

A local walk with a fine view from a viaduct. Parts can be muddy.

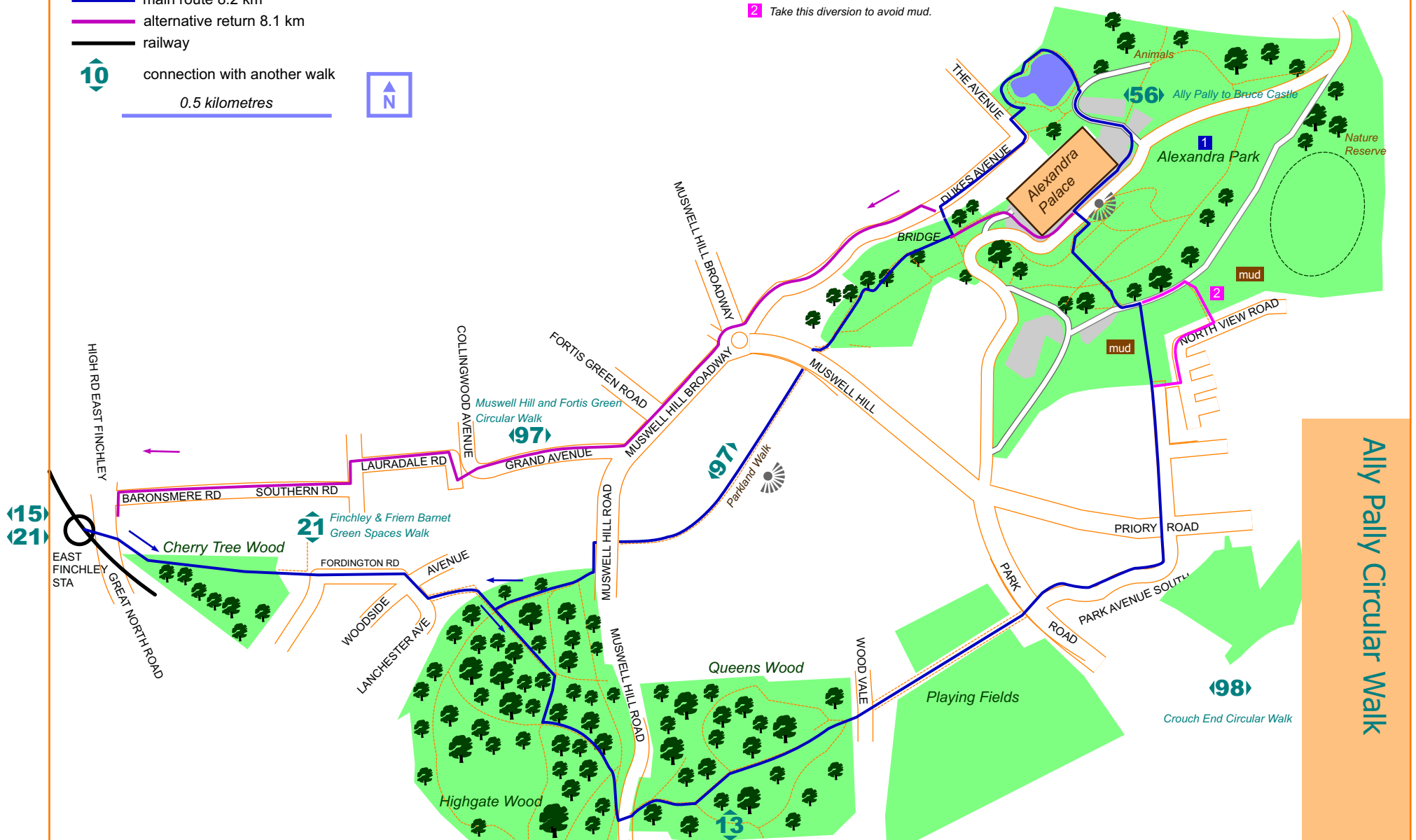
There are cafes in Cherry Tree Wood, Highgate Wood, Queens Wood and Alexandra Park

- main route 8.2 km
- alternative return 8.1 km
- railway

10 connection with another walk
— 0.5 kilometres



- 1 Take time off to explore the park.
- 2 Take this diversion to avoid mud.



Ally Pally Circular Walk

walk notes

Ally Pally Circular Walk

This circular walk from East Finchley uses an old railway track as part of its route.

Railway to the Palace

The branch line from Highgate to Alexandra Palace was constructed to coincide with its opening on 24 May 1873. It was extremely popular – nearly 60,000 passengers visited on the bank holiday but on 9 June calamity, the palace burned down! To help combat the flames, the GNR sent two of their own fire engines by rail and these arrived before the local ones. Some traffic was generated by people coming to see the ruins but then the line closed until the palace was rebuilt. On reopening there were 90,000 passengers on the bank holiday but there was a derailment at Copenhagen tunnel, north of Kings Cross. Trains backed all the way up the line and many passengers walked home. The fortunes of the branch line closely followed those of the palace, despite the growth of Muswell Hill commuters, and a new station at Cranley Gardens (1902). On 3rd July 1954 the last passenger train, with eight gas-lit coaches full of railway enthusiasts and local residents set off from Finsbury Park, arriving 20 minutes late.

The palace itself burned down a second time and is only gradually being restored.

What is done is impressive; the palm court can usually be accessed directly or via the pub.

Highgate Wood

Evidence of human activity and use of wood dates back to prehistoric times. During the Medieval period, the wood was part of the Bishop of London's hunting estate. Between the 16th and 18th centuries the church leased the wood to tenants, who managed it as 'coppice with standard'. Hornbeam was coppiced, being regularly cut and used for fuel, and oak standards were left to grow to maturity, before being felled for construction of ships and buildings. In the 1880s, the surrounding area was being rapidly built-up. Local residents feared that the church would sell off the wood for development.

A high-profile campaign to save the wood was led by Henry Reader Williams and in 1886 the wood was gifted to the City of London and declared "open for the use and recreation of the public forever". 362 moth, 353 fungi, 70 bird and seven bat species have been recorded. At least 28 species of bird regularly breed here, including great spotted woodpecker, nuthatch and treecreeper. There are more than 50 species of trees and shrubs.

Muswell Hill

The views south from Muswell Hill never cease to impress.

In the mid-twelfth century the Bishop of London, Lord of the Manor of Hornsey, granted some 65 acres to an order of nuns recently established in Clerkenwell. Situated on the east side of Colney Hatch Lane, this land contained a natural spring or well. John Norden, the Tudor Historian described how a King of the Scots was cured of a disease by taking the waters of this well, and in medieval times this well was to become a place of pilgrimage. The nuns built a chapel near it, "bearing the name of our Ladie of Muswell". The chapel was to disappear with the dissolution of religious houses by Henry VIII, but administration of the land was to remain with Clerkenwell parish until 1900, and was known as "Clerkenwell Detached". In 1896, the vacant The Limes and the adjacent Fortis House estate were purchased by James Edmondson of Highbury, giving him 30 acres of flat land in the heart of the village. He created a perimeter of shopping parades and laid out Queens, Princes and Dukes Avenues. Commodious terraced houses attracted middle-class residents. Simultaneously, W.J. Collins, built over the Fortismere and Firs estates, and elsewhere. Between them Edmondson and Collins created within a short period of time a homogenous and unique suburb. (<http://www.muswell-hill.com/muswell/history/muswellhill.htm>)