

PROSPECT PARK, BROOKLYN

PROSPECT PARK: THE RAVINE AND THE WATERCOURSE

A MUSEENYC WALKING TOUR · FREE, AND NOT SPONSORED BY ANYONE

DISTANCE 4.2 miles	TIME 3.5 to 4 hours
STOPS 16	START Grand Army Plaza (2/3 to Grand Army Plaza)
END The Peninsula and Duck Island, exit at Parkside Avenue (Q to Parkside Av)	MAP museenyc.com/tours/14-prospect-park-wild/map

Prospect Park has one continuous stream. It starts as a pipe at the top of the Ravine, drops over a waterfall, runs through a gorge, passes under three arches, falls again, spreads into the Lullwater, and finally opens into the sixty-acre Lake at the bottom. Follow it end to end and the park stops being a lawn with some trees and becomes a single piece of engineering that happens to be beautiful. On the way you get Brooklyn's last remaining forest, a Revolutionary War battle site, an old formal garden now under restoration, and several stretches where you genuinely cannot hear the city. This is the long, slow, unpaved version. Wear real shoes and expect mud after rain.

ROUTE CARD

Screenshot or tear off this page. Full detail for each stop follows.

1 Vale of Cashmere	9 The Midwood
2 Battle Pass	10 Binnen Falls and the Binnen Water
3 Fallkill Falls	11 Music Pagoda
4 The Upper Pool and Esdale Bridge	12 The Lullwater and the Boathouse
5 Ambergill Falls	13 Lullwater Bridge and Terrace Bridge
6 The Ravine	14 Lookout Hill
7 Rock Arch Bridge	15 The Wellhouse
8 Nethermead Arches	16 The Peninsula and Duck Island

GETTING THERE AND BACK

START	2/3 to Grand Army Plaza. The Vale of Cashmere is about 8 minutes into the park, northeast side. It is closed for restoration until 2027, so you will see it from the edge.
FINISH	Q at Parkside Av, about 8 minutes from the Peninsula. Or B/Q/S at Prospect Park if you double back north.
ALONG THE ROUTE	Ring stations only, no crossing: 2/3 at Grand Army Plaza and Eastern Pkwy, F/G at 15 St-Prospect Park on the west, B/Q/S at Prospect Park, Q at Parkside Av and Church Av on the southeast. Buses: B41 on Flatbush Ave, B69 on Prospect Park West, B68 on Prospect Park Southwest. Nothing crosses the park's interior, so from the Ravine you are committed to walking out one side or the other.

Cutting it short

Every walk here has exits. Good ones on this route:

- After stop 3 (Fallkill Falls): cut west across the Long Meadow to Prospect Park West and the B69, or F/G at 15 St.
- After stop 8 (Nethermead Arches): east to B/Q/S at Prospect Park, about 12 minutes.
- After stop 12 (Boathouse): B/Q/S at Prospect Park, 6 minutes east. Natural half-way stopping point.
- After stop 14 (Lookout Hill): B68 on Prospect Park Southwest, or walk down to the Q at Parkside Av.

THE WALK

1 VALE OF CASHMERE

CLOSED FOR NOW: CLOSED FOR RESTORATION UNTIL 2027

Heads up: Closed for restoration until 2027. Look in from the edge, then head on to Battle Pass. Check the Prospect Park Alliance site for the reopening date.

Named after a line in a Thomas Moore poem. It was a children's play area, then a formal garden with three oval pools and a fountain, then it fell into decades of neglect and became overgrown and largely forgotten. It has long been a known meeting place for gay men. In 2026 the city began a \$37.5 million restoration of the Vale and its pools, expected to finish in 2027, so for now the Vale itself is closed and you are looking in from its edge. When it reopens, this is the right place to start.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.67080, -73.96660

2 BATTLE PASS

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Southwest from the Vale about 5 minutes, toward East Drive.

Heads up: A plaque and nothing else. No visitor center, no crowd, and one of the most consequential spots in the city's history.

The old Flatbush road ran through a gap in the terminal moraine here, and Continental troops held it against a British frontal assault while Howe marched 10,000 men around the American left through Jamaica Pass. The line broke, Washington's army was nearly destroyed, and the survivors escaped across the East River at night in fog. A plaque marks the pass. There is no visitor center and almost no one stops.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66990, -73.96680

3 FALLKILL FALLS

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: West and downhill about 8 minutes, to the northeast corner of the Long Meadow. The falls are screened by trees just off the path.

Heads up: Easy to walk straight past. Listen for it rather than looking.

The first waterfall, dropping into the first pool of the stream that feeds the entire park. Every drop of it is city tap water, released from a pipe at the top, which Olmsted and Vaux considered an entirely respectable solution. Small, rustic, screened by trees, and completely invisible from the Long Meadow thirty yards away.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66940, -73.97010

4 THE UPPER POOL AND ESDALE BRIDGE

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Follow the stream downhill, 3 minutes.

The stream widens into the Upper Pool and then narrows again under Esdale Bridge. The bridge is one of the park's rustic structures, built to look handmade and improvised, which took considerable skill to fake. Stand on it and look downstream into the Ravine.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66870, -73.96920

5 AMBERGILL FALLS

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Keep following the water down into the gorge. 5 minutes.

Heads up: Take the lower path right down beside the water. Stand still for a minute and notice you cannot hear a car.

The stream drops into a boulder-lined gorge called the Ambergill, and the falls here are the loudest water in the park. The whole gorge eroded badly through the 20th century and was rebuilt in the 1990s with the original boulders reset. There is a path right down beside the water. Take it, stand still for a minute, and notice you cannot hear a car.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66790, -73.96850

6 THE RAVINE

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Continue downstream through the gorge. 10 minutes of unpaved trail.

Heads up: Steep, rocky and muddy after rain. This is the part that needs real shoes.

Olmsted and Vaux carved a mountain gorge out of a glacial moraine and planted it as an Adirondack forest. It was closed for years due to erosion and reopened after a long restoration. Steep, rocky, unpaved, with switchback trails and the stream running the length of it. This is the most convincing wilderness illusion in New York City and it is entirely artificial, right down to the hemlocks.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66700, -73.96800

7 ROCK ARCH BRIDGE

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Follow the stream. The arch is low and on your right.

Heads up: Go under it, not over it.

The same trick as Huddlestone Arch in Central Park: enormous stones fitted without mortar, held by their own weight. It was rebuilt during the Ravine restoration using as much of the original stone as could be recovered. Walk under it, not over it.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66660, -73.96740

8 NETHERMEAD ARCHES

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Downstream about 8 minutes to where the paths converge.

Heads up: Stand in the middle arch and look through. Three kinds of traffic separated in one span.

The most ambitious bridge in the park, carrying the carriage drive over the stream, a pedestrian path and a horse trail simultaneously, all in one span of rough sandstone. Built 1868. Stand in the central arch and look through. Every one of the park's circulation systems is separated here so that carriages, riders and walkers never cross each other, which was the same idea behind Central Park's sunken transverse roads.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66430, -73.96780

9 THE MIDWOOD

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Southeast into the woods below the Nethermead, about 6 minutes.

Heads up: Stay on the marked paths here specifically. The soil is compacted and the understory is under long-term restoration.

This is part of Brooklyn's last remaining forest, and it includes trees that were standing before the park existed. Tulip poplars, oaks, hickories. It has been under continuous restoration for decades because heavy foot traffic compacts the soil and kills the understory, so stay on the marked paths here specifically. In late April this is where the migrating warblers come through.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66280, -73.96620

10 BINNEN FALLS AND THE BINNEN WATER

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: East and downhill to the water, 5 minutes. Below the Music Pagoda.

Heads up: Most people are already heading for the Boathouse and miss this entirely. Go down to the water's edge.

Binnen is Dutch for inner. The falls drop into the Binnen Water just below the Music Pagoda, and this is where the stream stops being a brook and starts being the Lullwater. Frequently overlooked because most people are heading for the Boathouse fifty yards away. Go down to the water's edge.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66250, -73.96570

11 MUSIC PAGODA

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Up the slope east of the falls, 3 minutes.

Built in 1887 so concerts could be heard across the Nethermead and the Binnen Water. It burned down and was reconstructed to the original design. On most days it is an empty wooden pavilion in a clearing with nobody in it, which is arguably better.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66340, -73.96490

12 THE LULLWATER AND THE BOATHOUSE

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: South along the water, 5 minutes to the white terra-cotta building.

Or ride: Q at Prospect Park station is 6 minutes east if you want out here.

Heads up: Right place to stop and eat. Bathrooms inside when the Audubon Center is open.

The Lullwater is the long calm stretch between the falls and the Lake, deliberately engineered to be still where everything upstream was turbulent. The 1905 Beaux-Arts Boathouse sits on it, now the country's first urban Audubon Center, and the Camperdown Elm is just below. The terrace here is the right place to stop and eat something.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66230, -73.96560

13 LULLWATER BRIDGE AND TERRACE BRIDGE

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: South along the water's edge below the drive, about 12 minutes.

Heads up: Quietest shoreline in the park, because everyone else is on the loop road above you.

Lullwater Bridge is a graceful cast-iron span from about 1890; Terrace Bridge carries the drive high over the water on a long masonry curve. Walking between them along the water's edge is the quietest stretch of shoreline in the park and it is almost always empty, because everyone else is on the loop road above.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.65950, -73.96640

14 LOOKOUT HILL

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: West and up. The climb takes about 10 minutes and it is genuinely steep.

Or ride: B68 bus on Prospect Park Southwest if the hill is not happening.

Heads up: The Maryland 400 monument is at the base. Read it before you climb.

The Maryland 400 monument at the base commemorates the Maryland regiment that repeatedly charged a British position near here to cover Washington's retreat, and was nearly wiped out doing it. The climb up is one of the few genuinely strenuous stretches in any New York park. The Butterfly Meadow on the south slope is planted for pollinators and is worth the detour in late summer.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.65660, -73.96920

15 THE WELLHOUSE

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Down the south side of the hill, 5 minutes.

Heads up: Only bathroom for a long stretch. Composting toilets, and cleaner than you expect.

It housed the machinery for a well that once supplied the park's water before the city hooked it into the mains. It sat derelict for decades and reopened in 2017 with composting toilets, the first in any New York City park, which is an unusual second act for a landmarked Victorian utility building. Worth a look for the stonework alone, and it is the only bathroom for a long stretch here.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.65600, -73.96890

16 THE PENINSULA AND DUCK ISLAND

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: East and down to the Lake shore, then out along the finger of land. About 8 minutes.

Heads up: Duck Island offshore is a protected bird refuge, so stay on the path. Q at Parkside Av is 8 minutes from here.

A finger of land reaching into the Lake with paths through meadow and woodland along it, and Duck Island just offshore as a protected bird refuge. The stream you have followed for four miles finishes here, having started as a pipe at the top of a hill. Sit down. The Q train at Parkside Avenue is eight minutes away.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.65550, -73.96760

COMBINING THIS WITH OTHER TOURS

- [Tour 13 \(Prospect Park: The Greatest Hits\)](#) covers the landmarks and the layout. This one follows the stream from the pipe at the top to the Lake at the bottom. Several shared stops. Do 13 first if it is your first time in the park.
- [Tour 12 \(Central Park: The Wild North\)](#) is the exact same walk in the other park, and the pairing is the best way to understand what Olmsted and Vaux learned between the two. Both follow an entirely man-made stream from a hidden pipe down to a lake, both have a dry-laid boulder arch, both have a gorge. Prospect Park was built second and they thought it was better. Walk both and decide.
- **Water-only version:** stops 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 16. Fallkill to the Lake, following the stream and nothing else. About 2.5 miles.
- **Skip the hill:** drop stop 14 (Lookout Hill) and go straight from Terrace Bridge to the Wellhouse. Saves 20 minutes and the only real climb.

WALKING NAVIGATION LINKS

Google caps a directions link at ten points, so the route is split. Open a segment on your phone and it starts walking navigation.

- [Stops 1–10](#)
- [Stops 10–16](#)

THE MAP

Open the MUSEENYC map for this walk at museenyc.com/tours/14-prospect-park-wild/map. Every pin carries its own walking directions, transit alternative and notes.

● **Green pin** = open to the public.

● **Orange pin** = private, look from the sidewalk. Several are people's homes: no gates, no doorways, no photographing into windows.

The orange line is a straight-line guide between stops, not the walking route. Use the navigation links for turn-by-turn.

MUSEENYC

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Questions about a stop, a closure, or anything else on this walk? Reach MUSEENYC at museenyc.tours@gmail.com or [@museenyc](https://www.instagram.com/museenyc) on Instagram. More walks at museenyc.com/tours.