

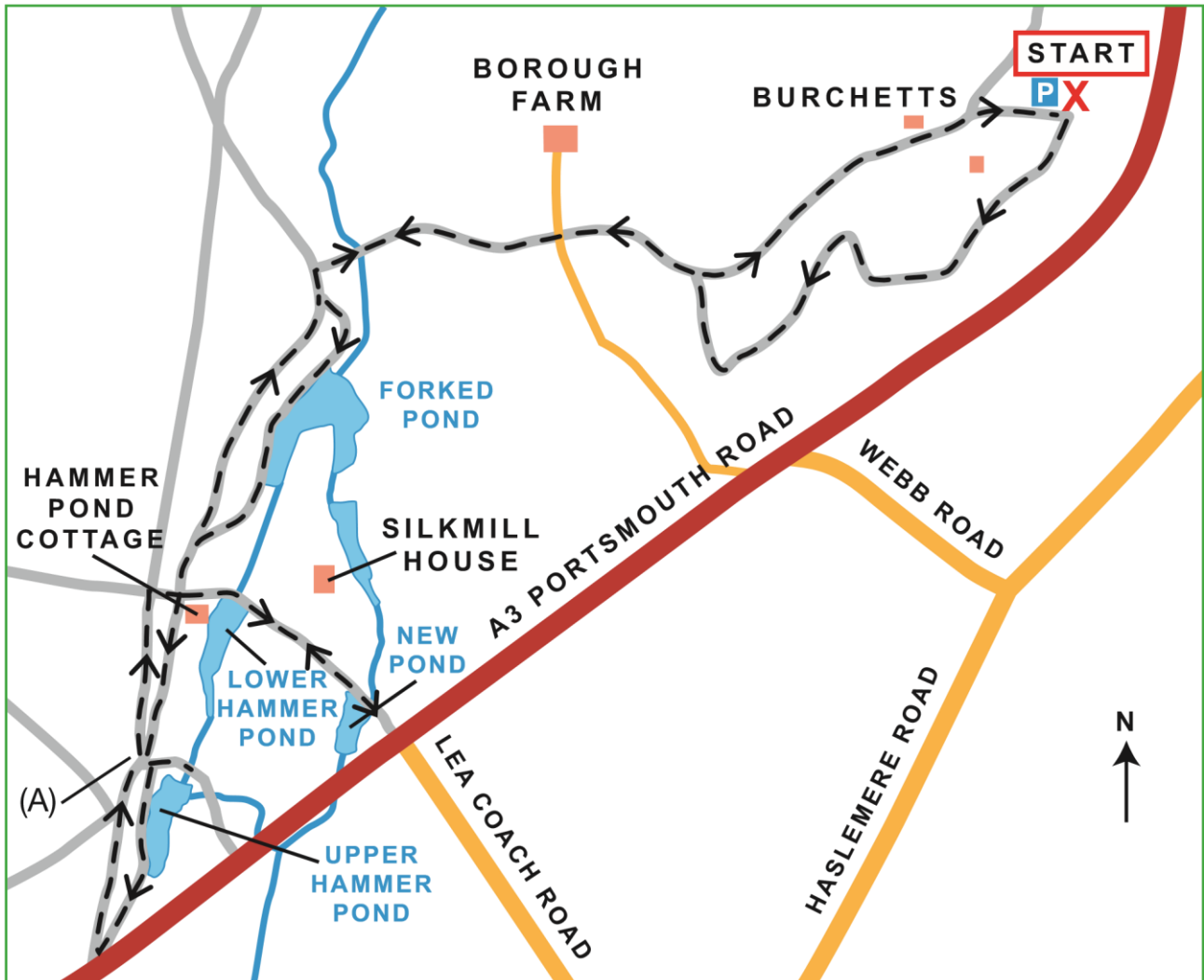


Walk 2

The Ironworks Walk

Rodborough Common & the Hammer Ponds

Some relics of an industrial age, which ended two hundred years ago, are brought to light on this walk



-  ROADS
-  FOOTPATHS & TRACKS
-  ROUTE OF WALK
-  WOODED AREAS

Map: OS Explorer Map 145 – Guildford & Farnham

Start: Rodborough Common car park, Milford

Grid Ref: SU938419

Distance: 5 miles. Easy terrain.

Refreshments: None on route.

Directions

At the far end of the car park at the barrier, ignore the wide sandy track going downhill and take the narrow footpath off to the left. Follow the path with the marker trail posts and shortly bear right into the woods. You will hear the roar of the traffic on the A3 over to your left.

During WW1 & WW2 Canadian Forces were camped on the common. This was the first site of Rodborough School, which occupied the old army huts, before moving to the present site in 1960.

After entering the wood and passing a large white house, in the wood to your right, reach a manhole cover where the path divides. Now take the path to the left of it, leaving the trail, and quickly passing 2 water hydrant markers on your right.

Small ironstones may be found along the path. In the 16th and 17th centuries these were collected and used to strengthen and decorate the mortar in cottages.

Continue to a junction of paths with power lines overhead and turn right on to a sandy track. Continue on this path, which can be muddy in winter, and reach a further manhole on the right. Here the path dips down and turns left. Coming out of the dip keep to the path uphill. At the top of the hill a path comes in from the right. Keep straight ahead down into birch woods and up again. Take the right fork, just before a seat, out of the woods for a view over Warren Hill, Puttenham Common and the Hog's Back.

Looking due north to the wooded mound of Warren Hill, there is a hollow beneath Puttenham Common, in which nestles Rodsall Manor. It is here that Francis Wyatt lived when he leased the ironworks from Anthony Smith of Rake, Witley.

Continue along this path and very shortly it dips down. Ignore the trail marked wider path that drops down on the right. Continue up slope on the narrower path, through the heather, slowly dropping down to come out on to a wider track opposite a gate and with a barrier to motor vehicles to the right.

The heather is glorious in late summer.

Turn left on this wider track which has recently been upgraded as part of the cycle way between Milford and Elstead. Continue till you reach a tarmac drive leading to Borough Farm on your right. Cross the drive and then continue on the bridleway past a house named Little Borough and a gate. Keep on this path as it bends to the left, goes over a stream and, after passing a farm gate on the left, reaches another gate. This is part of an earth bank marking the parish boundary between Witley and Thursley.

You are now entering Thursley Common Nature Reserve. Turn left and after a short distance take the left fork with a large green barn in the trees on the left. Follow the path to the edge of a large pond and then, keeping the pond on your left, continue round the edge, ignoring any paths to the right. The pond becomes marshy and overgrown at the southern end but the path is not affected.

This is Forked Pond, constructed about 1560 by Thomas Jones, Queen Elizabeth I's steward of the Royal Manor of Witley. During the Tudor period there were 145 fish days in the year, so carp and other freshwater fish were highly prized. In the 17th century angling became a popular pastime of the gentry and the ownership of fishponds was an indication of social status. Sir George More of Loseley bought the ponds with the manor of Witley from the crown at the end of the 16th century.

At the end of the pond the path swings right and slightly uphill to a T junction. Turn left here on this sandy track which is a bridleway. The path follows an earth bank topped by a deer fence on the left-hand side. Ignore paths off to the right.

In this area, Sir Robert More of Loseley and Henry Bell of Rake in Witley set up a rabbit warren in 1618 and built a house for the warrener.

When you reach cottages turn left and go down the path with the Hammer Pond cottages on your right. Pass over a stream channel with a pond on the right-hand side and go up the slope with the entrance to Silkmill House on the left.

This is the Lower Hammer Pond, which has been restored since 1872. The pond is fed from the stream that runs through the site of Upper Hammer Pond. The iron works area was converted to a silk mill in 1805, and more recently was a trout farm. On the left, in the grounds of Silkmill House, is the site of the cottages built by Sir George More for the ironworkers in about 1608. The working area would, in the 17th century, have had buildings for storing iron, coals, water-powered hammers, timber and tool sheds as well as a peat store. Turfs of peat were cut from the Pudmore region of Thursley and Ockley Commons and brought to the ironworks to fuel the furnaces.

Continue along the track to the next pond on the right-hand side.

This is New Pond, which served the ironworks. The ironworks was called Horsebane Hammer before 1666 and included two ponds, Forge or Finery Pond and Hammer Pond. After 1666 the ironworks was renamed Coldharbour

Hammer and leased to William Yalden a respected ironmaster from Blackdown. As the valuable timber of the Weald was being rapidly exploited, the huge demand for fuel for the furnaces promoted the use of coppicing to provide a renewable resource of wood to fuel the ironworks. Coldharbour Wood is on the left opposite New Pond. There are believed to have been two or possibly three forge sites and a furnace at these ironworks. There was believed to have been a forge here and cinders have been found in the stream on the left.

The track here is the line of the original turnpike road shown on the Rocque map of 1768, running north of New Pond and taking a sharp left bend at the entrance to Warren Lodge.

Now turn and retrace your steps back to Hammer Pond Cottages.

By the entrance to Silkmill House you re-cross a channel that has been constructed for water which flows from Upper Hammer Pond, bypassing Silkmill pond and flowing into Forked Pond. It is believed to postdate the ironworks.

Turn left immediately after passing the cottages again and follow the fence on the left. At a junction of paths ('A' on the map) turn left and walk a short distance to view the pond on your right.

This is the Upper Hammer Pond, marked on the sketch map, which ceased to exist for a time when the dam collapsed in early 2014. The dam has subsequently been rebuilt and the pond re-instated. Many trees have been cleared from around the site of the pond.

There would originally have been a forge here and a sluice and water-powered wheel. The iron ore was mined in Witley Park near Wareham House, where there was also a furnace. The ore was roasted with charcoal and broken into smaller pieces, 'mollified'. The ore was reduced in the furnace and the molten iron cast into moulds called 'sows' and 'pigs'. The sows and pigs were hammered in the forge consisting of the 'finery' and the 'chafery'. The result was an iron bar about 1 meter long. These were then supplied to local blacksmiths or used to make small items such as nails and firebacks. The ironworks were still operating in 1767, when 'pigs' were brought in barges, up the Wey Navigation to Godalming, then by cart along the turnpike to the forges here.

Return to the junction of paths at 'A' and turn left onto the path which runs parallel to the Upper Hammer Pond. Continue until the path rises slightly and, by a marker post, you can see a gate ahead to the A3.

Here you can just make out the line of the stream in the hollow beneath you on the left. This stream rises from a spring beneath Gibbet Hill and flows through Cosford where in past times it powered the watermill. The stream runs under the A3 to feed the Hammer ponds.

Now turn right onto a higher path, running parallel to the one you were on, for your return journey. At a crossing path, with a marker post, turn right and go downhill into the woods. At the T junction with your outward path, turn left and return to the junction of paths (A). Now continue ahead on the wider path, not the narrow one by the marker post that you came up earlier.

This is the route of the old turnpike shown on Rocque's map and would have been an important route for transporting pig iron to the forges and iron bars to the local smithies at Thursley, Elstead and Bowlhead Green. The turnpike road also allowed easier transport of iron bars and hoops to Portsmouth and to Guildford and London via the Wey Navigation.

At a major junction of paths and a Thursley Nature Reserve sign, turn right towards the deer fence and Hammer Pond Cottages.

The left-hand track leads across Thursley Common and would have been used by the peat cutters in the mid-17th century when they carried turfs to the ironworks.

Turn left before the cottages and retrace your steps with the deer fence now on your right. You can now retrace your steps around the pond or, alternatively, keep straight on this main path, through the wood, joining the path coming from the pond to the right when you are level with the green barn visible in the trees.

Shortly afterwards you reach the gate in the parish boundary on the right.

Go past the gate and retrace your steps, crossing the tarmac drive leading to Borough Farm, following the bridleway to the barrier prohibiting access to vehicles. Go past the barrier, ignore all footpaths off and eventually reach a further gate and a house, Burchetts, on the left side. A short distance on, another house, Moushill Corner, is on the right side. At this point, where the main track swings left, go straight ahead on an uphill track back to the car park.

