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## Ockley Station and Vann Lake

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Distance: 6½ km=4 miles

easy walking

Region: Surrey

Date written: 19-aug-2024

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Refreshments: Ockley

Map: Explorer 146 (Dorking) and 134 (Horsham) *hopefully not needed*

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*Lake, village, historic and fine houses, woodland, country railway*

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### In Brief

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This walk from Ockley station is simpler than the other Vann Lake walk on this site - ideal for walkers who don't want to follow intricate twists in the path. Yet it reveals all the drama for which this area is so well-loved: the surprise appearance of the lake, the lush green of the forest and the quaint cottages of Ockley village. Nominally the walk begins at Ockley Railway Station, making it a "non-Sunday" walk for people without a car.

But this walk is just as good if you come *by car (or bus)*. There are several free car parks in Ockley and, by omitting the station, you reduce the length by 1km (.6 mile).

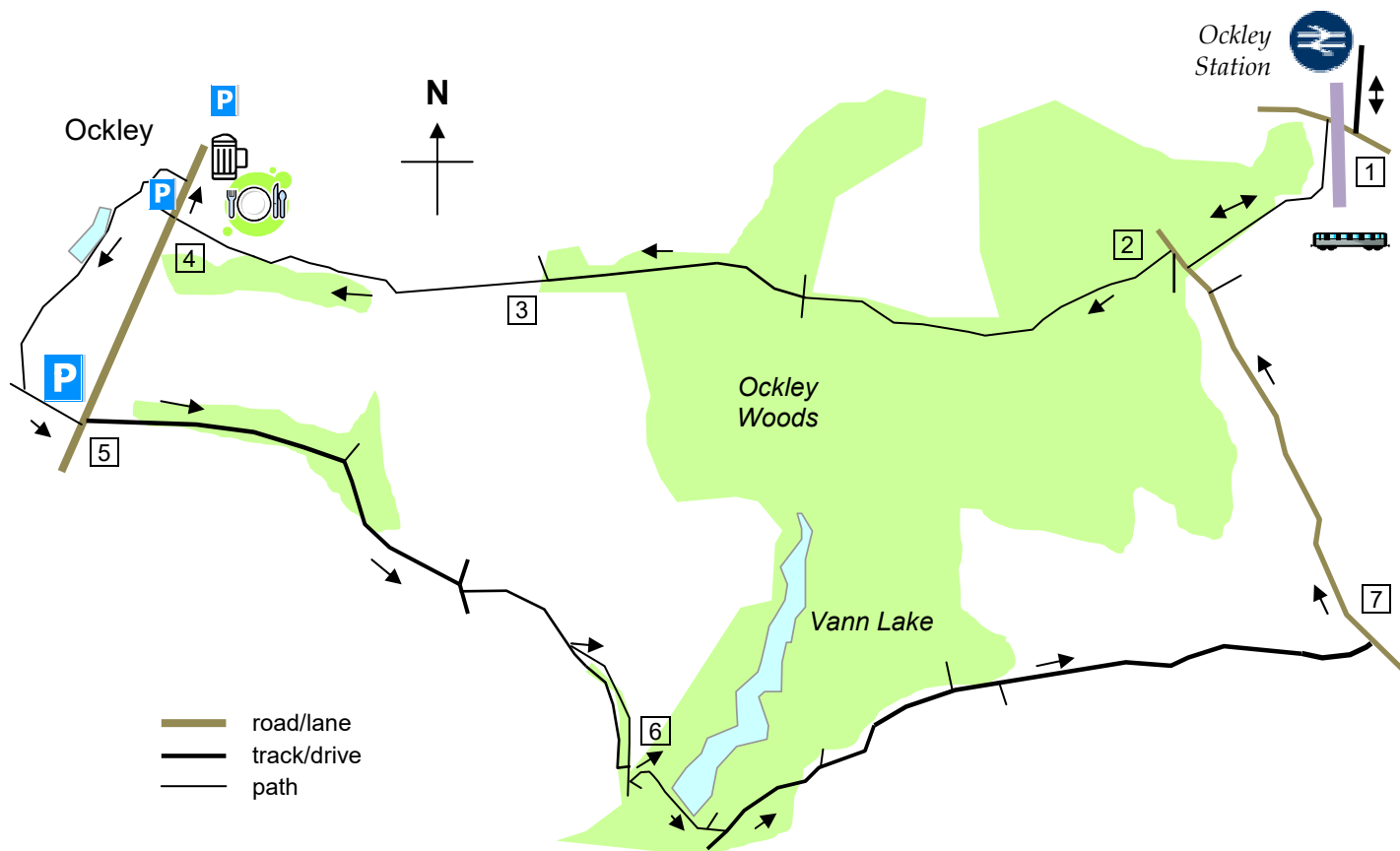


There is no significant undergrowth on the paths so shorts should be wearable. All the ways are either tarmac or clear woodland paths or wide driveways or grass, so good walking shoes or trainers should be adequate, although as usual many will prefer boots, especially in winter. With only the main straight Roman road in Ockley to contend with and *no compulsory stiles*, this walk is fine for your dog too.

The walk begins at **Ockley railway station** (1 train per hour direct from London Victoria, via Sutton), or in **Ockley village**, Surrey. If you arrive by car it's best to avoid the station, even on a Sunday, because of parking charges: in this case, park in the village, opposite the cricket pitch if no play in progress ([www.w3w.co/worldwide.judges.bluffing](http://www.w3w.co/worldwide.judges.bluffing)), or on the off-road patch ([www.w3w.co/wonderful.removable.marmalade](http://www.w3w.co/wonderful.removable.marmalade)) opposite the *Inn on the Green*. In the unlikely case of every space being taken, park a little further up the road, in the village hall car park ([www.w3w.co/artichoke.starring.gums](http://www.w3w.co/artichoke.starring.gums)). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

## The Walk

If you did not arrive by train, but are parked e.g. in Ockley, skip to section [4](#). or to the appropriate place in the text below.



*Ockley Railway Station is a historic Grade II Listed Building. It was opened in 1867 as part of a branch line of the London-Brighton route. People were secondary in those days to the main commodity of bricks and dairy produce. John Harrod's book "Up The Dorking" gives a detailed account of the history.*

- 1** Beginning the walk in Ockley railway station, go out to the road and turn **right** under the arch. In only 5m, turn **left** on a narrow unmarked footpath beside a wire fence. The path goes over a concrete bridge-with-rails and runs beside a paling fence, ending at a tarmac lane, Weare Street. Turn **right** here along the road for 40m.
- 2** Next to the entrance to Weavers Farm, turn squarely **left** on a signed footpath. This straight woodland path has a surface of flagstones part of the way. It curves round a property and, after a total of 300m, runs beside a field on your right. [There is a good view of the Greensand Ridge to your right with Leith Hill Tower showing just to the left of a dip.](#) By the end of the field, at a waymarked crossing path, go straight over, now on a bridleway. After a wide bridge-with-rails, go straight ahead up a broad path. Follow this path through a coppice with a field visible on your right, and shortly a field on your left too. In late spring, bluebells are prominent along the fringes of the path.



- 3 Your path enters a hay field. Keep exactly the same direction as before, on a faint path that cuts across the centre of the field. In 200m or so, at the other side, go through a gap by an old rusty gate and continue along the left-hand side of the next hay meadow. **You now have a good view of Leith Hill Tower in profile.** In the far corner keep ahead on a path between brambles. An avoidable stile leads to a path under hollies, followed by a narrow path between garden fences. You come out to the main road (the A39 Stane Street) in Ockley. The *Inn on the Green* is only 40m **right** along the footway. If you began the walk near this point in Ockley, your day's ramble is finished.



*Ockley is believed to be the same as "Aclea", the site of the defeat of the Danes by the Saxon Ethelwulf in a great battle in 851, as recorded in the Saxon chronicle and described by Tudor historian William Camden. The village lies on either side of Stane Street, the long straight Roman road to Noviomagus Reginorum (Chichester).*

- 4 The walk will now take you onward to the cricket green. The best route from here is as follows. Continue a short distance past the *Inn on the Green*, to just past the off-road parking strip, and turn **left** on a driveway, heading for a pink-red house with a single gable roof. This house is the first of a series of historic cottages that show off the great charm of this village. Turn **left** past the house and keep round the edge of the green, passing a pond, *Weavers Pond*, on your right. You join a shingle drive and pass a cricket pitch on your left. Finally the driveway ends at a tarmac drive. Turn **left**. If you began the walk here, your day's ramble is finished. Walk past the cricket pavilion to the main road.

- 5 Cross straight over the main road to a tarmac lane, *Friday Street*. In 400m, passing various small houses, follow the lane round to the right. Immediately, at a fingerpost, ignore a footpath and stay on the tarmac. You pass *Vann Cottage* and, 200m later, you reach a major junction of drives. Ignore Vann Farm Road sharp left and go past the ornate gates of *Vann House*. Immediately, at a fingerpost, turn **left** on a signed narrow hedged bridleway. The path bends right to run beside some paddocks on your left. 200m from the start of this path, you will notice that the path begins to go through trees. At this point, look for a narrow parallel path on the left which runs close to the fence. This path is better in case of mud, so fork **left** on it. (If you miss this path, stay on the main path and zig-zag left and right at the end.) 200m after the fork, you are in the depths of *Vann Lake Nature Reserve* and you arrive at a multi-way junction with a fingerpost.

- 6 Take the **leftmost** good path, i.e. very sharp **left**. Keep **right** shortly on a tight looping bend, almost reversing direction. You are suddenly welcomed by a dramatic view of Vann Lake: a big surprise if this is your first time.

*Vann Lake is part of a nature reserve known as Vann Lake and Ockley Woods. This is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, partly managed by the Surrey Trust for Nature Conservation. Like so many lakes, it was originally a wooded ravine which was dammed to form a hammer pond. The combination of clay and limestone makes the surrounding ancient wood extremely diverse in the species of plants, insects and other animals it supports, especially the mosses and liverworts that cling to the outcrops, the rare dormice, the many tree species and no less than 611 types of fungi.*

After a pause to admire, continue straight over a footbridge across the old millrace (now full of debris). On your right is a chalet-style house in a fine landscaped garden. The path leads up steps. Ignore a junction on the left half-way up the steps. At the top, keep **left** to bypass a wooden barrier and turn **left** on a wide shingle track, *Vann Lake Road*. In 150m, avoid a private entrance on the left and stay on the drive, now tarmac, snaking left and right. Avoid a side lane on your left, simply called *Vann Lake*. You pass an immaculate mobile home hamlet. The drive now runs in open country. Finally you pass *Woodcroft Farm* with its old oast (rare in Surrey). *Stylehurst Forge* on your right has a little "family" of steel pipe people sitting on an anvil. You arrive at a road junction.

- 7 Turn **left** on Weare Street, a desirable abode with many swanky properties. Ahead of you are 600m of quite pleasant walking on this quiet residential lane. After this stretch, you need to look to your right for a side lane, Woodland Drive, followed by a long laurel hedge. At the end of the hedge, at the corner of a wire fence, there is an unmarked narrow footpath on your right. If you did **not** arrive by train, continue a further 40m, wrap round this text and resume from Section 2, otherwise ... Turn **right** on this straight narrow footpath between fences. The path veers left over a concrete bridge and comes out to a road. Turn **right** under the arch and immediately **left** on the approach road to Ockley Station where the walk began.

## Getting there

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By car: Ockley lies on the main A29 (Bognor) Road about 7 miles south of Dorking.

By train: trains go direct from London Victoria to Ockley, every day except Sunday. There is one train per hour, but service on Saturday ends at 18:30. You can also change at Dorking or Horsham.

By bus: bus 433 from Dorking. Check the timetables.

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