

CAPITAL CHALLENGE 2022

Saturday 2 April



THE THAMES BARRIER WALK

ROUTE DESCRIPTION AND GAZETTEER

Total Distance 27.3 miles

START

08.00-09.00

The Scoop (Amphitheatre next to City Hall, South Bank) 110 The Queen's Walk, SE1 2AA
TQ334801

FINISH

19.00

St Hugh's Community Centre, 42 Castledine Road, SE20 8PL TQ346701

THE THAMES BARRIER WALK

Introduction

Over 40% of London consists of parks and gardens open to the public, and with 8.3 million trees there are almost as many as there are people. The walk will allow you to enjoy the biodiversity (and diversity) of this vibrant city. A quarter of this walk is north of the Thames and the rest in the relatively unknown south. Not only will you get near to some of the big sights but also lots of lesser attractions that most tourists never get to see.

This is a walk of two halves. The first part of the walk is never far from large expanses of water and follows the canals and basins of London Docklands and the River Thames, right up to the Thames Barrier. The character of the walk then changes and mainly follows the Green Chain Walk and the Capital Ring through a string of parks, commons, meadows and woods. Pay attention to the Route Description, which sometimes takes a different course. Some signposts are pointing the wrong way so follow the Route Description if in doubt.

Inevitably, you must follow roads in between the open spaces, mostly in quiet residential areas, but we have tried to find a route that avoids walking along main roads for any great distance.

The walk is full of little surprises, which hopefully will challenge your perception of London as well as your feet. Of course, if it rains you are never too far away from a café or pub. Just don't stay too long - there is a time limit!

Practicalities

Toilets are indicated in the route description. All of them are free. Do not on any account miss the sweet relief of the 5 star toilets in Canary Wharf.

Water refill points, that are still functioning, are infrequent, but are mentioned where available to minimize use of plastic. So bring your own bottles.

Refreshments. Limited refreshments will be provided at the checkpoints, and hot drinks and cake at the finish. You may want to carry some food and snacks to save time, and there are many cafés along the route, so you are unlikely to starve. Bring a mug for hot drinks.

A torch may be necessary for the later stages of the walk.

Hazards and emergencies

Roads. You often need to cross busy roads, and mostly this is possible at a controlled crossing, but in a few cases there is none available and you should take extra care. We remind you with the symbol ☒ – it means ‘Cross with great care!’ And bear in mind rogue drivers, cyclists and e-scooters! Cycling is being strongly encouraged in London and you will encounter many stretches that are shared with cyclists, indicated by this symbol C. Do take extra care.

Surface. Most of the route is on a firm surface, usually tarmac, bonded gravel or pavement, but there are sections in woodland on the second part of the walk, which may be muddy and slippery in wet weather.

Other pedestrians. The route passes many popular places, and if it’s a nice day there will be many families out walking. Please show consideration for others, especially on narrow paths.

Key to symbols

☒ = take extra care crossing busy road C = beware cyclists

TP Thames Path GCW Green Chain Walk CR Capital Ring

Nearest Station to start of walk is London Bridge.

Exit Tooley Street and head towards River. The Scoop is about 150 yards before Tower Bridge.

Do use the free toilets in London Bridge Station. It’s easier to find the toilets for the London Bridge tube station than for the train station (entrance on Tooley Street), and you don’t need to go through the ticket barrier to get to them.

Route Description

Entries in CAPITALS are briefly described in the gazetteer at the end.

1. Head towards Tower Bridge. Do not go under bridge but climb steps and cross River. Near end of bridge descend staircase and turn right to follow north bank of river with Butler's Wharf on the opposite bank. Continue past the Girl and Dolphin and keep ahead past a giant sundial to cross a small bridge. Turn left into ST KATHERINE'S DOCK with its imposing clock tower. After passing a red bascule bridge on left turn right to follow dockside. Just past the Dickens Inn, bear right onto dockside path immediately to left of inn. Follow this round to the right and continue. Just after bollard turn left behind dockside houses and left again at dockside.

0.7 miles

2. After 30 yards turn right through barrier and right again, with a high brick wall on the left. Pass gap in wall *an entrance to Waitrose* and continue straight on. Turn left into Stockholm Way then right into Vaughan Way. Just after bus shelter turn right through bollards to reach a large metal rope sculpture, in front of the HERMITAGE BASIN. Turn around and descend wide steps, passing under low road bridge to reach the start of the ORNAMENTAL CANAL.

1.0 miles

3. Continue on wide waterside cycleway/walkway C with canal on right. After a few yards swing right. Keep ahead then swing left and right again following the canal. Continue to pass the historic Tobacco Dock, with its old ships. Continue under a road bridge to reach cross-track, where this section of the canal ends. Take path half left signed 'Shadwell Basin' across a tiny wooded park. At next cross track the canal appears again. Keep ahead with the canal on right, under a red bascule road bridge, to reach SHADWELL BASIN with views towards the towers of Canary Wharf. Turn left to walk clockwise round the basin. Exit onto Glamis Road to the left of another red bascule road bridge.

1.9 miles

4. Turn left and after 30 yards turn right down path signed 'Thames Path East', to reach river at Rotherhithe Tunnel ventilation shaft C. Follow Thames Path signs keeping close to the river. Soon you reach a wide riverside walkway C. Continue with one brief diversion onto the road. Opposite a restaurant cut back to the river. Just after the 'Narrow' gastro-pub climb steps to join road again. Turn right to cross bridge then immediately turn left, passing a lock on the left, into LIMEHOUSE BASIN.

2.7 miles

5. Keep ahead and after 100 yards climb steps to cross bridge and turn right to follow LIMEHOUSE CUT. After 75 yards cross second bridge, on right, and keep ahead through park. Just beyond bandstand exit the park and turn left. After 50 yards look out for two white columns on right and follow walkway between them. Turn left over mouth of creek to reach riverside again C. Continue and on reaching the boat landing stage for CANARY WHARF turn left up wide steps and keep ahead over road and through a circular park.

3.3 miles

6. Continue along West India Avenue on either side of central reservation. At end climb steps onto Plaza with fountain. *(On the far side of the fountain the large letters Cabot Place mark the entrance to the shopping mall. Inside are super free toilets down escalator on left. On the left of the up escalator ahead is a water refill point. Don't get lost here as your GPS will not work and you will never find your way out again).*

Turn right past statue of large lady. Descend steps, cross road and descend more steps then turn left along the side of Middle Dock. At end turn right past Canary Wharf Underground to cross Bank Street. Continue straight ahead through the Atrium of the Obica building to reach a footbridge.

3.8 miles

7. Cross footbridge over South Dock and turn left *O2 in distance*. Keep straight on alongside dock. Turn right at dock inlet and at main road turn left and cross road at traffic lights to South Quay DLR Station. Continue ahead for 600 yards with MILLWALL INNER DOCK on your right. After passing a floating restaurant cross Pepper Street, *double leaf bascule bridge can be seen over to the right*, and continue ahead along Turnberry Quay, passing to left of a restaurant. Continue to reach MILLWALL OUTER DOCK. Turn left and then right with a large chimney ahead used for burning contraband. After 10 yards, just before waterside steps turn left and left again under bridge. Go up steps and cross East Ferry Road. Go up more steps and enter MUDCHUTE PARK through kissing gate.

4.8 miles

8. Continue up more steps and through second gate. Keep straight across field to gate and through farmyard to reach an ack-ack gun on the right. After 10 yards turn right into Mudchute Farm and continue to four way junction. Turn left to go up steps and then turn right on raised path passing allotments on right. Where path curves right, turn left down steps and descend along concrete path to exit park through gate. Immediately turn left to enter Millwall Park. After 30 yards turn right and right again, soon curving left to follow the railway arches on your right up to Island Gardens DLR Station

Cross road and keep ahead along Douglas Path to enter Island Gardens, with superb views of GREENWICH across the river. Enter the 400 yard long Greenwich Foot Tunnel C. Descend steps and ascend steps to re-emerge on south side of River Thames. *You will be disqualified if you use the lifts!!!* Turn left and right round the Cutty Sark.

CHECKPOINT 1 **09:30 – 12:00** Cutty Sark, near Greenwich Information Centre

After 30 yards turn left through gate past visitor centre fronted by a cannon and a statue of Sir Francis Drake. *(Nice free toilets inside on the far right)*

6.0 miles

9. Keep ahead on a wide path. Opposite the domes of the Old Naval College turn left through an ornate gateway and continue on a narrow riverside path. At the end turn right past statue of Nelson and immediately left into Crane Street. You are now on the Thames Path, which you follow for 4.5 miles to the Thames Barrier C. There is much of interest and you don't need to worry too much about navigation. Just go with the flow and follow the TP signs.

After about a mile there is a brief diversion inland. Turn left at the Bay Wharf signpost to rejoin the river. *Do not follow the cross peninsula route straight ahead.* Continue round the Greenwich Peninsula with the O2 on your right. 100 yards after crossing a slipway you cross the Prime Meridian line. A signpost indicates it is 24 859 miles back to HERE again. *Do not follow it!* This is the start of the LINE SCULPTURE TRAIL

8.0 miles

10. After passing under the 'cable car to nowhere' you should catch your first sight of the Thames Barrier. You pass an attractive ecology park and a not so attractive aggregates site. Soon after a golden dome ahead promises hope, an anchor and fresh seafood. Finally on reaching a concrete wall at the Thames Barrier do not turn right on cycle path C but turn left up steps and down again, through a tunnel and along a walkway with a great close-up view of the THAMES BARRIER. On reaching a grassy slope turn right up and over the embankment to join the GREEN CHAIN WALK. *(there is a free toilet behind visitor centre about 100 yards ahead)*

10.3 miles

11. Continue ahead with car park on right *note yellow industrial sculpture.* Cross minor road and continue, bearing left after 10 yards on tarmac path *more yellow industrial sculpture.* Follow GCW/TP signs through gardens, past a red brick building and over a minor road. Take the narrow path, with a stone table and stone circle on the right, and continue to follow it to pedestrian crossing on the main road. Cross and enter Maryon Park through gate. *(The Capital Ring soon joins the GCW and you will be mainly following both paths for several miles. Major signpost indicates a choice of routes so make sure you are going the right way).*

Turn left at major signpost (Maryon Park). Soon bear right to continue past playground on right. Just before tennis court bear right at GCW signpost, curving left on main path. 40 yards after next left bend turn right up steps, soon turning left to continue climbing up to the top. Bear right past an oak tree to continue through meadow to road.

11.0 miles

12. Cross road into Maryon Wilson Park. Continue on main path through children's zoo. At GCW signpost turn left on path. Continue on this wide path, climbing steadily to exit park at road. Continue right to cross road and after further 20 yards turn left through gateway into CHARLTON PARK.

Continue ahead and turn right at major signpost (Charlton Park) along an avenue of lime trees with the Jacobean Charlton House ahead. At T-junction (*water fountain on left*) do not follow the GCW signpost, instead turn right then left (*toilets on right*) to pass a café, with some famous people drinking tea.

CHECKPOINT 2 **11:00 – 14:30** Charlton Park, near Old Cottage Coffee Shop

11.8 miles

13. Continue to take first left and then first right keeping ahead to pass to the right of the house. Turn left to reach the magnificent front entrance and turn right down steps with arch ahead. Bear left round semi-circular garden to exit through brick gateposts. Turn left past a handsome, old, red brick building, *now a carer's centre*, and keep straight ahead over crossroad to continue down Hornfair Road. At T-junction, turn right then left into Prince Henry Road ⊗.

Just before road curves left, turn right along alley to enter Hornfair Park. Turn left to reach large playing field. Continue right and then left to reach far corner of park at a GCW signpost (Hornfair Park) with the Hornfair BMX track over to the left. Exit park through gate in grey fence and turn right through second gate. Continue ahead to main road and turn left. After 60 yards turn right over a crossing and half left *do not take path parallel to road* to enter WOOLWICH COMMON.

12.9 miles

14. Continue on a dirt track. On reaching tarmac path turn right and keep ahead over a crosspath. *Views open out to the left*. Just before hedgerow, with road ahead, turn right. On reaching fork keep left to exit common. Turn right along main road to reach traffic lights. Cross Academy Road and Shooters Hill ⊗ to turn left up Shooters Hill on right hand pavement. On reaching the open space of Eltham Common, bear very slightly right uphill heading for a gap in trees with a GCW sign. Enter woods and bear right up steps and continue to ascend Shooters Hill on woodland paths. On reaching a wide tarmac path turn right still ascending to continue to SEVERNDROOG CASTLE.

14.0 miles

15. Continue through gate and pass to right of castle. Descend steps, cross tarmac path to descend more steps. Cross lawn to descend even more steps. When there are no more steps to descend turn left and follow level path soon entering woods. Follow GCW/CR signs on wide woodland path. *Ignore sign pointing sharp left leading back to castle*.

Emerging from wood bear right and curve right to pass in front of a walled lawn then a rose garden. Continue into more woodland and after 20 yards turn right downhill soon bearing left. Keep following signs to emerge at Oxleas Meadow and continue uphill bearing left to major signpost next to café (*toilets on left and water fountain*). Keep ahead round semi-circular fence, with café on left, and then descend to pass exercise area on left. Continue to enter OXLEAS WOOD.

14.7 miles

16. Keep straight ahead. On reaching large multi-trunk tree take right fork downhill. Continue following GCW/CR signs. At major signpost (Oxleas Wood) turn right on wide path. Continue and just before reaching edge of wood turn left on wide path. Keep ahead to main road. Turn right to cross Rochester Way at the traffic lights. Take extra care ⊗.

Enter woods soon bearing right and then left to continue along main woodland path. Keep following GCW signs. On reaching major signpost (Eltham Park North) turn right. Ignore a minor crosspath then at second crosspath, *trying not to trip over small tree stump*, turn left to continue to open field 30 yards ahead. Go left then right along right hand side of Long Pond. At Long Pond signpost turn left.

15.8 miles

17. Follow main path through meadow as it bears left then right to enter wood. After 150 yards turn right at major signpost (Shepherdleas Wood). Go over Green Link Bridge to cross motorway and enter Eltham Park South. With the park on the right keep ahead turning right at corner to continue. Pass tennis courts on the right and exit the park at Glenesk Road.

Cross road and turn left. Continue to cross main road and keep ahead along Butterfly Lane. After a right turn continue ahead for 50 yards. Just before the main path curves left, turn right on a narrow path to a well hidden major signpost (Conduit Meadows). Continue past CONDUIT HEAD on the right, soon reaching the road with Holy Trinity Church on the left.

17.0 miles

18. Turn left past church and keep ahead. Just after *not before* mini roundabout cross main road to bus stop and turn right. Continue into Footscray Road passing school on left. Just after left bend turn left into North Park. Continue to the end of this road. Cross mini roundabout, *using crossing on left*, and keep ahead into Tilt Yard Approach. Where the road bears right, continue ahead to left of green then turn left to reach the front entrance to ELTHAM PALACE.

17.8 miles

19. Just before main entrance turn right along King John's Walk. You will be following this lane for nearly a mile. Continue downhill with the castle moat on the left. After 150 yards turn left, *do not go through barriers ahead*, to continue along lane with fields and extensive views on the right. Continue ahead on this quiet lane.

After passing a bollard the lane narrows and descends. Cross road ⊗ and continue through Joan Crescent to pass a barrier. After 30 yards cross railway line and continue to main road. Cross with care ⊗ and turn right for 10 yards. Turn left to continue down King John's Walk, soon passing houses on the left. Continue ahead to reach and cross Mottingham Lane. Main signpost on right but turn left to leave Capital Ring. Continue following GCW signposts.

18.7 miles

20. Take first right into Grove Park Road crossing to left pavement. Continue to pass Eltham College on right. Where the road bends right pass through vehicle barrier and continue ahead on tarmac path. Where path bends right jump over barrier and keep straight ahead, between football fields, to reach signpost. Turn left along path and after 40 yards, just before large oak tree, turn right into Marvels Woods and continue ahead. At fork bear right and continue to road. Cross and continue ahead bearing right after 100 yards. Continue to exit wood. Now leave GCW and turn immediately left along Castleton Road to T- junction. Turn right and then first left into Kimmeridge Road. Keep ahead for 350 yards, passing Coop store on right, to reach ST EDWARD THE CONFESSOR church. (*toilets in church*)

CHECKPOINT 3 12:00 – 17:00 St Edward the Confessor Church SE9 4AX

19.9 miles

21. Exit checkpoint and retrace steps back along Kimmeridge Road. At T-Junction turn left and then first right into Charminster Road. Soon take first left into Castlecombe Road. After 40 yards turn right into wood. Keep ahead following GCW signs. After 100 yards bear left to reach wide crosspath. Turn right to continue through wood to reach the corner of the fence of Grove Park Cemetery. Continue with fence on right. At major signpost (Elmstead Wood) continue ahead. Soon turn right between the fence of the cemetery on the right and fence of railway line on left and continue. At major signpost turn left to cross railway and continue down New Street Hill for about quarter of a mile.

21.1 miles

22. On reaching Oak Tree Gardens on right, cross road to enter wood and continue with fence of golf course on left. Continue on narrow path past allotments on right. Ignore path on right and continue ahead. On reaching tennis court, bear right over tarmac path and continue ahead to cross railway bridge. After 80 yards cross road and continue along tarmac path. Turn sharp right into Foxbury Road following road round two left bends. At end turn right into Croft Road and continue over main road *use crossing on left*.

21.9 miles

23. Continue along Park Avenue for half a mile bearing left with it to reach the main road, Bromley Hill. Cross this road ⊗ at crossing and continue ahead on Oaklands Road. Where this road bears left turn right down an unmade road, Coniston Road. After 100 yards turn left down Elstree Hill, another unmade road, passing an unusual archway dated 1874, on the right near the bottom of the hill. At bottom of hill cross Calmont Road. Turn right and after 20 yards turn left to continue ahead along wide tarmac path, bearing left to large open space. Turn right and continue to cross footbridge over Ravensbourne River. Continue ahead and up Ravensmead Road. Cross main road, turn right and first left up Crab Hill. Continue and 50 yards past station turn right into BECKENHAM PLACE PARK.

23.2 miles

24. Continue ahead on broad woodland path. At T Junction turn left to follow tarmac path. Turn right at bench back into woodland. Continue over crosstrack for 50 yards to major signpost. Go right up to signpost and bear right to follow wide path. After 100 yards you reach another major signpost (Beckenham Place Park) briefly rejoining the Capital Ring. Continue on wide fenced path with open space on right soon reaching a large lake. Continue on tarmac curving left uphill towards Beckenham Place Mansion, passing a red squirrel and a café *with toilets* on the right. Soon you leave the Capital Ring. Just before house turn sharp right on a path, which curves round to the front of the house with its impressive portico. Continue past house and after 30 yards turn left on drive with parkland on left. Follow drive to exit park through gate.

24.5 miles

25. Continue along residential road with some very expensive housing. Pass lodges and turn sharp right into Southend Road. Follow this round a right bend. Cross road at crossing and switch back 20 yards to a VERY rare pillar box. Turn right into Brackley Road and continue past large church to T-Junction. Turn left then first right into Park Road *use crossing by pillarbox*. Follow right hand pavement, to continue through railway underpass.

Take first left into Kings Hall Road and continue on right hand pavement, past pillar box. Follow this road round to the right. After a further 500 yards keep ahead at roundabout into Parish Lane. Continue to crossroads.

25.9 miles

26. Turn left into Green Lane crossing to right hand pavement. Take first right into Wordsworth Road then left into Southey Street. Continue on right pavement *watching out for a stray elephant*. Continue until a colourful bird and a green woman direct you round a left bend to the high street. Cross at crossing turning right along High Street. *Do not enter the alley ahead where lurks a dangerous lamp fish!* Continue for 50 yards and opposite ROYAL WATERMAN'S ALMSHOUSES turn left into Maple Road.

Soon pass St John's Cottages on right. After nearly another half mile turn right into Jasmine Grove. Continue ahead on left hand pavement, *watching out for parakeets*, towards large storage facility. Turn left into Anerley Station Road and continue past Anerley Station* to main road. Turn right and immediately after crossing railway line, opposite Town Hall, turn right into Ridsdale Road. Follow this round to the left passing the Anerley Arms. Continue to cross a small car park. After 50 yards you finally reach St Hugh's Community Centre on the left. (Finish is from 14:30 – 19:00)

**You could use the railway bridge as a short cut but make absolutely sure that the back exit to the station is open. The author of this route description can in no way be held liable if you have to stagger back over the bridge. Be warned the steps are steep!*

27.3 miles

WELL DONE!

Train Station

Anerley

Just a 5 minute stagger away. Back track past the Anerley Arms.

The back entrance to the station is just beyond the pub.

Southern Trains to London Bridge.

London Overground to Highbury and Islington.

Gazetteer

Tower Bridge

The most famous example of a double leaf bascule (see-saw) bridge. It opens and closes about 1000 times a year so you will be very unlucky to arrive just as it is opening. You will just have to wait 5 or 10 minutes. On the other hand you will have a bit more time to read the rest of this gazetteer.

Docklands

Until the beginning of the 19th century, shipping was handled entirely within the Pool of London on the stretch of the River Thames upstream of the Tower of London. Increased trade led to the construction of an extensive network of enclosed docks, making up the Port of London. In the 19th and early 20th century London's East End was home to the largest and busiest port in the world. From the 1960s onwards, the docks experienced a steady decline as the shipping industry adopted containerisation, which effectively moved traffic downstream to Tilbury. From the 1980s onwards, many of the docks were filled in to be replaced by upmarket developments. The rest are now used for recreation.

All that remains of the docks round Wapping are **St Katherine's Dock**, **Hermitage Basin** and **Shadwell Basin**. The **Ornamental Canal** is a remnant of the Western Dock which once was the largest of these docks.

Tobacco Dock

The dock was established in 1796 to handle the import of rice, tobacco, wine and brandy. There was storage space in the warehouses for 8 million gallons of wine. The high walls were essential to keep out smugglers, pirates and other undesirables. At one stage the dock employed 300 cats to deal with other unsavoury creatures.

Limehouse Cut was created in 1770 to provide a navigable link between the River Lee and Thames, while the **Limehouse Basin** provided a link between the Regents Canal and the Thames via the Limehouse Basin lock.

Canary Wharf is situated on the Isle of Dogs, a large peninsula formed by a meander in the River Thames. Number 1 Canada Square is at 770 feet the second tallest building in the UK. It will be in constant view for many more miles. What is now a major financial centre used to be the West India Docks.

The enormous **Millwall Docks**, South of Canary Wharf, were excavated in 1868. The huge quantities of mud dug up were dumped onto neighbouring land creating the elevated site, which came to be known as Mudchute. The mud stank horribly. A flat area just north of the mud was leased to Millwall Athletic football club for their very first stadium. Visiting players complained about falling on the pitch as they couldn't get rid of the stink for weeks. The Lions have long since moved to sweeter smelling pastures!

Mudchute became important strategically during the second World War as a base for the Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Four Ack Ack anti-aircraft guns were positioned there to help defend the docks. Nowadays all is peaceful, fragrant (apart from the pig pen), bucolic bliss.

Greenwich

The Greenwich Foot Tunnel is a link under the Thames between Millwall and Greenwich. It opened in 1901 to provide dock workers, living south of the river, with free and convenient access to the Isle of Dogs. It replaced an expensive and unreliable ferry.

In the 1870s the Cutty Sark was the world's fastest tea clipper, completing the trip from China in 107 days.

The riverfront is dominated by the buildings, with their striking twin cupolas, of the former Royal Hospital for Seamen. These were designed and built by Christopher Wren and Nicholas Hawksmoor on the orders of Mary II. The buildings are bisected by a wide avenue, which allows uninterrupted views between the river, the Queen's House and Greenwich Hill beyond. On account of the outstanding architectural ensemble together with the Royal Observatory and its vital role in the history of navigation, Greenwich is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Don't miss the view from Island Gardens just before the foot tunnel.

The Line Sculpture Trail

The Sculpture Trail extends from the Olympic Park to the Greenwich Peninsula along the Meridian Line. 20 installations make up the trail. You will pass four of them.

Here: A very long way indeed!

A Slice of Reality: Sliced vertical section of a sand dredger on the river foreshore

Liberty Grip and near the boat terminal the enormous **Quantum Cloud**.

Thames Barrier

The barrier was built in response to the devastating North Sea floods of 1953 when a huge tide saw sea levels rise by more than 5 metres. Over 300 lives were lost in England alone. Much of Docklands and the East End of London were swamped causing extensive damage. With a span of 520 meters the Thames Barrier is the second largest movable flood barrier in the world. The largest is the 9 kilometre long Oosterscheldekering *no prizes for guessing which country it is protecting though points awarded for correct pronunciation*. The Thames barrier became fully operational in 1982 and was expected to last till 2050. With rising sea levels some experts are predicting the barrier may need to be replaced by 2030.

The Thames Path National Trail runs for 184 miles from the Cotswolds and officially finishes here, though there is an unofficial 15 mile extension to Crayford Ness near Dartford.

Green Chain Walk

The Green Chain is a string of parks, gardens, golf courses, commons, playing fields, farmland and other open spaces established in late Victorian times to protect South East London from rampant over development. The Green Chain Walk is not a linear walk but rather a network of 40 miles of paths connecting much of the Green Chain area. The Capital Challenge will be using much of this network. Pay extra attention at signposts to make sure you are following the correct branch of the walk.

The Capital Ring the 75 mile circular walk round London follows part of the Green Chain Walk and will be encountered several times on the Capital Challenge.

Charlton Park

Inside the park is the red-brick Charlton House. Built in 1612, it is one of the finest examples of Jacobean architecture in England. It is now used as a community centre. The front entrance to the house is especially grand.

The Village Green, in front of the house, was for over 200 years the location of the festivities to St Luke, the patron saint of horned animals. Charlton's Hornfair eventually extended right up to the present Hornfair Park. Horns were on sale everywhere and soon the fair became an excuse for drunken rowdy behaviour and general bawdiness. The fair was eventually abolished in 1872 though a much more sedate event is now held annually.

Woolwich Common

From Roman times onwards the main London to Dover Road ran up the aptly named Shooters Hill. In the 18th century the woods and commons, including Woolwich and Eltham Commons, around this lonely stretch of road were the haunt of highwaymen. A gibbet stood at the crossroads of Academy Road and Shooters Hill but this did not deter these desperados. They even went so far as to organize protection rackets selling expensive passes to travellers to ensure their 'safe' onward passage. Hopefully your walk up Shooters Hill will be less gruesome and dangerous.

Severndroog Castle

The 'castle' is in fact a folly erected in 1784 as a memorial to Sir William James, a military commander of the East India Company. The plaque above the entrance commemorates his gallant achievements in 1755 during the conquest of the fortress of Janjeera Soowumdroog, south of Bombay, which fell to his superior valour and able conduct. 1000 'pirates' were alleged to have been captured.

Posterity has been less generous in its praise.

The East India Company has been described as a dangerously, unregulated, private company with a huge private army, managed in India by an unstable sociopath Robert Clive. It seized control of India at the end of the 18th century. There followed a century of ruthless exploitation with scant regard for the life or property of the population. The 'pirates' were very likely local landowners fighting against the unlawful annexation of their lands.

The bottom of the tower is the highest point on the challenge walk at 404 feet. Whatever the history of Severndroog Castle, there is an incredible view from the top of the 63 foot tower. You will have to come back another day to enjoy it.

Oxleas Woods

Oxleas Wood is a 72 hectare area of ancient deciduous woodland. It is hard to believe that in 1993 this beautiful woodland was threatened by a major road building project. There were massive protests including a pledge by 3000 individuals to engage in civil disobedience to defend the woodland. This and the wide publicity ensured the destruction of the motorway scheme and the survival of Oxleas Wood.

Eltham Palace

From the 14th to the 16th century the moated manor was an important royal palace, where monarchs often stayed and hunted in the surrounding parks. After the reign of Henry VIII the palace fell into disrepair. The magnificent great hall is the only medieval building to have survived. Feasts with up to 2000 guests were held here during the reign of Edward IV while tournaments took place in the Tiltyard outside the moat.

After centuries of neglect, Eltham was leased to Stephen and Virginia Courtauld in 1933, who built an up-to-the-minute mansion here that incorporated the great hall. The result was an Art Deco masterpiece. The childless couple adopted a lemur (not a great idea to have as a pet) which had its own living quarters in the mansion.

Eltham Palace is well worth a visit (on another day) with its contrasting architecture, moat, beautiful gardens and history. It is now owned by English Heritage.

Conduit Head dates from the 16th Century and controlled the flow of water from local springs to the moat of Eltham Palace.

Eric Liddell, the Flying Scotsman, whose story is told in the film Chariots of Fire, attended Eltham College. No prizes for guessing the name of their Sports ground.

Edward the Confessor

The only King of England to have been canonized. He became quite a cult figure in the middle ages and though Saxon his name became popular, amongst the Norman elite and even royalty. Unlike Eadred, Eadwig, Ethelwulf and Ethelred, Edward remains a popular name to this day. Unfortunately Edward's vow of marital celibacy led to a vacancy on the English throne, with rival claimants Harold and William of Normandy. The rest as they say is history.

Beckenham Place Park

This beautiful 98 hectare park has ancient woodland, meadows, pleasure grounds, walled gardens and a recently restored lake, which is now used for wild swimming. *Of course you might wish to cool off before attempting the last 4 miles!!!*

The Grade II listed Beckenham Place Mansion is a fine example of Palladian Georgian architecture. It now houses a community centre.

Royal Waterman's Almshouses

The almshouses were built in 1840–1841 to house retired members of the Company of Watermen and Lightermen of the City of London and their widows. The Grade II listed buildings are the most prominent and oldest of the Victorian almshouses in Penge. In 1973, the almspeople were moved to a new site in Hastings, and the original houses were converted into private homes.

The 'Anything is better than a Brick Wall' campaign by local artists has made Penge one of the best places in London to see street art. Hopefully some of the colourful murals will brighten the final slog to the end of the walk.

For further info

<https://londoncallingblog.net/2017/05/01/a-street-art-guide-to-penge/>