

Pirbright Ranges Circular

Canal walking, wet woodland, heathland and bog.

The walk starts at Deepcut Village Centre GU16 6SR where there is plenty of free parking. Turn right on the road from the front of the Centre and walk to the new roundabout. Take the second exit – and follow Deepcut Bridge Road along, then down the hill passing St Barbara's the historic 'tin' church soon to be restored. You then pass the new village green and play area where the planting is intended to replicate the nature of the area.

Keep going down the hill, pass the mini roundabout and opposite Highbridge House take the concrete track signposted 'Frimley Lock, Shared Use Path' and turn right into the woodland onto the soil path at the first corner. (NOTE: You can continue on the concrete track all the way to Frimley Lock if you wish but it's not as nice as the alternative.) Follow the obvious path in the woodland. This is a good place to set yourself a bit of tree spotting, identifying at least oak, beech, sweet chestnut, holly and rowan (mountain ash) along the path and listen for woodpeckers in the trees.

Most of the path is straight but towards the end it drops into the open on the left and goes through an overgrown but open area where butterflies and flowers can be found in summer. Follow this narrow path as it turns right and left towards a building which you keep on your left. There is then a steep short bank going left, only a few steps, so the best walker amongst you might go to the bottom to slow anyone else! Walk across to the new road with barrier posts and go down towards the 'dry dock' and Lock Cottage passing them on your right-hand side and you see the lock on the right.

Stop at the foot bridge. This is a place to see grey wagtails. They nest here and the young are often active on the lock shelves after breeding. It has also been a very good place to see Kingfishers in 2020. The Cottage has feeders so look out for more birds there.

Over the bridge turn left and follow the path all the way to Brookwood. In August I found the wild flowers were spectacular here. They are mainly common species but a great place to learn them. I saw agrimony, water mint, enchanter's nightshade, common skullcap, yellow loosestrife, fleabane, hemp agrimony, lesser stitchwort, marsh woundwort, marsh cranesbill, ragwort and meadowsweet to name just a few. Look for the water birds also moorhens, mallards and maybe coot, grey herons and always watch for kingfishers.

Immediately before Brookwood Lock opposite the lock cottage you may be lucky enough to see Terrapins resting on timbers over the water. Cross over the lock gate footbridge before the road bridge and go up the slope to the road, cross and turn left. Pass two driveways and there will be two signs on one post for paths into the woodland. Take the left-hand path. Follow the footpath signs carefully now ignoring alternatives and before long you will emerge into an open area lined with gorse with an old tarmac roadway. Follow the driveway to the right or take the grass path the other side of the tarmac both join the driveway to the properties. When you reach the service road to the houses turn left.

Next you meet the main road and there is no footpath for a while but a grass verge for part of it. Take care for this short while, keep going past the houses as best you can and then you reach a stretch of tarmac footpath and reach more houses. Keep going and look for a tall conifer tree in a garden on the right. Now look for the footpath sign on the left-hand side of the road on the bend in the road. You should see a red and white warning sign on a fence in the woods. Cross here carefully, join the path along the fence and you will have no more road problems! The path follows the fence by the ranges and soon reaches a tarmac roadway with no traffic (usually), carry on along the roadway and as the road turns sharp left you join the footpath to the right but take the left-hand option at the first junction. Keep going left here following the paths until you reach the open part of Bisley Common. Again, keeping left you soon reach Bullhousen Farm and see the old farmhouse on the left. There are some logs here you might use to rest up! You are half way now!

Turn left passing the farmhouse and following the track past a couple of gates. This is a nice country track and is alive with birds and butterflies in season. You should see Buzzards over the fields and probably the chance of a Kestrel. There is a change of scenery with meadows and hedgerows here and probably animals grazing.

As you see the farm in the distance you need to look for a footpath sign (on your left) for a path on your right across the field to a stile. Cross the stile and follow the path slightly angled left towards a further stile and gate on the woodland edge. Cross here and follow the path ahead then quickly left until you reach a driveway where you turn right. The driveway reaches a T junction and you cross over onto a footpath into the heath. Follow the obvious path across the heath soon heading towards the fence of the MoD ranges. I found a lot of bell heather here amongst the common ling. Also, stonechats can be seen perching on the gorse and saplings in the heather. Just before reaching the fence turn right on the path and you may see the log piles from reducing the silver birches removed for heath conservation purposes. Soon you reach the lane opposite the compost works where you turn left.

This lane continues past some houses and onto a track. Just keep going in the same direction. This is a peaceful track with a good hedgerow and pasture on both sides. Nice old trees are dotted around in the field and hedgerows. A place for birds here with all the common species to be found, robins, dunnocks, wrens and blackbirds. Song thrushes should also be heard in spring and summer with their loud repetitive song, changing to another tune every few times. Always be on the look-out for hedgerow flowers.

At the end of this track you need to turn right, pass the house and turn first left up a new track into Brentmoor Heath. I spent a lot of time here. You can look and listen for the heathland specialties like Dartford warbler, woodlark and maybe silver studded blue butterflies. At dusk you would find nightjars here. When the heather is flowering from August to October it's interesting to identify the three types we have, ling, bell heather and cross-leaved. Bell heather is easiest because it is the brightest pink. In spring the main colour will come from the bright yellow gorse which may flower for many months. When the gorse finishes broom may be present and show its bright yellow colour in its stead.

You may be tiring now but keep on the same track with the MoD ranges on your left until the fence ends and you turn left along another wide and easy track. This leads to Folly Bog, an area of wet heath. Insectivorous sundews, cotton-grass and white beak sedge can be found here. Often Belted Galloway cattle are used to manage this land. The site Brentmoor Heath/Folly Bog area is great for reptiles like grass snakes, adders, common lizards and slow worms.

After the Bog, this part of the walk is lovely, open and great underfoot but has a number of small hills. Your fitness is tested here! You pass nice heathland on the right with Dartford warblers and stonechats, coal tits and possibly tree pipits and meadow pipits will make themselves known. There is a slow up and down climb to the end of the MoD fence where you turn left now walking parallel to The Maultway. This is easy walking now on a good path part of which is a shady option in the trees.

You eventually reach Colony Gate, where the main track meets the road but keep left there and follow the path in the woodland keeping right and then left. Now you just have to keep to the left of the buildings that appear on this track. Sticking to the track with the buildings and gardens to your right you finally meet a tarmac road leading into the MoD ranges. Turn right here along the wide Aisne Road with houses set back.

At the end of Aisne Road turn left and follow the line of horse chestnut trees, bedecked with flowers in spring and great for those with energy left to play conkers in autumn! Cross the grass area to the left and aim to walk down the footpath to the left of the housing development. Once you are walking by the houses the end is in sight at the end of the road. Well done!