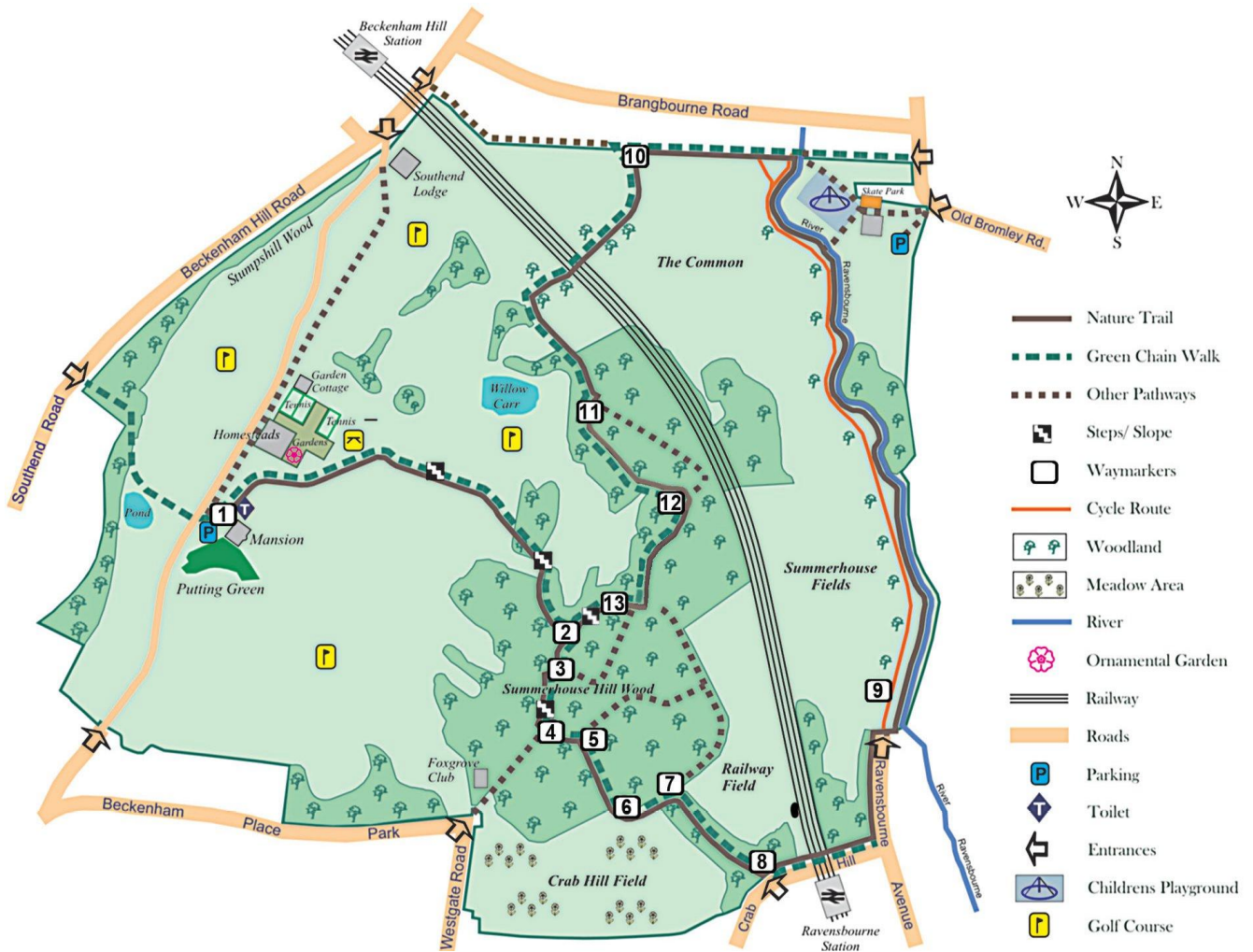


Friends of Beckenham Place Park

Take a walk on the Nature Trail



Point 1: Start by the Mansion signboard and map. Walk through the hedge to the left of the Mansion House and take the path to the left which follows the edge of the golf course. See if you can spot the evergreen Holm Oak and also the English Oak. On this path you will pass the formal gardens, you might like to take a look around them before continuing. By the steps up to the gardens there is a gnarled Black Mulberry Tree and further on a large stone squirrel statue. A little further on you will discover a fallen Turkey Oak which was at least 230 years old when it fell in 2002. Continue across the valley up toward the woodland past more mature Oaks, a Tulip Tree and a variety of specimen conifers. Also, a patch of Gorse is on your right just before you enter the ancient woodland. There is a good view back to the mansion from here. A little further on an information sign indicates some things you might see in the woodland. Listen out for the screech of the bright green feathered Ring Necked Parakeets, which are a common feature in the park. On the left by a golf course green there is a large pollarded oak and sizable sycamore tree.

Point 2: The path eventually reaches a T- junction with a signpost, map and bench. Turn right, you have now entered Summerhouse Hill Wood. The tree canopy along this path is predominantly Sweet Chestnut, a species introduced to Britain by the Romans. These trees not only provide edible nuts but its timber is ideal for fencing as the wood has natural preservatives and is easily split into posts & chestnut paling. Squirrel drays can occasionally be found in the trees near here they look like a large untidy nest of twigs. If it is winter see if you can spot any in the tree canopy. Also, a good specimen of a Wild Service Tree is off the path to the right somewhere behind the signpost and bench. Bluebells and Wood Anemone will be visible in spring.

Point 3: Follow the path right, look for Point 3 and keep straight ahead. Look at the tree trunks for woodpecker holes, you may hear woodpeckers drumming or calling, they drum more in the spring to mark their territory. All three British woodpecker species are present in the park but the lesser spotted one is very rare and hard to find.

Point 4: Turn left. In this short section, before you reach Point 5, on your right you will see a variety of ferns, the most common being the bracken fern. In May and June the drooping waxy white flowers of the lily Solomon's Seal can sometimes be seen. The roots of Solomon's Seal were used medically to heal bruises.

Point 5: Turn right. About half way to point 6 on your left is a depressed wet area which may be the remains of a natural spring indicated in old maps of the area. There are two iron marker posts nearby showing the old parish boundaries, the larger one is for Lewisham and the smaller one for Beckenham. Carry on to the edge of the woodland where it meets the grassland/meadow of Crab Hill at point 6.

Point 6: Turn left for point 7 but at this point, you might like to roam around Crab Hill and look at the impressive views of Crystal Palace and Beckenham over the brow of the hill. Look and listen for insect species including grasshoppers, butterflies, bees and several striking day flying moths such as the Cinnabar and 6 Spot Burnet Moth. On late summer evenings Pipistrelle Bats can be seen foraging over the meadow. See if you can find two wild flowers that have similar yellow flowers but completely different shaped leaves. Creeping Cinquefoil has almost hairless leaves, whereas, Creeping Buttercup is characterised by having three-lobed hairy leaves.

Point 7: There is a good viewpoint across the railway and Ravensbourne Valley, which is the river flood plain, toward Downham. Turn right and walk along the sunken lane pathway. On the left side of the path note what appears to be a lump of concrete containing pebbles. This 'conglomerate' (rock containing a mixture of stones cemented by finer sediment) was laid down in shallow water some 55 million years ago, during the Palaeocene period. It forms part of a series of strata known as the Blackheath Beds, a geological layer of pebbles in which small fossil shellfish and sharks teeth have been found. Just before you leave the park at point 8 there are some steps on your left which lead up to a large oak which has another boundary post beside it. The oak was the original boundary marker. (from Point 7 it is possible to follow the path round the edge of the field to Point 13 for a shorter walk, see map.)

Point 8: Leave the park turning left down the hill and over the railway bridge (Take care NOT to follow the Green Chain signs as they lead in the wrong direction) and turn left again at Ravensbourne Avenue back toward another park entrance at the end of the road. Go through the entrance at the bottom of the lane, this part of the park is called Summerhouse Field.

Point 9 is beside the sandy track which can be followed up to point 10. Safety note: rain can make the river dangerous if it is deep and fast flowing, take care. This is the beginning of the Riverside Walk which follows the River Ravensbourne downstream. Another parallel path follows the riverside more closely but can be muddy or partially obstructed with fallen trees and nettles, but there is a chance you may see kingfishers or egret in this area, or in winter perhaps a snipe. The River Ravensbourne is the principle river in Lewisham into which all the Borough's other rivers run. Here it is mostly still within its natural gravelly bed and bordered by Crack Willow (aptly named as it 'cracks' and breaks easily) and Alder, as well as wetland species such as Marsh Marigold. Among the bankside nettles, the spectacular Butterbur, a rare plant in Lewisham can sometimes be seen. It has ghostly, pale pink flower spikes which appear in spring followed by huge green heart shaped leaves that are grey and downy on the underside. This path crosses Summerhouse Field, followed by the grassed area known as the Common. You may see numerous crows which, on careful inspection, have more colour than you might think with iridescent blue in their feathers. At the end of the track you reach a tarmac footpath which runs parallel to the rear of the houses. Turn left here, this part of the park is called The Common and used to be reed beds and a marshy area in the distant past.

Point 10. Turn left, this will take you back over the railway via a bridge bounded by Horse Chestnuts, Hawthorns and another old Oak tree to your right. Keep to the main path (beware of any maintenance vehicles).

Point 11 is at a junction where there is a Green Chain marker post and a dog bin. Keep right, the sunken area on your left is the bed of the old ornamental lake. This part of the woodland is called the Ash Plantation and although it was managed woodland once, it is still part of the ancient woodland where amongst the brambles Bluebells can still be found. Alder, Ash and Sycamore trees have colonised this area. Also, Himalayan Balsam may be seen here which grows up to 3 m tall and is arguably the tallest annual plant found in the UK. A native of the Western Himalaya, it was introduced in 1839 and because it is very invasive it has to be managed to stop it from spreading.

Point 12: Keep right at Point 12 or you will be heading back down the other side of the old lake bed. There are fallen trees throughout the park but many fell here in the storm of 1987 and are still alive because their roots remained in contact with the damp soil. Dead trees are important habitats for many invertebrates including the rare Stag Beetle & Lesser Stag Beetle. Both species are common in the park but you will only see the beetles when they emerge in summer to mate and lay their eggs. On your way to Point 13 you will pass some large Sweet Chestnut trees. Look out for two waymark posts, when you reach...

Point 13: you have a choice of route to take. The short route to the right takes you via some steps up to Point 2. The longer route to the left will avoid steps and take you to Point 3. From either Point 2 or Point 3 turn right and you will follow the Green Chain Walk back towards the Mansion House and the end or start of the trail.