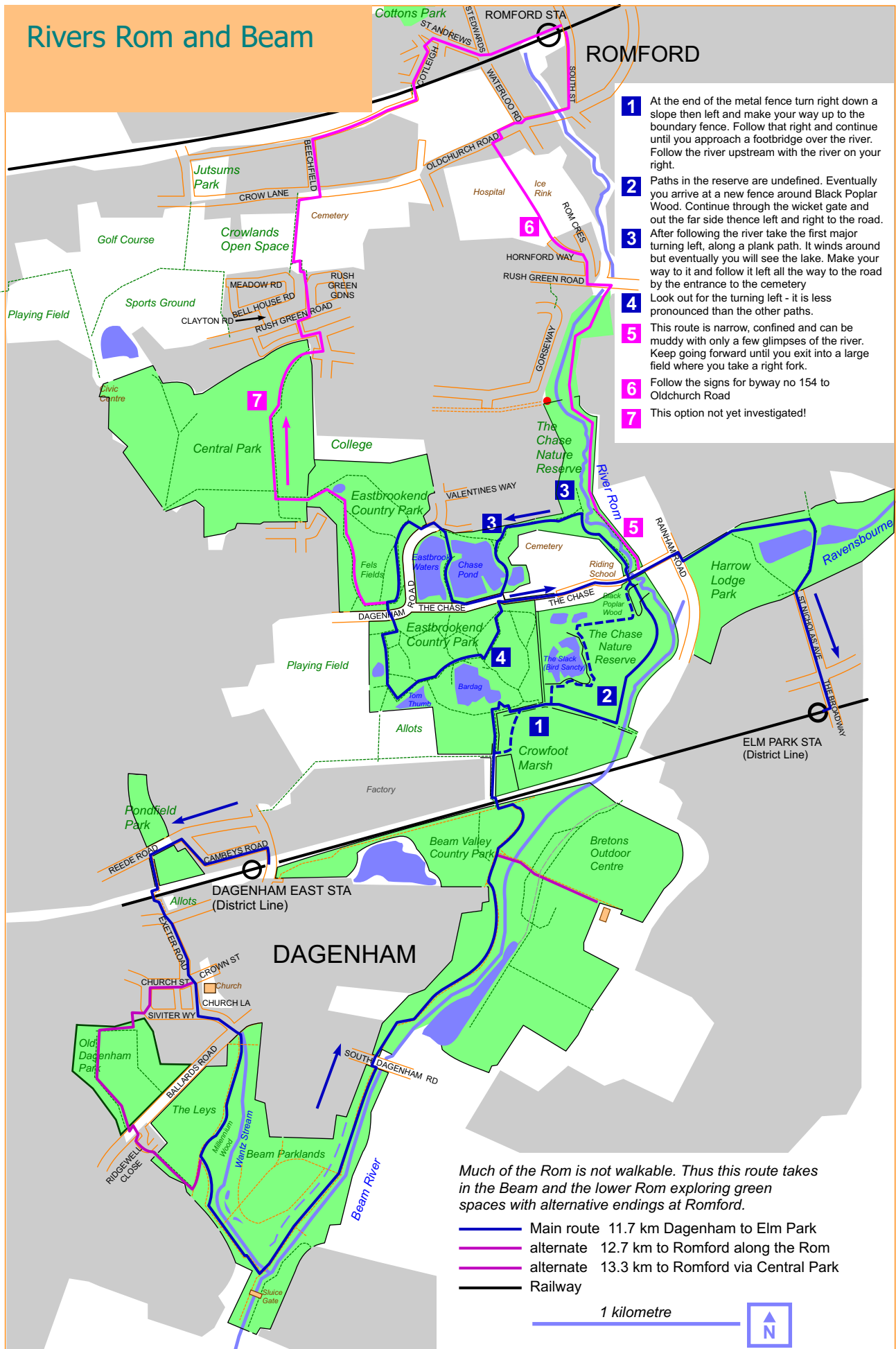


Rivers Rom and Beam



Much of the Rom is not walkable. Thus this route takes in the Beam and the lower Rom exploring green spaces with alternative endings at Romford.

walk notes

Rivers Rom & Beam

There is a remarkable amount of countryside on this walk, including some muddy bits. Much of it is reclaimed from old gravel pits. Wildlife has taken to the reclaimed countryside in a big way, and one could spend all day here.

Dagenham village

Dagenham is first mentioned in a charter of Barking Abbey from the year 687. It was then almost certainly just the small farmstead ('ham' in Anglo-Saxon) of a man named Daecca, hence 'Daeccanham'. Dagenham is not mentioned by name in the Domesday Book as it was part of the Manor of Barking. By 1205 Dagenham was large enough to have a chaplain, and the parish church of St Peter and St Paul was probably built around that time. Much of the church collapsed in 1800 and had to be rebuilt. This was completed by 1805 and included a spire, which can be seen in old photographs. In 1841 a new gallery was added. The church was re-roofed in 1913.

Much was to change with the building of the huge Becontree Estate after World War 1, with the village losing its rural character and its role as the centre of the community. Many other important buildings were in decay by the 1950s and 1960s and a million pound facelift in 1963 destroyed most of the medieval buildings along Crown Street. In the 1970s the last part of the medieval village was cleared.

The Wantz Stream

The Wantz stream has had several name changes. The longest lived seems to have been a corruption on the the medieval 'Wythenbroke', Wise (or Wisdom) Water. This lasted until the name became East Brook and this in turn lasted until sometime in the 17th -18th century when the name changed to the Wantz stream. Wantz coming from the crossroads near the stream source. The

Four Wantz corner, Wantz being a corruption of Wents, an old name for four way junctions in Essex and Kent.

The 1 km long surface portion of the stream is now reasonably clean and home to the usual small freshwater plants and creatures including the crested newt.

The Leys

The Leys is an open area of grassland with trees, shrubs and the Wantz stream running through it. It was formerly meadowland of Leys Farm, and once part of the Manor of East Hall, which dated back to at least the C14th. The site was purchased by Dagenham UDC in 1928 to provide for public recreation.

Beam Parklands

Dagenham was founded at the upper limits of the River Beam. Dagenham sprawled out from these early Saxon developments, which were also one of the earliest in Essex.

The River Beam gets its name from a beam bridge which used to cross the River Rom at the top of Beam Valley. The River Rom, therefore, became known as the River Beam from this point, as it flowed downstream. The bridge was first mentioned in 1299.

The park incorporates the flood plain for the River Beam. Neighbouring homes and businesses in the area are protected from flood as a result of the parklands flood storage capacity. There are times, when some areas of the parklands are underwater, the pathways and bridge structures are designed so that they can withstand this flooding. Birds found on the site include kingfishers, reed warblers, reed buntings and skylarks.

Bretons

The Manor of Bretons, by the River Beam, is probably named from the Le Breton family who owned land in Hornchurch between C12th and C14th. The spelling of the name has changed over the years. By 1812 Bretons was owned by Mrs Elizabeth Grafton Dare, at

which time the manor house was moated on three sides. Bretons remained in the ownership of the Hall-Dares family until 1869 when it was sold to Romford Local Health Board for a sewage farm. Bretons passed to the LB Havering in 1965. In 1976 the farmland was developed as a Youth Centre and sports ground and renovation of the house began; in December 1978 Bretons Sports and Social Club took over day-to-day running and maintenance of the house. During the 1980s extensive tree planting took place; Thames Water excavated an 11-acre lake that the River Beam now runs through creating a flood plain; the large mound to the north of Bretons was formed from the spoils. In 1997 Bretons Community Association was created and took on responsibility for the Sports and Social Club. A mature Cedar of Lebanon stands behind the fine curved wrought-iron C18th screen and gates of the view to the front of the manor, which have been repaired recently as part of restoration works. A number of the old C16th farm buildings remain, including the milking parlour now changing rooms, tack room now shower and toilets.

The Chase Nature Reserve

The River Rom, which is the boundary between the boroughs of Barking/Dagenham and Havering, runs through the site. From the 1920's to the 1960's the area was a gravel quarry which supplied material to help build the Becontree housing estate and possibly Fords. From the 1960's to 70's, the area was used as a dumping ground and filled with the rubble left over from the second world war blitz.

The creation of Eastbrookend Country Park started in the 1990s with large scale earth moving to develop an interesting, undulating landscape on what was formerly land filled derelict land. The landfill was capped with a layer of impermeable clay and topsoil; large scale seeding was undertaken using wild flower

grassland mixes that are particularly suited to poor soils and more than 50,000 small trees (whips) were planted across the 84-hectare site. The park officially opened in 1995.

In Black Poplar Wood, near the Rom, the Reserve contains 6 mature female Black Poplar trees which is 1% of the national total. Jackdaws and Woodpeckers regularly use these trees to nest in.

Harrow Lodge Park

Harrow Lodge Park is an extensive rolling park, formerly the manor of Maylards Green and Wybridge. In 1594 Maylards was an important house standing near the present boating lakes in Harrow Lodge Park; in 1670 the house was recorded as having 17 hearths and in 1849 the combined manors totalled some 440 acres. There is no longer a house on the site and the park was developed for public use in the 20th century. An 8.5-acre Boating Lake was formed in 1954/56 by damming the River Ravensbourne, together with paths, shrubs, trees and formal features, and a walled garden near the lake was created in 1959/60. The largest lake has large flocks of mute swan and Canada geese and on one of its wooded islands has a small heronry. Kingfishers are regularly seen here. Trees planted included oak, elm, lime, larch, Corsican pine, cherry, hazel and yew.

Old Dagenham Park

Dagenham Park is a conventional park and opened in 1931 on land purchased by Dagenham UDC. The land was once part of the Manor of East Hall, which dated back to at least the C14th. The park was laid out with children's playground, drinking fountain, bandstand, rose beds, formal planting, bowling green, a Sports Arena with stands and pavilion, tennis courts and a putting green. Over the years various facilities were added to the park including a new stadium stand in 1950 and new children's playground in 1961. The park lodge remains near the original entrance gates.