

Moor Park, Nature Reserve, Meadows and River Wey

Walk some of the Greensand Way, see a rare SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), some caves full of bats and some little known riverside water meadows.

This fabulous walk has loads of options. I will offer three distances all with great walking and nature features.

Seeing it all 4.1 miles)

Start at the roundabout at the Shepherd and Flock pub (GU9 9JA), parking is roadside but do check the limits (4 hours usually). Pass the pub door and turn left at the bottom of the road. Follow this road-cum-track past the houses, under the A31 bridge and suddenly it feels like open country! Go under the railway bridge and stay on this route now for over half a mile. It's a pleasant and varied walk past ponds with moorhens and ducks, fields, often with geese and sheep or horses, a brief encounter with the river Wey and some nice woodland alongside.

When you reach the road (1) go straight across through the gate next to the big road gates. This is Moor Park, (historians will know that Sir William Temple employed Jonathan Swift here). Now a prestigious set of homes, the property is beautifully managed. You now follow the track past the houses, past the fields and until engulfed by woodland. On the way look for the old coppiced hazel on the left that, having been neglected for so long, is now groups of tall stems of full tree height! There is a nice view across the meadows to the River Wey below.

At the start of the woodland (2) there is a WWII pillbox, one of several here. There is also a narrow broken path on the right with steps into the nature reserve but the steps are crumbling and the reserve is now a himalayan balsam forest. (Natural England are aware). There is an old boardwalk but that is partially blocked by fallen trees. If you want to adventure a little it gets you into the phragmites australis reeds that will shelter water rail all year and reed warblers in spring and summer. Other flowers and plants may be present but may have been subsumed by the balsam. Exploring here is difficult but enjoyable but you will need to return up the hill because I found the old circular route impassable.

At the top of the hill on the main path carry on to the right and you will see views of the rare deep alder swamp for which this is important, as it's a nationally rare habitat. You should see and hear mallard, teal and tufted duck with luck, possibly glimpse herons. Winter should find siskin and redpoll here, kingfishers visit too.

Further on the path (3) you will see Mother Ludlum's Cave, a hole in the sandstone cliff. A notice board has more information. The stream flowing through this probably created the cave in the first place but humans have most likely widened it. There should be natterer's, daubenton's and long-eared bats in good numbers if you're there after dark and with a bat

detector! Just near this is a view of the River Wey down the hill and a steep path down again with rather broken steps. You can follow it with care, cross an old sleeper bridge and get to the riverside. In summer it's very lush but mainly with balsam. Fishermen still seem to use a couple of riverside plots. Otters were seen here a few years ago.

Next climb back up the hill and retrace your steps to the road (1). Turn left carefully and cross the bridge taking the gate into the meadow on the left (4). The signpost is marked SANG. It is not a registered SANG but I traced the owner who confirmed it's open for the public to use and a grass path follows the edge of the three meadows. They stretch along the River Wey and there is access to the riverbank all the way, subject to natural obstacles!

The riverbank and meadows are great to explore. My visit was in late summer and time limited but I found a good selection of trees, including a holm oak, horse chestnut, alder and ash. The meadows had a good selection of flowers and butterflies such as small copper, small tortoiseshell and large whites were enjoying the sunshine. Grasshoppers were buzzing and bumble bees enjoying the plants and trees. Following the paths and gaps will lead you around the meadows in a nice route passing more phragmites australis reed, bramble full of blackberries and alder trees that had woodpeckers and nuthatch in them and should feed siskin and lesser redpolls in winter. Take a picnic and enjoy it but remember your parking time limit and to take your litter home! (From the gate you are about 1 mile, say 20-30 minutes, from where you parked the car).

Exit the gate onto the lane carefully (4) and turn left. Walk to the corner (5), turn right with care this is a busier road. Soon you will see a North Downs Way and footpath sign on the right (6). Turn right there and follow the nice wooded path. I saw small balsam growing here. After an impressive bench you reach a T junction and turn right. Follow this path across the footbridge over the Wey and past the horse pasture. Stay on this path. Soon you will see some slightly unwelcoming signs at High Mill House but open the gate and go through - it is a proper public right of way. The outlook is beautiful and some quick photos will be tempting. Exit the gate the other side and keep walking until you meet the track you came in on (7). Turn left now and retrace your steps to the Shepherd and Flock and maybe a quick drink before you go!

Moor Park Nature Reserve and the Caves (3.4 miles)

The instructions are exactly the same but don't turn left at (4) into the 'SANG' meadows.

Moor Park and the Meadows (3 miles)

The instructions are the same but instead of crossing the road into Moor Park at (1) turn right and follow the road across the bridge turning left into the meadows at (4).