



Ockham

Distance: 6 km=3¾ miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: The *Black Swan* after the walk

Map: Explorer 145 (Guildford) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Village, green paths, woodland, horse paddocks, church

In Brief

This is a quiet relaxing walk around an ancient Surrey village and beyond, along easy paths by hedgerows and through woodland. The village, as you will see, is notable in history. There is no village centre and therefore no amenities, but the excellent *Black Swan* pub/restaurant is very close (at the other end of Ockham Lane).



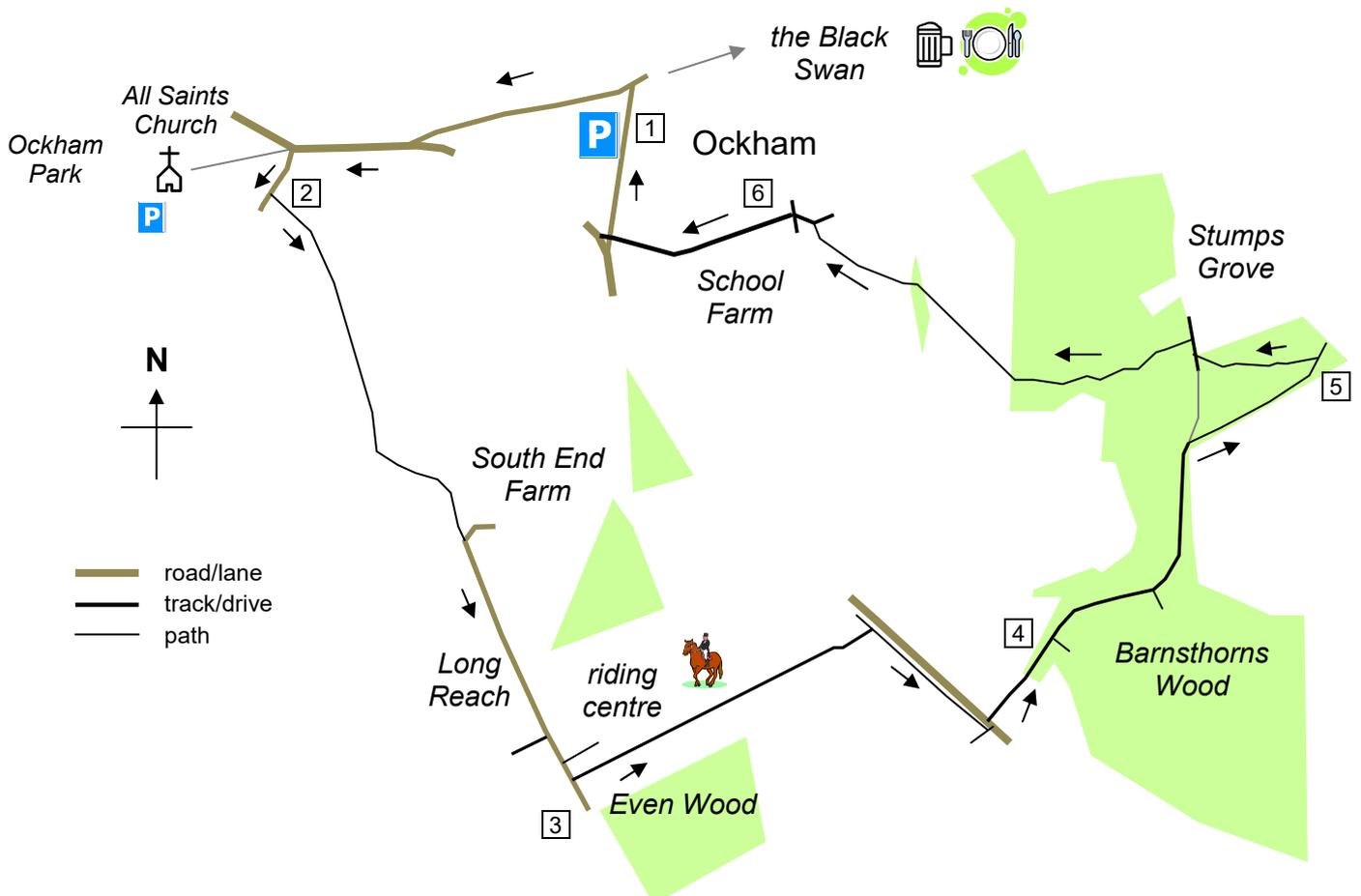
Although this walk was last done in December, the paths were surprisingly dry, the only short section of mud being at the farm near the end. The remaining paths are either grass between fields, or a wide track, a woodland path or a route across green meadows. In the colder half of the year there are few nettles or scratchy vegetation to worry bare legs. But in summer the undergrowth becomes thicker, making shorts inadvisable. This is especially apparent at the end of the first footpath in Section 2 where a strong stick or hiking pole comes in useful. In most seasons, trainers or sensible footwear are adequate, but in wet conditions boots are advisable. The roads are generally quiet (except for a short stretch along the B2039) and they all have a footway, so your dog is welcome. The word "stile" is not in the dictionary in Ockham.

The walk begins in the village of **Ockham, Surrey**, postcode **GU23 6NZ**. Park in the quiet side road Alms Heath, www.w3w.co/junior.brings.harp, which is at the corner of the big redbrick *Hautboy*. (*Please do not park close to the Hautboy and not over the pavement!*) Another possible starting place is *All Saints Church* (but not before 10.30 on Sundays please!). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Ockham's history goes back millennia and the latinised name "Occam" has resulted in the whimsical claim that William of Occam was born here. The Occam brothers were Franciscans and William spent his scholastic years on the simplifying of philosophy, which became known as "Occam's Razor". At its crudest, you should choose the simplest explanation, which in today's culture usually means "somebody screwed up".

Two American ex-slaves, Ellen and William Craft, were recipients of a famous act of charity by the village. They had escaped to the North using a network of secret routes and safe houses. But because of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, they could be captured at any moment and returned to their place of captivity. (This controversial law was one of the causes of the American Civil War.) Ellen, having a lighter skin, was able to disguise herself as an affluent white gentleman, with her husband acting as her servant. They sailed to Liverpool and spent 19 years in England, raising five children. Lady Byron of the village (some give credit to the social reformer Harriet Martineau) arranged for them to live in Ockham for the first two years where their first child received schooling and the parents paid for their stay by teaching. They returned to America after the Civil War. One of the sons re-settled in England.

Ockham Park, located just beyond the church, built in the 1600s, is the largest house in the village. It was the home of Ada Lovelace but that part of the story must wait.



The Walk

- 1 Starting in the side road, Alms Heath, walk with a low brick wall plus redbrick houses on your left, and open fields on your right, as far as a T-junction with a major road next to the ornate redbrick *Hautboy* (of which more at the end of this guide). Turn **left** on Ockham Lane. You pass several houses, including the village hall (now under threat) and the *Old Forge*. Turn **right** when you reach a major road using the footway on the right. Where the road flexes right, cross carefully over to a minor lane Guileshill Lane. As a worthwhile excursion, the driveway just to the right leads to All Saints Church, in an idyllic isolated spot, with a view of Ockham Park, also a possible starting point.

All Saints' Church, founded in the 1100s and "restored" by the Victorians, is Grade I listed, making it a national treasure. (One consequence being that it's usually locked.) The north wing has a small chapel dedicated to the King family (to which the Earl of Lovelace and Ada belonged).

- 2 About 50m along Guileshill Lane, at a signpost, turn **left** onto a narrow footpath. The path runs beside a line of trees, a fence and a ditch, with fields on each side, perfect for blackberries in late summer. [Apr 2022: care! the ditch beside the path is now deeper and there are hanging trees.] You come out momentarily into a field. A yellow arrow directs you straight ahead, close to a wooden fence on your left, with a thick hedge on your right. [2023: this short section has been walkable and is occasionally cleared, but in summer it was overgrown and impassable; a walker offered the *summer diversion* described in the separate paragraph below.] Finally your path elbows right, runs beside a tractor depot and come out next to South End Farm onto a quiet tarmac road, Long Reach. Continue straight ahead along the road, passing the occasional big house. After 400m, ignore a bridleway on the right. In a further 100m you pass the entrance to the *Holistic Horse and Pony Centre*, a riding centre which aims to "de-stress" by nurturing a close emotional connection between rider and horse.

Summer diversion: go slightly **right** around the left-hand edge of a large field, keeping close to the thick hedge on your left. Walk the perimeter of this field and the next one, passing several back gardens. You eventually come to a wooden gate in the hedge. Go through the gate, turn **left** and continue down a gravelled track until you come to the road. Turn **right** to pass in 100m the entrance to the *Holistic Horse and Pony Centre* described in the main text.

- 3 Immediately after the gated entrance to the riding centre, turn **left** through a small gate onto a signed bridleway. This wide straight path, comfortably surfaced in bark chips, leads past paddocks and exercise arenas. Finally it leads you through a small wooden gate to a T-junction with another path, audibly close to the main B2039 road. Turn **right** on this path, parallel to the road. The path ends at a minor road, Green Lane. Turn **left** and cross over the main road, shifting about 10m to your left, onto a wide track opposite, known as Whitehill Lane, signed as a bridleway, heading for woodland.
- 4 Just after the track enters the deep canopy of Barnsthorns Woods, **ignore** a 3-plank bridge into the woods on your right. 150m later, **ignore** another tempting signed path on your right: the so-called Blue Ride, used on the *Bookham-Effingham* walk in this series. In a further 200m, you approach some open fields and the track divides. Keep **left** here, still on the main

track, avoiding the signposted footpath on the right. In another 200m you reach a fingerpost. Fork **right** here, leaving the main track, taking a narrower path through the birchwood. (Many walkers and riders stay on the track, but the woodland paths here are much quieter and more attractive, although sometimes muddy.)

5 After 300m the woodland path ends at an oblique T-junction with a redbrick house visible on the right. Turn sharp **left** here on another path through birchwoods and rhododendrons (which make a fine display in late spring). The path ends at the familiar wide track. Turn **right** on the track and in 30m, just before a large wooden gate leading to Stumps Grove Farm, turn **left** at a signpost onto a footpath. Your path runs through mixed woodland for about 400m, making several turns. It ends at a modern kissing-gate, followed by a 4-plank bridge and a view to the high rise buildings of Woking, then taking you into a grassy meadow. Take a faint path diagonally **right** leading to gates on the other side. Go through the small gate into a sheep pasture. Your direction is a fraction right across the pasture, ending at a modern kissing-gate beside a (possibly open) large metal gate. After a short piece of farm track, turn **left** at a T-junction to meet a crossing path beside a 4-way fingerpost.

6 Keep straight ahead on a wide driveway, passing the timbered *School Farm* house. On your right are new smart houses, while a little further on you pass several older houses of Ockham village. You come out to a major junction near the main road. Turn **right** just *before* the main road onto Alms Heath, thus completing the circuit. The small group of redbrick houses along the road behind the continuous low wall are the *Lovelace Cottages*, ending at the *Hautboy* at the corner. You pass the entrance to the second house, *Heathside*, dated 1866 according to the tile on the front wall. Note too the date ("Sep 28, 1867") and signature of the builder on the tile just to the left of the wooden gate. Finally you are approaching the *Hautboy* where the walk began.

These houses were built in 1867 by the William, Earl of Lovelace, who also built the Horsley Bridges and Ockham Mill (see those walks in this series). Note the Lovelace coat-of-arms featuring three axes. The "star and bugle" motifs are from the Surrey Regiments (East Surrey and First Surrey Rifles) and run all the way along the bricks. William had acquired a cool fortune by his marriage to Lord Byron's only (legitimate) daughter Ada (who famously worked with Charles Babbage on the Difference Engine). He used the money to build the Hautboy as a second hotel in the village. The first inn had been "The Fiddle" and William decided to pursue the musical theme ("hautboy" being the old term for "oboe"). When the Fiddle went bust, William transferred the license to the Hautboy and it remained a smart pub till recently. The interior, including its quite startling vast "baronial hall" was made over and the building is now residences. (During the excavation, a collection of bronze-age items was discovered, now known as the "Ockham Hoard".)

Getting there

By car: Ockham is very close to the A3 trunk road. If coming from the London direction, your turning is the **first on the left** after going over the M25 motorway (or after coming off the M25 onto the A3 towards Guildford). The sign is *Ockham, Ripley, Send*. Beside the underpass, keep **left** on the B2039. The church is on your right at the first bend. To park in the village, fork **left** in 200 yards, direction *Cobham* (or turn left at the junction after that one), continue to the large redbrick Hautboy and turn **right** after it on a minor road Alms Heath. Park considerately in a quiet spot on the side where the houses are, but *well away* from the *Hautboy*. *Do not park with wheels over the curb because this impedes pedestrians, prams and pushchairs (apart from being illegal!)*.

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