



## Wisley Common

Distance: 10 km=6½ miles, easy walking

Author: Schwebefuss

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Refreshments: car park café

revised: 19/08/2011

Map: Explorer 145 (Guildford)

Problems / changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)

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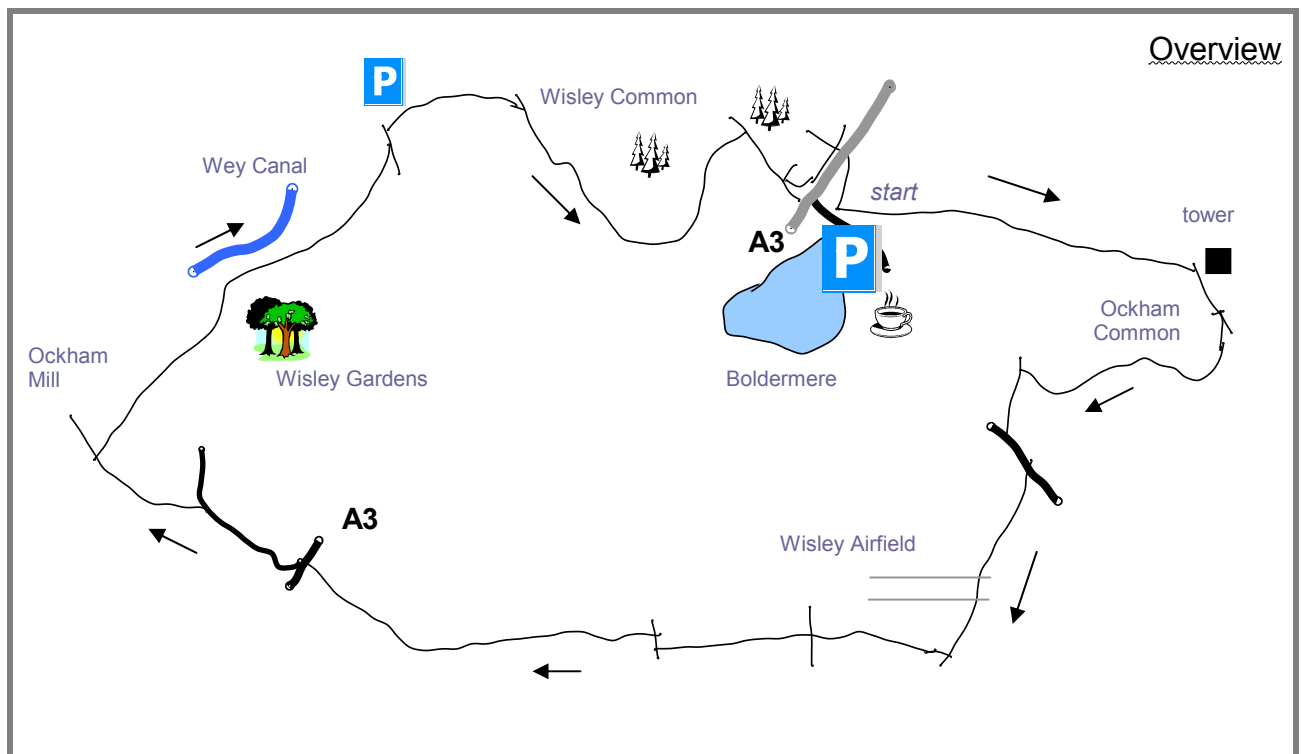
*Heath, gardens, river*

### In Brief



This is a circular walk through history exploring the wild pine and birch slopes of Wisley and Ockham Commons in an accessible part of Surrey. The route goes past the River Wey with a generous view of Wisley Garden. It is perfect for any time of the year including deep winter. There is very little mud, so good shoes are adequate. There are some patches of nettles and scratchy undergrowth making shorts uncomfortable. The Commons themselves are ideal for dogs but this walk goes a little further afield so it may not be the best option.

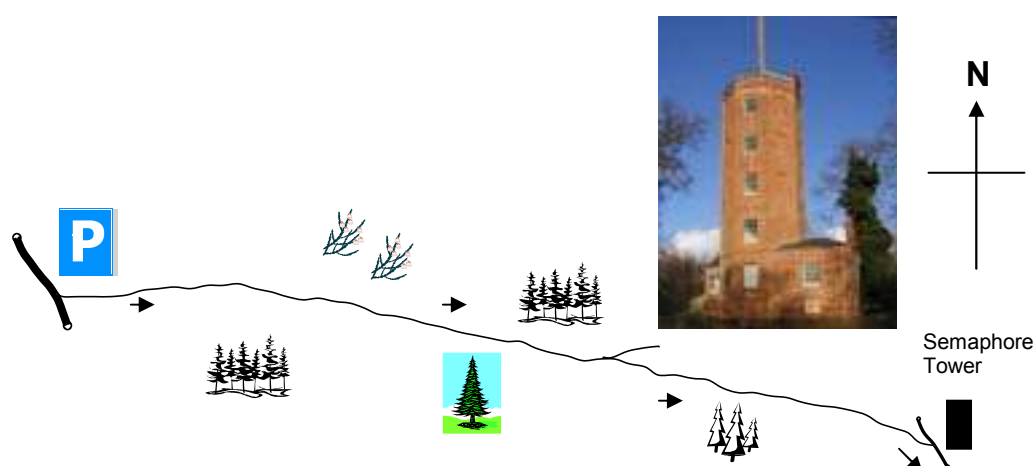
The walk begins at the **Ockham Common Boldermere** car park just off the A3 road, near the M25 junction. For details, see **Getting there** at the end.



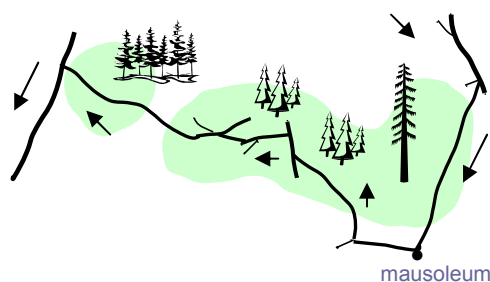
## The Walk

- 1 The first stage takes you up to the Semaphore Tower. Go east past the wooden 1-bar gate by the noticeboard onto a wide track, next to a sign for the *Chatley Heath Semaphore Tower* (a naval captain with a telescope). In 100m, the path goes through a clearing of felled trees, over a horse track, along a narrower path through heather, over another track and then to the **right** of some railings. *If you pass this way during the Christmas season, you may see decorations in the trees for the special events held here.* Soon you reach the tower.

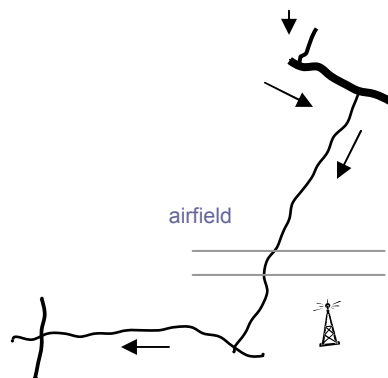
*The Semaphore Tower formed part of the Admiralty Telegraph joining Portsmouth to Whitehall. Naval orders and news of victories came this way before the invention of the telegraph. The existing 70ft high semaphore tower was built in 1822. The mast still works and there is an information centre inside but it is only open a handful of days a year.*



- 2 Veer **right** on the driveway and turn **left** and **right** round the tower. After 50m, just before the tarmac bends left, ignore a waymarked bridleway right but, just 5m after it, fork **right** on a wide woodland path. This path takes you past a giant redwood and round the left-hand edge of the Common to a domed mausoleum. *The occupier, Bernhard Samuelson 1820-1905, was owner of nearby Hatchford Park.* Wheel **right** with the path and, in 90m, immediately after going between wooden railings, ignore a path forking left and keep to the main path which curves right and then left. At a T-junction with a bridleway turn **right**. After only 15m, turn **left** on a path which promptly passes through more wooden railings. Avoid all minor paths off and, at a T-junction, turn **left** on wide straight path. You will be following this path for some way. In 50m, you will notice a fine Dutch-gabled mansions on your left. 50m on, the path enters a more winding course and, 80m further, goes through a forest of young birches. 50m later, avoid a lesser left fork and, 80m on, avoid a small path forking right. 80m later, you reach a very wide track opposite a sign "L5" painted on a tree and some yellow arrows. Turn **left** on the track, ignoring all the signs.



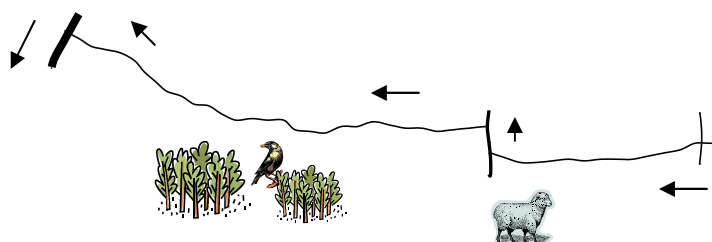
- 3 Follow the track past a, possibly dry, pond on the left, through a gate and out to a road. Turn **left** on the road. In just over 100m, turn **right** over a broken stile next to a driveway for *The Gardens*. Cross two stiles under a plum tree and go along the left hand side of a large field. At the field corner, keep the same direction up the centre of the field, heading for what looks like a huge branding iron. *This is in fact an air traffic beacon (a kind of radar lighthouse)*. The path crosses the old Wisley Airfield, between the metal barriers that deter speed racers.



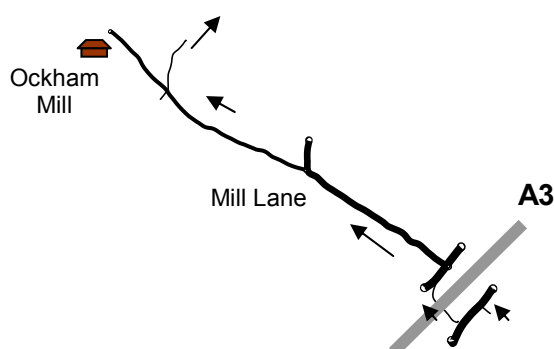
*Wisley Airfield was requisitioned from farmland and opened in 1944 for flight testing by the nearby Vickers factory. It closed in 1972 and its unusual control tower, converted from an old cottage, was demolished in 1980.*

Continue on the path until you meet a fence and fingerpost. Don't cross the stile but turn **right** beside the fence. At the corner, bear **left** with the fence. You reach a farm track near the farm buildings.

- 4 Cross the farm track and take the **left**-hand option of the two footpaths indicated, running alongside the fence and poplar trees. In the field corner, keep ahead, still with a fence on the left. *The field on the left is notable for the huge puffball fungi that appear in some seasons.* At the next corner, ignore a metal kissing gate on the left and keep ahead on the rather coarse path. At the far corner, pass an avoidable concrete stile and go down steps to a sunken track. Turn **right** on the track and in 25m turn **left** on a footpath at a post. The path immediately curves left, goes past a redundant stile and follows the left-hand edge of a long field. There are tall trees on the left, often with resident noisy crows. Continue for some distance on a sometimes vague path, always along the left edge and into another meadow, until eventually you meet a yellow marker and have a fence on the right. The path goes through a metal barrier and reaches a sliproad of the A3. Turn **left**.



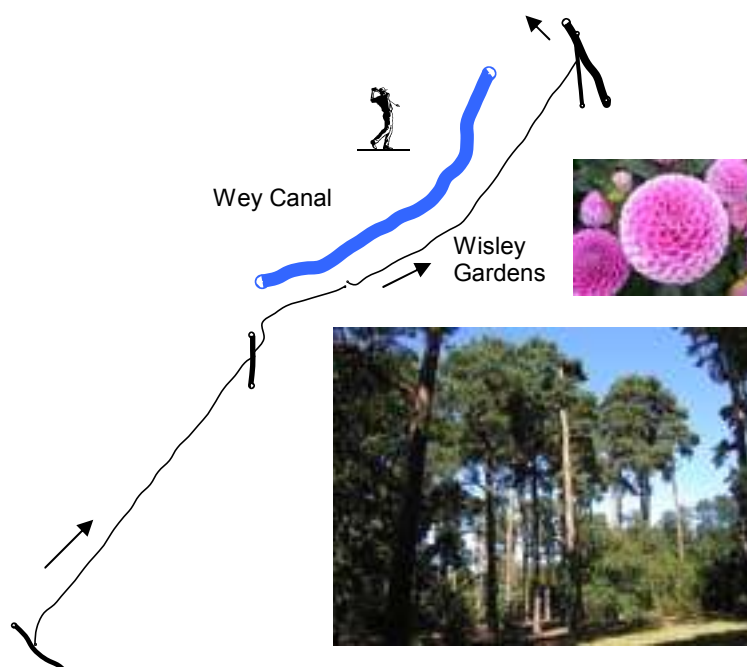
- 5 Turn **right** through the first A3 underpass, veer **right**, cross the sliproad carefully and turn **left** on Mill Lane opposite. *On the right is part of Wisley Gardens, of which more later.* When the road bends right towards the golf club, keep straight ahead on a narrow lane. Soon there are two fingerposts and here you will turn **right** on a narrow enclosed



path. However, the lane you are on leads to *Ockham Mill* and this is an absolute *must* if not seen before, requiring only a small diversion. (The driveway past the mill to the lovely millpond is a right-of-way.)

*Ockham Mill is a fine brick structure in the beautiful setting of a pond on the River Wey Navigation. There has been a succession of mills at Ockham since probably 1296. The present structure was built by the first Earl of Lovelace (William King-Noel, 8th Baron King of Ockham), lover of gothic architecture, in 1862. The earl's coronets can be seen either side of the sack hoist sited near the top of the building.*

- 6 The enclosed path leads between fields. Where it ends, continue between fields to a drive and cross it to a narrow footpath opposite. The path veers left and runs close to the new glasshouse of Wisley Gardens and through a metal gate. It then runs beside the Wey Canal and crosses a bridge over a path onto a fenced path running through the gardens. The path passes through more metal gates and a swing gate for keeping out deer and finally emerges on a tarmac drive. The route is **left** here but the signposted tarmac footpath on the right would take you to the entrance to Wisley Gardens.

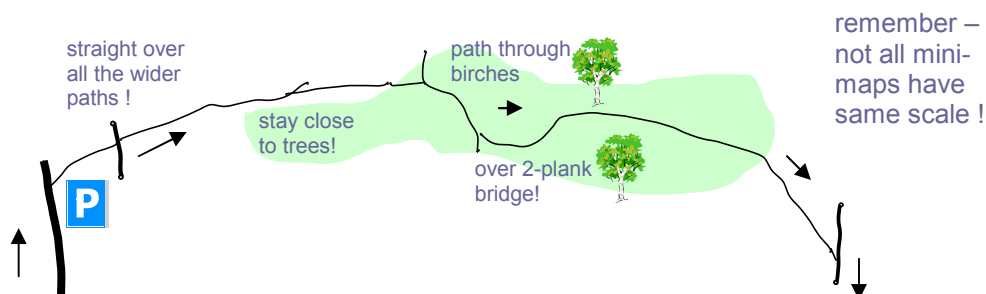


*Wisley RHS garden is one of the world's great gardens. It was given to The Royal Horticultural Society in 1903, and the garden grew from 60 acres (24 hectares) to the present-day 200 acres (80 hectares). It is a beautiful garden in itself with a fine collection of rare plants but it also serves as a centre for practical and innovative design and research. Wisley Garden is open all year. The dazzling glasshouse closes a little earlier than the rest of the garden.*

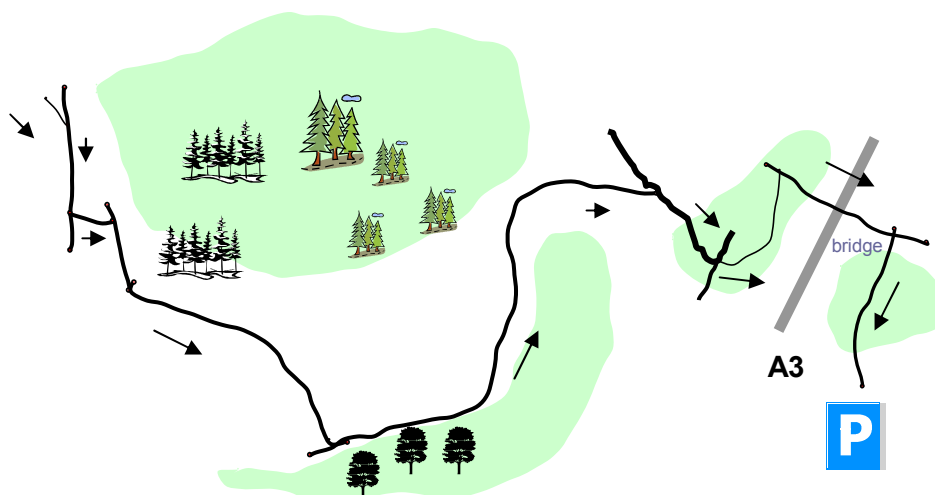
Where the drive shortly meets a road, keep **left**. In 50m, turn **right** through the Wren's Nest car park (an alternative starting point).

- 7 **See map overleaf.** Go straight through the car park and exit through a wooden gate beside a larger one. Go immediately across a junction of several paths and continue straight ahead on a narrow path between gorse bushes. In 90m, you pass on your right some oak trees at the start of woodland. Just a metre or so after the start of these trees, fork **right** on a

narrow path that runs fairly close to the woodland on your right. In 50m, on reaching a line of birches, wheel **right** onto a path through the birches. In 40m, cross a ditch on the left via a plank bridge. Follow this rather winding path through birches, more gorse, over another bridge and through bracken, finally reaching a T-junction with a wide track. Turn **right** here.



- 8 In 100m, at a junction by a wooden bench and a post, turn **left**. In 30m, wheel **right** with the main track. Follow this track for some distance as it curves right, left and right again. Eventually the main track reaches a T-junction at the tree line. Turn **left** on another wide track. Follow this track as it curves left around the tree line and skirts a hill on the right. Finally it reaches a T-junction with another track. Turn **right** here. The tarmac track approaches the busy A3 and reaches a junction by a large fingerpost that points to various landmarks. Ignore a dirt track on the right and abandon the tarmac track as it bends sharp left. Your course is almost straight ahead on a rather obscure grassy path between two silver birches. The path winds through trees and reaches a gate. Turn **right** here over a footbridge across the A3. On the other side, take the first track **right**, leading back to the car park where the walk began.



## Getting there

By car: park in the **Ockham Common Boldermere** car park. To get there from the London area, go to the A3 / M25 junction and take the sliproad towards Guildford. (If you come from the A3, you need to take the exit for the M25 and go straight on at the roundabout. If you come from the Guildford direction, you need to do an about-turn at the M25 roundabout.) In about 100m, leave the sliproad by turning **left** onto a narrow road (Old Lane) signposted *Effingham* that runs through the forest beside the lake (*Boldermere*). The car park is immediately on the **left**. There is another car park further along Old Lane, but it is often closed in winter. An alternative starting point is the **Wren's Nest** car park on Wisley Common.

By bus: the special Wisley Gardens bus runs from Woking railway station from May to September. (Begin the walk near section 7.)

