



Six Ponds and a River Bank Esher West End and River Mole

Distance: 5½ km=3½ miles easy walking with obstacles, some slopes & steps

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: West End Village

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Author: Schwebefuss

Map: Explorer 161 (London South) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Woodland, river, heath, ponds

In Brief

This woodland walk begins by a quiet village pond near Esher, Surrey and quickly develops into a wild ramble along the River Mole and then over beech- and pine-clad hills. It also takes in **all six** ponds of this part of Esher Common, some hidden deep in the woods. The woodland, river and ponds are attractive at any time of the year.

The walk begins beside the **Prince of Wales Pond**, grid ref 129639, **postcode KT10 8LJ**, www.w3w.co/lonely.corner.behind. To get there from the A3 road, turn off for Cobham or Esher, take the A307 Portsmouth Road that runs between Esher and Cobham and turn onto Hawkshill Way or West End Lane to reach the village pond. Alternatively, if you know the area, take Lammas Lane from the centre of Esher. Park in Winterdown Road where there is plenty of off-road parking. There is more parking space further up Winterdown Road, past the entrance to *Garsons*.

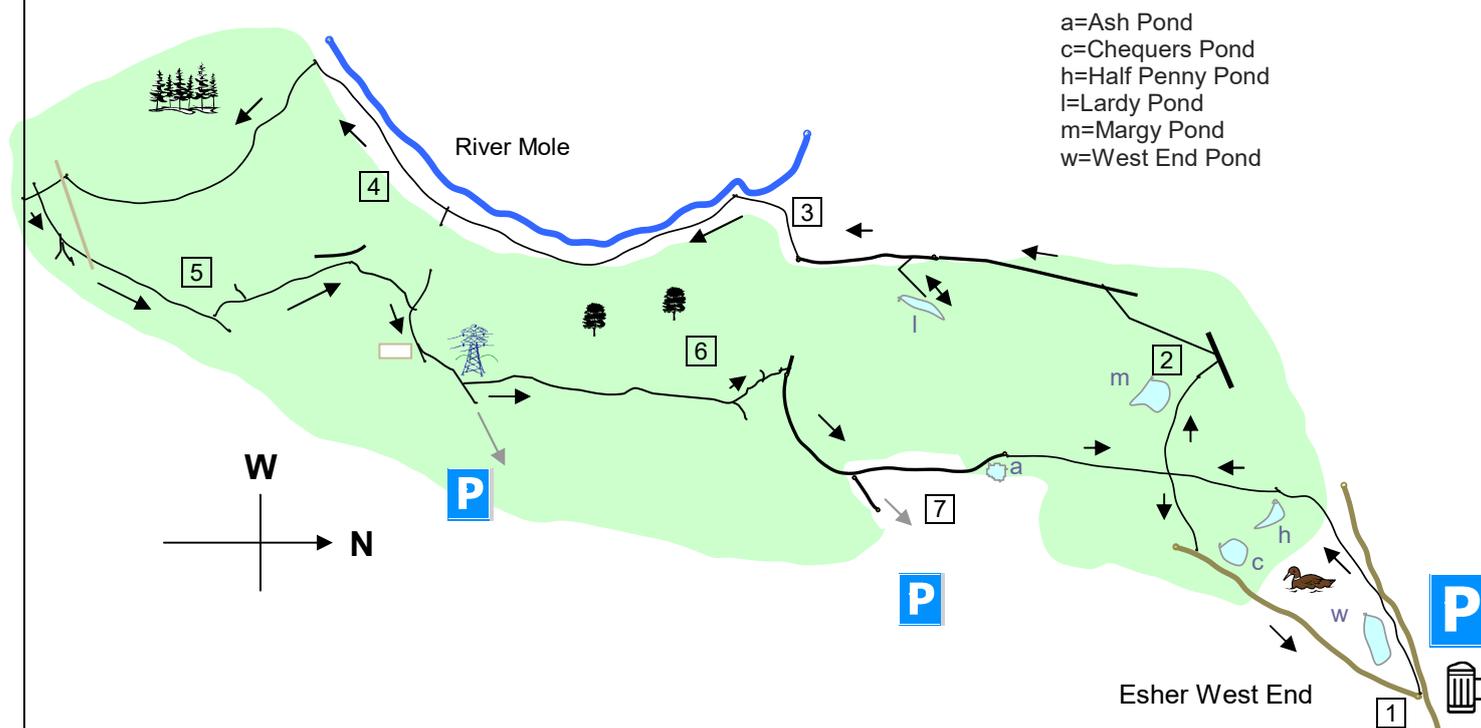
An alternative start is the **West End Lane** car park which is on the left just off a side road from the A307 opposite the entrance to Claremont, postcode **KT10 9JG**, www.w3w.co/lawn.cake.chest. If you start here, leave by a small path between uprights in the fence (not the wide path by the noticeboard on its left), follow it to a T-junction and turn **right**, joining the walk at section 7. You could combine this walk with a visit to **Claremont Landscape Garden** and Lake (entry charge to non-NT members) with its wonderful landscaping and a good café / restaurant on one side. Simply exit the car park and turn right to the main road.

Another possible starting point is the **Horseshoe Clump** car park, on the A307, opposite the entrance to *Black Hills*, very *approximate* postcode **KT10 9JW**, grid ref TQ 124 627 (go up steps on *either* path at the back and turn **right** on the *second* crossing path).



The route has a few steep sections with board walks where slipperiness can be a problem. Good solid waterproof footwear should be fine if the weather is not too damp and there are no nettles or stiles. Dogs are very welcome.

The Walk



- 1 Head along the green next to Winterdown Road beside the **Prince of Wales Pond** with its huge population of ducks, that sometimes roil around your feet hoping for bread. After the pond, diverge gradually away from Winterdown Road aiming for a noticeboard visible at the treeline ahead. Take a path here going **left** into the woods, to an info board and a bench seat by a large pond on your left. This pond is the large **Half Penny Pond**, one of six in this area, all skimmed by dragonflies in summer and hosting numerous protected types of wildlife. Just after the pond, keep ahead through a wooden barrier on a path that runs between ditches. *Long and straight, because in past times, this path was part of a rifle range.* Exactly 200m on, you reach a very obvious crossing path with a culvert and lining stones. Turn **right** here. Ignore all minor paths leading off and keep to the main winding path as it runs along the right-hand edge of a well-lit area of tall thin oak trees. In about 50m you enter an open area with fallen tree trunks and a wide path branching off right. Fork **right** here. Soon you have the filmy **Margy Pond** (very reduced in summer) on your left.
- 2 After the pond, follow a wide path away from the pond, leading in 100m to a tarmac lane. Don't join the lane, but just **before** the lane, turn **left** on a narrow path, shortly going over a 3-plank bridge, and immediately turn **left** on a wide forest path. Continue to the end where there is a 3-plank bridge, a T-junction and a noticeboard. Turn **left**, going past a wooden barrier with a sign for *The Ledges*, on a wide track which runs along the edge of the common with crops on the other side. After just over 300m on this track, in a more open area, you will see on your left a little 2-plank bridge (*this feature is easy to miss!*). Fork **left** over the bridge and go sharp **left** over a 4-plank bridge to the **Lardy Pond**, another beautiful hidden-in-the-forest pond. Now retrace your steps back to the wide track, staying on the right next to the crop field and going gently up a slope. As the field ends and the track

begins to enter the deep forest ahead, turn **right** on a good side path so that you still have the fence on your right.

- 3  The path leads up to a promontory with a bench with a fine view of the Mole Valley below. Just before the promontory, veer **left** towards wooden barriers and keep **right** down steps. The steps are supported by railings and they lead down to the bank of the river. *(For more information on the River Mole, see the walk in this series "Box Hill, Mole Valley, Mickleham Downs".)* Turn **left** along the river side and follow it for some distance. You pass a bench and you need to traverse several steps and beautifully restored boardwalks. They may be slippery after wet weather, so special care is needed. The path runs past a memorial bench under grid lines (possibly unseen above the trees) and reaches a wide junction on your left. *(There used to be a fingerpost here with the words "steps and carpark" but it has disappeared; you can clearly see the steps.)* Keep straight ahead ignoring the junction, staying as close as you can to the river. *[2024: there were a number of fallen trees across the path, requiring an occasional scramble.]* The path twists a lot, goes over a sunken ditch and finally terminates at another watery ditch with a metal fence ahead.

- 4  Turn **left** at the fence, away from the river. Your rather unclear path leads straight ahead over a marshy area (where an old bridge was washed away) and begins to climb. This section may also be slippery. You approach a sloping beechwood. Go straight up the steepest part of the beechwood and continue through rhododendrons, reaching a fence. Keep the fence on your left, with a steep drop visible on your right. *Bluebells are plentiful in late spring.* Finally, the path descends steeply, following the fence, and goes over a 2-plank bridge. After the bridge, your path goes slightly uphill with a wire fence on your left. As this path begins to curve right, turn **left** on a narrow side path, heading for a long section of wooden ranch fencing which surrounds a private enclosure. You meet a wide driveway on your left. *(You can avoid the invigorating climb over the hill by turning left on the driveway, past a house, turning left at the crossing at the start of the next section.)* Cross straight over the driveway, passing the rounded corner of the fence, and continue uphill on a snaking path, initially with the fence on your left. In 100m or so, your path ends at a T-junction with another path. Turn **left** here, shortly passing a grotesquely twisted tree trunk and uphill, going through a gap in a bank. After this high point, your path runs down, passing the fenced enclosure again.

- 5 At a tarmac drive, go between concrete posts and cross straight over, past a barrier. In 200m, the path goes over another tarmac drive, curves left, goes over a stream and winds uphill, touching the drive again. Veer **right** away from the drive, staying on the horse ride. The path passes a junction on your left and reaches a wide crossing path and a post with a red-white badge and "No. 32", the first of several of these marker posts. On your right is a large white studio-style modern house, *The Homewood*. Turn **right** on the path passing the house on your right.

The Homewood is an early masterpiece (1938-39) by the modernist architect Patrick Gwynne who acknowledged Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe as his influences in its lean lines and its use of modern materials. Before his death, he gave the house to the National Trust. The Homewood can be visited by a pre-booked guided tour on certain Fridays and Saturdays in the warmer months.

Soon you see overhead grid wires. Keep straight on till you are practically underneath the wires in an open space. (The path straight ahead leads to the **Horseshoe Clump** car park.) Fork **left** here, passing marker post with a faint “No. 31”, and, in 20m, fork **right** directly into trees. This narrow path winds its way uphill before widening and levelling out to run through beech woods with various branching paths.

6 About 100m after the grid wires, you come over a crossing path with post “No. 40”. In nearly 100m, you pass a major junction on your right. In under 100m, you reach a Y-junction by a post with a red-white badge “No. 36”. Keep **left** on the main path which suddenly curves away **left** down into the valley. You pass a post with a red-white badge “No. 37”. Keeping the post on your left, follow the right-hand fork down to reach a T-junction. Turn **right** here on a wide path. The path goes over a hump and gradually curves left, being joined by several paths coming down from the right, entering an open space by a post with a red-white badge “No 38”. 50m after the post you reach a major fork. (If you parked in the **West End Lane car park**, take the **right** fork; otherwise ...) Take the **left** fork, the more grassy option.

7 Soon you pass the remain of an old fence with steps down to the **Ash Pond**, now only a large puddle identifiable from the reeds. Continue along a straight path running into the distance between two ditches. In about 200m, you reach a wide crossing path with a culvert and lining stones, which will be familiar if you started in the village. Turn **right** here. The path leads to West End Lane. Turn **left** on the road, beside the final pond, **Chequers Pond**, leading to the village green where the walk began.

There are several good refreshment stops in the village:



At the end of the green, there is the *Prince of Wales* pub. *The Prince of Wales has an appealing Regency look with a view of the pond and the green. For food, Esher town centre, Hersham or Cobham are also good prospects.*



West End Sports and Social Club Café is based in West End Lane. *The cafe is open from 9.30 to 3, last orders at 2.30. Everyone is welcome. The café serves breakfasts, toasties, cakes and so forth (the toasties are highly recommended by walkers). Charming owner and lovely outside seating area overlooking the green.*

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Getting there

By car: see introduction.

By train and bus: bus 458 goes to the Princess Alice Hospice Roundabout, ten minutes from the walk; bus 515 stops at the end of West End Lane, on the A307 opposite Claremont Landscape Garden, five minutes from the walk.