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Discover an urban wilderness at Sutton Park

SUTTON PARK, BIRMINGHAM

Covering some 2,400 acres of wild land just a few miles north of Birmingham city centre, Sutton Park is one of Europe's largest urban parks, providing a precious breathing space for those who live in the surrounding towns and cities. A designated Site of Special Scientific Interest and a National Nature Reserve, this former hunting forest offers a wealth of wonderful walking through ancient oak and birch woods, over heather-clad heathland, wetlands, marshes and around its lakes and pools, all important habitats for a diverse variety of wildlife. You might also spot cattle and wild ponies grazing on the land – these are part of a carefully managed conservation grazing programme to keep invasive plant species at bay on the open heathland.

Several of the lakes, including Keeper's Pool and Wyndley Pool, both of which are passed on this walk, were built in the Middle Ages to stock fish. The pools were made by damming small streams, and both the dam and the quarry used for their construction are still visible today.

This lovely loop is smooth and accessible and makes an excellent gentle 3.1-mile (5km) jog with a running buggy, too. It starts and finishes at the visitor centre, where there's a range of facilities as well as maps of the park, including lots of other great walks.

WALK DETAILS



Start/finish: Park Road, Sutton Coldfield, B73 6BT. This walk can also be accessed from Boldmere Gate or Streetly Gate.

Distance: 3.1 miles (5km)

Difficulty: 2/5

Public transport: Regular buses and trains from central Birmingham to Sutton Coldfield. The train station is a short walk from the start.

DIRECTIONS

1. With the visitor centre on your left, take the left-hand fork, then keep on the right-hand path towards Wyndley Pool. Pass the pool on your left and continue straight ahead through Hollyhurst. Look out for holly blue butterflies here over the summer months.
2. At the fork, take the sharp right-hand path, then, at the next two junctions, take the left-hand path leading uphill.
3. At the next junction, which is Flying Field, turn right and follow the path across heathland, ascending gently towards the Jamboree Stone. From the Stone, bear left at the fork, following the path downhill and passing Keeper's Well and Keeper's Pool on your left to reach a metal gate. Go through the gate and follow the path back to the visitor centre.







THINGS TO SEE AND DO NEARBY

There's a lot more to discover at Sutton Park, including learning to sail at **Powell's Pool** with **Sutton Sailing Club** and kayaking at **Blackroot Pool** with the **Royal Sutton Coldfield Canoe Club**. There are also two **orienteering courses**, available September to April, to avoid disturbing ground nesting birds.



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A waterfall walk through Eskdale

ESKDALE, CUMBRIA

Lying on the remote western edge of the Lake District, at the foot of the winding Hardknott Pass and the south-western flanks of Scafell, Eskdale remains relatively undiscovered yet is a perfect place for family adventures. The Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway connects the village of Boot, in the heart of Eskdale, with the coast using heritage steam engines. Built a little over 100 years ago, it's one of the oldest and longest narrow-gauge railways in England, known affectionately as 'La'al Ratty', meaning 'little railway' in old Cumbrian dialect. The line is 7 miles (11.3km) long – a 40-minute journey through spectacular scenery, which means you'll have plenty of time to explore Ravenglass before jumping back on the train for the return trip.

This walk takes you alongside the River Esk, which is dotted with spots for paddling over the warmer months, and with views across to the series of waterfalls that tumble off the higher fells. There's a good path either side of the river so an out-and-back amble works well for younger children. The full loop heads into the more rugged terrain on the opposite side of the valley, offering yet more adventurous walking.

WALK DETAILS

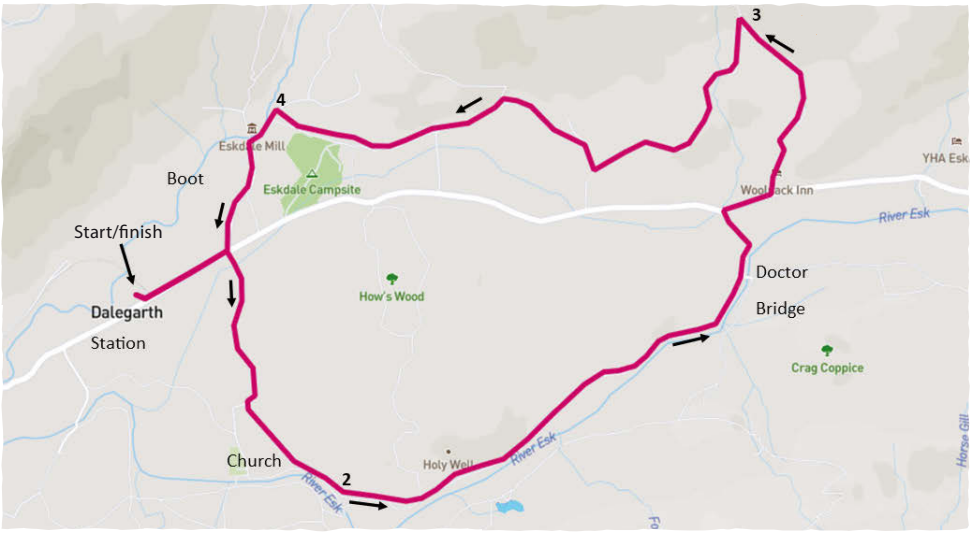
Start/finish: Dalegarth for Boot Rail Station, Eskdale, CA19 1TF

Distance: 3.5 miles (5.6km)

Difficulty: 4/5

Public transport: Train to Ravenglass then catch the La'al Ratty to Boot

DIRECTIONS



1. Turn left out of Dalegarth train station and follow the valley road 820 feet (250 metres) to a lane on the right. Turn right and follow the lane to St Catherine's Church beside the River Esk. Turn left here and follow the footpath alongside the river. You can cross the river over the footbridge at Gill Force to walk on the opposite side and make a shorter loop.
2. Continue along the riverside path until you reach the road just west of the Woolpack Inn. Turn right on to the road and then left at the Inn, following footpath signs to the left of the buildings and up into the fells.
3. At the junction, bear left, heading back towards the road, but at the next junction, where the left option would take you to the road, stay right and carry on past a house on your right. Bear left at the next house and follow the footpath along the top of the campsite to reach a bridleway.
4. Turn left and cross the bridge into Boot, passing the pub and carrying straight on until you reach a T-junction. Turn right here to return to the station.





THINGS TO SEE AND DO NEARBY

The campsite at Eskdale is excellent and very family friendly.

Jump on a steam train to **Ravenglass** or follow the winding lanes around to beautiful **Wasdale**. There's a cafe at **Dalegarth train station** and a decent, family- and dog-friendly pub, **The Woolpack**, at the halfway point of the walk.

Stanley Ghyll Force, a waterfall to the south of the valley, and **Eel Tarn** and **Blea Tarn**, both to the north, are all beautiful, peaceful places to visit and are within easy reach of Boot.