



Crystal Palace to Forest Hill walk

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

Length **Main Walk:** 13¼ km (8.2 miles). Three hours 15 minutes walking time. For the whole excursion including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 7 hours.

Short Walk, omitting Dulwich: 7 km (4.3 miles). One hour 40 minutes walking time.

OS Map Explorer 161. Crystal Palace and Forest Hill are in south London.

Toughness 3 out of 10 (2 for the Short Walk).

Features 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](#), the last remnants of the ancient North Wood which once covered south London (and gave its name to the suburb of Norwood).



[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.

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 master paintings (open Tue–Sun from 10am to 5pm); admission (2018) is £9. 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).

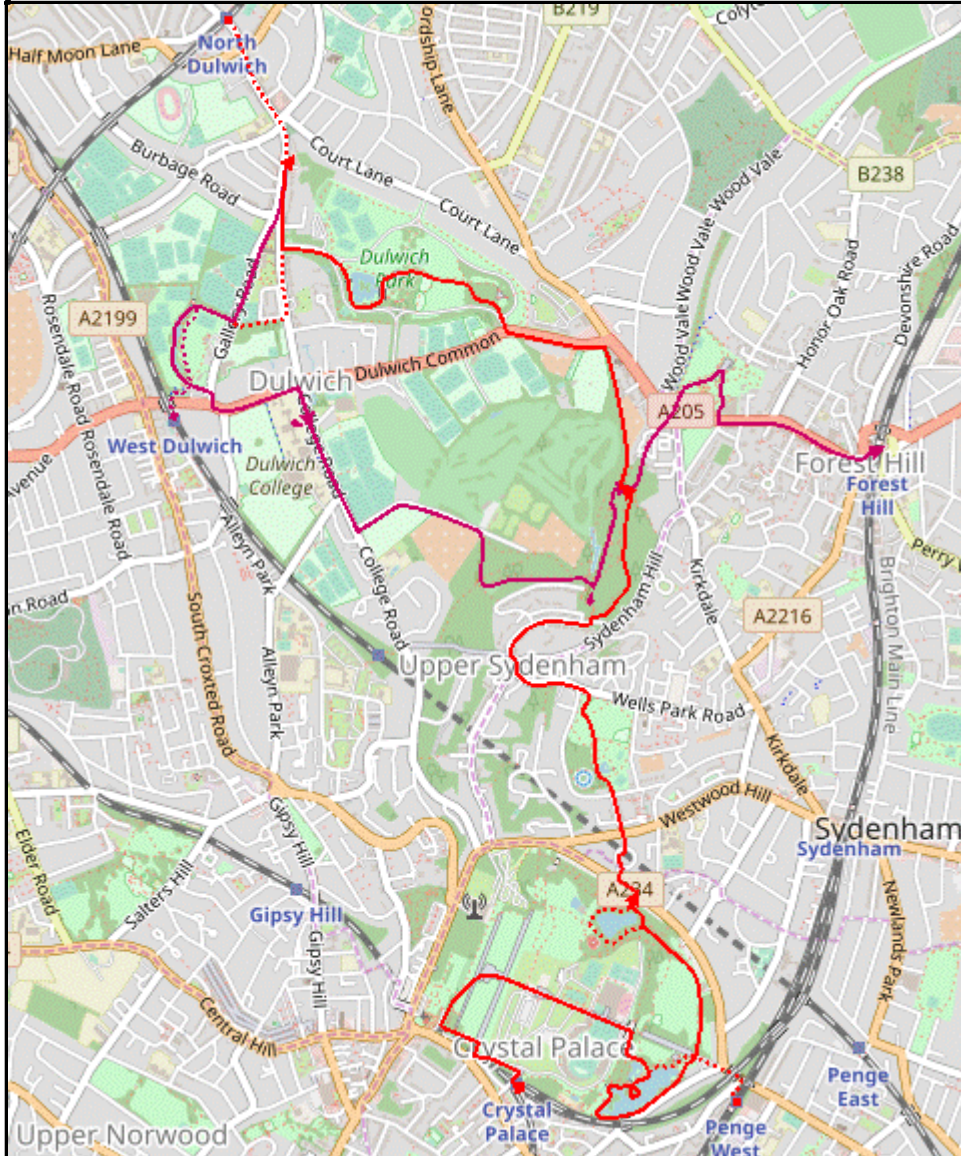
Note that all these parks and gardens close around dusk.

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 (in Zone 3).</p> <p>Both stations are also served by London Overground trains from Highbury & Islington.</p>
Suggested Train	<p>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.</p>
Lunch	<p>On the Main Walk the suggested lunchtime pub is the Crown and Greyhound (020-8299 4976) at 73 Dulwich Village, after 8 km. This large town pub was extensively refurbished in 2015-16 and offers a good range of home-cooked food, served all day. There are only a few other eateries nearby, but a little earlier an alternative is the Dulwich Clock Café in Dulwich Park.</p> <p>An earlier pub option (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>
Tea	<p>There is a good café at the Horniman Museum, plus several places on London Road as you approach Forest Hill station: a delicatessen at #56, The Teapot, open to 5pm Mon–Sat, 4pm Sun; and a JD Wetherspoon's pub converted from an art deco cinema at #11-21, The Capitol.</p>
Help Us!	<p>After the walk, we would love to get your feedback</p>
Photos	<p>Upload your photos to the SWC Group on Flickr, and videos to Youtube. This walk's tags are:</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid #e91e63; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; display: flex; align-items: center; gap: 5px;">  swcwalks </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #e91e63; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; display: flex; align-items: center; gap: 5px;">  swcwalk137 </div> </div>
By Car	<p>Start SE19 2AZ Finish SE23 3HB</p>
Help	<p>National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Travelline SE (bus times): 0871 200 2233 (12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234</p>
Version	<p>Oct-18</p>

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Walk Directions

Walk Map



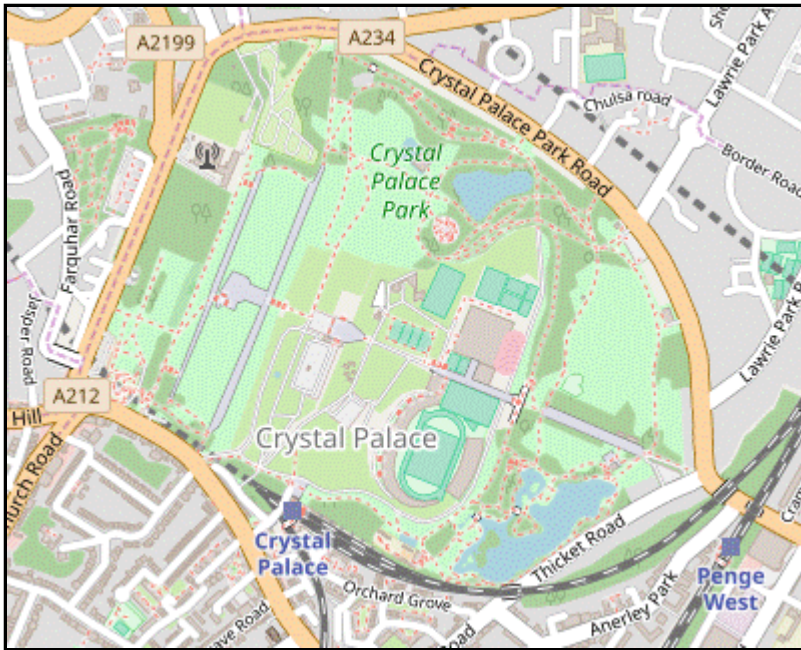
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Walk Options

- M. Main Walk (13¼ km)
- a. Short Walk, omitting Dulwich (7 km)

Walk Directions

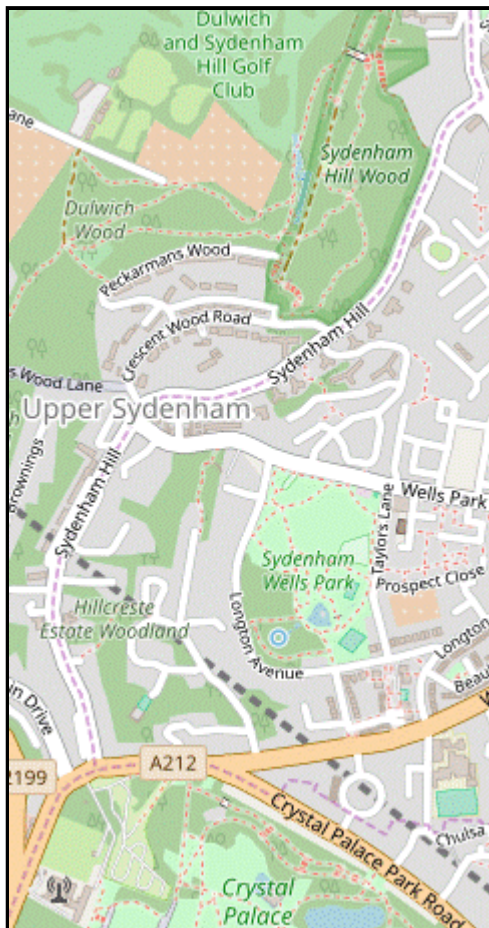
A. Crystal Palace Station to Crystal Palace Park Road (3¼ km)



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. Where 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 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 in front of 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** in order to view another group of sculptures, of three more extinct animals; however, the path loops back to this point so you could save 125m by skipping this circuit and turning right instead.

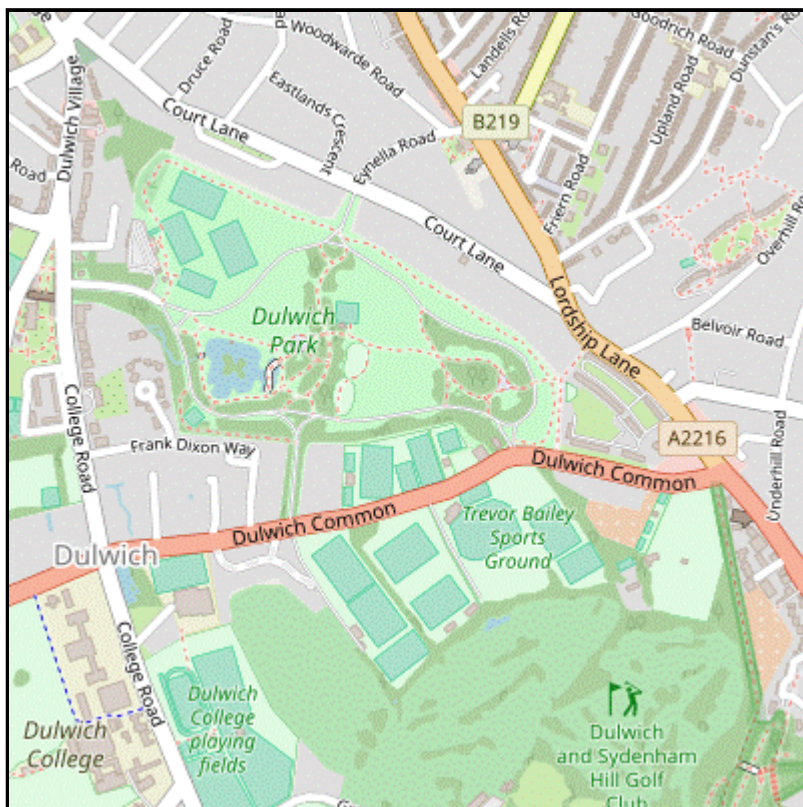
10. Follow the path as it swings left past a **Geological Time** information panel and comes to the main part of the **Dinosaur Trail**, with a spectacular set of life-size models on the island to your left.
The models were commissioned as part of the park's renovation for the reconstruction of the Crystal 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. The Visitor Centre is 100m ahead and you could turn right there to join the walk route, but even if you do not want to do the full walk it is worth veering left past the café and at least making a circuit of the lake as described above.
13. The simplest continuation is along the broad path 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 down 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 **Park Maze** and the back of the **Concert Bowl**.

B. Crystal Palace Park Road to Cox's Walk Footbridge (2¼ km)



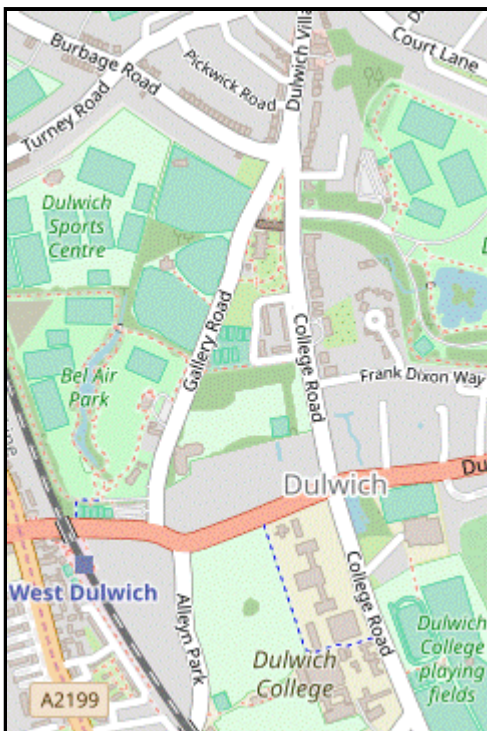
16. Turn left and go uphill on the A234 (Crystal Palace Park Road), crossing over carefully at some point. In 100m **turn right** into Charleville Circus.
17. Take either route around its central circle (the left-hand route is slightly shorter) to come out onto the A212 (Westwood Hill). Cross over carefully and go straight ahead along Ormanton Road into **Sydenham Wells Park**.
Medicinal springs were discovered here in 1640 but their popularity later declined. The wells were removed in the mid-19thC.
18. Take any route through the park to the exit in its top left-hand corner, eg. by forking left in front of the pond and following the path round to the right (avoid side exits onto Longton Avenue).
19. At the top turn left onto Wells Park Road and go uphill to its junction with Sydenham Hill. Cross over (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.
20. 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.
21. Shortly before the road rejoins Sydenham Hill, turn left through a metal gate into **Sydenham Hill Wood**. Go down a few steps and **fork right** to follow a numbered trail through the Nature Reserve, passing a **Folly** at post □ .
The native trees in this ancient woodland are predominantly oak and hornbeam. The more exotic species (eg. a monkey puzzle and a cedar of Lebanon) are remnants from the gardens of six large Victorian houses up on Sydenham Hill which extended into this part of the wood.
22. Keep to the main path, ignoring turnings to the left. After passing □ & □ , go through a gate and turn left onto **Cox's Walk Footbridge**.
*The footbridge crosses the track of the Nunhead to Crystal Palace (High Level) railway line, which opened in 1865 to serve visitors to the site. The line lost much of its traffic after the 1936 fire and closed in 1954. An information panel shows the scene (unrecognisable today) looking north to Lordship Lane station, painted by the French impressionist Camille Pissarro in 1871.
If you are doing the Short Walk (omitting the Dulwich loop), do not cross the bridge but turn back and complete the directions at §F.*

C. Cox's Walk Footbridge to Dulwich Village (2½ km)



23. On the western side of the bridge turn right and go all the way down the broad avenue of Cox's Walk to leave the wood.
24. Turn left and go along the A205 (Dulwich Common). In 400m turn right through Rosebery Gate into **Dulwich Park**.
25. 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.
26. 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.*
27. Join Carriage Drive to leave the park at Old College Gate.
 - If you are not stopping at any of the refreshment places in Dulwich Village you could take a short cut: turn left onto College Road, passing the **Dulwich Picture Gallery**, then in 250m turn right into Lovers Walk to reach Gallery Road almost opposite the gate into Bel Air Park. If you do this (saving 500m), resume the directions at [31].
28. For the refreshment places in Dulwich Village, turn right onto College Road and keep ahead at the roundabout. The **Crown and Greyhound** pub is on the right-hand side in a further 200m, opposite a **Pizza Express**.
 - 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.

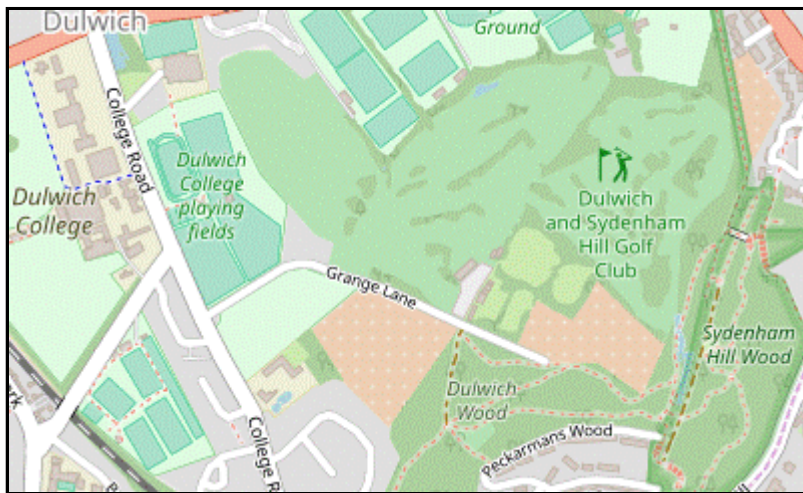
D. Dulwich Village to Dulwich College (1¾ km)



29. After lunch go back along the right-hand side of Dulwich Village to the roundabout, passing the old **Grammar School**.
This was established as a free school for local boys after the college became fee-paying. It was designed by Charles Barry in 1842.
30. Fork right and go along Gallery Road for 500m, passing **Old College** and the **Dulwich Picture Gallery** on your left and sports fields on your right.
*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".*
31. 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.

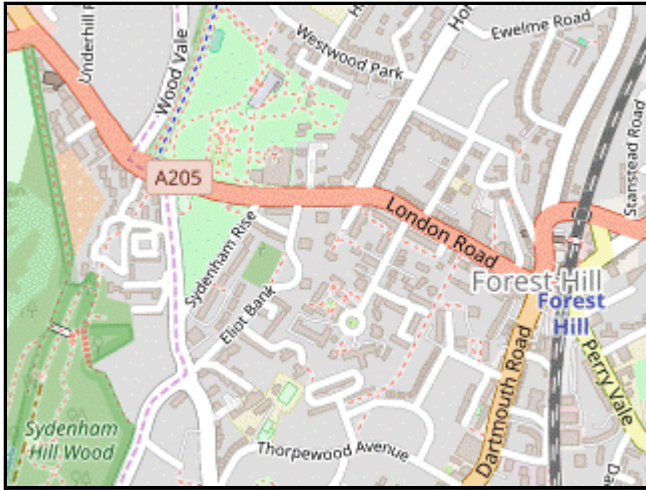
32. Turn left onto either of the two paths alongside the lake. At the far end there is a car park and tennis courts.
- To finish the walk at **West Dulwich station** (150m away), make your way to the opposite corner of the tennis courts. The station entrance is on the other side of the A205, under the railway bridge.
33. 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), with the **New College** buildings and playing fields of Dulwich College 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.
34. 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**.
*On display in the North Cloister (to the right of the front door) is the **James Caird**, the famous lifeboat from **Ernest Shackleton's** ill-fated Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1915-16. Its epic voyage of 1,500 km across the southern Atlantic Ocean secured the rescue of the party stranded on Elephant Island after the loss of their ship **Endurance**. [The school grounds are now usually locked but a friendly teacher might let you in.]*

E. Dulwich College to Cox's Walk Footbridge (2 km)



35. 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.
36. 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.
37. The suggested route is to head **S** on the main path for 175m to a major path junction, where there are three paths off to the left. **Turn left** onto the middle of these three paths to head **E** through the wood.
38. In 400m maintain direction through a confusing jumble of paths to come to the trackbed of the dismantled Nunhead to Crystal Palace line, with the entrance to **Crescent Wood Tunnel** off to the right.
- The walk route turns left here, but if you make a short detour to the tunnel you will find an information panel about its railway history and subsequent transformation into a hibernaculum for long-eared bats.
39. To continue the walk head **N** along the trackbed, now back in **Sydenham Hill Wood** and parallel to your earlier route off to the right.
40. Where the way ahead along the trackbed is fenced off, veer left as indicated to continue in the same direction at the top of the bank. **Turn right** to go back across **Cox's Walk Footbridge**, in the opposite direction to your outward route.

F. Cox's Walk Footbridge to Forest Hill Station (1½ km)



41. On the eastern side of the bridge fork left up a short slope. Turn left through a new metal kissing gate and go down an enclosed path towards a housing estate.
42. Continue downhill in the same direction between blocks of flats, eventually on a path between fences leading out to the A205 (London Road).
43. Cross the main road at the traffic lights and go into **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.
44. Take any route up to the bandstand near the centre of the park for a fine view of the city.
45. Go back down the hill to find the **Horniman Museum** and its **Café** on your left.
46. From the café, return to the main path and turn left. Leave the park and turn left onto the A205.
47. Fork right at the traffic lights by the petrol station to stay on the A205. Some other possible refreshment places are **The Teapot** delicatessen near the start of the parade of shops on the left, and **The Capitol** pub on the right at the bottom of the road.
48. At the bottom of the hill **Forest Hill station** is just off to the left, on the other side of the road junction.

» Last updated: September 14, 2018

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