



Discover the plants and animals of Sydenham and Dulwich woods, visit the site of the original Crystal Palace and walk with some dinosaurs!

1 Kingswood House and Library
Rather than having any royal connections, King's Wood probably got its name from Edward King, a tenant back in 1535. The Lodge was built in 1814 and later renamed Kingswood House.

One of the most famous owners was John Lawson Johnston, the inventor of Bovril. A Scotsman who emigrated to Canada in the 1870s, Johnston made a fortune by supplying the French army with his beef drink. In 1880 he sold the business and moved to Kingswood, which became known locally as 'Bovril Castle'.

2 Dulwich and Sydenham Woods
Together, these woods form the largest surviving part of the ancient Great North Wood, confusingly four miles south of central London. At its largest it stretched from Camberwell to Croydon, where it was relatively north and so got its name. Place names like Norwood, Woodside and Forest Hill remind us of the former nature of this area.

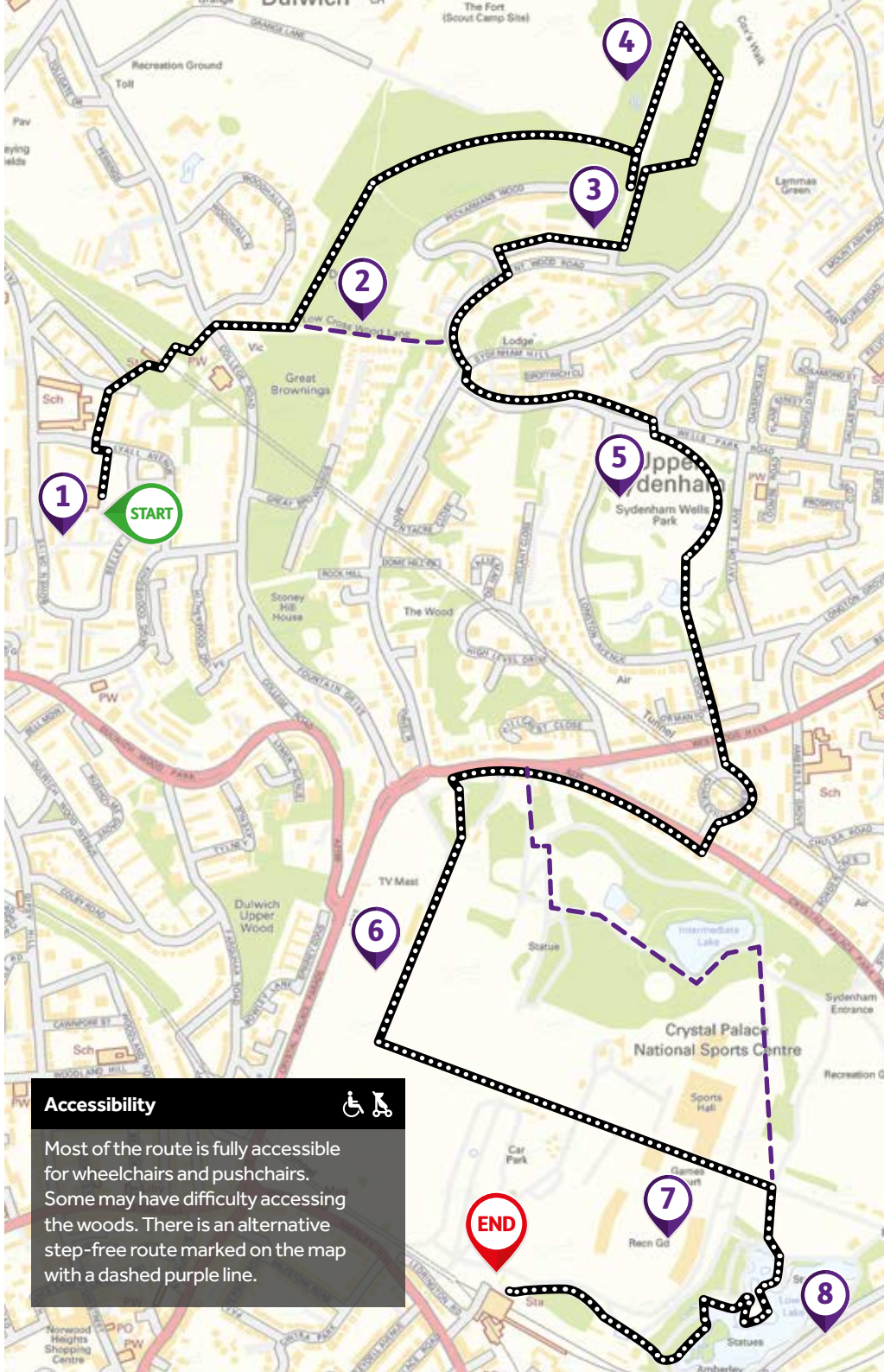



Railway tunnel, photograph by Sara Moiola

Most of the woodland had been developed by the early 1800s, although apparently there was a hermit, "Matthews the hairyman", living in the woods up until 1803. His grave can be found in Dulwich cemetery.

3 Railway Tunnel
The path now follows the old railway line that ran from Peckham Rye to Crystal Palace. It operated from 1884 to 1954, and closed because so few people used it after the Crystal Palace was destroyed in 1936. The remaining railway tunnel is now home to the area's only population of long-eared brown bats. Every evening they fly out to find insects by the open waters of nearby parks.

4 Sydenham Wood Folly
Turn back on yourself and then turn right. You will come across a Victorian folly – a building that was designed to look like a ruin. It once would have sat in the gardens of David Henry Stone, a former Lord Mayor of London. You may also be able to see the remains of the large houses around this site. They were all demolished by the 1970s and the area was returned to its woodland state. It has been managed by the London Wildlife Trust since 1982.



Accessibility 

Most of the route is fully accessible for wheelchairs and pushchairs. Some may have difficulty accessing the woods. There is an alternative step-free route marked on the map with a dashed purple line.



Crystal Palace,
illustration by Geles Tomas

5 Sydenham Wells Park

The name of this park refers to 12 natural springs, which were discovered in the 1600s. Their supposed medicinal properties drew large crowds to the area up until the 1830s, including George III. Eventually they became polluted as the area turned into a wealthy suburb, although some are still active.

6 The Crystal Palace

This park was created to be the magnificent setting for the relocated and enlarged Crystal Palace, which Joseph Paxton designed for the 1851 Great Exhibition in Hyde Park. A redesigned building was completed here in 1884 to impress, educate, entertain and inspire, eventually becoming an international attraction. The geological illustrations and the full scale models of dinosaurs were pioneering and the technical engineering of the Palace itself was innovative.

The Crystal Palace was destroyed by fire in 1936. This was followed by a period of dereliction and decay at the park. Although there were a number of plans to rebuild it, none ever came to pass.

7 Athletics Stadium and Race Circuit

Although it has now disappeared, this was the site of the first ever London Grand Prix in 1937. The racetrack was built 10 years earlier, was only a mile long and ran along existing paths in the park. It was upgraded for the Grand Prix to two miles, but still only had tarmac on the corners. Race meetings were held up to 1974, (apart from a break in WWII when it was taken over by the Ministry of Defence) and the track was eventually covered over by the growing National Sports Centre. This was the first multi-purpose sports park in the UK, and began in the 1960s. The large athletics stadium and Olympic-sized pool were the main facilities for the sports right up until the new park was built in Stratford for the 2012 Olympics.

8 Lower Lake – The Crystal Palace Dinosaurs

These creatures are relics of a bygone age – and not just the Mesozoic. They are the only remaining attraction of the original Crystal Palace, and were created in 1853 to sit in the grounds of the newly created park. They were made by artist and sculptor Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins, with help from famous fossil expert and founder of the Natural History Museum, Richard Owen. The dinosaurs are now recognised as being largely inaccurate; for example the Iguanodon is shown standing on four legs (it would have stood on its hind legs) and with a nose-horn (a misunderstanding of the fossilised remains). Nevertheless, the acceptance and representation of prehistoric



Folly in Sydenham Hill Woods,
photograph by Sara Moiola

life at all was quite revolutionary in the 1850's.

To publicise the opening of the 'Dinosaur Court', Hawkins famously held a banquet for Richard Owen and other scientific figures inside the mould for the Iguanodon figure on New Year's Eve in 1853.

After the Crystal Palace was destroyed by fire in 1936, the dinosaur figures themselves became increasingly decrepit and were scattered around the park in the 1950s. Between 2001 and 2003 Hawkins's dinosaurs were restored and reunited in their original position by the Borough, and were awarded Grade I listed status by English Heritage.



Crystal Palace Dinosaurs,
photograph by Sara Moiola

What the walkers say...

"Happy, friendly and the walk was very informative."



Sir Joseph Paxton, photograph by Sara Moiola