

Shorter Walks – October 2015 to October 2016



Here is a record of the iU3A Shorter Walks group walks in our second iU3A year - from October 2015 through to October 2016. For more recent visits and future plans, go to our [web page](#)

October



Thames Path - for the first of our twice-monthly walks, nine of us met for a water-themed walk along the Thames Path and Grand Union Canal. We set off from Richmond, slightly delayed by not one but two falls on slippery ground but no major injuries sustained and an opportunity to use the Shorter Walks Official First Aid Kit for the first time. At picturesque and historic Isleworth we left the Thames to walk through Capability Brown's landscape in Syon Park, with glimpses of the elaborate Orangery, to an early lunch break in the Garden Centre. The walk continued along the Grand Union Canal, with coots and the odd swan,

almost rural in places - apart from the roar of traffic on the A4 and the ever-present West London scourge of planes. Finally, as the drizzle struck again, we made our way through Elthorne Wood and emerged into the urban world once more and the leisurely pace of the Piccadilly Line home.



Hampstead Heath - for our second walk in October we went to Hampstead Heath. We had perfect walking weather for our walk across the heath, with splendid Autumn colours and crunchy leaves. And no mud! The Hill House pergola and garden were particularly stunning and we were impressed by not only a trumpet vine in flower but also kiwi fruits growing on a vine (*Actinidia kolomikta*) – sadly just out of reach. If you see a future episode of *The Office* set in woodland with a happy group of walkers striding across the set, that'll be us when we came across a film crew on Sandy Heath. Kenwood House was an elegant setting for lunch

and the end of a lovely walk.

November



High Barnet to Cockfosters – On our first November walk the rain miraculously stopped just as we set out from High Barnet and held off for the entire walk. We had something for everyone: history (the Wars of the Roses and Dr Livingstone), architecture (magnificent Georgian mansions and ancient village church), Autumn colours in Hadley Wood (beech, hornbeam and oak) and mud for those who like to know they're on a proper walk. We heard birdsong rather than traffic, found a hidden lake and had a splendid lunch in The Cock Inn in Cockfosters to round off a lovely walk. And despite the carpet of slippery leaves underfoot, nobody fell over!



Angel to Limehouse Basin - 14 of us ventured down the canal towpath to the Thames. We had a fine day which was very lucky as there had been gales the day before. We managed to avoid the cyclists and runners. It was very interesting to see all the new building work and new pontoons for permanent moorings. We were surprised to see a pair of very exotic Egyptian geese on the canal. Just past Old Ford Lock the canal is being drained for work on the walls. One of the workmen regaled us with some of the animals he had seen there. We saw lots of traffic cones and a few chairs. Afterwards we enjoyed a light lunch at La Verde Riverside.

December



Parkland Walk - for our early December walk, sixteen of us had balmy weather with blue skies and sunshine. Starting from Finsbury Park we walked the main section of the Parkland Walk Nature Reserve, to Highgate, with a surprisingly low number of joggers and dog-walkers for once. We followed the paths through ancient woodlands, pausing for a coffee break in the charming café in Queen's wood, and rejoined the northern section of the Parkland Walk, admiring the extensive views across London en route to Alexandra Palace. Two parks, two woods and two sections of London's longest Nature Reserve, in (just over) two hours of walking.



Pre-Christmas Social - We headed off from Manor House to track the New River, pausing for a quick look at the planned Woodberry Wetlands site before following the riverside path to the old pumping station. The damp, windless day produced little to see there in the way of either sailing activity or bird-life apart from the odd coot and mallard. Once past Clissold Park and across the Hackney-Islington border to Canonbury, we picked up the New River path again through a lovely linear park. We arrived at Carluccio's on Upper Street with impeccable timing and enjoyed our Menu Festivo and a glass or two to put us in holiday mood.

January



River Lee and Olympic Park - 18 walkers met at Tottenham Hale for our first walk of 2016 in damp, chilly weather along the river Lee. There were many swans (a bevy apparently), as well as gulls, the odd cormorant and moorhen. After the Springfield Marina, we diverted to take a look at the old filterbeds, then followed the houseboats, graffiti and floating rubbish to the more pristine Olympic Park, where we enjoyed the gardens and marvelled at the early irises and daffodils. Lunch followed at the Podium, opposite the Aquatics Centre, after which one of us went for a swim and several opted for retail therapy in the Westfield Centre.



Greenwich Park - we had a splendid setting for a winter walk in perfect weather. We started with a beautiful view south across the river to the historic Greenwich waterfront, then walked under the Thames to the impressive Cutty Sark before reaching the park via the Thames Path. The views across historic Greenwich and the modern skyline became ever more stunning as we climbed up towards Blackheath. We admired the Royal Observatory (and stood on the Meridian Line of course) before lunch in the sunny Pavilion Restaurant. More beautiful views accompanied us down the hill and home, via the riverboat for some, and the DLR for the rest.

February



Four Royal Parks - Sixteen walkers braved the chilliness of a blustery day to walk the green stretch of parks across central London. In four miles we covered four parks: St James, Green, Hyde and Kensington Gardens. Plus four palaces: St James, Buckingham, Kensington and Clarence House (is that technically a palace though?), at least four pelicans in St James Park and many more than four fountains in the Italian water gardens. We were walking into the teeth of a westerly much of the way, there were waves on the Serpentine, and it was certainly a walk to blow away the cobwebs. We decided to do it again in the summer.



Regent's Canal from Little Venice to Angel - A last-minute change of plans due to high tides on the Thames didn't stint the enthusiasm of 14 walkers on a very cold but fine day. We started among the leafy green back streets and large Victorian houses of Little Venice and made our way past the barges and luxury mansions to Regents Park. After warming up with coffee by the lake, we spotted some of the exotic waterfowl. We braced ourselves to climb Primrose Hill with fabulous views across London, then returned to the canal, past Camden Lock, pausing for lunch at King's Place, and walking on to finish at the Angel.

March

Crystal Palace to Dulwich — Despite a real-feel temperature of -1°C and a threat of sleet, 15 walkers braved the weather for a bracing walk in the uncharted territory of SE London. Relatively uncharted, as we were following the extraordinarily well-signposted Green Chain Walk for most of it. The icy rain prevented us from thoroughly appreciating the dinosaurs, before an early coffee-break, but fortunately we remained dry after that. The uphill stretch through Sydenham Wells Park provided the aerobic exercise and the only other challenge was rather a lot of mud in Sydenham Hill wood. Well, at least we were out of the wind. It was a relief to finally reach the Dulwich Picture Gallery and although the restaurant was disappointingly full, attractive Dulwich village was full of alternative possibilities.



Bushy Park — Wordsworth would have enjoyed our March walk in Bushy Park, with endless carpets of daffodils through the woodlands. There were even a few unseasonably early bluebells too. Both the weather and paths were dry (yes really, no mud!) although the sun never did make an appearance, but the daffodils cast a golden glow to make up for that. The magnificent baroque water gardens complete with heron and Egyptian geese also impressed. Sadly the Hampton Court Gardens had just changed their free entry policy, which shouldn't have

happened until Easter, but we managed to glimpse the formal gardens through the railings from the Thames Path.

April

Trent Park — April's reputation for fickle weather was in little doubt on our walk in Trent Country Park. But we managed to dodge all except a couple of showers, and the raindrops on the primroses and celandines glistening in the sunshine brought out the poet in us. There were even early bluebells drifting artfully among the daffodils. The pretty woodland Water Garden was in complete contrast to the Baroque splendour of the one on our Bushy Park walk last month. Spring was just starting in the woods; blackthorn blossom foaming along the hedgerows and horse chestnut leafbuds delicately unfurling. With birdsong drowning the hum of distant traffic, it was a delightful Spring walk. And lunch at The Cock Inn (an old haunt of the Shorter Walkers) rounded off the morning perfectly.



Banstead Wood, Chipstead, Surrey — The Banstead Wood Bluebell walk lived up to its name and the bluebells were truly magnificent. They seemed to go on forever and the colour and smell were divine. We also spotted celandines, cowslips, wood anemones and violets. Good to know so many native wild flowers are thriving in Surrey. Southern Rail almost ruined our day by announcing the train wouldn't be stopping at Chipstead leaving eight very disgruntled walkers at the end of the line. Fortunately the next train back to London did stop at

Chipstead, so we finally set off 45 mins late. This was our first really 'rural' walk and we enjoyed mud and rough paths at a nippy pace doing about six and a half miles with gastropub lunch included.

May

River Cray and Joyden's Wood — The weather was perfect, with blue skies and warm sun, the riverside path was delightful, the bluebells (and wood anemones) were prolific and glorious. A perfect walk... Hang on a minute though – weren't we meant to be in Joyden's Wood? Oh well. In the event, Chalk Wood (into which the leaders had inadvertently led their trusting band of walkers) turned out to be even better than Plan A. An unexpected bonus was that we didn't encounter the rickety stiles, after all. Everyone took the change of plan in good part and we were even more cheered when we found a bus to shortcut the return to Bexley station.



Richmond Park — Twenty walkers had great weather for our second trip to Richmond Park. We took the Thames Path, pausing at the leafy Petersham Nurseries café, and through the park to the Isabella Plantation to admire the always delightful azaleas and rhododendrons. We saw deer, of course, and heard a cuckoo (a welcome change from parakeets), then lunched outside the lovely Pembroke Lodge. We marvelled at the views from King Henry's Mound, to St Paul's, 10 miles away, then half the group opted for the bus and the rest

walked back to Richmond via the Thames (slightly flooded) path, a total of 8 miles. We may have to change our group's name if this continues!

June

Regents Park — It was waterproofs, windbreakers and fleeces rather than suncream and sunhats for our walk around Regents Park: this did not daunt 14 of us. We viewed the Italianate gardens and fine Nash stucco terraced houses on the east and west of the park (some with blue plaques), St Katherine's Gate, the copper dome of the London Central Mosque, and a flying trapeze school. We saw 2 giraffes looking out of their house in London Zoo and tiptoed past 2 armed policemen by the US Ambassador's residence. We admired the wildfowl reserve, the roses in Queen Mary's Gardens and the beautiful St John's Lodge Gardens.



A Clues Trail — not a proper "walk", but Shorter Walks had a team in this fund raiser for Islington Giving. The team followed provided directions to note hidden sights within the St Paul's area. There were about 55 things to spot on route and some cryptic pub names to work out as well. An interesting route through back lanes never normally noticed. We didn't come first - but more importantly good fun was had by all - and money raised for a good cause!



Boundary Walk — the annual Boundary Walk in aid of Islington Giving luckily was a lovely day (in contrast to the wet stormy weather we've had this month so far). We all appreciated that the route was slightly altered to include as much green space as possible and it was exciting to discover some new pathways. Our group started mostly in Waterlow Park which had a magnificent garden display. We then walked through backstreets of Highgate to the Parkland walk to Finsbury Park and on to the Woodberry wetlands and to Clissold Park and

onwards toward the City. There were 14 shorter walkers out of a total of 33 and we hope we've persuaded some of the other participants to join our group. Thanks to Derek for organising this event and also thanks to those who donated to Islington Giving.

July

North Downs around Guildford — A small group of seven walkers had glorious weather for our first trip to the North Downs. We were soon through Guildford's salubrious suburbs and followed the North Downs Way through woodland and flowering meadows (and occasional waist-high nettles) to the Watts gallery near Compton. After diverting to visit the extraordinary chapel designed and decorated by Mary Watts (potter and wife of the artist G K Watts) we stopped for a rather good lunch at the Tea Shop. The afternoon brought more nettles and a wonderfully quiet path that took us past Loseley Park Elizabethan manor house (of ice cream fame). The last mile was along the scenic River Wey back to Guildford.



Greenwich Park — For the second walk of July, 11 of us had perfect walking weather on our repeat walk in Greenwich Park: warm but not too hot, with a light breeze and hazy sunshine. We had beautiful views of the Thames, the Isle of Dogs and the City of London from various viewpoints including Island Gardens, One Tree Hill, and in front of the statue of James Wolfe. We admired the Cutty Sark, the Trinity Hospital, the Royal Observatory and the Meridian Line. Trees were in full leaf, and the Flower Garden between Vanbrugh Gate and Blackheath Gate (with

its lake) had glorious displays of plants and flowers. Several of us enjoyed lunch at the Pavilion Restaurant. After exiting St Mary's Gate, we visited the Hawksmoor St Alfege Church (where Henry VIII was baptised) and where James Wolfe and Thomas Tallis are buried. (Dr Mary McMinn)

Gardens of Bloomsbury & Holborn — two days of rain preceded this walk, so Central London was quite fresh and green and traffic not too intrusive. Perfect walking weather; sunny but not too hot or dusty. Starting at the Friends Meeting House garden in Euston Road we continued past or into about 10 green spaces between there and lunch in the delightful cafe in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Some individual gardens are not very exciting in their own right but together they make a pleasant green walk. Some of them are crying out for a bit of volunteer TLC. Unexpected gardens are the roof garden at the Brunei Gallery at SOAS and the gardens at Odham's Walk where some of us were deterred by a rather fierce resident.



August



Ruislip Woods and Lido — twelve of us ventured to west London to explore the little known (to us) Ruislip Lido and Woods. We started from the River Pinn and then stopped for coffee to take in the spectacle of the multitude of people enjoying the beach at the Lido in beautiful sunshine. We next walked through attractive rare oak and hornbeam ancient woodland, remnants of the old Forrest of Middlesex. We avoided the balls on the edge of Haste Hill golf club and were able to wave at a packed miniature rail train as it circumnavigated the

Lido. This was a good 7 miles and we managed to avoid the mud and nettles although we were surprised at the vast amounts of Himalayan Balsam.

Barnet and Hadley Wood — A large group of walkers set out from High Barnet equipped with a fetching array of sunhats and prepared for record-breaking temperatures. The long sunny uphill to Monken Hadley was a challenge but after that we were pretty much in the welcome shade of the stately old trees of Hadley wood. We wandered off-piste slightly, requiring a bit of athleticism to cross a ditch (we like to challenge our members from time to time) and arrived in record time at the Cock Inn where we had lunch in the delightful shady garden. This allegedly '5 mile walk' was somewhere between 4.2 and 4.6 miles depending on whose App was most accurate.



September

Cassiobury Park and Whippendell Wood — A lovely, surprisingly rural walk, even though it was between Watford and the M25. We followed the River Gade and the Grand Union Canal, continued through stunning woodlands with stately old beech and oak trees and along country paths past farmland. The walk was punctuated by forays across a golfcourse (we managed to avoid flying balls). The coffee break was in the company of a life-size replica bull (that's a first). Fortunately the Cha café in the park managed to rustle up a fairly substantial late lunch for us, despite stocks being depleted by an earlier walking group.

Epping Forest — Seventeen of us set off from Chingford station in perfect sunny but cool weather. We passed the amazing Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge and admired the fine views over the forest. We mostly walked on clear wide sandy tracks and ventures off into the forest were occasionally more challenging for the leader and necessitated a few exploratory detours. We were surrounded by the most wonderful woodland and magnificent old trees. From our coffee stop at the King's Oak pub, we admired the fine views of the tower of Waltham Abbey. Later, we diverted off from the path to reach the earthworks of Loughton Camp, an ancient fortification from 500BC. We probably walked over 7 miles and finished with a lovely lunch at Butlers Retreat.



October



Colne Valley — The weather gods were smiling on our walk in Hertfordshire after the previous day's wind and rain. It was a beautiful early Autumn day and we were soon shedding layers of clothing as we headed along the Grand Union Canal from Uxbridge, accompanied by the usual soundtrack of parakeets and distant traffic. We stopped for a break at the Visitor Centre café (as Fran's Tea Shop, idyllically situated beside the water, turned out to be closed on Mondays) then continued past the extensive lakes (actually gravel pits) with reflections of golden trees

across the water. A decidedly flat walk — until the last half-mile up a hill to the Old Orchard for a good lunch with views over the lake and red kites soaring overhead.

Parkland Walk and Woodberry Wetlands — A perfect Autumn morning with blue skies and dry, crisp weather set the scene for our walk from Alexander Palace to the Wetlands. We discovered, as we admired the splendid views across the London skyline, that it was the 80th anniversary to the very day, since the first TV broadcast from the mast above our heads. We continued through both sections of the Parkland Walk with a diversion through Highgate Wood for a coffee break, with the constant accompaniment of brilliant Autumn leaf colours. Then we crossed Finsbury Park and were soon in the Woodberry Wetlands, our feet having scarcely touched a pavement. We ended with lunch (as always) with one of the best views in north London, and the bonus of a spot of birdwatching.

