

# THE LEA VALLEY WALK

LEAGRAVE TO THE HEART OF LONDON

by Leigh Hatts

**CICERONE**

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*Front cover:* Towpath near Ware (Section 5)

## DAY WALK

### *Tour of the Olympic Park*

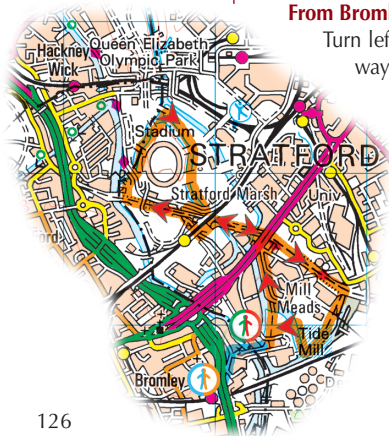
<b>Start/Finish</b>	Three Mills
<b>Distance</b>	3¼ miles (5.2km)
<b>Time</b>	2hrs
<b>Maps</b>	OS Explorer 162; Landranger 177
<b>Refreshments</b>	Cafés at Three Mills, Dane's Yard, The Greenway and Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park
<b>Public transport</b>	Bromley-by-Bow underground station for Three Mills, Pudding Mill Docklands Light Railway station is near The Greenway

'Go and see the area now so that you can compare it later,' said Mayor of London Ken Livingstone on the day that London won its bid to stage the 2012 Olympic Games. Now is the time to see the legacy known as the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The Bow Back Rivers – the River Lea split into parallel streams – now run not between sheds and factories but clean through grassland sown with wild flowers. This circular walk replicates as far as is possible a route that was available before the Olympic makeover.

#### **From Bromley-by-Bow station**

Turn left to go down steps and through the sub-way. At the top of the second steps turn right. Go right again at Tesco to Three Mill Lane (½ mile/0.6km).

At Three Mills pass in front of Mill House (left) and before the blue gates of Three Mills Studios go left to reach Three Mills Green. Here, by Three Mills Wall River (left), there is a modern memorial to men killed in a well rescue in 1901. Continue ahead to cross the north end of Prescott Channel.



Continue alongside Three Mills Wall River. Across the water is Sugar House Island. At the far end is Groves Bridge carrying Stratford High Street main road.

The main road is a former causeway across damp-ground and the present bridge was built in 1933 and strengthened in 1995. On the west bank in Dane's Yard, developed by Ikea, is the wooden lattice Strand East Tower, erected in Olympic year 2012 and resembling the Olympic torch. At night the tower, promoted as a 'rotated hyperboloid inspired by pickupsticks', is illuminated by more than 600 lights.

Turn right to pass Abbey Lane and cross the main-road on the pedestrian crossing. On the far side go right for a short distance to find The Greenway (left) just before the former Yardley's building decorated with a lady and two children carrying baskets of English lavender. Turn left on to the at first wide Greenway (see Section 8) and cross Waterworks River.

There is a first view of the Olympic London Stadium. The path crosses an unseen City Mill River before turning sharp left downhill to avoid a railway line. Ahead is Pudding Mill Station. At the road go right to pass under the railway and take a path (right) running uphill to rejoin The Greenway. To the right on the path is the View Tube.

The **View Tube** was built with recycled containers and opened in 2010 before the London Olympics to offer a view of the dramatically changing scene. The café (open 7am–5pm) has from the start been a walkers' attraction, while the once temporary building has developed into a community hub with events and workspaces.

Go left to continue along The Greenway with the view to the right of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park dominated by the **Olympic Stadium**.

**Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park** is 56 acres landscaped for the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. It took six years to clear 275 businesses and build the

*Sign for the  
View Tube café*



Stadium, Aquatics Centre, Velopark and Olympic Village. Overhead power cables, such a feature in the Upper Lea, are buried in two tunnels. The stadium is now the home ground of West Ham Football Club which was founded downstream on the Lea's riverside (see Section 9).

To the left are central London landmarks such as The Shard and The Gherkin. Before the path crosses the River Lea, and where a railing starts, bear half left on a path running down to the river. Go right under The Greenway to follow the towpath upstream towards Old Ford Lock.

Do not cross the footbridge to the lock on the Lea Navigation but stay on the path to follow the Old River Lea and a long brick wall (right). Pass under low pipes and a park road. Soon there is an inlet marking the entry

to Pudding Mill River, which was lost as a waterway when the Stadium was built for the Olympics. The riverside path is now alongside the Stadium (right). After two more bridges there is a confluence of Bow Back Rivers.

Cross the blue pre-Olympic footbridge spanning City Mill River. Turn right to walk with the water on the right. The Stadium is across the water. Pass under two bridges. Here the riverside has been recreated as a flower meadow. At the third bridge do not go under but take the steps up to a park road (left).

At the top cross the river and, as the road begins to run downhill, go over the pedestrian crossing to walk up a slope to The Greenway. Walk over The Greenway to retrace the way downhill and under the railway. ►

The walk continues left up a rising path to rejoin The Greenway. Follow the path back to the main road passing over Waterworks River on the way. Use the pedestrian crossing ahead at Stratford High Street to continue along The Greenway and pass Abbey Mills Pumping Station.

**Abbey Mills Pumping Station**, a fusion of Moorish and Romanesque, was designed by engineer Joseph

To the right is  
Pudding Mill Station.

*Garden in park by  
Old River Lea*





*Footbridge at City  
Mill River entrance*

Bazalgette, Edmund Cooper and architect Charles Driver, was built between 1865 and 1868 to collect sewage from low-lying sewers for transfer to the Northern Outfall Sewer. The name Abbey comes from now lost Langthorne Abbey founded nearby in 1134.

Continue past the pumping station (right). Just as the path bends to cross Abbey Creek go right through gates to follow a high concrete path with water below (left). After a short distance bear left on to the concrete zig-zag path and follow a further narrow path which runs down to the water.

Stay on the rough and wooded waterside path. This eventually suddenly bears right to a firm path running up the Prescott Channel.

**Prescott Channel** was given a new lock in 2009 ready for the increase in navigation traffic during





the building of Olympic buildings. This has resulted in the Bow Back rivers in the park ceasing to be tidal. In the water at the channel's southern end are the remains of the Euston Arch, the Euston Station grand entrance erected in 1838 and demolished amid much controversy in 1963. Mill Meads on the east bank was the site of the first Big Brother television set in 2000.

*New riverside  
planting*

Pass the lock and cross the long footbridge to Three Mills Green. Stay on path to the left of the grass and at the end go left to reach Three Mills.

### **For Bromley-by Bow Station**

Go up Three Mill Lane to pass Tesco. Turn left and, beyond a side turning, join the main road which rises to cross the railway. The station, reached by an underpass, is on the far side of the road. (1/2 mile/0.6km).