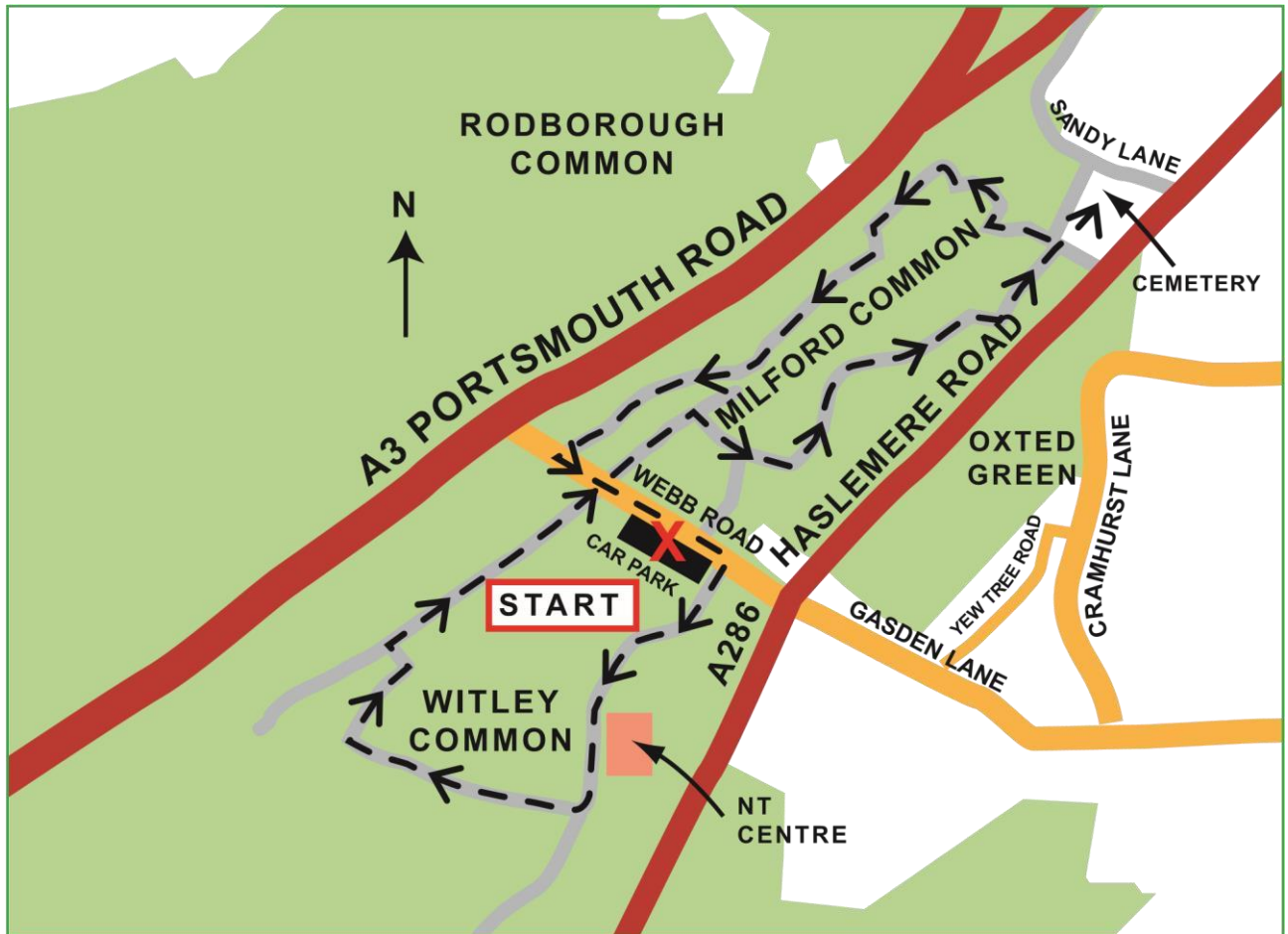




Walk 11

The Commons at War



-  ROADS
-  ROADS
-  FOOTPATHS & TRACKS
-  ROUTE OF WALK
-  THE COMMONS AND OTHER WOODED AREAS

Map: OS Explorer Map 145 – Guildford & Farnham

Start: National Trust Pay and Display car park, Webb Road, Witley.

Grid Ref: SU934408.

Distance: Approx. 2 miles, easy terrain.

Please note the map is a guide only. The commons are criss-crossed by many small paths.

Directions

From the car park walk back towards the road and turn right onto a well-made track by a NT Witley Common sign. The NT has created a natural play area on both sides of the path along this stretch. After passing several wooden posts, with animal carvings and 'Heathland Hike' (HH) markers on them, and keeping left at a junction of paths, you pass through a clearing previously used as a car park but now the final part of the woodland play area. Remain on the track passing further wooden posts to reach a T junction behind the NT building. Turn right and carefully follow the green route, marked 'Nature Trail', through the woods.

Note the surface of the paths as you walk: some have evidence of a rough stone surface: these were the old troop and vehicle roads.

The path eventually emerges into a more or less open area and on the left is a seat and a gate to an enclosed area.

This was a parade ground during the Second World War and is host to many wild flowers in summer, with their associated insects and butterflies. Look out for thistles, speedwell, clover, bird's foot trefoil, lady's slipper, agrimony which is a medicinal plant used against snake venom, and many sorts of grasses.

Continue to follow the green signs round two sides of the parade ground. At the crossroads where the green route is directed back across the parade ground, turn left onto the crossing path, with pink HH marker. At the next junction turn right following pink route onto what was a metalled road and continue to a junction with Webb Road. The route can be very wet and muddy just before the junction.

Shortly before the Webb Rd junction, there is what could be a lay-by to the left of the path. There are trees there now but these have mostly grown up since 1945. It is not too difficult to imagine army vehicles passing each other or parking at this point.

There is evidence of serial trenches above the clearing and possibly the remains of a vehicle track.

You are now leaving Witley common and entering Milford common. Cross the road (slightly to the left) and continue straight ahead, following pink HH signs, on a continuation of the metalled road, although the surface is even less obviously metalled. Ignore the left turn with the blue 'Permissive Bridleway' (PB) sign and watch carefully for a narrow crossing path. Turn right, onto the narrow path and pass hawthorn that has been layered to encourage nightingales to nest.

The extensive hawthorn planting on this common was done by the Polish contingent of troops stationed on the common as a reminder of their homeland.

Shortly, at another crossing path, continue straight ahead, down steps and arrive at semi open heath to the left. Continue straight ahead, with car park on your right, and at the T junction, turn left.

The open heath was an army exercise area.

At the first fork take the right hand route and follow the path round to the right at a T-junction, passing a post with PB/HH on it, and enter a wooded area. Shortly, at a PB/HH sign bear left to reach a clear area which was another parade ground.

Heather is now regenerating in this open area.

Leave the area still following the PB/HH route and pass a white Esso marker on the left which denotes where the oil pipeline crosses the common. Continue to a junction of paths and follow the PB/HH sign where it bears to the right, passing through an area of brambles and some layered hawthorn.

Continue to follow the PB/HH signs and after another open area enter a wooded area. As you emerge from the wood, follow the HH, which turns right and soon swings to the left through a more open area of grass and gorse. The path bears slightly right up a gentle incline.

On the left is a memorial stone to the Canadian soldiers of WW1 many of whom are buried in the cemetery. The stone was erected in 2018 to mark the centenary of the ending of WW1.

Ignore the HH sign to the left and continue on this path, to reach the car park adjoining Milford cemetery. A small gate at the left-hand corner leads into the cemetery.

The cemetery contains a war memorial dedicated to the soldiers and sailors of the First World War buried in the cemetery. There are rows of graves of Canadian and British soldiers, sailors and airmen from both world wars that are maintained by the War Graves Commission. A corner of the cemetery is devoted to East European emigres who arrived in Milford during the Second World War and whose families still live here.

On leaving the cemetery by the side gate back into the car park, turn right on the path that runs parallel to the cemetery and to the right of the metal gate. At the rear of the cemetery keep straight on this path, ignoring paths off and crossing paths and going slightly downhill until a path comes in from the right, just before a crossing path and PB/HH post (this may be partly obliterated by nettles). Turn right here, go straight ahead at the next crossing path to a T junction by another PB post (possibly obscured by brambles). Turn left on a narrow path. The A3 traffic will be clearly visible in winter to your right,. At the next T junction turn right and head straight towards the A3 to arrive at an open clearing by the A3. There is what appears to be, a large manhole cover to the right.

You are now by Rodborough Hill where a water pumping station was installed to service the troop camps. One of the benefits to local residents of the army occupation of an extensive area of the commons during the First World War was the necessary improvements to the water and sewage services to cope with the additional numbers. Between 30 and 50,000 passed through the camp during the Great War, with 30,000 stationed there waiting for demobilisation. The commons then looked very different from the way they do now as there was much less tree cover due to intensive grazing. Much of the area used during the First World War was used for grazing the army's horses.

Just before the clearing, turn left onto the old troop road that runs parallel to the A3. After some distance the path goes steeply downhill for a short while. At the first fork take the right hand option and at the second fork leave the PB and go right gently uphill. After the brow of the hill arrive at Webb Road. Turn left and return to the car park.

