



Rather than provide a detailed description of the route, which is (I trust) well indicated on the detailed attached map and by signposts on the common, I will instead describe some of the sights *en route* (and also provide an explanation for the slightly eccentric title of this walk).

This walk passes almost all the ponds on and around Naphill Common (the exceptions being Lady Horse and Daisy Ponds). Most of the ponds on the common were used by livestock – the ‘White railing ponds’ for human use were nearer the main road (mains water did not arrive until 1929). In the absence of grazing animals, there is a continuing problem of their becoming overrun with grass and weeds and then drying out. Despite this, in wet summers(!) they provide a haven for wildlife, with newts (including Great Crested Newts) and other amphibians as well as grass snakes (that prey on the amphibians). Insects include predators such as damselflies and dragonflies as well as pond skaters, water boatmen and whirligig beetles.

The Roman interest is provided by the earthworks just beyond Dew Pond, which consist of a D-shaped ditch and bank, thought to be a Romano-British homestead (a small farm dating from the first few centuries of the Common Era). A shard of Roman ‘mortarium’ pottery was found in the nearby Dew Pond in 1991. The archæology team from Princes Risborough Countryside Group have assisted Friends of Naphill Common in carrying out a non-destructive survey of the site using geophysics technology that will be familiar to viewers of Channel 4’s ‘Time Team’.

Finally the Emperors – I hope the fact that these are both species of insect will not prove too much of a disappointment! The Purple Emperor is a large British butterfly that lays its eggs on Sallow (Pussy Willow) on which the caterpillars feed. The males frequent the upper branches of tall trees, oaks being a favourite. They are most likely to be seen in early July, but a wet summer can delay their emergence by several weeks. When the sun strikes their upper wings at the correct angle, it reveals their striking purple sheen.

The Emperor Dragonfly is the largest European species of this voracious predator. At around 78mm (3”) in length it is an impressive sight. The only other dragonfly of this size to be found on the common is the (more common and slightly smaller) Southern Hawker, but these are largely green in colour whereas the Emperor (especially the male) is a vivid blue.