



Crystal Palace to Forest Hill Walk

Short suburban London walk with plenty of interesting and unusual features.



Length	<p>Main Walk: 13¾ km (8.5 miles). Three hours 15 minutes walking time. For the whole excursion including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 7 hours.</p> <p>Short Walk, omitting Dulwich: 7¼ km (4.5 miles). One hour 45 minutes walking time.</p>
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OS Map	Explorer 161. Crystal Palace and Forest Hill are in south London.
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Toughness	3 out of 10 (2 for the Short Walk).
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Features	<p>This short suburban walk takes in five attractive parks and gardens with plenty of interesting and unusual features. The majority of the walk is necessarily on urban paths and pavements but two sections explore the neighbouring Sydenham Hill Wood and Dulwich Wood, remnants of the ancient North Wood which once covered much of south London (and gave its name to the suburb of Norwood).</p> <p>The Crystal Palace was the popular name for the vast building constructed in Hyde Park for the Great Exhibition in 1851. After the exhibition closed it was rebuilt on Penge Common and the surrounding area eventually acquired the name. The building was completely destroyed by fire in 1936 and only traces of the gardens and terraces survive. At the start of the walk you could learn about its history in the small Crystal Palace Museum (open Sundays only from 11am to 4pm summer, 3pm winter; free admission).</p>
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The most unusual sight on this walk is the **Crystal Palace Dinosaurs**, the first ever life-size sculptures of dinosaurs and extinct mammals. They were

constructed in the 1850s – before the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* – and restored in 2002.

The central section of the walk is through the leafy suburb of Dulwich and passes the **Dulwich Picture Gallery** with its important collection of European old masters; it is open Tue–Sun from 10am to 5pm, but the full-price admission of £16.50 (2024) doesn't encourage a quick mid-walk visit. Alongside is **Old College**, the original site of **Dulwich College** which later became one of England's largest independent schools in the **New College** buildings.

The route into Forest Hill passes the **Horniman Museum** with its unusual collection of natural history, anthropology and musical instruments (open daily from 10.30am to 5.30pm; free admission apart from the Aquarium and Butterfly House).




Note that all these parks and gardens close around dusk, including the Horniman Gardens at the end of the walk.

Additional Notes	Because of the extended closure of Cox's Walk Footbridge from 2020-24, the walk route was tweaked to avoid the unnecessary extra road walking shown on the official diversionary notices.
Walk Options	<p>There is no need to follow the directions precisely through any of the parks and a few minor variations are suggested. For a very Short Walk you could cut out the entire loop through Dulwich, since the walk route crosses over itself in Sydenham Hill Wood.</p> <p>If you want to abandon the walk, link routes to several nearby stations are briefly described. There are also many bus routes in the area.</p>
Transport	<p>There are frequent suburban trains from both Victoria and London Bridge to Crystal Palace (in TfL Zones 3/4) and Forest Hill (Zone 3).</p> <p>Both stations are also served by London Overground trains from Highbury & Islington.</p>
Suggested Train	On a Sunday the suggested starting time for this walk is around 11am, which is when the Crystal Palace Museum opens. If you are not planning to visit this or any other museum you could start at any convenient time (bearing in mind that all the parks close at dusk).
Lunch	<p>A possible early lunch place (and the only convenient pub on the Short Walk) is the Wood House (020-8693 5666) at 39 Sydenham Hill Road, which has a large beer garden.</p> <p>On the Main Walk the suggested place is the Crown and Greyhound (020-8299 4976) at 73 Dulwich Village, after 8 km. This large town pub was extensively refurbished in 2014-17 and offers a good range of food, served all day. It is the only pub in the immediate area but there is a GAIL's bakery and several other eateries nearby. A little earlier there are cafés in Dulwich Park and by the entrance to the Picture Gallery.</p>
Tea	There is a good café at the Horniman Museum , about 10 minutes before Forest Hill station. There are several places in the parade of shops as you

approach the station, including **The Teapot** delicatessen at #56 (open to 5pm) and a **Costa** at #7 (open to at least 6pm). If you want stronger fare **The Signal** is a large town pub across the road from the station

***The Capitol** (a former art deco cinema) had been converted into a JD Wetherspoon's pub, but it closed in October 2023.*

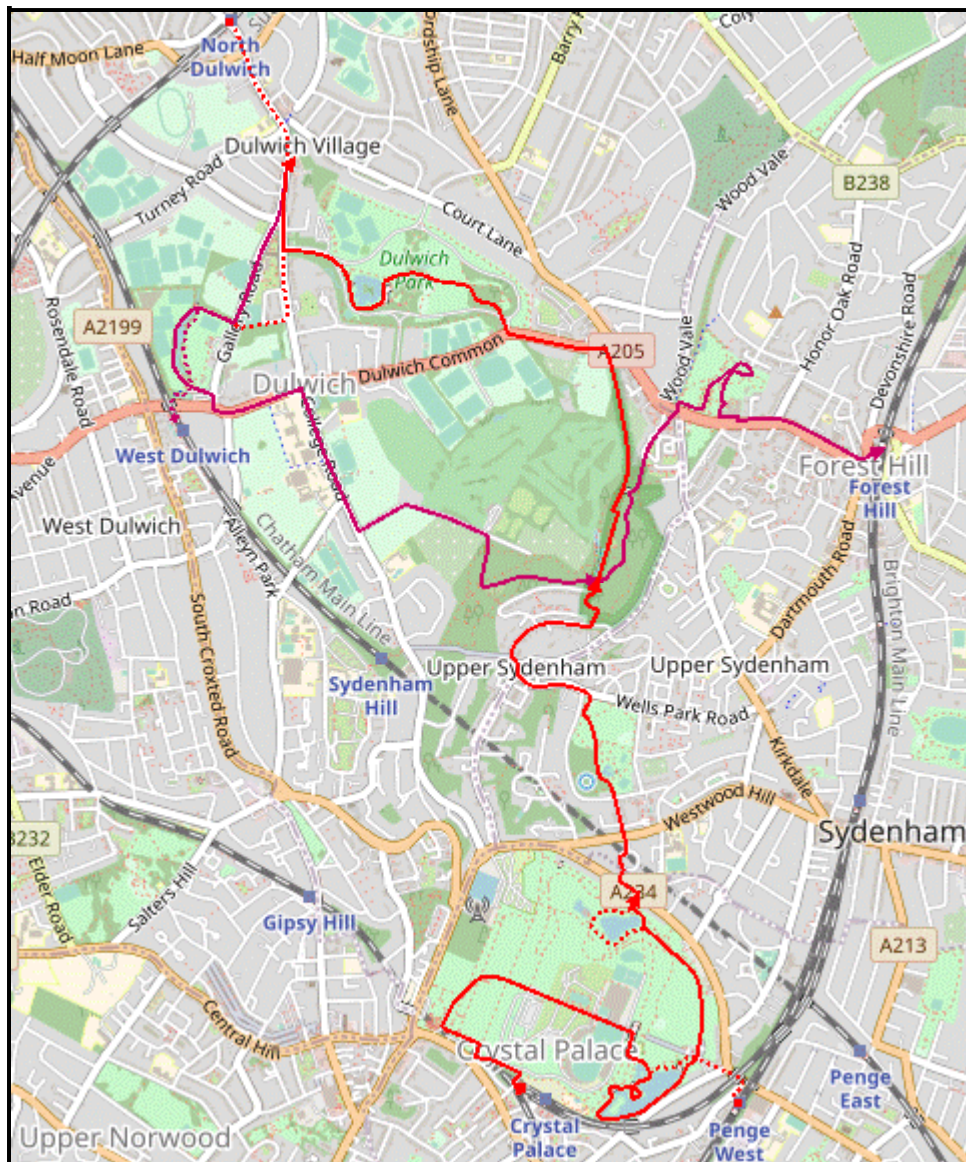
Help Us! After the walk, please leave a comment, it really helps. Thanks!

You can also upload photos to the   SWC Group on Flickr (upload your photos) and videos to  **Youtube**. This walk's tags are:

By Car	Start	Finish
Help	National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Traveline (bus times): 0871 200 22 33 (12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234	
Version	Nov-24 Sean	
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Walk Directions

Walk Map



All maps © OpenStreetMap contributors

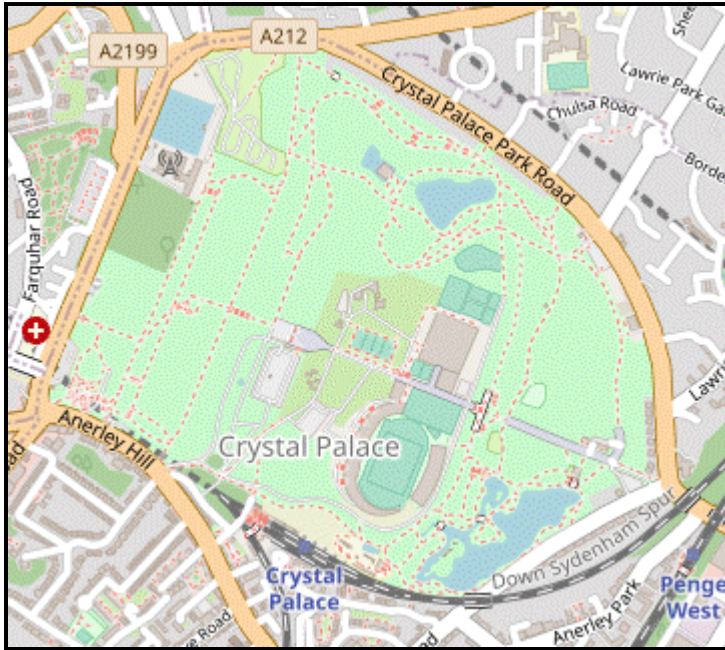
Walk Options

M. Main Walk (13¾ km)

a. Short Walk, omitting Dulwich (7¼ km)

Walk Directions

A. Crystal Palace Stn to Crystal Palace Park Road (3¼ km)

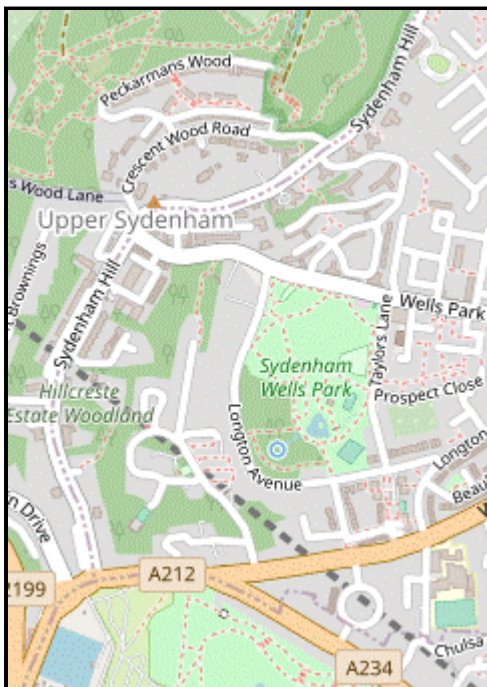


1. Turn right out of **Crystal Palace station** into **Crystal Palace Park**. **Turn left** to go up the western side of the park, signposted as the **Green Chain Walk (GCW)** towards Sydenham Hill.
The GCW is a network of paths through fields, parks and woods in south-east London. This walk overlaps its final section (from Crystal Palace to Nunhead Cemetery via Sydenham Hill Wood and Horniman Gardens) in several places.
2. Go straight across one junction and then join a road leading out of the park, still climbing and passing the end of the stone columns which supported the old Crystal Palace building. Just before the road meets the A212 **turn sharp right** past a vehicle barrier to re-enter the park.
3. **Turn left** up a tree-lined stony path, with a view over the wide grass terrace on your right. Go past the next terrace (with sphinxes) to come to a small open space in front of the **Crystal Palace Museum**, which is worth a visit when open (Sundays only).
4. A flight of steps leads up to a small flower garden at the top of the park, but for the main route take the level path away from the museum, through a belt of trees onto the upper terrace. Go along the path for 200m, dropping down to the broad flight of steps in the centre of the terrace.
5. Go down these and the next flight of steps to go straight down the centre of the park. In between two parking areas there is a large memorial bust of **Sir Joseph Paxton**.
Paxton pioneered the design of prefabricated glass and cast-iron buildings, initially for greenhouses and conservatories in his role as Head Gardener at Chatsworth House. His revolutionary design was chosen for the Crystal Palace and it was built in just eight months.
6. Continue through the second parking area and along an elevated walkway between the **National Sports Centre** complex and the athletics stadium. At the far end go down another flight of steps and turn right.
7. Go past an old turnstile and ignore a path down to the stadium, but 40m later **turn left** onto a path which descends through a copse and comes out by a small lake.
8. Keep ahead along its left-hand side and follow the path round to the right to pass the hut for the **Boating Lake**. Take either fork where the path splits in front of the first of the **Crystal Palace Sculptures** (of Irish Elk).
You will now be following the park's Dinosaur Trail, although in reverse chronological order.

9. The two paths soon rejoin and at the next fork the suggested route is to **turn left** onto a short loop past another group of sculptures, of three more extinct animals.
 - You could save 125m by skipping this circuit and turning right instead.
10. The main path swings left past a **Geological Time** information panel and comes to the most famous part of the **Dinosaur Trail**, with a spectacular set of life-size models on the island to your left.

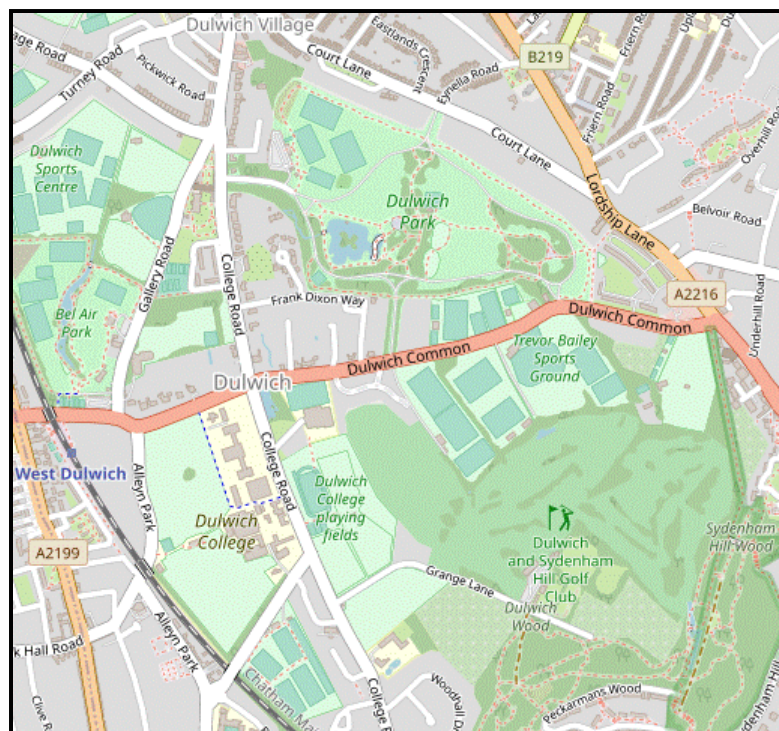
The models were commissioned as part of the park's renovation for the reconstruction of the Crystal Palace in 1852-54. They were designed and sculpted in Sydenham by Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins with advice from Sir Richard Owen, a leading palaeontologist at that time, but knowledge of these extinct species was still sketchy and they are now considered inaccurate.
11. Follow the path alongside the island and keep left at the end to come back along a tree-lined path on the other side of the lake, parallel to Thicket Road on your right.
12. At the far end of the Boating Lake you pass the **Crystal Palace Park Café** off to the left. Go down a slope and keep ahead across a broad avenue (with a Visitor Centre and toilets on the left).
 - If starting from **Penge West station** (300m away), leave via the London-bound Platform 1 and turn right onto Anerley Park. At the end turn left onto the A234, go under a railway viaduct and cross Thicket Road to enter Crystal Palace Park. You could turn right by the Café to join the walk route here, but even if you do not want to do the full walk it is worth making a circuit of the lake as described above.
13. The simplest continuation is along the broad path initially heading **N**, near the eastern side of the park. You will essentially be following this perimeter path around a long gentle curve to the left for 700m to a park exit, so you could cut across the grass if you wish.
14. Ignore an exit on the right after 400m, by the pre-school "Diddy Dinos". In a further 150m, with a skate-park away to your left, bear right onto a path leading up to the tree-lined **Fishing Lake**.
15. Follow the path around the eastern end of the lake for 100m, then **turn right** onto a short avenue lined with cherry trees to leave Crystal Palace Park.
 - Alternatively, you could turn sharp left and do an almost complete clockwise circuit of the lake to come to this exit. This longer (450m) route goes past the **Maze** and the back of the **Concert Bowl**.

B. Crystal Palace Park Road to Sydenham Hill Wood (1¾ km)



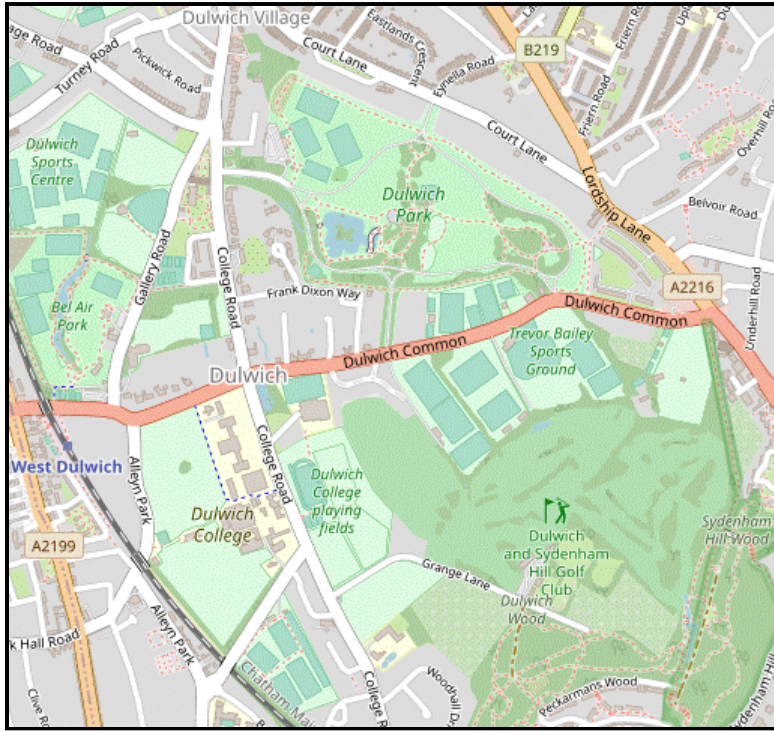
16. Turn left and go uphill on the A234 (Crystal Palace Park Road), crossing over at some point. In 100m **turn right** into Charleville Circus.
17. Take either route around its central circle (the left-hand route is slightly shorter) to come out onto the A212 (Westwood Hill). Cross over and go straight ahead down Ormanton Road into **Sydenham Wells Park**.
Medicinal springs were discovered here in the 1640s and it was a popular chalybeate watering-hole until the wells were removed in the mid-19thC. It was opened as a formal park in 1901.
18. The suggested route is to follow the GCW waymarker posts through the park, starting by forking left in front of the pond and following the path round to the right. Avoid side exits onto the road on the left (Longton Avenue).
19. The waymarkers lead you to an exit in the top left-hand corner of the park. Turn left onto Wells Park Road, steadily uphill.
In woodland down to the left is the site of Upper Sydenham station, at the southern entrance to Sydenham Hill Tunnel; see note at [24].
20. At the top cross over Sydenham Hill (slightly to the right) into Crescent Wood Road, with the **Wood House** pub on the right being a possible refreshment stop.
This was once the home of Sir Joseph Paxton.
21. Follow Crescent Wood Road for 350m as it curves round to the right.
*John Logie Baird, pioneer of television broadcasting, lived at the second house on the left (#3, with blue plaque) from 1933-46. On the right, **Six Pillars** (1935) is an example of International style.*
22. Shortly before the road rejoins Sydenham Hill **turn left** through a metal gate into **Sydenham Hill Wood**.
The native trees in this ancient woodland (now a Local Nature Reserve) are predominantly oak and hornbeam.
23. Go down a few steps and **fork left** in front of a London Wildlife Trust information panel. Follow this fenced path downhill, at one point going over the entrance to an old railway tunnel.
24. At the bottom **turn right** to come to the trackbed of a dismantled railway line, with the northern entrance to **Sydenham Hill Tunnel** off to the right.
The Nunhead to Crystal Palace (High Level) line opened in 1865 to serve visitors to the site. It lost much of its traffic after the 1936 fire and closed in 1954. The tunnel is now a hibernaculum for long-eared bats.
25. Turn left onto the trackbed, away from the tunnel. In 50m there are paths off to both sides.
If you are doing the Short Walk (omitting the Dulwich loop), turn right at this path junction and complete the directions at §E.

C. Sydenham Hill Wood to Dulwich Village (3 km)



26. Ignore the side paths and continue along the trackbed for 250m, where the way ahead is fenced off. Veer left up the slope as indicated to continue in the same direction at the top of the bank, soon coming to the western end of **Cox's Walk Footbridge**.
*This brick and wood cantilever bridge crosses the old railway line. An information panel on the bridge shows the scene (unrecognisable today) looking north to Lordship Lane station, painted by the French impressionist **Camille Pissarro** in 1871.*
27. Go through a metal gate and continue in the same direction down the broad tree-lined avenue of Cox's Walk to leave the wood.
28. Turn left and go along the A205 (Dulwich Common), crossing over when possible. In 400m turn right through Rosebery Gate into **Dulwich Park**.
29. Fork left inside the park. You could continue on this broad avenue, but the suggested route is to bear right, going past the American Garden and later a children's playground to the **Dulwich Clock Café** (and toilets) in the centre of the park.
30. Take the boardwalk across the eastern end of the pond and bear right to go around its southern side.
*A bronze **Barbara Hepworth sculpture** "Two Forms (Divided Circle)" (1970) used to stand here but was stolen by metal thieves in December 2011.*
31. Join Carriage Drive to leave the park at Old College Gate, with **Old College** opposite.
*The almshouse-like Old College is the original site of **Dulwich College of God's Gift**, set up by Edward Alleyn in 1619 as a charitable foundation. Entry to the school was by drawing lots and the twelve successful boys drew a slip of paper inscribed "God's Gift".*
 - If you are not stopping for refreshment in Dulwich Village you could take a short cut: turn left onto College Road, passing the **Dulwich Picture Gallery** with its **Café**, then in 250m turn right into Lovers Walk to reach Gallery Road almost opposite the gate into Belair Park. If you do this (saving 500m), resume the directions at [35] in §D.
32. For the refreshment places in Dulwich Village, turn right onto College Road and keep ahead at the roundabout. A **GAIL's** bakery and the **Crown and Greyhound** pub are on the right-hand side in a further 200m, with several other eateries nearby.
 - To finish the walk at **North Dulwich station** (600m away), continue northwards along the road and keep ahead at a staggered road junction. In 300m go straight across the A2214 to reach the station in a further 150m.

D. Dulwich Village to Sydenham Hill Wood (3½ km)



33. After lunch go back along the right-hand side of Dulwich Village to the roundabout. Fork right into Gallery Road, passing the old **Grammar School** on your right.
This was established as a free school for local boys after the college became fee-paying. It was designed by Charles Barry in 1842.
34. Go along Gallery Road for 500m, passing the **Dulwich Village Orchard** and sports fields on your right, **Old College** and the **Dulwich Picture Gallery** on your left.
The Village Orchard was opened by the Dulwich Estate in 2019, on the route of a new Heritage Trail between North Dulwich and Sydenham Hill stations.
35. Go through a gate into **Belair Park** and follow the perimeter path anti-clockwise to the lake, with **Belair House** off to the left.
The Adam-style mansion (now a restaurant) was built in 1785. These grounds are owned by the local council.
36. Go past the narrow end of the lake and turn left onto the path alongside it. At the far end there is a car park and tennis courts.
 - To finish the walk at **West Dulwich station** (150m away), make your way to the opposite corner of the tennis courts. The station entrance is on the other side of the A205, under the railway bridge.
37. To continue the walk, go out through the car park and turn right onto Gallery Road. At the T-junction turn left to go along the A205 (Dulwich Common) and cross over at one of the traffic islands. The **New College** buildings and playing fields of Dulwich College are off to your right.
The school building was designed by the younger Charles Barry in 1870, in North Italian Renaissance style with extensive use of terracotta.
38. At a crossroads turn right into College Road, passing an old **Mill Pond** on your left and then coming to the main entrance to **Dulwich College**.
*In the North Cloister (to the right of the front door) it used to be possible to see the famous lifeboat from the ill-fated Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1915-16. After the loss of their ship **Endurance** the group were stranded on Elephant Island and **Ernest Shackleton** navigated the **James Caird** for 1,300 km across the Atlantic Ocean to South Georgia to secure their rescue. [In 2015 it was moved to a permanent exhibition space in the Laboratory, with limited viewing hours.]*

39. Continue along College Road for 450m, almost up to a **toll-gate** in the middle of the road.
Dating from 1789, this is the last toll booth still in use in London.
40. Turn left into Grange Lane and go uphill between playing fields, a golf course and later allotments. After passing the car park for Dulwich and Sydenham Golf Club **turn right** into **Dulwich Wood**.
The wood is privately owned but the Dulwich Estate allows public access.
41. Follow the main path through the wood for 175m to come to a small clearing with a bench and three paths off to the left. **Turn left** onto the middle path, heading **E**.
42. In 400m go up a short slope and straight across the trackbed of the old railway line (crossing over your outward route).

E. Sydenham Hill Wood to Forest Hill Station (2¼ km)



43. Follow the path into the trees, with wooden paling on the left. The path bends left and later swings right uphill to come to a **Folly**.
The gardens of six large Victorian houses on Sydenham Hill extended into this part of the wood, one of which included this garden feature.
44. Bear left at a path junction by post ④. Keep to the main path for 250m, ignoring paths going back down to the trackbed and later passing posts ⑨ & ⑧.
These posts are part of a numbered trail through this Local Nature Reserve.
45. The path eventually goes down a short flight of steps and comes to the eastern end of **Cox's Walk Footbridge**.
*This brick and wood cantilever bridge crosses the old railway line. An information panel on the bridge shows the scene (unrecognisable today) looking north to Lordship Lane station, painted by the French impressionist **Camille Pissarro** in 1871.*
46. Go through a metal gate and **turn right**, up another flight of steps. At the top turn left through a metal kissing gate and go down an enclosed path towards a housing estate.
47. Continue downhill in the same direction between blocks of flats, eventually on a fenced path leading out to the A205 (London Road).
Lordship Lane station was just off to the left.
48. Cross the main road at the traffic lights and enter **Horniman Gardens**.
Frederick John Horniman was an avid Victorian collector who opened his house to the public "to bring the world to Forest Hill". He later commissioned a more suitable building for his collections from the architect Charles Harrison Townsend. He donated these grounds to the public and the new museum was formally opened in 1901.

49. Inside the gardens veer right up a few steps onto a path parallel to the road. In 75m turn left to go through the **Grasslands Garden** and then the **Dye Garden**.
Originally a formal Display Garden and Sunken Garden, these two areas have been planted with grassland plants from North America & Southern Africa, and plants and flowers traditionally used to make dye.
50. At the far end go up to the **Bandstand Terrace** for a fine view of the city.
*The two large blocks of flats dominating the view are **Dawson's Heights** in East Dulwich, designed in a modernist style (said to be reminiscent of a ziggurat) by Kate Macintosh and built in 1964-72.*
51. Before heading to the museum it is worth going up the slope above the terrace. The **Butterfly House** is on the left at the top, together with the entrance to a short **Animal Walk** which leads back down to the far end of the terrace.
52. From the terrace area take the broad path back down the hill towards the A205. The **Horniman Museum** and its **Café** are just off to the left.
53. From the café, return to the broad path and turn left. Just before reaching the main gate turn left to walk past the front of the museum.
The mosaic on the museum façade is "Humanity in the House of Circumstance", designed by Robert Anning Bell.
54. Go out onto the A205 and walk down the hill, forking right at the traffic lights by the petrol station to stay on the main road.
55. At the start of the parade of shops on the left you pass **The Teapot** delicatessen, another possible refreshment place. Further down the hill there is a **Costa** across the road, just past **The Capitol**.
56. The Capitol is no longer a pub but **The Signal** is just around the corner on the left at the bottom of the hill. Cross the road at the traffic lights for **Forest Hill station**.

» *Last updated: November 12, 2024*

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