

## GETTING THERE

To reach Union Bay, exit I-5 at Exit #169 on NE 45th Street. Drive east past the University of Washington and down the viaduct toward University Village. Pass it and make the first turn right onto Mary Gates Memorial Way, following signs to the Center for Urban Horticulture. Park in its parking lot or on nearby streets.

From east of the lake take the #520 bridge and the Montlake Boulevard exit. Turn right onto Montlake and pass Husky Stadium, then veer right to pass University Village and continue to a five -corner intersection. Take a hard right for the Center for Urban Horticulture. Metro buses #25, #65, and #75 will take you to the five-way corner at 45th and Mary Gates Way.

## THE WALK

Walk out onto Wahkiakum Lane, the path facing south toward the stadium. The meadows have been re-planted with native grasses to determine if they can thrive, but introduced exotics like Scots Broom, Himalayan blackberries, and purple loosestrife still dominate more of the land. An introduced exotic bird you may see or hear on paths through the marsh is the Ring-Necked Pheasant, which does no harm. Another introduced species with more undesirable characteristics is the carp fish, which takes food needed by native fish such as trout, salmon and bass, and roots up some of the water plants needed by nesting birds.

## BRING BINOCULARS

While the land is recovering, the trail along Union Bay makes a wonderful walk and opportunity to observe wildlife. Many migrating birds stop here during the winter, some rare to this area. Bring your binoculars and bird book. Shoreline, ponds and fields attract a great variety. In February when Shoveler's Pond is full, you may see green-winged teals, buffleheads, hooded mergansers, or coots and cormorants, and the northern shovelers with their shovel-shaped bills, for which the pond is named.

Regular winter residents are mallards, coots, juncos, song sparrows, towhees, and chickadees. Some of the swallows make their nests in tunnels and under parts of the Husky buildings, like closely packed mud tenements. The baseball field is a parade ground for great blue herons, gulls, and crows in winter, and though football fans are oblivious, peregrine falcons have been observed catching pigeons on the roof of the stadium.

As the ponds dry up in spring, different birds appear. Because of the cattails you will hear and see red-winged blackbirds. You may also see an occasional Western pond turtle sunning himself on logs in the water lilies and yellow iris. Muskrats, river otters, raccoons have been seen, and beaver lodges are appearing again around the shore. Look for nests and occasional evidence of muskrats and beaver in the cattails

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# Union Bay Natural Area Urban Walk

**An In-city Family Adventure with  
Joan Burton**



**START YOUR WALK HERE**



## CANOES, KAYAKS AND CATTAILS WITH VIEWS OF HUSKY STADIUM

Kids also like seeing the Husky sports facilities from the waterside. Plan to visit the Waterfront Activities Center where families can rent canoes and kayaks for a paddle along the shoreline among the cattails and nesting geese. If you plan to rent a boat, don't forget your driver's license.

Nothing remains of the 1888 Yesler sawmill built on Union Bay. The Lake Shore and Eastern Railway served the mill and settlement with the same name, carrying heavily loaded log trains to Seattle, but the mill burned in 1895, and was never rebuilt. Once abundant wood ducks and tundra swans are being seen again, but scarce. Dredging for UW crew practice has eliminated some of the marsh plants, minnows, crustaceans and cover they required. Today Canada geese nest in the cattail marshes. Various shell houses, from which Husky rowing crews practice in all weather, have been used for decades along Union Bay. If you watch the marsh early in the morning you may see crews out before classes practicing in the cold and dark.

Later the marsh became a city dump. For decades the community piled garbage, refuse, and chemicals onto this prime waterfront land. When the University built the Medical School in 1948, it needed a place to deposit the earth excavated in the construction. By this time the dump had become something of an embarrassment to the city, so the construction earth was heaped on top of the old city dump. But toxic chemicals couldn't just be covered over. They continue even now to leach up through the ponds, along with natural marsh gas, or methane, derived from decaying natural material, which also bubbles up along the shore.

The University of Washington allows ecologists to monitor how and whether the land is recovering from its various historic abuses and to combine research, university teaching, and public outreach on plants in urban environments by managing the land as an ecological research area.

## UNION BAY NATURAL AREA – RECLAIMED LAND FROM THE LAKE

Walkers who admire the Dutch for reclaiming land from the sea may like this walk over land reclaimed from Lake Washington. A natural area adjoins the Center for Urban Horticulture, the University of Washington's athletic fields and Husky Stadium. Called the Montlake Fill for several generations, it is now an ecological research area or the Union Bay Natural Area. Despite the closeness of Husky sports activities, bird lovers enjoy the migrating winter birds in seasonal ponds, and walkers love the vestiges of natural Lake Washington shoreline.

These ponds and the Lake Washington waterfront trails are fun for kids to walk. In winter they may see many unusually colored ducks, and in summer turtles, raccoons and geese among the cattails. A small camel-backed bridge is another attraction.



This land was once part of, and under, Lake Washington. Heavy timber around the deep bay was logged when one of Henry Yesler's nearby mills had steamers pick up lumber at its dock. Then when the lake was lowered in 1917 by nine feet, this became a wetland and an early version of a community p-patch. A long-ago neighbor remembered that she never had to water vegetables in her garden here because it had subterranean water all summer long.

**Distance:** One Mile Round Trip  
**Time:** As Long As You Like  
**Terrain:** Level  
**Restrooms:** Urban Horticultural Center

