



Wisley Common

Distance: 10 km=6½ miles

easy walking

or 7½ km=5 miles or 3½ km=2¼ miles

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Date written: 26-dec-2009

Refreshments: entrance café in Wisley Gardens
Ockham Bites

Date revised: 10-jun-2014

Map: Explorer 145 (Guildford)

Last update: 3-dec-2020

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

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Heath, woodland, historic landmarks, gardens, river

In Brief

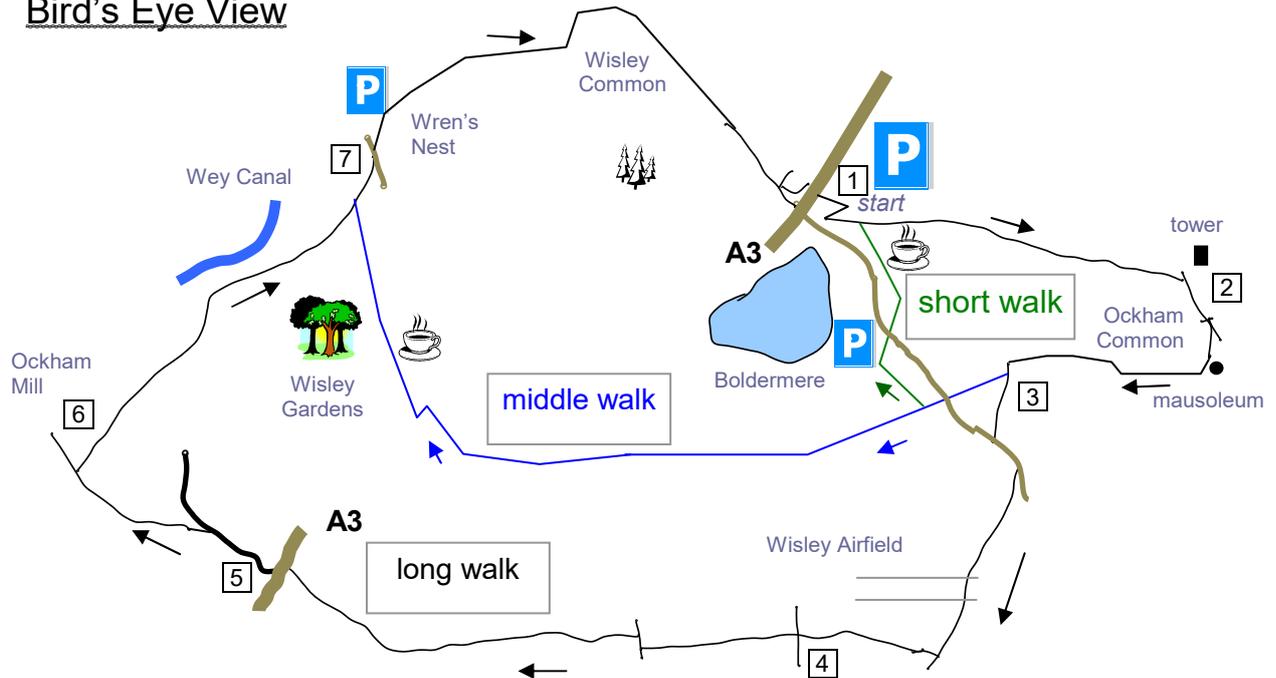
This is a circular walk through history exploring the wild pine and birch slopes of Wisley and Ockham Commons in an accessible part of Surrey. Three options are available. The **full walk** (10 km=6½ miles) visits Ockham Mill and goes past the River Wey with a generous view of Wisley Garden with a chance 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. This walk has many varied and unique features. The great beauty of the heath is tempered a little, on the full walk, by nearness of the A3 trunk road, the undergrowth around Ockham and the fencing around Wisley Gardens. Nevertheless, this walk holds a strange fascination for regular walkers.

This is also a fine winter walk. In the height of a dry summer, walking through the barley on the full walk is a joy, but not if it has been raining. Also in summer, the undergrowth there can be very dense in parts. The full walk contains one short very muddy section, making boots necessary, even in dry weather. Otherwise, good shoes are adequate in the drier months. There are some patches of nettles and scratchy undergrowth on the full walk that may need all your legs and arms to be covered. The Commons are ideal for your dog but the full walk goes a little further afield, with some rough ground, so it may not be the best option for him.



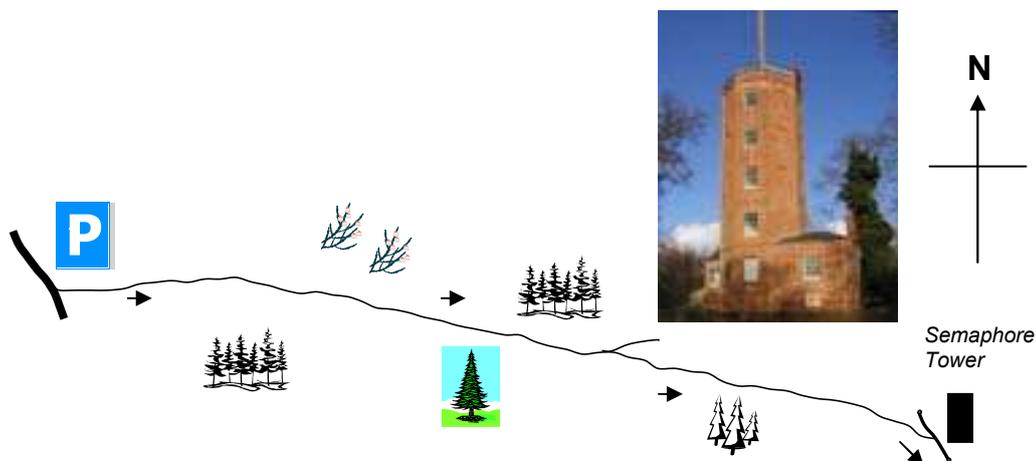
All three versions of this walk begin at the free **Ockham Common Boldermere** car park, nearest **postcode KT11 1ND**, just off the A3 road, near the M25 junction. The Boldermere car park is the first of two car parks in Old Lane. For the short walk, you can also start in the second, Pond car park, a little further along the lane. Both car parks are free, with optional donation to a worthy cause. For the two longer walks, there is the Wisley Common ("**Wren's Nest**") car park (approx postcode **GU23 6QD**). For the middle walk, you could park at Wisley Gardens (postcode **GU23 6QB**). There is a dirt strip in Mill Lane (**GU23 6QT**). For details, see at the end → **Getting there**.

Bird's Eye View



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 small blue-and-white sign for the *Chatley Heath Semaphore Tower* (a naval captain with a telescope). Follow those signs, avoiding any minor paths leading off. 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 (under scaffolding and screens in 2020).



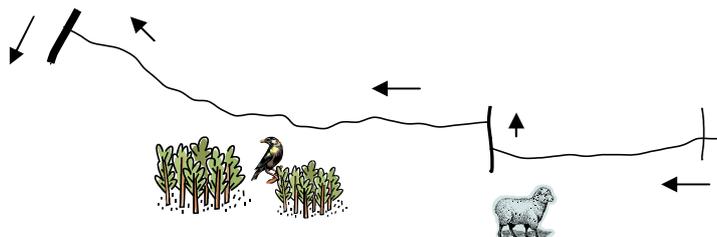
The Semaphore Tower formed part of the Admiralty Telegraph joining Portsmouth to Whitehall. Naval orders and news of victories came this way before the invention of the telegraph. The existing 70ft high semaphore tower was built in 1822. The mast still works and there is an information centre inside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

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. It is now (2019) given over to cereal crops.

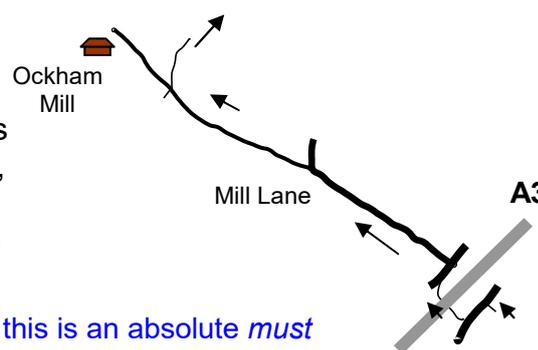
Continue on the path across another field (with swaying barley or maize in summer) until you meet a (new) wire fence and a fingerpost. (As a diversion, by turning **left** after the fence and **left** again at a road, you reach in 10 minutes the *Black Swan* pub for a good lunch.) Cross the stile and turn immediately **right** following the fence. At the corner of the field, turn **left** with the fence towards farm buildings. Keep hugging the fence, avoiding the farm, passing a lot of debris on your right, reaching a wide farm track.



4 Go briefly **right** on the farm track. On the other side of the hedge you will find an avoidable concrete stile on your **left**. After the stile, take the **left**-hand option of the two footpaths indicated, running straight ahead alongside the fence and a line of poplar trees. *The field on the left is notable for the huge puffball fungi that appear in some seasons.* In 300m or so you meet a metal kissing gate on your left. Go **left** through this gate. (There is a footpath straight ahead, keeping the the wire fence on your left, leading down steps but it is periodically (2016, 2019) very heavily overgrown.) Cross straight over a pasture, over a stile, down a few steps, onto a sunken bridleway and turn **right**. (This bridleway is muddy even in a dry summer and circumvention is possible but difficult.) In 200m, just after a large concrete block, turn **left** at a markerpost on a footpath, indicated by a yellow arrow. The path 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, until eventually, after nearly 1 km in total, you come to a major crossing track. Turn **left** and keep left following the path towards the noise of traffic, with the A3 over/underpass visible ahead, cutting through bushes, to reach the A3 slip road (the exact exit point seems to vary each year). Turn **left**.



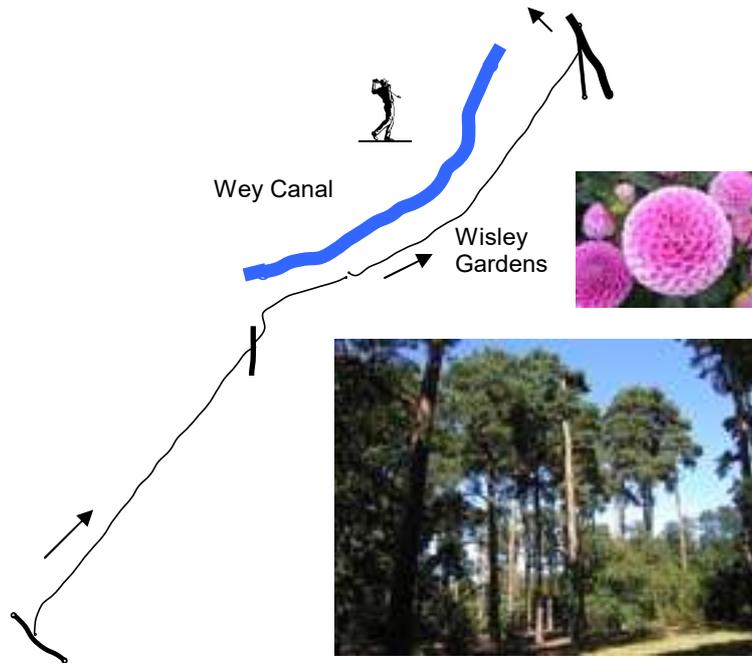
5 Turn **right** through the first A3 underpass, veer **right**, cross the sliproad carefully and turn **left** on Mill Lane opposite. *On the right is part of Wisley Gardens, of which more later.* Where the road bends right towards the golf club, keep straight ahead on narrow Mill Lane, passing a seed 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.)

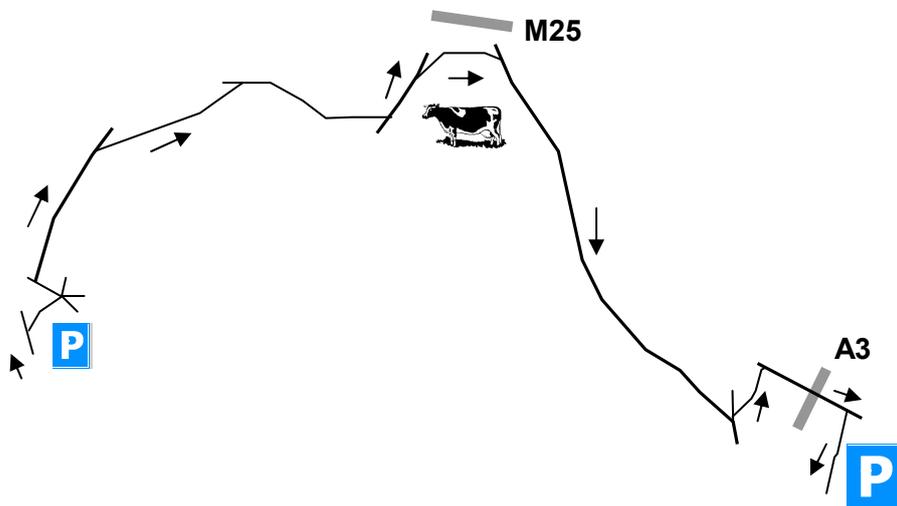
Ockham Mill is a fine brick structure in the beautiful setting of a pond on the River Wey Navigation. There has been a succession of mills at Ockham since probably 1296. The present structure was built by the first Earl of Lovelace (William King-Noel, 8th Baron King of Ockham), lover of gothic architecture, 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 more fields to a drive and cross it to a narrow footpath opposite. The path veers left, goes through a tall kissing gate and runs close to the new glasshouse of Wisley Gardens. 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 two 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 (2017: passing a big construction site for the new Welcome Centre).



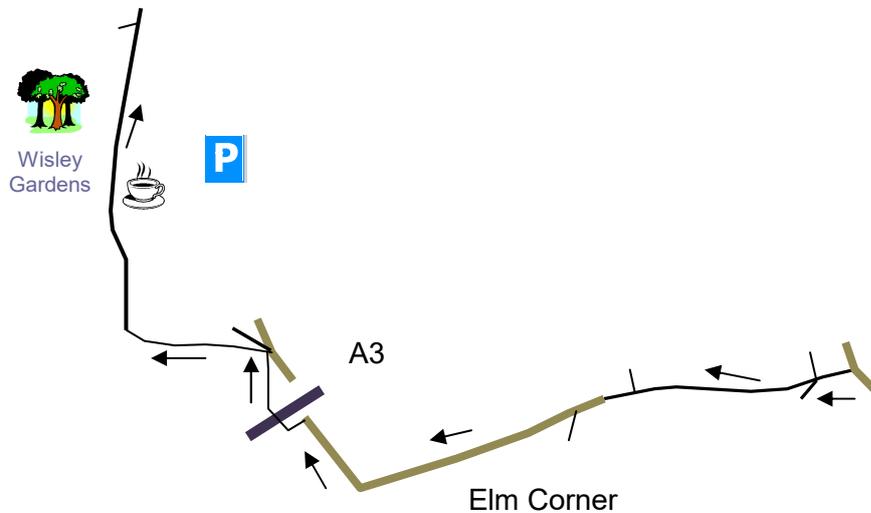
Wisley RHS garden is one of the world's great gardens. It was given to The Royal Horticultural Society in 1903, and the garden grew from 60 acres (24 hectares) to the present-day 200 acres (80 hectares). It is a beautiful garden in itself with a fine collection of rare plants but it also serves as a 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,



Wisley Garden Quest 2¼ km=1½ miles

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



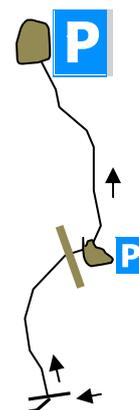
Ignore the track with the wooden barrier and take the **right** fork. Follow this wide, rather rutted track. After 350m on your left, although *not* part of this walk, is a pair of gates leading into Snakes Field, a conservation area. Continue on the track, passing a noticeboard in another 100m or so 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. Your path bends right into the car park. Go straight across, passing a main block on your left which used to be the welcome centre. Keep all buildings on your left till you pass the spanking new visitor's centre with its shop and coffee shop where you can take refreshment without necessarily 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 walking on pedestrian tarmac, with everything tight on your left, finally heading for "car parks 4 and 5". You come out eventually near the road as a tarmac footpath joins you from the left. Keep **right** to meet the road.

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 715 runs hourly from Guildford or Kingston railway station, including Sundays. Check the timetables. (Join the walk in the *Wisley Garden Quest*.)

