

Lesnes Abbey Woods with Bostall Woods (Abbey Wood Circular)		
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Lesnes Abbey Woods with Bostall Woods (Abbey Wood Circular)

Start & Finish: Abbey Wood Station

Length: 5.2 km/3.2 mi with 127m ascent or 9.6 km/6.0 mi with 214m ascent/descent.

Time: 1 ½ hours or 2 ¾ hours

Rating: 1 out of 10 or 2 out of 10

Transport: Abbey Wood Station is in Zone 4 and the local station for the Thamesmead suburb. It is served by Main Line Services on the North Kent Line from Charing Cross and Cannon Street to the Medway area and also by some Thameslink services (journey time from London Bridge is about 30 minutes), and it will also be the south easterly terminus for Crossrail (journey time from Liverpool Street will be 17 minutes).

Walk Notes:

This is an undulating route on the boundary of the Boroughs of Bexley (Lesnes Abbey Woods) and Greenwich (Bostall Woods) in South East London, based upon the atmospheric ruins of Lesnes Abbey, surrounded by a beautiful park with some ornamental gardens and towered over by ancient and secondary woodland, with a high extent of sessile oaks, some large wildflower meadows with bluebells and native wild daffodils in spring and several scenic ponds. A heathland with an Iron Age tumulus and some acid grassland are passed through as well. A longer version leads across a busy road junction on Bostall Hill into Bostall Wood, with its dense sloping woods and deep ravines.

Walk Options:

A longer route also meanders **through Bostall Woods**: 9.6 km/6.0 mi with 214m ascent/descent, **2/10**.

Bus stops on the A 206 near the off-route pubs and on Bostall Hill enable early returns to Abbey Wood, Woolwich or Slade Green stations (see the route map for the exact locations of the bus stops).

Refreshments (600m off route, after 2.3 km of the route):

The Eardley Arms 44 Woolwich Road, *Upper Belvedere, London DA17 5EN* (01322 432 107). Open all day.

The Prince of Wales 13A Woolwich Road, *Upper Belvedere, London DA17 5EE* (01322 433 737). Open all day (Mon-Tue from 14.30). Food served Wed-Sun 12.00-18.00.

Refreshments at the end of the walk:

Chestnuts Kiosk Lesnes Abbey Lodge, *Lesnes Abbey Woods, New Road, Abbey Wood, London SE2 0AX*. Spring opening times (longer in summer): 10.00-16.00 Mon-Fri and 09.00-17.00 Sat-Sun.

Abbey Café 183 Abbey Wood Road, *Abbey Wood, London SE2 9DZ* (020 8312 1277, <https://abbeycafe.business.site/>). Open every day to at least 16.30.

Abbey Arms 31 Wilton Road, *Abbey Wood, London SE2 9RH* (020 8310 1763, <https://www.abbeyarms-se2.co.uk/>). Open Mon-Thu 16.00-late, Fri-Sun all day. Sourdough Pizza and a limited menu offered.

Coffee House at WHSmith Abbey Wood Station, *Abbey Wood*. Open to 20.00 (-19.00 Sat-Sun).

Notes

Abbey Wood Station

Originally opened in 1849, Abbey Wood Station has been rebuilt several times to keep up with the development of the local area and the changing railway network. The last rebuild happened in preparation for the opening of Crossrail, of which Abbey Wood will be the south easterly terminus, with the refurbished station opening on 23 October 2017.

The station was also to be served by the proposed Greenwich Waterfront Transit, however the project was cancelled by the then Mayor of London due to lack of funds. A proposed extension of the Overground from Barking across the river to Thamesmead and Abbey Wood was proposed in 2015 and may yet happen, as an extension from Barking to Barking Riverside has already been confirmed. In 2016, the then Mayor also proposed a DLR extension from Gallions Reach across the river to Thamesmead and Abbey Wood.

Thamesmead

Thamesmead is an area of south-east London, straddling the border between the Boroughs of Greenwich and Bexley. It is located 18 km east of Charing Cross, north-east of Woolwich and west of Erith and mainly consists of social housing built from the mid-1960s onwards on former marshland on the south bank of the Thames. There is some evidence of prehistoric human occupation of the area: flints, animal bones and charcoal were found in bore holes. In Roman times, the river level was significantly lower, and archaeological work revealed evidence of field ditches and pottery and quern stones from Germany dating from around the 3rd or 4th century. After the Roman era, river levels rose again and the area reverted to marshland. Some areas of this marshland were drained by 1279 by the monks of nearby Lesnes Abbey. Later, most of the land area of Thamesmead formed part of the old Royal Arsenal site that extended over Plumstead Marshes and Erith Marshes. Between 1812 and 1816, a canal was built by convicts to take materials such as timber from the River Thames to Woolwich Royal Arsenal. Much of this canal has been filled in, but part remains in Thamesmead West and is now called the Broadwater. A disused lock gate and swing bridge over the canal still exist beside the Thames.

Thamesmead as it is now was built at the end of the 1960s. Efforts were made to solve the social problems that had already started to affect earlier estates. These were believed to be the result of people being uprooted from close-knit working-class communities and sent to estates many miles away, where they did not know anybody. The design of the estates meant that people would see their neighbours more rarely than they would have done in the terraced housing that had been typical in working-class areas. The solution proposed was that once the initial residents had moved in, their families would be given priority for new housing when it became available. Another radical idea was taken from housing complexes in Sweden, where it was believed that lakes and canals reduced vandalism and other crime, mainly among the young. Water was used as a calming influence on the residents.

Thamesmead was designed around futuristic ideas, and indeed looked impressive at first from a distance. It provided walkways between its blocks of housing and later between sections in North Thamesmead, which quickly became littered and abused though, making them unsafe places to walk. Pathways set out for people to walk on were put in without regard to how people would wish to get about. The pre-1974 parts of Thamesmead are a mix of modernist town houses, medium-rise and 12-storey blocks system-built in concrete, which have featured in various films (most famously: *A Clockwork Orange*) due to their 'rough urban look'; the design of the newer buildings is more traditional and in brick.

One of the main problems is Thamesmead's geographical and transport isolation: despite early proposals for the Jubilee Line Extension to go to Thamesmead, via the Isle of Dogs and the Royal Docks, it was not included and the line now heads north to Stratford, despite it also being on the Central line. The main reason cited for this decision was that many workers in Canary Wharf lived in Essex and could change from National Rail to the Jubilee line at Stratford and West Ham.

Thamesmead is also cut off from the north by the Thames and is in the centre of the 25 km gap between the Blackwall Tunnel and the Dartford Tunnel/QE2 Bridge river crossings. Various proposals have been made for a new river crossing, but all plans fell through. Since then, Thamesmead has grown significantly, limiting the number of potential sites for a new river crossing.

Existing plans for more house building will increase the total population to 80,000.

Lesnes Abbey Woods

Lesnes Abbey Woods, sometimes known as Abbey Wood, are an 88 hectares Local Nature Reserve near the ruins of Lesnes Abbey, 69 hectares of which are wood. The woods have several features dating back to the Bronze Age and a fine display of wild bluebells and native daffodils in the Spring. Part of the wood is the Abbey Wood (geological) Site of Special Scientific Interest, an important site for early Tertiary fossils, with some important Palaeocene finds, including one of only two bird fossils found from that era in Britain. Members of the public can dig for fossils in the designated Fossil Pit (with the permission of the ranger). The very old fenced Mulberry Tree is thought to be one of the trees commissioned by James I in an attempt to set up an English silk industry. Unfortunately, the trees planted are the wrong type of Mulberry for that purpose (black rather than white). <https://visitlesnes.co.uk/>
Local community group Lesnes Abbey Conservation Volunteers run practical conservation events to help manage the woodland. <https://lacv.btck.co.uk/>

Lesnes Abbey

Lesnes Abbey is a former abbey, now ruined, in Abbey Wood, in the Borough of Bexley. It is a scheduled ancient monument and was founded in 1178 by Richard de Luci, Chief Justiciar of England, as the Abbey of St Mary and St Thomas the Martyr at Lesnes. It is speculated that this may have been in penance for the murder of Thomas à Becket, in which he was involved. The abbey is situated to the north of the ancient but long-managed Lesnes Abbey Woods that are named after it, just where the land rises above what would originally have been marshland. The Abbott of Lesnes Abbey was an important local landlord, and took a leading part in draining the marshes. It never became a large community, and was closed by Cardinal Wolsey in 1525 as one of the first to be closed, under a licence to suppress monasteries of less than seven inmates. The monastic buildings were all pulled down, except for the Abbott's Lodging.

The LCC purchased the site of the ruins in 1930, which were opened to the public as a park in 1931.

The woods have several features dating back to the Bronze Age and a fine display of wild bluebells and native daffodils in the Spring. The abbey kept fishponds which were fed by a small stream running down through the woods, and these are still visible today though the water level is often low.

<https://www.southlondonclub.co.uk/blog/2017/9/12/a-brief-history-of-lesnes-abbey>

Green Chain Walk

The South East London Green Chain, also known as the Green Chain Walk, originally was a linked system of open spaces between the Thames and Crystal Palace Park, created in 1977 by the four boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Lewisham and Greenwich and the GLC from 300 open spaces to protect them from building activity. The system begins at three places on the Thames: Thames Barrier, Thamesmead and Erith. There are various circular walks along the route, and there is an offshoot from the main route to Chislehurst.

More recently it has been extended to include sections in Southwark, with arms leading to Dulwich and Nunhead Cemetery. Many parts of the system are also part of the Capital Ring route.

<https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/walking/green-chain-walk>

Bostall Wood

Bostall Heath and Woods is an area of 159 hectares of woodland with areas of heathland, adjacent to Lesnes Abbey Woods. The area to the south of the A206 (Bostall Hill) is Bostall Woods and to the north is Bostall Heath. It consists of gorse and broom at the top of Bostall Hill, with dense woods and deep ravines on either side. During the 19th century the Heath was under threat from residential development, but the Metropolitan Board of Works and the London County Council bought up individual sections to combine them into what we see today. Bostall has various meanings, i.e. woody heath. In Sussex the term bostal is given to a steep path, particularly over the Downs.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Walk up some steps at the easterly end of the platforms to leave **Abbey Wood Station** through the beautiful new station building onto the forecourt and – with the busy raised **A2041** ahead and the higher buildings in **Thamesmead** visible to the left – **[!]** *turn hard right* immediately down some steps to the right of the lift shaft leading down to street level, signed '**Wilton Road**'. At the bottom of the steps, with the **Abbey Arms** ahead, *bear left* along Wilton Road and its assortment of shops and fast food outlets. In 100m at the top of the road at a four-way junction, you find the **Abbey Café** 25m away on the right along **Abbey Wood Road**. *Turn left* along **Abbey Road** and in 50m go under the raised A road and cross **Florence Road** to continue in the same direction. In 50m ignore the road forking up to the right, despite it being signed for Lesnes Abbey on a lamp post (this will be the return route at the end of the walk).

Cross the road to its right-hand side at a convenient point and in 170m, opposite **Fossington Road** on the left and 30m before a bus stop, *turn right*, **[!]** **but not** up the first right turn by a three-way signpost ('Link to Green Chain Walk') through a gap in the metal fence and up a grassy path, **[!]** **but instead in another 10m** go through a metal kissing gate and follow a gravel path past a map of **Lesnes Abbey Woods**. You pass a **Dipping Pond** on the left and in 50m a viewing platform extending out into the pond and start to ascend a minor slope. The gravel path curves to the left and now runs parallel to a tarmac path from the right, with a **Monk's Statue** visible on the right beyond the tarmac path, and the two paths cross at a four-way junction. *Bear left* here along the furthest left tarmac path to the left of a wooden-clad building, **The Lodge**.

In 40m ignore a right forking tarmac path, leading directly to the ruins of **Lesnes Abbey**, and – with the higher buildings in **Thamesmead** visible on the left and the **Belvedere Energy-from-Waste Incinerator** ahead in the distance – in another 75m you reach a five-way junction of paths with a large mosaic in the middle of it. The Thamesmead arm of the **Green Chain Walk** (GCW) joins from the left along a raised path over the A road out of Thamesmead. *Bear right* across grass to a fenced **Mulberry Tree** 35m away and find an info panel there. From the tree *turn right* from the previous direction across the grass towards a gap in the crumbling wall of the abbey ruins and in 25m walk through it into the **abbey grounds**. Explore the ruins at leisure (there are occasional small plaques explaining what you are looking at) and leave them by *turning right* 40m away through an archway, back towards **The Lodge**.

In 25m you reach another info point by a tarmac path and *turn left* along the path towards a fenced **ornamental garden**. You pass an artist's impression of what the abbey grounds might have looked like and in 40m go through an elaborate metal gate into the **Monk's Garden**. In 70m at the far end go up some steps and in 10m leave the gardens through another metal gate and *turn left* along a tarmac path. In 40m cross a path leading up to the wood on the right and in 20m *turn left* at a T-junction and follow the fringe of the wood along the gravel path, gently rising. In 60m a path joins from the left and you continue in the same direction at a slightly elevated level above the ruins. In 40m ignore a stepped path on the right up into the woods, while you get increasingly good far views on the left. In 35m you pass an info panel with the floorplan of the abbey, away on the left and in 40m reach the **London Skyline Viewpoint**, with framed views from the high rises in Plumstead and Woolwich, via Canary Wharf (with The Shard and The City just behind), Abbey Wood & Thamesmead to Crossness/Lower Belvedere.

At a T-junction, *turn right* along tarmac (joining the Green Chain Walk) and in 20m ignore a left fork downhill. In another 40m enter **Lesnes Abbey Woods**, now along gravel-and-earth. In 50m *turn left* at a four-way junction, leaving the Green Chain Walk. The path ascends gently and in 40m curves to the right to descend and in 60m you pass **The Green Man** timber carving on a tree on the left and in 15m ignore a faint

left fork. In 70m *fork left* with the main path, away from the fenced wildflower area on the right and in 30m – at a staggered six-way junction – you continue in the same direction with a GCW signpost ('Leather Bottle $\frac{3}{4}$ m', due E). You start to re-ascend through the wood, soon along a stepped path, and curve to the right with the path and in 300m reach a **large heathland clearing** at the top of the rise.

Turn left at a T-junction with a GCW marker post and in 15m you reach a four-way junction of paths by an info panel on **Heathland & Tumulus**, with the (much diminished) fenced **Bronze Age burial mound** in question being 20m ahead of you. Here now follows a 200m loop through the lovely heathland, getting you back to this junction in a couple of minutes: *turn left* at the junction and in 50m *turn right*, ignoring the path's continuation back into the woods. Ignore a minor left fork in 20m and in another 40m by another GCW marker post (this is the **Erith arm of the GCW**) *turn right* at a T-junction with another path coming up from the left. In 60m, at the corner of a fence on the right surrounding the tumulus, *turn right* with the GCW, pass the tumulus and in 40m *turn left* at the four-way junction passed earlier. [But *turn right* if you have omitted the 200m loop.] In 50m by an info panel on SE London's heathlands *bear right* at a T-junction and in 100m reach an exit from the woods into a housing estate.

Here you have a choice:

For a detour to the two off route pubs (600m each way), leave the wood and walk along the residential road and in 200m at a T-junction with **Woolwich Road** (the A206), *turn left* along its pavement, with **bus stops either side** of this junction (for services to Woolwich or Slade Green stations). In 390m at a four-way junction of roads you find **The Eardley Arms** on the left and **The Prince of Wales** on the right.

For the continuation of the route, *turn hard right* along the wood's edge. In 50m *turn down to the right* along an earthen path back into the wood (345°), going steeply downhill. You gently curve to the left with the path and in 220m at a four-way junction continue in the same direction and in 15m pass an info panel and the entrance to the fenced **Chalk Pit** on the left. Ignore a right turn and go steeply up the wooded ridge, with the Chalk Pit on your left. In 200m at the top of the rise at a four-way junction of paths, the **Fossil Pit** is 180m away to the right and is **worth an out-and-back**. *Turn left* along the wooded ridge and in 160m at a four-way junction by a wooden bench away on the right, *turn right* past the wooden bench and in 30m *fork left* with a blue-ringed marker post with a black arrow to pass the pretty **Conduit Pond** in 30m.

Cross the pond outflow on the earthen path and re-ascend. In 80m the path begins to level out at a three-way junction and you *turn left* to continue slightly uphill. In 70m ignore a left turn and descend towards an often-audible road. In 80m go through a metal kissing gate at the upper edge of the wood and cross **New Road** and go through another metal kissing gate back into the wood on the other side, steeply up a stepped path. In 80m *turn left* at a T-junction (in 20m ignore the steep descent on the right over tree routes towards another pond) and in 110m at the edge of this part of the wood, *turn right* at a T-junction. In 30m at a four-way junction *turn right* downhill towards the pond and in 70m you reach the perimeter fence of **Pine Pond** and *veer right* to the right of the pond. In 60m, by a bench, *turn left* along the pond (the GCW joins from up ahead out of the wood) and cross its outflow and re-ascend. In 50m you reach the top of the rise at a five-way junction of paths.

Here you have a choice:

For the Longer Walk including a meandering route through Bostall Wood, *turn left* uphill with the GCW along the path and in 160m leave the wood through a metal

kissing gate left of a car wide metal barrier and *turn right* along the pavement of **Hurst Lane**. Pick up the directions below under **Extension**.

For the Main Walk, *turn right* downhill.

***)** In 70m *turn right* downhill along stepped path and in 50m pass a small pond and *turn left* at a T-junction on the far side of the pond. You are back on the GCW and in 70m *fork left* and in 130m go through a metal kissing gate and cross **New Road** to go back into the wood on the other side through another metal kissing gate. In 30m at a fork continue in the same direction with the GCW, gently uphill and in 120m *turn left* at a crosspaths, back down towards the abbey ruins. In 170m you emerge from the wood with the **Monk's Garden** just ahead, and *turn left* along the gravel path along the fringe of the wood. The path curves around to the right in 50m to continue as a tarmac path in another 10m (take the right fork).

In 120m – at the far end of the garden just before **The Lodge** – either *turn right* for the **Chestnuts Kiosk**, or (to continue the walk) *turn left* down some steps and along a tarmac path. In 40m *fork left* again at the four-way junction crossed early in the walk, with the **Monk's Statue** away on the left. In 50m leave the park through a large metal kissing gate to the left of a car wide gate and in 60m go past metal bollards and *turn right* along **New Road's** pavement. In 170m *turn left* along **Abbey Road** and re-trace the start of the walk, passing the **Abbey Café** (25m off route) and the **Abbey Arms** to **Abbey Wood Station** with its **Coffee House at WHSmith**.

There is also a **café in the large Sainsbury's** on the far side of the station.

Extension

In 75m *turn left* with a GCW sign on a CCTV camera post up a residential road through the **Orbit Bexley** estate and in 100m (there is a **bus stop visible on the main road ahead**) *turn right* with the residential road and a GCW sign on a lamp post and in 50m *turn left* along the A road to a pedestrian crossing at a four-way junction with the A206 (Woolwich Road/Bostall Hill) and *turn right* there across the A road and **[!]** *turn right* back down Knee Hill (road) on the other side. In 40m *bear left* along a tarmac drive with a GCW signpost and in 70m *turn left* along a narrow path through trees with a GCW signpost ('Bostall Woods ¼ m'). In 120m *turn right* along Bostall Hill (road). In 40m *turn left* carefully across the road with a GCW sign and walk along the left-hand tree-lined boundary of a large open grassy area (**Clam Field** on the OS map).

You pass a GCW marker post en route and in 130m *turn right* along the treeline by another marker post. In 80m *bear right* with another marker post and in 60m you reach an overview map of this stretch of the GCW by a car park. *Turn left* across **Longleigh Lane** and **[!]** go past a GCW three-way signpost ('East Wickham Open Space ¾ m' will be your direction, but not yet here) and **[!]** 25m further along continue in the same direction at a fork with a GCW marker post (195°), ignoring the right fork (this will be the return route). In 30m pass another marker post and *fork right* to descend through **Bostall Wood** down a stepped section. In 25m the two forks re-join and you **[!]** *turn right* immediately (275°) along a wide level path (while the GCW descends to continue to the south easterly corner of the wood and leaves the area towards East Wickham Open Space).

The path contours the wooded hillside for a while, with the continuation of the GCW visible down below on the left. In 240m at a staggered five-way junction, ignore a first path joining from the right above and behind, and a little further on take the furthest right of the other three paths, more or less in the same direction and on the level initially (290°). In 160m ignore a minor left turn downhill and in another 50m you get views of houses on the other side of a steep valley and some road noise drifting up from **Wickham Lane**, as the path curves to the right. In 120m *turn right* with the path and in another 120m you reach a holloway running down to the left at a four-way path junction, with the GCW joining along the path opposite.

Cross the holloway and follow the GCW along a narrow path, which gently contours the wooded hillside, curving slowly to the right. In 140m* ignore a faint path uphill and in another 90m where the GCW veers left downhill towards the fringe of the wood by some houses, you follow the path around to the right, on the level. In 30m the path curves to the right and ascends a low rise and in 60m at the top at a T-junction, you *turn right* along a level path. The path turns left in 50m and you get views on the right below of the area walked along a few minutes ago. In 160m *bear right* with the main path and in 60m *bear left* (100°) along a wider path joining from the right behind (this is the continuation of the holloway crossed earlier). You are back on the GCW.

In 40m (15m before a marker post) *turn right* (due S) along a minor path and in 30m *turn right again* (250°) towards some wooden benches 40m away. Pass the benches and follow the path, which in 100m by a bench turns left to then loop around to the left for three sides of a circle back on itself; in 50m *bear left* at a metal bench, in 60m pass a wooden bench on the left, then ignore all paths off to the left and in 200m *turn left* by another metal bench at a T-junction. In 40m *turn right* along a wide path, the GCW, with some buildings ahead in an open area. In 120m you pass a bowling green away on the left and in 50m *turn left* with a marker post at the corner of the green. In 50m you pass the three-way signpost at the point where you entered **Bostall Woods** and cross **Longleigh Lane** and re-trace your steps from earlier to **Lesnes Abbey Woods**.

In detail: walk along the right-hand side of **Clam Field** and across Bostall Hill (road) and along a narrow path through trees and a right turn along a tarmac drive back to the set of lights on Knee Hill (road) by the four-way road junction. Follow GCW signs through the **Orbit Bexley** estate onto **Hurst Lane** and **[!]** *turn left* and in 70m – just before the busy A road – *turn right* through a metal kissing gate and *turn right* immediately, ignoring a clear downhill path parallel to the road. In 15m *turn left* along one of the many mini-ridges in the woodland, which in 50m starts to descend. In 70m at a four-way junction *turn right*, ignoring the continuation downhill. You go steeply down the little ridge and in 50m cross a path by a low blue-ringed marker post to re-ascend up a stepped path onto another little wooded ridge. In 70m you pass a blue-ringed marker post on the right and in 20m at the top of this little rise at a five-way junction of paths, you can see a pond down below a little to the right.

This is **Pine Pond**; you have walked past it up to this junction earlier. *Turn left* downhill (250°) along the right of the two paths on the left and pick up the directions above in the main text at the asterisk *).