

Three London Parks

A zoo, a view and possible tea for two... (or more)

Easy walking, people-watching in the parks, ending on Hampstead Heath where you can abandon the route directions given here and set out on your own improvised ramble, getting deliciously lost, perhaps finding Kenwood House café en route before improvising your path back to your chosen station.

Featuring (The) Regent's Park, a free peak into the Zoo, two panoramas of London – from Primrose then Parliament Hill; a saunter through chi-chi Belsize Park village and on to the semi 'wilderness' of the ancient Heath.

Route Summary

 Easy / 3 out of 10

 5.6 miles / 9 kilometres
(for basic guided walk from Regents Park, round Hampstead Heath returning back to Parliament Hill.
Additional walk options - guided walk or anarcho/free style across the Heath)

 OS Urban Map Walk London

 Dog Friendly

WALK DIRECTIONS

Start: Regent's Park Underground Station

1. Leave Regent's Park Underground Station facing the busy Marylebone Road, **head left** towards the traffic lights and cross over towards the grand Georgian houses opposite. Take the small road straight ahead (Park Square West) towards Regent's Park.
2. Cross over the Outer Circle (watch out for whizzing cyclists) into the Park. There are now **two options** depending on whether you have a dog with you:
 - **Non dog owners** can take the path just past the notice board, right, and after 50m or so at the fountain turn left to go straight ahead through the beautifully planted Italian Garden emerging after a few hundred metres at Chester Road, crossover to pass through the obvious entrance by the small café (and loo) just inside the park.
 - **Dog owners** - If you're lucky enough to have a dog companion then you and your hound are unlucky enough to be banned - for no given reason - from the Italian Gardens. So, at the noticeboard, continue straight ahead with a small playpark on your right and an open meadow on your left. Emerge after a few hundred yards on Chester Road; turn right

and crossover to take the entrance by the small café (and loo) just inside the park.

3. Shortly past the café the main route continues on, but you will take a slightly quieter diversion which will run parallel to this main path and run along the side of the zoo.

So, take the first path after the café/loos 80m ahead bearing **left**, then a short distance ahead at the Y-junction take the **right fork**. As you then almost immediately hit a T-junction of paths, leave the paths to continue onwards across rough grass between trees to pick up the path which clearly has open football pitches on its **left and a café surrounded by trees to your right**. Continue ahead (north) on this path ignoring all paths off.

4. With the football pitches on your left and fenced trees on your right, you will eventually be able to peek at a few of the enclosures of **London Zoo**. If you are lucky you may catch glimpses of, or hear, some of the animals; the camel enclosure is usually a reliable find. If you are very lucky, next to it is a tall bare grey tree marking the home of the watchful tigers. If you happen to arrive when it's tiger feeding time (usually around noon) the tigers will emerge. Sometimes I have seen a tiger lying languidly in the tree eyeing, with a casual disdain, the oblivious visitors below.
And... what do we think about animals in



captivity and the justification of conservation? Are they being 'preserved and protected' or are they serving life sentences in depleted conditions far from their natural habitats?

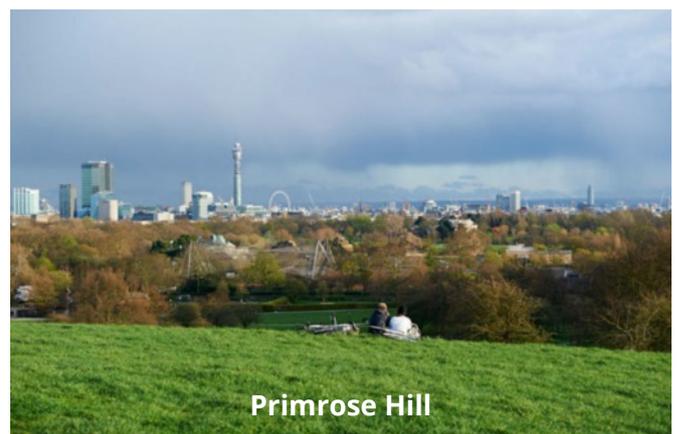
5. If the tigers are not to be seen, and even if they are, look out for a small break in the trees alongside the tiger enclosure. The 'tiger house' also has a separate monkey house. If you drop down into the gully by the fenced off zoo boundary you can see into the rope and swing exterior of the spider monkey enclosure. You might even see one emerge to climb, clamber and just hang out.
6. Still with the football pitches on your left and the zoo on your right, continue on for several hundred metres until you reach the footbridge across the **Regent's Canal** and the busy outer road. Turn **right** and use the pedestrian crossing to enter **Primrose Hill** immediately opposite.
7. Make your way by whatever route you prefer towards the summit of Primrose Hill directly ahead and up to your left. (Note: there is a café and a loo c150m, directly off to your right).

On reaching the summit take a moment to consider that you are standing on an ancient pagan religious site celebrated by Welsh Druids for the last 200 years. The Order included among their number William Blake. (See *LOHO wbsite for the curious tale of the battle between the Welsh Druids and Blur fans*.)

8. Having "conversed with the spiritual sun", politely turn your back to face North, choosing the sloping path leading **slightly right** and down to the corner and the road a few hundred metres to your right. As you track down

towards the north east corner you may see, on your right, a barely discernible patch of concrete showing through the grass. This is believed to be the sight of an anti-aircraft gun from the Second World War, positioned below the summit so as not to be a silhouetted target for the Nazi enemy bombers and their fighter escorts.

9. Follow the path down towards the corner where it abuts a school; at weekends this often serves as a Farmers' Market, making for an interesting diversion. Use the pedestrian crossing opposite the Market and continue onwards away from the Hill, passing on your right a short row of shops and head-high wall. Note the mixture of grand houses and occasional, seemingly haphazard, architectural interruptions of post war development in this area. This can be largely ascribed to the area's heavy bombing in the Blitz, the intended target being the railway lines, behind the head high wall, which serve London's mainline stations. It has been said by unkind souls than mine that what the Luftwaffe began the post war designers of London finished.
10. Follow this road straight on (**Primrose Hill Road**), crossing **Adelaide Road** at the lights and continue on to The Washington pub. Here, turn **right** into **England's Lane** and, if you can afford to pass Starbucks, you will find better coffee shops further along.
11. As the shops on the right end, cross England's Lane to the pharmacy on the corner to turn left and walk on the right hand side up **Primrose Hill Gardens** – a cheerful hotchpotch of flats and houses sandwiched between the grand Georgian splendour of neighbouring streets.





Hampstead Heath

12. At the end of the Gardens turn right into **Belsize Grove** passing a lovely row of houses of old terraced houses on your right.
13. Emerge into the bustle of **Haverstock Hill** turning left, uphill, passing **Belsize Park tube station** opposite on your right. More coffee shops and mini diversions abound.
14. As the shops end by the WACA centre, cross over continuing onwards to The George pub ahead. Immediately after take the **diagonal path down to your right** with a tiny nature reserve and church on your left. Emerging at the front of **The Royal Free Hospital** descend downhill to the busy junction of **South End Green** where more cafes and pubs abound (in summer you can try the Freemasons pub garden 300m to your left and 100m then up Downshire Road).
15. At South End Green turn **left** following the row of shops and cafes with **Hampstead Heath Station** on your right – where you cross over. Immediately ahead your path enters an avenue of tall plane trees and rises up to open out on the just visible southern corner of the Heath and the car park. *(See LOHO website for more information about Hampstead Heath).*
16. Take this path until it opens out with a lake on your right. Ignore the first narrow path off to your right between the ponds. Follow ahead along the main path, passing a second lake, before dropping slightly down to **follow the wide main path** (the busiest of the two paths that pass between the lakes) running between the second lake and the mixed bathing pond on your left. Keeping to the right follow this

obvious busy path up as it passes through trees then climbs to the summit of **Parliament Hill** (aka Kite Hill or Traitor's Hill).

You are now 134m above London, though it feels much higher if you say 431 feet. *(See LOHO website for the curious history of this much loved vista).*

17. Here your options are endless or, in this case, two:

- **The Guided Route**

Follow on from #18 below.

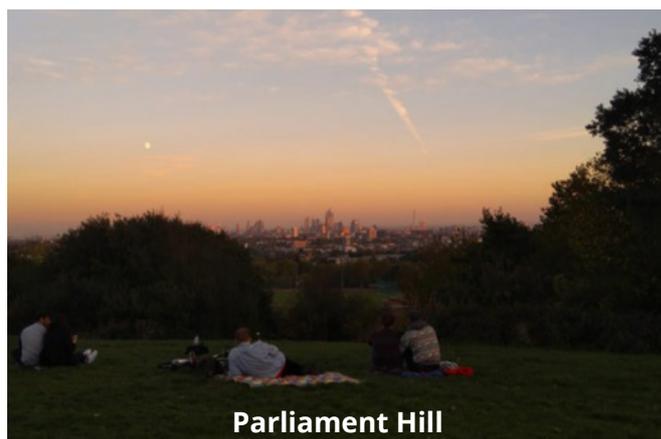
- **2) The free-form anarcho-rambler's route.**

With your back to the southerly view, so now facing north, head directly into the Heath on any path – straight ahead where possible, aiming to keep Parliament Hill (and the sun) behind you, head for Kenwood House which is about a 20 minute ramble away depending on how lost you want to get.

If in doubt ask passers by for directions, (don't be shy, it's Hampstead, the lovely people here will give advice to anyone who'll listen). You will pass through meadows and woods and eventually stumble into the Kenwood Estate and thence the House.

Rejoin the guided route at #25 below.

18. From Parliament Hill – with your back to the southerly view, so now intending to head mainly north, take the path down to your left back the way you came, then about 50m from the summit take the right path at the junction by a small tree, heading towards the tall grouping of trees about 150m away. (Note the path over to your left following the line of



Parliament Hill



Boudicca's Grave

trees and heading north, away from the Hill summit. You will pick this up very soon).

19. Where you reach the trees, the path curves to descend downhill and right, but you should leave the path to head **left** and onwards, bearing **diagonally left** into the edge of a copse of old beech trees. Look out for the upright dead tree in among them about 50m away – note the arty arrangement of wooden blocks on the trunk. From here head across open ground out of the copse **towards the line of trees** and its adjacent northerly path ahead of you. Head around the fallen tree in front of you – either side it doesn't matter – towards the northerly path and go right to continue north with the line of trees on your left.

20. With the wood on your left (one of several Anglo Saxon field boundaries) head onwards; you will see on your right in the open meadow a large, round, fenced 'tumulus' with its conifers. (See LOHO website for speculations about this mysterious prominence tagged by some as Boudicca's burial site).

Note the landmark of landscaped ponds some way off down to your right at the bottom of the meadow – you will encounter these on your return. Beyond them, high on the wooded hill, is **Highgate Village** with **St Michael's Church** – useful navigational landmarks.

21. Continue on until you see the large wood ahead blocking your onward travel. As you meet the wood, at the T-junction of paths turn right then, after about 60m, take the left fenced path into the wood. Your path now

opens up and rises slightly uphill through the wood until after about 150m there is small patch of open ground and benches on your right with a conjunction of several paths.

22. Go straight ahead to follow the obvious path, round a majestic upright remnant of a veteran oak tree girdled by shrubs on your right, and then winding onwards between trees and bushes for c100m to reach the gate of the **Kenwood Estate**.

23. Follow the obvious stony/muddy path ahead of you, with a large open meadow on your right, which after c300 m begins to curve right. Note the small white buildings up to your left – these are the newly renovated dairies.

24. **Note:** *If you intend to make the **Spaniards Inn** your lunch stop you will need to look out for the stripped bare silver grey tree trunk on your left at the edge of the wooded slope. Turn left here to enter the wood and head directly up on the obvious short steep path ahead. This will take you through the trees and alongside a posh residential block to emerge after 150m on Hampstead Lane. The Spaniards is 100m to your right on the opposite side of the road.*

25. Staying on the original curving path, passing the Dairy: After another 300m or so the path takes you through an open gate into the large open meadow that announces Kenwood House. Follow the path on to Kenwood, or for a better view turn right to drop down about 80m or so, and then head across the meadow admiring the Humphrey Repton created vistas, to the neoclassical splendour of the House – described in the 1830s as "beyond all question, the finest country residence in the suburbs of London". Go figure...

Don't miss the Henry Moore sculpture off to your left. Though sometimes called 'Mother and Child' it's official title is 'Two Piece Reclining Figure'. (See LOHO website for information about Kenwood House and grounds).

26. Kenwood's café (and loos) are your extremely handy stopping off place.

27. After Kenwood you can loop back towards your choice of end point to any of the three



stations by following these directions (#28 onwards) or, if you're feeling adventurous, tracing any path away from the House and heading in the general direction of the sun. This will, with luck and perhaps some mild swearing, take you back to Parliament Hill.

28. **The guided route back:**

Leave Kenwood by facing the lake and taking the main path left to head directly steeply down towards the trees and the lake to enter Kenwood itself and exit the estate after 100 shady metres or so at a junction of paths.

29. Continue straight on, passing the bleached remains of a fallen tree on your left.

30. Follow the path as it glides downhill, with a copse on your right, and bending right to emerge after several hundred metres through a line of trees at another junction of a major busy path.

31. Cross the path (can be muddy) to take the obvious rising ground up into the more open meadow. (If too muddy turn left down towards the ponds and swing right). The tumulus from before is off to your right. Soon you'll see a clump of trees (including a copper beech) and a bench at the crest of the hill with the ponds down to your left. Descend from the crest of the hill bearing slightly left to meet the junction of paths clearly visible below and just past the pond.

32. At the junction of paths continue ahead for a short distance where there is a path just beyond the hedge boundary, **rising steeply at an angle up to your right**. Take this, to arrive

after 300m or so, to the back of Parliament Hill which will be directly to your left and familiar to you from your previous encounter.

33. At the junction of paths continue ahead for a short distance where there is a path just beyond the hedge boundary, rising steeply at an angle up to your right. Take this, to arrive after 300m or so, to the back of Parliament Hill which will be directly to your left and familiar to you from your previous encounter.

34. Directions to stations from summit of Parliament Hill. (For Hampstead Heath and Belsize Park you will be retracing your steps).

For Gospel Oak Overground:

- Facing the City (and the south) turn left from the summit going steeply downhill on an obvious busy path. Follow this path for several minutes as it swings right between scrubby trees to eventually reach the bottom of the hill: Huts, loos and, at weekends a Farmers' Market.
- At the busy T-junction of paths turn right passing a café immediately on your right and take the first path left. This will take you to the Lido and then shortly after the station can be found to your right after passing under the railway bridge.

For Hampstead Heath Overground Station:

- Facing the City (and the south) take the path to your right and retrace your steps down, straight ahead, through the woods between the ponds and back towards the station.

For Belsize Park Tube:

Follow the instructions to Hampstead Heath station then go straight ahead for c100m to take the right turn up Pond Lane, past the Royal Free Hospital, to retrace your steps to Belsize Hill. The station is at the top of the rise, to your left and downhill, in 200m.