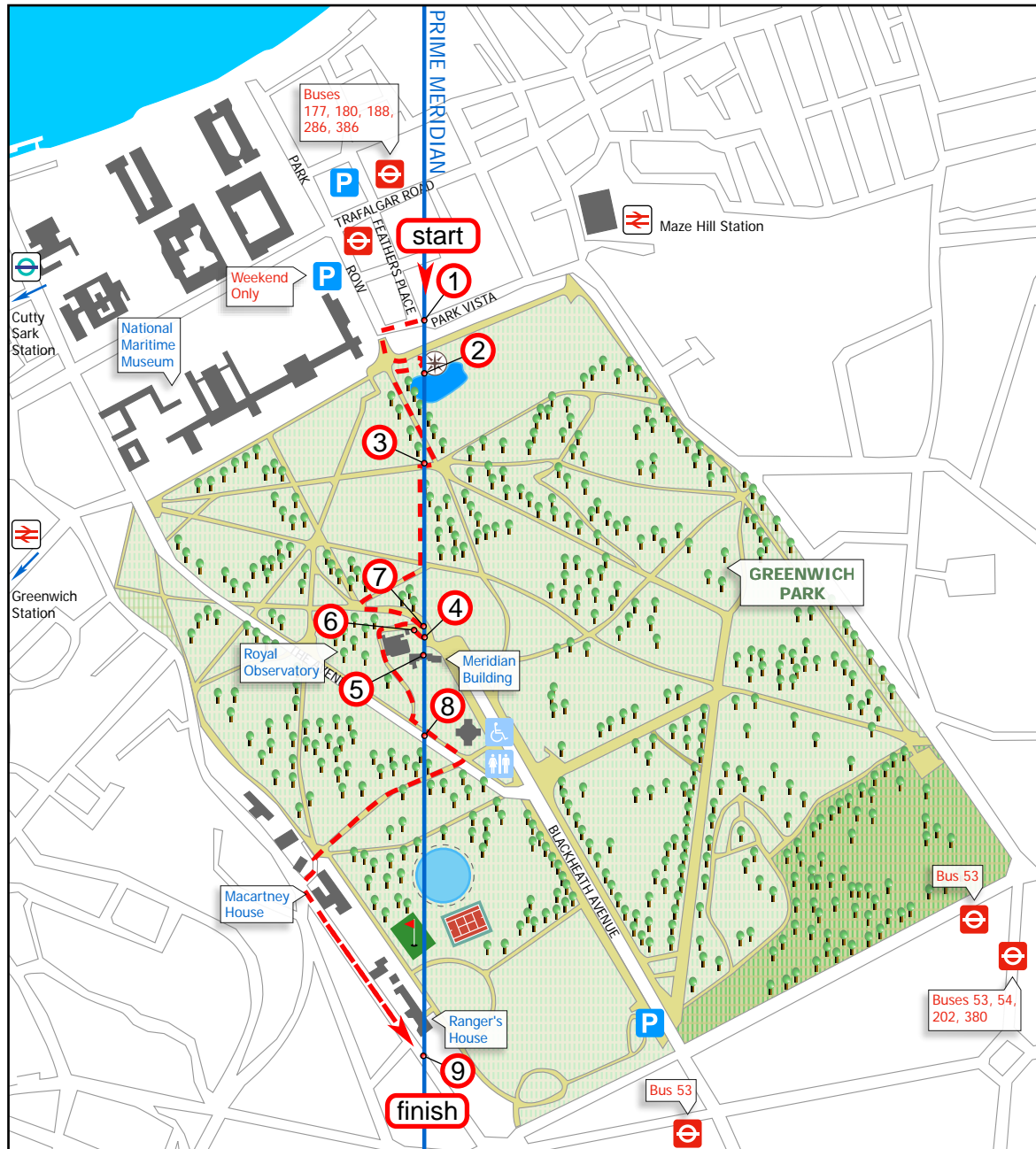


PORTCITIES London

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MERIDIAN TRAIL



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Introduction

The Prime Meridian divides the eastern and western hemispheres in the same way as the equator divides the northern and southern ones. Its position is defined by the Airy Transit Circle, a telescope at the Royal Observatory Greenwich. Follow our trail through Greenwich Park, to walk the Line where east meets west.

Key information

Distance - **1 km**

Terrain - **Some steep hills**

Underfoot - **Tarmac paths, grass**

Time to allow - **45 minutes (excluding time spent at the Observatory)**

Equipment - **Camera (optional)**

Park Vista

The first plaque marking the Meridian Line is located on the garden wall of a house opposite Feathers Place in Park Vista. The Line is also marked by a metal strip on the pavement and a row of 13 metal studs in the road.



Meridian Line plaque

The Meridian sundial

Walk along Park Vista towards the National Maritime Museum and turn left to enter the park. There is a boating lake on the left with a large sundial. The sundial was designed to have its gnomon (the big triangle that casts the shadow) aligned exactly on the Meridian Line.

Walking the Line

Return to the main path by the park gate. Follow the path opposite the gate and under the trees towards the observatory. Take the first turning to the right and walk a few paces along this path until you are clear of the trees. Then stop and face the Observatory. Here you can use a navigational technique used by sailors coming into harbour to walk exactly along the unmarked Meridian.

Look for the red line on a black background on a low building, in between the large dome to the left and the red time-ball on top of the redbrick building to the right. If you take a few paces along the path a white post (also on the Meridian) will align with the red line. When the white post covers the red line you know you are standing directly on the Meridian. If the white post is to the left of the red line, you will need to move to your right (west). If it is to the right of the red line, you will need to move to your left (east). Keeping these markers aligned walk towards the Observatory across the grass until you reach the next path. Follow this path up the hill to the Observatory itself.

The Meridian Line at the ROG

Collect a free admission ticket from the booth by the gate of the Royal Observatory and enter the courtyard. The Observatory is the home of the Prime Meridian. The Line is clearly marked by a strip on the ground leading up to a stainless steel sculpture. The glass shard at the tip of the sculpture is the white marker you used to walk up the Meridian Line in the park. People from around the world come to have their picture taken standing astride the Prime Meridian.

Airy Transit Circle

Look through the window where the Line enters the building. On the Line you will see the Airy Transit Telescope. This telescope has defined the Greenwich Meridian since 1851. In 1884 the Greenwich Meridian was adopted as the Prime Meridian of the world. Before 1884 different countries measured east and west from different places, for example the French measured from Paris, while the Spanish measured from Cadiz.

An earlier Greenwich Meridian

There is a stone block on an earlier Meridian by the railings of the courtyard about six metres to the left of the sculpture. This Meridian Line is called the Bradley Meridian and is defined by an earlier telescope, which is also in place inside the Meridian building. It was used between 1750 and 1850. The Ordnance Survey first mapped the UK during this time. They used the Bradley Meridian as their zero reference for measuring east and west. The Bradley Meridian is still used for Ordnance Survey maps today. The stone block supported a marker for carrying out simple alignment checks with the telescope. It was placed here in 1798.

An early public Meridian marker

Turn sharply to your left out of the Observatory courtyard gates and follow the path along the wall and through the small kissing gate. Just past the gate is probably the oldest public marker of the Prime Meridian. A thin strip of metal runs across the path and up the Observatory wall with a plaque above. Follow the path around the Royal Observatory, past the Astronomers' garden until you reach the Avenue that runs through the park.

The Avenue

Turn left up the Avenue and you will see the Meridian marked by a strip of granite blocks that runs across the full width of the road. Walk up the Avenue, crossing the Line and take the first path to the right. Go straight on through a narrow archway to leave the Park. Turn left past the McCartney House and follow the wall until you reach the Ranger's House.

Ranger's House

English Heritage administers the Ranger's House. It is open to the public from Wednesday to Sunday between June and August. There used to be a marker for aligning the telescopes on the Bradley Meridian attached to one of the chimneys. It consisted of an iron plate with a hole through which the sky could be seen. Unfortunately it is no longer there. However there is a marker for the Prime Meridian on the garden wall, approximately 45 metres beyond the house gates. This final marker is positioned at head height. It is almost identical to the plaque you saw at the beginning of the trail. Compare the plaque in front of you with the photograph from point (1) of the trail. See if you can spot and explain the difference between them.

This is the end of the trail; we hope you have enjoyed it!

If you'd like to try another trail log onto www.portcities.org.uk/london and print out some more.

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