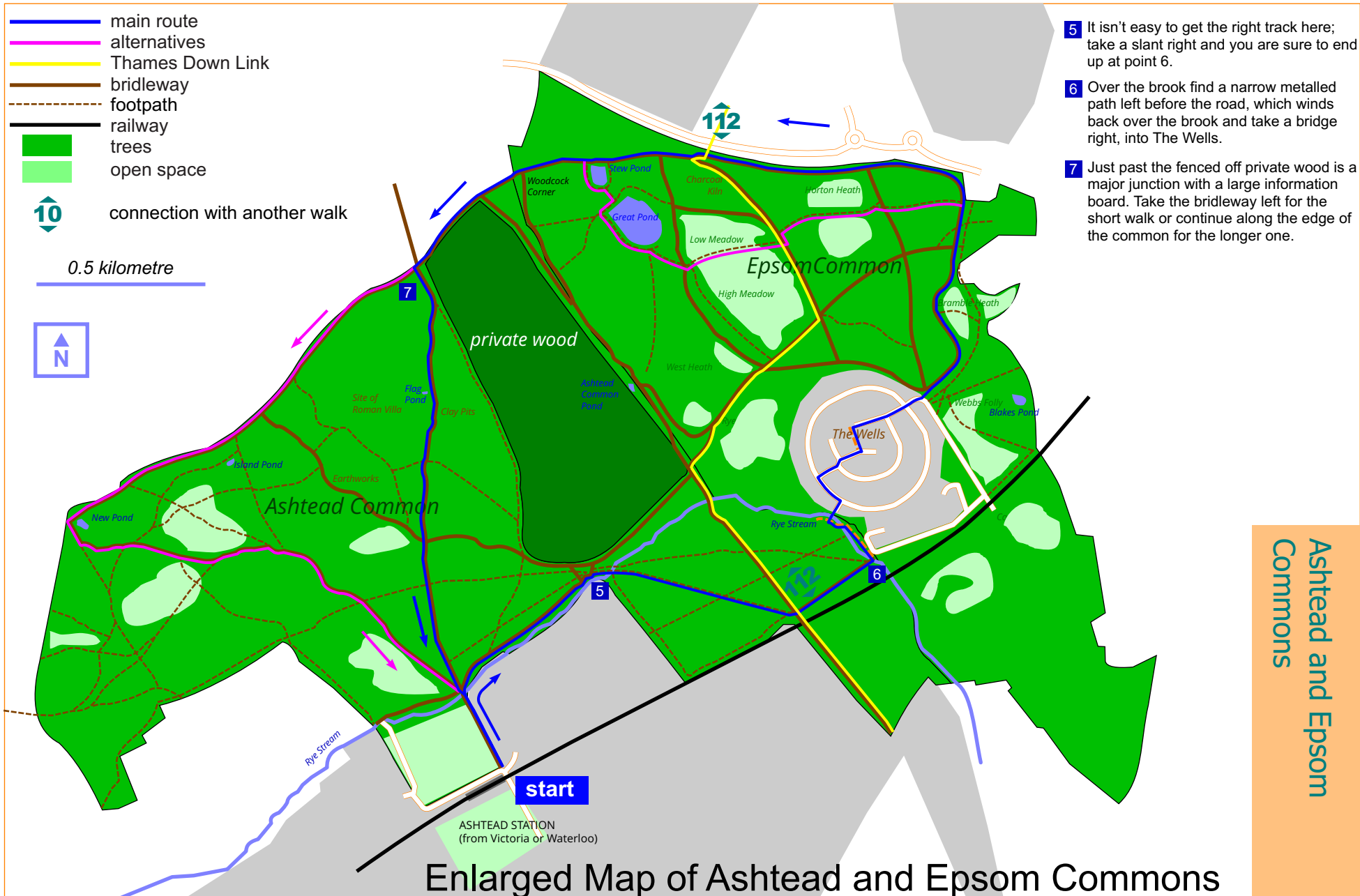


Oxshott, Claremont Park,
Horton Country Park

See below for enlarged map of
Ashtead and Epsom Commons



Ashtead and Epsom Commons

Much of these walks is on unmetalled paths and some are uneven, however, when the sun is shining in summer this is a magical area.

Oxshott Heath

Oxshott Heath is an area of approximately 200 acres, coarse grass, heather and pine thrive and together with a wide variety of deciduous trees and undergrowth make for a rich variety of flora, fauna and wildlife. The Heath is now designated an SSSI. The land once belonged to the Abbey of Waverley but after the dissolution eventually became part of the Claremont Estate, part of the Manor of Esher and Milbourne. After the death of Leopold of Belgium (who for a time owned Claremont) the land was acquired in 1882 by Queen Victoria who willed it to her youngest son, the Duke of Albany. In 1884 it came into the possession of his son Charles, the Duke of Saxe Coburg Gotha who was of German nationality, and so in 1917 the land was appropriated by the Crown. In 1923, under the Alien Property Act, Esher Urban Council purchased the land for the princely sum of £300, and Elmbridge Council remains the owner to this day. However during the latter part of the 19th century the Heath was frequented by a range of undesirables and the arrival of the railway in 1885 accentuated the difficulties. Heather and young trees were uprooted,

there were frequent fires and the woods were rapidly becoming spoilt. Vandalism was rife and "old folk and children were fearful of going there". The locals forced a public enquiry resulting in an Act of Parliament which vested responsibility for management of the Heath in nine honorary Conservators, an arrangement that persists to this day. There are also three appointed officers who assist the Chairman in the day to day running of the Heath, all on a purely voluntary basis. The Conservators employ a warden to carry out routine clearance and maintenance. The Conservators have had many challenges; cleaning up what they inherited in 1904, opposing the plans of Esher Council to build a new trunk road through the Heath, repairing havoc from the storms of 1987 and 1990 and more recently coping with seen an alarming increase in the dumping of building and household waste and old vehicles in the woods.

The Princes Coverts

Leopold, later King of the Belgians married Princess Charlotte, the only child of George IV, in 1816 and the couple lived at Claremont Park, Esher, the estate having been purchased for them by the Commissioners of Woods and Forests. Charlotte died in childbirth a year after the marriage. The prince remained and in 1821 acquired a considerable area of

common land to the south of Claremont to develop as a shooting estate. It had been attached to the manor of Stoke D'Abernon and was known as Stoke Common. Part of this land is now the woodland called Prince's Coverts. On the death of Leopold in 1865 the Claremont Estate, including the addition, was acquired by the Crown and eventually broken up; however, the woodland and some of the farmland were retained, and Prince's Coverts is now managed as mixed woodland by the Crown Estate Commissioners. In the middle of the Coverts is a little square building with a hipped roof known as Jessop's Well. It was built in the eighteenth century over a well with properties similar to those of Epsom waters.

Access to the walking public is permitted through specified gates. See leaflet: http://www.clarendonpark.co.uk/images/oxshott/princes_coverts.pdf

Ashtead Common

Ashtead Common is a 200 hectare (500 acre) ancient wooded common with over 2,300 ancient oak pollards. The site has been part of the Epsom and Ashtead Commons SSSI since 1955 due to its rich community of breeding birds. It has also been a National Nature Reserve since 1995 due to the decaying wood of ancient trees and the rare invertebrates that live in it. The site includes two ancient Scheduled

Monuments - a Roman villa and a triangular earthwork, and is a registered charity managed by the City of London.

Horton Country Park

Horton Country Park covers 400 acres, of which half is public open space, managed by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council.

The land was once part of the 1000 acre Trotter Estate, John Trotter being the High Sheriff of Surrey. This was sold to the LCC in 1896 to enable five Mental Hospitals, known as the Epsom Hospital Cluster, to be constructed. This was to be self-sufficient as far as possible, so the four existing farms were used to supply food and to provide occupational therapy. A Power Station was built to provide heating and electricity. The Cluster was large enough to warrant the construction of its own extensive rail system and at its peak during the 1930s housed over 8000 patients. It was the largest concentration of mental hospitals in the world.

In 1973, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, with the aid of a grant from the Countryside Commission and Surrey County Council, purchased some of the agricultural and woodland from two of the farms, West Farm and Long Grove Farm, which by that time had fallen out of use. It is this area, to the west of the Hospital Cluster, that is now known as Horton Country Park.

<http://www.epsomandewellhistoryexplorer.org.uk/HortonCountryPark.html>

Epsom Common

The known history of Epsom Common stretches back to the Saxon era. Then it covered a far greater area, including what is now known as Epsom Downs. Unfit for cultivation because of the layer of a 200 ft thick layer of clay - water logged in winter and dried-out in summer - they formed the wastes of the Manor of Epsom, owned by Chertsey Abbey until the Dissolution. The Commoners were allowed to collect firewood and graze their animals, mainly cattle and pigs. Whilst under the ownership of the Abbey of Chertsey, monks in the 12th century created the Great Pond, stocking it with fish to provide food for the winter.

In 1618 a spring was discovered on the Common whose water contained magnesium sulphate - an aid for constipation - and so, for the next 100 years, Epsom was regarded as a Spa Town. Only a wishing well, located in the middle of the Wells housing estate, remains on the site of the spring and is a reminder of Epsom's most famous product, 'Epsom Salts'.

www.epsomandewellhistoryexplorer.org.uk/EpsomCommon1.html

Claremont Park

In 1709, architect, playwright, courtier and

spy Sir John Vanbrugh bought the area then known as Chargate Farm and Wood. He built himself an elegant retreat and began to develop the garden.

Later he sold the estate to Thomas Pelham-Holles, the Duke of Newcastle in 1714. He helped the new owner develop Claremont, working on designing the gardens and extending the mansion. In the early years of Claremont, around the 1720s, designer Charles Bridgeman crafted a formal garden for the Duke. His most notable addition was the three-acre turf amphitheatre, painstakingly carved into 'Bridgeman's Hill'.

As the formal garden went out of style in the 1730s, Newcastle employed William Kent to bring it up to date. He replanted large areas and expanded the 'round basin' at the base of the amphitheatre into a serpentine lake.

In 1769, Clive of India bought Claremont. He commissioned 'Capability' Brown to build a replacement mansion and move Portsmouth Road further away.

In 1922 much of the Claremont estate was sold for housing development, leaving just the house and surrounding 210 acres of garden. Most buildings were demolished, but the house became a school in 1930.

Given to the treasury in lieu of tax, in 1949 the surviving 49 acres of the garden were passed to the National Trust.