

Hidden GEMS

We reckon there are great walks everywhere – and here’s the page where we prove it...

#10 CENTRAL LONDON



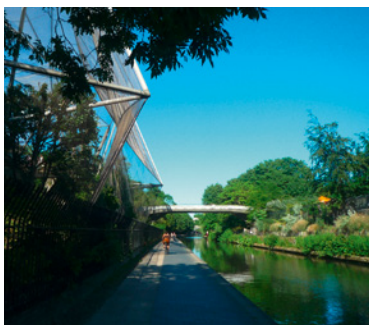
Photos: Phil Clough

The Big Smoke. The den of iniquity. "Populous and smoky – like hell," according to Percy Shelley...

... and a magic labyrinth of hidden green tracks threading together world-class parklands, according to **Country Walking**. Yes, with more than 2,000 miles of walking trails, towpaths, hills and riverbanks, we reckon London's greenery could be stitched together into a serviceable national park.

You jest.

Maybe – but not massively. I mean, did you know that there are 12 official long-distance footpaths and one national trail (The Thames Path) running through the city? The Capital Ring, Shakespeare's Way, Queen Eleanor Crosses Walk, Jubilee Way, Grand Union Canal Walk...



I do now. But talk me some specifics.

We've got a belter in this very issue. How about a walk which in a mere nine miles sweeps right across the city, barely setting foot off green turf for more than a fleeting footstep? We've followed the Regent's Canal across the city from Limehouse in the East End to 'Little Venice' way up west.

'Little Venice'?

Term coined by either Robert Browning or Lord Byron (or possibly neither) for the area of Maida Vale where the Regent's Canal meets the Grand Union Canal. It has waterside cafés, houseboats – even a waterbus. Probably gondoliers too. *O sole mio...*

Stop it. Keep selling.

Regent's Park (a Royal Park with some of the most immaculate gardens in the country). Victoria Park in Hackney ('The People's Park', the East End's retreat, with gazebos made with bits of the old London Bridge). Camden Town and Hoxton (probably the two coolest boroughs in London). And water as your permanent companion, no matter how busy the streets get. Nice wide path, too. And an easy rail journey back.

Wide path? I'll get mown down by cyclists, then.

Well, yes, if you must nit-pick, the Regent's Canal towpath is very popular with our two-wheeled cousins. But for a while now they've been using this radical new technology that helps them share the trail with us walkers. It's called a bell.

Alright, don't get tetchy. Sounds good.

It is. When a man is tired of London, he's tired of life; so said Samuel Johnson. We think this is the best way to stay excited by London – sneaking around it without the populous and smoky bits knowing you're there. **CW**

Above: Little Venice in Maida Vale, the end point of your adventure across the capital.

Below, left: The Regent's Canal running past the Snowdon Aviary, part of London Zoo.

TRY IT YOURSELF

Explore: See Route 7 in this issue.

The map: Ordnance Survey Explorer 173.

Done that. Where else? You could follow another, slightly larger waterway through the city: the Thames. You could start at the Thames Barrier and follow the river upstream through the city. Eventually you'd end up at a small field in the Cotswolds where the river first pops out of the ground. More details at www.nationaltrail.co.uk/thamespath

► Find our previous 'Hidden Gems' entries at www.lfto.com/hiddengems

WALK HERE
See Route 7 in this issue.



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14.4 Distance
14.4km/9 miles

4 Time
4 hours

Moderate Grade

Lots of pubs/café Refreshments



Relaxing by a lock,
between Points 1 and 2.

Photo: Phil Clough

**READ THE FEATURE
ON PAGE 162 FEB '12**

This gentle wander along the towpath of London's Regent's Canal begins in the deepest East End and finishes in the well-heeled environs of Maida Vale in the west. The canal has a surprising life of its own, with a permanent population of barge-dwellers and a buzz of activity, especially at the weekends. The walk adheres to the canalside for eight of the nine miles, so this guide concentrates on the sections where it deviates slightly.

By Phil Clough.

1 Start

At Limehouse DLR Station head to eastern end of platform and take exit signposted 'Branch Road'. At bottom of stairs turn R into Branch Road (but only briefly) then go straight across road at traffic lights before turning R again into Commercial Road. After 200m a bridge

crosses canal below. At other side of bridge, descend steps to towpath.

2 0.3km/¼ mile

Absolutely no danger of getting lost during this section. Path sticks to R-hand bank of canal throughout.

3 7.1km/4½ miles

Towpath ends abruptly where canal enters a spooky-looking tunnel. Unless you're lucky enough to hitch a lift through on a passing narrowboat, veer up to R and carry on straight ahead along Duncan Street. At end you reach dual-carriageway of Upper Street. There's a handy pedestrian crossing a few yards to R, followed by a nifty shortcut through shopping arcade in front of you (the NI Centre). When you reach metal wings sculpture at other side, do a quick R then immediately L into

PLAN YOUR ROUTE



ROUTE

Is it for me? A pleasant urban walk with lots to see but barely a slope to speak of
Stiles None

START/PARKING

Limehouse DLR Station, grid ref TQ361811

Nearest town London

Refreshments Wide choice along the way

Public toilets None

Public transport

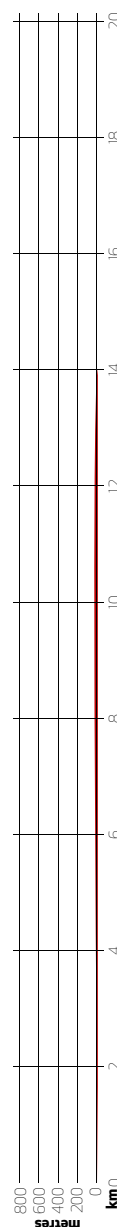
Limehouse Station is served by the Docklands Light Railway, as well as regular trains from Fenchurch Street; Warwick Avenue tube station (Bakerloo Line) is a two-minute walk from Little Venice

MAPS

Ordnance Survey Explorer 173; Landranger 176 & 177

TRAIL ILLA
ID: TZID9557

SOUTHERN ENGLAND



GREATER LONDON LIMEHOUSE – LITTLE VENICE

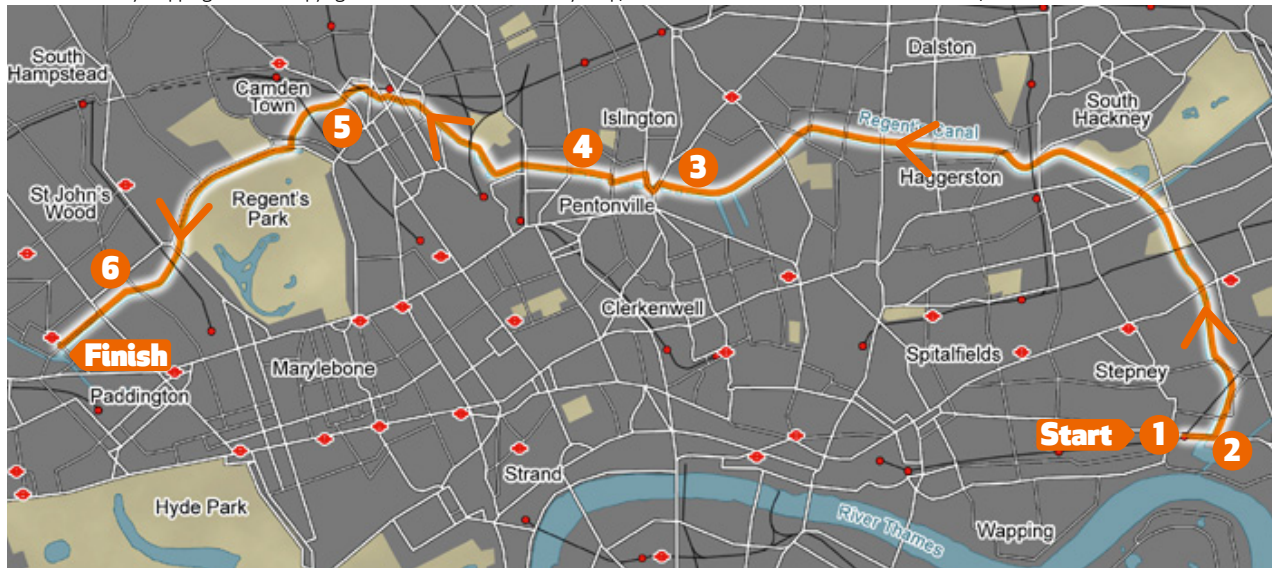
Country
Walking

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Tolpuddle Street. At end go briefly R into Barnsbury Road, then L into Maygood Street. Part way down Maygood Street it becomes a pedestrian footpath passing through 'Half Moon Crescent Tenants Cooperative'. At bottom, cross road (Muriel Street) and gate to canal is slightly R.

4 8.2km/5 miles

It's easy-peasy towpath now, all the way to Camden Lock, London's bohemian Mecca. Just under bridge at Camden Lock you find yourself in a cobbled square known as Middle Yard. Fighting your way through hipsters, goths and foreign students, make your way around a little inlet, then through a brick archway back on to towpath.

5 10.8km/6¾ miles

Back on towpath for probably finest part of walk, featuring

overhanging willow trees, swanky stucco houses, a floating Chinese restaurant and strange sights and sounds of London Zoo, which straddles both sides of canal.

6 13.5km/8½ miles

Another impassable tunnel looms, but this time much shorter than the Islington one and you can actually see

through to other end. Climb steps up into Aberdeen Place. At end of street you find canal again, but towpath itself is gated off here for private moorings. Take one of streets either side (Blomfield Road or Maida Avenue), both of which bring you to open basin of Little Venice with its island in middle and a big barge at other end which serves as a café. CW



The Pirate Castle, a youth activity centre, between Points 5 and 6.

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