

**Walk One – Winter Wonder:** This walk will take about an hour – longer if you are keen to stop and explore. It is quite flat, prone to be muddy, and may be difficult with a buggy or wheelchair, particularly in winter.

**You don't really need anything special, but here are a few things that may be useful:** wellies, warm clothes, water, a compass, a magnifying glass, [Winter Wonder treasure hunt](#) sheet, [map](#), a sketch pad and pencils

**Your Journey Starts Here – good luck, have fun!** As you come out of Vine Road Recreation Ground, turn right, and go across the railway line onto the Old Cricket Ground.

On the road's edge there are native and non-native trees. Can you spot two Horse Chestnuts and several Lime trees? The Lime has slim, reddish twigs. Some twigs sprout from the base of the trunk. This kind of growth is very cool and has a super-scientific name: epicormic growth. The Horse Chestnuts are sturdier, with brown buds. Do you know another name for these trees? Clue: the name comes from the lovely smooth, brown seeds found inside prickly hard nuts that fall in Autumn!

Walk into the centre of the pitch/field and then look back, noticing the difference in the outline of the trees. Face front again and continue walking over to the boggy edge of the field, where stepping-stones will lead you into Dragon Wood. Why not make some hot chocolate and listen to the tale of the [Oak and the Dragon](#) when you get home?

On your left as you face a large Oak tree, you will find a Holly bush at the beginning of a woodland path. Spoiler: do not get confused here – you want the path just past the Holly bush that is under a sloping oak tree....so much to look at!

As you start along the path, it is time to look down: can you find oak leaves or perhaps you may see some very long, tooth-edged leaves of the Sweet Chestnut, absolutely no relation to the Horse Chestnut...confusing indeed!

Further along, where the ground can get boggy (so do wear wellies), are some Silver Birch trees. Are they on your right or your left?

As the path comes closer to the railway line, there is a large example of a very interesting and very scarce Black Poplar. The trunk of the tree slopes and makes it hard to miss. We are working very hard to try to help stop this tree from becoming extinct. Read about our [Black Poplar Project](#).

Now it is time to head up the steps and cross over the railway, taking the second flight of steps on the other side. It's sharp left to walk through the tunnel. From here, take the first path on the left and walk along the side of the football pitch (the railway line should be on your right).

After you pass through an area of trees and bushes, you will come to a meadow. One side is mown and the other side left to encourage more plants. This provides shelter and food for insects, birds, and mini-beasties. Get down and have a look – what can you find? The name of this meadow is Half & Half – can you guess why?

From here, follow the Diagon Ally path over the meadow and get ready to cross Common Road carefully. Follow the path through the woods that leads you in a northerly direction (Do you have a compass on your phone – or perhaps you can find north from the sun?). You will come to an open space known as Van Buren's meadow (because apparently U.S. president Van Buren once stayed in, funnily enough – Van Buren's Cottage that was nearby).

Along the southside of this meadow are examples of Lombardy Poplars, with Willows to the north and Silver Birches to the east and west sides. Cross the meadow by turning left onto a sandy path (northwest between

the birches). Here you will find a young sweet chestnut and you may be able to see some of the nuts that have fallen – they are even spikier than the Horse Chestnut!

Now it is time to cross Common Road again – do take care here! Once safely across, can you describe how the land has changed? Do you see the grassy ‘tussocks’ or mounds? These are made by hundreds of thousands of tiny yellow meadow ants, over many years. The yellow meadow ant is a special treat for the Green Woodpecker and if you are still, you may see one or two skimming low over the ground, hunting out the ant. Perhaps you can think of something you might add to this food chain? If you listen carefully, you may hear the woodpecker’s distinctive call that it a funny-sounding nickname - can you guess what that might be?

This habitat, with its sandy soil and anthills, is an unusual and quite scarce habitat known as Lowland Acid Grassland. You will not find thick, green grasses or large showy flowers here. It takes a real nature detective (and maybe even a magnifying glass) to take time to stop look closely to discover a range of low growing plants with their tiny flowers.

Now follow the path and the Gas Markers until you cross Rocks Lane – again... be careful! This takes you into Mill Hill (named because there used to be a Mill here a very long time ago – and it is the highest point on all of Barnes Common!)

This is still acid grassland and there are plenty of places to run, and to slow down, and see if you can find Sheep’s Sorrel, with its lovely arrow-shaped leaves. During winter, it is easy to see the feathery outline of a Lime tree standing on its own.

Walk across Mill Hill, leaving the houses on your right and see if you can find the Gorse and Broom bushes. Gorse is the prickly one!

After you have crossed Station Road (carefully!), again you will see a sudden change in the grass and soil. You have left the sandy acid grassland habitat and entered the Cricket Pitch area that is full of thick green grasses on clay soil that is often very muddy indeed. If you see lots of green, green grass, you know that it is rich in nitrogen. This is great for all those thicker, sturdier grasses – but it also means that the tinier, more delicate acid grassland plants get suffocated out. Who knew you could discover so many different habitats to be found just on one walk?!

Walking along the right side, back toward the level crossing, can you see Brambles, Nettles, Elder bushes?

And you have done it! Cross over the level crossing (VERY carefully!) and head back to the café for a lovely drink and perhaps even a cake to celebrate your wintry adventure.

WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED YOUR WALK!!

We love to see your photos and drawings

and would love to be tagged if you post on social media using #barnescommonwalks

Insta: [@barnescommon](https://www.instagram.com/barnescommon)

Tweet: [@FriendsBC](https://twitter.com/FriendsBC)

Facebook: [@barnescommon](https://www.facebook.com/barnescommon)

[Become a Friend](#) – it’s quick, easy, costs nothing and is a great way to support our work