

## **TWOAT – Bluebell Walk - April/May 2021 - Langley Vale**

**Do remember current COVID restrictions on group numbers and stay safe !!**

**Start** at the Downskeepers' car park, off the Tattenham Corner small roundabout beside the Epsom Racecourse. OS Map146 (GR 223583). It is about 4 miles long.

**Getting to Langley Vale.** Leave carpark by the racecourse and walk up the main path to cross the far racetrack (see map**1**) and then down the path alongside the woods on the left. Then go ahead towards a path beside white railings at **2**. STOP and LOOK RIGHT for galloping racehorses! Cross the tracks and walk down over 'The Gallops'. LOOK RIGHT before crossing the two tracks and meeting the wide gravel bridlepath **3**, where you turn right and continue, bearing left and immediately right at **4**, until you reach a wide left turn at **5** signed Walton Rd. Go a little way up this ancient coaching track called the **Sheep Walk** to point **6**. On the left you will see a Langley Vale sign but we need to turn right now through a swing gate and left uphill through a new plantation of beech, oak, hornbeam, maple, hazel and birch trees so adding to the ancient woodland species already occupying 20% of the land here at Langley Vale before the Woodland Trust bought it in 2014. With more than 160000 new trees now planted this cover has increased to 60%; the rest is largely chalk downland. Since being managed, the diversity of flora and fauna has increased greatly. Many new wildflowers, butterflies, small mammals and birds have been seen. Do watch out at different times of day and year for cuckoos, skylarks, owls and lapwings nesting beneath the kestrels, kite and buzzard!

At the top of the slope pass through a gap in the hedge to reach an **Avenue of 39 Cherry Trees**, planted by Sainsbury's to commemorate employees who lost their lives in the Great War. Here at **7** you will find a series of display boards showing the history of this 640 acre area where the huge Tadworth Camp was situated. It was used for training soldiers before they were dispatched to the WW1 battlefields, alas so many to their deaths. Read 'BRITAIN NEEDS YOU' before bearing left up the path and ignoring the right turn. At the top, bear right and immediately left through a gap in the trees where you will see, planted and tended by many local volunteers, the Sainsbury **Community Orchard** with a notice about it in the far corner at **8**.

Now go through the gap ahead, straight over the track and left into the **Regiment of Soldiers**. Here at **9** are remembered the 20000 new soldiers inspected briefly by Lord Kitchener in Jan 1915. Notice the newly signed up civilians, recruits without webbing or weapons and the sergeants in full uniform with rifles, harking back to the snowy day of that fateful inspection! Look at the recently installed majestic oak sculpture by John Merrill. In the adjoining field off Headley Road an approved carpark and visitor centre will be appearing soon.

Retrace your steps to the Community Orchard which this time we walk round on the other side, passing a bug hotel at the far end just before exiting the field and back to the top of the Cherry Ave. Here we now turn right and keeping on the main path cross a huge field of 6097 young trees, one for each allied serviceman who lost his life in the great **Battle of Jutland**. The 14 larger standard oaks planted at **10** in this new wood represent the 14 warships sadly lost in less than 48 hrs at Jutland.

At the far side of this field, at over 400ft above sea level, a fossilised sea urchin 60million years old was recently unearthed. Now passing through the gap and minding your feet on wood stumps in the path, head left and pass through a gate to re-join the Sheep Walk at **11**. Go leftwards across this track and enter the field of hazel trees through a high gate in the deer-proof fencing. Grown for coppicing in the future, these trees surround a beautiful mature beech tree. Exit the field at the bottom by another gate and go up the path ahead which in the springtime passes through a magnificent **sea of bluebells** under the beech trees. Fork right continuing uphill to enter another fenced plantation and down to the gate at **12** by a track. (If tired, now turn left and continue down to **6** the '*Langley Vale*' entrance sign.)

Otherwise turn left and then immediately right on an upward path which bears right over many badger runs to **13** a chalk scraping created two years ago. Here has naturally grown a rare Kidney Vetch to attract the **Small Blue**, the UKs smallest resident butterfly. Eggs were found in its flowers, which the hatched larvae then ate together with the developing seeds. Volunteers photographed the resulting small blues as well as the Dinghy Skipper the thirty-second species of butterfly recorded here since 2018. Fantastic sightings of returning birds and other rare invertebrates including a crane-fly and the Wasp-banded comb-horn indicate how well the Woodland Trust is managing the chalk downland as well as the woods.

Now follow the path through some ancient coppiced trees. Just before the top on the left at **14** lies an old extremely long flagpole now protected by a black plastic pipe. It was originally used to determine the wind's direction when this area, called **Gas Wood**, was used for training soldiers in the use of gas masks! Carry on into the open and turn left to view Terminal 5 at Heathrow as well as the Chilterns in the distance. Here at **15** there is an amazing carved seat with many symbols of WW1 trench warfare. How many can you find?

Follow the wide grassy track downhill past other seats and fields which in spring and summer are full of amazing wild flowers such as ox-eye daisies, poppies, red campion, orchids, scabious, and grass vetching. Low intensity grazing of sheep and cattle makes the grass grow slower and encourages a wider diversity of species. When the path eventually starts to climb near the top on the left a little path leads to the **Verdun Oak** grown from a battlefield acorn according to the plaque at **16**. Further on, by a naval seat, turn left downhill past the first trees planted more than 5 years ago. At the bottom you reach point **6** again, the *Langley Vale* sign board.

You can turn right down the Sheep Walk and right at the T junction to return to the open downland of The Gallops. Cross the all-weather track and around the white bar to a wide upward grassy path which after crossing the all-weather track again and turning right will lead onto a wide path with the woods on your left, rising to get you back to points **2 and 1 from** where you can see the track back to the carpark.

**If you have enjoyed this walk please consider making a donation on-line at [www.TWOAT.org](http://www.TWOAT.org) .** It was designed by Dick Shelley (01737 817930) with help from the Downland Conservators and the Woodland Trust.