



Vann Lake

Distance: 5½ km=3½ miles or 4½ km=2¾ miles
or 3½ km=2 miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: Ockley

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Map: Explorer 134 (Horsham) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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Woodland, hidden lake, nature reserve

In Brief



Vann Lake is part of a Nature Reserve and is rich in trees, other plant life and small animals. In spring, bluebells are abundant. 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. The return gives you *three* options [**one now suspended: see below**]. The third option, the longest, was added in 2016, taking you on signed footpaths through more forest and a farm.



There are no nettles and in summer any good footwear should be fine. But in the wetter seasons, you will be glad to be wearing boots because of the occasional muddy sections and winter floods. Dogs are welcome.

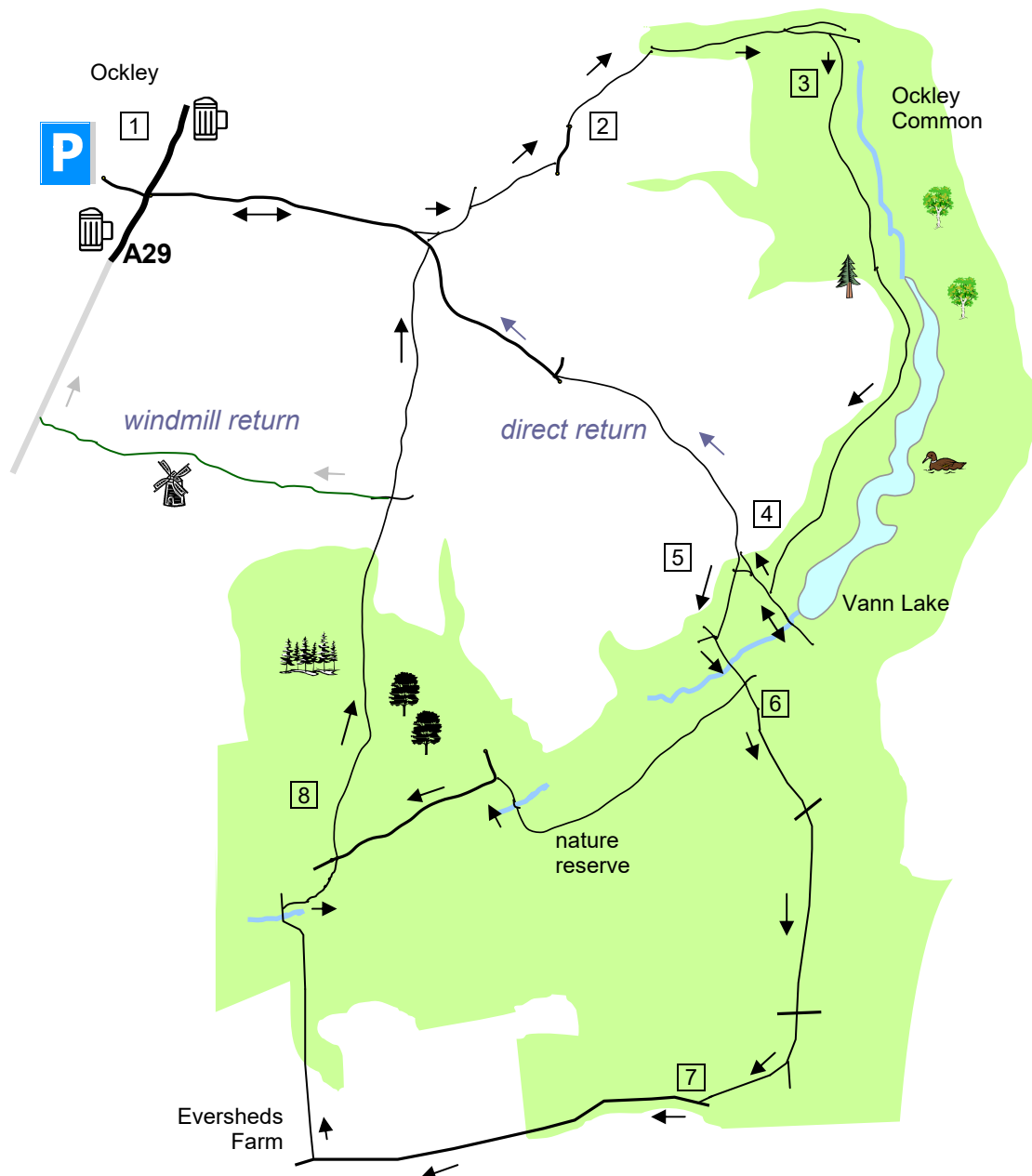


The walk begins off the A29 in **Ockley**. If there is no cricket match, park in School Lane, postcode **RH5 5TS**, www.w3w.co/worthy.fancy.wicket, grid ref 146399, opposite the cricket pavilion or the school. Otherwise, there are spaces opposite the *Inn on the Green*, some spaces in the close by the 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, ignore an unmarked track and turn **left** at a fingerpost 50m later on a footpath, going over a stile into a meadow where there are two yellow arrows. Veer **right** and cross the meadow diagonally following some overhead wires. Head for a small wooden gate in the opposite corner, to the left of a house. You may pass some ponies and goats. After the gate, turn **left** and then immediately **right** in a meadow. Keep to the right-hand edge.
- 2 Your path passes the corner of a garden fence and cuts the right-hand corner of the meadow, veering right and passing under the wires again. *On your right are the recently renovated buildings of Vann Farm.* At the other side, go through a large metal gate onto a wide unsigned tree-lined path. In 100m, where the path enters broader woodland, keep to the **right** on a higher parallel path. In 60m, ignore an unmarked straight path on your right. Just before the path narrows and begins to descend more steeply towards a bridge in the distance, turn **right** on a good unmarked straight level path. *(Straight ahead over the bridge is Church Copse with many unmapped paths to be explored another day.)*

- 3 Soon the path reaches some tall conifers, is joined from the right by another path and curves left. You are now on a high ridge with the meandering stream below on your left. (Stay high up on the ridge path, avoiding a descending path branching to the left: it only goes down to the stream and to a derelict unsafe bridge.) Where your path begins to descend towards a stream bed, you come to a junction of small paths. Turn **right** at a fork on an ascending path and, in 10m, turn **left** on a descending path (*don't miss this turn!*), down three steps and over a plank bridge. Your path veers right over a knoll and left down again. 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.

The path veers right, away from the lake, passing close to paddocks on your right. It then winds through trees, down steps, over a plank bridge and comes to a fork. Take the narrower path to the **left** which rises to a T-junction with a raised path.

- 4 Your route is **right** here on the raised path. However, first turn **left** for 70m to view the head of the lake where there is a wooden walkway over the stream as it races down a channel on your right. Now retrace your steps to resume the walk. In 30m, after passing a marker post on your right, you reach a T-junction. Turn **left** here, quickly meeting another T-junction and a fingerpost.

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 more satisfying return with a chance to see more of the woodland or the Nature Reserve, continue with the next stage.

- 5 Turn **left** at the fingerposted T-junction on a bridleway. In 80m, you come to a junction by another fingerpost. Turn down **left** here and cross a wide bridge over the stream. On the left you can just view the stepped cascade that was built to carry the water channel. On the right you look down the stream valley. You arrive at another fingerpost indicating a path straight ahead and a path on the left.

Decision point. You now have a choice of two routes. The shorter route through the Nature Reserve uses some interesting easy but unmarked paths. The longer route takes you on a footpath through dense forest with an attractive episode on good paths by a farm.

- 6a **Nature Reserve Route.** [Apr 2019-Jun 2020: note: the bridge described below was broken and is now gone; some walkers in boots managed to ford the stream in dry weather; however this option is *not recommended* and this text is retained only in the hope that the bridge may be repaired in the future]. Ignore all the pointers and turn **right** on an unmarked path. 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 long wooden bridge [see note]. Cross the bridge and follow the path as it immediately curves right and rises to the corner of a forest plantation at a

bend in a path. Turn **left** on the path. At the end of two sections of plantation, in a total of 300m, opposite a hidden fingerpost on your left, turn sharp **right** on a wide footpath.

Now **skip over the next two sections** and resume the walk at section **8**.

6b Eversheds Farm Route. Keep straight on at the fingerpost. This wide path through Birches Wood is wide at first and later gets squeezed by a mass of sedge grass. In 200m you meet a wide crossing track. Cross straight over the track onto a narrow forest path which shortly becomes clearer, although you need to concentrate. You pass a small info plaque for *Candy's Copse* on your right and, after a total of 250m (and some woodland debris), you meet another wide crossing path by another small plaque. **All the special paths through the nature reserve are so straight and clear, it's as if they want to tempt you off the official footpath.** Once again, go straight over the track on a narrow forest path (over a couple of fallen birches). Just after yet another fallen birch, your path forks with a fingerpost visible 20m ahead. Take the **right** fork, with the fingerpost on your left, and immediately keep **right** on a level path running along a wide level strip of sedge grass [2018: **stepping over another fallen tree**]. You reach the edge of a large field and a 3-way fingerpost.

7 Turn **right** on a bridleway, with the field on your left and woodland on your right. You come out on a wonderful green path beside a line of oaks. Several neglected plots on your right lead to the buildings of Eversheds Farm. 10m before the first grey barn, turn **right** through a large metal gate. (The stile is broken.) Go along the left-hand side of a meadow and, in 200m, over a stile. After the end of a field on your left, your path leads down into woods and takes you over a long bridge across a stream. Immediately after the bridge, at a fingerpost, turn **right** on a path leading uphill. At the next fingerpost [2018: **obscured by a fallen tree**], veer **left** over a bank to meet a wide crossing track. Cross straight over the track on a wide woodland path.

The Nature Reserve Route re-joins the walk here.

8 The path passes through mixed forest. In 400m, when the forest ends, go through a new metal kissing gate into a meadow. Soon on the left you see Ockley Windmill.

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 WW2, 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 (albeit without the sails and blades). At the time of this revision (2013-16), the tower is complete, awaiting only the blades and sails.

Continue along the right-hand side of the meadow, shortly going over a crossing path by a fingerpost. (**Or, as an option, turn left on this path, doing the Windmill Return, described at the end of this text.**) On the other side, go through an awkward metal gate or over a stile. Keep to the right-hand side of the next small meadow. Then go through a new metal kissing-gate leading to a lane. Go **left** on the lane, taking you back to the start. Welcome back to Ockley village where the walk began!

Ockley has two pubs. The Cricketers Arms is a cosy traditional pub, which may close early on Sunday (ring 01306-627205 to check). The Inn on the Green is nicely situated and serves customers well, except for accommodation, it seems.



Direct Return

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

Turn **sharp right** at the signposted T-junction on a wide bridleway. This 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.

Windmill Return

This alternative return from the longer options passes the windmill and gives you a chance for purchases of grocery or refreshments in the *Cricketers*.

Turn **left** on the crossing path. (Some walkers cut the corner before reaching the fingerpost.) Go across the centre of a rough meadow, heading straight for the mill, going over a narrow stile. Ascending a grassy slope, you pass the mill on your left, joining a driveway. After passing a converted barn and a pond, you reach the main road. Turn **right** on the road, passing a mini market by a filling station and the *Cricketers Arms*.



Getting there

By car: Ockley is on the main A29 (Bognor) Road about 7 miles south of Dorking.

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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