

Water and Bread

Length of the walk : about 45 minutes each way

The ground : the outward route is suitable for baby buggies and, if some short steep slopes and some bumpy ground can be overcome, wheelchairs. It can be used to return.

Getting to the start : Lea Bridge Ice Rink is served by bus routes 48, 55 and 56, and has a car park (which may have restrictions on its use).

Refreshments : the walk passes the Princess of Wales pub at the start, and there is a café in the Hackney Marshes pavilion near the furthest point on the walk.

Some background : the bridge is on the site of an ancient crossing of the River Lea, but the straight Lea Bridge Road and bridge have only existed since 1757. A strip of land about a hundred yards wide was in the medieval parish of Walthamstow even though the land either side belonged to Leyton. It was straight with many slight changes of direction, kept clear of buildings, and ended at Lea Bridge. Porter's Way was a route, also quite straight, from St Leonard's, Shoreditch to Lea Bridge, much of it still surviving as streets and alleyways. It continues on to Walthamstow as the Black Path. The River Lea itself has been the boundary between Hackney in Middlesex and Walthamstow and Leyton in Essex. The River Lea has been a route for boats. Vikings reached Waltham Abbey, and King Alfred had work done to prevent further attacks.

The route : cross Lea Bridge Road, turn right, over Lea Bridge, and immediately past the Princess of Wales turn left and walk through the pub car park to the towpath along the Lea Navigation. Keep straight on along the towpath.

On the other side of the Lea from the Princess of Wales pub is a weir, over which the river flows. From this point south the towpath follows an artificial channel dug in 1767, to make navigation easier for boats.

Follow the towpath over the bridge to the left-hand side of the Lea Navigation. Through the brick wall on the left take the entrance into the Middlesex Filter Beds nature reserve. Turn left and then curve right to reach the wall along the natural course of the River Lea. Then continue through the nature reserve with the River on your left and the disused water filtration beds on your right. Near the end take the path out of the reserve and into the extensive open space of Hackney Marshes. Head slightly left towards a bridge with large metal panel sides painted red. Just before you reach the bridge turn right and take a path through a strip of woodland. Follow the path with the river on your left.

For a while you will see through the trees and over the river a pitch'n'putt course. After that can be seen railway sidings, followed by a large building that is a depot for Eurostar trains.

After the Eurostar depot can be seen the large canopies for a fruit and vegetable market relocated from Spitalfields on the eastern edge of the City of London.

Eventually the path comes out of the trees. A footbridge across the River Lea has been closed for the 2012 Olympic Games.

An interesting interpretation board gives some history of The White House Inn and its bridge.

Keep straight on with the river to the left and football pitches to the right. Shortly afterwards you can see a large building with a deliberately rusty exterior. This is a pavilion for the Hackney Marshes football pitches, with a café inside.

Continue following the surfaced path, to reach Homerton Road.

Getting home by public transport from the 'turning point' here : Homerton Road and Eastway are served by the W15 bus route (for Hackney in one direction, and in the other Leyton, Leytonstone and Walthamstow, with - eventually - interchange along Lea Bridge Road for routes 48, 55 and 56 back to the starting point).

Turn left to the traffic lights and left again to get a good view of the River Lea as it goes under Eastway and into the 2012 Olympics site. This is the furthest point on the walk.

The elevated dual carriageway road, the A12, crosses over the River Lea at the site of Temple Mills, water-mills that ground wheat for the Knights Templar and later the Knights of St John.

Retrace your steps back to the sports pavilion. On weekdays you have the option of walking half-left across the football pitches, with the artificial Lea Navigation on your left, back to the Middlesex Filter Beds nature reserve. Alternatively, just follow the surfaced path through the trees along the way you came.

Go through the nature reserve (or along the towpath outside it) to the towpath back to the Princess of Wales and Lea Bridge Road with the ice rink car park on the right.

Getting back home : see 'Getting to the start' on the previous page.



