

London & the Southeast

Welcome to London – capital of Britain, cosmopolitan melting pot, the world in one city. Visitors come to see the famous sights – Buckingham Palace, Tower Bridge and all – but if you're a local, or you've come to Britain specifically for walking, you'll probably be tempted to skip the big smoke and head straight for the hills. But hold on there! Perhaps surprisingly, London has one of the largest footpath networks of any city in the world, and walking (along with cycling and increased public transport use) is positively encouraged by the city authorities.

We're not talking trackless wilderness, of course, but exploring London on foot can be one of the best ways to see Britain's largest city. Pounding the pavement – not to mention miles of parkland, woodland and river-side path – provides a great opportunity to get under London's skin a little, to see the famous monuments from an unusual angle and to simply explore parts of the city that many visitors never reach.

Beyond London, there are many more opportunities for walking in the surrounding counties of southeastern England – Essex, Hertfordshire, Berkshire, Surrey and Kent – and this chapter outlines one of the finest routes in the region, the Thames Path, leading walkers beside Britain's best-known river from its semi-rural hinterland to the landmark barrier holding back the ever-rising waters of the North Sea. We also describe the 100%-urban Jubilee Walkway through the heart of the capital, and the Centenary Way – an unexpected Cinderella route through green parks and patches of ancient forest little more than a stone's throw from the high-rise buildings of the city centre.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Strolling along **London's South Bank** (p58) from Westminster to Tower Bridge
- Discovering tranquil glades in **Epping Forest** (p61), surprisingly near central London
- Watching the rowers in a quintessential English scene at **Henley-on-Thames** (p65)
- Admiring **Hampton Court Palace** (p68), Henry VIII's splendid Thames-side home
- Drinking in history at one of the many old pubs along the **River Thames** (p64)

INFORMATION Maps

For route planning and orientation, the Ordnance Survey (OS) 1:250,000 *Southeast England* map covers this large region (with London at the centre) on one sheet. Maps covering individual walks in this chapter are listed in the Planning section of each route description. Homing in on the capital, Lonely Planet's *London City Map* includes several maps of different scales, from the whole of Greater London down to detail of the inner centre. For ultra-detail, a street directory such as the iconic *London A-Z* is always useful.

Books

Walking guidebooks covering London and the Southeast include *London: The definitive walking guide* by Colin Saunders and *Walks in the Country Near London* by Christopher Somerville. Also good for ideas is *100 Walks in South East England* (published by AA).

For before and after your walk, you'll need a general guidebook to help you get around, to recommend places to stay and eat, and to provide more information on places of interest. Lonely Planet's *London* and *Best of London* guides also include descriptions of short walking tours. There's also *The Rough Guide to Walks in London and South East England* by Judith Bamber and Helena Smith. For a different angle, *Eccentric London* by Benedict le Vay guides you well beyond the usual sights.

Guided Walks

The weekly listings magazine *Time Out* includes details of guided walks in and around London in its Around Town section. These range from literary walks through the city streets to pub walks in the parks and leafy suburbs.

Information Sources

For general tourist information, there are tourist offices throughout London and the Southeast – those useful for specific walks described in this chapter are listed in the individual route descriptions. You're probably better off using one of the countless websites covering the capital and its environs; good places to start include www.visitlondon.com and www.londontown.com.

The **Ramblers' Association** (☎ 020-7339 8500; www.ramblers.org.uk), Britain's largest and most active national walking organisation, is another very useful contact for information on walking in London (as well as the rest of Britain). From its website you can order the excellent *Walking in London* booklet. Other good walking sites include www.london-footprints.co.uk.

GATEWAYS

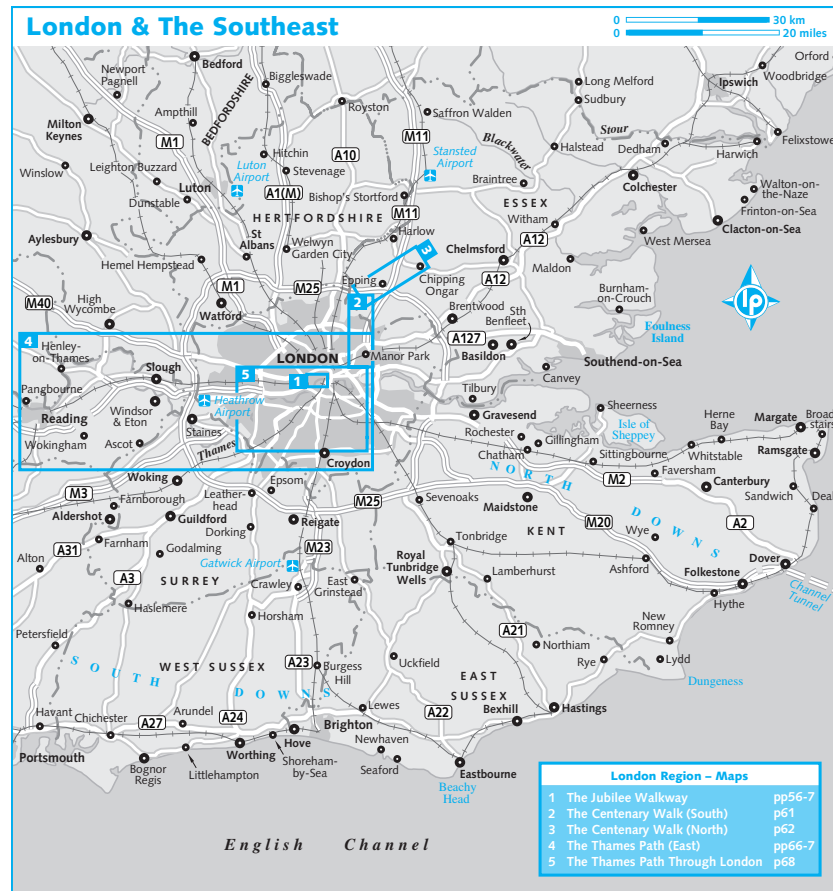
As well as being the start and end point for a couple of the walks in this chapter, London is the gateway to the Southeast region and a major gateway to Britain for many visitors. The city has a wide range of places to stay, from basic hostels to the finest hotels, and if you're peckish there are about 10,000 restaurants to choose from.

From London you can reach the rest of the country by train or long-distance bus – for details see p458 and p456.

THE JUBILEE WALKWAY

Duration	3–4 hours
Distance	8 miles (13km)
Difficulty	easy
Start/Finish	Leicester Square, central London
Transport	bus, train, tube
Summary	A fascinating walk through the streets of ancient and modern London, taking in many popular sights along both sides of the River Thames.

The Jubilee Walkway strides through the heart of London and is a great introduction to walking in the capital. The route was created in 1977 (as the Silver Jubilee Walkway) to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's accession to the throne, and remains a legacy enjoyed by Londoners and visitors alike. The Walkway passes some of the best-known sights in the city, including Buckingham Palace, Big Ben, St Paul's Cathedral, Tower Bridge, Trafalgar Square and the Tower of London. The route also goes along the south bank of the River Thames, providing excellent views of the great buildings on the northern side, while crossing and recrossing the famous Thames bridges gives some of the finest views of the city.



PLANNING

The main route is circular, with three additional (or optional) loops, running mainly through city streets north of the River Thames and along the traffic-free embankment path along the south side. The official start and finish is Leicester Square. We describe the main route clockwise, but you can start anywhere and go in either direction. The route is signed with silver metal discs marked with a crown and set into the footpaths and pavements; many are scuffed by the passing of countless feet but most have survived the years since 1977 pretty well.

The Jubilee Walkway's total distance is 14 miles (including the three additional loops). The route we describe is 8 miles.

You'll need to at least double the suggested walking time if you stop to look at the sights – and probably double again if you go into just some of the famous buildings along the way. It's best to allow all day, or even two days. Another option is to do the walk as a whole, then come back and separately visit the sights that take your fancy. If you can't do the whole route, we recommend the Leicester Square to Tower Bridge sections.

Maps & Books

A booklet called *The Jubilee Walkway Route Map & Guide* is available from local tourist offices, libraries and museums, although this is one route where you could use the map in our book alone.



Information Sources

Your first stop for information should be www.jubileewalkway.com. Numerous information boards along the route explain the history of landmark buildings or interpret the scenes from bridges and other view points. As you walk along the South Bank, you can also pick up a very nice series of *Walk this Way* leaflets from local tourist offices, shops, museums and cafés, describing in detail the various points passed on this section. See also www.southbank.london.com.

If you want to know more about all the famous buildings and fascinating sights along the Jubilee Walkway, you'll need a good local guidebook to give more details. See p54 for some suggestions.

THE WALK

Leicester Square to Lambeth Bridge

1 hour, 2 miles

Setting off for your walk from Leicester Square, it's hard to believe this busy London landmark was once a quiet public garden. Today it's most famous for its cinemas – and for its movie premieres when the stars pose for pictures and make handprints in brass plaques in the pavement.

From here, the route heads south to **Trafalgar Square**, dominated by Nelson's Column, then along the Mall for a short distance (with Buckingham Palace, the London home of the Queen, at its western end) before turning left into Horse Guards Rd, with the parade ground on your left and St James's Park on your right. (One of the optional loops takes you down the Mall, past **Buckingham Palace** then along the south side of St James's Park.)

From Trafalgar Square, you may prefer to leave the route briefly, and go along Whitehall instead, past the entrance to **Downing St**, where the prime minister lives at No 10, rejoining the Walkway at the **Houses of Parliament**, dominated at the north end by St Stephen's Tower, commonly called **Big Ben** (actually the name of the bell inside).

The route goes south past **Westminster Abbey** (the coronation place of monarchs since at least the 11th century, and final resting place of Geoffrey Chaucer, Charles Darwin and many other famous names) and just south of Parliament cuts into Victoria Tower Gardens, from where you get your

first sight of the Thames, crossed nearby by **Lambeth Bridge**. Some benches, thoughtfully raised so you can see over the embankment wall, provide a good rest spot.

Lambeth Bridge to Tower Bridge

1–1½ hours, 3 miles

Cross the River Thames on Lambeth Bridge, from the north to the south bank. For the next few miles the route stays off the roads and follows walkways beside the river. After passing **Lambeth Palace** (London residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury), there are excellent views of the Houses of Parliament and the nearby Westminster Bridge. Go past the **London Eye**, a giant wheel giving spectacular views over the city, and under Waterloo Bridge. From here the south bank becomes the **South Bank**, an area of theatres, studios, museums, galleries and concert halls, with a lively atmosphere despite the ugly concrete 1960s architecture.

Next, you pass the **Tate Modern**, a former power station now a world-class art gallery, and the silver thread of the **Millennium Bridge** spanning the river. There's a fine view of St Paul's Cathedral, dominating the near skyline on the north side of the river. Walk past **Shakespeare's Globe**, a re-creation of the Bard's original theatre, and go under Southwark Bridge and then a rail bridge rattling with trains (and home to flocks of pigeons – so walk fast and don't look up).

Now you're in **Southwark** (pronounced 'suth-ark'), once a separate town outside London, famous for its taverns, brothels and theatres that flourished beyond the control of the city's lawmakers. From here, the route moves inland slightly away from the river and down Clink St (site of a former prison so notorious that 'clink' became a byword for prison everywhere), then past ancient **Southwark Cathedral** (dating back to Saxon times).

The next feature is **London Bridge**, but the route goes underneath almost without noticing (if you want to stand on the bridge, for great views up and down the river, go up the steps on the left) and past a large office block called St Olaf's House, before cutting down an alley (virtually under the office block) called St Olaf's Stairs to reach the river-side path again. Be sure to visit **Hay's Galleria**, a converted warehouse and dock (one of many that used to line the south bank), now

with shops and cafés centred round a large and fantastical metal sculpture.

As you pass the spherical, glass-clad headquarters of the mayor of London and the London Assembly (back by popular demand after being abolished in the 1980s), your view over the river is dominated by **Tower Bridge** – one of London's most famous landmarks. Before crossing to the north bank, with luck you may see the roadway swing open to let a ship through.

Tower Bridge to Leicester Square

1–1½ hours, 3 miles

On the north bank of the River Thames, the official route loops through **St Katharine's Dock**, now a fancy marina with waterside pubs, shops and cafés, but it's more interesting to walk west along the embankment between the river and the **Tower of London**. Built originally by William the Conqueror shortly after the Battle of Hastings in 1066, the tower has been added to by many subsequent monarchs; it is now home to the Crown Jewels and ceremonial guards called Beefeaters. (More prosaically, there are some cafés, snack bars and public loos nearby, so this might be a good spot for a lunch break.)

For the remainder of the route, the path leaves the river and hits the streets. You're now in the **City of London** – usually just called the City or the Square Mile, a separate entity within the metropolis governed by a corporation more than 900 years old that today is London's banking and financial centre. If you thought the City was ancient, next stop is **All Hallows-by-the-Tower**, a church dating from AD 675.

Turn back to more recent times as you pass near the **Monument**, commemorating the 1666 Great Fire of London, and wander up King William St to the **Mansion House**, the residence of the Lord Mayor of London since around 1750. (Just to keep you on your toes, this is a different figure to the Mayor of London based at the London Assembly back by Tower Bridge.) Nearby is a potent symbol of Britain's financial prowess: the **Bank of England**.

From Mammon to God, and the next highlight is **St Paul's Cathedral**, designed by Sir Christopher Wren, one of London's greatest architects, and built between 1675 and 1710. (From the Mansion House, the

official route runs the length of Queen Victoria St, but at the junction with Queen St it's more pleasant to take Watling St and reach St Paul's at its eastern end.)

The route then takes you up a street called Ludgate Hill and over a road junction called Ludgate Circus (once an execution site), down Fleet St (once London's newspaper centre), past the Royal Courts of Justice (where TV crews wait for the latest celebrity trial to end) and through Lincoln's Inn Fields (London's legal centre), crossing **Drury Lane** (past a cluster of famous theatres) and continuing down Bow St (where the 'Bow Street Runners' in the 1750s became the forerunner of London's police force).

Round the corner and back to the present: **Covent Garden**, the epitome of trendy modern London, with shops, cafés and a lively street atmosphere. (Even this place has its roots in history though; it was a fruit and flower market for centuries, and the name comes from a convent that stood here for centuries before that.) Time to sit down, have a coffee, watch a busker, or buy an 'I love London' hat. It's a short stroll back to Leicester Square and the end of the walk.

THE CENTENARY WALK

Duration	6–7 hours
Distance	15 miles (24km)
Difficulty	easy
Start	Manor Park
Finish	Epping (p60)
Transport	train, tube

Summary An eclectic mix of ancient forest and urban parkland, with historical highlights and some fine pubs for sustenance.

The Centenary Walk offers good walking surprisingly close to the centre of London – the starting point is a mere 5 miles from St Paul's Cathedral – through Epping Forest on the northern edge of the city. A look at the map shows that the 'forest' tag may be a little misleading – perhaps woodland would be more accurate, and there are large areas of open parkland too – but the swathes of trees are indeed remnants of the great royal forest that covered much of the county of Essex in the 12th century. For the people of London today, it's still a much-loved oasis and respite from suburbia.

HISTORY

Epping Forest has a continuous biological history dating from the last Ice Age, but for more than 1000 years it has been greatly influenced by human activity, managed for firewood, timber and grazing, and as a hunting ground for the monarch. Common forest trees include beech, oak and hornbeam, many of which have been pollarded – ‘beheaded’ around 3m above ground level to produce a cluster of branches that are later cut for firewood. Pollarding mostly ceased in the 19th century but left a remarkable legacy of weirdly contorted trees still easily seen all along the route.

Over the centuries, as kings lost interest in hunting, the forest diminished. By the 1850s the possible loss of a much-used recreation area (allied to early stirrings of the environmental movement) caused the City of London to act. In 1878 legislation was introduced that made the City of London ‘conservator’ of the forest with a charter to keep it public and preserve its natural aspect. Since then the forest has remained popular, particularly among walkers who make good use of the network of paths and bridleways. It was to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Epping Forest Act that the Centenary Walk was devised in 1978.

PLANNING

This linear walk can be done in either direction, but south to north is more pleasing as you head out of town into the countryside. From Manor Park to Epping is 15 miles, requiring about six to seven hours of walking. With stops for lunch and places of interest, you should allow seven to eight hours. The walking is mostly on flat or undulating tracks. All are straightforward, although they can be muddy after rain.

On the southern part of the route Epping Forest is embedded in urban development, but its setting becomes much more rural to the north. Some parts of the route are heavily used on summer Sundays, so if you prefer a solitary walk choose another day.

There are very few waymarks for this route, so you need a good map. In some parklands and forest areas there’s a maze of paths, but don’t worry too much. Keep heading in roughly the right direction and you’ll soon find a landmark that will help you get back on track.

You can reduce the length of the walk (and cut the more urban sections) by starting at Leytonstone or Chingford, reducing the distance to Epping to 12 miles or 7 miles, respectively.

For sustenance along the way, there’s one café and a selection of good pubs serving meals and bar snacks. More details are given in the route description. Epping (below) also has a choice of restaurants.

Maps

The Centenary Walk is on OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 174 *Epping Forest & Lee Valley*. An inexpensive *Epping Forest* pictorial map, marking the Centenary Walk, is available from the Epping Forest Information Centre (below).

Books

The most useful book is *The Centenary Walk* booklet, published by Epping Forest Conservators. For more options, get *Short Walks in Epping Forest* by Fred Matthews. For history and background, try *Epping Forest Through the Ages* by Georgina Green or the *Official Guide to Epping Forest*. All are available at the Epping Forest Information Centre (below) and can be posted on request.

Information Sources & Guided Walks

The **Epping Forest Information Centre** (☎ 020-8508 0028; www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/epping) at High Beach, south of Epping (and on the Centenary Walk), has a bookshop, plenty of free leaflets, displays about the forest’s history and ecology, and an extensive program of guided walks on forest topics.

NEAREST TOWNS

London is of course the ‘nearest town’ to the start of this route, and if you’re staying in the city centre it’s very easy to reach Manor Park (and return from Epping) by public transport (see p61).

Epping

At the end of the route, the old market town of Epping has a small selection of places to stay, including the **Duke of Wellington Inn** (☎ 01992-572388; 30 High St; r £45), although no breakfast is available here, and **Thatched House Hotel** (☎ 01992-578353; 236 High St; s/d £55/65). About 3 miles south of Epping, bang

on the route at High Beach, the charming **Epping Forest YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5822; epping@yha.org.uk; dm £12) maintains the forest theme. The **Epping Forest Information Centre** (☎ 020-8508 0028; www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/epping) at High Beach can provide an accommodation list with more options

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

From central London, the start of the walk at Manor Park is easily reached by suburban train from Liverpool Street train station. At the end of the walk, you can easily return to central London on the tube (London’s underground railway) – Epping is the northern terminus of the Central Line. Train and tube services start early in the morning and end late in the evening, with several trains an hour in each direction daily, with a reduced service on Sunday.

THE WALK

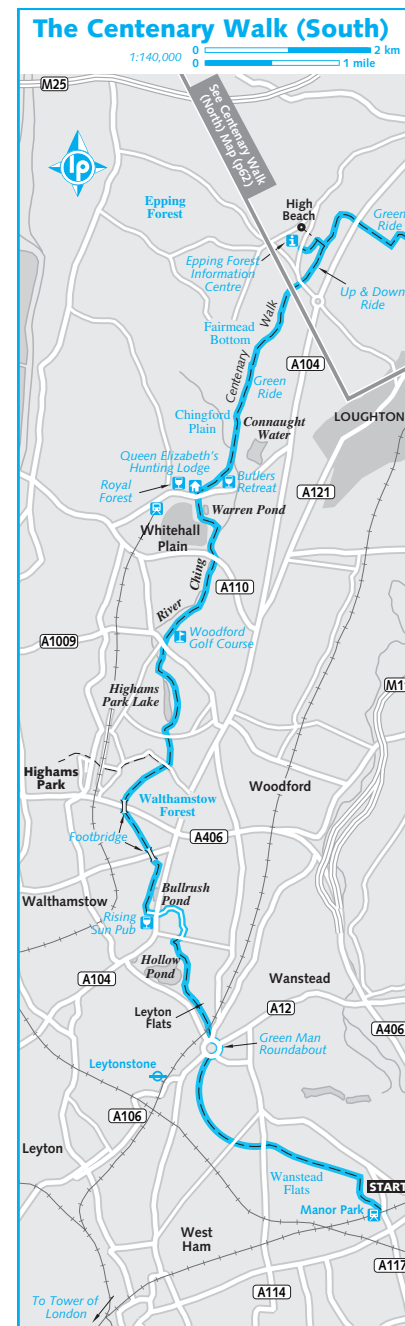
Manor Park to Chingford

3–3½ hours, 8 miles (13km)

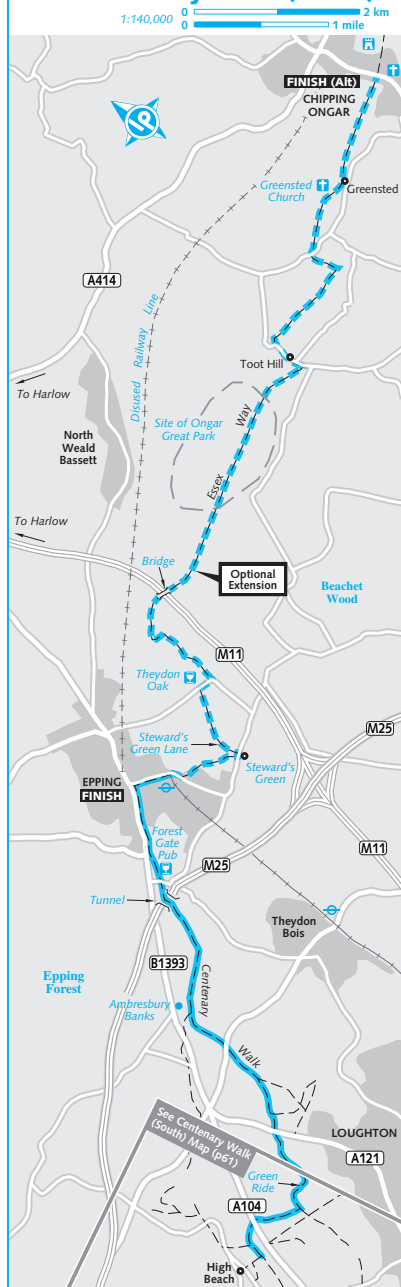
From Manor Park train station, begin by turning left along a street called Forest Dr, which soon brings you out to a large, grassy open space called Wanstead Flats. Head diagonally across the grass in a northwesterly direction.

After 1 mile, you cross a road and continue towards the left edge of some houses on the far side of another road, which you also cross. Go along a track with grassland on your left and houses on your right, fork right then left, and follow the path through woodland to reach a busy main road and the **Green Man Roundabout** – named after a former pub, in turn named after the ancient spirit of the woods, a reminder that the forest has existed here for millennia.

Use the pedestrian tunnel to go under the roads feeding the roundabout, then over a bridge crossing the railway to reach Leyton Flats, another largely grassland area. Head across this, through a belt of trees, past Hollow Pond and straight ahead through woodland to meet a road that you cross. Go past a pond and some attractive houses on your right to enter a road called College Pl. At its end, veer left through the forest, crossing a road to reach the **Rising Sun Pub**. It’s probably too early for a drink, so re-enter the woodland with Bullrush Pond on your right, then turn right and go along a



The Centenary Walk (North)



white-posted track (for horses) until a narrow path on your left leads up a grassy bank to cross a footbridge over a road. From here there are panoramic views over the city and suburbs of London.

To continue, fork left, following the path over another footbridge, this time above the busy North Circular Rd, then down into the woods of **Walthamstow Forest** and past an area where, in 1992, the Epping Forest Conservators repollarded trees as an experiment. For perhaps 1000 years much of the forest would have looked like this.

Cross a road and continue with a high-rise building on the left. Keep left as you go downhill and then over a road and along the right (east) side of Highams Park Lake. At its end go uphill through trees to pick up a grassy track leading onto and over a road to Woodford Golf Course. Continue on the track, later with a fairway on the right, then go uphill and through trees along a wide grassy strip.

The route skirts round the eastern edge of the suburb of Chingford, crossing a road to reach Whitehall Plain. It then continues alongside the little River Ching, turning left over a bridge. Go uphill to the left of Warren Pond to meet and cross a road opposite distinctive **Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge** (see opposite). Just to the left is the **Royal Forest**, a good pub serving no-nonsense food like liver and bacon or steak pie for around £6. To the right, **Butlers Retreat** also provides refreshments.

Chingford to Epping

3–3½ hours, 7 miles (11km)

From Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge go towards the fountain behind Butlers Retreat and turn right (with a pond on the right) and down a wide grassy track to the right of Chingford Plain. This is **Green Ride**, cut through the forest in the 1880s so Queen Victoria could go on a commemorative carriage tour, and it soon becomes a gravel-surfaced track continuing through woodland. Go over a junction of tracks and continue uphill, round an overgrown pond on the right, and on for 1.5 miles, to eventually reach a large grassy area called Fairmead Bottom. Go left and uphill as the track winds through beech woods, crosses a small road and becomes **Up and Down Ride**.

ONWARDS OVER ESSEX

Epping is the end of the Centenary Walk, but it's also the start of a long-distance path called the **Essex Way**, extending for 81 miles through farmed countryside and sizable woodlands to the North Sea port of Harwich. If you enjoyed the Centenary Walk, you could keep going along the Essex Way for a day or two. The historic market town of Chipping Ongar is just 8 miles (13km) from Epping, three to four hours of walking along the Essex Way. Highlights of this section include **Ongar Great Park**, the first recorded deer park in England, mentioned in early-11th-century documents, and **Greensted Church**, possibly the oldest wooden church in the world, a remarkable survivor from the 10th century or earlier. Another option is to start the Centenary Walk at Chingford and go all the way to Chipping Ongar – a comfortable day's walk of six to 7½ hours (15 miles), avoiding the more urban part of the route. For details see www.ramblers.org.uk/info/paths/essex.html.

a pond on the left. Follow this over a road (the nearby **Forest Gate** pub does excellent lunches) and continue over Bell Common – a narrow strip of scrub, grass and trees between a main road to the left and houses to the right.

At the end of the common follow Hemnall St (past a little house where Lucien, son of Camille Pissarro the French impressionist painter, lived for many years) to Station Rd, then turn right to reach Epping train station – the end of the Centenary Walk.

Take a left fork after about 800m and then left again down a hard track to reach Epping Forest Information Centre at High Beach (not a misspelt tree name – so called because the soil is quite sandy), where Queen Victoria dedicated the forest to the people in 1882. Years later the dedication is not forgotten and this area is busy at weekends. Nearby, the **King's Oak** pub serves lunches, while the green **tea hut** serves drinks and cakes.

From High Beach retrace your steps to the main route and go left at the fork. Cross the main road to a car park and continue ahead on a surfaced track, which after 500m joins another main track, where you turn left. You're on Green Ride again; follow it for 2.5 miles through woodland and across two roads.

After the second road and 200m beyond another track on the left, it is worth a short detour slanting left into the woodland to the impressive **Ambresbury Banks** earthworks – an Iron Age defensive structure dating from around 500 BC. According to local legend, a British uprising led by Queen Boudicca was put down here by the Romans in AD 60.

Eventually the track arrives at a grassy area with a cricket pitch to the left. In the 1970s this part of the forest was threatened with the construction of the M25 motorway and major environmental battles were fought to prevent it being severed. These were successful and today the motorway goes through a tunnel a couple of metres below your feet.

Go past the cricket pavilion to a gravel track and turn right onto a footpath with

TEMPER & TEMPERANCE

The Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge is centuries old but, despite its name, dates from a period *before* the well-known eponymous queen. It was built for King Henry VIII in the mid-16th century, and from here the monarch would ride out to hunt deer or simply escape the pressures of court in the city. Henry is of course famous (or infamous) for his impatient desire to ensure a male heir for the throne – a quest that led to the break up of the Church and his marrying six wives. Tradition says that he waited here to hear the cannon signalling that Anne Boleyn (wife No 2) had been beheaded at the Tower of London, meaning he was clear to marry Jane Seymour (wife No 3). To celebrate, so the legend goes, he went hunting!

In contrast, nearby Butlers Retreat is a symbol of restraint. It was one of many 'retreats' established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to provide an alcohol-free alternative to the pubs that were a major cause of drunkenness for the working people who escaped to Epping Forest on Sunday from the factories and docks of London's East End.

THE THAMES PATH (EAST)

Duration	6 days
Distance	90 miles (145km)
Difficulty	easy
Start	Pangbourne (p91)
Finish	Thames Barrier
Transport	train

Summary Take the main artery to the country's heart, ticking off Britain's best-known sights along the way.

The Thames Path National Trail follows Britain's best-known river from its source in the countryside of Gloucestershire all the way to the sea barrier on the edge of the capital. Picking up from Pangbourne, the eastern section is like taking a walk through time, from semi-wild and rural beginnings to increasing industrialisation and urbanisation, finishing in London's gritty suburbs.

Along the way you'll pass a veritable Greatest Hits of British tourist attractions, making it the perfect path for first-time visitors wanting an alternative to tour-bus hell. For locals it gives a fascinating insight into the importance of the Thames in shaping their history. There isn't a long-distance path more accessible from London or gentler in its gradient – making it perfect for both day-trippers and those wanting the taste of a longer challenge.

The genteel western half of the route is described on p88.

PLANNING

Most of the general information covering the whole route is in the Thames Path (West) section (p88). For this eastern section, we break the walk into the following stages. Every suggested overnight stop has shops and ATMs.

Day	From	To	Miles/km
1	Pangbourne	Henley-on-Thames	15/24
2	Henley-on-Thames	Maidenhead	15/24
3	Maidenhead	Staines	14/22.5
4	Staines	Kingston upon Thames	15/24
5	Kingston upon Thames	Battersea	15/24
6	Battersea	Thames Barrier	16/25.5

Alternatives

On Day 1, although Pangbourne is a pleasant town, you can avoid the tedious suburban section to Reading by starting at Reading and heading to Henley from there.

Many walkers end the route at Kew or Richmond on the outer limits of London. This misses a large section of the walk through the capital, which, although built up and urban, provides views and experiences not found on the standard walking trails.

To stretch this walk into a sightseeing extravaganza, stop at Windsor on Day 3, carrying on to Staines on Day 4, Hampton Court Palace on Day 5 and then allow a few days for London's numerous river-side attractions.

When to Walk

Especially on this eastern section, the Thames Path can be easily walked at any time of the year and the path conditions are suitable for children. If the weather turns bad you're never too far from the next town or village.

Maps

The eastern section of this route is covered by the OS Landranger 1:50,000 maps No 175 *Reading & Windsor*, 176 *West London* and 177 *East London*. For a single map of the whole route, Geoprojects' *Thames – the river & the path* is excellent.

For the first five days along this eastern section, as you pass each lock you can collect free *River Thames Out & About Guides*, featuring maps of the upcoming section of the river.

NEAREST TOWNS

The eastern section of the Thames Path begins in Pangbourne (p88) – also the end the western section of the Thames Path. The

WARNING

Upstream from London you'll see many people swimming in the river on hot days. If you choose to join them, be extremely careful. Stay close to the banks, as currents can be strong and the water unexpectedly deep. Don't attempt to swim across the river or near weirs and locks, and don't swim alone. Certainly don't dive off bridges.

'nearest town' to the end of the walk is the giant city of London.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

There are numerous daily trains from London to Reading (30 minutes) and also from Reading to Pangbourne (10 minutes). Reading is equally well served by National Express coaches from London (1½ hours) and other centres.

The walk ends at the Thames Barrier in Eastmoor St, off the A206, about 1 mile west of Woolwich. At the end of the route, walk 10 minutes south to catch the No 472 bus from Woolwich Rd to North Greenwich tube station (Jubilee line). A wonderfully triumphant coda is to catch the River Thames Boat Service from Thames Barrier Pier to Westminster (1½ hours, five daily).

THE WALK

Day 1: Pangbourne to Henley-on-Thames
6 hours, 15 miles (24km)

The peaceful river-side stroll takes a turn for the worse leading into Reading, but quickly recovers with the most unspoilt section of the route.

It's unfortunate that the first sign on this otherwise well-marked route points the wrong way out of Pangbourne, but you should have no trouble picking up the path following the south side of the river, heading east from the bridge.

The trail gets off to a good start, following the river as it winds through pretty fields to Mapledurham Lock. Suddenly it detours through farmland and then climbs through drab suburbia to follow a busy road before dropping back down to the water just past **Beethoven's Hotel** to follow the railway line into Reading. This is the worst section of the whole itinerary. You could hardly be blamed for skipping it.

Aside from hosting a legendary annual rock festival, Reading (pronounced 'red-ding') is a dull, sprawling town, but a good lunch stop nonetheless.

After leaving its industrial fringes, the route swiftly becomes incredibly beautiful, especially after crossing the bridge at Sonning. There are plenty of secluded spots to be found if you're tempted to cool off in the clear water (see the boxed text, left). From here, continue on an idyllic 6-mile shady stretch leading to charming Henley-on-Thames.

HENLEY-ON-THAMES

This picturesque old town hugging the river banks makes a great first pit stop. Henley-on-Thames has a **tourist office** (☎ 01491-578034; www.visithenley-on-thames.co.uk; King's Arms Barn, Kings Rd), loads of shops and excellent restaurants. It's all rather posh, but surprisingly stylish. Be sure to book ahead during the internationally renowned **rowing regatta** (late June/early July).

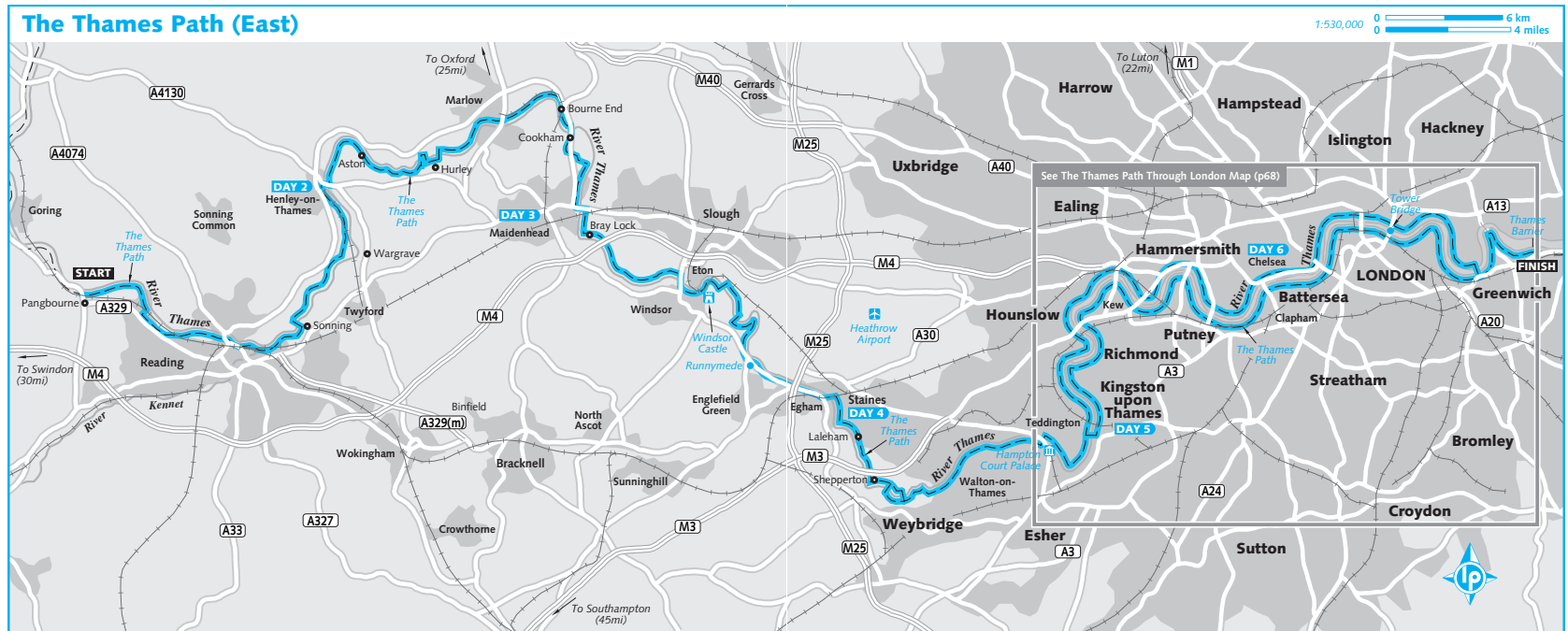
On the northern outskirts of town **Swiss Farm** (☎ 01491-573419; www.swissfarmcamping.co.uk; Marlow Rd; camp site for 2 £10-14; 🚰) is about as upmarket a camp site as you'll find. **Alushta** (☎ 01491-636041; www.alushta.co.uk; 23 Queen St; s/tw/tr £45/50/95, d £75-85, d without bathroom £60) and **Lenwade** (☎ 01491-573468; www.w3b-ink.com/lenwade; 3 Western Rd; s £45-50, d £65; 🚰) both exude old-world charm, while modern, minimalist **Milsoms** (☎ 01491-845789; www.milsomshotel.co.uk; 20 Market Pl; r £95) is a beautifully designed boutique hotel.

The river-side setting makes up for the average grub and paper plates at **Angel on the Bridge** (☎ 01491-410678; Thames Side; mains £6-9; 🍷 lunch & dinner). The seafood, wine list and service are exceptional at **Loch Fyne** (☎ 01491-845780; 20 Market Pl; mains £9-18; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner), while the **Three Tuns Food House** (☎ 01491-573260; 5 Market Pl; mains £10-18; 🍷 lunch & dinner) is a gastro pub with lots of ambience.

Day 2: Henley-on-Thames to Maidenhead
6 hours, 15 miles (24km)

This is more like it – a consistently beautiful walk through the English countryside, book-ended by pretty towns.

Crossing the bridge, a pleasantly rural start takes you alongside meadows for about 3 miles before leaving the river to head through tiny Aston, then through a



farming estate with a manor house. Back to the river there are more meadows until **Hurley Lock** (☎ 01628-824334; Mill Lane; camp sites for 2 £7), where camping is permitted on the idyllic lock island (book well in advance).

The path crosses the river three times in quick succession, ending up on the north side heading towards Marlow, a busy riverside town with a **tourist office** (☎ 01628-483597; 31 High St) and several places for lunch. After a further 3 miles you'll cross again, where the path wanders through the grounds of Cookham's Holy Trinity Church. From here you follow what is now the western bank of the river to Maidenhead.

MAIDENHEAD

The town of Maidenhead has an air of faded glory. Some large hotels by the river are testimony to its pre-WWI peak, when it was a playground for toffs. Comfortable, walker-friendly B&B is offered at **Ray Corner Guest House** (☎ 01628-632784; www.raycornerguesthouse.co.uk; 141 Bridge Rd; s £40-45, d/tw £55/60) and the nearby **Bridge Cottage** (☎ 01628-626805; www.bridgecottagebb.co.uk; Bath Rd, Taplow; s with/without

bathroom £47/37, d/tw with bathroom £55/60). For more options, enquire at the **tourist office** (☎ 01628-796502; Library, St Ives Rd).

Thai Orchid (☎ 01628-777555; 2 Ray Mead Rd; mains £5-15; ☺ lunch Sun-Fri, dinner daily) serves delicious meals, as does the upmarket **Blue River Café** (☎ 01628-674057; The Bridge; mains £8-18; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner), with a wonderful river-side setting.

Cross the bridge and continue along the path for 1 mile to reach the excellent **Amerden Caravan & Camping Park** (☎ 01628-627461; Old Marsh Lane, Dorney Reach; sites for 2 £8), just past Bray Lock. Neighbouring **Amerden Lodge** (☎ 01628-673458; Old Marsh Lane, Dorney Reach; r £55) is a 16th-century cottage and serves great breakfasts.

Day 3: Maidenhead to Staines

5½ hours, 14 miles (22.5km)

A country vibe feel still dominates in this moneyed stretch, although opportunities for posh-house spotting increase as it starts to get more developed.

Maidenhead to Windsor is another gorgeous leafy stretch, with intriguing views

of manor houses on the other side of the river. Eventually the woods open up to a stunning view of **Windsor Castle** (☎ 01753-831118; www.royalcollection.org.uk; adult/child £14/free), one of Britain's greatest surviving medieval strongholds and the residence of royalty since 850. Surrounding the castle, Windsor has fine old cobbled streets, historic buildings and the prestigious **Eton College**.

If you decide to stay overnight to explore properly, there are dozens of B&Bs. Try **Dee & Steve's** (☎ 01753-584489; 169 Oxford Rd; s with/without bathroom £40/30, d with bathroom £58), **Barbara's Bed & Breakfast** (☎ 01753-840273; www.bbandbwindsor.com; 16 Maidenhead Rd; s £30, d with/without bathroom £60/55) or the central **Clarence Hotel** (☎ 01753-864436; www.clarence-hotel.co.uk; 9 Clarence Rd; s/d £65/77). Otherwise the **Royal Windsor Information Centre** (☎ 01753-743900; www.windsor.gov.uk; Old Booking Hall, Windsor Royal Station) can help you find a place (£5 fee), as well as providing a free city map.

At the very least Windsor makes for a great lunch stop before tackling the 9 miles to Staines. **Spice Route** (☎ 01753-860720; 18a Thames St, Boots Passage; mains £8-15; ☺ lunch & dinner

serves a killer curry, with lots of vegetarian choices.

Beyond Windsor, the towpath was closed by Queen Victoria so walkers have to divert along a busy main road for a stretch. Any republican feelings this engenders can be given full vent at the meadow of **Runnymede** – where the powers of absolute monarchy were limited in 1215 when barons forced King John to sign the Magna Carta. Today it's a popular swimming spot.

From here it's a few more miles to Staines, the end of the day.

STAINES

Once an important river crossing, Staines is now a lacklustre commuter town that serves primarily as a convenient stopping point rather than a place to explore.

It's a further 3 miles to **Laleham Camping Club** (☎ 01932-564149; Laleham Park; sites for 2 £10). Otherwise **Penton Guest House** (☎ 01784-458787; 39 Penton Rd; s with/without bathroom £40/30, d £60/50) and **Rose Villa** (☎ 01784-440022; www.rosevillaguesthouse.co.uk; 75 Gresham Rd; s £35, d £50-70) are good B&B options. **Thames Lodge Hotel**

(☎ 0870 400 8121; www.thameslodge-hotel.co.uk; Thames St; s/d Fri-Sun £75/110, r Mon-Thu £120-180) is right on the path, but midweek it's priced for businesspeople jetting in to nearby Heathrow. The same is true of the upmarket **Runnymede Hotel & Spa** (☎ 01784-436171; www.runnymedehotel.com; Windsor Rd, Egham; s Fri-Sun £88-98, Mon-Thu £211-234, d Fri-Sun £140-175, Mon-Thu £253-287; ☎ ☎ ☎), on the river side as you're nearing the town. **Baroosh** (☎ 01784-452509; High St; mains £7-9; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is a friendly, modern bar serving seafood, pasta and grills, with plenty for vegetarians to choose from.

Day 4: Staines to Kingston upon Thames

6 hours, 15 miles (24km)

Less posh and more built-up, there are still some traces of countryside, but river-living becomes more evident, with lots of permanently moored houseboats.

From Staines, it's a straightforward 8 miles to Shepperton Lock, following the northeastern bank. Here you have a choice of continuing to Walton Bridge or crossing the river by ferry (every 15 minutes 10am to 6pm). If you're following this itinerary

in the opposite direction, take care not to branch off along the River Wey.

The **Minnow** (☎ 01932-831672; 104 Thames St; mains £7-18; ☎ lunch & dinner) at Weybridge is a great spot for lunch, although there is no shortage of picturesque river-side pubs over the next few miles.

The path follows the south side of the river until crossing the bridge to pass England's grandest Tudor structure, **Hampton Court Palace** (☎ 0870 751 5175; www.hampton-court-palace.org.uk; adult/concession/child £13/10/free), home to King Henry VIII. You could easily spend a day exploring this beautiful building, with superb grounds and a famous 300-year-old maze.

The path continues past Christopher Wren's baroque wing for a pleasant 3.5-mile stretch alongside meadows, while suburbia begins in earnest on the opposite bank.

KINGSTON UPON THAMES

On the fringe of Greater London, Kingston upon Thames is a town in its own right. From here on, camping is nigh impossible and B&Bs are in short supply.

One B&B option is **Annard** (☎ 020-8547 0074; 16 Chivenor Grove; £50), close to the river just past the town. **Bushy Park Lodge** (☎ 020-8943 1917; www.ashortlet.com; 6 Sandy Lane; s £65-75, d £75-80), 800m west of Kingston Bridge, offers self-contained apartments. Both **Chase Lodge** (☎ 020-8943 1862; www.chaselodgehotel.com; 10 Park Rd; s £65, d £85-98) and the **White Hart** (☎ 020-8977 1786; www.fullersholidays.com/main/1014; 1 High St; r/st Fri & Sat £95/125, Sun-Thu £125/155) are hotels in neighbouring Hampton Wick. There are dozens of eateries to choose from on Kingston's high street.

Day 5: Kingston upon Thames to Battersea

6 hours, 15 miles (24km)

Despite journeying from London's transport zone 6 to zone 2, there's still plenty of green space on this penultimate leg.

From Kingston Bridge the Thames Path runs simultaneously along both banks of the river – although as far as Kew the east bank is definitely preferable. As you head through Richmond you'll pass an extraordinary cluster of stately homes – including **Ham House** (1610), reputedly the most haunted house in England – before reaching fascinating **Kew Gardens** (☎ 020-8332 5655; www.kew.org.uk; Kew Green, Richmond; adult/child £12/free) and **Fulham Palace**, home to the bishops of London from the 8th century through to 1973.

From Putney the buildings finally drag themselves up to dominate both sides of the river, and from now on you're well and truly in the city. Finish the day under the shadow of the magnificent **Battersea Power Station**, immortalised on the cover of Pink Floyd's 1977 album *Animals*. Now you're in London proper, make use of public transport and check into a hotel for two nights, returning at the end of the next day.

Day 6: Battersea to the Thames Barrier

6½ hours, 16 miles (25.5km)

The sights just don't stop coming.

Again you can choose either side, although we'd recommend the south bank to **Tower Bridge**, as this passes several interesting sites and has superb views across the river. For more details of the section between Lambeth Bridge and Tower Bridge, see p58.

Beyond Tower Bridge, the final sections of the Thames Path weave through the detritus of the old London docks and

industry. Some follow pleasant river-side embankments past yacht marinas and renovated warehouses; others take dirty streets or dodge through forlorn parks, tower blocks and waste-ground.

At Greenwich the two routes rejoin and there's plenty to see: the **Cutty Sark** (☎ 020-8858 2698; www.cuttysark.org.uk; King William Walk; adult/child £5/free) sailing ship, the **National Maritime Museum** (☎ 020-8312 6565; www.nmm.ac.uk; Romney Rd; admission free) and, of course, the prime meridian marked out at the **Royal Observatory** (☎ 020-8312 6565; Greenwich Park; admission free), giving its name to Greenwich Mean Time. The **Trafalgar Tavern** (☎ 020-8858 2437; Park Row; bar snacks £6-11; ☎ lunch & dinner) is an atmospheric spot to stop for lunch, with outdoor benches by the river.

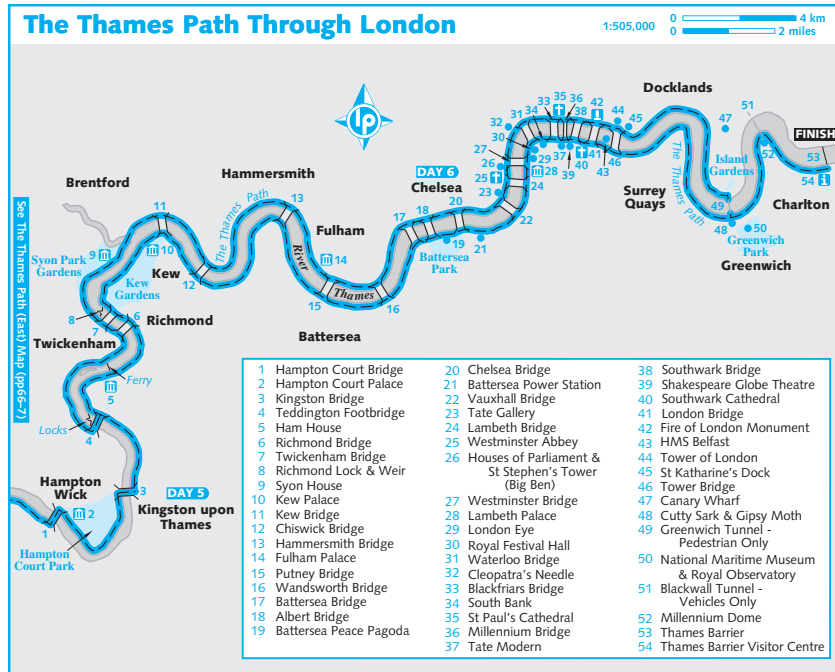
Beyond Greenwich, the route takes a post-apocalyptic turn, as you wander past abandoned buildings and factories. It's a fascinating contrast to the pyramid-peaked **Canary Wharf** business hub across the river, a testimony to the brash aspirations of the plutocratic 1980s.

Next iconic structure: the **Millennium Dome**, the world's largest dome (365m in diameter) lying abandoned at the time of research – having opened on 1 January 2000 at a cost of £789 million, but closing on 31 December, only hours before the 3rd millennium began. Negotiations are taking place to convert the site into Britain's first super-casino, and it's expected to house the gymnastics and trampolining at the 2012 Olympic Games.

As you round the peninsula, the giant silver shells of the **Thames Barrier** come into view, marking the end of the route. The Barrier was built in 1984 with hydraulic gates to protect the capital from flooding. As you pass under the control tower, you can retrace your journey on the river map etched into the wall. The barrier's **visitor centre** (☎ 020-8305 4188; adult/child £1.50/1) tells the story of the Thames through history and has a **café** attached. Time for a cake and cup of tea to celebrate the end of your walk!

MORE WALKS

The Jubilee Walkway (p54) takes in many great sights of London, but this is only a taster and the city offers many more opportunities for exploring on foot. If you're looking



for ideas, a good place to start is Transport for London's walking website (www.tfl.gov.uk/streets/walking) and the London and Southeast sections of the Ramblers' site (www.ramblers.org.uk).

PARK WALKS

To get off the streets, take a long walk through London's glorious parks. You could start in St James's Park and go east to west through Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. Or try a south-to-north route, tying in all or any of Battersea Park, Ranelagh Gardens, Hyde Park, Regent's Park and Hampstead Heath, using buses or the tube to skip the street sections in between. To the southwest are the larger open areas of Richmond Park and Wimbledon Common. On a clear day, and armed with a picnic, a walk here is guaranteed to banish urban blues.

GREEN CHAIN

The Green Chain is a well-signposted 40-mile (64km) network of walks in southeast London connecting parks, commons, woods and other open spaces. The Chain stretches from the outer suburbs of Thamesmead and Erith, on the banks of the River Thames, through Plumstead, Eltham and Beckenham to Crystal Palace. A major branch goes through Charlton, linking this line to the Thames Barrier. Access is easy as the whole route is well served by public transport, and you can do short or long stretches. For more details see www.greenchain.com.

LEA VALLEY WALK

The Lea Valley Walk is a 50-mile (80km) linear route from Limehouse, in the East End, along the valley of the River Lee, past the site of the 2012 Olympic Games, then winding a green way between the suburbs and towns of Tottenham, Enfield, Waltham Abbey, Hertford and Harpenden to reach Luton, north of the capital. Of course, you don't have to do the whole route; it's very well served by public transport all along the walk. The route passes through country parks and nature reserves, beside lakes and reservoirs, over golf courses and beside canals. The southern sections are undoubtedly urban but the walk becomes surprisingly rural as you go north. For more details see www.leavalleywalk.org.uk, following the links to 'Outdoor Recreation'.

The best guidebook is *Lea Valley Walk* by Leigh Hatts; as well as describing the main route it includes an Olympic Park chapter for those wanting to explore the developing site before 2012.

CAPITAL RING & LONDON LOOP

The Green Chain walk (left) is part of a complete circuit of London called the Capital Ring – a 72-mile (115km) route divided into 15 stages, mixing city streets, parks, gardens and other open suburban spaces. For a longer option try the London Loop, a 150-mile (240km) outer circuit taking full advantage of the many green spaces that line the capital's fringe – many with a surprisingly rural feel. The route also passes several villages with attractive pubs for lunch. This is an ideal way to sample the countryside and yet still be in reach of the city centre.

You don't have to do the Ring or the Loop in one go. In fact they're designed to be done in short sections, tied in with a circular route, or using bus and train to get back to your start. *The Capital Ring* by Colin Saunders and *The London Loop* by David Sharp are the best guidebooks, and you can order handy leaflets (free) from **Transport for London** (www.tfl.gov.uk/streets/walking), or pick them up from local libraries and tourist offices.

THE NORTH DOWNS WAY

The North Downs Way takes you further away from London, and is a popular national trail along with the neighbouring South Downs Way (p123).

As the name suggests, the North Downs Way National Trail follows the North Downs – an elongated area of hills and chalk ridges running through southeastern England between Farnham, south of London, and Dover, on the coast of the English Channel. Never far from towns and roads (although they're often out of sight), the walk does have a commuter-belt feel in some places, but also passes through two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), with panoramic views, leafy woods, grassy downland, nature reserves, farmland, orchards and vineyards, and ends with a grand finale across the famous white cliffs of Dover.

For history fans, part of the modern walkers route parallels the Pilgrims Way, a Victorian interpretation of the ancient route taken by Christians from Canterbury

to Winchester for the festival of St Swithen, and more recently from Winchester to Canterbury in celebration of St Thomas Becket. Other historical features include Neolithic long barrows (burial mounds), medieval castles, 1970s motorways and the entrance to the Channel Tunnel.

The total length of the North Downs Way is 157 miles (251km), walkable in around 12 to 14 days. For more details see www.nationaltrail.co.uk/northdowns. A recommended guidebook is *North Downs Way* by John Curtin.

NORFOLK & SUFFOLK

Although not really in the southeast of England, the two counties of Norfolk and Suffolk deserve a mention, as they're within easy reach of London – ideal for a weekend getaway. The landscape is mainly (some say unforgivingly) flat, so don't come here looking for hills and dales. The main attraction for walkers is a coastline ideal for gentle walking, with wide sandy beaches, great

expanses of salt marsh, nature reserves rich in bird life, tiny villages and several busy seaside resorts. A good base with a range of accommodation, walks and activities is the visitor-friendly village of **Burnham Deepdale** (www.burnhamdeepdale.co.uk).

The region's other main attraction is the **Broads**, a vast network of navigable rivers and lakes between Norwich (the Norfolk county capital) and the coast. The Broads Special Area is effectively a national park, and there are many opportunities for walking along lake shores and river banks.

For a longer walk, two quite separate routes together form a national trail, the **Peddars Way & North Norfolk Coast Path** (www.nationaltrail.co.uk/peddarsway), usually completed by walkers in about a week. For a taste of seaside walking, the final three days are highly recommended.

Further south, another enjoyable route with salt in the air is the **Suffolk Coast & Heaths Path** (www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org), running through the AONB of the same name.

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