

Old Dean Common

A superb heathland area with many walking routes to choose.

It is worth noting that this area is used by the military for training. You may encounter them but you are entitled to be there. I find the best thing is to simply skirt around the area where they are operating and if that is difficult simply ask if it is OK to walk where you are headed.

1. Park at the Old Dean Common Bowling Club or roadside in Wimbledon Road or Bracknell Road. At the end of Bracknell Road, follow the lane past the gate all the way to the huge communication tower at the top. Most years ravens breed on this tower.
2. Continue on the wide track via the footpath gate. At the crossroads (the end of the woodland on the left), take a left turn and then immediately right. Until now you should have heard or seen many common woodland birds. This area passes some nice heather where you may see find Dartford warbler. On the right the land has recently been cleared to encourage heather growth for the future. I found a woodlark here. Stonechat and tree pipit may be seen perched on taller trees or shrubs. Willow warbler is a common sound in spring, crossbill is more likely in winter. Walk to the next crossroads.
3. Turn left and walk through the heath on the quiet track. At the end go through the narrow stretch of woodland and turn right. This woodland often has common redstart. You start going down the hill.
4. As you go down the hill take the first left hand track. This is nice and open with silver birch and young conifers lining it. As with all heathland walks, watch in summer for the silver-studded blue butterflies. The big open skies here offer opportunities to see red kites and common buzzard and possibly more rare raptors. At the clump of big trees, turn right and follow this new track. After a little meandering, the track reaches another main route with a water main sign.
5. Turn right. Keep straight on this track ignoring the big crossroads and a smaller one. Gorse will appear on your left before you enter more mixed woodland. This is a good place to find common redstart. Stay on this track until you reach a T junction passing many mature oaks, an old chestnut and a beech tree.
6. Turn left. You will quickly reach a sign telling you about the Barossa military training area. At the big junction keep left on the main track. After passing a group of old trees that caused the track to split you reach a crossroads. Continue

straight on with a hill in front of you. Just before the bottom of the hill look on the left for two tracks.

7. Take the left of the two. This is Wishmoor Bottom. Along here ignore all side tracks and keep to where you can see wheel tracks. I found tree pipit, whitethroat and stonechat. In winter, where the Wishmoor stream is, on your left (invisible to you), rare great grey shrikes have often been found. After a while, to your left, the heather becomes boggy ground suited to grasses, sedges and insect life so watch for dragonflies. You will eventually reach a T-junction with a gravel track.
8. Turn right. Keep going until you meet a major track crossroads in the trees where you will see horse jumps.
9. Turn left. At one point along here, you will cross a tiny bridge over the Wish Stream after which the Wishmoor area is named. At the next major crossroads continue towards the gate entrance but take the second left turn without passing the gate.
10. Follow this wide track, up the gradual incline ignoring all turnings. At the top continue down the other side. Do not be surprised if you find Dartford warblers woodlarks or stonechats. When you reach the bottom take the first track on your left. In front of you is Stickleback Hill. Continue on the track. Ignore all turnings. Soon you reach an open area with many pathways.
11. Go straight across so that the path you're taking goes uphill with a group of trees on your right and many tree roots on the path. Soon after you will see the distant communication tower and a nearer group of trees ahead of you. Skirt the trees which are now on your right. You will then see a huge electricity pylon in front of you.
12. Advance to the pylon and keeping right, follow the wide, grassy route beneath the electricity cables. Keep going until a line of trees ends your path under the pylons.
13. At the trees, exit the gate, turn right onto the roadway and return to where you started.