

Lakeside, Hollybush and Chalk Farm – 4 miles (4.7 miles if joining by bus)

Visiting beautiful restored nature sites after gravel extraction, river, meadows and lakes

Getting there

Free parking at Lakeside Nature Reserve, Lakeside Road, Ash, postcode GU12 5AD. Stagecoach bus 3 stops nearby on Vale Road connecting Aldershot and Camberley stations and Yateley.

Step by Step guidance – anti-clockwise

1. Walk through the children's play area taking the right-hand path. Turn right at the first junction and this path eventually bears left and reaches the Blackwater Valley tarmac path on a sharp bend. Watch for the signpost.
2. Turn right along the path. You will follow the tiny Blackwater River and at the Blackwater Valley path sign use the footbridge on the left. After a short way going under the railway bridge, cross the road. Enter the Hollybush area via the gateway. You quickly find a measure of quiet and a nice wild area on both sides with plenty of wildflowers, blackberries in late summer to collect for pies or bramble jelly! You will find warblers here, blackcaps, garden warblers, whitethroats, and chiffchaffs amongst them. In winter finches, robins, wrens and dunnocks will call from the undergrowth and blackbirds and thrushes will be in the trees. At the path junction you have a choice.
3. Follow the Blackwater Valley Path signposted to the left along the pleasant riverside path (best in winter) all the way to the footbridge. Alternatively, continue straight on leaving the tarmac track, towards a wildflower meadow full of flowers, orchids, butterflies and bees (best in spring and summer). Following this narrow meadow path to the left you soon enter the trees and the path slopes down to meet the Blackwater Valley Path close to the footbridge over to your right.
4. Cross the footbridge and head straight up onto Hollybush Hill. If you're lucky, in June or July you may find bee orchids and others in flower. It's worth a search around the meadow on this small hill. Follow your original path over the hill taking you to a footbridge over the A331. Crossing the bridge keep following the main permissive path straight through some mixed woodland full of birdsong. A few hundred metres later emerge into a car park for the Connaught Centre, a military service building.
5. Pass the end of the Centre building, continue along the building front, eventually reaching Alanbrooke Road across the grass. Follow Alanbrooke Road until it becomes Camp Farm Road and after a few hundred metres, you will see a signboard on the left for Chalk Farm Lake, part of Wellesley Woodland SANGS.
6. Enter here and follow the sign posts for the Sycamore trail (red colour) around the lake keeping to the left side of the lake. There's a short hill and then a nice path

through woodland with wildflowers and butterflies in the spring and summer months.

7. The Sycamore Trail turns right at a junction, turn right and drop gently downhill. At the bottom, there's a picnic place to stop for a break. Carry on and exit the Chalk Farm SANGS, at point 8. (Alternatively, if you don't want to complete the circuit around the lake, don't turn right on the Sycamore Trail and carry on down the hill to the road and cross and up to the canal bank at point 9).
8. From the exit to the Chalk Farm SANGS, return to the road, turn left and cross to the other side. Take the first opportunity on your right to step up onto the Canal towpath which runs parallel to the road, this is next to a very large oak tree.
9. Turn left and here bulrushes, yellow flags in spring, waterside vegetation are interesting holding many butterflies and pollinating insects on a variety of summer flowers. Keep following the canal bank passing Ash Lock where can go down the steps to avoid having to cross the road. Continue on the canal towpath passing Gold Valley Lakes, a fishing venue with a massive bat cave mound in the middle, until you cross the blue painted A331 aqueduct and see the Blackwater Valley Path (North) signs.
10. Then follow the signs to the left and down on the Blackwater Valley Path (North). After the steps or the slope, turn right at the bottom and you will have returned to Lakeside Nature Reserve.
11. Take the first clear path on your right at a marker post, follow this until you reach a T junction, turn left and soon you will emerge back at the play area and car park. If you still have some energy the Lakeside lake area is interesting with a phragmites reedbed that holds Reed Warblers in Summer, possibly Water Rail in winter. Dragonflies are here in good numbers.