

A long walk taking in some features of Beckenham Place Park (1-1.5 hours)

Start: Ravensbourne entrance (2 minute walk from Ravensbourne station)

Finish: Beckenham Hill Gate (by Beckenham Hill station and 54 bus stop)

Can be walked in reverse



- 1) Summerhouse Fields housed a small anti-aircraft artillery site during World War II. As you walk along the path, keep an eye out for small openings in the undergrowth on your right. These take you to the river bank where you can walk along a narrow unmade path. The water quality is good and Kingfishers can sometimes be seen fishing here. The River Ravensbourne is a tributary to the Thames, with its confluence at Deptford Creek. Keep on the riverside path for as long as you wish / can then return to the made path.
- 2) At a junction with a bridge over the river to your right, cross the bridge, then turn right by a children's playground to see the Lewisham BMX track. Do a circuit of the former changing block to admire the mural behind the skate park. It was painted by a local artist and young people during National Park City week in July 2019.
- 3) Take the path running down the side of the children's playground, cross the river again (using a different bridge) and continue straight on the path running along the edge of the field. Take the first path to the left, to a footbridge across the railway. This line was constructed between 1889-1892, running between Nunhead and Shortlands.
- 4) Turn left upon entering the woodland to see the mound, created in 2019. It has views across to the way you have come as well as in to the tree canopies. Take care on the steps if wet!
- 5) Continue along the path, keeping left at the next junction (to walk around the wet woodland in a clockwise direction). Wet woodland is a rare ecosystem in London. It was created here as part of the restoration project in 2018-19. This area would have been part of John Cator's original ornamental lake. As water-loving trees take seed, the wet woodland will provide habitats for insects which attract birds such as redpolls.
- 6) At the end of the wet woodland, take the path that hugs the railway line rather than curving round to the right. This path brings you out at the bottom of Railway Field – a lovely open space which is often empty of other visitors! Hug the edge of the field (following the railway track) and you will see some whips on your left that were planted by volunteers in 2018 and 2019. Species include Guelder Rose, Dogwood, Cherry, and Elder.
- 7) At the top of Railway Field, re-join the path and take the tree-lined path running left towards Crab Hill Gate. On the left, near the bottom of this path, by a spectacular fallen/split tree, you can see a geological feature that is rare in London: an outcrop of Blackheath Beds – a sedimentary rock layer that is 2-24 metres thick. It was formed 55 million years ago when this area would have been covered by a shallow sea and the climate would have been warmer. The rounded flint pebbles were deposited in under-sea channels close to land and are set in a cement formed when tiny sea creatures died and their calcium-rich shells fell to the sea floor. Please don't touch the feature so that it lasts for others to see.

- 8) Just before the gate out of the park, take a steep path up to the right. Wend your way through the trees up onto Crab Hill. Hug the trees on your right. When you hit the path, turn left. Crab Hill had a Prisoner of War camp in World War II and potatoes were grown on the field. Later in the twentieth century, it had a football pitch at the summit and a pavilion, the foundations of which you pass on your right. After the foundations, look for a small path to the right leading into the woods.
- 9) As soon as you enter the woods (which are ancient woodland) take the path to your right. Follow it to its end, where you will see a large sculpture of a flying insect. At this, turn left. There are some interesting things to look for along this path – old parish boundary posts on the right, a muddy pond (which must have a spring under it), a hand burnt into a tree (just as you step onto the path) and a ‘zig zag’ oak tree–look up!
- 10) At the next junction, turn right. When you reach a stretch of dead hedging on the right (made by a dedicated team of volunteers), take the small path to your left. If you miss the path, you’ll end up at a T junction, in which case turn back and look again!
- 11) Follow the path to its end (it becomes quite narrow), turn left onto the main path and immediately left (at a big junction of paths) to walk slightly uphill.
- 12) Follow this path to its end (passing a lovely large fallen log) and turn left when you hit another main path at a T junction.
- 13) Walk along this path, lined with Sweet Chestnut trees, until you come to a path lined with branches on your left (and within sight of Westgate Road gate). Take the path almost opposite it, on your right.
- 14) This small paths weaves through woodland – follow it to its end where you eventually come out onto one of the old golf fairways (the public golf course closed in 2016), with a wonderful view of the Georgian Homesteads to your left.
- 15) Walk downhill, across the grass, to a drainage ditch (which feeds the lake, to your right) and head towards the mansion, built by John Cator in the 1760s. See <http://www.beckenhamplaceparkfriends.org.uk> for an extensive history of the Cator family.
- 16) Walk around the back of the mansion and up the far side of it (for you as you approach it). This takes you to the front of the Mansion and its carriageway drive. Cross the drive to continue walking straight ahead, along a path with Stumps Hill Pond on the left. The pond was restored in 2019-20 thanks to the work of the Friends of Beckenham Place Park in applying for grant funding. The benches on the decking are made from reclaimed fallen oak from the park.
- 17) Continue on the path and turn off the tarmac path to the right as you enter Stumps Hill Wood. Follow the path through the woodland to its end. You will come out onto a field (often boggy!) and will see the drive in front of you. Turn left onto the drive to arrive at Beckenham Hill Gate where the walk ends. The drive used to be the main road, until the road was diverted to its current position in 1785 by John Cator.



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