then **right** to reach a road opposite a large brideway sign. Cross the road and follow the indicated brideway straight ahead, with a house over on your left.

2 (Care! you need to concentrate for a short while to get onto the correct path across the common.) In only 20m, at a marker post, turn **left**, following a blue arrow. [Jul 2023: if the “signed bridleway” mentioned below is very overgrown, you can instead go a further 50m and turn left there to turn right on the bridleway.] Your path runs close to the rear garden fence of the property. Only 10m after the start of the fence, at another marker post, turn **right** away from the fence on a signed bridleway. In 15m the path splits with a footpath forking left (yellow arrow) and the bridleway forking right (blue arrow). Choose the **left** fork, the footpath. You now have a lonely trek across the pine, birch and heather heath of Stanners Hill on a narrow but quite clear path with some good dry sections. At a crossing path shortly, go straight over, still following the yellow arrow. Your path goes over another marked crossing after 250m and again after another 150m. After a further 250m of tall pines and rhododendrons, you reach a T-junction. Veer **left** at the T-junction, still following the yellow arrow. In 150m, you meet a large sign *Bridleway Link to Youngstroat Lane*. Turn **right** here and in 20m **ignore** a similar sign pointing right. Keep straight on along a rather squishy path, with horse pastures on your right. In 300m you reach the main Chertsey Road.

3 Turn **right** on the main road for an unavoidable 150m and turn **left** on a wide driveway, Bonseys Lane. Where the track veers left into a stables, keep straight on, now on a wide dirt path. Fair Oaks Airport is on your right.

This airport used to be RAF Fair Oaks during the last war. It now supports a variety of light aircraft and provides training through Synergy and the London Transport Flying Club. Since 2016 the owners have planned to close the airport to build 1500 houses on the site. An opposition group “NO Fair Oaks New Town” has since sprung up.

The path emerges onto the green expanse of the airport. Your route is dead straight across the grass, but you are asked not to stop! At the other side, the path enters woods. On emerging through a wooden gate and over a bridge, you are welcomed into a beautifully landscaped park, part of the campus of McLaren Applied Technologies.

McLaren are a legendary Formula One Team which launched the McLaren F1 to the well-heeled in 1998. The McLaren Group has far wider interests, including precision engineering, collaborating in vaccine development and researching into renewable energy.

Passing the Silicon Valley-style research centre on your left, follow the signed path through a line of new trees and past landscaped ponds. You pass on your right a grove of young trees, amongst which are several inviting picnic tables with benches. After a further 100m you arrive at a group of five young trees, also on your right, with a single picnic table and then a pond (which may be seasonal). Your destination is the dark shroud of Horsell Common ahead. A noticeboard, three stumps and a house (note the huge totem pole in the garden!) finally herald your entry into the forest.

Horsell Common covers 355 ha (880 acres) and nearly half of it is a Site of Special Scientific Interest because of its distinctive heathland and rare flora and birdlife. The Common includes a newly restored Islamic Peace Garden and several trails, including the Bedser Trail, named after the famous cricketer brothers.

4 The paths across the Common form a complex network and you need to concentrate at the start here and later after passing the farm (see below). Keep straight ahead on a wide track for only 20m. Turn **right** here on a narrow

unmarked path into the woods. After 100m on this knobbly path, another path joins from your right. In 80m you reach a junction of paths. Keep straight on here, passing an open bleak moor on your right. 120m further on, you meet a wide diagonal crossing path, with an (open) metal gate visible to your left. Turn **right** on this wide highway, the main path that traverses the Common. You will be following this easy path as far as the *Sandy Tracks* car park.

5 On your left soon is a large sandpit. *In H.G. Wells' "War of the Worlds", this was where the first Martian spaceship landed. There is even a computer game available with Horsell Common as the launch point!* The area on your right soon is Danewell Hill, the only upland on this flat (but far from dull) terrain. You pass a pond on your left and finally, after 1½ km of easy walking, you reach the *Sandy Tracks* car park, with spaces only for HCPS members (see intro).

6 The main path runs too close to the main road, so the next stretch is much quieter and more interesting. But you need to concentrate for the next ½ km or so. Go through the car park, immediately meeting the access drive. Turn **right** on the drive. In 70m, you meet a very narrow crossing path. It is slightly lower than the raised driveway and quite obvious on your right, although on the left it may be rather obscure. Turn **left** on this narrow path, heading for a stand of tall pines. Your path winds its way through the pines, goes over a 2-plank bridge and joins another path coming from the right. You are walking close to the horse pastures of Wapshott Farm with their wire fence on your right. After 200m, you will notice that the wire fence turns right at a corner, by a horse pasture. The main path also turns right to stay next to the fence. This is where you **leave** the main path.

7 Instead of turning right with the fence, keep **straight ahead** on a rather faint path. The path immediately forks, but you can take either fork as they both do the job. In only 30m or so you come to a T-junction with a wider woodland path. Turn **right** on it. This is a popular path amongst regular visitors to the Common and it will lead you, without further ado, to your next destination. Where you meet a wide surfaced drive, cross straight over. [\[Care! some walkers turned here prematurely: you need to keep straight on for another 400m to a tarmac lane-like drive.\]](#) Soon you have a ditch on your left and the path gets a little twisty: just keep straight on at all times. Finally, after a total of 400m on this path, the path ends at a wide tarmac drive.



Turn **right** on the drive, quickly entering the precincts of Heather Farm, a popular destination for families, host to the Wetlands Centre and café.



The café on your right is licensed and serves teas and more substantial nutriments. Just beside the café is a series of walkways, worth exploring, with a picnic table, and a bird hide where woodpeckers, goldcrest, kestrels, fieldfare, snipe and reed bunting are just a few of the species you might glimpse.



The café is extremely popular on a good day. An alternative place to eat is the Longacres Garden Centre which you can reach by turning **left** instead of right at the point marked * below. The Centre is only 200m away, across the main road. Recommended as friendly with tasty food.



8 If you visited the café for a break and welcome refreshment, go back to the drive. Immediately before the corner of the car park, turn **right** on a well-made path which runs along the fence, with the café area over on your right and the car park on your left, and keep straight on. 150m after the car park, you go over a stout bridge. *Turn immediately **right**, thus keeping the

river on your right. Your path soon crosses the river via a bridge on the **right**. Avoid the tempting boardwalk here and instead turn **left** on a worn grassy path with the river now on your left. The path bends **right** in the corner and then **left** over a bridge, becoming a wide well-surfaced path. Where the path enters a green space, avoid a boardwalk on your right and keep straight ahead, still with the river on your left. You pass various seasonal ponds and water pools whilst on your left the buildings and pastures of Sunfield Farm are evident. After you go over a ditch, the trees are closer on both sides of your path. Finally, at the end, a swing-gate takes you out of the wetlands to meet the official footpath.

- 9 Turn **left** on the footpath, going over a wide bridge. Follow this excellent path, soon ignoring a left fork at a 3-way fingerpost and continuing over another bridge. Fair Oaks Airport is on your right (see the earlier section). *Beyond the airport, on a low hill, you can see the brown building of Ottershaw Park, a historic mansion built in 1761, part of a large estate.* Ignore a swing-gate and footpath on your left, finally joining a tarmac lane which leads from the airport to the main Chertsey Road. Turn **right** on the road and, in 100m, cross carefully and turn **left** onto a tarmac drive, avoiding the industrial estate on your left. (The drive is marked *No Through Road, Private* but it is also a public bridleway!)
- 10 You pass *Stanyards Cottage & Farm* on your right with its large orchard. At a Y-junction, ignore the narrow footpath ahead and stay on the tarmac by forking **left**, as for *Stanners Hill Manor & House*. In 150m, just after the rather modest Manor, look for a 3-way fingerpost and fork **right**, thus leaving the tarmac, on a bridleway through rhododendrons. In 150m, at a 3-way junction, veer **left**, still following the main bridleway. Just before the corner of a large low house, turn **right**, following a blue arrow to avoid the fence of the property. Veer **right** again at the next blue arrow, still circling the border of the property. At the next marker post, ignore a yellow arrow pointing right and keep straight ahead. You now enjoy 300m of radiant birch wood, finally joining a path from the right, just before a house. Ignore a blue arrow that points right towards the house and keep straight on, with the house over on your right, till you shortly reach the Stonehill Road.
- 11 Cross the road to a junction with the Gracious Pond Road. Don't take that road, but take a narrow path, as directed by a fingerpost, just to the **left** of the road, going past a wooden stump. Follow the main path, crossing diagonally under wires, avoiding all turnings off. Your path runs across a heath which gleams even (or especially) in winter with pine and birch and heather. After 300m, you meet a marker post where you can see some large metal gates a little to your left. Keep **right** here and stay on the path as it wheels right. Very shortly, the path splits to go round the stump of a tree. Go another 30m (45 paces) and turn **right** on a narrow path.
- 12 This path is narrow but quite obvious and well-used, and it is the first decent path on your right. Magically, it takes you immediately through a wooden barrier to the Fishpool. Turn **left** along the edge, going through another barrier. Where you see an earth bank ahead, keep **right**, going round the long side of the pond. In only 40m, turn **left** away from the pond. However, as an aid to navigation, if you stay on the pondside for another 20m, you reach a bench seat where you can enjoy a final view of the pond before final departure. **If you did not park at the Fishpool, keep straight on after the seat, to the indicated spot in section 1.** Having turned **left** away

from the pond, on an upward-sloping path, continue a short distance to reach the car park where the walk began.



For end-of-walk refreshments, there are two good pubs in nearby Chobham village: the *Four Horseshoes* (postcode **GU24 8QP**) and the *Red Lion* (postcode **GU24 8RG**), plus a restaurant or two.

Getting there

By car: the easiest way to the Fishpond is from the M25. Come off at junction 11, *Woking*. Follow signs for *Woking* (A320), *Chobham* (A319). At the end of the dual carriageway, at a roundabout, go **right**, in the direction *Chertsey, Staines*, on the A320. After ½ mile turn **left** on the B386, signposted *Windlesham*. Ignore a junction on the right and, in over ½ mile, at a fork, take the minor **left** fork as for *Stonehill, Chobham*. In exactly 2 miles, just after a group of houses, opposite a sign with “welcome to Chobham” on the other side, turn **right** onto the Gracious Pond Road. The car park is ¼ mile on the left.

By bus/train: buses 73 and 592 from Woking go to Horsell. Check the timetables.

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