

RAVENNA CREEK BED

In 1961, the Seattle Parks Department filled in the west end of the ravine with 100,00 cubic yards of dirt from freeway construction to create level playing fields, filling part of the glacier-carved ravine and burying the stream. A popular community effort to “daylight” Ravenna Creek throughout the park has finally been achieved under Pro-Parks funding.

THE WALK

Walk east from Cowen Park to Ravenna Park, entering at University Way NE and NE Ravenna. Step through the old Cowen Park entrance gates on the corner of Ravenna Boulevard, or go down the stairs on either side of a flat-roofed building housing rest rooms and a community meeting space. A lawn with a baseball backstop is tucked beside children’s play equipment, an aluminum sundial with a hand pointing to true north, and four large cast bronze sculptures showing development of a tadpole into a frog. A right turn brings a curving descent into the ravine.

As the day-lighted Ravenna Creek emerges from the North Trunk sewer pipe, it flows into a small stone-lined pond, part of the recent remodeling. Immediately above is the 15th Avenue Bridge that is the boundary between Cowen and Ravenna Parks.

The sides of the ravine are clothed in mature second growth maples, firs, and cedars, but invasive ivy, blackberry, and morning glory lie beneath them. Neighborhood groups such as the Ravenna Creek Alliance and others help to weed and maintain the trails.

Above the service road on either side are the easy north and south trails of the Ravenna Park Trail System, built and maintained by the Friends of Ravenna Park. Cross a small bridge and pause to gaze into Ravenna Creek. Imagine how enormous old growth cedars and firs must have looked here at one time. Continue walking down into the east end of the steep-sided ravine, and emerge from the trees into a baseball field near the park’s eastern boundary.

Climb up the south trail to street level and a small parking lot. There you find a picnic area, an historic restroom, and old tennis courts, protected from the wind by a line of tall poplars. Notice that the recreated creek bed is triumphantly above ground, but it disappears under street pavement at the edge of Ravenna Park and flows under University Village.

Return to Cowen Park along one of the alternative side trails, taking you west along Ravenna Creek, and back to your car or bus stop.

Ravenna / Cowen Park Urban Walk

**An In-city Family Adventure with
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START YOUR WALK HERE



RAVENNA / COWEN PARK – A SHADY HAVEN

Walkers through this magical shady ravine in north Seattle find that, despite the traffic above, it is a quiet place. The forest on the steep sides of the ravine dulls its roar and adds bird song. The 15th Ave NE vehicle bridge and the 20th Avenue NE bridge, now for foot traffic only, cross high above. Viewers enjoy looking down from both bridges onto the canopy and creek, but foot travelers along Ravenna Creek consist of runners, dog-owners, children, bicyclists, and bird-watchers.

Playing fields and equipment, along with a large sundial at Cowen Park will offer kids some choices for play. The walk along the floor of the ravine into Ravenna Park is cool and shady even on a hot day, and families with dogs regularly travel it with their pets. Playing fields have been rebuilt around Ravenna Creek at the Park's east end before it dives under University Village.

GETTING THERE

To reach Cowen Park, from I-5 take the NE 50th exit and drive east on 50th to 15th Ave E. Turn north on 15th Ave and go to Ravenna Boulevard. Or drive north or south on University Way North East to NE Ravenna Boulevard. Park just north of the Boulevard along side streets or on Brooklyn Avenue alongside Cowen Park. For Ravenna Park, drive north from University Village to 20th North East and North East 58th. Find a small parking area along 20th North East. Or turn on 20th NE to find a larger parking area just south of the 20th Street Bridge. Metro buses #71, #72, and #73 will take you to either Ravenna Park or Cowen Park.

ONE OF SEATTLE'S OLDEST CITY PARKS

Formed by the retreating Vashon Glacier, **Ravenna Park** is one of the city's oldest parks, acquired by the city by right of eminent domain in 1911, and cared for today by the Ravenna Creek Alliance. This park makes up the east end of the ravine. At the west end is Cowen Park, designed by the Olmsteds. Ravenna Creek runs along the ravine's length, but flows underground again into city sewers at the ends of both parks. To descend into this ravine is to escape from urban sounds and commercialism into natural beauty.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Platted as Ravenna Springs Park, it was bought in the 1880s by the William Beck family and named for the Italian town described by the poet Dante. The creek was a large stream teeming with trout and flowing above ground from Green Lake to Lake Washington. Thousand-year-old cedars and Douglas firs, some more than 300 feet tall, filled the ravine. The family built paths, benches, waterfalls, and a pavilion for musical performances, where the admission was 25 cents. An ancient 400-foot tall Douglas fir was christened the Robert E. Lee, another named for Theodore Roosevelt, who visited it in person, and another named for pianist Ignatz Paderewski. Ravenna was called the "place to see trees that swept the stars."

The Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition of 1909 brought trolley service and AYP fair-goers to Ravenna Park. When the city took the land in 1911, many of the old trees were still standing. Engineers submerged both ends of Ravenna Creek into the North Trunk Sewer line, and then, to Seattleites' dismay, sold the ancient trees to loggers. No one today knows who made that decision, but all the magnificent monarchs were gone. Crowds began to come for the first "music in the park" concerts in the 1920s.

Cowen Park was given to the city in 1907 by Charles Cowen, a British immigrant who spent many years in the San Juan Islands. When he gave his land for the park, he requested that the inscription above the formal granite entrance read "Man shall not live by bread alone." It is still there, and today's walkers still agree.

