

Dagenham Parks, Rivers and Ponds		
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Dagenham Parks, Rivers and Ponds

Start & Finish: Dagenham East Underground Station

Length: 10.1 km/6.3 mi

Ascent: negligible.

Time: 2 ¼ hours

Transport: Dagenham East Underground Station is in Zone 5, on the District Line to Upminster. Journey time from Aldgate East is 32 minutes, from Victoria 49 minutes. You can shave off a few minutes by taking mainline trains from Fenchurch Street (or from Limehouse or West Ham) to Barking for part of the journey.

Walk Notes:

This is an exploration of several linked green areas in an otherwise densely populated East London suburb, leading through some Local Nature Reserves, two Country Parks, an ex-landfill site and ex-quarry, a river floodplain and along the recently restored beds of the Wantz Stream and the Beam and Rom Rivers. This walk has a large variety of landscapes, from acid grassland, fenland and woodland to marshland and sandy shrubland via woods and a tranquil meandering valley.

Beam Parklands provides functional flood prevention and public open space for the community, while the Beam Valley Country Park was formerly derelict land after having been partly worked for gravel, leaving a wide diversity of habitats, with wet and dry grassland, tall herbs and scrub, and one small area of willow woodland, a scarce habitat in London. The Chase Local Nature Reserve has large areas of marshland and contains 6 of only 600 mature female Black Poplar trees left in the UK as well as a fenced off Bird Sanctuary (The Slack). Eastbrookend Country Park, now an interesting, undulating landscape, was formerly a gravel quarry then a dumping ground for the rubble left over from the blitz.

A shortcut at the northerly end of the walk reduces the length by 2.3 km.

Refreshments

Gunays Café 6 Beadles Parade, Rainham Road South, Dagenham, London RM10 8YL (020 8595 2518). Open daily to 17.00.

The Pipe Major 1 Yewtree Avenue, Dagenham, London RM10 7XS (020 3370 0981, <https://www.pipemajorpubdagenham.co.uk/>). A Marston's pub, open all day every day.

Enjoy Café 532 Rainham Road South, Dagenham, London RM10 7XD (07960 325 606). Open to 17.00 (16.00 Sun).

Notes

Beam Parklands

Beam Parklands is a 53 hectare site which provides functional flood prevention and public open space for the community. The site is a floodplain of the River Beam and is used for flood storage, protecting homes, businesses, schools and the nearby Barking power station (which supplies 1/3 of London's power). Archaeological excavation of Beam Parklands discovered that the site had previously been used in the late Iron Age and Roman era for settlement and to manufacture pottery. Later the site was the origins of Dagenham which sprawled out from these early Saxon developments, which were also one of the earliest in Essex. It was used for wide scale agricultural purposes throughout history and resulted in the construction of a windmill next to the river (no longer standing).

In 1894 West Ham County Borough Council purchased the Rookery Farm in the area as a site for a smallpox hospital, which opened in 1899. It consisted of single-storey brick buildings surrounding a quadrangle. [The quadrangle of trees is still on site today and surrounds the mound in the centre of Beam Parklands.] In 1912 the smallpox hospital was converted into a TB hospital and renamed the Dagenham Sanatorium, later Dagenham Hospital, but remained a specialist TB hospital. In 1980 it had become a geriatric hospital and in 1989 it closed for good and was subsequently demolished. The site was then badly neglected for many years and became a magnet for anti-social behaviour before the Land Trust took it on and opened it up to the public in 2011. Now Beam Parklands is the newest park in Dagenham with a variety of habitats including grassland, fenland and woodland along the recently restored parts of both the Wantz stream and the River Beam, while also providing flood storage washland (holding 450,000m³) & improved flood banks. Open daily till dusk. <http://www.beamparklands.co.uk/>

Romford Canal

The first of many proposals for the Romford Canal was made in 1809 although construction work did not commence until 1875 and then only to cease permanently 2 years later after the company was unable to raise sufficient capital to complete the work. In the early 19th century the Romford area was one of the main sources of potatoes for the London market and a canal was proposed from the Thames to Romford and Collier Row to take the crops into London and bring back manure on the return journey. Surprisingly, in 1875, at a time when many canals had already closed or were closing under the threat of railway competition, an act was obtained for the construction of a canal to Romford.

Part of the canal had been used for WWII defences and was infilled soon after the war. Remnants of tank traps and pillboxes can still be seen though only very limited evidence of the former canal has survived.

River Rom/River Beam

The River Rom, also known as the River Beam below its confluence with the Ravensbourne, is a tributary of the Thames that flows through east London suburbs. Starting in Essex, the Rom is the continuation of the Bourne Brook after Bournebridge, Stapleford Abbots in the Epping Forest which rises 5 km northeast in Brentwood. Throughout the northern section, its valley has been designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. It then takes an almost straight south-flowing course and further downstream in the Beam Valley is a mixture of woodlands, acid grassland, ponds and marsh areas, a habitat for many types of wildlife. The Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham and of Havering plan to develop the area to further improve the conservation interest and to create new opportunities for recreation and education. The River Beam is home to the water vole, while the grassland in the valley includes rare and endangered plants.

Rom is a back-formation from the name of the town of Romford, which is located on a crossing of the river. The name 'Romford' is first recorded in 1177 as *Romfort*, which is formed from 'rūm' and 'ford' and means "the wide or spacious ford". The name of the river is first recorded in the 13th century as *le Markediche*, meaning 'boundary ditch' and referring to the ancient boundary between the parishes of Dagenham and Hornchurch. A more recent name for part of the river of *the Beam* originated from an early bridge over the river, consisting of a beam of wood and first mentioned in 1299.

Beam Valley Country Park

Beam Valley Country Park is a 74 hectare park in Dagenham. Most of it is designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) called Beam Valley. The park was formerly derelict land after having been partly worked for gravel, leaving a wide diversity of habitats, with wet and dry grassland, tall herbs and scrub, and one small area of willow woodland, a scarce habitat in London as well as the River Beam and the Wantz Stream. Birds found on the site include kingfishers, reed warblers, reed buntings and skylarks. There is archaeological evidence that the site has been used since the Stone Age, and it also has a Roman pottery kiln.

Eastbrookend Country Park & The Chase Local Nature Reserve

From the 1920's to the 1960's the area was a gravel quarry, then through to the 70's, it was used as a dumping ground and filled with the rubble left over from the blitz. The creation of Eastbrookend Country Park started in the 1990s with large scale earth moving and tree planting to develop an interesting, undulating landscape. The park officially opened in 1995.

The Chase Local Nature Reserve contains 6 of only 600 mature female Black Poplar trees left in the UK. An area called The Slack is fenced off to ensure that the birds and wildlife are not disturbed.

<http://www.dagenhamchaselnr.org.uk/home/index.php>

WALK DIRECTIONS

Alight at **Dagenham East** station and walk up the steps to exit and *turn right* down Rainham Road South. Ignore several residential roads turning right: Shafter Road, Dewey Road and Sandown Avenue (twice). [!] In another 70m *turn right* along the next residential road, **Crown Street**. In 100m where the road turns right, continue in the same direction along a tarmac path and in 30m *turn left* with it. In 30m *turn right* to continue along the continuation of Crown Street and in 70m *turn left* into the churchyard of **Dagenham Parish Church**, a Local Nature Reserve.

Keep to the left of the church (usually shut) and leave the churchyard in 180m at the opposite end in its right hand near corner. *Turn left* along **Church Lane** and in 30m cross a road at a T-junction and *turn left* along its opposite pavement. In 170m cross the busy **Ballards Road** a little to the right at a set of lights and *turn left* along its opposite pavement. In 10m *turn right* through a squeeze gate into **Beam Parklands** and follow a tarmac path to the right of the **Wantz Stream**. In 60m at a T-junction with another path, *turn left* briefly along it and *turn right* immediately to continue in the previous direction, with some sports fields on the right ('The Leys').

In 280m the path turns left into some trees and in 110m it re-emerges into an open area. In 30m you *bear left* with the path where a couple of narrow grassy paths join from the right behind and in 70m *turn left* along a clear grassy path by a wooden bench on the right. In 40m you *bear right* with the path (now an engineered sandy path) running along a raised grassy bank, a flood containment bank. You have the reed-fringed **Wantz Stream** below on the left with some wooded areas, and an undulating area beyond it, rising to a tree-bordered mound, the **former site of a hospital** (initially a smallpox hospital, later for geriatric patients).

In 120m ignore steps down from the flood wall to the left and right and in 30m *bear left* with the path and bank. In 100m you *turn left* at a four-way junction of paths, cross a two-railed bridge over the Wantz Stream and in 20m pass an info panel on the **Beam Parklands** site and continue along the gravel path. Ignore a right turning grassy path in 110m and in 30m at the corner of the tree quadrangle bordering the ex-hospital site, *turn right* along another grassy path. In 70m you cross another path (tarmac on the left, grass on the right) and in another 60m *turn left* with the path.

You have the course of the never completed **Romford Canal** down below behind some trees, and – further away to the right – the reed- and tree-lined course of the **River Beam** as well as some flood storage basins, and a housing development behind that. Visible further ahead on the right is the **Mardyke Farm landfill** site. The path converges with the treeline below and in 280m at a T-junction with a tarmac path you *turn right* to cross the course of the Romford Canal and in another 20m *turn left* along a tarmac path at a T-junction. You now have the **River Beam** away on the right (mostly lined by trees) and walk up the narrower northerly end of the **Beam Parklands**.

In 500m go through a squeeze gate and *turn left* along **Rainham Road South** and in 30m *turn right* to cross the road at some lights and walk through another squeeze gate a little to the left to enter the **Beam Valley Country Park**. You follow a tarmac path for 120m through a grassy area, with some waterworks on the right, but then enter a more open area, with the **Beam** soon on the right, with plenty of reed beds and wilder grassy areas on this side of the river and with a large pond on the other side. The path curves a little to the left in 400m and in 200m runs close to a skip and recycling business on the left and after another 80m you reach a signposted three-way junction of paths. Ignore a left turn to 'Dagenham East Station (1/2 mile)' and continue in the direction of '**Eastbrookend Country Park** (1 mile)'.

In 50m by a gun emplacement on the right, ignore a squeeze gate on the left (to the left of a double metal field gate) and *turn right*. In 150m at a slightly raised triangular green with a bench and a metal sculpture (**'Equal Rights and Equal Pay'**), ignore a right turning path towards a wide two-railed bridge over The Beam (although it is a worthy excursion into the **Bretons Park** area across the river). The path then curves left around the wood on the left and in 250m at a bend in the path – with the fenced off Underground and Railway lines in front – you *turn left* with a signpost.

In 60m *turn right* to go over the overbridge across the railway lines. On the other side you *turn right* immediately along a narrow path between the fenced off railway lines and a fenced off grassy area on the left. In 120m at the corner of the fence on the left you walk through bike barriers as the landscape opens up and you enter **The Chase Local Nature Reserve**. The low lying area stretching away down to the left is called **Crowfoot Marsh** and named after the Common Water-Crowfoot, which grows here. Continue initially along the railway fence but in 110m *veer away* from it and follow an indistinct path through the marsh land on higher ground on a bearing of 50°.

In 40m you pick up a clear gravel path in the same direction along the left edge of the raised ground and in 160m the path curves a little to the left through a clump of trees and bears right again to cross a plank bridge over a streamlet and you *veer right* a little. In 100m leave Crowfoot Marsh through a wooden kissing gate to the left of a metal field gate. There are now **two good routes** through this northerly part of The Chase, but it is an area overused by a nearby riding school and therefore most paths are deeply rutted and often muddy. The easterly one along the **Rivers Beam**/ then **Rom** and past **The Black Poplar Wood** can be extremely bad, so only the westerly one is described here (the other one can be found on the route map though).

Follow a clear path in a broadly northerly direction (20°) towards some trees 40m away and then follow the meandering path through the trees. In 100m the path curves to the left towards a wooden fence to in 40m join another path that here runs along a boardwalk for a short section. *Turn right* and continue with the often indistinct path, somewhat to the right of the (fenced) pond **The Slack**, a Bird Sanctuary. In 250m you pass a corner of the fence around The Slack where there is a wooden field gate in the fence and in another 40m you reach an indistinct path junction just before the corner of another, smaller pond (**Hooks Hall Pond**).

Here you have a choice:

For a shortcut (cuts 2.3 km), you *turn left* and in 90m enter trees through a squeeze gate and across a two-railed plank bridge. In 40m you cross another two-railed plank bridge and in 60m *turn left* in a southerly direction along a broad grassy path (or along the raised ground on the left, for better views of The Slack). In 240m walk through a fence gap and *turn left* for 25m, then (*before* a new wooden fence on the right hand side) *turn right* back into **Crowfoot Marsh**. *Bear right* through the marshland on a broad bearing of 220°, always staying to the right of that new wooden fence and eventually heading towards the corner of a metal fenced grassy area. In 240m pick up a wooden boardwalk near the right corner of the fenced area and in 60m ascend an earth bank on a stepped path to leave the area through a squeeze gate. Pick up the directions below at the asterisk *).

For the main walk, you *turn up to the right* and then *veer slightly to the left* keeping close to some trees on the left. In 210m you reach a car wide track in front of a fenced-in wood. *Turn left* along the track with the fence on your right and in 40m (30m before a metal field gate leading onto a road) *turn right* through a grassy area with the wood still on your right and in 50m *turn left* through a double squeeze gate onto a road (**The Chase**). *Turn right* past an info panel on **The Chase Local Nature Reserve** on your

right and then *turn left* through a squeeze gate with a metal Footpath 18 signpost ('leading to Footpath 17 Dagenham Road') and follow an – initially – gravel path which hugs the meandering **River Rom** through a surprisingly untouched and tranquil valley.

In 450m where there are some houses visible a few hundred metres ahead, **[!]** *turn left* along a boardwalk through a grassy boggy area and in 75m cross a mire over a two-railed wooden bridge and enter **Eastbrookend Country Park** in its north easterly corner. In 100m you have some houses away to the right and in 200m you pass a metal Footpath 18-signpost (leading to 'Footpath 17 Dagenham Road'). In another 50m the landscape opens out and you can see the corner of a large pond on the left. *Fork left* to the pond and in 30m *turn right* along the water side path along **Chase Waters**, a fishing pond. In 170m, just past the far corner of Chase Waters, *turn left* at a T-junction of gravel paths and continue with **Eastbrook Pond** on your right.

In 80m *turn right* at a T-junction (the left turn leads to a promontory with fine views across Chase Waters) and in 200m *turn right* at a T-junction with a tarmac lane (The Chase). In 25m *turn left* through a squeeze gate in a metal fence along a tarmac path past a large car park to **The Millenium Centre**, which you pass to its left in 75m (toilets but no refreshments). In 30m from the far end of the building *turn right* at a four-way junction of gravel paths and in 20m *veer left* across a grassy area to the left of a fenced area. In 80m *veer left* where a gravel path joins from the right behind and in 60m *bear left* along a grassy path where the main path turns right. In 30m ignore a left turn but in another 10m *fork left* and in 20m *fork left again*.

In 70m *bear left* along a gravel path and head for a wooded area and in 60m pass **Wheelers Pond** on your right and the wood on the left. In 40m at a four-way junction at the corner of the wood, *turn left* along its fringe and in 120m *turn left* at a path T-junction, by **Tom Thumb** (pond) on the right. In 20m *fork right* further along the pond and in 110m *bear left* with the path where another path joins from the right. In 50m you can see a larger pond away on the left (**Bardag**) and in another 200m ignore a clear right turning gravel path to continue with Bardag pond to the left.

In 50m *turn right* back into **The Chase LNR** and in 20m walk through a squeeze gate into **Crowfoot Marsh**. The aim now is the near right corner exit 180m away as the crow flies: continue in the same direction towards some trees and in 40m go through them, *veering left* with the path over a plank bridge; *bear right* to continue in the previous (southerly) direction through a more open area; in 90m by a new wooden fence *turn right* along a wooden boardwalk and in 60m ascend an earth bank on a stepped path to leave the area through a squeeze gate.

*) You *turn left* along a narrow path with a high metal fence on the left (signed 'Footpath 25 leading to Western Avenue'). In 200m re-cross the railway lines over the overbridge back into **Beam Valley Country Park** and *turn right* on the other side along a car wide gravel track (signposted 'Dagenham East Station ½ mile'). The track follows the railway line fence closely for nearly 700m and then veers to the left to continue between grassy hummocks and trees. In another 250m you leave the park through a squeeze gate and *turn right* towards the main road.

Gunays Café is down the left along **Rainham Road South**, else *turn right* to find **Dagenham East Station** on your left and **The Pipe Major** pub another 100m along the road and the **Enjoy Café** another 100m further along, at the end of a row of shops.