

Shorter Walks – October 2021 to Sept 2022



Here is a record of the iU3A Shorter Walks group walks from October 2021 through to September 2022.

Another full and varied programme of walks delivered.

For more recent visits and future plans, go to our [web page](#)

October 2021

Dollis Valley — Fourteen walkers set off on a grey morning from Totteridge station following the Dollis Brook northwards through the green spaces of Barnet. Soon we emerged into Totteridge Fields with its much more rustic ambience. The similarity of the many open fields and mature hedgerows resulted in a longer-than-advertised walk as we took a rather circuitous route across to the nature reserve and Barnet Gate Wood. Fortunately the sun was shining by this point so complaints were muted. We emerged on to the Mill Hill Ridgeway with far-reaching views and lunch at the convenient Three Hammers pub. A lovely rural walk for early Autumn.



Thames Path, Richmond to Kingston — The stretch of the Thames from Richmond to Kingston is one of the loveliest parts of the London Thames Path and we walked along both north and south banks. On the north side we passed Marble Hill House, the iconic Georgian villa built for George II's mistress, and paused for a coffee break at the Coach House cafe in the park. We took the scenic route via Hammerton's foot ferry back across to the south bank, which must be one of the shortest ferry crossings in the country. We continued along the

Thames Path passing Teddington Weir to the Boaters Inn pub for lunch in the garden. No herons or cormorants to be seen (should we be worried?) but a few Egyptian geese were bravely holding their own among the Canada geese.

November

High Barnet to Cockfosters — Fifteen walkers enjoyed an autumn walk under sunny skies through the delightful Monken Hadley village with its historic houses and church, and on into the attractively-coloured beech woods of Hadley Common. No traffic to be heard either, so it felt like real countryside. After pausing to admire Jack's lake, we rambled along the woodland path to the Cock Inn where we had lunch in the garden.



December



Parkland Walk and Waterlow Park — Seventeen walkers set out from Finsbury Park following the whole length of the main section of the Parkland Walk to Highgate. The weather, although no less gloomy than it had been all week, at least was not fogbound as it had been the previous day. It was a short walk but as quite a lot of it was uphill, we felt sufficiently exercised! Our planned Christmas lunch in a Highgate village restaurant had to be postponed, thanks to the resurgence of Covid infections, but, undaunted, we settled for a festive

picnic in the grand surroundings of Lauderdale House terraced gardens in Waterlow Park.

January 2021

Pymmes Brook Trail — For our first walk of the new year, sixteen walkers followed the Pymmes Brook along a green corridor through Barnet and Enfield. The Brook runs through four parks: Oakhill, Brunswick, Arnos and Broomfield, all quite different in character, ranging from traditional Victorian to almost-rural woodland. The weather was unexpectedly glorious and we even heard a woodpecker. The coffee break at the delightful volunteer-run cafe in Broomfield Park was (literally) the icing on the cake.



Lee Valley — Despite the cold and rather grey day, 15 of us walked six miles from Cheshunt to Broxbourne starting off by walking through the Lee Valley Country Park with beautiful views of the water and passing a few wooden sculptures to the White Water Centre for a coffee stop. Fortunately the walking was on made-up paths so we avoided the very muddy areas. We then headed to the Lea Navigation Canal, walking along its bank for three miles to Broxbourne. We spotted a heron and a cormorant besides swans and ducks and admired

the different narrow-boats moored on the Canal. Half of the group stopped at the Old Mill Retreat Cafe at Broxbourne for a welcome lunch.

February

East Finchley to the Wetlands — A seventeen-strong group of walkers followed an almost completely off-road route across north London, beginning with Cherry Tree Wood (one day we'll do this walk when the cherry trees are in bloom). After a short hop we were into Highgate Wood, with snowdrops reminding us that Spring is just over the horizon and a woodpecker providing a welcome change from the squawk of the inevitable parakeets. Queen's Wood beckoned after the coffee break, and tested our knees with its downhill stretches and our lungs as we climbed up to the other side. After that it was plain sailing along the Parkland Walk, through Finsbury Park and around the Wetlands to the Coal House cafe for lunch. Fitbits and Apps declared the length as somewhere between five and six miles.



Hampstead Heath — The gales had abated and intermittent sunshine welcomed fifteen Shorter Walkers on our circuit of Hampstead Heath. We began with the cardio exercise and walked up Parliament Hill from where the view was clear enough to make out the Crystal Palace mast, for once. We crossed Viaduct Bridge and cut across to the upper Heath emerging at Jack Straw's Castle, managing to avoid most of the mud left behind in the wake of a huge cross-country race at the weekend. Back briefly into woodland, we arrived at the always stunning pergola and lovely Hill House garden, complete with Egyptian geese. On into Golders Hill Park for a welcome coffee break, then we completed our route through Sandy Heath and over to Kenwood House for lunch.

March

Crew's Hill to Cockfosters — Nineteen members attended the walk on a lovely, fresh day. Some mud, but less than expected. We had a short water break, then a longer coffee break on rough seating at Duncan's Wood, on the London Loop, not far from entering Trent Park. We arrived at Trent Park Cafe at 1.30pm, and some members stayed for refreshment, knowing there was only a quarter of a mile to Cockfosters Station.



Forty Hall and Myddelton House gardens — Wall-to-wall sunshine and a very gentle breeze created the perfect conditions for the nineteen walkers. We followed the Turkey Brook admiring the prolific celandines and wood anemones, with a photo opportunity provided by inquisitive cows. After a coffee break at Forty Hall cafe, our pace became leisurely as we strolled around the delightful walled garden, with daffodils, scillas, primulas and tree blossom all in perfect bloom. We continued our walk to Myddelton House, where we explored the gardens, including the magnificent Alpine meadow with vast swathes of daffodils and camassia. We seem to have hit the perfect week to see Spring gardens at their best.

April

Chess Valley — Ten people attended this walk on a beautiful Spring day. Slight problem with the Metropolitan Line, but it delayed the walk by just ten minutes. The Chess Valley Walk proved to be good walking with no mud, and several kites (the bird of prey type) were seen, as well as a blue tit nest beside the footpath. A coffee break was taken on a large fallen tree, and the walk finished at 1.45pm.



Wapping to Greenwich — A calm, cool day with light cloud, perfect for a gentle stroll on a surprisingly varied route. From Wapping we followed the river, then plunged into Canary Wharf, a little bit of Manhattan on Thames, with its huge office lobbies and malls. Some of us had coffee there (while others were distracted by shopping possibilities). We walked the length of Millwall docks with its ever taller apartment blocks. Then suddenly we were into open country: Mudchute Farm, complete with sheep, llamas and pigs, and wooded paths. Island Gardens, with its views of the old Naval College, and the foot tunnel under the river, took us to Greenwich. A few of us continued, after a leisurely lunch in the Old Brewery, up the hill to the Observatory with its wide open views, then to Blackheath and home.

May

Isabella Plantation — May is definitely the month to catch the huge variety of azaleas at the Isabella Plantation in Richmond Park, and visitor numbers seem to increase every year. Although we had narrowly missed 'peak blossom' there were still impressive numbers of the most exquisite azaleas and rhododendrons to admire, as well as bluebells. The weather was perfect, with plenty of sunshine for our walk along the Thames Path to the attractive Petersham Nurseries cafe for a coffee break. We finally encountered young fallow deer en route to Pembroke Lodge for a picnic lunch with an outstanding view. After that it was decision time between a short bus ride or the riverside walk back to Richmond station.



Tewin and Welwyn North — Nine of us took part in this 4½ mile walk to the peaceful village of Tewin, walking through rolling countryside with lovely views and dappled woodland shade on a warm and sunny day. We were briefly joined by long-standing Islington u3a member, Lesley, now living in Welwyn, who told us about the Digswell railway viaduct designed by Cubitt, seen as we walked through a field full of birdsong including skylarks. We stopped for lunch at the Rose and Crown in Tewin, some getting coffee at the community shop/cafe, then later a tiny blue tit fledging in our path was rescued and relocated, before we stopped for a photo by St Peter's Church, dating originally from Saxon times.

June

Richmond to Hanwell — We were lucky to have glorious weather for this walk. It started from Richmond town centre, past the former Richmond Palace (where Queen Elizabeth I died) and along the Thames. We crossed over the splendid iron footbridge at the Victorian-era Richmond lock and weir, which holds back the river to prevent the Thames above it from being tidal. After passing the historic riverside London Apprentice pub at Isleworth we entered Syon Park where we stopped for a coffee at the excellent garden centre. From Brentford the walk took us along the towpath of the Grand Union Canal. We turned off at the bottom of the Hanwell flight of locks, with the last section of the walk alongside the River Brent. The walk ended at Brent Meadow, with a view of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's stunning Wharncliffe railway viaduct. From there we all took the new Elizabeth line from Hanwell back into London, with some of us having lunch beforehand in the rather good Clocktower cafe.



July



Thames Path, Hammersmith to Kew — Eleven walkers met at Hammersmith on a pleasantly overcast day — a welcome respite from the recent heatwave — to follow the Thames to Kew. We had brief stops en route to discuss the several artists and writers who lived here, including William Morris, Edward Johnston, Emery Walker and AP Herbert, before our excellent Italian coffee and pastries, then made a short detour to the churchyard of St Nicholas, Chiswick, to see Hogarth's tomb. We watched a span of the new Barnes Bridge pedestrian

walkway being fitted into place, then continued to Kew, where some of us stayed on to enjoy an excellent leisurely late lunch at the Coach and Horses pub. Two even followed this with a visit to Kew Gardens. A lovely walk with a cultural twist.

August

Falconwood — August and it's another heatwave! This walk was hastily reorganised in view of predicted temperatures and full sun, to be almost entirely through the ancient woodland of SE London between Eltham and Shooters Hill. Fourteen intrepid walkers took up the challenge and we wandered mostly along pleasantly dappled Green Chain Walk paths, from Falconwood, through Oxleas Wood, Severndroog Wood with its looming castle folly, Jackwood, Shepherdleas Wood and Eltham Park, taking in distant views on the way, south to the Downs and north to the City. The original plan to continue north to Woolwich Arsenal had to be curtailed but many of us vowed to return and complete this in more clement times.



September



Blackheath to North Greenwich — Our walk was postponed in the face of the (accurate) forecast of torrential rain, but we had generally fine weather for this very pleasant route, starting in Blackheath, through Greenwich Park, past Queen Charlotte's Bath, the rose garden and the Ranger's House, to the magnificent views of Maritime Greenwich, the river and Canary Wharf. The rain had at least caused the grass to revive to being a little green instead of totally brown, but it had made all the blackberries by the path inedible! Seven of us had a leisurely walk down to the Maritime Museum, pausing to

admire Prince Frederick's gilded royal barge on display, before taking the Thames Path along the river to the O2. We had a very good lunch outside at the Cutty Sark pub before arriving at North Greenwich station.

Falconwood to Woolwich — Third time lucky! Our intrepid shorter walkers once again convened at Falconwood for the walk postponed in July and curtailed in August by the heat. This time the temperature was ideal with threatened rain largely avoided and we completed the route successfully. From the ancient woodlands north of Eltham, via a coffee stop at Severndroog Castle, we crossed Shooters Hill into the more open heathland of Woolwich Common and on to the Jacobean splendour of Charlton House, built for the brother of an earlier King Charles. Then we descended towards the grittier charms of Woolwich and a hearty lunch at the Dial Arch pub in the precincts of the old Arsenal itself, before being whisked swiftly home on the new Elizabeth line.



40th Anniversary Celebrations — Walking Around London, Stoke Newington to Olympic Park: The Shorter Walks group participated in walking the 230 miles around the Capital Ring and the LOOP for the 40th Anniversary of the U3A. Our allocation was the Capital Ring section 13. The 15 of us on the walk collectively contributed 75 miles. The weather surprised us by being largely sunny and by the time of our coffee break beside one of the more scenic stretches of the River Lea, at Springfield boathouse, fleeces and scarves were disappearing into backpacks. The towpath wended its way past the Walthamstow and Hackney Marshes on one side and the picturesque and often quirky houseboats along the waterway. We ended with a picnic among the gardens of the Olympic Park.