Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Three Common ways round the Pen Ponds Walk 2: Wimbledon Common

Distance: 9½ km=6 miles — easy walking

Region: Greater London, Surrey — Date written: 24-oct-2019

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Refreshments: Wimbledon Windmill, Richmond Park Golf Club Pen Ponds

Map: Explorer 161 (London South) or the wider A-Z

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Windmill, woodland, parkland, ponds

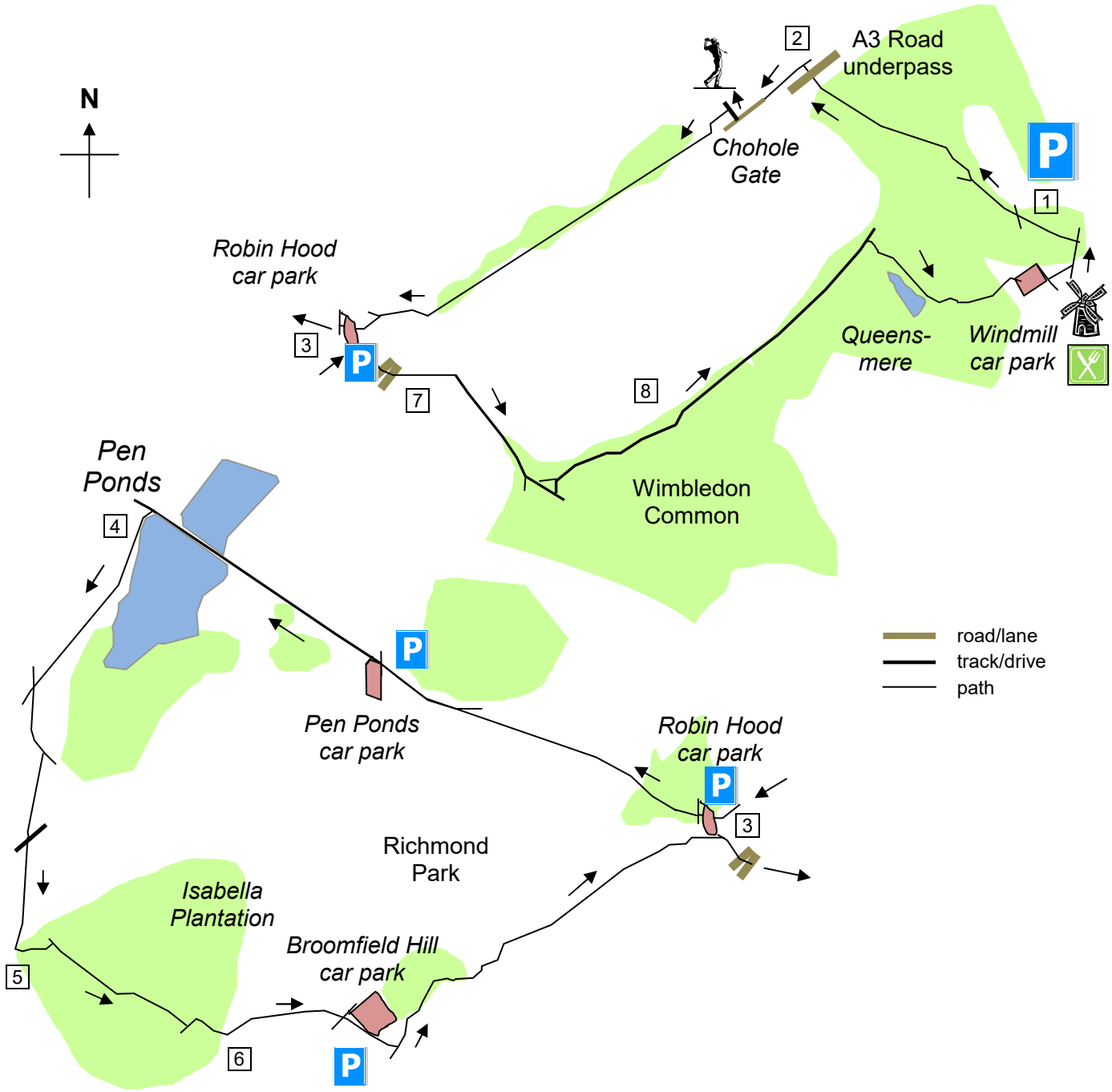
In Brief

Wimbledon residents are proud of their famous Common, but they sometimes like to venture further. A walk across Robin Hood Way into Richmond Park is so enticing because of the great contrast offered by the wide spaces, ancient oaks and the deer of Richmond Park. Indeed, walkers often continue past the Pen Ponds to Richmond for a river walk, taking transport back. But a sling shot around the Pen Ponds and back a different way makes for a perfect excursion. This walk also takes in the Isabella Plantation, a heavenly park-within-a-park with spring colour, streams, bridges and a bog garden.

There are no nettles on this walk and any sensible footwear and attire is fine. All these Pen Pond walks are timeless and seasonless. Your dog is welcome to come along (with a lead please because of the deer in the park!).

The walk begins at the large free Wimbledon Common **Windmill car park**, postcode **SW19 5NR**, w3w:chefs.fuzzy.shirt. You can also start from any of the car parks in Richmond Park (see mini-map). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



Wimbledon and Putney Commons are protected by the Act of 1871. There are two distinct kinds of terrain: the western slopes (which you see today) which lie on London Clay, and support mixed woodland and the upper eastern and northern parts which constitute a huge area of heathland. The Commons are run by the Clerk and Ranger and two dozen-odd employees and horses. The Conservators handle the annual budget which is paid for by an annual levy on houses near the Commons. Wimbledon Windmill was built in 1817 and has been altered and repaired numerous times. It is no longer a working mill but the machinery is on view. The excellent museum is open to visitors weekends until 5pm April to October.

The Windmill café offers a welcome rest from travels over the Common. The soup and crusty bread are delicious. Hot food is served until 3.30, "teas" at other times.

1 Begin the walk beside the Windmill and take the gravel path across the grass in the direction of a sign for the *Capital Ring*. In 100m, before you reach the trees, at a T-junction, turn **left** on a wider gravel path. In 60m you meet a junction of several paths, under trees, just before the wide path enters another open area. Turn **left** here on a level dirt track marked ***No Cycling, Horse Ride***. This wide woodland path will take you, in 800m, straight to your exit under the A3 trunk road. As a guide, you shortly pass close on your right to an artificial hill, created when Tibbets Corner was excavated. Down on your left is a deep wooded valley. Ignore all paths that cross your route or fork away, always staying level on this gently meandering path. After about 450m you reach a large fork. Ignore the smaller path that goes straight on and then starts to curve right, and instead take the larger **left**-hand path that begins to head downhill. After a further 150m you reach a wide crossing bridleway Go straight over. Your path leads over some humps and comes down to an underpass beneath the busy A3 road.

2 When you emerge on the other side, continue ahead to meet the garden wall of some houses and turn **left** beside the wall. (You can also take a parallel path through the trees.) Continue on a tarmac residential road and in only 80m, turn **right** through the gates of Richmond Park Golf Course.

This is a public pay-by-the-day golf course with two 18-hole courses; the visitor's centre / café in front of you is open to all. Almost at once, turn **left** at a signpost announcing *Richmond Park ½ mile*. This is the Chohole Gate, a less-known entrance to the Park. Your path zigzags left and right and runs dead straight beside a strip of greenery for nearly 1 km. Finally, you come through a black metal gate and over a bridge across the Beverley Brook into the Park.

3 Follow the clear winding sandy path and when you are near the Robin Hood car park, keep **left** to walk directly through the centre of the car park. At the other side, a sandy path leads out by a map display board and a voluntary payment machine to the main arterial road. Cross the road and take a rough narrow path on the other side, running under oak trees. In 100m or so, you are suddenly out at the edge of a wide open space. Keep dead straight, on a rather faint but well-used path, slightly uphill. Head for the jutting left-hand corner of the wood ahead (known as Spankers Hill Wood). After you pass the wood, continue on a wide dirt path. As a small diversion,

the Pen Ponds car park is on your left and has a refreshment hut. Go straight over a tarmac path to a wide shingle path opposite. It leads to a raised causeway running between the Upper Pond on your left and the Lower Pond on your right.

> *The Pen Ponds were dug in 1746, not for decorative reasons but to drain a marshy area, and they were originally called the "Canals". They grew in size due to excavation work and were used to rear carp for food. The outflow is mainly into the Beverley Brook.*

4 Immediately after the ponds, turn **left** with the Upper Pond still on your left. Stay on the pondside path until it veers away. About 350m after you left the pond side, you come to a wide diagonal crossing horse track. As a guide, this is just before an oak tree ringed by a paling fence. Veer **left** here on the horse track. In less than 200m, just after the track wheels left over a little brick bridge, turn **right** on a grass path. In 200m or so, you reach a wide tarmac drive. Cross straight over diagonally on a grass path opposite.

wc

This path soon leads over a little wooden bridge and reaches a small car park, reserved for disabled visitors. Go **left** through a metal gate into the Isabella Plantation. There is a WC on your right.

The name of the Plantation has nothing to do with a lady – rather, it comes from the old English word "isabel" which means "dingy" or "yellowish", as seen in the colour of the soil. The Plantation was fenced off in 1831 by Lord Sidmouth. He planted the large trees, not for decorative purposes but for timber. The lovely garden of exotic rhododendron species, azaleas, ponds and streams was established in the 1950s, largely the work of George Thomson, the park superintendent. The main stream through the garden from Broomfield Gate was excavated in 1960 and the Plantation was enlarged to include Peg's Pond. Later a new wild stream was dug in the northern part and it now holds a colony of ferns, water plantains and brook lime. The Bog Garden was added in 2000.

5 The following is only a suggested, rather hasty, route through this garden of earthly delights. Your exit is the Broomfield Hill gate on the far side, but you can reach it by several ways. Go straight ahead over a boardwalk, with the Peg's Pond on your left. Keep **left** over a bridge and turn **right** at a T-junction on a wide sandy gravel path, signed to *Thompson's Pond* and *Still Pond*. After a passage through heather, just before a bench seat, avoid a left fork. (It leads to the Bog Garden, a fantasy of winding paths, board walks and water steppings.) Go straight over a crossing path. (The mirror-like *Still Pond* is right and left here.) Where the main path ends at a T-junction, avoid a narrow path ahead and instead turn l**eft** as for *Exit to Broomfield Hill Car Park*, keeping **right** at a junction. This path leads to the ornate exit gate.

6 Take a wide shingle path straight ahead, heading for the car park. Cross the arterial road and walk through the car park, passing on your right a snack hut. At the far side, go over the grass almost to the wall at the park boundary. Turn **left** on a wide sandy gravel path. This path runs downhill and after a pleasant stretch, shared with cyclists, finally reaches the Robin Hood Gate car park. Turn **right** on the tarmac road to exit the park via the large wrought iron gates. Cross the busy A3 road using the pedestrian-and-rider lights into Wimbledon Common.

7 Take a path straight ahead across the green space and over a bridge across the Beverley Brook, reaching the corner of a playing field. There is a WC in the building on your left. Turn **right** beside the playing field and, at a fork, keep **right** (or left, since the branches re-join, but this way you walk beside the Brook). You soon reach a wooden bridge on concrete support. Take the path opposite the bridge next to a notice board. At a fork by a small triangular grass patch turn **left** onto a narrower path.

8 Soon you reach a junction of major tracks. Ignore tracks right and left here and keep straight on. You pass on your left an apiary and allotments, then Putney Vale Cemetery. The path gently rises and descends, soon running level and straight again. The cemetery comes into view again. On your right soon is a wide path between two lines of bricks. Turn **right** here to reach Queensmere Pond. *Queensmere is an artificial woodland lake, created from a valley by damming the western end. It usually has a large group of mute swans in residence.* Walk along the path with the pond on your right. At the water's end, fork **left** on a winding rugged path leading uphill to the Windmill Car Park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: The Windmill approach road leads off from half way along Parkside (the main road between Putney and Wimbledon) and is clearly marked with a tourist sign for “Windmill”.

By bus/train: bus 93 from Wimbledon Station, a regular daily service.

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