



Wisley Common

Distance: 10 km=6½ miles or 7½ km=5 miles or 3½ km=2¼ miles
easy walking

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Refreshments: car park café Wisley Gardens
Ockham Bites

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Problems / changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Heath, woodland, historic landmarks, gardens, river

In Brief

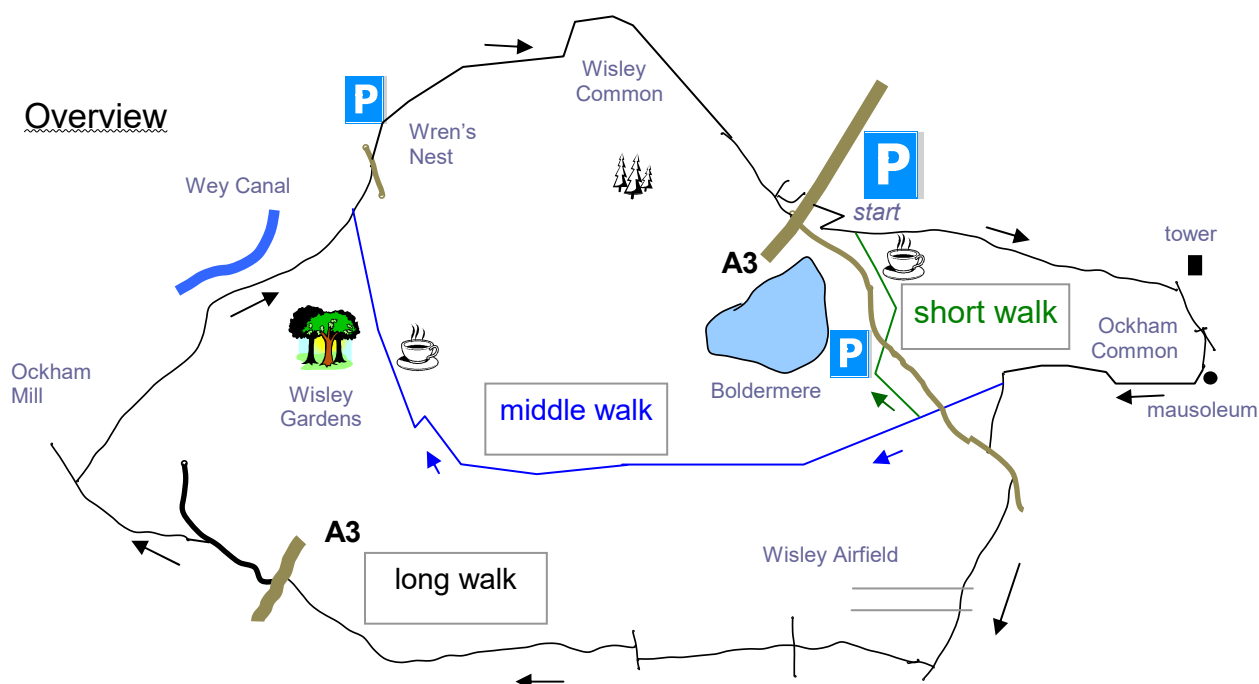
This is a circular walk through history exploring the wild pine and birch slopes of Wisley and Ockham Commons in an accessible part of Surrey. Three options are available. The **full walk** (10 km=6½ miles) visits Ockham Mill and goes past the River Wey with a generous view of Wisley Garden with a chance to visit the garden. The **middle walk** (7½ km=5 miles) goes to Wisley Garden by a more direct route, with an option to stop for coffee. The **short walk** (3½ km=2¼ miles) makes a shorter return, omitting Wisley Common.



These are also fine winter walks. In the height of a dry summer, walking through the barley on the main walk is a joy, **but not if it has been raining**. Also in summer, the undergrowth can be very dense in parts on the main walk, so alternatives are provided below. There is little mud in the drier months, so good shoes are adequate. There are some patches of nettles and scratchy undergrowth on the full walk that rule out wearing shorts. The Commons are ideal for your dog but this walk goes a little further afield, with some rough ground, so it may not be the best option for him.

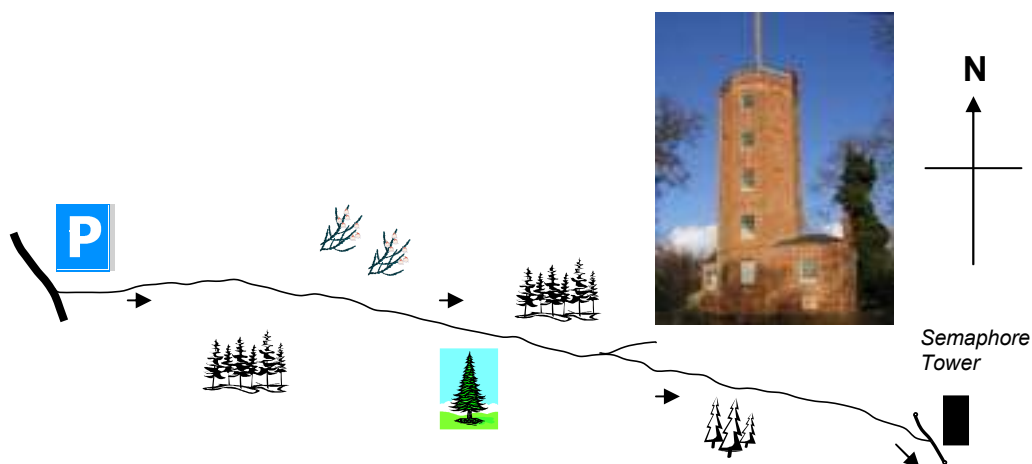
The walk begins at the **Ockham Common Boldermere** car park, nearest **postcode KT11 1ND**, just off the A3 road, near the M25 junction. The Boldermere car park is the first of two car parks in Old Lane. For the short walk, you can also start in the second, the Pond car park, a little further along the lane. For details, see → **Getting there** at the end.

Overview



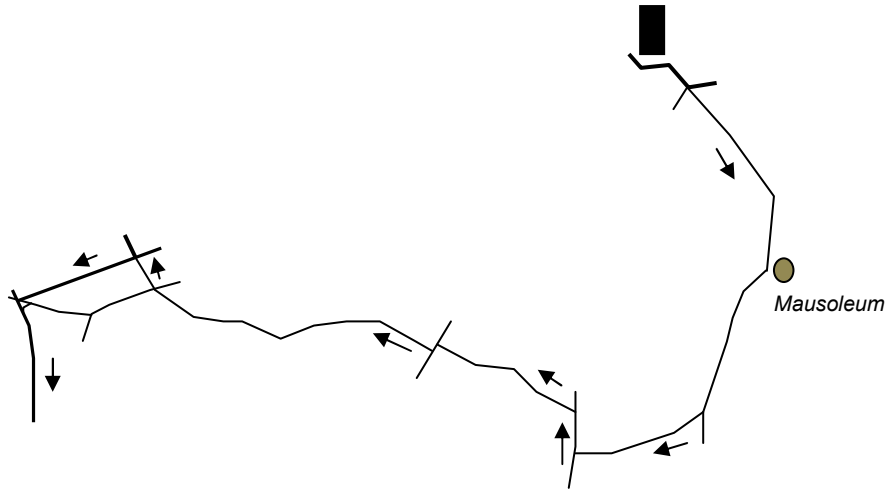
The Walk

- 1 The first stage takes you up to the Semaphore Tower. About 30m to the right of the café, go past a wooden 1-bar gate by a noticeboard onto a wide track, next to a sign for the *Chatley Heath Semaphore Tower* (a naval captain with a telescope). Avoid any minor paths leading off, always following those signs. 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.* After 1 km of agreeable walking, you reach the redbrick 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.

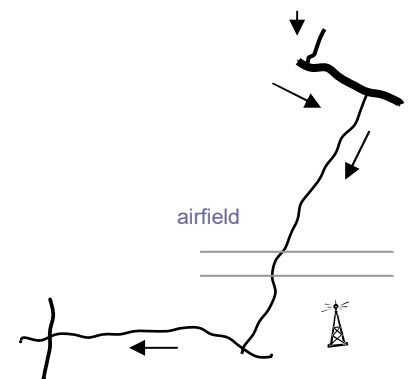
- 2 Veer **right** on the driveway and turn **left** and **right** round the tower. After 50m, the tarmac drive bends left. There are two waymarked paths here on your right, one immediately *before* the bend and one immediately *after* it. Take the *second* right turn, immediately *after* the bend, a wide woodland path. **Ignore** a lesser path that forks right in 15m towards a giant redwood and keep to the main path



round the **left**-hand edge of the Common. In 250m you reach a domed mausoleum. *The occupier, Bernhard Samuelson 1820-1905, was owner of nearby Hatchford Park.* The rest of this section requires some complex navigation and you need to concentrate for a while! Wheel **right** with the path which takes you in 90m through a wooden barrier. Immediately ignore two narrow paths on your left and stay on the main path which curves right and left, shortly arriving at an oblique T-junction by a post with a yellow arrow. Veer **right** here on a bridleway but, **after only 15m**, turn **left** on a path which promptly passes through another wooden barrier. Follow this path for 40m to a T-junction. Turn **left** here on a wide straight path **but**, in less than **10m**, turn **right** on another narrow path. This pleasant twisty path through silver birches and bracken is clear and dry and has no major branch-offs. After 250m or so, you pass through the remains of a wooden railing. 15m after the railing, go **straight over** a crossing path onto a *very narrow* path through bracken. In only 20m, the path ends at a T-junction. Turn **left** here on a *very wide* brick-lined horse path. In 100m or so, you come to a major junction of several wide paths by the open heath. Avoid a path very sharp left, but take the *second* path on your **left**, a wide, fairly straight track under tall oaks, heading for a green meadow. In 50m you will notice on your right a sign "L5" (now faded) painted on a tree, just before the meadow.

Decision point. If you are doing the **short** or the **middle** walk, skip to the section called the **Route by the Stream** near the end of this text. Otherwise, continue with the next section.

- 3 Stay on the track, regardless of the sign, and follow it, passing the meadow on your right and a pond on the left, through a large wooden gate beside *Surrey Cottage* and out to a road. Turn **left** on the road. In just over 100m, turn **right** on a foot-path over a 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 to the right of 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.



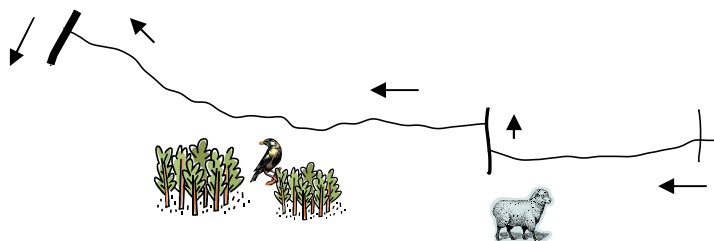
Wisley Airfield was requisitioned from farmland and opened in 1944 for flight testing by the nearby Vickers factory. It closed in 1972 and its unusual control tower, converted from an old cottage, was demolished in 1980.

Local people, model aircraft enthusiasts, riders and cyclists have been observed turning **right** on the concrete. They either go **left** at the next metal barrier to avoid the overgrown crops and grass of the next section. Or they continue unsentimentally to the very end of the concrete, down past a stile over a patch of shingle, down a narrow path direct to the exit to the A3 road, thus making indirect use of a parallel footpath on the left which is often impassable due to crops. However, because of the *Respect for Land* clause in our *Principles*, we must of course insist that these options are *not* taken.

Continue on the path across another field (with swaying barley or maize in summer) until you meet a (new) wire fence and a fingerpost. (As a diversion, by turning **left** before the fence and **left** again at a road, you reach the *Black Swan* pub for a good lunch.) Cross the stile. Because of frisky cattle and a very overgrown path later, many walkers stay on **this** side of the fence. Turn immediately **right** following the fence. At the corner of the field, the fence bears **left** towards farm buildings. A narrow path takes you between fences, over a stile and out to a farm track near the buildings.



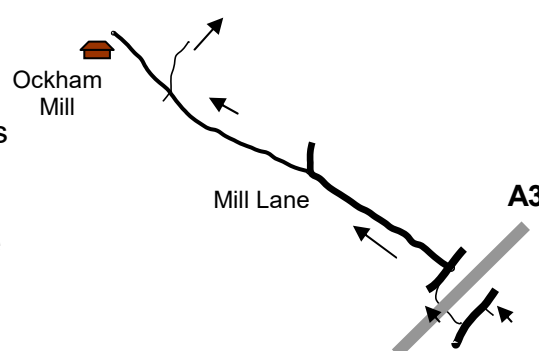
- 4 Turn **left** on the track (through a small wooden gate if you stayed on the right of the wire fence), in 10m turn **right** over an avoidable concrete stile and take the **left**-hand option of the two footpaths indicated, running straight ahead alongside the fence and a line of poplar trees. In 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. In 350m, at the next corner, you meet a metal kissing gate on your left. There are **two** options, the first being always preferable to avoid mud. (1) In **winter** when the unharvested maize does not encroach, do *not* go through the gate, but keep ahead on a very coarse path, at the far corner pass an avoidable concrete stile and go down steps to turn **right** on a sunken track. (2) In **summer**, or when the undergrowth or the crops are high, turn **left** on a path across the meadow, go over a stile, down steps and **right** on a very muddy sunken track, passing in about 100m some steps on your right. In 25m turn **left** on a footpath at a marker 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 on a sometimes vague path, always along the left edge and into another meadow, until eventually, after nearly 1 km in total, you meet a yellow marker and have a wire fence on the right. The path goes through a metal barrier and reaches a sliproad of the A3. Turn **left**.



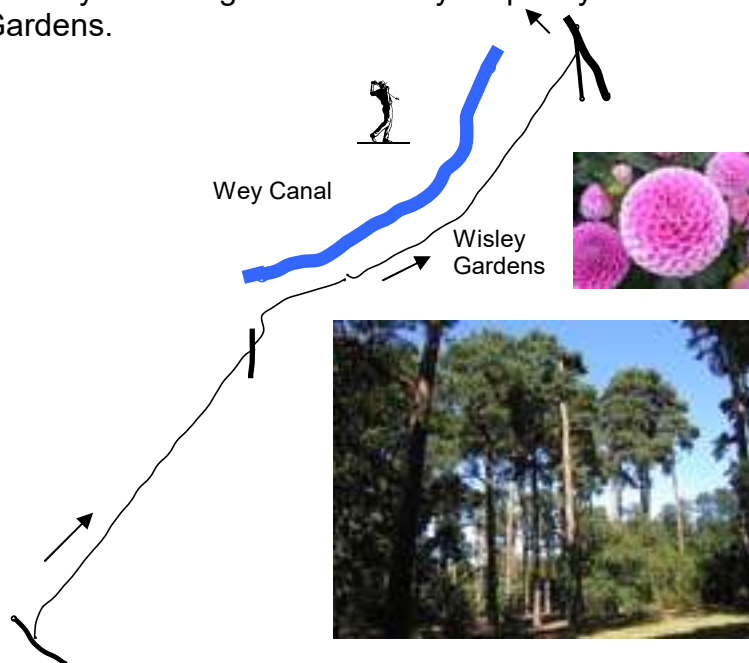
- 5 Turn **right** through the first A3 underpass, veer **right**, cross the sliproad carefully and turn **left** on Mill Lane opposite. *On the right is part of Wisley Gardens, of which more later.* Where the road bends right towards the golf club, keep straight ahead on a narrow lane, passing a seed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

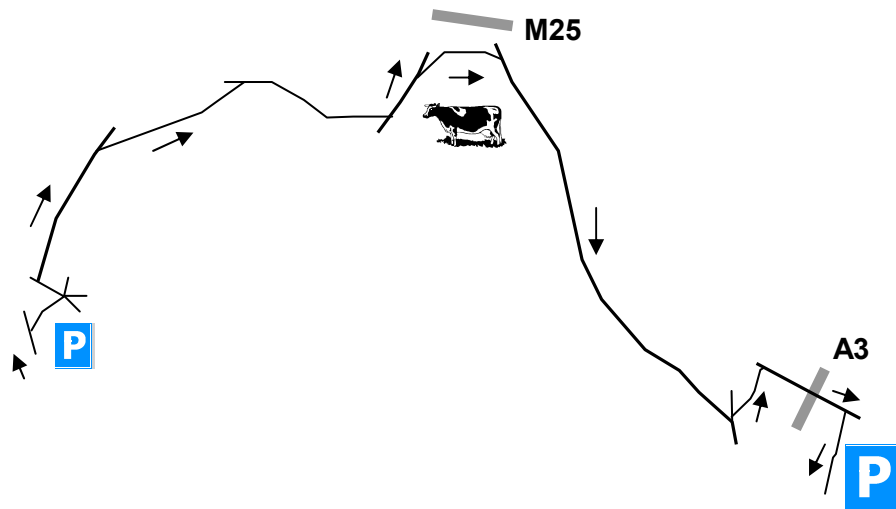
Ockham Mill is a fine brick structure in the beautiful setting of a pond on the River Wey Navigation. There has been a succession of mills at Ockham since probably 1296. The present structure was built by the first Earl of Lovelace (William King-Noel, 8th Baron King of Ockham), lover of gothic architecture, 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 concrete drive. The route is **left** here but the signposted tarmac footway on the right would take you quickly 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.

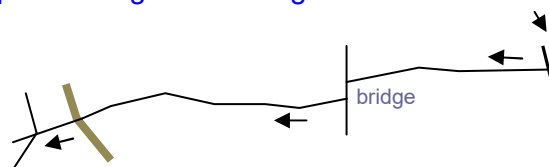
- 7 Where the drive shortly meets a road, keep **left**. In 50m, turn **right** through the Wren's Nest car park (an alternative starting point). Go straight through the car park and exit through a wooden gate beside a larger one. Immediately turn **left** beside the fence. In 50m, opposite a small wooden gate,



fork **right** away from the fence on the main path. After two marker posts, in 200m or so, you see a marker post ahead with blue and yellow arrows. Fork **right** here on a permissive (unsigned?) horse path. In 300m, within sight of the M25 motorway, a footpath joins you from the left as you veer a little right. Follow this wide winding irregular path, keeping to the left-hand side. Finally, at a T-junction in front of a farm gate, turn **left** on a wide track. In 120m, about 50m before the noisy M25, fork **right** on a wide path which skirts a field on your right, staying by the wire fence. 25m after the corner, turn **right** on a wide track. Follow the track, passing pastureland and sometimes belted Galloway cattle. A large expanse of water with ducks appears on your left, with buildings of suitably named Pond Farm on your right. After 750m you reach a T-junction, visibly close to the A3 road 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. Follow this path ignoring a path that forks to the right. 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.

Route by the Stream ½ km= .3 miles

Take this route if you are doing the **short** or the **middle** walk, missing Ockham Mill and the path through the RHS garden.



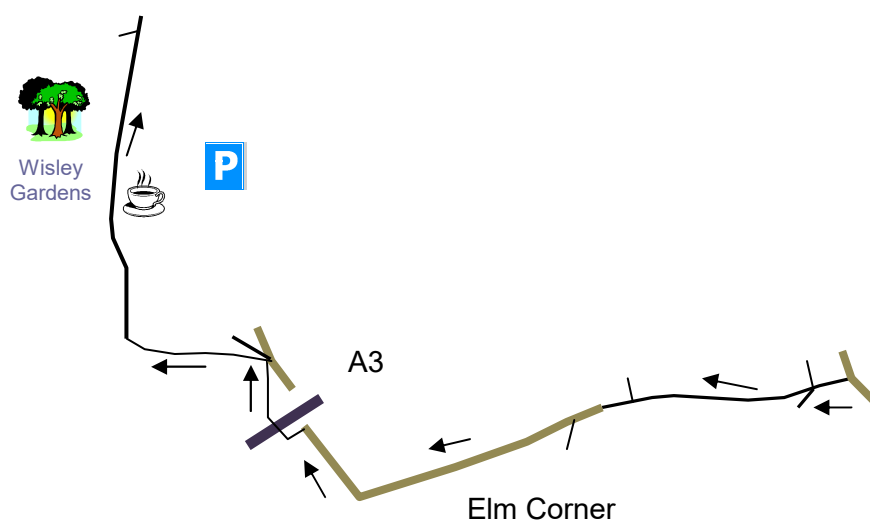
Turn **right** at the "L5" sign on a narrow path into a wood of beech, rowan and chestnut. The green meadow is visible on your left and the pine-clad heath on your right. Closer on your left is a sunken rather murky stream.

After 200m you reach a 3-way junction with a path coming down from the open birch heath on your right. Turn sharp **left** here into the woods. *Don't miss this turn!* The path takes you quickly over a stream via a 4-plank bridge. *Immediately after* the bridge turn **right** on a peaty path into the deep woods. The path veers right a bit and on your right you will see a deep swampy area. The road Old Lane gets nearer on your left. Finally you reach the road at a bend. Cross straight over Old Lane to a wide cinder track opposite. In 70m you reach a junction of paths with a 1-bar barrier.

Decision point. If you are doing the **short** walk, skip to the section called the **Short Return** at the end of this text. Otherwise, continue with the next section, the Wisley Garden Quest, with an opportunity to visit the gardens or at least a pleasant coffee stop in prospect.

Wisley Garden Quest 2¼ km=1½ miles

Take this route if you are doing the **middle** walk.



Ignore the track with the wooden barrier and take the **right** fork. Follow this wide, rather rutted track. After 350m on your left, although *not* part of this walk, is a pair of gates leading into Snakes Field, a conservation area. Continue on the track, passing a noticeboard in another 100m or so and reaching the start of the tarmac in the hamlet of Elm Corner. Continue ahead on the lane for another 300m and follow it as it turns **right** on a concrete surface heading for the A3 road. On reaching the A3, turn **left** and cross the road by a pedestrian bridge. At the other side, a wide path takes you down into woodland and you reach a tarmac lane by the entrance to Wisley RHS Gardens. Keep **left** here on a narrow path with the entrance drive about 15m on your right. You come out by the Plant Centre. Go straight over reaching the shop and coffee shop where you can take refreshment without buying an entrance ticket. *A visit to the gardens is an absolute must-do.* For more details see section [6](#) of the main walk. Continue on the concrete exit drive close to buildings on your left, soon taking the tarmac footway on the left. In 200m, keep straight on as you pass a footpath on your left.

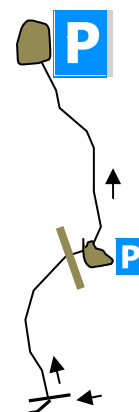
Now re-join the main walk at section [7](#).



Short Return $\frac{3}{4}$ km = $\frac{1}{2}$ mile

Take this route if you are finishing the **short** walk, returning directly to the car parks.

Ignore both main tracks ahead and turn sharp **right** on a path into the Common, signposted *Horse Ride*. After 100m, by a marker post, keep right on the main path. (The lakeside is unfortunately not easily accessible.) Soon the path goes along a boardwalk. Take any path up the slope ahead to reach Old Lane again. Cross the road into Ockham Common Pond car park. For the Boldermere car park, take the first path on the left with a sign for *café and toilets*. At the top of the slope, fork **left** as indicated. Keep following the signs, going over a boardwalk, quickly reaching the car park where the walk began.



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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**. The alternative **Pond** car park is further along Old Lane, but it is often closed in winter. An alternative starting point for the middle and long walks is the **Wren's Nest** car park on Wisley Common.

By bus: the special Wisley Gardens bus 515 and 515a runs from Guildford (and possibly Woking) railway station, including Sundays. Check the timetables. (Join the walk in the *Wisley Garden Quest*.)

