

Farnham to Bentley - Rail to Trail

A lovely walk with water meadows, streams, riverbanks, a forest and a butterfly reserve

1. Leave Farnham station on the platform 1 side and go down the hill and cross the main road (A31) by the pedestrian lights towards Farnham town centre. After the church turn left into Gostrey Meadows.
2. Pass the war memorial and cross the footbridge in front of you and continue diagonally towards the church. Keep going along the roads until you reach the church.
3. Enter the churchyard and follow the tarmac path to the left into a lovely brick-walled winding path. You soon enter Bishops Meadow local nature reserve, an area of water meadows. This is a lovely wild area very close to town and worth investigation to find birds, butterflies, wildflowers and dragonflies. Cattle may be found grazing here. It might be muddy in winter. Continue on the tarmac path past the open meadow. Just after the railings turn left and follow the path across the bridge over the tiny River Wey, your first encounter of several.
4. Turn right along the riverbank. This is a delightful little stretch despite road noise with many birds and waterside plants. I found and saw a buzzard calling and searching down here. White and red campion were both flowering here in October. Eventually the path meets the main A31 road.
5. This is a dual carriageway. Looking across to your right you will see the public footpath sign where you continue. You can cross here carefully particularly bearing in mind the traffic can be fast, on your right the traffic is from a roundabout and may take time to negotiate. Traffic lights control batches of traffic from the left making it a bit easier to cross. After crossing you continue alongside the River Wey. The path continues as a track between the housing. Everywhere in early October you could hear the sound of humming bees around the ivy flowers. There were noisy squirrels, Jays and calling chiffchaff along this track which leads you to the A325.
6. Cross this road carefully to the footpath opposite on the left-hand side of the houses. There is a nice bank of old mixed woodland on your left. You will soon reach a narrow lane. Turn left here up the hill and under the railway bridge. At the top, turn right (you are opposite the co-op) and go up the hill a short distance turning right into Riverdale.
7. Follow this down, along and then around to your left looking for a footpath sign on the right-hand side. Turn right and cross the park directly opposite. Join the footpath in front of you on the left of the hedgerow.
8. The path will take you through some gates where you can follow it curving around to your right. You reach a footbridge from which there is a substantial view across the number of old quarry workings returning to nature. It's worth looking for birds of prey here and warblers and thrushes in the scrub below. Continue on towards the railway line and turn left. The native hedgerow on the left appears to have been planted as part of the screening for the quarrying activities. Ignore, if you can, the first heavily graffitied bridge and footpath on your right. Continue along-side the gravel pits which appear to have reached the stage of being filled with inert waste. Finally, you leave the pits behind. Cross the stile and continue along the side of the

field. On reaching the old kiss gate turn right under the railway bridge. Follow the path to the left.

9. A large tree has fallen here so you need to go around a little to the right and then skirt it to the left by stepping over a fence. Then you can join the path along the left-hand edge of the field. A lovely old stunted oak tree will now be on your right. You now have a lovely view across the valley of the River Wey. Soon you return to the edge of the river but keep on the upper path in winter as the lower path looks highly vulnerable to flooding. The path does eventually drop down to the water's edge. Continue heading west. I found quite a lot of fungus here. Cross another stile and you're into a field on the left hand side of the river. The clean river looks perfect for kingfisher as there are so many perches but it may be too fast flowing. The path here angles away from the railway bank keeping more towards the river and eventually takes you to the lane at Bentley Mill via two more stiles. These fields would be a great place for a picnic but note that they may be used sometimes for grazing (and, of course, take all your litter home!).
10. At the lane turn left go around the bend and take the next footpath on the left. This leads you back across a large field to the woodland on the railway bank. Keep to the left of the big oak tree in the field and the right-hand side of the ditch. There are green woodpeckers here and loads of fungi in the woodland. This path leads you to a new metal stile and the railway crossing.
11. Cross the line carefully and exit via the second railway stile. You are in part of Alice Holt Forest. Continue on the path which joins a track and becomes wider. Join the road keeping in the same direction. Ignore the track on the left and take the next track on the right-hand side.
12. Continue past the gate and car park along the main track. Go straight over a crossroads. At the next crossroads turn right on the tarmac track.
13. There is a bench here to rest upon and you will see on the right-hand side is the Alice Holt Arboretum, worth exploring if you have time. At the bottom of the hill are signs and a gate, at a footpath crossroads, pointing you to an area of grassland meadows which has been managed by Butterfly Conservation and should also be flower-rich in the spring and summer.
14. By all means investigate here for some of the wildlife. At the footpath crossroads continue downwards and then up and this leads immediately to Bentley station and your return journey.