

Chingford Circular		
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Current status	Document last updated Tuesday, 13 th February 2024	
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Chingford Circular

Start & Finish: Chingford Overground

Length: 7.6 km/4.7 mi

Ascent/Descent: 109m

Time: 1 ¾ hours

Transport: Chingford Station is one of the northern termini of the Lea Valley lines from London Liverpool Street, serving Chingford, Cheshunt, Enfield Town and Hertford East. The Chingford line is operated by London Overground and the station is in Travelcard Zone 5. The journey time is 27 minutes.

Walk Notes:

A varied and undulating route through commons, ancient woods and wildflower meadows, with plenty of fascinating trees as well as fantastic views to Central London and across the Lea Valley. You leave Chingford into the Chingford Plain, heading for the main body of Epping Forest, where you cross Cuckoo Brook, the main tributary of the River Ching and then the Ching itself, before rounding most of the artificial lake of Connaught Water. Follow a meandering route along forest paths, tracks and rides through the very interesting ancient treescape, dominated by ancient, often pollarded oak and hornbeam, including stretches along the Upper Ching River and through the valley of the meandering Cuckoo Brook. You bypass Sewardstonebury and the Hawk Wood to walk up the sloping, south facing Yates' Meadow, from where fine far views open out to the close-by wooded hills and into the Lea Valley with its large reservoirs, across it to North London's higher ground and also providing for panoramic views of the London Skyline. Descend from Yates' Meadow and rise again along Daisy Plain into Hawk Wood and then initially skirt the wooded Pole Hill along the edge of the Chingford Plain, before turning up to Pole Hill's summit obelisk and trig point. From nearby, a residential road takes you back to the station and some tea options, while a longer alternative leads past some more tea options, including the only pub in this end of town.

Walk Options:

Cut the loop around Connaught Water (cut 750m).

Cut the loop past Grimston's Oak and the upper reaches of the Ching (cut 500m).

Extensions

- loop over Yardley Hill with more complete views of the London Skyline (add 600m);

- take a route to the west of Pole Hill, for views of the Lea Valley Reservoirs (add 400m and 20m ascent).

A Shortcut at the end cuts the ascent of Pole Hill (cut 160m and 10m ascent).

Refreshments

Station Road is full of bars, cafés, restaurants and takeouts, but only some of them are close to the station. Passed on the optional loop through town (adds 700m) are: **The King's Head** pub, **The Wine Factor** wine bar, **Dada Café**, **Las Tapas**, **La Baita** and **Trattoria Ibleo** (Italian), **Pat Pong** (Thai), **Bar Sicilia**.

In the station: **Toni's Express**, a coffee kiosk, just past the ticket gates (Mon-Sat to 16.00 at least).

Notes

Chingford and Chingford Station

Chingford is a town and London suburb of about 70,000 population within the Borough of Waltham Forest. Waltham Forest Borough was created in 1965 by merging Chingford with Walthamstow and Leyton.

Having been referenced in the Domesday book as "Cingefort", it is thought that, with *ching* being old English for the king, that Chingford could refer to a King's Ford. This idea is compounded by links to royalty using the area for hunting, with Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge still standing in North Chingford.

Furthermore, there is evidence of King Harold Harefoot having lived in Chingford and the environs in the 11th century, a date which ties in with the Old English use of "Ching" for King.

The ford in question could be one of many across the Ching River, but is more likely to refer to one across the Lea, possibly at today's Cook's Ferry.

Noteworthy buildings include the Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge and the adjacent Butler's Retreat (a former barn), Friday Hill House, the Pimp Hall Dovecote and the Pole Hill Obelisk (marking the meridian). Famous people with Chingford connections include a number of footballers (David Beckham, Dwight Gayle, Harry Kane, Teddy Sheringham and Andros Townsend) as well as film director Peter Greenaway, guitarist Steve Hillage, Apple Chief Design Officer Jonathan Ive, the Kray Twins, composer Michael Nyman and Tory politician Iain Duncan Smith.

Chingford Station opened in 1873 as a gateway to Epping Forest. Built initially closer to Chingford's centre and as a temporary terminus in light of plans to extend the line to High Beach in the centre of the Forest, those plans were scrapped as the Forest got protected status and instead the station was moved to the northern edge of town, somewhat to the inconvenience of residents nowadays.

Epping Forest

Epping Forest is an area of ancient woodland and other habitats like grassland, heath, streams, bogs and ponds, which straddles the border between London and Essex. Stretching for 19 km (12 mi) from Manor Park in East London north to Epping, with the main body of the Forest being north of Chingford, it is never more than 4 km wide, and in most places considerably narrower. It lies on a low ridge between the Lea and Roding Valleys which were formed by arms of the Scandinavian ice sheet during the last glacial period, around 18,000 BC. It is London's largest forest and largest Open Space at 2,400 hectares (5,900 acres).

The highest points are near Ambresbury Banks to the south of Epping, which is 111m above sea level, while Pole Hill near Chingford reaches 91m. On the western edge of the ridge (in High Beach at a similar height), is an expanse of gravel and sand, thought to have been deposited by an unknown river which flowed northwards from the Weald of Kent before the creation of the Thames Valley in its current location.

The elevation and thin gravelly soil (the result of the glaciation) of the Forest made it less suitable for agriculture and it was historically managed as a common, with local landowners exercising economic rights over timber, while local commoners had grazing and other rights.

It has been protected since the 12th century as a Royal Hunting Forest, as part of the much larger Forest of Essex, which covered most of the county (i.e.: only the monarch had the right to hunt deer but it did not mean the land was necessarily well wooded). The physical Forest is thought to have declined to something like its modern extent no later than the early 14th century, but is thought to have extended further south to the Old Roman Road to Colchester in today's Forest Gate area of West Ham.

The Forest was principally used as a source of shipbuilding timber for the Royal Navy, which was taken overland to the mouth of the Roding (Barking Creek) and then floated in rafts to the Royal Dockyards at Woolwich and Deptford. This exploitation continued until about 1725, when all the suitable oak trees had been felled. In the 1830s, Epping New Road was built through the heart of the Forest, but else it has been largely untouched since, helped by the fight of the public to prevent partial or full enclosure.

Since 1878's Epping Forest Act, it has been managed by The City of London who also acquired large areas of buffer land around the Forest to prevent development.

The historic land use has had a big impact on its character and ecology, this is particularly evident with the pollarded trees, which were cut back to the *bolling*, the permanent base of the pollard, every 13 years or so. It was cut just above the browse line of wild and domestic grazing animals. However, the pollards have not been cut since the passing of the Epping Forest Act, and have now grown large crowns of thick branches with correspondingly large boles. This gives the trees an unusual appearance, uncommon in other forests. Epping Forest has 55,000 ancient trees, more than any other single site in the United Kingdom.

River Ching

The Ching is a 9.5 km (6.0 mi) tributary of the River Lea (or Lee) and originates as a small stream from a seep at the foot of a tree in the southern part of Epping Forest (this can be seasonal). It flows through woodland to the artificial lake Connaught Water. The Water was created by damming the Ching to provide an outlet for drainage measures in the formerly swampy Fairmead area of Epping Forest.

Immediately, the Ching is joined by the Cuckoo Brook, which – together with a tributary – drains Chingford Plain and the woods rising up to Sewardstonebury. It then flows through lightly wooded commons and woods (largely in natural banks) to enter Highams Park, where it was re-channelled to bypass the new boating lake (stones from the old London Bridge were used to form the sides of the lake).

The Ching then passes the former site of Walthamstow's greyhound stadium and flows under the North Circular Road to join The Lea north of Banbury Reservoir.

The name of the river is a back-formation from Chingford, rather than the town being named after the river.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Leave **Chingford Station** onto the forecourt-cum-car park and make your way to **Station Road** a little ahead. *Turn right* downhill along the pavement, immediately passing **Chingford Bus Station**. In 110m cross over to the left-hand side of the road, using a median and continue downhill. In 30m cross **Forest Approach** and in another 30m *turn left* along **Bury Road**. In 60m, where a broad gravel track joins from the left and with **Chingford Golf Course's** clubhouse just ahead, *turn right* across the road and follow a gravel track along the bottom of a very shallow valley with a drainage channel to the left of it. This is the **Chingford Plain**.

In 120m ignore a left turning gravel path and in another 80m, by a LOOP marker post on the right, ignore a track from the left through some wooden barriers. Here, you ignore a right bearing broad grassy path up towards the complex of houses up on a rise (a Premier Inn Hotel, The View **Epping Forest** Visitor Centre and Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge) but *veer right* just a few metres after along a wide grass path (100°). In 100m cross a path down from those buildings and in another 180m cross a more major track junction (SWC 259 - The Epping Forest Centenary Walk crosses here) and in 60m *veer left* along a clear wide grassy track (45°). In 230m at a T-junction with a wide gravel track, *turn left* for 20m to a right turn along an engineered gravel path.

Here you have a choice:

To cut out the loop around Connaught Water: continue ahead and in 80m cross a ditch where a broad grassy track joins from the left and *bear right* along a wide gravel track (the **Green Ride**), with a ditch on the right. In 10m you cross the **Cuckoo Brook** on the track (this drains the woods up to the left and Chingford Plain behind). In 350m a narrow path joins from the right out of the trees, some 20m before a four-way track junction; this is the Main Walk. Pick up the directions below at the asterisk *).

For the Main Walk, *turn right* along the engineered path and in 120m cross the **Cuckoo Brook** on the path (this drains the woods up to the left and Chingford Plain behind), just by its joining of the **River Ching** a little to the right. Follow the path along the Ching for 60m to the outflow weir of **Connaught Water** (named after the Duke of Connaught, Ranger of the Forest). *Turn right* along the wheel chair friendly engineered path across the Ching and in 180m *turn left* with the path along the lakeshore by a car park in its south easterly corner. *Turn left* again in 25m and continue along the lake past some maps of Connaught Water and a waymarked trail (the **Willow Trail**). In 220m continue along a broad wooden boardwalk crossing the north easterly corner of the lake.

At the far end of the boardwalk in 75m, *turn left* at a T-junction with an engineered path. In 140m you cross **the infant River Ching**. In 15m pass a bench and in 40m another one (without a back rest), then in 30m a third one. In 20m from this third bench, **[!]** *turn right* away from the gravel engineered path into a small clearing with some tree trunks looking as if they have been arranged as a seating area and in 20m follow a forest path (which may be a little difficult to follow with leaves on the ground) through a lightly wooded area for 200m. You emerge in a grassy area and *turn left* to a broad gravel track 15m away and *turn right* along it.

*) Immediately ignore a left turning broad forest track and in 20m you get to a four-way junction of broad forest rides.

Here you have a choice:

For another Shortcut, *turn left* with a broken marker post with a yellow arrow leaning against a tree. This is the **Jubilee Ride**. In 75m (that's 40m before the track crosses

the Cuckoo Brook) **[!]** *turn right* along a narrow path (the first couple of steps are through a depression and may be under water). In 50m the path is close to the wildly meandering **Cuckoo Brook** and you *bear left* to follow the brook for 200m, always a little above the river to avoid mud-prone sections. Ignore any right turns and carefully negotiate a mud-prone section for 50m. In another 20m *turn left* at a T-junction with a clear forest path. Pick up the directions below at the double asterisk ******).

For the Main Walk, *turn right* along the broad gravel ride and in 110m cross the Ching on the track and start a gentle ascent. In 140m the track levels out by the magnificent **Grimston's Oak** on the left in a clearing (named after a 19th century cricketer), where a forest path joins from the right. This is an oak pollard thought to be 350 years old, and sometimes referred to as '**The Monarch of the Forest**'. In 40m *curve to the left* with the main ride, ignoring a right turn. In 25m by a marker post with a red arrow, **[!]** *turn left* off the gravel ride (which turns right), and follow a wide, grassy forest path. In 15m ignore a right turn and in 60m (where a path joins from the left from Grimston's Oak), you *turn right* along a clear forest path (295°). In 50m go through a mud-prone area for 35m, which in fact is a hard-to-spot **crossing of the Ching**.

In 30m you *turn right* with the path. In 70m pass a reed-filled pond on the left, with the clear if shallow valley of the Ching down on the right. In 50m, just before reaching the Ching again, *turn hard left* along a clear path and in 30m pass the top end of the pond. In another 30m you cross the **Green Ride** and pass a couple of marker posts (red and yellow arrows) and in 10m ignore a left turning path. *Veer to the right* on the level along a broad forest path, with an area of pollarded hornbeams to the right and a long reed-filled pond on the left (initially hidden by trees), staying on the left of two initially parallel paths, close to the pond on the left. This is in fact just the first of several shallow ponds; they are the **Cuckoo Pits**. In 240m (from the crossing of the Green Ride) the path starts to descend into a shallow valley.

******) At the bottom of the valley, cross the **Cuckoo Brook** on a three-plank bridge and continue in the same direction, initially between rows of pollarded hornbeams (255°). There are many paths continuing broadly southwesterly (245°) through this lovely part of the forest (**Bury Wood**), but stay towards the left edge of the pollarded area. In 150m at least three of those paths converge and in 90m you reach the end of the pollarded area by a clear fork in the path.

[Note: The remaining route through Bury Wood contains several forks and turns along minor paths, but fear ye not to get lost, as you are now passing through a roughly 250m wide tongue of wood between the car wide gravel **Jubilee Ride** away to the left and the similarly wide **Three Plank Ride** away to the right, with **Bury Road** 400m ahead. *If you lose the described route*, as long as you continue broadly westerly, you will come out on either Jubilee Ride (*turn right* along it to Bury Road and *turn right* uphill for 220m along a broad gravel track this side of the road until you get to a LOOP marker post where a path joins from the right) or on Three Plank Ride (*turn left* along it to Bury Road and *turn right* uphill along a wide gravel track this side of the road).]

Fork right (265°) and in 70m *bear right* along a well-used earth path (300°). In 60m cross a path and in 30m ignore a left fork. In 30m *fork right* and in 150m another path joins from the left behind. In 60m you come out at a T-junction with a broad track with **Bury Road** just a little beyond separated by trees, and **by a LOOP marker post**. *Turn right* uphill along the track. In 50m **Three Plank Ride** joins from the right. In 70m *turn left* to cross the road (there is a **Sewardstonebury** village sign away to the right) and continue past **Gate no. 99** (Woodman's Ride) along a broad path to the left of garden fences through **The Hawk Wood**. In 250m, just after the corner of the last garden fence, *turn right* along a narrow path out of the wood and in 30m *turn left* along a residential road with a public footpath signpost.

In 80m the tarmac discontinues by some horse stables on the left and in 25m you go through a wooden kissing gate to the right of a metal field gate and continue along a fenced grassy path to the right of some paddocks, with the rising **Yates' Meadow** ahead, and with views to the left into the **Lea Valley**. In 220m go through the boundary bramble growth and then a wooden gate into the meadow and walk uphill along the right-hand boundary. In 240m in the top-right corner of the meadow, *turn left* along a permissive path. You have fine views on the left across a shallow valley to **The Hawk Wood**, with the wooded **Pole Hill** rising to the right of it. Ahead is the also wooded **Yardley Hill**. In the distance you can see parts of the **London Skyline**, some of the **reservoirs in the Lea Valley** as well as the higher grounds and buildings in **North London**. You pass a wooden bench and follow the grassy ridge curving to the left a little. After 370m in the meadow you come to a gap in the boundary growth.

Here you have a choice:

For an Extension Loop over Yardley Hill (including more complete views of the London Skyline), go through the gap, cross a wide grassy track (the LOOP and the Greenwich Meridian Trail run along it) and continue ahead **to the left of a marker post** along a narrow path through the wooded hilltop (i.e.: not along the other path to the right of the post). In 130m cross a clear path and continue through an area of low trees and branches and in 140m *bear left* up a small incline with the path. In 20m you emerge in a grassy area and *turn right* through it. Stay close to the right-hand bushy growth and the views of the **London Skyline** get wider, as **Canary Wharf** comes into view as well. You *turn left* downhill through the grass and near the bottom of the clearing *turn left* on the level, in a narrowing grassy clearing and with some houses visible away to the right through the trees.

In 120m *fork right* to enter a lightly wooded area and follow the path gently downhill. In 200m you pass a high marker post (without markers) and in 40m meet an often-muddy and always well-churned broad bridle track, with a narrow path opposite crossing a ditch on an earth bridge into a large meadow. Enter the meadow (**Daisy Plain**) and walk up its right-hand side, negotiating some scattered trees. In 250m you pass a LOOP marker post and continue further uphill through the wood. The Main Walk has joined from the left behind. Pick up the directions below at the triple asterisk ***).

For the Main Walk, *turn left* downhill within the meadow and in 200m in its bottom corner, *turn right* through a gap and *turn left* downhill along a wide gravel track (the LOOP and the Greenwich Meridian Trail run along it). In 40m *bear right* to cross a track coming down through the trees on the right and in 30m *turn left* between wooden barriers to cross a ditch and enter a large clearing in the wooded hillslope (**Daisy Plain**). You pass initially through the middle of the clearing (with some scattered trees), gently uphill, but then *veer right* to leave it in 200m in its top right-hand corner. In 40m pass a LOOP marker post to continue further uphill through the wood. The First Extension has joined from the right behind.

***) In 140m you emerge at a track junction in a clearing by a 'No horse riding beyond this notice' sign on the left (and pointing backwards).

Here you have a choice:

For the Second Extension, *turn right* (235°) along a clear forest track into a lightly wooded area. In 120m the track crosses a path and starts a gentle descent, and in 170m you *turn left* along a mud-prone path on the level along the wooded slope of **Pole Hill**. Ignore several paths to the left as well as some crossing paths and in 400m you emerge from the wood into a clearing, with the wooded slope only on the left now. You

have two of the reservoirs in the **Lea Valley** away down to the right (the **King George's** and **William Girling** reservoirs), and fine views of the **London Skyline** ahead. Continue along the trees on the left and in 100m *turn up to the left* along a broad grassy track (i.e.: ignore a narrow path up to the left just a little earlier). In 180m another track joins from the right and you *bear left* to **the top of Pole Hill** at 91m above sea level, some 120m away. There is **a trig point** (on the Meridian Line) **and an Obelisk** with a couple of informative plaques (on what was then thought to be the Meridian Line). The Main Walk joins through a linear grassy clearing along the ridge. Pick up the directions below at the quadruple asterisk ********).

For the Main Walk, continue ahead up **Pole Hill**. In 40m *fork left* and in 60m pass a golf green on the left. In 60m the terrain has levelled out and you *bear right* along a path joining from the left. This continues as a car wide track and in 20m you have the **Chingford Plain** on the left, with a golf fairway immediately to the left (played from in front). In 90m you re-enter trees and in 115m ignore a right hand grassy fork and curve gently to the left with the wide track. In 40m the track turns hard left with houses visible about 50m ahead through the trees, by a grass track turning right uphill.

Here you have a choice:

For an immediate return to Chingford Station, *turn left* with the track along the golf course and follow it for 800m parallel with a road away on the right to the junction with **Bury Road**. *Turn right* along it and then right again along **Station Road** to the station.

For the Main Walk, *turn right* along the grass path. In 35m you continue ahead along a narrow path uphill, crossing a path. In 90m you reach the top of the wooded **Pole Hill** and *turn left* along a clear path along the curved ridge. In 60m you emerge in a linear grassy clearing and continue through it towards **a trig point** (on the Meridian Line) **and an Obelisk** with a couple of informative plaques (on what was then thought to be the Meridian Line) 70m away, at 91m above sea level, with the trees framing a view south towards the London Skyline. The Second Extension joins from the far side of the hill.

******) For the longer loop through town past a wider selection of tea places**, go briefly downhill in a southerly direction (i.e.: continue ahead from the direction of the Main Walk, go back down if you came up along the Second Extension) and more or less immediately *turn left* downhill along a clear wide grassy break in the trees. Follow a path down to a road on the fringes of Chingford. At the road (Mornington Road to the left, Woodberry Way to the right), *turn right* a little uphill along **Woodberry Way** and follow it for 470m to a T-junction with the busy **King's Head Hill**. *Turn left* up the road and in 35m you pass the entrance of **The King's Head** pub.

Continue along the road past the police station on the left with a war memorial across to the right. Cross a busy four-way road junction at a set of lights and continue along the pavement of **The Green** (a road). In 30m *fork left* away from the road along a broad tarmac path leading to the left of a walled churchyard. In 110m you pass the entrance of **St. Peter and St. Paul Church** on the right and in 30m cross **Carbis Close**, continuing to the left of the village green. In 50m you pass an info panel on the green and the town, pass the assembly hall and library as well as a **bus stop for services to the station** and continue along **Station Road** for 450m, past many tea options.

For the Main Walk and the shortest route to the station, turn back from the trig point and obelisk into the top-of-the-hill clearing and *turn right* along a grass path. In 25m *fork right* downhill towards some houses and in 130m continue along the residential **Connaught Avenue**. Ignore all crossings and roads off to the left and right and follow the avenue for 700m to its junction with **Station Road**, right opposite the train station. **Tea options** can be found along this road, mostly to the right.