



WHERE London and Surrey

START & FINISH Richmond Park (or The Mall)

DISTANCE From 98km **WORDS** John Storms

PICTURES Geoff Waugh and Colin Evans



FOLLOWING THE OLYMPIANS

Watch the event from the roadside or get on your bike and do it yourself. CTC's **John Storms** previews the 2012 Olympic road race route

The lottery for Olympic tickets is optional: the men's and women's road races are two events that you can watch for free as they head out from London into the leafy lanes of Surrey on 28 and 29 July. You can even ride the route yourself in the days, weeks, and months after the pros have packed up and gone home. It's a nice road loop, and riding it will put those Olympic battles on Box Hill into context.

The men's and women's routes are the same, except that the men's does more loops of a circuit around Box Hill to make it longer. The Olympic route starts and finishes on The Mall, then heads southwest through Westminster, Kensington, Chelsea, Hammersmith, Fulham and Putney to reach Richmond Park. If you plan to ride the route recreationally, this is the place to start: you skip eight miles each way of London streets, so you'll see less traffic.

IN THE PHOTOS

- 1) Why not skip Central London and start at Richmond Park?
- 2) Box Hill is 224 metres high
- 3) Staple Lane – a long drag
- 4) The aptly named Zig Zag road up Box Hill

PARKS, KINGS, AND PRIORIES

Richmond Park is deservedly popular with cyclists and you may want to explore it a little. When you're ready to begin the ride proper, head to Ham Gate and down the hill, past the lake and out of the park. Take a slight detour north into Richmond and cross Richmond Road bridge over the Thames.

Head south towards Bushy Park. These were once Henry VIII's hunting grounds, being adjacent to Hampton Court Palace. You won't be in the park for long as it's a straight short ride down the main road and around the newly refurbished Diana Fountain. Just as in Richmond Park, you should be on the look out for deer alongside or crossing the road.

From Hampton Court, you follow the roundabout-heavy road along the river for at least the next hour. You ride into Walton, descend into Weybridge, which



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can be busy, and West Byfleet, where traffic starts to lighten up. The next highlight is on the approach to Ripley, as you pass through farmland on winding roads. Heading south on Newark Lane, you'll see Newark Priory off to your left. It is an imposing set of ruins, listed as a Grade I Ancient Monument.

CLIMBING THE ZIG ZAG

There's no shortage of refreshment stops on the route, if you fancy something more appetising than energy gels. When Patrick Trainor and I rode the route, we stopped at The Bakery in Ripley for cakes, sandwiches and drinks.

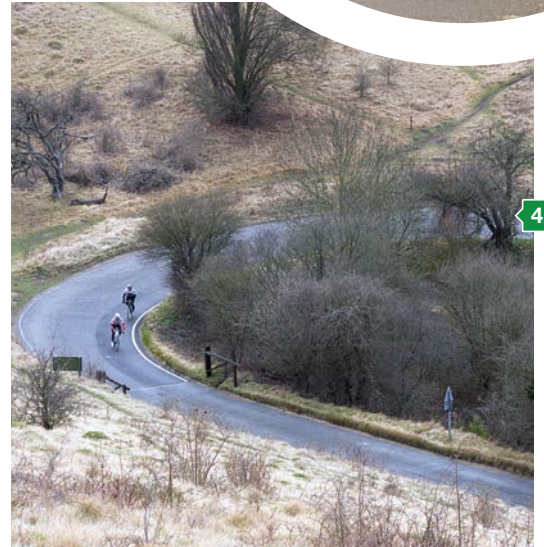
After relatively quiet lanes, you end up on a much busier road, the A246, which you follow to the west. You're not on it for long, however, soon turning off onto Staple Lane. Shere Road was pencilled in on prospective route maps but Staple Lane is a better choice. It's a significant climb, the only one of note other than Box Hill. It's only a mile long and starts out very gently but gets more difficult nearer the top. At the end of this road, be prepared for the steepest descent of the day. Combe Bottom has seen many cyclists crash due to its 20% tight, blind turns and slippery surface.

The next stretch is on the wide-open A25, taking you into Gomshall and then Dorking. For those living or staying south of the route, a picturesque place to stop is The Gomshall Mill inn, an 11th century pub and



DO IT YOURSELF

- › The roads will be open to traffic when you ride the route. To avoid the worst of it, avoid peak commuter times during the week (7-9am, 5-7pm), or do it on a Sunday instead.
- › The Surrey lanes are thick with road cyclists at weekends, particularly around Box Hill. Be courteous to residents and other road users and don't drop gel wrappers etc.
- › If you want bragging rights for your Box Hill climbing prowess, log your ascent with Strava ([strava.com](https://www.strava.com))



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“The Zig Zag road up Box Hill is less than two miles long and averages 5%. You are guaranteed to see a mix of cyclists here”



“The test event last summer proved how technical this road is. The professionals had crashes on both laps”

›restaurant.

At the end of Dorking High Street, turn left at the Silver Cockerel roundabout and onto the A24 heading north. You are just a few minutes from Box Hill now. There is an option to take the bike path most of the way on this A-road. There is also a tunnel to cross the road just before the Box Hill roundabout.

The Zig Zag road up is less than two miles long and averages 5%. You are guaranteed to see a mix of cyclists here. The sheer volume of cyclists since the announcement of the Olympic event – several hundreds per hour on Sunday mornings – prompted a police review of cycle use here last year.

When we rode it, the only signs of improvement to the surface were filled-in potholes and rut patches from last year. By May, the Zig Zag road will be fully resurfaced so should be in its best shape for years.

HOME FROM BOX HILL

We skipped the National Trust café at the top and went on to Cycles Dauphin in the small row of shops on the right a mile further on. It's a well-known and friendly ›



- IN THE PHOTOS**
- 5) The men's race comes up Box Hill nine times
 - 6) The Combe Bottom descent has a tight turn on a 20% slope at both top and bottom
 - 7) The old Gomshall Mill inn



OLYMPIC SPECTATING

›› WATCHING THE RACES AT THE ROADSIDE

› Richmond Park and Bushy Park are completely traffic free for the 48 hours around the events. The exit into the Hampton Court area is full of opportunities to see the Olympians more than once, as the riders pass through here on the way out to the Surrey Hills and on the way back into London. Bushy Park and Hampton Court Palace are great places to spend some family time in the gardens and grounds. The Kings Arms pub is in the centre of all of these locations.

› Ripley is easily accessible. The High Street is full of restaurants and pubs, and with a cycling history dating back to the late 1800s we would expect a good atmosphere here for the Olympics.

› Gomshall is on the busy A25, but for those living or staying south of the route it's just a few hilly miles away by bike. The Gomshall Mill inn is an 11th century pub that would fit the bill for a proper meal.

› Dorking is the largest village on the Surrey part of the route. West Street has 18 antique shops with over 150 dealers. There are plenty of pubs, restaurants, cafés and a couple of bike shops as well.

› The nine laps of Box Hill for the men and two for the women will be a restricted, ticketed area. There will still be opportunities to watch but access in general may be difficult. The flatter A24 approach road is wide enough and with closed roads might prove to be a place with a good atmosphere to picnic and spend the hours to see the riders the maximum number of times. There are also bridleways running over Box Hill, including the North Downs Way, so you could easily get there by mountain bike. You'll avoid road closures and parking restrictions this way.

› The Bear in Oxshott. The last climb of the day isn't very long but this pub is halfway up and offers a great place to see everything and toast the riders on their way.



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FACT FILE OLYMPIC ROAD RACE TASTER

Distance: this recreational route is about 98km (61 miles). The Olympic route has multiple laps of the 16km Box Hill circuit (nine for the men, two for the women), plus 13km each way between The Mall and Richmond Park – making 250km for the men and 140km for the women.

Time: 4-6 hours, depending on speed and stops.

When: the Olympic races are on 28 and 29 July. Recreationally, this route is best in summer but it could be ridden any time.

Terrain: rolling lanes in Surrey – steep around Box Hill. Flatter around London.

Maps: OS Landrangers 176, 186, 187

More Information: london2012.com

Travel advice during the games and the weekend of 28-29 July is at getaheadofthegames.com. The Surrey Hills Road Race Festival will take place at Denbies Vineyard in Dorking from 27-29 July. It will be free to enter and will include stands, exhibitions, and a big screen to watch the action. More at road.cc

bike shop. A new feature here is the tea, coffee and cakes on offer while you sit and admire the Italian framesets and bikes from Colnago and De Rosa. Their workshop is top notch as well.

Back on for the road north towards London, get ready to descend for a good while. The test event last summer proved just how technical this road is. The professionals had crashes on both laps. Be careful through here and give yourself plenty of time to brake, especially on the tight left-hander before Headley Common. Leatherhead is next with the last punchy climbs of the day on the way up to Oxshott.

The final 10 miles is the run into Esher, past Claremont Gardens, then back past Hampton Court and Bushy Park and into Kingston. Head over the bridge and around the one-way system, then go up to the Kingston Gate entrance of Richmond Park. The Olympic cyclists will carry on into London for – hopefully – a sprint finish on The Mall. For the rest of us, for whom the roads won't be closed, Richmond Park is a less frenetic place to stop. 🌳

Spectator tickets for Box Hill go on sale on 29 May, priced £10-£15 for adults. Visit tickets.london2012.com



IN THE PHOTOS

- 8) Download the .gpx file of this route from ctc-maps.org.uk – just put '2012 Olympic road race route' in the search box
- 9) Finish in Richmond Park or press on to The Mall