

The Joys of Walking

Walking is a great way to get from A to B. It won't necessarily be the quickest way, but by simply putting one foot in front of the other you will eventually get there. Not only that, by walking you will improve your health, it will save you money and you will be doing your bit for the environment.

Walking is the closest thing to perfect exercise. What's really great about it is that you can start as soon as you leave home, and all that's needed is a pair of comfortable shoes. You can hardly better that, can you? Now, with a bit of time, practically everywhere is within walking distance....

Walking is a way to discover things that you don't see from a car or a bus. Once you start you will be amazed at how much is hidden behind the houses, such as parks, footpaths, woodland, meadows, waterways and much, much more, just about everywhere, if you just care to look.

If walking on your own may seem a bit daunting, get together with a friend or, better still, join a walking group. All over the place there are groups of people walking and talking, enjoying being outdoors, and exploring new places.

Personally, I've never thought of myself as a 'walker', meaning one of those people who go on walking holidays in places like the Lake District. What I have done is to build a bit of walking into my daily routine. For many years, I was commuting to London, which meant a walk to Grove Park station in the morning, then from Charing Cross to Victoria, and the same at night, a good hour each day. When my job entailed driving to customers all over the country and I stopped for a break along the motorway, I chose to park as far away as possible from the service building so as to get a walk, and when I reached my destination, I would don a pair of trainers to explore my surroundings. It didn't always work, but when it did, it was great.

Now I'm retired and spend a great deal of my time on various walking activities. For instance, once a week I lead a local healthy walk from Downham Health & Leisure Centre. We've been going since October, and I'm proud to say we have not yet missed a single Thursday due to bad weather, although I have to admit that for a couple of weeks in January, it was so icy underfoot that we had to hang on to the path railing so as not to speed down the slope on all fours.

The other thing I do is walk around London, bit by bit, M25 fashion, but without the traffic jam. Having completed the Capital Ring, I am now half-way through the London Loop, 150 miles long split into 24 sections, a truly wonderful journey of discovery.

Also, from time to time, I do Nordic Walking with a group of like-minded enthusiasts. You won't believe how fast one can move with two sticks!

I'm not bragging about my achievements, but simply wish to share all those wonderful things there are to see by simply walking. I for one would be quite lost without it.

The Chief Medical Officer recommends that everyone should be physically active for 30 minutes a day on at least 5 days of the week, and this physical activity should be of a 'moderate' intensity to benefit health, such as brisk walking, cycling, gardening, dancing and heavy housework.

The good news is that it does not have to be all in one go, but could be just 10-15 minutes at a time, spread over the day. I whole-heartedly recommend it!

www.walklondon.org.uk www.whi.org.uk/walkfinder www.nordicwalking.co.uk

For further information on healthy walks, contact Sonja at 07836 548870.

(From GPCG Newsletter Summer 2010)

Walking Diary
by Sonja Aldengard

In the last issue of Grove Park Community News I wrote about the joys of walking. Did my ramblings inspire you to give it a go? Maybe you have already discovered that walking is a most accessible and agreeable pastime. Now is a wonderful time to be out there in nature, in the cooler air, surrounded by all the lovely autumn colours. Of course, it can be a bit muddy in places after several days of rain, but if you stick to the footpaths you should be do alright.

The Downham Circular Walks on Thursday mornings have recruited a few new walkers in recent months, and each new person who joins the group expresses surprise and delight when walking through a park, a piece of woodland or along a footpath for the first time. "I never knew this was here" is a common remark. We have ventured into some new areas like the Excalibur Estate, the largest surviving estate of prefabs in England, built by German PoWs in the 1940s, but now to be demolished, and Elmstead Woods where we have admired the wonderful wooden sculptures. Even walking our originally mapped out routes again and again is never dull, as we discover new things in each different season, which gives us a lot to talk about. It never ceases to amaze me how the group is chattering away all the time while walking, but that's just how it should be, walking **and** talking, great!

So, apart from walking with the Downham group, what else have I been doing since last time? Well, first of all there was the inauguration of the Tutu Peace Trail in July which turned into a nice event. Some 40 people participated in the walk, which was interspersed with short talks by historian John King, local councillor Suzannah Clarke, Anne Slater from Friends of Chinbrook Meadows and Mark Ingleby from Friends of Grove Park Nature Reserve. The walk ended at St. Augustine's Church, where Christopher Town entertained us with some well chosen anecdotes from Desmond Tutu's time in Grove Park, and where we finally enjoyed some well deserved refreshments.

My walking buddy bought a pack of Bromley circular walks and trails, which has taken us to Biggin Hill, Chelsfield and Green Street Green, to name but a few. On each of these walks we have managed to go wrong at some point which just makes it all so much more interesting!

During the Walk London Autumn Ambles weekend in September I took part in the ribbon-cutting event which was the official opening of the Green Chain extension into

Southwark. It is now quite possible to walk along the Green Chain from Grove Park all the way to Dulwich and Sydenham Hill Wood.

Last, but not least, **healthy walks** are finally coming to Grove Park, see next page.

K-e-e-e-e-p walking!!!!

(From GPCG Newsletter Autumn 2010)

Walking Diary May 2011
by Sonja Aldengard

The last newsletter announced that healthy walks were finally coming to Grove Park. A day before the walk was due to start, it looked bleak, very - we had SNOW! In a flurry of activity, a plan B was devised: we would meet at the Ringway as planned and simply stay there for a chat over a hot drink, as walking was deemed too risky. On opening day, five persons braved the weather expecting a walk, so we navigated in deep snow to Chinbrook Meadows and back, warming up at the Ringway afterwards. The next week we were eight and, despite icy pavements, we ventured to Northbrook Park. By the third Wednesday the snow had gone, again we were eight, including a man who is registered blind. This walk took us to Horn Park off Winn Road. And from then on the group has grown and grown so that we now have over 20 people registered. Not only are the numbers increasing, we are also walking in ever increasing circles. We were a bit restricted during the winter months, sticking mostly to streets, but spring allowed us to investigate footpaths leading further afield. More recently, we have walked all the way Eltham, to Chislehurst and Beckenham Place Park. Because of the Ringway's location, some of our walks take in no less than three boroughs. While walking and talking, nobody thinks about distance, but when I tell the group afterwards how far they have walked, they are usually amazed. One walker said: I've no idea where I am and where I've been walking, but I've enjoyed every single minute of it.

Late November I had the chance to attend a workshop organised by the Ramblers at the London Living Room on the 9th floor of City Hall, although there were no panoramic views on that rainy day. It was a revelation: The Ramblers are no longer all about open air enthusiasts in anoraks and walking boots; their Get Walking Keep Walking scheme, aimed at getting inactive people walking, has been running for the past three years, with aims similar to those of Natural England's Walking for Health scheme: see <http://www.getwalking.org/> & <http://www.wfh.naturalengland.org.uk/>.

A "walkshop" rounded off the day's programme. It was quite an adventurous walk, weaving in and out of London Bridge Station, Guys Hospital, Borough Street Market, etc, all the while watched over by the imposing Shard, in the making. And, as mostly happens on a walk, we discovered something new, namely the delightful Red Cross Garden, created in 1887, bordered by six picturesque Victorian cottages, a real gem for the residents of Southwark, then and now.

Increasing access to the natural environment can provide both mental and physical health benefits. Evidence from the Natural England / Department of Health Walking for Health scheme suggests that for every £1 invested in the scheme, £7 worth of health benefit is delivered. Are you ready for a dose of walking? All you've got to do to get your green fix is to turn up at the Ringway Centre at 10.30 on a Wednesday, fill in a simple form and start enjoying yourself. This is strictly come walking, in all weathers, come rain, come shine. My best tip: bring a bottle of water, your Freedom Pass, if you have one, and a brolly. See you on a walk soon!

(From GPCG Newsletter May 2011)

Walking Diary Autumn 2011

by Sonja Aldengard

By the time you read this, Grove Park healthy walks will have been going for nearly a year, not just once in a while but **every Wednesday** throughout this time. The number of people walking regularly every week has remained impressively high at about a dozen, but on occasions we have been an even larger group. Some walkers come faithfully week in week out, while others turn up more sporadically. New walkers are always welcome, and the walks are FREE!



Over the year we have built up quite a repertoire of different routes which gives us great flexibility and variation. Any new footpath we discover on our walks is a potential new route. Or we make a new route by simply walking the other way round. In other words, it never gets boring or repetitious. On the contrary, the group is getting ever more adventurous, not to mention fitter.

We are by no means losing touch with the Grove Park Nature Reserve, Chinbrook Meadows, Northbrook and Horn Parks, our nearest green spaces, which we visit again and again, in isolation, or in combination. Doing local circular walks allow us to return to the Ringway for a drink and chat afterwards; the group has practically adopted the Art Hut for this very purpose.

However, during the warmer months, and helped by the odd bus ride or short train journey, we have been able to do walks away from Grove Park, although we always still meet at the Ringway first. Thus we have meandered along the Waterlink Way in both directions. We have covered the distance from Lee to Greenwich largely via footpaths. We have explored Scadbury Park with its moated manor, Foot's Cray Meadows with its Five Arch Bridge, Keston with its ponds and we have ambled along the boardwalks in Sutcliffe Park. These walks are not necessarily longer, but they do take more time.

If you want to join us, check out the monthly walk programme displayed on the Ringway notice-board, or just turn up any Wednesday morning at 10.30.

For information: <http://www.wfh.naturalengland.org.uk/>

For inspiration: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwPsA9cGUf0&feature=related>

(From GPCG Newsletter Autumn 2011)

GPCG 2-page news sheet for The Big Lunch

Contribution from walking groups:



"I enjoy meeting all the other people and also being able to find out about and walk to all the really lovely places and countryside that we have around us which before the walks I didn't know much about. The exercise is also very good!"

"I never knew just how many green spaces and streams, rivers and brooks there were tucked away in the borough, until starting the walks. You get good exercise, and good interaction with other members of the group."

GROVE PARK WALKING GROUP - part of Lewisham Healthy Walks - continues to meet at the Ringway Centre every Wednesday at 10.30 to do walks lasting up to 90 minutes. There is a different programme of walks every month, both local and further afield, for which a Freedom Pass or Oyster Card comes in handy. Just turn up any Wednesday or for more information, contact Sonja on 07836 548870. These walks are FREE.

If you work during the week you may like to join **GROVE PARK COMMUNITY WALKERS**, a new group doing monthly walks at weekends. Walkers meet at the Ringway Centre to walk between four and seven miles. The next walk will be on Saturday 21st June following the Green Chain to Oxleas Wood. You can join the walk via [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com), or by contacting Sonja on 07836 548870. COST: £2.00/walker, proceeds to Grove Park Community Group.

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