



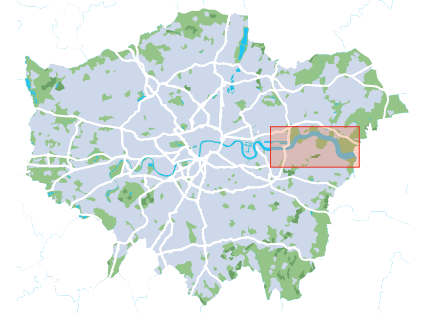
Thames Path south bank



Section 4 of 4

Thames Barrier to River Darent

- Section start:** Thames Barrier
- Nearest station to start:** Charlton
- Section finish:** River Darent
- Nearest stations to finish:** Slade Green
- Section distance:** 11 miles (17.5 kilometres)



Introduction

Beyond the Thames Barrier, the route is waymarked with the Thames Barge symbol rather than the National Trail acorn. This is because the Thames Path National Trail officially ends at the Thames Barrier but it is possible to continue the walk as far as the boundary with Kent.

There is a continuous riverside path all the way along the Thames as far as the River Darent on the Bexley boundary with Dartford. There are plans to extend further through the Kent side of the Thames Gateway. Eventually it is hoped the 'Source to Sea' Path will materialise on both sides of the Thames.

The working river displays all the muscularity of its ancient history, built up by hard graft since Henry VIII's royal dockyard at Woolwich was established to build a new generation of naval warships. Woolwich Arsenal grew up alongside to supply munitions, and Thamesmead was built on a vast network of 'tumps' to contain explosions, some of which can still be seen.

Across the river, equally vast operations are visible where giant cranes move and shape the last landfill into new hillsides and Ford at Dagenham's wind turbines symbolise the post-industrial end of oil. The cargo ships now come only as far as Tilbury and the vast sea container ports on the north side of the river; whereas Erith with its pier, once a Victorian pleasure resort, retains a seaside feel.



Thames Barrier to Tripcock Ness - section 4a



Section 4a start: Thames Barrier
Section 4a finish: Tripcock Ness
Section distance: 3.5 miles (5.5 kilometres)

Directions

The hull-shaped cowls of the Thames Barrier make an awesome introduction to this section of the Thames Path, reaching out across the river towards Thames Barrier Park on the north bank.

Did you know?

This feat of modern engineering is the defence that protects 1.25 million Londoners, 26 Tube stations and over 4,000 properties from the increasing risk of flooding due to rising water levels and 'surge tides'. Conceived after 300 people died in the flood of 1953, it finally opened in 1982. The Barrier will serve until at least 2030. The round-the-clock control room receives up to 36 hour advance warnings of surge tides from satellites and other sources, and the Barrier closes four hours before high tide. Full closure takes 30 minutes, raising six gates and lowering four.

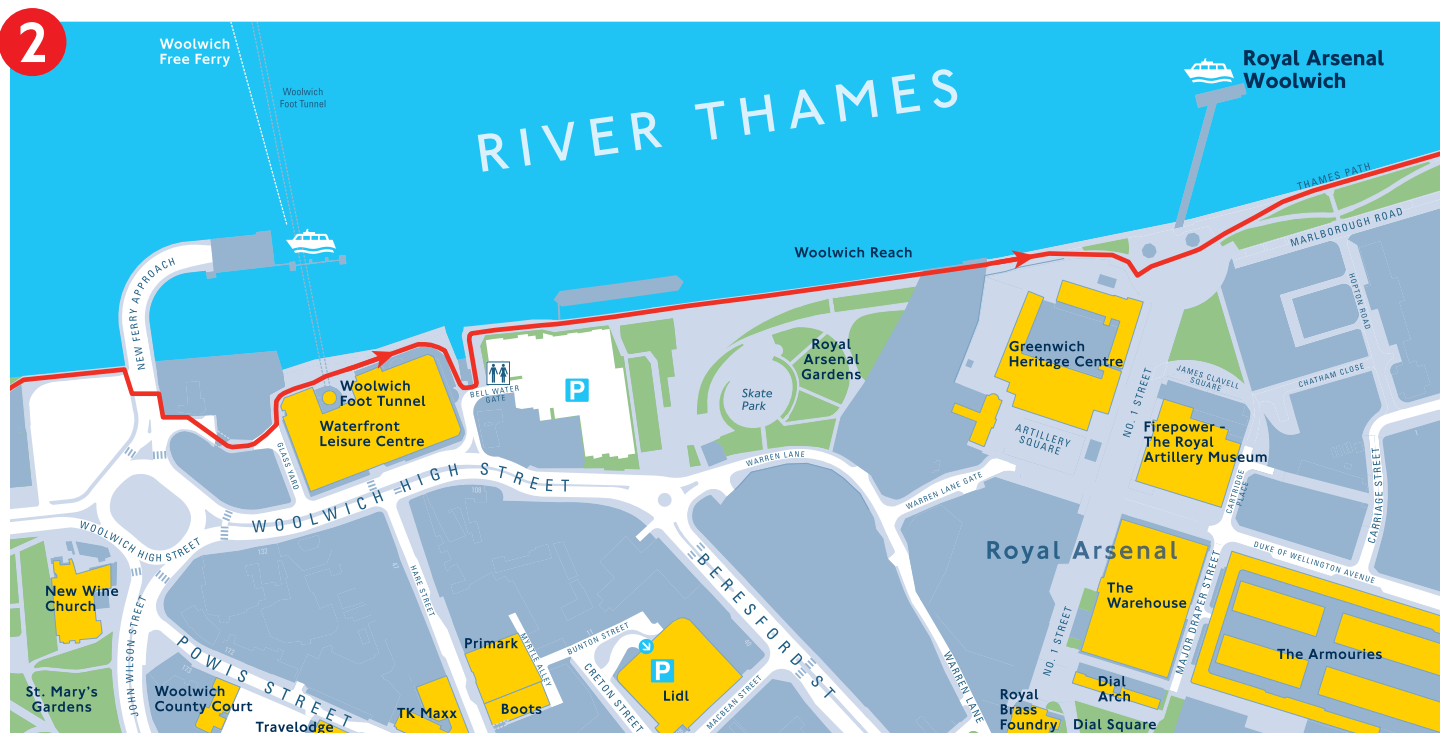
To get to the start of this walk from Charlton station. Turn left out of the station and go ahead (across Woolwich Road) towards the river. On reaching the river, turn right and follow the path until you get to the Thames Barrier.



1 From the barrier, the first part of the walk is slightly away from the river, shared with the Green Chain Walk, part of the Walk London Network of routes. Follow signs with the barge symbol marked 'Thames Path extension - Woolwich Dockyard via Interim Route' through the park. Turn left at Woolwich Road, leaving the Green Chain Walk.

At the roundabout, cross over Warspite Road then turn left down Ruston Road. Follow the road round to the left and at the T-junction turn right onto Harlinger Street and pick up the riverside route.

The walk leads through the former Woolwich Dockyard; the next landmark is the Woolwich Free Ferry. This free service for vehicles and foot passengers dates from 1889, but there has been a ferry across the river here for many centuries. The ferry links North Woolwich with the vast Royal Albert Dock and King George V Dock, the space in between used by London City Airport.



2 Cross over the Ferry Approach Road at the pedestrian crossing and take the access road down a slope and round the back of the Waterfront Leisure Centre to reach the river again. Here find the rotunda which houses the lift and stairs to the Woolwich Foot Tunnel.

Did you know?

Built in 1912, as an alternative to the Free Ferry, the tunnel was used by thousands of workers who had previously lost wages whenever the ferry was delayed by fog. This is also the starting point for the Capital Ring walk, part of the Walk London Network.



Continue along the riverside route past the new Royal Arsenal Gardens. It is worth glancing back for superb views of the O₂ Arena and Canary Wharf.

Did you know?

The Woolwich area was famous for ship building in the time of Henry VIII, then munitions. In 1805 George III changed its name to Royal Arsenal Woolwich.

As shipbuilding declined, the Arsenal flourished, and in World War I some 80,000 people were employed here. The Royal Ordnance Factory closed in 1967 and much of the area has since been redeveloped. Nearby is also 'Firepower' - the Royal Artillery Museum.



Carry on along the Thames Path, with the river on the left. Follow the landscaped promenade past former artillery buildings and new apartments. Next the river broadens out into Gallions Reach. On the other side of the Thames is the entrance to the King George V Dock, which was big enough to take the Mauritania in 1939 with inches to spare. Look back on the City for distant views of the BT Tower (formerly the Post Office Tower), the 'Gherkin' skyscraper and Canary Wharf.

Beyond Thamesmead the character of the path changes: unfenced with gravel underfoot it has a more rural feel. Ragged timbers of a wooden slipway thrust out of the bank marking the change of scene; buddleia and willow screen the path, and the cry of gulls gives the river a more jaunty, seaside air.

This is the approach to Tripcock Ness. Across the river, two 60 metre towers operate the drop-gate flood barrier that guards the mouth of Barking Creek.

Tripcock Ness to Crossness Incinerator - section 4b



Section 4b start: Tripcock Ness
Section 4b finish: Crossness Incinerator
Section distance: 2.5 miles (4 kilometres)

Passing the open space, notice the remains of 'tumps' - moated magazine stores that were part of the Arsenal site. The walking and cycle paths separate: take the lower path towards the wartime Pill Box trained on Barking Creek. From the Crossness Pumping Station, carry on along the gravel path, keeping the river on your left.

Oil storage depots on the far bank signal the approach to Crossness, its light visible to shipping for eight miles. The Riverside Golf Club comes next and just beyond is the old pumping station housing the Crossness Beam Engines, which used to pump London's sewage into a reservoir and from there out into the Thames on the ebb tide.

Turning its back on the Crossness Beam Engines, the walk now skirts the sewage works and the jetty, where waste was loaded onto sludge boats to be dumped at sea. Crossness Incinerator, the futuristic building with the curved chimney, changed all that.

Did you know?

The plant burns waste, generating power to drive the sewage works, and producing 40% as a by-product for soil fertilizer.

Crossness Incinerator to Erith's Riverside Gardens - section 4c



Section 4c start: Crossness Incinerator
Section 4c finish: Erith's Riverside Gardens
Section distance: 2.5 miles (4 kilometres)

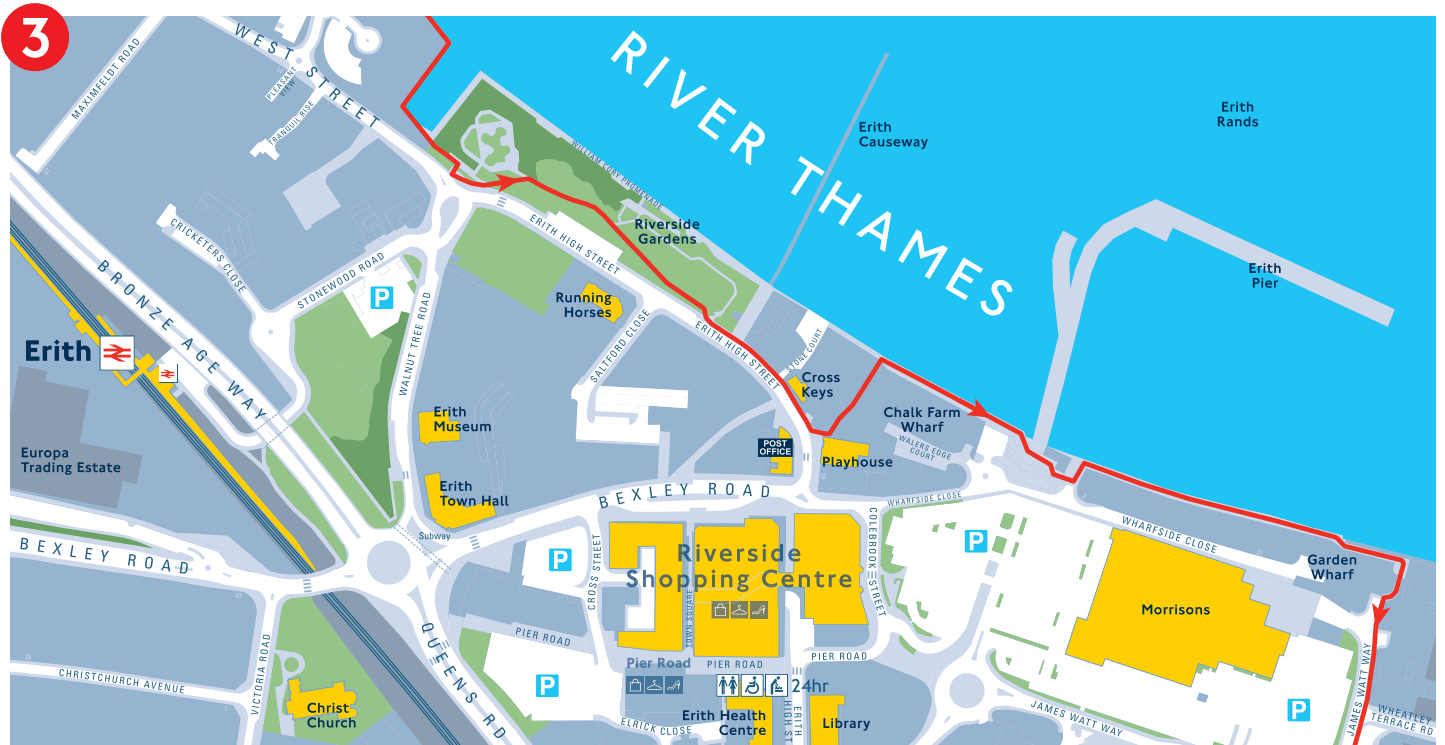
On the opposite bank, beyond the reedy fringes of the river, there's more hi-tech activity at Ford Motor Works. Car production ended here in 2002 but engine manufacture continues. This was where the Ford sewing machinists' strike of 1968 took place, as depicted in the film, 'Made in Dagenham'.


On the far side of the sewage works is Crossness Nature Reserve, a real birdwatcher's paradise.

Did you know?

This urban wilderness on the Erith flood plain is one of the last surviving open areas of grazing marsh in Greater London. In recent years, over 130 species of birds have been recorded on the 20-hectare site. Viewing facilities include a bird hide, sand martin wall, bat cave, and artificial nesting cliff.

Follow the river past industrial units to Crabtree Manorway. On the opposite bank the new Frog Island waste site opened in 2007. Around the bend, look out for barges bringing waste to be sorted in the giant green shed on the far bank. The whole landscape is green, marking the start of Rainham Marshes - a former shooting range - now a RSPB reserve.



 **3** On towards Erith, past a spidery network of cranes, chutes and the sort of working wharves that served all shipping before the advent of enclosed docks. Snaking up and down past mill and silos, the walk opens to views of Erith's curving waterfront, with modern housing, old church towers and dramatic vistas of the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge. The bridge was opened in 1991 as vital link in the M25 London Orbital Motorway spanning the River Thames between Dartford and Thurrock. At the time it was one of the world's longest cable-stayed spans.


 Follow Thames Path extension signage all the way along William Cory Promenade to Erith's Riverside Gardens. Here there are viewing platforms, looking out over a glorious sweep of the Thames to Coldharbour Point lighthouse, which marks the tip of Rainham Marshes.

Erith's Riverside Gardens to River Darent - section 4d



Section 4d start: Erith's Riverside Gardens
Section 4d finish: River Darent
Section distance: 2.5 miles (4 kilometres)

The walk now shares its way with the London LOOP, also part of the Walk London family.

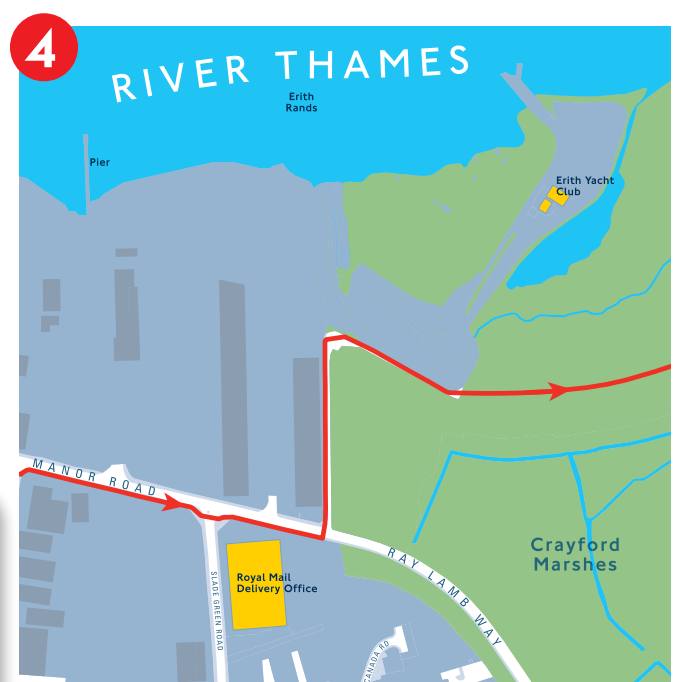
 **4** For a while the route leaves the waterfront, follow signage heading right into Wheatley Terrace Road and Appold Street, then left onto Manor Road.

East of Slade Green Road the Cray River Way starts and all routes then follow the signed footpath left off the road towards the river and Erith Yacht Club.

The route continues on the raised causeway across the ancient landscape of the Crayford and Dartford Marshes; more good bird-watching areas. The landscape here has a wild feel. To the left lie Erith Saltings.

Did you know?

Erith Saltings are the last remaining fragment of salt marshes on London's inner Thames. At low tide, remnants of a ghostly forest are sometimes visible on the foreshore.



The Thames Path extension finishes with a flourish at Crayford Ness by the River Darent Flood Barrier, built to protect Crayford and Darent from flooding at high tides. From here, the Cray River Way and London LOOP head southward along the bank of the River Darent.

To reach the station and buses at Slade Green, stay with the LOOP a bit further around the embankment and follow the station link signs.