

A taste of North London

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Did you know it's possible to walk from the northern suburbs of London all the way to the inner city – mostly on footpaths and away from main roads? This route follows the Dollis Valley as it winds southwards, and at Temple Fortune turns eastwards on to the Capital Ring, later joining the Parkland Walk.

Start point: High Barnet Underground station (Northern line).

End point: Finsbury Park (Underground and national rail).

Distance: 11.8 miles (or split into three 4 mile sections to Finchley Central, East Finchley, then Finsbury Park)

Difficulty: Easy; one or two steep climbs through Highgate Woods.

Maps and waymarks

An A to Z or map on your phone should suffice. A guide to the Dollis Valley Greenwalk (DVG) can be found on the LB Barnet website, and to the Capital Ring on TfL website. These directions below link the two routes together. Both are well waymarked.

Other practical points

- It is easy to drop out of the route at Northern Line tube stations on the way, so you can complete the route in parts or all in one go. *Routes to stations and part distances are in italics in the text.*
- Cafes near the route are indicated in the text, though you may want to bring a **packed lunch**.
- Public toilets are surprisingly rare. There's no shortage of woodland, but it can be rather busy for **comfort stops**.
- Parts of the route will be **muddy** during or after wet weather.

Directions

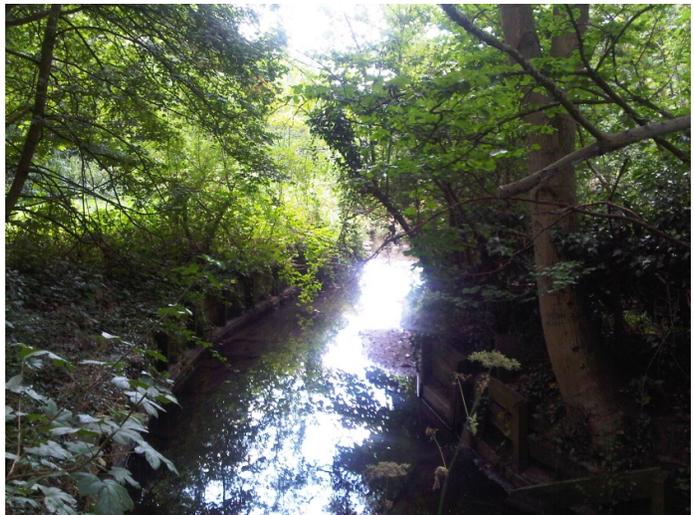
From either of High Barnet's exits, turn left then walk up the hill to the main road. Cross it and follow a path signed to Underhill down a grassy slope and turn left on the road at the bottom. *(To avoid bog in wet weather, go straight across down Barnet Lane, and turn left on a track past car parking.)* Before new town houses at the road junction, turn right, take the passage down to the next road, cross it and go down Priors Grove to the left of the school. On reaching the playing field, follow its left edge *(can be boggy)*, crossing a main tarmac path, and continue now on a tarmac path which soon joins the Dollis Valley Greenwalk (DVG) coming in from the right. Further along, the footpath and cycleway split.

On reaching a main road, Totteridge Lane *(1.7 miles, **Totteridge & Whetstone station up to the left**)*, cross at the traffic island and turn right down the hill. Follow a sign to the left to the DVG.

The path leads through to Laurel Way, where we go through the gate and cross the road to continue past a sports ground *(can be muddy)*.

At the next road crossing, Tillingham Way *(2.6 miles – left to **Woodside Park station** ¼ mile)*, we are obliged to divert briefly. Turn right past Twineham Green and at the main road turn left, following it until, just past the Old Finchleians Club, you see a sign left leading back to the brook. This is Woodside Park, where Folly Brook joins Dollis.

Keep on the path until it leads through another gate to cross Argyle Road *(cafes at **Sussex Ring** 100yds right)*. Continue on Riverside Walk with the brook on your left. You pass a playground and tennis courts, bridges lead off to the left and over into tempting woodland paths that make good rest points; but always return to the main path.



Cross Fursby Avenue *(3.3 miles, turn left up to end of road, then left to **West Finchley station** 1/3 mile)* then walk between allotments. The brook winds ever more tortuously. There is a choice of a good footpath to the right just before a bridge, or continue on the tarmac cycleway to join again by turning right at a second bridge.

After a while the path swings left, crosses the brook and emerges on a main road, Dollis Road, *(4 miles, turn left up the hill to **Finchley Central station** ½ mile)* with Mill Hill Viaduct up to the right. Go right under the viaduct and follow the road round a sharp and dangerous bend until you see Thornfield Avenue on the left. Turn left just before it, following Dollis Valley waymarks to the left into woodland. Cross the footbridge and turn immediately right along the path with the brook now on your right *(a bit muddy along here)*.

The path and brook pass between back gardens, with links to neighbouring streets to left and right. The occasional rattle of a Northern line train gives way to the drone of traffic as you approach major roads.

Pass a park on your left with sweeping, grassy slopes and a playground. Cross the next minor road, Waverley Grove. Continue for a short distance until another, more major road appears. Follow the waymark down to your right and clear the road by the pedestrian underpass.

Go straight on with the faithful brook still on your right. You pass under a larger underpass (the A1) then reach a playground in the heart of the Temple Fortune district (*see picture*); the route skirts it. At the corner of the playground, Dollis Brook meets Mutton Brook to become the River Brent going west. But the Dollis Valley Greenwalk continues to the left at this junction, joining the Capital Ring to go upstream along Mutton Brook. They follow the same route for a time, but from here on the Capital Ring waymarks should be your guide.



After passing under a main road, the North Circular, follow the wide tarmac path with the brook on your right, green slope to the North Circular left. It leads up to the Finchley Road.

Cross at the lights, enter a park and cross a bridge. Keep to the old tarmac path: as it skirts a quiet residential road, follow the path left here through a strip of green space until it emerges on Addison Way.

Turn left and continue until Addison Way merges with a main road. Bear right along the main road, over the brook and Oakwood Road and look for a Capital Ring waymark pointing right. Pass along a pleasant strip of parkland, Northway Gardens. Keep left through here, with the brook on your right. Once past the tennis courts on your left, bear left to the road, Northway. (*The café on the left is a convenient refreshment stop.*)

Cross the road following the Capital Ring. A straight path takes you through another green space to cross another road, Kingsley Way. Turn right along the road, then left so that the brook is now on your left.

Go through a traffic barrier and down a wide tarmac path to a sign welcoming you to Lyttleton Playing Fields. Turn right at the sign and take the wide path through the fields (*past the Park Cafe which may be open for you*), eventually skirting the bowling club. Leave by a path between high hedges, to emerge on a residential road, Norrice Lea.

Turn left down the road to a main road and cross it at the lights. Proceed up Vivien Way until it ends at a T-junction on a wider road, Deansway. Go left, then right into Edmunds Walk.

Keep on until you pass two sizeable weeping willows on your left. Ahead is a narrow path, waymarked. A little way down, a sharp right turn brings you to **East Finchley station**. Take the passage to your left through to the station's main exit (*8 miles*). (If the passage is closed you will need to go past it and round the station.)

On leaving the station, cross the main road at the lights and look for a path up the opposite side almost next to the railway line. We now enter Cherry Tree Wood and follow the path along its upper edge to the far end (*public toilets on the right*).

This brings you into Fordington Road, at its sharp bend. Keep straight on to a small roundabout. Here turn right up Lanchester Road, then left up a path between fences.

At the top, enter Highgate Wood. The Capital Ring continues to be mostly well signed, but keep an eye out for the waymarks as the wood is well provided with paths, distinct or otherwise.

Keep to the roughly surfaced path and carry straight on to an intersection with another main path. Turn right here and continue until you reach a crossroads with a café just ahead (*mainly outdoor seating*).

This is where the Capital Ring was launched in 2005. A major sign points you left and the Ring continues. Follow the path along the western side of Highgate Wood, crossing another intersection. Branch left with the main road below on your left, and down to New Gate to leave the wood.

Cross the main road, Muswell Hill Road, and enter Queen's Wood. Pass the eco-café on the left and follow the sign forking right down through the wood and across a dip then up to Queen's Wood Road. Cross it into more woods, descending muddy steps before going up the tarmac path to Priory Gardens.

Turn right and look for a narrow path between numbers 63 and 65 on the left (*or keep straight on to Highgate station, 9.5 miles*). Climb through Highgate Spinney. At Shepherds Hill turn right on to Archway Road. Go left down the hill (*past a pub*) and left again into Holmesdale Road. Look for the entrance to the Parkland Walk South on your left, bearing right.

Like the best former railway tracks, this section needs no directions. Simply follow the level track for about two miles, enjoying the thick greenery of Britain's most elongated nature reserve. Much has been done to improve the muddy and uneven terrain; this has made the Walk more popular than ever with everyone, from graffiti artists to dog-walkers, runners and blackberry-pickers.

You know you've reached the end when a T junction appears. Turn left over the railway and enter Finsbury Park.

A quarter of a mile down to your right is Finsbury Park station, with good rail connections above and below ground to both Hertfordshire and the rest of London. You can return to the start point by taking the Victoria line to Kings Cross and changing to a Northern line train bound for High Barnet.

Or you may think of continuing further on the Capital Ring through the park and along the New River towards Stoke Newington!