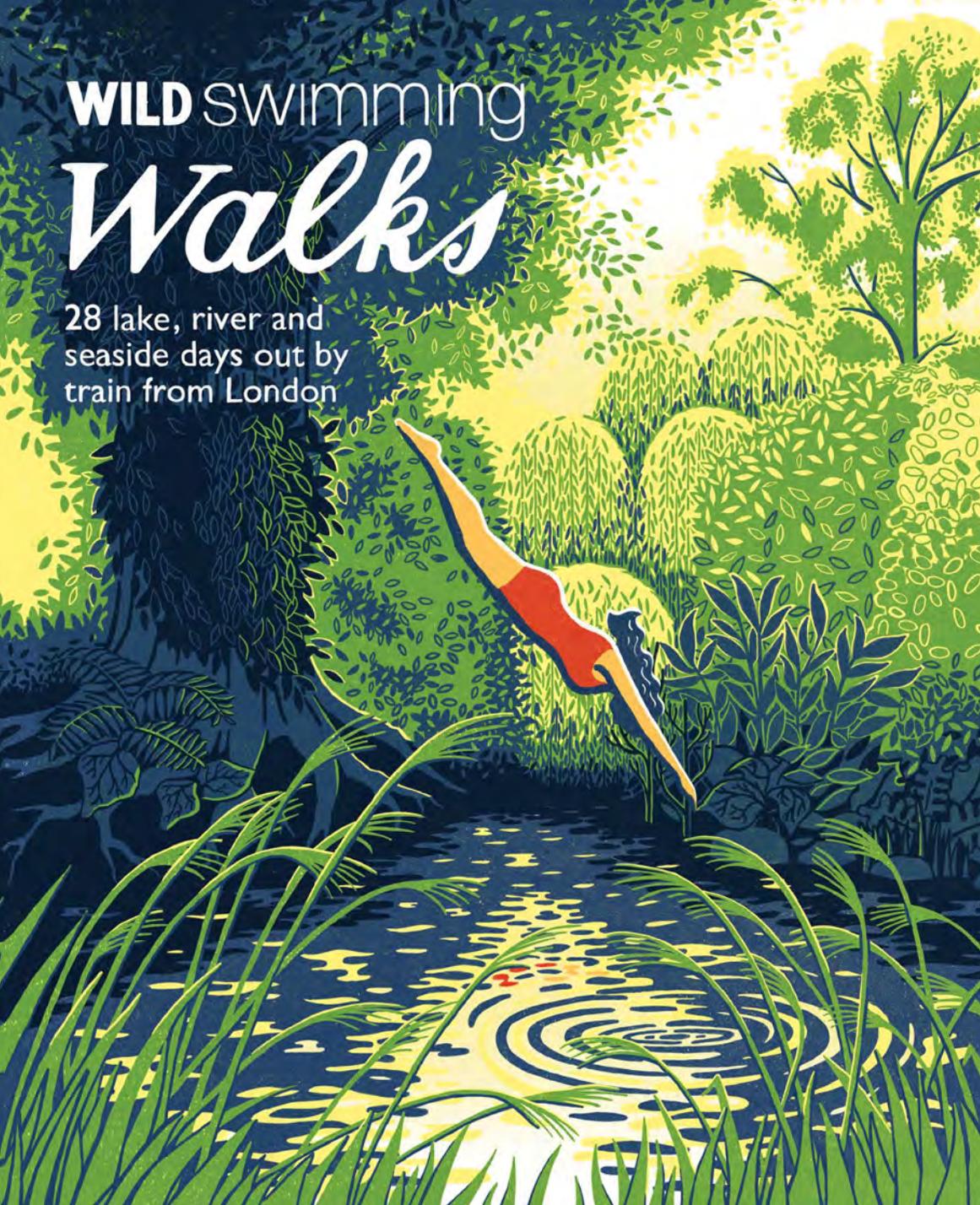


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The Kenwood Ladies' Pond on Hampstead Heath has been a women's swimming pond since 1926. World famous for its history and idyllic setting, it has become a magnet for London residents and visitors alike. Margaret Dickinson (editor) is a year-round wild swimmer, documentary film-maker and writer who campaigned to save swimming on the Heath.



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Walk 7

SHEPRETH TO CAMBRIDGE, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

A moderately long walk across stretches of East Anglian farmland, passing through several attractive villages with traditional thatched cottages, via Grantchester to Cambridge.

This is a very pleasant outing in spring or early autumn with scope for short or long swims and an extended picnic on the open meadows ¹⁰ near the historic village of Grantchester. Expect crowds on the river in high summer, especially at weekends, and biting winds in late autumn or winter. The walk can also be combined with punting, useful to accommodate a party including people averse to a long walk. The end of this route passes Scudamore's boat station ^{3b} above the weir below Silver Street Bridge, the traditional location for hiring a punt to go to Grantchester. A punting group could stay on the train to Cambridge, walk from the railway station to Scudamore's, collect a punt and rendezvous with the walkers at Grantchester.

Not surprisingly for a charming village very near to Cambridge, Grantchester can claim an unusual number of famous residents, past and present, many of whom enjoy, or enjoyed, swimming in the Cam. Rupert Brooke spent his days here studying literature, swimming naked and commuting into Cambridge by canoe. Virginia Woolf and EM Forster, philosophers Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein, economist John Maynard Keynes and artist Augustus John all joined him, and were keen swimmers too, forming the neo-Pagan contingent of the emerging Bloomsbury Group.

Byron's Pool, under a weir just upstream, was supposedly the poet's favourite swimming spot and his ghost is invoked by Rupert Brooke in the poem *The Old Vicarage, Grantchester*, written when Brooke was in Germany, nostalgic for life in Cambridge:

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 9.5 miles.

TIME: 4 to 5 hours.

MAPS: OS Landranger 154 (Cambridge & Newmarket) or OS Explorer 209 (Cambridge).

START POINT: Shepreth Station.

END POINT: Cambridge Station.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: By train from King's Cross or Finsbury Park. Purchase a day return ticket to Cambridge but take care to catch the stopping train on the outward journey.

SWIMMING: In the River Cam (or Granta, to use the archaic name), a clear river with a modest current.

PLACES OF INTEREST:

Barrington church; Haslingfield church; the Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory; Grantchester riverside village; Cambridge colleges, museums and Botanic Garden.

REFRESHMENTS: Village shops in Barrington and Haslingfield; The Red Lion gastropub (CB3 9NF, tel 01223 840121) and the Orchard Tea Gardens (CB3 9N,D tel 01223 551125) in Grantchester.



*'... The stream mysterious glides beneath,
Green as a dream and deep as death.
– Oh damn! I know it! and I know
How the May fields all golden show,
And when the day is young and sweet,
Gild gloriously the bare feet
That run to bathe . . .
Du lieber Gott!
Here am I, sweating, sick, and hot,
And there the shadowed waters fresh
Lean up to embrace the naked flesh...'*

Today the flesh is less likely to be naked, except perhaps by moonlight or at dawn, and Byron's Pool is too close to the M11, and too blighted by its new concrete weir, to feel in any way romantic. But there are better places to linger further along, and the river offers scope to do a long swim downstream from Grantchester all the way to Newnham, if you have companions to carry bags.

The water is often deep enough to dive into but take care to check.

Only the fastest of walkers could expect to combine the walk with serious sightseeing but it is worth pausing at Barrington church **3** and Haslingfield church **5**, both fine medieval buildings, and noting in the distance the Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory **6**. At the end of the walk there is the option of going into Cambridge **13a** where there is, of course, plenty to explore. The Fitzwilliam Museum closes at 5pm but is free so worth popping into, even for half an hour. Choral evensong in King's College chapel is at 5.30pm Monday to Saturday, but whatever the time it can be pleasant just to wander round the college area. The University Botanic Gardens are on the direct route to the station **13a** and from April to September are open until 6pm (4.30 or 5pm the rest of the year), but there is an entry charge.



DIRECTIONS

1 SHEPRETH

Turn left as you get off the train and follow the platform out of Shepreth station. Turn left over the tracks of the level crossing and towards the village taking exceptional care (if the gates are still down another train is coming). Walk past the village hall and the old telephone box (now home to the Shepreth Book Exchange).

Cross the bridge over the stream but veer to the left following a sign for the footpath to Barrington.

2 TO BARRINGTON

Continue down this side street until it runs out at the railway line. Cross over the gated level crossing with care. Follow the public footpath along the side of two fields. Halfway along the second

field, where a line of telegraph poles marches diagonally across the field, veer to your right, a signed footpath following the line of the poles. Turn left at the other side of the field and go around the field edge, ignoring the bridge on your right over a drainage channel. Cross a newly made marked footbridge on the right over a channel, and shortly afterwards

a metal bridge painted green over the main sluice. Continue up the alley between a high yew hedge on the left and high beech hedge on the right to Boot Lane and towards the thatched roofs at the top. This brings you to Barrington village high street and the shop. Turn right out of Boot Lane into the high street and go past the soccer field towards the church.

1.5 miles

3 BARRINGTON TO HARSTON

Take a right turn at the crossroads just before the church into Challis Green. Follow the road round the playground to a disused phone box. Turn left into Glebe Road and continue past the end of the village, picking up the footpath to Harston across the fields.

4 Cross the disused railway spur that used to serve the cement works, following the path to a farm building, with two large fuel tanks outside it, where the path veers off to the right (the sign for this is bent but still visible), running along the dyke and round a field beside a narrow sluice drain. The path takes an abrupt right turn over a small footbridge and through a small kissing gate, through the tunnel cut in this hedgerow, between two hedges through another kissing gate, and past a paddock beside a long line of old, large chestnut trees.

3 miles

5 TO HASLINGFIELD

Turn right at the road, cross the river bridge, and take the first left

beside the church on the western edge of Harston village. Turn immediately left in front of the sign for Church Street and the white cottages, following the sign for a footpath to Haslingfield. Follow this road (Button End) to the dead end. Here the footpath goes across the field beside a hedge, joining a bridleway where you turn left at a T-junction. Cross the stream and follow the path, ignoring a large gate on the right signposted to the Trumpington Estate. At a fork in the path, take the right hand fork. At the bungalows on the edge of Haslingfield, turn left for the shop and church, or turn right past the bungalows for the route to Grantchester.

4 miles

6 FIELDS WITH VIEWS

Pass a field on the left after the houses containing chicken coops. The path continues straight between fields, giving a view of the chimney and blocky buildings of Addenbrooke's Hospital on the far horizon to the right (on the edge of Cambridge) and on the left a line of radio telescope saucers. Beside an outbuilding with another large black oil tank the path divides again. Veer left here. Ignore the right-hand fork.

5 miles

7 OVER THE MILL

At a large electronic farm gate with a sign to Cantelupe Farm the track surface changes to concrete. Continue straight on, noticing a sign for Grantchester a mile and a half further on. Continue straight up the

public bridleway over the wooden bridge and up the path that runs through the patch of woodland on the other side. Watch out for cyclists here. As you leave this woodland the path forks.

8 Go right here, round the field edge and up over the raised footbridge across the motorway. The motorway noise disappears remarkably quickly as you leave the bridge behind you and cross the next field. At a three-way turn, take the right-hand path, leaving the church on your left. At the back of the farmyard with a 'No entry' sign, follow the path to the left of the laurel hedge. At the road a large orchard is largely hidden behind the high brick and flint wall directly opposite.

6.75 miles

9 GRANTCHESTER.

To visit Grantchester church and the pub turn left. To find the Orchard Tea Gardens turn right. To swim and continue the walk turn left, then right at the first bend, down the lane/public footpath towards the river. There are a couple of kissing gates and small fields before the path reaches the riverbank proper.

7 miles

10 BESIDE THE CAM. You now enter Grantchester Meadows from the village end. At this location the water may not look inviting, and there is little by way of vegetation where you might hide a bag. About 200 metres on, however, there are some large pools with ropes on the

opposite bank. This stretch is an ideal place to get into the river. Alternatively, half a mile from Grantchester, there are places with good cover for changing.

11 As you get closer towards Cambridge, the path along the bank merges at a narrow point with the paved bike path, after a kissing gate. The last meadow before this is a good place to swim at any time of year.

8.5 miles

12 LEAVING AND REJOINING THE CAM

As you start walking through Newnham village (on a street still called Grantchester Meadows) veer to the right, leaving a small repair garage (GP Motors) on the left. Turn right at the end of this street, and follow the posts marked with red rings. This will bring you into the Paradise Nature Reserve. Follow the footpath on through the trees here to regain the riverbank.

13 CAMBRIDGE

Beside a large municipal paddling pool and public toilets, cross the tubular bridge over the river, but pause here because you have a choice.

9.5 miles

13a TO THE STATION

Continue on the right-hand path over a second bridge, along the edge of Sheep's Green and behind the Leys School along the path beside Vicar's Brook until the Trumpington Road. Turn left and then almost immediately right into Bateman Street. You can opt here

to visit the 40-acre Cambridge University Botanic Garden. Alternatively, continue along Bateman Street. At Hills Road cross straight over and turn right, take the first exit left at the roundabout, Station Road, and follow it to the station.

13b INTO CAMBRIDGE

Turn left immediately after the tubular bridge and follow the path beside the culvert to Fen Causeway. Cross on the diagonal pedestrian crossing and continue to the Mill Pond. Turn right but then take the left fork immediately after this to head diagonally toward the main river. Turn left

Hannah Pearce, Liz Valentine

