

Walk along the Towpath of the Regent's Canal

Wednesday 21st March 2012

This walk has been organised by Ron Gee



Dear IOP Member,

I thank you for your enquiry about the Regents Towpath walk on March 21st, and welcome you to the trip. Details are as follows :-

- 1) Place and Time. Meet near to Mile End Tube Station at 11.45 to depart sharp at 12.00 noon. As you leave the station turn left (Westwards), then turn first left (Eric Street), a quiet backstreet where the party will meet. I shall wear a brown duffle coat and a baseball hat, so I hope that this will identify me OK.
- 2) Mile End Station is on the Central and District underground lines. Members living in London will be able to travel to Mile End on their Freedom Pass. Members living outside London should ask for a one-day "Travel card" to be added to their day return ticket to London. This is the cheapest way to travel around London as well as to London.
- 3) Car Parking . I do not know of any affordable car parking facilities in the neighbourhood of Mile End.
- 4) Toilets. **Warning!** There do not seem to be any toilets in the vicinity of Mile End Station. There is a pub in Eric Street where we meet. This should provide a toilet providing you choose to be a pub customer. Liverpool Street station which is two Central Line stations away from Mile End, offers toilets. Allow at least 15 minutes to travel from Liverpool Street to Mile End, due to time it takes to descend escalators and ascend stairs.
- 5) Late arrival at Mile End. As stated, we do not wait for late-comers. However there is no reason not to sample the trip and catch us up. As you leave Mile end Station, turn left (Westwards), and walk about 100m to the traffic lights at the junction with Burdett Road. Cross over the lights to the north side and then walk westwards again along the Mile End Road. About 200m further on should bring you to a pub named "The New Globe". Immediately after the pub, turn right into a side street. At about 20m to the north, you should find a flight of steps leading down to the canal towpath. Turn left and walk on until you catch us up or at least arrive at "the Grapes" pub by following the details given here.
- 6) The Walk. Once the canal is reached, you will see to the right a set of locks. However we turn left under the Mile End Road. I am uncertain as to when the Bridge was built (maybe 1820 when the Canal opened), but it now carries 40 ton lorries, which it was never designed to do in the first place. We continue southwards, with a pleasant park on the left and reach Johnson's lock. In the central island between the two locks is, according to a 1990 book about the canal, a post carrying a rack and pinion which can be used to operate the paddle between the two locks so as to control the flow between them. Almost opposite Johnson's Lock used to be a gas works with associated wharves to accept deliveries from the canal. We continue under some road bridges, and then a railway line, which carries the Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness service.

Soon afterwards we pass beneath a second railway bridge, which now carries the Docklands Light railway. This line was originally that of the London to Blackwall Railway, which was the second railway line to open in London and which opened in July 1840. Originally the line was cable operated, which provided the bonus of safe-guarding from the sparks and cinders emitted by steam locomotives, the commercial, sailing boats of that era, that were then were moored in the basin. As we pass under the railway bridge we will see to the right Limehouse station, which can offer rail, DLR and neighbouring bus services back to Central London when the trip concludes. The railway line concerned was closed to passengers in 1926, one of the legacies of the 1926 National strike, but was reopened as the first part of the DLR in 1987.

Back to waterborne traffic, we will now be at Limehouse Basin, which is now used to moor Millionaire's yachts, instead of barges and lighters. Around the Basin, which was formerly named Regent's Canal Dock, are displayed notices about the history, and the wildlife. The notices are much more definitive than anything that I write. The Basin has been extensively redeveloped since 1983. It may be still possible to see across the Basin the brick, accumulator tower of the first hydraulic pumping station of London Hydraulic Power Company. The tower housed the reservoir, which generated the pressure to provide hydraulic power to the Company's customers. From memory the provision of such power lasted until the 1980s. It was only the demise of customers that ended the service. Under our feet is the Limehouse Link, a M£171 road tunnel built to link the new, developments in Docklands with the A13. One of the few spendthrift ventures incurred during the reign of Margaret Thatcher.

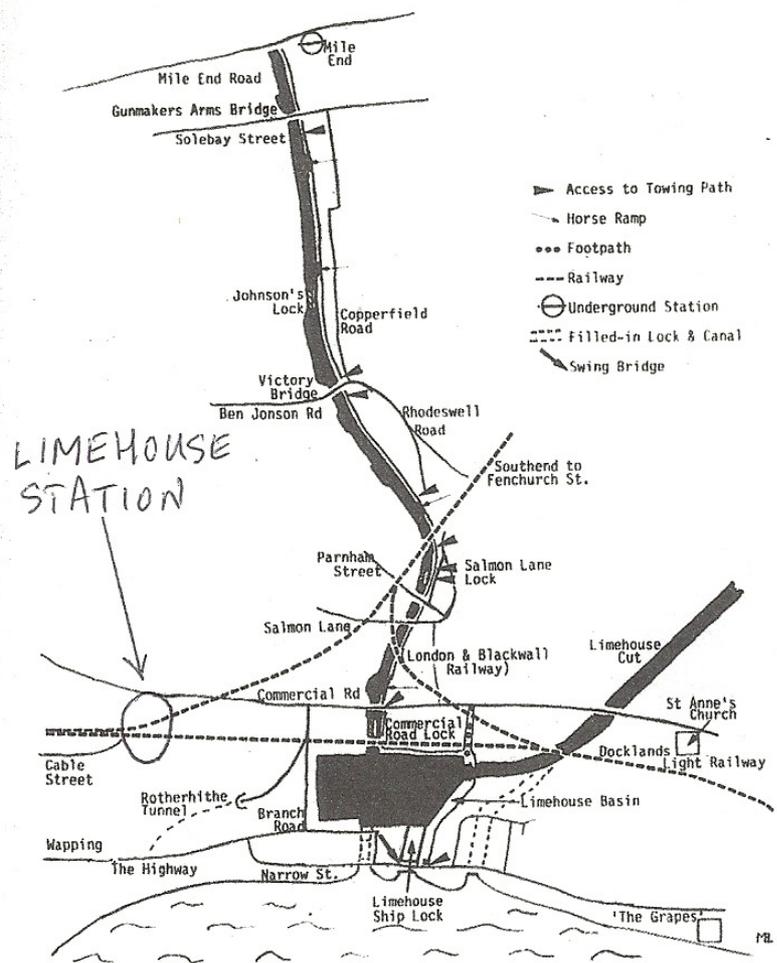


No doubt we will have observed waterfowl en route. Maybe as it is springtime, we may even be lucky enough to have seen a Kingfisher, as is stated in the notices, as foraging along the canal, although I have never seen one in this part of London.

We skirt the eastern side of the Basin and cross a bridge over the Limehouse Cut, which leads to the River Lea. Maybe we could walk this canal branch later this year if people wish. Then we follow signs stating "Riverside Pubs" to the Grapes Public house, where the guided tour will end. Inside the pub you will find notices about the history. Here you will be able to order lunch upstairs or bar snacks downstairs, and a riverside balcony, from which you will be able to view the shipping outside (mainly tourist boats these days).



7) End of trip. I leave it to you to decide when to leave the pub. After the trip, you could sample the nearby automated Docklands Light Railway, which can be boarded at the nearby Limehouse station. At 14.45 (or earlier if people wish), I will set off for Limehouse station, and a trip to the Brunel Museum. I.e. I offer an extension to the trip in order to visit the Brunel Museum in Rotherhithe. The trip will be via Shadwell and Wapping stations on the East London Line, where you can admire the elegant pictures on the walls of the stations. Those at Wapping illustrate the East London Railway in the 1960s (steam and electric). The East London Line (ELL) on which we will be travelling, passes through the Thames tunnel, which was the first tunnel in the world under a river and was built by Brunel's father. The son assisted his father and learnt his engineering craft in the school of experience. Two stops along the ELL will bring you to Rotherhithe station. Nearby is the museum devoted to the construction of the Thames Tunnel, which would be of interest to civil engineering enthusiasts in the party. So for a small museum admission charge of £1.50, you can have an after-lunch continuation trip led by myself to the Brunel Museum. Please join if of interest, but let me know if you wish to continue to the Brunel Museum, so that I can arrange departure after lunch, at a time agreed by those interested .



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