

# Walk with The Bridge: Thursley Common

Gemma Taylor visits Thursley Common Nature Reserve, one of the largest (326 hectares) and most important areas of heathland in Surrey containing marsh, woodland and lowland heath

I hadn't been there since September 2018, when my youngest (now 6) was a toddling 18-months and we delighted in spotting numerous dragonflies and were even lucky enough to encounter a common lizard!

Of course, my last visit had been before the awful wildfire in May 2020, which destroyed 20 hectares; or, to put in a more visually understandable way, nearly 50 football pitches of the reserve ravaged. Having heard that the much-loved boardwalk had been rebuilt (completed end of 2022), we decided to head that way one Saturday afternoon and were reminded just what a delight Thursley Common is.

It was staggeringly sad to see, even now after almost 3 years, just how sparse the heathland is. Yet despite the awful devastation, the landscape with its burnt scars is just as beautiful and it's fascinating to see how nature is making a remarkable comeback – the bright new greens juxtaposed against the blackened bark – so that even on an overcast day, the vast common is wonderful place to meander.

What is also really great about



Thursley Common, is that a walk can be tailored to almost any and everyone's abilities with so many paths to explore. Now that my children are 6, 8 and 10 years old, we went on a more challenging walk (5.13km) with some inclines along sandy paths and with a pub and a playground to reward all our efforts! However, if you have children with smaller legs or still in a buggy; or you are older and not able to walk as far, or have a wheelchair, then simply stick to the boardwalk for a nice, flat gratifying 35-minute loop walk (about 2 km).

The 5km route we did (*not suitable for buggies or wheelchairs*) is as follows (see map on page 19)

1. We started off at the Moat Pond Car Park (postcode for Sat Nav: GU8 6LW) and walked to the left of the



pond. Keep walking around to the right, then turn left onto the boardwalk.

2. Instead of doing the full loop of the boardwalk, we veered off at the first right turn (after about 5-10 minutes walking) which becomes a sandy path as boardwalk ends. Continue along this footpath through gorse and sparse woodland, where it becomes boardwalk again, with a nice lookout tributary, which the kids love!

3. When the boardwalk ends, at the junction, turn left along the sandy Heath Trail, further into the reserve. Follow this path until you reach a fork in the path (next to a damaged tree trunk), turn right here up a slight incline to the ridge. There is a bench at the top where it evens out; good place to pause and appreciate the 360° vista of the reserve and surrounding hills in the distance.

4. Continue going straight along as it becomes a slight up and down rollercoaster of a path.

5. Stay left when you reach the point where the path joins with another coming from the right and continue uphill along the bridleway.

6. You will reach not one but two bridleway cross-roads quite close together along this section – go straight over both. This section of path has slightly steeper inclines than before but it does again reward, with

nice 360° views of the reserve when it evens out at the top.

7. At the next fork, stay left along bridleway (also signed Cycle Surrey Hills) and keep going straight.

8. You will cross over another bridleway but then turn right at the next junction, along the bridleway adjacent with house and garden on right. The path moves into woodland as you near Dyehouse Road.

9. When you reach the road, you should see The Three Horseshoes pub on the opposite side, on the right. Carefully cross over.

10. Enjoy your pit stop with a pint/soft



drink and packet of crisps (advised, but not compulsory!). When ready, turn left out of the pub and walk on the path on opposite side of the road, past Thursley village hall. There are other bridleway paths on your right to take you back into the reserve more quickly but we kept going to reach Thursley playground (named Thor's Den!) to let the children have a play. My children gave it a 10/10 - overheard cries of "This is epic!" and "I'm so happy!"

11. Setting off again, there is a path to the right (that goes behind the park) which would, again, take you more quickly back into the reserve but we opted for the path furthest to the left of the playground, which runs more



parallel with Thursley Road and is a more direct route through woodland back to the car park.

12. This path is again a slight

rollercoaster of a path with initial descent and then mild inclines. After about 10 minutes walking, keep to the left but go straight across another path and head up the slight incline.

13. Keep going straight. Before reaching the heathland again, you will see many paths converging, keep left as you head forwards to re-join the sandy heath path.

14. You will go across a bridleyway junction (yes another!) and keep going straight until you notice the end of the boardwalk on your right and then turn left, into the woodland which surrounds the Moat Pond.

15. When you reach the pond, you have a choice to go left or right to get back to the car park. The left path is more direct but runs slightly closer to the road and is prone to being boggy, so stick to going right around the pond for an easier, potentially less boggy route!



**Gemma Taylor**

