

Theobalds Park Club Site

Two Rivers Walk

Camping and Caravanning



Route Summary

A circular walk of 18.6km/11.6 miles along Old and New Rivers then through nature reserves with historical areas and buildings throughout the route.

Route Overview



Category: Walking
 Rating: Unrated
 Surface: Moderate
 Date Published: 21st September 2018
 Difficulty: Easy
 Length: 18.270 km / 11.42 mi
 Last Modified: 21st September 2018

Description

The Camping and Caravanning Club Site at Theobalds Park is situated within what was the estate of the Royal Palace of Theobalds. This historical theme continues throughout the walk, with short detours possible to visit attractions and places of interest. Alongside this, there is an abundance of wildlife viewing opportunities along the route, including nature reserves that are home to nationally important birds and wildlife.

Immediately outside the site you are on Ermine Street, a Roman Road that was used as a main route for hundreds of years. It is along this road that King Harold marched his army to battle the Vikings near York before turning south to the fatal Battle of Hastings.

Still marked on Ordnance Survey maps, is where Temple Bar stood for several years. This was one of the eight gates into London and possibly designed by Sir Christopher Wren. For 200 years it stood at the junction of Fleet Street and The Strand until 1878 when it was replaced by the current City Dragon structure. In 1908 the Muex family paid for the bricks to be brought to Theobalds Park where the gate was rebuilt. In 2003 it was returned to its current site at the side of St Paul's Cathedral – a plaque marks the spot where it stood.

On 12 August 1944, a USAAF B-24 Liberator from RAF Waddington on its way to a bombing mission experienced major problems while over Cheshunt. The crew led by the pilot Lt Ellis remained on board and steered the aircraft away from

the town crashing into nearby fields, but sadly exploding on impact and killing all the crew. A monument to their bravery stands in the grounds of St Mary's School, close to where the crash happened.

The outward journey follows the course of what is referred to as the New River, however, it is not a natural watercourse, but a man-made canal for delivering water to the population of London. A charter was issued in 1604 to construct the New River, which was eventually opened in 1613. Initially taking water from springs, it was later augmented with water drawn from the nearby River Lea. The New River was almost the scene of a royal death – King James I was riding at his Theobalds estate when his horse reared and threw him into the icy water. Fortunately one of his companions saw the king's boots sticking out from the water and rescued him.

Cheshunt Park, of which the eastern side is now a golf course, was a huge hunting ground for the Royal Palace at nearby Theobalds Palace. However, after the death of Charles I the estate was broken up by Oliver Cromwell. By a quirk of fate in the mid-eighteenth century, Cromwell's great grandson came to own the estate through his marriage, and in 1795 he built a mansion, Brantyngheshay, in the grounds. Ironically this latter Oliver Cromwell became Lord of The Manor of Theobalds, from which his ancestor's adversary Charles I had set out to raise his standard at the start of the Civil War. The house was demolished in 1969.

At almost the most northerly point of the route is Broxbourne Mill. A mill has stood here since before the Domesday Book of 1086 – it changed many times over the centuries but a catastrophic fire in 1949 destroyed the building leaving just a 16th-century floor. It's now a pleasant spot to take refreshments.

After passing under the railway at Broxbourne Mill the nature of the walk changes as you stroll south through nature reserves adjacent to the River Lea, or Lee, or Ley, depending on whether using new or older spellings. The area is a haven for wildlife, birds, mammals, insects and plants, as it's a patchwork of different habitats – scrub woodland, open grassland, mature woodland, reed beds and open water. Some of the area was turned into wetland as a defensive measure when in 894 King Alfred had huge ditches dug to draw water off the river, which was considerably larger at that time. The plan, which apparently worked, was to prevent a fleet of Danes from reaching Ware.

This may have been a military triumph, but it caused another problem for the locals as the river had traditionally been the dividing boundary between parishes, manors and counties. The dispute over who had ownership over which bit of land was not properly settled until the later 1800s.

A less romantic reason for many of the lakes to be present is the extraction of sand and gravel from the area. Once finished the old gravel pits have been converted into nature conservation areas and fishing venues. Take the opportunity to meander along other tracks to enjoy the wildlife and look for the sculptures that are dotted throughout the nature reserve.

Cedar's Park is part of the old Theobalds Palace grounds, with some artefacts remaining.

Binoculars would be useful for this walk.

Waypoints

1 Start at Camping and Caravanning Club site Reception

(51.68617; -0.05752)



Leave the Theobalds Park Camping and Caravanning Club Site via the main entrance turning onto the Londinium to Eboracum road, better known and Ermine Street built by the Romans from London to York. Passing through parkland and woods until reaching New River.

2 Theobalds Lane crossing over the New River

(51.69210; -0.05083)



Take the towpath, which is now a Long-Distance footpath thanks to Thames Water, and enjoy the gentle stroll at the side of this man-made waterway. The buildings that can be seen to your left after passing under the road is St Mary's School which is close to the location of the 1944 Liberator plane crash. The walk along the New River is reasonably well signposted but keep your eyes open as the path crosses the waterway several times.

3 The New River near to Cheshunt Park Golf Course

(51.71542; -0.04226)



After crossing Brookfield Lane West and rejoining the riverside walk you will see the golf course on the opposite bank. The course is on the eastern side of Cheshunt Park in which house Brantyngheshay once stood. Brantyngheshay was owned by the Great Grandson of Oliver Cromwell. Unfortunately, trees and an embankment prevent views across the golf course and park. On reaching Vancouver Road, just after Thames Water Turnford Pumping Station, go left over the bridge then down the grassy slope to the river, not the tarmac path.

4 Path leaves New River near Wormley Park

(51.73549; -0.02577)



At the far side of Wormley Playing Fields, the route leaves the side of New River for a short distance along waymarked paths, through a hay meadow and roads. The route joins the river again at the bridge on High Street. After a short distance, turn towards Broxbourne Mill.

5 Site of Broxbourne Mill

(51.74351; -0.01443)



After spending time enjoying the sights and refreshments at Broxbourne Mill the route continues under the railway bridge. The path follows the western bank of the River Lea as it meanders south towards London. Soon you will leave the built-up areas and be able to experience the special calm that this area enjoys. There are numerous detours that can be made to various habitats that lie along the river. Silvermeade and then Turnford and Cheshunt Lakes have been designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest. There is a wide variety of birdlife as well as aquatic and non-aquatic invertebrates.

Common Lock on River Lea Navigation

(51.69854; -0.01857)



Leave the river at Common Lock and take the path that goes alongside Bowyers Water (oldest of the gravel pits). This will take you past The Shrine, one of many sculptures dotted around the Lea Valley Nature Park. As you walk along this section listen for the grasshoppers and crickets that make this one of the richest habitats for these creatures in Hertfordshire with some varieties that are scarce nationally.

Bowyers Water from Railway Bridge

(51.69149; -0.02532)



Cross over the railway line and you are back in an urban environment as you cut across the northern part of Waltham Cross. Pass underneath the railway near to Theobalds Grove Railway Station, then along Theobalds Lane.

Cedar Park Entrance

(51.69330; -0.03976)



At Cedar's Park take a slight detour to explore the park which was part of the old Royal Palace grounds that was used by some very significant figures in British history, such as Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I. The route then joins the New River to retrace your initial steps back to the Camping and Caravanning Club Site.

