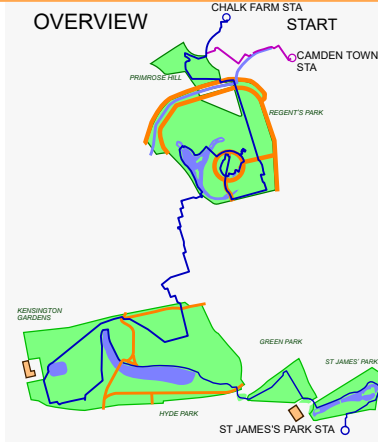


# Six London Parks



FOR AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE ALONG THE CANAL VIA LITTLE VENICE SEE WALKS 18 AND 25

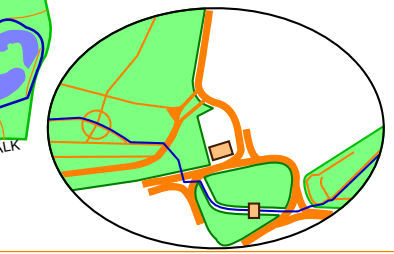
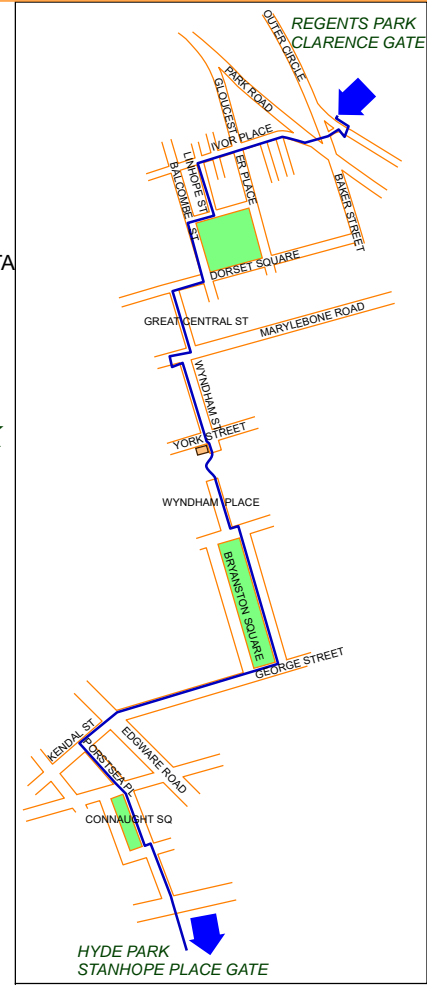
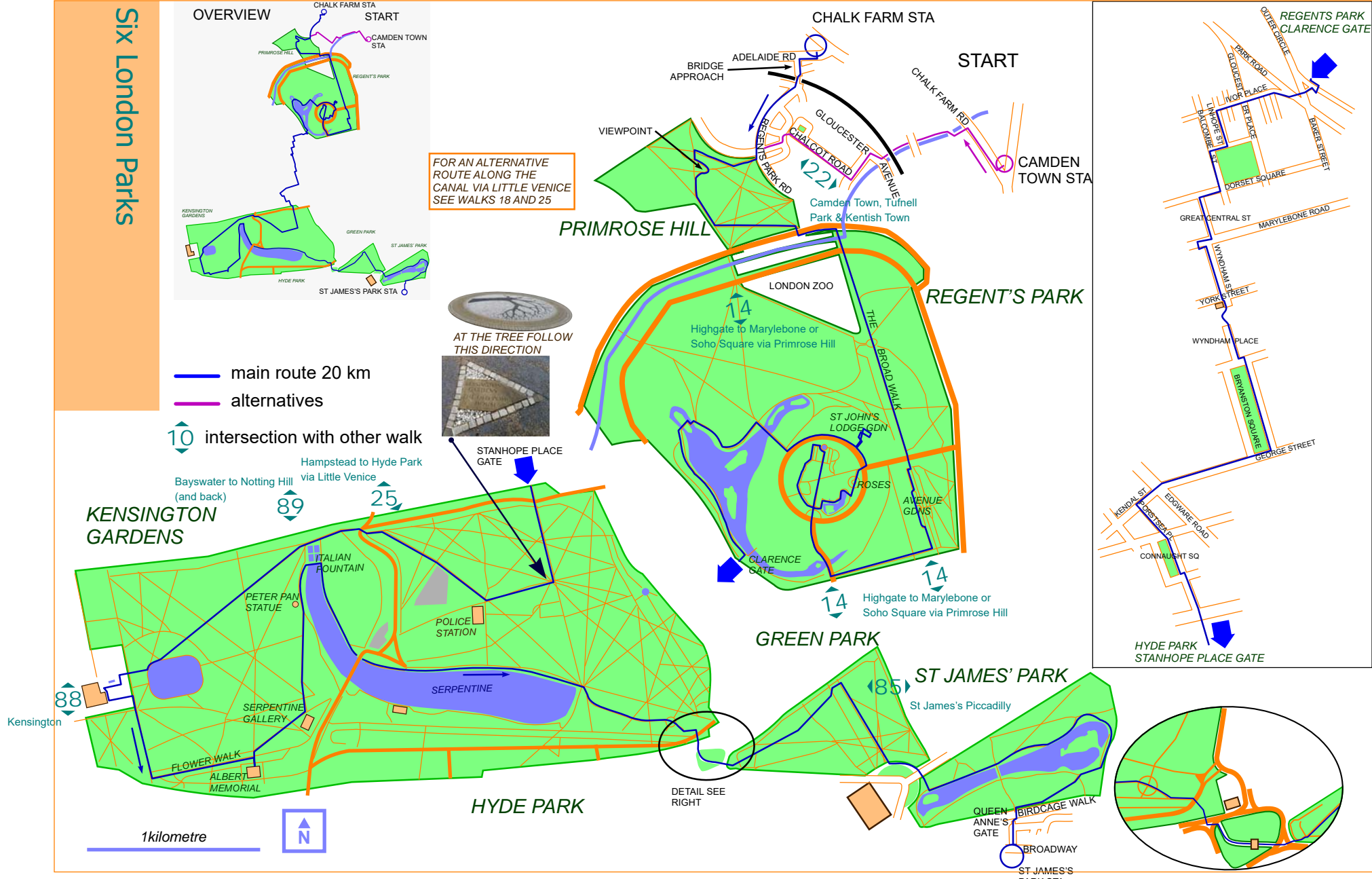
— main route 20 km  
— alternatives

10 intersection with other walk

Bayswater to Notting Hill (and back) 89  
Hampstead to Hyde Park via Little Venice 25



STANHOPE PLACE GATE



### **Primrose Hill**

The hill is 213 feet (65 m) high and has fine views over London. It was part of a vast swathe of land belonging to Westminster Abbey appropriated for Eton College. In 1857 at a time when the name Primrose Hill was first coming into use and shortly after Chalcot Square was laid out with stuccoed Italianate villas (and being adjacent to Regent's Park), the Crown acquired the summit of the hill for public use, in a land swap with the College.

### **Regent's Park**

Marylebone Park, as it was known, remained a royal chase until 1646. It was John Nash, architect to the crown and friend of the Prince Regent, who in 1810 developed The Regent's Park as we know it today.

Initially intended to be an exclusive development, with the land reserved for the 'wealthy and the good' Nash planned a palatial summer residence for the Prince, 50 detached villas in a parkland setting and elegant terraces around the exterior of the park. An elegant new street, Regent Street would link it to St James's Park and the Prince's residence, Carlton House.

Work began in 1812, but the venture was nowhere near as profitable as hoped. The number of grand villas was soon reduced to 26; only eight were built and nothing became of the Prince's summer pavilion.

Nash's original design included The Avenue, a grand carriage drive to provide access to the upmarket villas around the park. After few of these were built, the function of the Avenue

changed to a formal Broad Walk lined with trees.

### **Inner Circle**

The Royal Botanic Society leased and laid out the Inner Circle with a state-of-the-art conservatory, lawns and a lake. In the 1930's they decided not to renew their lease and in its place the park laid out the formal rose beds of Queen Mary's Gardens.

### **London Zoo**

In 1826 Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of Singapore, set up the Zoological Society of London in Regent's Park and made plans to build the world's first scientific zoo for 'teaching and elucidating zoology'. With Raffles' demise later that year the zoo was established by the third Marquis of Lansdowne, who obtained a lease on a parcel of land there at a nominal rent, and supervised the building of the first animal houses. Decimus Burton was appointed to work on the gardens and animal houses.

### **Bryanston Square/Wyndham Place**

Bryanston Square was begun by builder David Porter in 1811 for the Portman Estate, designed by Joseph T Parkinson, District Surveyor. The square was completed in 1821 and is named after the Portman family seat near Blandford in Dorset. It plays a significant part in the surrounding townscape, being aligned on an axis with Marble Arch to the south and Wyndham Place to the north. St Mary's Church, one of the Commissioners' Churches begun in 1823, situated at the northern end of Wyndham Place, acts as an eye-catcher, closing the long vista from Oxford

Street through the square. It was designed by Robert Smirke, one of the leaders of Greek Revival architecture, known for the British Museum and the Royal Mint.

### **Connaught Square**

It was only in 1795 that the Bishop of London obtained powers to grant building leases on the Hyde Park Estate. He commissioned Samuel Pepys Cockerell to create a plan. Connaught Square was one of the earliest sections to be erected, in 1821, and most houses completed by 1828 by architect Thomas Allason. The name 'Connaught' originated from George III's nephew and son-in-law, Prince William Frederick, who in 1805 succeeded as Duke of Gloucester and Edinburgh and Earl of Connaught.

The architecture in Connaught Square is typical of the late Georgian period, using dark brick and white stucco features.

### **Hyde Park**

Henry VIII acquired Hyde Park from the monks of Westminster Abbey in 1536 for hunting. It remained a private hunting ground until James I came to the throne and permitted limited access. The King appointed a ranger, or keeper, to take charge of the park. It was Charles I who changed the nature of the park completely. He had the Ring (north of the present Serpentine boathouses) created and in 1637 opened the park to the general public. The Serpentine, in Hyde Park, was formed in 1730-1733. Queen Caroline wife of George 2nd had the idea of providing an ornamental lake to further enhance the park's beauty. The

lake was formed by damming the Westbourne which, via a series of ponds, flowed into the Thames near present day Victoria. The park covers 350 acres.

### **Kensington Gardens**

Kensington Gardens covers 265 acres and was originally part of Hyde Park. In 1689, the new King William and Queen Mary, took the first step to creating a separate park. They bought Nottingham House, on the western edge of Hyde Park, renamed it Kensington Palace and made it their main home in London. Queen Mary began to create a palace garden of formal flower beds and box hedges. The garden got bigger when Mary's sister, Anne, became Queen in 1702. She took 30 acres from Hyde Park and asked her landscape designers, Henry Wise and George Loudon, to create an English-style garden. The biggest changes came in 1728 when Queen Caroline, the wife of George II, began to transform Kensington Gardens into the park we know today. She took another 300 acres from Hyde Park. She moulded the gardens to their present form by creating the Serpentine and the Long Water from the Westbourne stream. For most of the 18th century the gardens were closed to the public. They were opened gradually, to the respectably dressed. Queen Victoria was born in Kensington Palace and lived there until she became queen in 1837. In a long series of improvements Queen Victoria commissioned the Italian Gardens and the Albert Memorial. One of the most popular features in the Gardens is the bronze statue of

Peter Pan standing on a pedestal covered with climbing squirrels, rabbits and mice. The creator of Peter Pan, J.M. Barrie, commissioned Sir George Frampton to build the statue in 1902. It was erected in Kensington Gardens in 1912.

### **Wellington Arch**

Wellington Arch was designed in 1825 to double as a monument to the Duke's victory at Waterloo and as one of two royal entrances to Buckingham Palace (the other being Marble Arch, which originally stood in front of the palace). However, when George IV grossly overspent his budget on remodelling the palace, petty savings were made on the Arch. Intrinsic to Decimus Burton's design was a series of sculptures above the arch's frieze, and a quadriga on the top; these were dropped, leaving a handsomely proportioned but austere structure. A massive equestrian statue of The Duke of Wellington, financed by public subscription, was later placed on the arch. Twenty-eight feet high, made with 40 tons of bronze, it reduced the arch to a mere pedestal. Almost all who saw the statue, including the arch's architect, Burton, were appalled, but Wellington was delighted. When the government ordered it to be taken down in 1846, he threatened to resign all his official commissions. The government backed down, and although Burton left £2,000 in his will for the statue's removal, Queen Victoria refused to upset Wellington by authorising this while he was alive. It was a further 31 years before any change was made to the arch. The opening of

Victoria Station had greatly increased traffic, causing a bottleneck at Hyde Park Corner, so the entire arch was taken down and rebuilt in a different position to allow for road-widening. The Duke's statue was sent to Aldershot, where it still is, and the arch remained bare until 1912 when a new quadriga was installed.

### **Green Park**

King Charles II wanted to be able to walk all the way from Hyde Park to St James's without leaving royal soil. So he acquired land between the two parks, put a brick wall around it and called it Upper St James's Park. The King was very fond of his new park and used it to entertain visitors. The park was where the King went for his daily walk or "constitutional", explaining how Constitution Hill got its name. In 1746, Upper St James's was officially renamed The Green Park and no one knows why, despite various theories.

### **St James's Park**

St James's Park is the oldest Royal Park in London and is surrounded by three palaces - Westminster, St James's and Buckingham. The park was once a marshy watermeadow, which the River Tyburn often flooded on its way to the Thames. In the thirteenth century a leper hospital was founded, and it is from this hospital that the park took its name. In 1532 Henry VIII acquired the site as yet another deer park and built the Palace of St James's. The park underwent several metamorphoses, from natural to a straight formal canal lined with trees and back to natural.

*See walk 85 for the history of St James's.*