

**U3A Bikers**  
**Richmond Park and the Isabella Plantation**  
**Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2022**

The weather forecast for the day was “sunny periods and scattered showers, some heavy”, and so it proved to be.

Eleven of us assembled at Brockwell Park Lido and made our way via Clapham and Wandsworth Commons, past HMP Wandsworth and across Garrett Lane.



We were using a variation on a route – originally developed by Peter – but this took us across King George’s Park, up the modest incline of West Hill Road and on to join the A3.

This major route has a very good cycle path along its length and provided a nearly flat route to the underpass at the corner of Putney Heath, to pick up the earlier route.

We continued on past the **Telegraph pub** where a semaphore telegraph signalling system once connected the docks at Greenwich to the fleet at Portsmouth.

Telegraph Road took us across Putney Heath and down into quiet, attractive Roehampton High Street where we stopped at the Village Café for a coffee, over-due according to some!! The café is evidently popular with locals and serves lots of baked beans bacon and sausages.



At the lights we crossed Roehampton Lane and coasted down the gentle incline of Danebury Avenue, past council properties, some now much needing repair and redecoration, and finally arriving at Priory Lane - just as the heavens opened.

It was time to shelter under some trees and put on wet gear.

From this junction it was only a few turns of the pedals to bring us to the Roehampton Gate entrance to Richmond Park.



Turning left along a continuation of Priory Lane and crossing the Beverly Brook, we made intermittent progress as the heavy rain arrived and we took shelter as best we could under trees.



The deer were too busy feeding to notice us ride past, no doubt enjoying the lush grass along the roadside.

With some moderation of the rain, we continued on to find the finger post directing us left to the Isabella Plantation.



Cycle racks are provided at the entrance and here we secured our cycles, then proceeded into the gardens.....and were delighted to find none other than Peter, sitting by Peg's Pond.

He had arrived independently by car, courtesy of his house-keeper.



The rain continued and during the walk we had to take shelter again and heard the thunder overhead, as we watched the ducks and the chicks in Thompson's Pond. It was a delight to see the beautifully coloured Mandarin ducks there too. Some sensible people had brought umbrellas.

Some of the azaleas and rhododendrons were still in bloom. (Others were past their best. I have included several photos taken three weeks ago on a sunny day; each year is different but this year the blooms were out earlier than usual.)

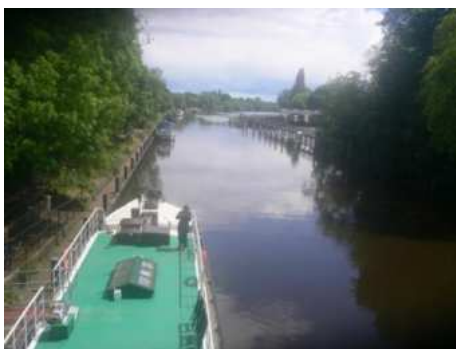


Leaving the Plantation we crossed Queens Road and enjoyed the lovely downhill run to Ham Gate.

On slick roads we continued through Ham Common Woods, across Upper Ham Road and on to Ham Common.

At Riverside Drive we took the path down to the Thames, with Teddington Lock down-river to the right and the Weir up-river.

We crossed the two foot bridges which provided a view of the Weir which was in full flow.



At The Anglers pub, pre-booked tables were ready for us, and for a while the sun came out, giving us an opportunity to dry out.

We were served by a waiter, Rida, who hailed from Tenerife. The conversation turned to the neighbouring island of La Gomera, famous for inhabitants having an ancient way of communicating across deep ravines by means of a whistled speech that can be heard two miles away. To our amazement and delight, Rida gave us a demonstration of some of these whistles!



The route home was along Teddington High Street to Teddington Rail Station for the 28 min ride back to Clapham Junction.

Time: about 5 hours.

Distance cycled: 15 miles.

**Additional photos**



*Mandarin duck*



*May 2022*



## Notes

The **Isabella Plantation** is located in what was a boggy part of Richmond Park. It was shown on a 1771 map as *Isabell Slade*. *Slade*, or *sleyt*, meant a bog or open space between woods or banks, and *isabel* meant dirty or greyish brown, referring to the colour of the soil there. The *Isabella Plantation* was established in the early 19th century when Lord Sidmouth, who was Deputy Ranger of Richmond Park (and a former Prime Minister), fenced it as an area of woodland to keep the deer out.

After World War II it was transformed into a woodland garden. It is now organically run, resulting in the rich flora and fauna that we see today. It was opened to the public in 1953. A survey in October 2012 found that about 40 per cent of the *Isabella Plantation* was covered with *Rhododendron ponticum*, a non-native and invasive variety of *rhododendron* introduced here (and in many other gardens all over Britain) by the Victorians. Over the next five years this was removed. Further improvements included de-silting of all three ponds (*Peg's Pond*, *Thomson's Pond* and *Still Pond*) in the *Plantation* and establishing new waterfalls in the streams which are such an attractive feature of the garden.

The **Telegraph pub** was named after *Admiralty Telegraph*, a shutter station which stood at the site in 1796 to convey messages between London and Portsmouth at the time of the Napoleonic Wars. Long before the electric telegraph came on the scene, a method of communication existed that relied on using relay stations connected by line of sight. This was no new idea as a similar system was used by the Romans to communicate from hilltop to hilltop. The system was set up by the Admiralty in the early 19th century in order to communicate quickly between their London headquarters and various naval ports. The line from London to Portsmouth operated from 1824 until December 1847 when it was superseded by the electric telegraph. It ran over 72 miles and cost latterly between £3,000 and £3,500 a year to work. In addition to this substantial sum, it was allegedly only fully operational for one-fifth of the year; being interrupted regularly by fog, rain and even by gloomy weather. The Admiralty semaphore was abandoned at the end of 1847.

See: [https://www.brunningandprice.co.uk/\\_downloads/telegraph/telegraph-history.pdf](https://www.brunningandprice.co.uk/_downloads/telegraph/telegraph-history.pdf)

Acknowledgement: Source material from Wikipedia

Ride leader: John Clements

Report and photos by John Clements, 25<sup>th</sup> May 2022