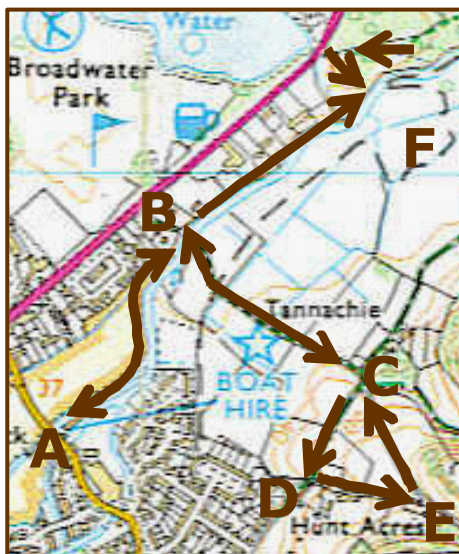


A walk near Godalming to view plants and habitats



Riverside walk from Farncombe Boathouse

Greening Godalming is a local community group campaigning to make Godalming a greener town by helping people reduce their carbon footprints.



Location: The starting point is Farncombe Boat House. Map reference: SU981445.

Short and Long Walks: The short walk (see map) is A, B, C, D, E, then back to B and A. You will see more of the riverside on the longer walk, plus be able to inspect dry land vegetation around Point F, developed on thin soil.

FROM A TO B: Have a look at the trees growing along this section. These trees have their roots in soils of various degrees of wetness. They include some species typical of well-drained soils, such as holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and elder (*Sambucus nigra*), and others characteristic of wetter land. The latter include alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), a very common species along the River Wey, white willow

(*Salix alba*), grey willow (*Salix cinerea*), poplar (*Populus*, visible on the other side of the river) and silver birch (*Betula pendula*). The field on the left-hand side of the path is the most easterly of a chain of three flood-meadows in Godalming. The flora is quite rich, reflecting that there has only been limited pasture 'improvement' or else that it happened some time ago. The water table is variable, giving a patchy flora. There are a number of species of grasses, including bent grasses (*Agrostis* spp.) and Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*). Two tall grasses seen here or by the river are reed canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) and reed sweet-grass (*Glyceria maxima*). There are also two large sedges, the tussock-forming greater tussock sedge (*Carex paniculata*) and the clump-making pendulous sedge (*Carex pendula*). Rushes, such as soft rush (*Juncus effusus*), also occur – a sign of frequent water-logging.

A number of attractive flowers may be glimpsed close to the river between A and F, identifiable according to the season. They include greater willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*), yellow flag (*Iris pseudacoris*), hemlock water dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*), valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*), purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), marsh woundwort (*Stachys palustris*), water figwort (*Scrophularia auriculata*), meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and forget-me-not (*Myosotis* spp.). Two plants introduced to Britain may also be seen, one the Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens*

glandulifera), regarded as a serious invader because it displaces native plants on a significant scale, and the other dame's violet (*Hesperis matronalis*), a handsome plant with fragrant flowers, well established along the ditch (Hell Ditch) that enters the River Wey just before the bridge at Point B. The riverside path has a different flora, related to its dry aspect and constant trampling.

FROM B TO C and the circuit view D and E: Turn right over the bridge and you soon come to an area of wet meadow or marshland, seen on both sides of the track. There are many interesting plants here, including marsh horsetail (*Equisetum palustre*), meadow vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*) with yellow flowers, marsh orchid (*Dactylorhiza*), bulrush (*Typha latifolia*), bistwort (*Persicaria bistorta*) and marsh thistle (*Cirsium palustre*). Trees present along this track include English oak (*Quercus robur*), Turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*), horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) and plane (*Platanus orientalis*). The triangular circuit at the end of this track provides a contrast with vegetation on well drained land.

FROM B TO F: Walk along the riverbank until you reach a wet ditch draining into the river from the left. Turn left and walk along the right-hand side of this ditch up to the Godalming to Guildford road, turn left along the side of the road and then left again after a very short distance. Proceed on path diagonal to the road back to the river. Extra habitats to see here are wet woodland (close to the ditch) and (on the return stretch) an area of thin soils with vegetation different from any previously seen on this walk. There is a wonderful display of wild roses (*Rosa*) in early summer and other plants present include teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*), self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*) and cinquefoil (*Potentilla* sp., probably creeping cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*).

A note on the riverside habitat

Considered narrowly, riverside is a thin linear habitat extending on the sides of rivers. However, more broadly, riverside vegetation can be considered to include all those areas of vegetation influenced by rivers, in particular those on the sides of rivers subject to permanent or occasional inundation. Species of plants present include some that require permanent immersion of at least some of their parts to those that are basically dry land species, but can tolerate occasional immersion.

There are some wetlands around Godalming dominated by trees, in particular alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) which sometimes forms fine stands of quite tall trees with a marshy understory below. The floors of these swamp forests can be quite irregular, with humps of higher ground providing footholds for ordinary terrestrial plants. Various species of willows (*Salix*) are also water-loving plants. Alder buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*) is a small and rather uncommon tree, which likes to grow on organic-rich soils on the margin of wetlands.

A series of three, occasionally inundated, water meadows (the Lammas Land) extends along the sides of the River Wey through the heart of Godalming. A visit to these meadows will demonstrate the great importance of micro-topography to the types of species found. For instance, in the most up-stream meadow (Overgone Meadow), drier places are dominated by normal dry land grasses, such as Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*), perennial rye grass (*Lolium*

perenne) and timothy (*Phleum pratense*), while wetter spots carry rushes (*Juncus effusus*), water-purslane (*Lythrum portula*) and other wet-loving species.

Dame's-violet (*Hesperis matronalis*) is an introduced species forming colourful patches found along the side of Hell Ditch (a waterway crossing the three water meadows mentioned above). This does not appear to constitute a serious invasive problem, but the same cannot be said of Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), which is abundant in wetlands in many places around Godalming and is regarded as a harmful invader because of its ability to suppress native species.