



Vann Lake

Distance 5km=3 miles or 3½km=2 miles easy walking

Region: Surrey

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comments please to feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

Refreshments: Ockley

Map: Explorer 134 (Crawley and Horsham)

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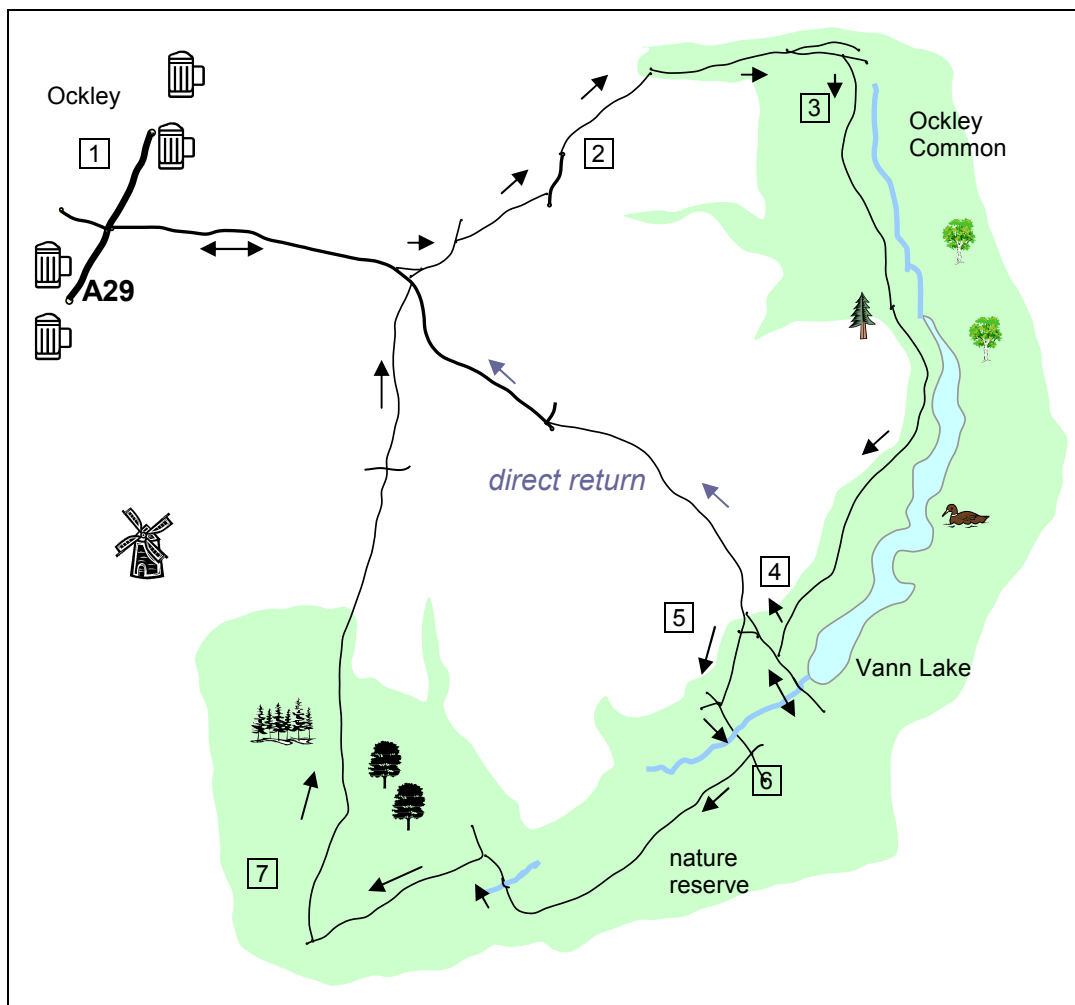
Woodland, lake, nature reserve

In Brief



Vann Lake is part of a Nature Reserve and is rich in trees, other plant life and small animals. The lake is very well known in the neighbourhood but this walk finds an unusual route that takes you the whole length of the lake.

There are no nettles and any good footwear is fine. Dogs are welcome.



The walk begins off the A29 in **Ockley**. If there is no cricket match, park in School Lane (postcode RH5 5TR, grid ref 146399) opposite the cricket pavilion or the school. Otherwise, there are some spaces in the close by the Cricketers Arms and even one or two by the grass verge in Friday Street (the lane opposite School Lane) half way down just before the first house. For a little more detail, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Before or after the walk, don't miss the chance to take a circular stroll to see the remarkable houses and cottages that border Ockley Green.

Ockley is believed to be the same as Aclea, the site of the defeat of the Danes by the Saxon Ethelwulf in a great battle in 851, as recorded in the Saxon chronicle. William Camden puts it thus: "Aethelwolp the sonne of Egbert, who having beene professed in the holy orders and released by the Popes authority, when hee had possession of his fathers kingdome by right of inheritance, joined battaile with the Danes, fought with good successe, and slew all the valiantest men among them." It lies either side on Stane Street, the long straight Roman road to Noviomagus Reginorum (Chichester).

- 1 Opposite School Lane, cross the main road and go down Friday Street, soon passing some houses on the right. As the road bends right, fork **left** on a track and turn **left** on a footpath, going over a stile into a meadow where there are two yellow arrows. Veer **right** and cross the meadow diagonally going through a metal gate on the other side. Continue on a tarmac track by a house.
- 2 Go through a metal gate into another meadow. Turn immediately **right** and cross the meadow passing, on your left, an old well head and its original winch. On your right are the tumbledown buildings of Vann Farm. On the other side, go through a gate onto a tree-lined path. Where the path enters broader woodland, keep to the **right** on a parallel path. As the path begins to descend more steeply towards a bridge in the distance, leave it by turning **right** on a narrow unmarked path. (Straight ahead over the bridge is Ockley Common with many unmapped paths.)
- 3 Soon the path reaches some tall conifers and curves left. You are now on a high ridge with the meandering stream below on your left. The path descends to a stream bed. Keep the same general direction here by hopping over the stream and picking up a path on the other side. Follow this winding path beside an arm of the lake which gradually widens. Soon you pass a noticeboard for Vann Lake Nature Reserve.

Vann Lake (properly known as Vann Lake and Ockley Woods) is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, partly managed by the Surrey Trust for Nature Conservation. Like so many lakes, it is a wooded ravine which was dammed to form a hammer pond. The combination of clay and limestone makes this ancient wood extremely diverse in the species of plants, insects and other animals it supports, especially the mosses and liverworts that cling to the outcrops, the rare dormice, the many tree species and no less than 611 types of fungi. A possibly ill omen is that it is listed on the woods4sale website.

Stay on the path beside the lake, going over a plank bridge. Finally at the end of the lake you reach a T-junction.

- 4 The route is **right** from here. However, first turn **left** for a short distance to view the head of the lake where there is a wooden walkway over the torrential stream as it races down a channel on your right. Now retrace your steps to resume the walk. In just 20m, you have a choice.

Decision point. If you want to return direct to Ockley, skip to the end of this text and follow the text under **Direct Return**. Otherwise, for a slightly longer return with a chance to see more of the Nature Reserve, continue with the next stage.

- 5 Turn **left** at a T-junction onto a bridleway. Soon you come to a junction. Turn down **left** here and cross a wide bridge over the stream. On the left you can view the stepped cascade that was built to carry the water channel. On the right you look down the stream valley. At the next fingerpost, ignore all the pointers and turn **right** on an unmarked path.

- 6 *The next stretch takes you through the nature reserve. In case access should be restricted at any future time, or if you are in a large group, you can keep ahead on the official footpath and use your map to rejoin the route.* Keep straight ahead passing a sign for the nature reserve and two paths on the left. At the corner of a field, the path turns right downhill and reaches a bridge. Cross with care. (The bridge feels shaky but it has a steel frame. Still, it may be best to cross one at a time.) The path now rises to the corner of a forest plantation at a bend in a path. Turn **left** on the path. At the end of the plantation, look for a fingerpost on the left. Turn **right** here on a signed footpath.

- 7 The path passes through mixed forest. When the forest ends, go over a stile into a meadow. Soon on the left you see Ockley Mill.

Ockley Windmill (more correctly Elmer's windmill or Almer's Mill), an octagonal smock mill, milled grain for the whole of the 1800s and stood here for nearly 150 years until, after WWII, it became a virtual ruin with only the base left. Supported by a campaign by local people, the site owner has decided to rebuild the windmill and to restore it to its past appearance for use as a dwelling. At the time of writing, the tower is almost complete.

Continue along the right-hand side of the meadow and go over a crossing path by a fingerpost. On the other side, go through a metal gate or over a stile. Keep to the right-hand side of the next small meadow. Then go over a stile to a lane. Go **left** on the lane. The lane takes you back to the starting. Welcome back to Ockley village!

Ockley has four pubs. The Kings Head, a short stroll north of the centre, is an upmarket restaurant. The Old School House, a short hop south, is run by Bryce and is a recognised seafood restaurant. The Cricketers Arms is a cosy traditional pub. The Inn on the Green is nicely situated but has rather mixed reviews.

Direct Return

Use this route if you want to get straight back to the start after the lake.

Fork **right** and turn **right** on a path. The path soon runs past Vann House where it narrows and comes out between a fence and a hedge to a junction of drives. Go straight ahead on a tarmac lane avoiding Vann Farm Road on the right. The lane takes you back to the starting point.

Getting there

By car: Ockley is on the main A29 (Bognor Road) between Dorking and Billingshurst.

By bus/train: bus Arriva 50 from Horsham station. Check the timetables.
Ockley station is far from the village and does not appear to have a bus service.

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