



Peter Aylmer

Peter Aylmer discovered the joys of walking in London as a way of relaxing after work, whether by taking the tube out to Epping Forest or by avoiding the tube and striding along the Regent's Canal instead. Over many years he has found just how good London can be for walkers, if you know where to look.

He was until recently the chair of the London branch of the Long Distance Walkers Association, which offers both long day walks and short evening walks in and around the London area. Beyond London, Peter has completed many long-distance trails and has developed his own routes from the south to the north of Wales, England and Scotland. Keen on Britain's wild places as much as its greatest city, for many years he was publications editor for the Mountain Bothies Association.

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• explore one of the world's greenest cities • woods, forests, parks, heaths, marsh and wetlands, rivers, canals and nature reserves • discover the city's wildlife



Half of London is open space, making it one of the greenest cities on the planet. With this guide you can explore not only tourist highlights such as the Royal Parks and Hampstead Heath, but lesser-known areas from Enfield Chase in the north to the open downland of the south London fringe.

Each walk describes some of the wildlife you might come across – perhaps a rare water bird on Rainham Marshes or a great stag in Home Park. Almost every walk visits a nature reserve, so the guide gives walkers an excellent opportunity to discover the variety of London's 15,000 species.

Find out too how London's open spaces came to be preserved into the 21st century, and what walkers can do to make sure this green legacy survives for future generations.

- walks are within the range of most occasional walkers
- includes public transport information
- option to split longer walks

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25 walks in London's green spaces



Peter Aylmer

WALKING IN LONDON

East: Essex to the Lea

- Walk 1 Rainham Marshes and the lower Thames
- Walk 2 Dagenham's open spaces
- Walk 3 Epping Forest from Chingford
- Walk 4 Wanstead Flats and Park
- Walk 5 Olympic Park and Greenway
- Walk 6 River Lea

North: Lea to Brent

- Walk 7 Enfield Chase
- Walk 8 Regent's Canal
- Walk 9 New River and Parkland Walk
- Walk 10 Royal Parks
- Walk 11 Hampstead Heath
- Walk 12 Dollis Valley Greenwalk

West: Brent to Wandle

- Walk 13 Ruislip Woods
- Walk 14 Yeading Brook
- Walk 15 Crane Park
- Walk 16 Bushy Park and Home Park
- Walk 17 Wimbledon Common and Richmond Park
- Walk 18 Kew and Isleworth
- Walk 19 Wandle Trail

South: East of the Wandle

- Walk 20 Happy Valley
- Walk 21 Hills and woods of Croydon
- Walk 22 Sydenham Hill Wood
- Walk 23 Woodlands of south-east London
- Walk 24 Chislehurst
- Walk 25 Downe





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WALKING IN LONDON
PARK, HEATH AND WATERSIDE
25 WALKS IN LONDON'S GREEN SPACES
by Peter Aylmer

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I retain my thanks to Mathew Frith of the London Wildlife Trust, historian Mark Gorman, and the Wren Wildlife Group for their help in bringing the first edition to life.

Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/1146/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal LA9 7RL, United Kingdom.

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Front cover: Wetlands area, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (Walk 5)



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Route symbols on OS map extracts
(for OS legend see printed OS maps)

	route		alternative start
	shortcut/diversion		alternative start/finish point
	start/finish point		alternative finish point
	start point		route direction
	finish point		Urban area

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at www.cicerone.co.uk/1146/GPX.

ROUTE SUMMARY TABLE

Walk	Start	Finish	Distance	Break points	Time	Page
1	Purfleet station	Rainham station or Purfleet station	6½ miles (11km); or 3½ miles (6km)		3hr; or 2hr	25
2	Central Park, Dagenham	Dagenham East tube	5½ miles (9km)	Rainham Road South, 3½ miles (6km)	3hr	31
3	Chingford station	Chingford station	5½ miles (9km)		3hr	36
4	Forest Gate station; or Wanstead Park station	Forest Gate station; or Wanstead Park station	6 miles (10km)		3hr	42
5	Stratford International station	East Ham nature reserve	5½ miles (9km)	Stratford High Street, 2 miles (3km)	3hr	47
6	Tottenham Hale station	Bromley-by-Bow tube; or Victoria Park	7 miles (11km)	Lea Bridge, 2½ miles (4km); Hackney Wick, 5 miles (8km)	3½hr	54
7	Crews Hill station	Oakwood tube	7½ miles (12km)		3½hr	63
8	Limehouse station	Paddington station	10 miles (16km)	London Fields station, 2½ miles (4km); Angel tube, 5 miles (8km); Camden Lock, 7 miles (11km)	4½hr	69
9	Angel tube	Alexandra Palace station	10½ miles (17km)	Canonbury station, 2 miles (3km); Finsbury Park, 6 miles (10km); Highgate tube, 7½ miles (12km)	5½hr	77
10	Camden Town tube or Camden Road station	Westminster tube	7½ miles (12km)	Canterbury Gate tube, 4½ miles (7km)	3½hr	86
11	Gospel Oak station or Hampstead tube	Gospel Oak station or Hampstead tube	6½ miles (11 km); or 4½ miles (7km)		3½hr; or 2½hr	93

Walk	Start	Finish	Distance	Break points	Time	Page
12	Golders Green tube	Moat Mount open space	11 miles (17km)	Mill Hill East tube, 4 miles (6km); Totteridge & Whetstone tube, 6½ miles (11km); Barnet, 7½ miles (12km)	5hr	100
13	West Ruislip station or Ruislip tube	Northwood Hills tube	6 miles (10km)		3hr	110
14	Yeading Lane	West Ruislip station or Ickenham tube	5 miles (8km)		2½hr	116
15	Whitton station	Whitton station	4 miles (6km)		2hr	121
16	Hampton Wick station	Hampton Wick station	4½ miles (7km); or 6½ miles (11km)		2½hr; or 3½hr	125
17	New Malden station	Richmond station	9½ miles (15km)	Robin Hood Gate, at 3½ miles (6km)	4hr	132
18	Kew Bridge station	Kew Bridge station	6½ miles (11km)		3½hr	141
19	Wandsworth Town station	East Croydon station	13½ miles (21km)	Earlsfield station, at 2½ miles (4km); Morden Hall Park, at 6 miles (10km); Carshalton, at 9½ miles (15km); Waddon station at 12 miles (19km)	6hr	147
20	Coulsdon South station	Coulsdon South station	6½ miles (10km); or 4½ miles (7km)		3½hr; or 2½hr	158
21	East Croydon station	New Addington tram stop	7½ miles (12km)	Coombe Lane tram stop, at 3 miles (5km)	4hr	163
22	Nunhead station	Crystal Palace station	6½ miles (10km)	Sydenham Hill station, at 4½ miles (7km)	3½hr	169
23	Abbey Wood station	Falconwood station	7 miles (11km)		4hr	175
24	Chislehurst station	Chislehurst station	7 miles (11km)		3½hr	183
25	Farnborough	Farnborough	9 miles (14km)	Downe village, at 5 miles (8km)	4½hr	188

INTRODUCTION



Seasonal ponds are a feature of The Chase (Walk 2)

Until 1965, the Lea was the boundary between London and Essex, and this boundary had a very real effect on how what is now east London developed. In particular, much of the London-specific legislation preventing noxious industries had no effect here, and so refineries, gas and chemical works, and heavy industry from shipbuilding to railway manufacture were located here instead – especially in what are now its two western-most boroughs, Waltham Forest and Newham.

Yet wild London was not pressed out of all existence. The River Lea itself became home to reservoirs for London's water, and hence a green corridor for wildlife. Tipping down its gravel ridge between the Lea and the Roding, Epping Forest was saved as London's eastern lung by the steadfast vigilance of locals and city folk alike. The marshes of the Thames below Barking have to this day precluded large-scale development, while further out, town and country battled an uneasy draw that persists to this day.

Walk 1

Rainham Marshes and the Lower Thames

This walk takes you around one of the best places in southern England to see its birdlife, and then gives you an introduction to London's great river, the Thames.

The marshes east of Rainham were formerly used by the military, which kept other users away, and their refurbishment by the RSPB is an object lesson in conservation. And while the lower Thames might not have the glamour of the river further west – it's a working river here, the path hemmed in by industry – the skies are wide, and look about you to see the many species of gull, duck and wader that rest and forage here.



The southern edge of the RSPB reserve

Start/alternative finish	Purfleet station (TQ 554 781). Trains every 30 minutes off-peak.
Finish	Rainham station (TQ 520 820). Trains every 30 minutes off-peak.
Distance	6½ miles (11km) or 3½ miles (6km)
Time	3hr or 2hr
Maps	OS Explorer 162
Refreshments	Royal Hotel, Purfleet; café at the RSPB centre; pubs and cafés in Rainham
Parking	Rainham Marshes RSPB centre, New Tank Hill Road, RM19 1SZ (TQ 547 787). Return to start by rail (one stop).

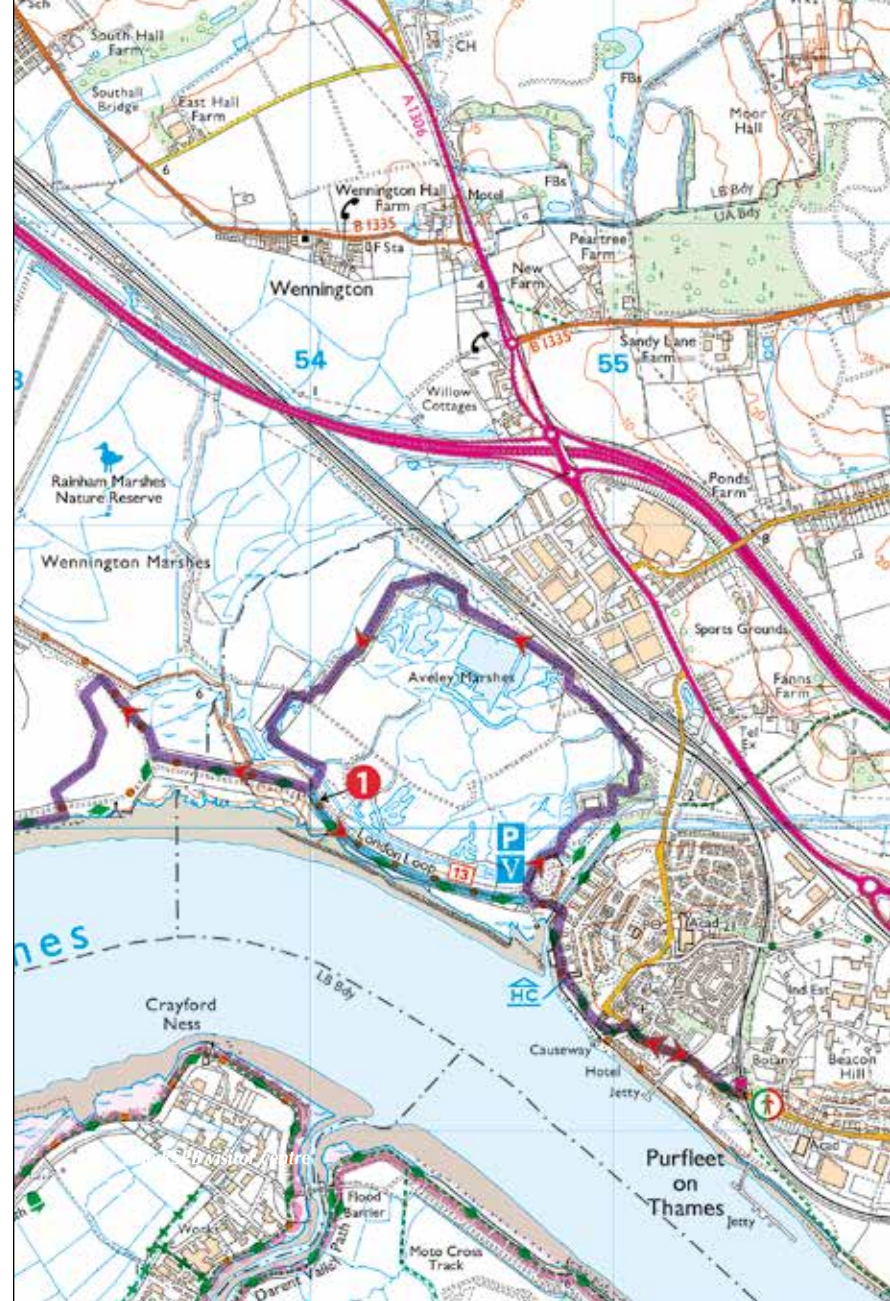
Turn right out of the station and walk along London Road to the Royal Hotel. Here turn left on a path for a few metres to the Thames, and turn right beside it, passing the **Purfleet Heritage Museum** housed in a former munitions magazine on your way to the RSPB centre. Here, get a ticket to enter Rainham Marshes Nature Reserve – it's free for RSPB members and residents of Thurrock and Havering.

Despite its name, the **RSPB** reserve in fact occupies Aveley marsh. The reserve is open daily except for Christmas Day and Boxing Day. Check www.rspb.org.uk for opening times and entry charges.

Cross the bridge from the end of the café and go ahead at the map sign, then take the second left. Ignore two left turns at the cordite store – at the second (where there is a little tunnel) go half-right – and also ignore two right turns on a boardwalk. In a little



The RSPB visitor centre



while you will come to the Ken Barrett hide, a good place to observe birdlife on the adjacent ponds.

Beyond the hide, there is a lengthy boardwalk section through a reedbed, and then after a while a path takes you to the very substantial Shooting Butts Hide. Continuing, there is a picnic area to your right, then more boardwalk leads you to a bridge. Cross it and leave the reserve through the turnstile ①. For the shorter walk, go through the fence and turn left on the estuary wall, perhaps venturing out towards the saltmarshes, back to the RSPB centre, then retrace your steps to the station; but for the longer walk, follow the brown signpost towards Rainham Village.

THE RESURRECTION OF RAINHAM MARSHES

Rainham, Wennington and Aveley marshes were used as a military firing range for virtually the entire 20th century, thus saving them from other development. In essence, they remained a medieval landscape, and indeed beneath their surface Bronze Age trackways, from a time when the regular flood and drain of the river gave a rhythm to everyday life, criss-cross the site.

To a bird looking for a resting place, or a source of food, even the 20th-century marshes would have looked much like any other wildlife-friendly river estuary. The end of military use gave the RSPB a great opportunity to acquire the eastern part of the marshes in 2000 and to set about restoring habitats such as pools and reedbeds. The bold new visitor centre opened in 2006.

Continue towards Rainham Village at the next brown sign but later cross the road through a gap in fencing on your left. Take a path over the eastern tip of the landfill site, with a fence over to your right. The path climbs a little to give good views over the marshes, down the Thames estuary, and across Kent, the North Downs in view, and Essex.

Cross the road again and turn right on the riverside path. At **Coldharbour Point**, where there is a navigation light, the river swings from west to north, bringing Shooter's Hill (see Walk 23) and the Canary Wharf financial district into view. In about 1km you reach the cement barges ② – around a dozen of them, remnants of a fleet of 500 used in the D-Day landings; they too are a favourite place for birds to rest. The large building in front of you is the Tilda Rice factory.

The stretch from the cement barges to Purfleet station forms the last 3 miles of the **London Loop**. This 150-mile long-distance path, essentially the walker's





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