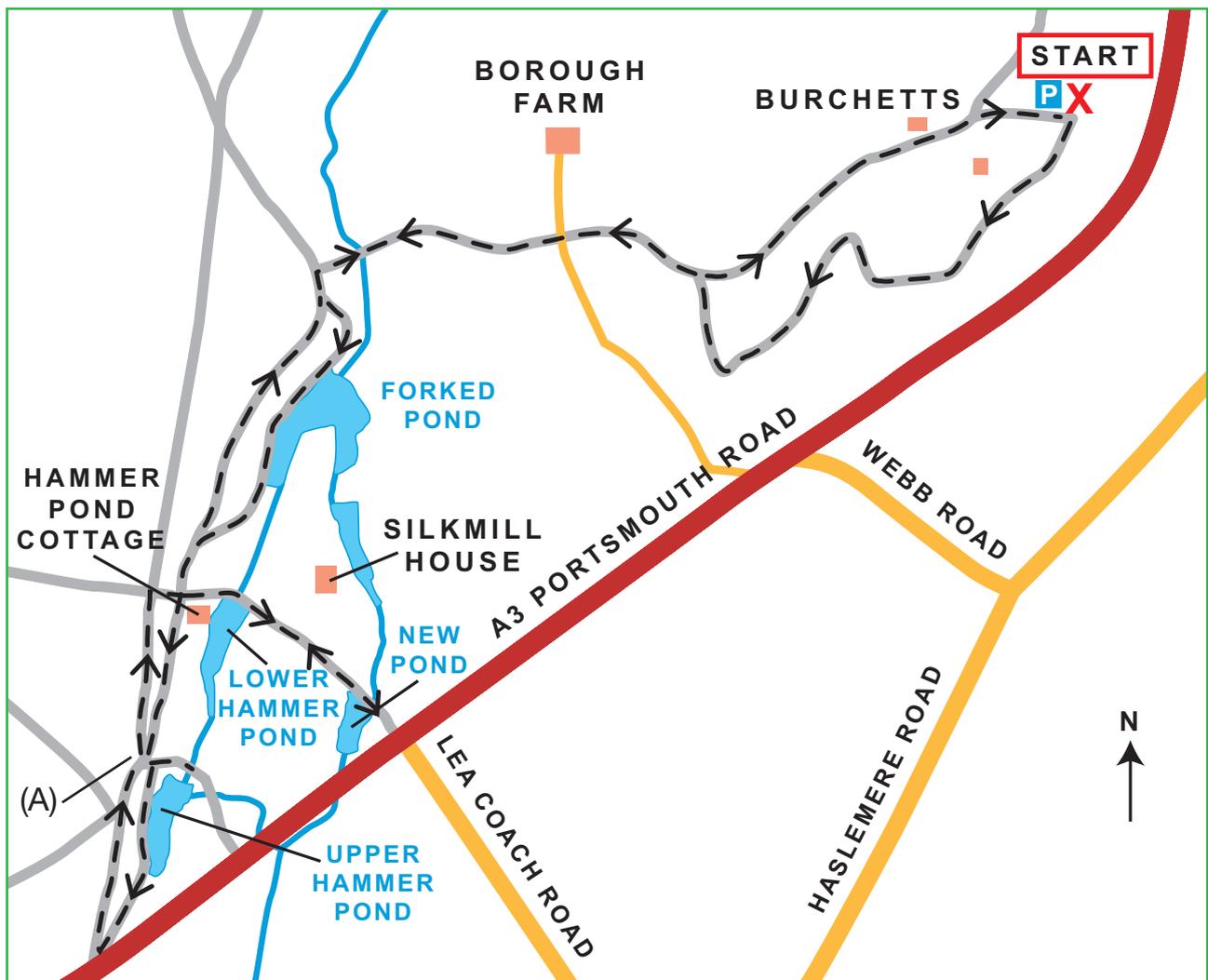




Walk 2

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.



Walk 2

The Ironworks Walk – Rodborough Common & the Hammer Ponds

Directions

At the far end of the car park go through the barrier and ignoring the wide sandy track going downhill, take the narrow footpath off to the left. Follow the path with the marker posts indicating a self-guided trail and shortly head 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, down 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 self-guided 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 lines overhead and turn right on to a sandy track. Continue on this path and reach a further manhole on the right. Here the path dips down and turns left. Out of the dip keep to the path uphill until you reach a prominent marker post at the top of the hill. Keep 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 and up. Ignore the wider path that drops down on the right. Continue on this narrow path, through the heather, slowly dropping 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 and continue till you reach a tarmac drive leading to Borough Farm on your right. *(This section can be muddy in wet weather.)* Cross the drive and then continue on the bridleway past a house named Little Borough and through 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.

The stream and complex system of gullies are part of the drainage system to control the flow of water when the ponds upstream are drained, once or twice a year, as part of the general pond maintenance for fish.

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 the pond then, keeping the pond on your left, continue round the edge. 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.

Emerging in open pinewoods turn left on the sandy track that 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 the cottages turn left and go down the drive with the Hammer Pond cottages on the right. Pass over a ford with a pond on the right hand side and up the slope to the drive 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 the former Upper Hammer Pond and 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 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.

Retrace your steps back to Hammer Pond Cottages, pausing awhile at the entrance to the drive of Silkmill House.

Hidden amongst the undergrowth on the left is a narrow channel, which runs under the path and is visible in the entrance to the drive of Silkmill House. This channel flows from Upper Hammer Pond, bypasses the silkmill pond and flows into Forked Pond and 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 stop.

Here is the site of the Upper Hammer Pond, still marked on the sketch map, which ceased to exist when the dam collapsed in early 2014. There is no plan to rebuild the dam and thus to reinstate the pond. Many trees have been cleared from around the site of the pond. All that remains is a stream running through and the area is to be allowed to evolve into a wetland.

Walk a short distance to view the collapsed dam on the right.

There was a sluice here from Upper Hammer Pond. There would have been a forge here and the water-powered wheel would have been in the pit on the right. 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 site of the Upper Hammer Pond. Stop after the path rises slightly and you can see a gate ahead to the A3.

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.

Turn right on to a higher path running parallel to the one you were on and right again for your return journey. At a crossing path, with a marker post, turn right and go downhill into the woods. As you approach the site of the former pond turn left and again reach 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. 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 through the gate and retrace your steps across the tarmac drive leading to Borough Farm to the gate prohibiting access to vehicles. Go through the gate, 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 turns left, go straight on uphill back to the car park.

