

A Bristol out and back circular walk

Length: 6.5km

Duration: 2hrs

Refreshments: various options every 20-30mins en route at Clifton Village, Underfall Yard, the Harbourside, and the Clifton Triangle.

Map:

<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/d/viewer?mid=1XBQToUIJWv87U5oiyZClqN8USduA8m4q&ll=51.45339064432934%2C-2.6177650000000052&z=15>

This circular walking route begins at the University of Bristol and takes in the wealthy eighteenth-century suburb of Clifton, the famous Clifton Suspension Bridge, Burwalls Wood, the New Cut of the River Avon, the Underfall Yard Pumping Station museum, part of the floating harbour and Brandon Hill. The route, like much of Bristol, is not flat – starting at c.70m elevation and descending down to c.10m and back up again. There are multiple opportunities for refreshments en route, from coffees and cakes to hearty meals and pints of beer and cider. Most of the route is on pavements and paths, but a short section through Burwalls Wood is on a woodland trail where there are protruding roots and steps. Hiking boots are not necessary, just sturdy shoes or trainers. The route takes about two hours at a leisurely pace.

### **University of Bristol**

Beginning at the School of Humanities on Woodland Road at the University of Bristol, turn right along Woodland Road, and then left along Tyndall's Park Road. Following Tyndall's Park Road, cross over Whiteladies Road and follow St Paul's Road onto Queen's Road, past the Student's Union and towards Victoria Square.

### **Victoria Square**

You are now entering the heart of the wealth Bristol suburb of Clifton, and its bourgeois shopping and dining centre of Clifton Village. Follow the path across Victoria Square and through the archway occupied by the East Village Café. There are several places to eat and drink on the pedestrianised street through the archway. At the end of the street, cross at the zebra crossing and head up Princess Victoria Street. There is an excellent Fish and Chip shop here, and a nice lunch spot, Spicer + Cole. Follow Princess Victoria Street, passing (or stopping in at) the Oxfam charity bookshop, turn right on The Mall, and then left down Caledonia Place. Here you pass a good example of Georgian terraced houses, typical of this part of the city. At the end of the road, turn right to catch your first glimpse of the Clifton Suspension Bridge and the Avon Gorge. Heading up the hill towards the bridge, you will see the Clifton Rocks Railway, an underground funicular railway which used to take passengers to and from here paddle steamers and tram routes along the river. The railway cars were drawn upwards by the weight of descending trains, which had tanks filled with water that was let out and pumped up again into the large tank that can be seen from the road (with a low roof to the left of the railway entrance). Just beyond the entrance to the railway on the left hand side of the road is a good viewpoint for the bridge.

### **Clifton Suspension Bridge**

Our walk goes over the bridge. Before crossing, there is a public toilet on the opposite side of the road. Up the hill behind the public toilet is the start of the Clifton and Durdham Downs, a large public park with good views of the gorge. A short walk up the slope will take you to an observatory and the entrance to the Giant's Cave, a narrow passage through the cliff face with stomach-churning balcony overhanging the gorge, which can be accessed for a small admission fee. Our route takes us over the bridge. Before crossing choose your view – it is not permitted to cross the road on the bridge, so for views of the city keep left, for more of the gorge, keep right. The bridge was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who did not live to see its completion in 1864. It links Clifton to the small Somerset village of Leigh Woods. On the Somerset side of the bridge you will find the Suspension Bridge Visitor Centre which contains displays and exhibitions about the history and engineering of the bridge. There are toilets at the Visitor Centre.

### **Burwalls Wood and Rownham Hill**

Passing the Visitor Centre, continue along Bridge Road until you reach Burwalls Road. Go left on Burwalls Road, which winds downhill past some substantial residential properties. After the road bends right, look for a gate in the black metal railings with a National Trust sign reading 'Leigh Woods National Nature Reserve'. Go through this gate and follow the path down through the woods (the Google Map shows the route following the road, which is incorrect). The sides of the gorge are very steep, and are dangerous where quarrying once took place in the nineteenth century, so please keep to the path. The path eventually briefly returns to the road, where you turn immediately left over a bridge crossing a railway line. Once over the bridge, turn right on the tarmacked path, keeping the river on your left. Walk along the river, underneath the Brunel Way bridge until you reach the Ashton Avenue Bridge. This bridge is for guided busses, pedestrians and bicycles only. Cross it, towards the large red brick building on the other side of the river.

### **Underfall Yard**

You have just crossed the New Cut of the River Avon, a channel excavated in the early nineteenth century to divert the river around Bristol's floating harbour. The large red brick building is one of three bonded warehouses, where imports could be worked and re-exported without incurring customs duty. These three warehouses were constructed in the early twentieth century for use in Bristol's booming tobacco industry. Following the guided busway until you reach a bus stop, follow the path under a road bridge, and head towards the large red brick chimney behind the houses in front of you. This is the chimney of the Underfall Yard. The Yard is a collection of boat building businesses and a nineteenth century steam-powered pump room, which housed engines that provided hydraulic power to sluices and bridges around the floating harbour. There is a nice café and some exhibitions in the power house describing the hydraulic power system of the floating harbour. You can sit out here, watch the boats and paddle boarders and spot herons and cormorants. Retracing your steps, go back to the road and turn right out of Underfall Yard. The Nova Scotia pub is on your right and serves good local beers and ciders. Cross the small green swing bridge, passing the Merchant Seamen's cottages down by the water, and turn right at the Pump House pub – another remnant of the harbour's former power system. Keeping the harbour on your right, follow the water's edge until you reach the Grain Barge, a pub-on-a-boat which serves a good all vegan menu and local Bristol beers.

### **Brandon Hill**

From the Grain Barge, follow the straight path between the road and the harbour until you see a roundabout, about 400 metres ahead. Cross here and go up Jacob's Wells Road. If you like any one

of cats, beer or cider, then do stop in at the Bag of Nails pub, where you will find all three. Just past the Bag of Nails, on the right-hand side of Jacob's Wells Road is a series of steps. Climb these to emerge into Brandon Hill. Our walk takes us up and across Brandon Hill, keeping the Cabot Tower (named for Zuan Chabotto, or John Cabot, who sailed to North America from Bristol in 1497) on our left. Brandon Hill is the source of springs that once fed one of several piped water supply systems established in medieval Bristol. Heading up the hill, don't forget to turn around and take in the views over south Bristol and towards Somerset. Exit the park via Upper Byron place, which is to the right of Cabot Tower. Upper Byron place leads to the Georgian Berkeley Square. Cross Berkeley Square and come out onto the so-called Clifton Triangle, where there are lots of food options, including local favourite Pizza Bianchi's. Crossing the Triangle, head up University Road between Brown's restaurant and NatWest. Head up University Road and turn left at the top onto Woodland Road, where you will find our start point, the School of Humanities.