Manor House Gardens and Manor Park

The Quaggy winds its way through the landscape of this walk but is rarely seen unless looked for. The river is mostly open to the sky, often hidden behind the houses and gardens that have grown around it. It is best seen in Manor House Gardens and Manor Park, but we will get other sightings of it along the way.

Hither Green station where the walk begins, opened in 1895 - relatively late for Lewisham. Please note that you will have to “mind your ‘Manors’”. The name is popular in the area and has been heavily used in the naming of roads.

What will you discover?

- Quest for the Quaggy
- Wild trees and flowers
- Waterfowl and herons
- Old oak wildlife
- Memorials of the Manor

Map Key:

- Buses
- Cafés
- Toilets
- Lookout Points
- Optional Route

DISTANCE: 2.2 km / 1.35 miles  
WALKING TIME: 1 Hour  
WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Yes  
STATIONS: Hither Green Station  
BUS ROUTES: 181, 225, 273

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1. When arriving at Hither Green station, follow signage to platform 5. Continue along the platform and on your right is a small triangle of land called Hither Green Nature Reserve. The bottom of the slope is at the original level of the land. A small stream passes through and then goes underground before joining the Quaggy. The reserve is managed on behalf of Network Rail by Lewisham Council’s Nature Conservation team in partnership with local volunteers who attend work days to look after it.

Walk back up the platform to the station exit. There are toilets at the station that can be opened on request to the staff.

As you walk down the slope from the station look out for ferns above your head. The once rare Wall Rue can be found growing here. At the bottom of the slope turn right towards Staplehurst Road. You are walking out into an area of landscape that until the end of the nineteenth century was farmland. To your left if you look above the shopfronts, the year 1905 is recorded. Most of the development around here took place in the early twentieth century.

Continue down Staplehurst Road crossing Leahurst Road, then also crossing Longhurst Road.

2. Slow down half way to Manor Park (road) or you’ll miss our first glimpse of the river Quaggy hidden behind a parapet. If tall enough you can look over the edge, or on the right hand side of the road you can look round the edge. After heavy rainfall you can hear the river and occasionally you can hear river life such as Grey Wagtails calling as they fly back and forth.

3. Turn right on to Manor Park and then take the second left onto Thornwood Road and walk to the end. Optional route - The bridge over the Quaggy is just to the right of Thornwood Road.

You are at Manor Lane and opposite on the right is the entrance to Manor House Gardens. Optional Route - Just to the right of the entrance is another bridge over the Quaggy.

Enter the park. Manor House Gardens is a part of the old Kent countryside that has survived into the modern era and some fine old trees remain such as mature Oak and Ash.

The park has become very popular since its redevelopment at the end of the 1990s and has a cafe and toilets. There is an active Friends group which is open to the public to join.

Follow the path round to the right and you pass through a gate.

On your left is the lake and on your right is the “Bourne” or river called the Quaggy. It is heavily shaded here but some flowers do appear on the slopes of the earth banks.
Continuing round you pass the entrance for the ice house. By it is a fine interpretation board giving detailed information about it. The Ice House is opened to the public on the first and third Sunday of the month from April to September by the Lee Manor Society.

The lake is home to the usual mix of water fowl and there is an interpretation board to illustrate them. More unusually a Heron nest in the Weeping Willow on the island in the lake. They start nesting early in the year.

Heron on the nest in mid February >

The Daisy

The Daisy. The most common lawn wildflower and probably the least valued and most taken for granted. So much so that we scarcely think of them as wild, particularly as they have thrived on our love of mowing.

Mowers control the competition, always keeping the grass at a reasonable height which is good for daisies as they don’t like shade. When the mower cuts their heads off they regrow to flower again and again and are one of those plants that can be in flower at anytime of year. But when you get a great Daisy lawn in full throttle in spring it is a sight to gladden the hardest heart.

The Day’s Eye opens as the sun comes up and closes as the sun goes down.

Walk round the lake and up the slope.

At the top is the Manor House built in the 18th century and whose most famous resident was Sir Francis Baring of Barings Bank fame. It is now a public library.


Carry on until you get back to Manor Lane. Leaving the park turn right. Follow the road round which becomes Kellerton Road and then turn right into Manor Lane Terrace. Walk up the terrace and turn left into Northbrook Road, also named after the Lord of the Manor. As the aristocracy sold off their piles in Lewisham they left their names behind in the streets and public houses.
8 On the left side, the first large tree you pass is an English Oak inside the garden at number 34. Old mature oaks support a wealth of wildlife. They become habitats in their own right. And so long as they survive, so do those that rely on them including birds, moths, insects, bats, fungi, lichen and moss.

The Oak is also associated with over 40 different types of gall, and late summer and through the winter is the best to find these. Those shaped like doughnuts are Silk Button Spangle Gall and the hairy pancakes are Common Spangle Gall. Both are caused by different species of miniature wasp.

At the end of Northbrook Road cross over to Manor Park.

9 **Enter Manor Park**, which was the last working farm in the area. In 1966 it was opened as a park. **Going down the landscaped entrance you pass a magnificent old pear tree.**

At the bottom of the slope the land levels out towards the river which is lined with a mixture of planted and wild trees. The wild trees are mostly Sycamore but look out for Holm Oak, Horse Chestnut and Turkey Oak.

Wildflowers in the area are generally restricted to the usual species found in newly wooded places such as Cow Parsley and Garlic Mustard. But some other woodland edge species occur such as Lords and Ladies and if you hunt around in April/may, the Goldilocks Buttercup. This is an extremely rare survivor usually only found in extremely old woodlands. Somehow it has managed to cling on here by the river in what is now its only Lewisham locality. It is a species almost unheard of in inner London.

The scrub here supports a variety of woodland birds including in spring a migrant warbler from North Africa the Blackcap. This is a small grey bird with a very distinctive cap on its head. The males have a black cap and the female’s cap is chestnut in colour.

The Blackcap has a rapid fruity and fluty song. It sings in verses generally beginning with some harsh and scratchy notes, which shift effortlessly into the heart of the song with rich fluting notes and then ends each verse with something of a flourish. The Blackcap’s alarm call is also very distinctive and sounds like two stones being knocked together.

10 **Follow the river on to the new bridge over the Quaggy.** To your left you see a pond created when work was carried out to the river a few years ago. The Quaggy is on its way to Lewisham Centre (where we will next see it on walk 6). There it joins the Ravensbourne on its journey to the Thames and then the wide North Sea.

Walk up to the road and you’re back at Longhurst Road. Turn left and walk up to Staplehurst Road.

11 Turn right and you’re back at the shops leading back to Hither Green Station.