

WALKING IN THE LEA VALLEY



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The Lea Valley is a walker's paradise blending the peace and tranquility of 10,000 acres of regional parkland with excellent facilities and transport links. The combination of open space and abundant wildlife makes it hard to believe it's only 17 miles from central London. Starting on the River Lee Navigation and walking through marshland, along the banks of Horsemill Stream and finishing in the town centre, this walk combines rural magic and historical charm in equal measure.

HISTORY

At the heart of the Lea Valley lies the historic market town of Waltham Abbey which dates back to the 11th century. Waltham's history is owed to Kings and warfare. King Harold, killed at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, was buried in the Abbey which was also the last of the monasteries to be dissolved by King Henry VIII in 1540. The Royal Gunpowder Mills, visible from the New River Path, played a significant part in Britain's warfare history, notably during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars and contributed to the victory at Waterloo in 1815.

Waltham Town Lock to Waltham Common Lock

Parking is available in the Lee Valley Country Park just off Station Road which is where this walk begins. If you are arriving by train you will need to walk approximately half a mile east along Eleanor Cross Road which turns into Station Road passing the park entrance on your left.

From Lee Valley Country Park turn left out of the park entrance (there is a short cut onto the towpath through the car park) and continue east along Station Road towards the Old English Gentlemen Pub. Turn left at the bridge onto the towpath following the Lee Valley

Walk. Just below the bridge is Waltham Town Lock, continue past the lock along the towpath. On the left, within Lee Valley Park car park, are picnic and barbeque areas. These are the only areas within the park where barbeques are permitted however there are various other places along the river where you can stop for a picnic. Continue under a footbridge and after about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile you will arrive at Waltham Common Lock.

Waltham Common Lock to Windmill Lane Bridge

This area of the Lea Valley was once a grazing meadow. The changes in the landscape have also meant a change in the natural



environment and many water birds such as mallards, teal, coots, moorhens are now in abundance. If you're lucky you may catch a glimpse of a great crested grebe or the even rarer otter or water vole. Friday Lake, behind the old lock keepers cottage, is a fishery run by Lee Valley Regional Park Authority. Day permits can be obtained from them.

Continue on the towpath and you will shortly arrive at Cheshunt where the Herts Young Mariners are based. Colourful narrowboats moor along the towpath following the course of 13th century grain traders on their way to Hertford.

At Windmill Lane Bridge this walk leaves the canal turning right over the bridge towards Fishers Green. However, at this point a short detour to the orchid field is well worthwhile. Continue on the towpath for about five minutes and you will discover the best place in London to see Early Marsh Orchids. In early June a pink carpet of orchids cover an area the size of a football pitch, as the nutrient

poor soil is a perfect habitat for these delicate flowers.

Windmill Lane Bridge to Waltham Town Lock

Follow the footpath and bear right. The wetlands on the left are part of Seventy Acres Lake. Close by is Fishers Green, home of the National Bittern Watchpoint (bitterns visit only between the end of October and the end of February). At the fork continue straight following the signs for Hooks Marsh car park.

Go through the car park and follow the signs to Waltham Abbey situated opposite the information point. On your left is the flood relief channel, also known as Horsemill Stream. A short distance ahead are the sluice gates, used to maintain a constant water level during high waters and preventing Waltham Abbey from flooding. Carry on along this path. As you walk you can just make out the Royal Gunpowder Mills on the opposite bank. Established during the 17th century, the Gunpowder

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Every care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of all information given in this guide and British Waterways London does not accept responsibility for any changes that may have occurred since going to press. Walking alone in isolated areas is not recommended.

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Start: Waltham Cross

Finish: Waltham Cross

Distance: 4 miles

Time: 2 hours

Transport: Waltham Cross train station

Parking: Lee Valley Car Park

Conditions: Mostly flat with some steep bridges

Mills developed a reputation for superior production methods for gunpowder internationally. After about a mile you will emerge next to your starting point at Waltham Town Lock.

Towards the Gunpowder Mills, the Abbey and the Town Centre

Approximately ten minutes walk from here lies Waltham Abbey, the last Abbey to fall due to the

dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century. The Abbey and the town centre are worthy of a detour and a perfect place to end your walk and take a break. At the road opposite The Old English Gentleman pub, turn left. On your left are the Royal Gunpowder Mills which have played a significant part in the area's history and offer an interesting experience. Open between May and October, the mills are set in 175 acres of natural parkland and boast 21 buildings of historical importance. The town is a

few minutes walk from here. Cross the road at the crossing towards Lee Valley Park visitor centre and continue straight along Highbridge Street crossing the street before the Church. The Abbey ruins lie at the rear of the church and the town centre to the right. To return to the car park, retrace your footsteps to Waltham Town Lock. You can access the car park from the towpath by the barbecue area.

Other walks available in this series

- Little Venice to Camden
- Walking the East Ends Canals
- Islington to Limehouse Walk
- Walking around Hanwell
- Walking in Harlow
- Walking in Broxbourne

