



[Home \(/\)](#)

[News \(/articles-62328/news-category.html\)](/articles-62328/news-category.html)

[About Us \(/?Itemid=\)](/?Itemid=)

[London Campaigns \(/current-campaigns.html\)](/current-campaigns.html)

[Get involved \(/volunteer.html\)](/volunteer.html)

[FAQ \(/questions.html\)](/questions.html)

[Join \(/join.html\)](/join.html)

[Walk Ideas \(/ideasforwalks.html\)](/ideasforwalks.html)

Latest Updates

- [Walk Leader Training - new dates announced \(/articles-62328/news-category/176-walk-leader-training-new-dates-announced.html\)](/articles-62328/news-category/176-walk-leader-training-new-dates-announced.html)
- [2018 AGM Agenda Available \(/component/content/article/30-articles/agm/174-2018-agm-agenda-available.html\)](/component/content/article/30-articles/agm/174-2018-agm-agenda-available.html)
- [Festival of Winter Walks \(/component/content/article/18-articles/173-festival-of-winter-walks-2.html\)](/component/content/article/18-articles/173-festival-of-winter-walks-2.html)

Most Popular

- [Rambler's Inner London Area \(/\)](#)
- [Walk ideas for you to try \(/ideasforwalks.html\)](/ideasforwalks.html)
- [Hampstead Heath Circular Walk \(4½ or 6½ miles\) \(/ideasforwalks/self-guided-walks/15-hampsteadheath.html\)](/ideasforwalks/self-guided-walks/15-hampsteadheath.html)
- [Led Walks \(/ideasforwalks/led-walks.html\)](/ideasforwalks/led-walks.html)
- [Inner London Area Local Groups \(/about-us/local-groups.html\)](/about-us/local-groups.html)

Hampstead Heath Circular Walk (4½ or 6½ miles)

Hampstead Heath Circular Walk (4½ or 6½ miles)

This walk starts and finishes at Hampstead Underground Station (Northern Line).

The short version, omitting Highgate, is an easy walk of 4.55 miles / 7.32 kilometres, with some moderate hills. The longer version has steeper hills and covers 6.58 miles / 10.59 kilometres. Both versions are mainly on surfaced or semi-surfaced paths.

The walk explores one of London's best known and loved open spaces. It ascends the viewpoint of Parliament Hill, then skirts the edges of the Heath by way of the Hampstead and Highgate Ponds, before affording the chance to visit one of Britain's most important art collections. It then plunges into the heart of the Heath before emerging by the Whitestone Pond, and returns to the start via some of Hampstead's most delightful streets. The longer version affords the chance to explore the famous Highgate Cemetery (admission charge) and to use the extensive refreshment facilities of Highgate Village.

1. Turn left out of the station down **Hampstead High Street**. Take the first left into the part-pedestrianised **Flask Walk**. There is a pleasant mixture of buildings here, with cottages contrasting with the larger terraces and town houses. At the junction, continue forward past the Victorian **Wells and Campden Baths and Wash Houses** of 1888 (now housing), and at the next junction, by **Burgh House**, turn right to cross the end of Gayton Road and descend along **Willow Road**. Burgh House dates from 1703 and is now a museum and arts centre.

2. Follow Willow Road right to its end, passing the tree-clad **Preacher's Hill** on the left. At the end of the road, pause for a moment outside **No 2**. This building is considered one of the most important Modernist houses in Britain, and was built as a family home by Ernö Goldfinger in 1937-9. It contains a number of innovations. It was not appreciated by everyone. Ian Fleming, the creator of James Bond, lived locally and objected to the concrete house. Ernö Goldfinger's wishes prevailed however, and the story is that Fleming took his revenge by naming one of his principal villains after the architect. Willow Road is now owned by the National Trust and guided tours are available.

3. Fifty metres further on, turn left into a short section of **Downshire Hill**, then cross **East Heath Road** to go past a traffic barrier onto the Heath. Almost immediately, turn right downhill on a broad gravel track, then left to reach the corner of the first of the **Hampstead Ponds**.

The 320 hectares of Hampstead Heath are now well cared for, but it was not always so. In the early 19th century, the Lord of the Manor, Sir Thomas Maryon Wilson, attempted to sell off parts of the Heath for housing, and some parts of the Heath have suffered from large-scale sand extraction.

In 1871 the Hampstead Heath Act enabled the-then Metropolitan Board of Works to acquire the Heath. The Act laid an obligation on the Parks Committee to preserve "as far as may be, the natural aspect and state of the Heath". Successive local government reorganisation saw the Heath pass through the hands of a number of bodies, control finally residing in the hands of the Corporation of London, who look after it today. The Heath had its own protection society as early as 1897, now has its own constabulary, and the present Heath and Hampstead Society is still very much active in safeguarding the Heath.

The attractive ponds that skirt the Heath reflect its early use as a source of water supply for London. The ponds are fed by the River Fleet, which rises near here and flows into the Thames near Blackfriars Bridge, but which now runs entirely underground. The Heath's landscape has proved attractive to many artists, the most famous of whom, John Constable, came to live in Hampstead in 1827 and made a number of studies of the Heath.



Hampstead No 2 Pond

4. Now follow the earthen path close to the left edge of the pond. Cross over a made-up path and continue along the left edge of a second pond. At the end of this, turn right along a railed path, with a third pond — the **Mixed Bathing Pond** — on your left. Continue uphill along this path, keeping to the right, then over a cross-path to ascend **Parliament Hill**.

Parliament Hill is said to get its name from its designation by Parliamentary forces during the Civil War as a defence point for London. It was formerly known as Traitors' Hill. At the summit, there is a viewpoint indicator which identifies buildings in the wide panorama over central London to the south. Looking over to the north-east is a verdant hillside climbing up to Highgate with the spire of St Michael's Church prominent at the top. The green-domed building further to the right is St Joseph's Catholic Church.

5. Keeping to the same path, fork left at the cross-path to descend to a T-junction near the corner of the **Highgate Ponds**. Turn left here and, this time, take the hard-surfaced path (not the earth one). Continue past a second pond. Just past a concrete pillar on the right, turn right at a cross-path and, in 20 metres, right again at a second cross-path. Soon take a left fork along a newly-created raised path which gives good views over the **Model Boating Pond** on your left and the **Men's Bathing Pond** on your right.

6. Bear left to follow the raised bank; where this begins to drop down towards the pond, bear right uphill over grass, keeping near a woodland edge, to make for a block of **toilets** ahead. On arrival, the walk splits between the short and long versions. **If opting for the short walk**, pass to the left of the toilet block and immediately right on a rise to come out onto **Millfield Lane** in 20 metres. **If opting for the longer walk** (which will return to this point), pass to the right of the toilet block and go straight ahead to climb **Merton Lane**, then follow the instructions from **point 16** onwards.



Millfield Lane

7. Otherwise, turn left along **Millfield Lane**, with an iron railing on your left and houses on your right. This tranquil, rough-surfaced, traffic-free lane passes alongside woods and even more ponds, one of which is a **Ladies-only bathing pond**. Keep along this secluded lane for about 800 metres. It eventually comes into a clearing, rises, and follows the boundary fence of **Kenwood** on the left. When **Millfield Gate** is reached on the left, go through to join a path running parallel, and follow this to **Kenwood House**, the large mansion you see ahead of you.

Kenwood House is said to be the finest 18th century country house in North London; it was remodelled by Robert Adam in 1764-79 and contains a fine art collection, donated by Earl of Iveagh in 1927, together with the house and grounds. The collection includes works by Rembrandt, Vermeer, Turner, Gainsborough and Reynolds. The house and parkland, including extensive woods, are now in the care of English Heritage and entry is free. A good map of Hampstead Heath can be bought at the shop. A restaurant and toilets can be found down the steps in the service wing.

8. Once your appetite for coffee, cakes and culture has been satiated, return from the service wing, keeping alongside the house, to pass through an ivy arch at its corner. Now walk left of the house for about 25 metres, to enter a path on the left passing underneath overhanging shrubbery. At the end of the lawn, look for a modern sculpture, Barbara Hepworth's "**Monolith-Empyrean**" on the left, and take a path sharp left to go past it. This short path ends in a double-kink before emerging onto a wide terrace, where turn right. Swing left on this path, passing Henry Moore's sculpture

“Two Piece Reclining Figure No 5” at the edge of a large field. Follow this path downhill around to the **Wood Pond** in the valley bottom. You will have come in a wide semi-circle, with Kenwood House resplendent on its hill to your left.



Kenwood House

9. Go forward over **Stone Bridge** and immediately turn right into the woods, keeping by a wire fence overlooking a shallow valley on the right. Further along, find a squat **memorial** to the 1987 hurricane which caused much damage to these woods. Continue on the main path for some distance as it twists about. Ignore the first gate on the right, but continue alongside iron railings, shortly taking the next gate on the right, just **before** the apex of a major bend. Turn immediately left downhill, left again around a tight bend, then - still downhill - take the next path on the right through trees (i.e. the narrowest path at this complex junction). Cross **Bird Bridge** at the bottom of the hill and turn left at the T-junction ahead, shortly arriving at the **Viaduct Bridge** to enjoy the picturesque view.

10. Now retrace your steps past the previous junction, this time continuing ahead, a deep valley visible to your right. Further along, pass a mock half-timbered building, containing **toilets**, on your right. The next point of interest is a small building with a conical roof, just off-route on the left. This was an **ice-house**, used before the days of modern refrigeration. Ice would be collected from frozen ponds and lakes during the winter and stored in these semi-subterranean buildings, being further insulated with straw. This enabled food to be kept fresher during the warmer months.

11. Continue on the rising main path, swinging left on reaching the top of the hill. A little way along the level path, divert left to take a parallel earthen path running along the edge of the hill. From here enjoy fine views over the **Vale of Health** to central London. This path briefly descends into trees, before rising up steps to emerge on **Spaniards Road** opposite **Jack Straw's Castle**.

Jack Straw's Castle was one of Hampstead's most famous pubs and the highest one in London prior to the creation of the new county of Greater London in 1964. Alas, it is no longer a pub. Originally a coaching inn, built in 1721, it has been largely rebuilt several times, especially after extensive war damage. Jack Straw, a supposed leader in the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, is said to have taken refuge hereabouts, although the name appears to have been a generic one applied to the Revolt's leaders.

12. Turn left to go over the pedestrian crossing and continue in the same direction to cross **Whitestone Walk** with care, keeping **Whitestone Pond** and the flagstaff on your right. Cross **West Heath Road** at the lights and go forward into **Hampstead Grove**, offset slightly to the right from the main road.

There are temporary roadworks currently (May 2017) obstructing access to Hampstead Grove at this point. To get back on route, simply go forward down the main road, take the next right, then the next left into Hampstead Grove.

Hampstead Grove is one of the most pleasant streets in Hampstead with many fine houses and several rewarding byways just off it. Further on, Fenton House is passed on the right. This dates from 1693, and is another National Trust property. It contains fine furniture and one of the largest gardens in Hampstead, but is chiefly known for the Benton Fletcher collection of early keyboard instruments. Most are in working order, and recitals are regularly given.

13. Where Hampstead Grove gives way to **Holly Bush Hill**, swing left, soon turning into **Holly Mount** and the **Holly Bush** pub. If time is pressing, a short-cut to the end can be gained here. A few metres past the pub, take steps down a wide passageway on the left to reach **Heath Street**. Go across the pedestrian crossing and turn right for 100 metres to return to **Hampstead Underground Station**. Otherwise, retrace your steps from the pub back to **Holly Bush Hill** to reach the foot of the sloping path adjacent to the pub sign. The large mansion over to the right is **Mount Vernon**, originally built as a consumption hospital in 1880 and now apartments. At the top of the slope, turn right, then left along **Mount Vernon** and, just before the iron bollards, swing left into **Holly Walk**.

***Recommended pub:** Hampstead is not short of good pubs, but the Holly Bush is one of the best. The building was converted to a pub from stables in 1896. There is a good selection of real ale, proper home-cooked food, and even a resident ghost!*

14. Descend Holly Walk, passing the **St Mary's Catholic Church** of 1816 on the left then, at the bottom of the hill, alongside Hampstead's additional **burial ground**, to arrive opposite **St John's**, Hampstead's parish church.

The church is worth visiting. Built in 1744-7, the interior is neat and airy and there are some interesting monuments. An unusual feature of the church is that the usual layout is reversed, with the church entrance at the east. and the altar at the west end, these arrangements necessitated by steep ground to the west.

15. On leaving the church, keep the burial ground on your left. The grave of **Hugh Gaitskell**, the former Labour Party leader, can be found in this section towards the end of the wall. Continue along **Church Row**, arguably the finest street in Hampstead, with an impressive range of tall houses along the south side, built between 1713-30. At the end, turn left along **Heath Street** to reach the **Underground Station** at the crossroads.

Extension to walk from point 7, taking in Highgate:

16. After a stiff climb up **Merton Lane**, cross busy **Highgate West Hill** with care, then turn left, still climbing. **Witanhurst**, left, near the crest of the hill, claims to be the largest private house in London, and was built in 1913 for the soap magnate, Sir Arthur Crosfeld. On reaching **South Grove**, keep to the right past the spindly **St Michael's Church** (1831), the **Old Hall** (c1691) and **Pond Square Chapel** (1859).

17. Twenty-five metres further on, turn down **Swain's Lane**, go past the radio mast and **Bisham Gardens** to enter **Waterlow Park** after another 50 metres. Keep downhill close to the park boundary until another gate is reached on the right. Go through this to find the main entrance to **Highgate (Western) Cemetery** almost opposite. The entrance to the **Eastern Cemetery** is a few paces further down on the park side of the road. There is a separate admission charge payable to both parts of the cemetery.



Waterlow Park

Waterlow Park was given to the public by Sir Sydney Waterlow in 1889. The park, measuring ten-and-a-half hectares, contains Lauderdale House, where Nell Gwynne is said to have once lived. The house itself dates from the sixteenth century, although much of what can now be seen dates from two hundred years later. Its garden is bounded by an ancient wall.

Highgate Cemetery: Arguably the most famous of the "Magnificent Seven" group of cemeteries that were largely created by the urgent need to find a replacement for the overcrowded and insanitary conditions found in London's parish churchyards. The population of London was to more than double in the first fifty years of the nineteenth century, and in 1832 Parliament passed a bill encouraging the creation of seven private cemeteries. The other cemeteries are Kensal Green, Brompton, Abney Park, Nunhead, West Norwood and Tower Hamlets. Highgate Cemetery was opened in 1839 and covers fifteen hectares. In 1855 a separate eastern extension was built. There is not enough space here to do justice to the long list of Victorian and other notables who are buried here, but mention must be made of Karl Marx, whose monument is in the Eastern Cemetery. Further details of access are given at the end of the walk description.

18. Return to **Waterlow Park** through the same gate and take the major path winding left up the hill, soon forking right towards **St Joseph's Church** (1889). Pass between two lakes, immediately forking left, then turn left in front of the high brick wall. The second gap in the wall gives access to **Lauderdale House**, which contains a **café** and **toilets**, otherwise continue on either of two forward paths to pass **Waterlow's statue**. There are fine views towards central London from hereabouts. Turn right at the T-junction, keeping right to exit the park at **Highgate High Street**.

19. Turn left and walk the length of the street, which affords a number of refreshment possibilities. Use pedestrian crossings over both **South Grove** and **West Hill**. Pass the Gatehouse Theatre-pub on the left and **Highgate School** (where John Betjeman was educated) in **North Road** on the right.

Drop-out point: *Several bus routes are available from here connecting to local tube stations, although none go directly back to Hampstead Tube. Buses going down Highgate High Street and Highgate Hill can take you to the High Barnet branch of the Northern Line at Archway; alternatively, the 210 bus can shorten the walk by taking you to Whitestone Pond (point 12); staying on the bus will take you to Golders Green Tube, one stop from Hampstead.*

20. Now turn left down **Hampstead Lane** and take the next left, **The Grove**, soon turning right into **Fitzroy Park**, a private road. Follow this all the way down for 850 metres. Pass allotments on the right, then turn left with the road at the foot of the hill, eventually arriving back at the foot of **Merton Lane**, where turn very sharply right into **Millfield Lane**. You have now arrived back at **point 7**.

Visiting Highgate Cemetery: For full information see www.highgatecemetery.org.uk (<http://www.highgatecemetery.org.uk>). There are admission charges to both cemeteries. Exploration of the Western Cemetery is by guided tour only for safety reasons. There are frequent daily tours, but it is essential to book ahead if visiting Mondays to Fridays; weekend tours are on a first-come, first-served basis. Visits to the Eastern Cemetery do not have to be booked and are usually self-guided; a leaflet is available. Hours could be spent here, but most visitors would want to see the monument to Karl Marx. About 100 metres from the entrance, take the first major fork left, following the path as it bends left then right. Karl Marx's monument is then on the right - its bulk making it unmissable. It bears the uncompromising inscription: "The philosophers have only interpreted the World in various ways. The point however is to change it."



Karl Marx Monument



A faithful dog - Emperor

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If you have any comments about this walk, or notice that it needs updating to take account of changes on the route, then please contact Mike at sgw@innerlondonramblers.org.uk (<mailto:sgw@innerlondonramblers.org.uk>)

Short/Leisurely Walks

- Sunday, 4th February 2018: Green London Way, Part 7 – Brent River Park (<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/find-a-walk-or-route/walk-detail.aspx?walkID=3940637>)
- Wednesday, 7th February 2018: LoveLondonWalkLondon: Royal Chelsea Hospital & Sloane Square (<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/find-a-walk-or-route/walk-detail.aspx?walkID=3951123>)
- Thursday, 8th February 2018: KINGS CROSS CIRCULAR (<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/find-a-walk-or-route/walk-detail.aspx?walkID=3946847>)
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Ramblers Groups London Walks

- Sunday, 4th February 2018: Green London Way, Part 7 – Brent River Park (<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/find-a-walk-or-route/walk-detail.aspx?walkID=3940637>)
- Sunday, 4th February 2018: The Parkland Walk - Ally Pally (<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/find-a-walk-or-route/walk-detail.aspx?walkID=3946303>)
- Sunday, 4th February 2018: A North London Linear walk (<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/find-a-walk-or-route/walk-detail.aspx?walkID=3948387>)
- Tuesday, 6th February 2018: LONDON - Wandle Trail (<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/find-a-walk-or-route/walk-detail.aspx?walkID=3937475>)
- Tuesday, 6th February 2018: Walking from, London (<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/find-a-walk-or-route/walk-detail.aspx?walkID=3941420>)
- Wednesday, 7th February 2018: LINEAR WALK: London Loop/Hillingdon Trail/Chess Valley; Section 2 (<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/find-a-walk-or-route/walk-detail.aspx?walkID=3946171>)
- Wednesday, 7th February 2018: Circular - Walk around the Squares of Bloomsbury (<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/find-a-walk-or-route/walk-detail.aspx?walkID=3944885>)
- Wednesday, 7th February 2018: Highgate Tube station to Stoke Newington (<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/find-a-walk-or-route/walk-detail.aspx?walkID=3951243>)

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