



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

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Date revised: 11-may-2018

Refreshments:

Last update: 16-feb-2019

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, views, 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, (a) for the Great Park route, turn **right** on the lane to the huge **Savill Garden car park** or (b) for the Round-the-Lake route, return to the A30 London Road and turn **right** to the **Virginia Water car park** (or park free in the layby!), postcode **GU25 4QF**. 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. 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 immediately **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 lake-shore 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. After 150m, you pass a yellow-topped post set back a little on your right. Continue 100m further to find a wide grassy opening on your right with a large evergreen Japanese cedar *cryptomeria japonica*. [2018: there was a yellow-topped post here but it has disappeared. There are many more yellow-topped posts along your route almost as far as Johnson's Pond, all marked “route to High Flyer's Hill”. But too many of the posts are now missing to make a reliable guide.] Turn **left** opposite the opening on a narrow path between rhododendrons. Your route zigzags left-right over the grass past a post into a valley called the Punchbowl. The route goes down into the valley, affording another brief view of the lake, and up again the other side, past a post. 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** by another post between a tall cedar on your left and a seat, up a grassy slope. At the top turn **right** on a sandy path. In 10m, turn **left** by a post on a knobbly path down steps and into another valley. Just as before, there is a riotous display here in spring with contouring paths around, worth exploring. Keep straight on, wheeling a fraction right, on a very wide green strip. *The little white pergola at the head of the valley up on your right is a memorial to Patrick Plunket (1923-1975), equerry to Queen Elizabeth II.* At the top, turn **right** on a sandy path and, in 50m, turn **left** steeply down a rough grass path. At the bottom, turn **left** on a very wide sandy path. This wonderful snaking path gives you a great view of the

Azalea Valley down to your right, plus a dazzling display of bluebells in spring. You will be following it for 700m. In 200m, keep straight on at a junction. You pass a pond and a little bridge in the distance on your left. Follow the path round the valley with a fine stand of pines visible on your right, part of the Pinetum. Later, avoid a right fork uphill by the last yellow-topped post, thus leaving the waymarked route. Your path finally descends to a T-junction. Turn right, immediately reaching 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 Wyattville 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 Wyattville.

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 later 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. When in 600m you reach a crossroads, go straight over. As you emerge from the trees Windsor Castle comes into view with the distinctive shape of Eton College chapel also visible and you catch a glimpse of the Copper Horse. In 350m, ignore a wide grassy path on your right. At the next junction, veer **right** on a drive through green deer-proof gates into the woods of the Deer Park. 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 or a soft drink. Walkers report reasonably priced food, choice of real ales and friendly service.

- 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 runs under oaks and goes over two little bridges, soon with a ditch on your left. Eventually the path crosses the ditch and the horse track and reaches a more open area. Keep left here staying close to the edge of the wood on your left on an improvised path. After 300m, 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. 30m after the second wooden bench, before the path zigzags left-right, you will see a wood-chip path joining you on your left. Turn **right** at this point over the grass on a faint mown path heading for a tall group of larches. (This is a short cut: if you prefer, you can simply continue on the original path and turn **right** at the end on a tarmac path.) Stay on the main path through the centre of the larches where the path veers left, leading you finally to a corner of some fences. Turn **right** here on a tarmac path, arriving shortly at a large open area, part of Smiths Lawn, the polo centre. Immediately, opposite a large white 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, soon visible in the distance.

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



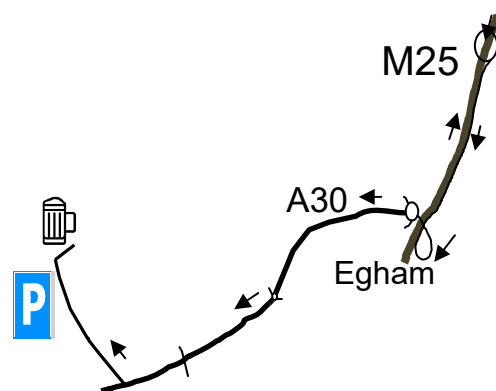
The Obelisk was built in honour of the Duke of Cumberland who was Ranger from 1746. He was the major landscaper of the Park, responsible for Virginia Water, many buildings and bridges and a huge number of native and exotic trees. He also happened to be son of the king (George II) and butcher of the Scots 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 ($\frac{1}{3}$ 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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