

Borough top

If you ever see a walker hanging around on Sidney Road, between the houses on its north and Centre Road, don't be alarmed. They are probably collecting a 'borough top'. For it is somewhere around here that the London Borough of Newham ascends to its maximum elevation, officially 15m / 49ft.

It's none too easy to identify the precise location. The borough boundary runs along the northern edge of the road, with an extension around the gardens of their houses; all that lies beyond is Redbridge. So step off the Newham-maintained pavement and onto the Flats, or outside the boundary fence of the gardens, and you're in another country.

The official list for these things, the Database of British Hills www.hills-database.co.uk, gives a grid reference of TQ 402860 for the summit. That's a 100m-square, so quite imprecise in a flat area. Mapping software, which continuously interpolates heights, shows an elevation of 16m / 52ft in one of the gardens of nos 6 to 14, in square TQ 403860 – the next square to the east. Home-owners are unlikely to be keen though to be asked for access from groups of obsessives.

Because there are indeed such people, who set out to walk to the highest points of various local government areas. The London Boroughs list is perhaps the least involving of them all; many are under tarmac. Perhaps the nicest borough top is the high point for Waltham Forest, Pole Hill in Epping Forest. Another fine spot within the one-time Great Forest of Essex, Cabin Hill in what is now Hainault Forest Country Park, is the top of Redbridge.

The tops of the historic counties of the UK are rather more of a walker's challenge. There are around 90 of these, depending a bit on definitions; they even have their own guide book, *The UK's County Tops* published by Cicerone Press. The Long-Distance Walkers Association keep a register of all those who have visited the Great Britain tops, and with just 47 completions recorded so far, it's a more exclusive club than Everest. It needs, of course, strong mountain skills to cope with Bidean nam Bian, Ben Nevis, Snowdon and the rest, but it gives too an opportunity to scour some wonderful corners of our beautiful island. And Boring Field (sic) in Huntingdonshire.

And just in case doubts have been growing as you read: yes, the 26m / 84ft Beckton Alp has a higher elevation than Sidney Road. But that is man-made, as the spoil from Beckton gasworks, not the result of natural process. Or else we might be hooking ourselves to the outside of the Orbit tower, just to get a tick on a list.

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