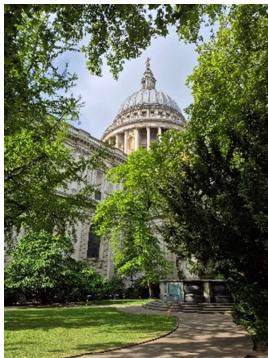


April was a special month in many parts of Britain because we did not experience our usual April showers and the sun shone brightly most days, parching gardens especially, if like me, you couldn't find the interest to water plants every day. However, after March when my health was not good, this bright beginning to spring enlivened and strengthened me. I decided it was time to give something back in return for renewed health and all the loving and prayerful support I had received over the past seventeen months by walking the 35 mile pilgrimage path from St Paul's Cathedral, London to St Albans Cathedral in five stages in order to raise money for Isabel Hospice in Welwyn Garden City. This would involve travelling from home to the start point and home again after the set walk. In order to keep my carbon footprint as low as possible these journeys would form an additional part of the pilgrimage and would be by walking and public transport only. The plan was to start on Sunday, 3rd May and make two trips per week as my strength, my treatment schedule and the weather would permit. What follows is my daily blog.

Sunday, 3rd May 2026 – Stage 1, 9.3 miles from St Paul's Cathedral to Hampstead Heath Station

The weather forecast was for about 40% chance of rain with ideal temperatures for walking, so with rucksack and my Pilgrim Passport to hand, I caught the 08.07 train to King's Cross and walked to bus stop H in Pentonville Road to catch the 17 bus to St Paul's Cathedral.



There was time for a leisurely stroll around the churchyard before going inside to dedicate my faith pilgrimage by lighting a candle in front of the icon of Christ Pantocrator followed by Choral Mattins in the Choir of the cathedral. The choir sang the Stanford setting in B flat beautifully.



With my Pilgrim Passport duly stamped, I was out into the real world of crowded tourist London at 11.30am on a sunny Sunday. I soon realised that my normal first hour rate of 4 mph would be wishful thinking and even my estimated average of 2.7mph would be difficult.

My route took me over the Millennium Bridge to the south Embankment which I followed to Westminster Bridge, crossing to Parliament Square and Westminster Abbey.



Then came relief from the crowds as I crossed into St James' Park and worked my way alongside the lake and over the blue bridge to the Mall (beautiful view of Buckingham Palace) before crossing into Green Park.



Following the line of Constitution Hill I reached the Wellington Arch and crossed into Hyde Park. There was much discussion concerning the situation in Iran at Speakers Corner so I did not linger long.



Leaving Hyde Park at the Stanhope Place Gate I worked my way through the elegant Connaught Square to Porchester Place and across Sussex Gardens and Praed Street to Paddington Basin on the Paddington Arm of the Grand Union Canal. How different it is today from when I last boated there about 40 years ago.



Passing Paddington Station I followed the towpath to Little Venice where there was a Cavalcade of canal boats, many of them traditional. I stopped to chat with the traditionally dressed crew of a boat flying the

Ddraig Goch (the Red Dragon flag of Wales) from their stern. They were from Aberhonddu (Brecon) in South Wales

From Little Venice I turned on to the Regents' Canal, much relieved to be out of the crowds. This is one of my favourite canals, lined as it is by beautiful Regency houses, as it makes its way to London Zoo and Primrose Hill.



I left the canal and climbed to the top of Primrose Hill to sit once again in the company of Iolo Morganwg (1747 – 1826), the bardic name of Edward Williams, who was an 18th century Welsh antiquarian, poet and collector. He claimed to have identified, in early Welsh poetry, a full account of Druidry, including a complete system of Druid organisation, rituals and beliefs, even a Druid

alphabet. He founded the modern Gorsedd (A Community of Poets) and devised their rituals based on the Druids. His memorial plaque lies on the summit of Primrose Hill on the approximate site of the first Gorsedd ceremony, held on the summer solstice of 1792. Sadly the slate is being worn away by the visitors who appreciate the wonderful view of the City of London more than a memorial to an 'unknown' Welshman and the text is hardly visible.



St Paul's (my starting point) from Primrose Hill, with much magnification!



The real view of the City from Primrose Hill.



All downhill from hereon, well almost! Leaving Primrose Hill by its most northerly corner I made my way to the 19th century grade II listed public house 'The Washington' at the corner of Primrose Hill Road and England's Lane. Sadly, no time to visit but it looks to be worth calling in next time I am in Belsize Park.

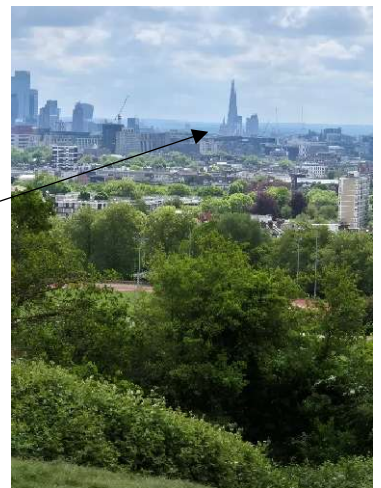
On to Haverstock Hill, Upper Park Road, Lawn Road and Fleet Road, noting South End Green en route for the bus back to King's Cross station, and I had arrived at Hampstead Heath station, just five hours after leaving St Paul's Cathedral. My phone registered 31,312 steps and I estimate about 13 miles by the time I returned home. Some of those steps were very small in the crowds!



Wednesday, 6th May 2026 – Stage 2, 7.3 miles from Hampstead Heath Station to Woodside Park Tube Station



Today the weather was cooler at about 12° and ideal for walking. After an easy journey from Hatfield to Hampstead Heath station I turned into Parliament Hill, a pleasant residential street which terminates in a path leading to the summit of Parliament Hill on the heath to appreciate the view. St Paul's cathedral was still visible, albeit miniscule beside the Shard. Descending along



the path behind my viewpoint, I entered the woods before turning sharp right on to a cycle track heading north-west. This was going to be a very different walk from Sunday in the city: birdsong in the air and people relaxing and doing Tai Chi, pilates etc. Views on the heath were varied and beautiful. On crossing the bridge between two lakes I this cormorant was feeding and drying his wings.





Pilgrimage often entails discovering more of yourself or something new. Diversions are part and parcel of the process. So, on reaching a sign to blue plaques for D H Lawrence and my favourite poet, Rabindranath Tagore, located in the quaintly named settlement "TheVale of Health" I set off to find them before returning to the route.



I discovered this area is rich in blue plaques, so I'll be back to investigate them and the stories of the people they honour.



Having crossed Spaniards Road on the boundary of Hampstead Heath, I made my way down steps to North End and crossed Hampstead Way to a gate leading to an open space *Hampstead Heath Extension* and a drinking fountain. By following this track and keeping to the right of the cricket pitches with the tower of St Jude's church, Hampstead Garden Suburb directly in front, I arrived at a footbridge and some steps leading to Heathgate where I realised I had reached somewhere rather special with its



beautiful early 20th century houses and gardens, public squares and accommodation for all classes and income groups. Edward Lutyens and other famous planners and architects had been involved in its creation.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hampstead_Garden_Suburb

Having used the church as a waypoint, I was delighted to find it open. What a church in which to



dedicate the day's pilgrimage. Its rather unusual but plain exterior does not lead you to expect the glorious murals that cover the domes and every inch of the interior. Many are in need of conservation and two conservators were at work bringing out unimaginable colours. What a mammoth task!

There are no bells in that tower. One of the original planning conditions was that the Garden Suburb be peaceful and bells were forbidden! However, as at St Albans Cathedral, peregrine falcons are nesting there. <https://www.stjudeonthehill.com/>



WELCOME TO ST JUDE'S
 Sunday Parish Eucharist
 10.30 am
 www.stjudesonthehill.com
 020 5729 1302
 Revd Emily Koltheit
 priest@stjudesonthehill.com
 Inspire Centre
 of LONDON

From here the route followed the Dollis Valley Greenwalk (DVG) through the Big and Little Woods (both very small) to Addison Way where it joined the Capital Ring and proceeded along the Mutton Brook, over Finchley Road and continued to the confluence of Mutton Brook and the Dollis Brook, forming the River Brent.

Mutton Brook



Having a laugh with another walker near the start of the DVG just to prove I was there!



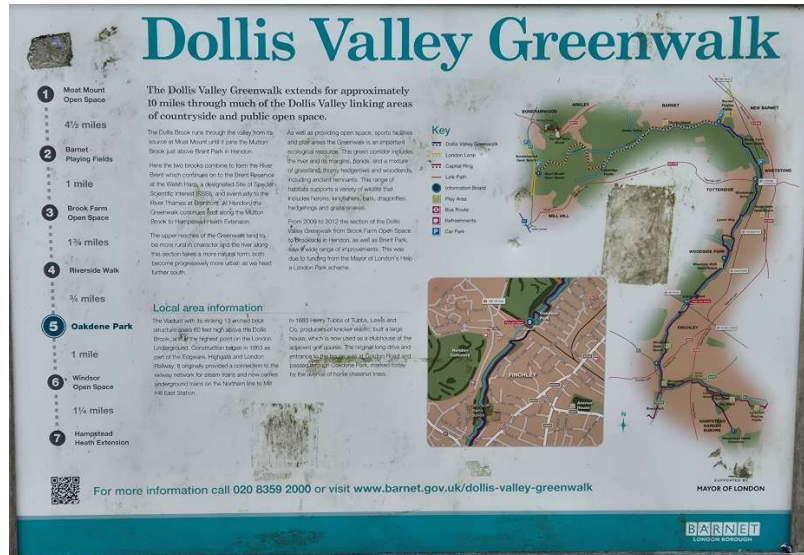
DVG Waymarker



The Pilgrimage Way turns right along the DVG and comes out at Dollis Road, Finchley where the pilgrim turns right and comes face to face with the Dollis Valley Viaduct which carries the Northern Line train. It is the highest point of the London Underground network above ground level (but not above sea level. That claim belongs to the Metropolitan Line just outside of Amersham, approximately 150m above

sea level.) Designed by John Fowler and Walter Brydone, the 68-foot (18 m) tall structure is composed of 13 arches of 32 feet (9.8m) span. It opened on 22nd August 1867 on a branch that was formerly part of the Edgware, Highgate and London Railway.





Getting close to my destination, the station after Oakdene Park on the map, I saw this beautiful egret fishing in the brook and this attractive chestnut tree. A flock of parakeets also loved it and filled the air with their screeching.



And here I am: Time to return via the path alongside the Northern line to bus stop TT, Argyle Road / Avondale Road for the 221 to New Southgate station and the train back to Hatfield.



Steps: 24,943

Departed Hampstead Heath Station: 11.30

Arrived Woodside Park: 16.30

Walk duration: 5 hours including one hour in St Jude's church.

Approximate mileage: 11 miles including diversion to the Vale of Health and walking between modes of transport.