

Riverside Park and the Wey Navigation, Guildford

A delightful walk with meadows, a lake for birdwatchers, river, canal and a marshland boardwalk.

Start from the free car park off Bowers Lane, Guildford GU4 7ND. If the car park is full there is free roadside parking in Bowers Lane.

1. Exit the car park on the long, straight track heading west. Although you may be troubled by the road noise it is only for a short while. You can stay on the main track or follow the path at the edge of the meadow on the right enjoying its flowers, butterflies and crickets. This path cuts across to the main track at the end of the meadow.
2. Keep left on the main track with the road noise until it drops down to the pylons and continue along the central meadow track. On my visit in August 2022 hundreds of starlings used the pylons to begin gathering ready for their winter murmurations. It was the whistling, clicking and squealing sound of the birds that alerted me to them high up on the top.
3. At the end of the meadow a narrower path appears on the left leading over a wooden bridge, follow this around the left-hand side of the *phragmites* reed-fringed lake. In summer you will hear reed warblers singing here and when gaps appear throughout the year and especially in winter, you will see many water birds including great crested grebes, tufted duck, cormorants and grey herons on the edges. Pass a dragonfly bench, with dragonflies darting around the waters edge in summer, and reach the end of the lake. Turn right to the picnic benches with a great view of the lake and all of the birds.
4. Turn away from the lake and cross the meadow away from the water. On the left is some wetter, boggy ground (not in summer 2022!) and on the right, dryer higher ground all offering a chance to see birds like stonechat, meadow pipit and green woodpeckers.
5. Eventually you reach the banks of the river Wey. (*If you were to turn left here you would eventually reach the Spectrum, Leisure Centre.*) Turn right and then continue keeping left at all choices until you reach the footbridge to Stoke Lock.
6. A plaque tells you this was the first lock built on the Wey Navigation in 1653, that was 100 years before the canal age. A bench to sit here is welcome and hopefully see a boat passing through the lock. The canal and river divide here. Retrace your steps back across the metal footbridge and go through the gate opposite onto a boardwalk. This is a real treat and the long boardwalk crosses the marsh which will have many flowers, butterflies, dragonflies and birds seasonally, throughout the year. My visit in August featured purple loosestrife, with rosebay willowherb, water mint and water smartweed and many other plants. Chiffchaffs and willow warblers called from the bushes and the pond in the middle of the marsh was criss-crossed by dragonflies and other insects.
7. Towards the end of the boardwalk, a sharp left turn allows you to visit a seating area overlooking a pool of water fed by the river where birds like kingfisher may appear. Coot and moorhen, reed warbler and possibly sedge warbler and reed bunting could

also appear in spring and summer. In winter, water rail is always possible at the foot of the reeds. These birds make a loud squealing noise and may be heard anywhere in the marsh and ditches on your walk. Retrace your steps and keep left at the boardwalk junction. You quickly meet the path at the lake edge and turn left.

8. Follow this nice reed and woodland fringed path past the end of the lake and back through the meadow with the huge pylon. At the junction take the left-hand option which leads through to the canal bank.
9. Turn right and enjoy a nice walk along the canal (ignore the sign to the car park on the right). Keep following the canal bank all the way to an old yellow-painted bridge.
10. Turn right here back along Bowers Lane to the car park or where you parked your car.