

Freedom Pass circuit

Section 41: Beckton to Dartford

Distance: 16.50 mi, 26.40 km

Introduction

Although this section is very long, crossing five zonal boundaries, it is actually very straightforward. It is largely made up of sections of other designated walks: to the Woolwich Tunnel, the Capital Ring; from the Woolwich Tunnel to Erith, the Thames Path; and from Erith, the London Loop. Most of it is along the South Bank of the Thames, and much of the rest is along the North Bank, or along the Darent or Cray.

Although one might imagine that the first part would be easiest, the Capital Ring being a well-trodden route, it is in fact the most difficult. At the time of writing, for the past four years there has been a large housing development blocking the east end of the Thames riverbank, with no information about diversions. Previously, for a couple of years there was another development blocking the riverbank at Woolwich (fortunately this is no longer in effect). Most recently there were emergency repairs blocking the gates of the King George V Lock. There is an alternative footpath provided for this eventuality, but the first part of it is seriously overgrown, and the next part is inundated (although, curiously, the remainder appears to be well cared-for).

There are pubs in Woolwich and Dartford, and some places to eat in Erith. It is about 1½ hours to Woolwich, then about 2½ hours from Woolwich to Erith, then about 2 hours from Erith to Dartford.

Directions

Turn left out of Beckton Station, and then left again along a footpath just after the grass embankment.

Carry straight on when you get to the road.

Keep going along the road until it bends sharp right, then carry straight on along the footpath.

Turn right at the first intersection.

For a short stretch a road runs alongside on the right.

At the first intersection after this, turn right.

At the roundabout, cross over the first two roads on the left, and leave along Ferndale Street.

Follow this road as far as a sharp right bend, then turn left along a cycle track.

At the roundabout, cross over the first two roads (both dual) on the left, and leave along Atlantis Avenue, under the DLR. We are now on the Capital Ring.

Keep going along this road to a sharp right bend, then carry straight on to the Thames.

Turn right along the riverbank.

After the path turns right, towards the airport, turn left and cross over the lock gates.

Carry on along the road to the right, alongside the green metal fence.

When the road bends right, take the footpath on the left, and carry on along the riverbank.

At the next lock, go up and down the steps on the left, cross over the lock gates, and follow the path right and sharp left, back towards the riverbank.

To go outside the flood defence wall:

Go up the ramp, and through the gate, and turn right.

Follow the path with the flood defence wall on your right.

At the last set of steps, cross back over the wall and turn right.

To keep inside the flood defence wall:

Pass to the right of the ramp.

Turn right and proceed with the flood

defence wall on your left.

A little later the path turns right.

Go through the security gate, cross the ramp, and turn left along the path back to the riverbank.

The path crosses another ramp, then goes along the edge of a park.

Just before the Woolwich Ferry, turn sharp right up a ramp.

Make for the small cylindrical brick building, in the middle of the ferry's approach road.

Cross the Thames through the foot-tunnel.

On emerging at the other end, turn right and right again, along the South Bank of the Thames.

Here we join the Thames Path and leave the Capital Ring. The path goes on for many miles. Highlights include Woolwich Arsenal and Crossness Pumping Station. The route is so clearly signposted that detailed instructions should not be necessary.

For much of the way as far as Thamesmead, you have a choice of parallel paths, one inside and one outside the flood defence wall.

When you get to Erith, keep on the path next to the river, despite any signs directing you inland.

At the end of the path, turn right up the ramp, and then left along the High Street. We have now joined the London Loop.

Turn left between the Cross Keys and the Playhouse.

Go down the steps and turn right along the riverbank.

Keep going along the riverbank, past the pier.

At the end, turn right.

Carry on along the road.

Cross Wheatley Terrace Road, and go through the line of bollards up the road on the

left, which is Appold Street.

At the end, turn left.

Keep on this disagreeable road past a mini-roundabout to the end of the industrial area.

Just before the road bends right, take the track on the left.

Follow the track round to the right, and then go straight ahead into Crayford Marshes.

Keep on the track for several miles.

At first it runs alongside the Thames, then it bends inland and runs alongside the Darent.

Go straight across the access road to the tidal barrier.

At the next fork, keep left.

Eventually the path leaves the Darent and runs alongside the Cray.

Finally it emerges in an industrial area. Carry straight on along the pavement.

Keep straight ahead at the fork after the railway.

At the end, cross the dual carriageway and turn left along the pavement.

At the roundabout, cross the first road and leave along the second.

Carry on over the Cray, where we leave the London Loop, and under the railway.

Then take the track on the right. Follow it round several bends.

At the end, after a bend left, continue along the narrow footpath on the right.

When it emerges from the trees, cross the track, and carry on through the kissing gate opposite.

Join a residential road.

When it bends left, carry straight on and then bear right.

Keep straight ahead. At the next road, carry on along the track slightly offset to the left.

At the top of the hill, go straight ahead on the footpath, which takes you over the railway.

After another short climb, bear left, alongside the railway.

At the end, turn left, under the railway, then right into a carpark.

Carry on through the carpark, and leave it at the far end through the exit on the left.

Turn right along the road.

At the roundabout, turn right, under the railway, then go up the steps on the left.

Dartford Station is over on your left.