



Virginia Water and Windsor Great Park

Distance: 2 walks of 8½ km=5½ miles and 14 km=9 miles easy walking

Region: Surrey / Berkshire

Date written: 27-feb-2012

Author: Botafuego

Last update: 26-mar-2018

Refreshments: various pubs, restaurants, park cafés

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

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Lakes, deer park, botanical garden, woodland, monuments, pubs

In Brief

Here are two walks centred on Virginia Water in Surrey and the dream-like Valley Gardens. One walk (9 km=5½ miles) follows the classic circuit of the lake visiting the Ruins and the Cascade. The other walk (14 km = 9 miles) takes you into the great open areas of Windsor Great Park, with great views, passing the Bronze Horseman, the Savill Garden and the Obelisk.



Any kind of attire and footwear are fine for this easy walk and your dog is very welcome everywhere.

The walk begins at the free parking area in **Wick Road**, near the *Bailiwick* pub / restaurant, Englefield Green, Surrey, **postcode TW20 0HN**. There are a lot of spaces marked out on the side of the road. If you arrive late on a popular day, they are likely to be mostly taken. In this case, the official Wick Road car park is next door. In fact, any of the official car parks makes a good alternative (see *overview* map). The £10 parking fee (as 2018) is reasonable when you consider the free entry to the Park. Another possible starting point is the **Virginia Water car park**, off the A30 London Road (or in the layby), postcode **GU25 4QF**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



The Valley Gardens 4 km=2½ miles

This first part is the same for both walks.

The area north of the lake gives you endless opportunities to explore the gardens and valleys with their spectacular trees and spring colours. The route here is designed as a “taster” to show you some of the best features, but of course you could choose another route.

- 1 Enter the Park by the *Bailiwick* pub through the small wooden gate and keep ahead along the tarmac driveway. The drive bends right to go over a bridge with white railings. 40m after the bridge, turn **left** on a stony path (you can take a short cut to it across the grass). At a crossing path, continue straight ahead with an arm of the lake called the Wick Pond on your left. The path bends right to meet a tarmac path. Turn **left** on this path, shortly reaching the Totem Pole.

The Totem Pole was carved by the First Nation people of western Canada from a single 600-year old log and erected in 1958 to mark 100 years since British Columbia was established. It shows men, animals and mythical creatures such as might appear in legends or tribal history.

Turn **right** at the Totem Pole, going between two notices, and turn **left** by a signpost in the direction of the *Walk Round Lake*. In 100m or so, bear **right** as you join another path. Soon the rhododendrons give way to a grassy space with a view over the lake, at an elbow of the lakeshore known as Botany Bay Point. On the other side of the lake, the classical ruins can be seen as a foretaste of the shorter walk.

- 2 From Botany Bay Point, fork **right**, thus leaving the lakeside walk, going past a notice board welcoming you to the Valley Gardens. Along this path there are exotic pines and rhododendrons, and silver birch. You pass a post with a yellow top a little way back on your right. Continue nearly 100m further on to a similar post and turn **left** there. These yellow-topped posts will guide you along the next stretch through part of the beautiful Valley Gardens. Your route zigzags left-right over the grass past another post into a valley called the Punchbowl. The route goes down into the valley and up again the other side, affording another brief view of the lake. However, the great delight of the Punchbowl is the little paths that contour round it. *In late spring the rhododendrons, some of rare species, and azaleas make a dazzling display. Camellias are on show in the winter months.*

- 3 Veer **right** past a tall cedar heading for the next post in the distance. At the top, by the post, turn **right** on a sandy path. In 10m, turn **left** on a rooty path down steps and into another valley. Just as before, there is a riotous display here in spring with contouring paths around, worth exploring. *The little white pergola at the head of the valley is a memorial to Patrick Plunket (1923-1975), equerry to Queen Elizabeth II.* Veer **right** in front of a bench, uphill on a wide grassy path. At the top, turn **right** on a sandy path and, in 20m, turn **left** on a mossy path. [Mar 2018: a walker wishes this important additional instruction to be inserted: at the bottom of the steep slope turn **left** on a sandy path.] This curving route gives you a great view of the Azalea Valley down to your right. At a T-junction, turn **right** down some steps and, at the bottom of the steps, turn **left** on another mossy path. Keep straight ahead until, just on your right, you meet a wide sandy path at a bend. Join this path and follow it round the valley with a fine stand of pines visible on your

right, part of the Pinetum. Stay on the main path at all times, avoiding all minor turn offs and waymarkers until it descends to a tarmac driveway.

- 4 Turn **left** on the driveway and keep ahead on a short causeway that runs between Johnson's Pond on your right and an arm of the lake on your left. Immediately after this, you can stay on the tarmac or take a grassy path that runs on the left parallel to it. Over to your left, you will see several houses, close to the lake. After a while, you reach the Five Arch Bridge (designed by Sir Jeffry Wyatville and completed in 1827).

Decision point. Before you cross the bridge, you need to make an irreversible decision. Choice 1 is **Return Round the Lake**, making a complete circuit of Virginia Water via the Ruins and the Cascade, back via the Totem Pole again. Choice 2 is **Back Across The Great Park**, taking you through the great open spaces of Windsor Great Park, visiting famous landmarks and more wonderful displays of nature.

Return Round The Lake 4½ km=3 miles

- 1 Cross the Five Arch Bridge and, in 150m, fork **left** on a tarmac path that curves left to a tea / coffee kiosk. *However, if you would like a Chinese luncheon, continue instead on the main tarmac path, through the white Blacknest Gate and a little further along Mill Lane to the Royal Ascot Oriental Restaurant. This is nothing like a high-street Chinese eatery but a superior amalgam of Szechuan and Japanese with a concise and well thought-out menu. Remember though: this is Ascot.* Continue over a small rocky-sided bridge and keep **left** on a tarmac path beside the lake. The route from here is straightforward. As you go, you see the Five Arch Bridge again and the big white boathouse on the other side of the lake. After some distance, you reach some lying stones and the ruins, on your right, of *Leptis Magna*.



The historical Leptis Magna is in Libya. The stones you see here were brought to the nearby Fort Belvedere in 1816 as a present for the Prince Regent, moved to the British Museum and re-assembled here, not necessarily correctly, by Sir Jeffery Wyatville.

You can explore the location further, going through an arch under the road to see the rest of the ruins, before returning to the lakeside.

- 2 The path curves away from the lake, runs near the road and soon reaches the Cascade.

The 10m-high Virginia Water Cascade was originally built in the 1750s, together with a cave and grotto. It was all swept away by a storm a few years later and then rebuilt in this lower position by the architect Thomas Sandby in the 1780s.

Your path goes over a stone bridge and curves its way back to the lakeside. The Virginia Water car park is on your right, followed by some wooden sculpture. Soon your path curves left towards the Totem Pole with an extensive grassy space on your right. At this point, leave the tarmac path and take a sandy path **right** that runs beside the grassy space. In about 200m, you see a curved wooden bridge on your **left**. Go over the bridge and immediately fork **right** on a path uphill under tall beeches. Go over a crossing path and veer **right** at the top past a bench and a large tree. Keep left along the grassy strip, avoiding paths leading off on your right. Soon you reach the *Bailiwick* and the road by the park gates where the walk began.



The “Bailiwick” stands on what was part of Wick Common until a bungalow was built here by John Cheeseman in the 1790s by “encroachment”, i.e. “build your house and have a fire going within 24 hours”. In 1877, Cheeseman’s grandson built the house that stands now. It was a general store and beer house until 1944 when it saw the crash of a German Messerschmitt. Now it is quite a charming pub/restaurant. It is worth noting that the “Bailiwick” also does tea and coffee and welcomes dogs.

Back Across The Great Park 10 km=6½ miles

- 1 Don’t cross the Five Arch Bridge but turn **right** instead on a wide path with the message *No entry for horses or cycles*. Stay by the lakeside on your left. You may find yourself free for the first time today of the crowds who regularly throng the Park. Eventually the path goes over a small stream, one of the streams that feed the lake. Turn **right** on a wide horse track through the woodland. In over 1km, you finally reach a T-junction with Dukes Lane in a more open landscape. Close by on the left is Prince Consort Gate. Your route however is **right** on this wide easy tarmac drive. If you like, there is also a grass verge. On either side is agricultural land, making you feel you are walking on a country lane rather than in a Royal Park. Ahead on your right is Cumberland Lodge, an educational charity. Finally, you pass a redbrick house and reach a junction.
- 2 Go straight over at the junction and shortly continue straight over a diagonally crossing drive. In 600m you reach a crossroads. Go straight over and as you emerge from the trees Windsor Castle comes into view with the distinctive shape of Eton College chapel also visible. As you go, ignore a wide grassy path on your right. Your path curves right through green deer-proof gates into the woods of the Deer Park. Here, immediately fork **right** on a dirt track uphill with more fine views on your left. Where the horse track curves right, keep ahead on a path under oaks, soon arriving at the Statue of the Copper Horse on Snow Hill.



Henry VIII apparently stood here on Snow Hill awaiting news of Anne Boleyn’s execution which was to be signalled by gunfire from the Castle. The Copper Horse is a statue of King George III, created in 1824-1830 by Sir Richard Westmacott at the behest of King George IV. Note the absence of stirrups! (There’s an unfounded rumour here: see the website www.thamesweb.co.uk/windsor/.)

You have a remarkable vista from here down the Long Walk all the way to Windsor and the Castle. The Long Walk is over 4 km=2½ miles long.

- 3 From the statue, continue straight over in the same direction, on a grassy path, heading for a tarmac drive visible ahead. Your path joins the drive just before a bridge-like structure over a stream valley. As you pass a pink building on your right, the path takes you through more green deer-proof gates. Immediately, fork **left** on a dirt path heading for some large white gates. The gates are an exit from the Park known as Bishops Gate. For refreshments, proceed just 100m along the road ahead and find the *Fox & Hounds* pub / restaurant on the right. *The Fox & Hounds is the oldest pub in the area, although now converted and styling itself a “bar/restaurant”. It has pleasant outdoor seating and of course you can just have a beer.*
- 4 Retrace your steps back through the gates into the Park. In 30m, turn **left** on a horse track. (If you skipped a visit to the pub, turn **right** on a horse track 30m before the gates.) After only 10m, fork **right** on a narrow path



that runs parallel to the track. The path goes over two little bridges, soon with a ditch on your left. Eventually the path crosses the ditch and the horse track and reaches an open area. Keep left here keeping close to the edge of the wood. You arrive at the head of a T-junction of much wider paths. Continue on the path ahead, passing through an arboretum containing many interesting species of trees and shrubs, including oriental oaks, beeches, cherries and witch-hazels. Before the path bends left, 30m after the second wooden bench, you will see a wood-chip path joining you on your left. Turn **right** at this point on a grassy path heading for a tall group of larches. Stay on the main path through the centre of the larches where the path veers left, leading you finally to a corner by some fences. Turn **right** here on a tarmac path, arriving shortly on a large open area, part of Smiths Lawn, the polo centre. Immediately, opposite a house turn **left** and left again by a fence (a boundary of the Savill Garden) on a long grassy ride that leads towards the Obelisk, visible in the distance.

- 5 You finally reach the Obelisk on a grassy knoll popular with visitors as it has a tea kiosk.

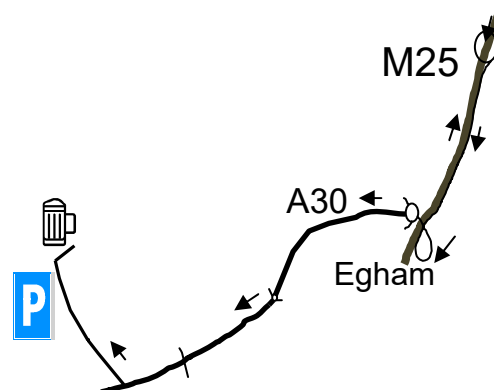
The Obelisk was built in honour of the Duke of Cumberland who was Ranger from 1746. He was the major landscaper of the Park, responsible for Virginia Water, many buildings and bridges and a huge number of native and exotic trees. He also happened to be son of the king (George II) and butcher of the Scots at Culloden.

Join a tarmac path coming from the left, passing the large Obelisk Pond. Continue onwards for some distance to a multiple junction with a signpost. Take the **first** drive on the **left**. This drive takes you on a curving route over a bridge, through the gates of the Park and back to Wick Road where the walk began. For a summary of the delights of the *Bailiwick* pub, see the end of the other walk.



Getting there

By car: the following directions take you to the start at Wick Road from the M25. Leave at exit 13 (A30 Staines). Follow the sign for *Bagshot, Egham*, going on a slip road parallel to the M25 for a while. (If you came in the clockwise direction, this means doubling *back* parallel to the way you came.) Keep in the left lane so that you don't re-join the M25 and go round the cloverleaf, under the M25 to the big Runnymede roundabout. Take the **second left**, the A30 sign-posted *Basingstoke Camberley*. Keep straight ahead at the next roundabout, still on the A30. Pass the Royal Holloway College and go straight ahead at the next traffic lights. Wick Road is the next road on the right, about 500m (1/3 mile) further. Follow Wick Road to just before a bend, near the *Bailiwick*, and park on the left, at right-angles to the road.



By bus/train: bus 500 from Staines station (not weekends); check the timetables.

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