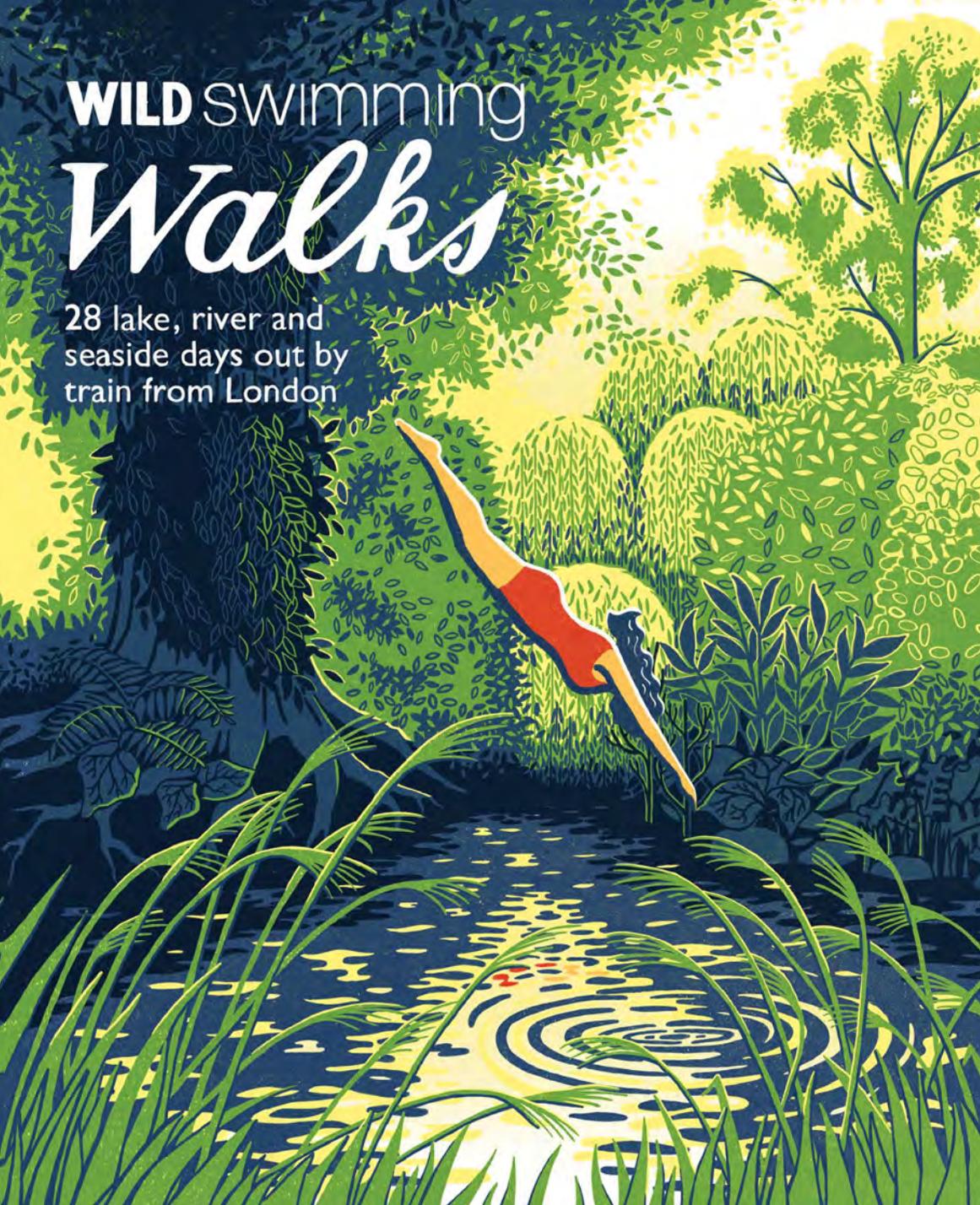


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The Kenwood Ladies' Pond on Hampstead Heath has been a women's swimming pond since 1926. World famous for its history and idyllic setting, it has become a magnet for London residents and visitors alike. Margaret Dickinson (editor) is a year-round wild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



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Walk 12

WINCHFELD TO HOOK, HAMPSHIRE

This pretty walk offers swims in a trout stream and a spring-fed canal, and passes lakes, nature reserves, churches, a mill and a ruined castle.

We first did this walk on a sunny April day when the scenery seemed to be all white blossom, green buds and shimmering water, but in any season water is a strong theme as it is never far away. A second theme is history and, unsurprisingly, the two are linked.

The route includes two sections of the Three Castles Path, a long distance trail between Windsor and Winchester inspired by the journeys King John made from his castle in Odiham. These sections follow the Basingstoke Canal, a narrow, pretty waterway, mostly tree lined and rather meandering for a canal. Completed in 1794, it was built to promote agricultural development and linked Basingstoke to the Wey Navigation in West Byfleet, which in turn links to the Thames. Barges carried flour, timber and chalk out and brought in coal and fertiliser, but as a commercial venture it was a failure and the company went bankrupt in 1866.

Parts remained navigable until the mid 20th century when it fell into complete disrepair and might have disappeared, had it not been for the hard work of the Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society. Formed in 1966, the society campaigned successfully for the two county councils to buy it and contribute towards its restoration, which was completed in 1991. Details can be found on the Basingstoke Canal Society's website.

Our walk joins the canal twice, first along a stretch crossed by attractive bridges with nameplates dated 1792 **2**, and the second time by the Greywell Tunnel **8**, which collapsed in 1932 and now marks the end of the canal. There is no towpath through the tunnel, so barges used to push their barges through by lying on their backs and pressing their feet against the wall.

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 11 miles (9.5 miles with shortcut).

TIME: 6 hours.

MAP: OS Landranger (186 Aldershot & Guildford); OS Explorer 144 (Basingstoke, Alton & Whitchurch).

START POINT: Winchfield Station.

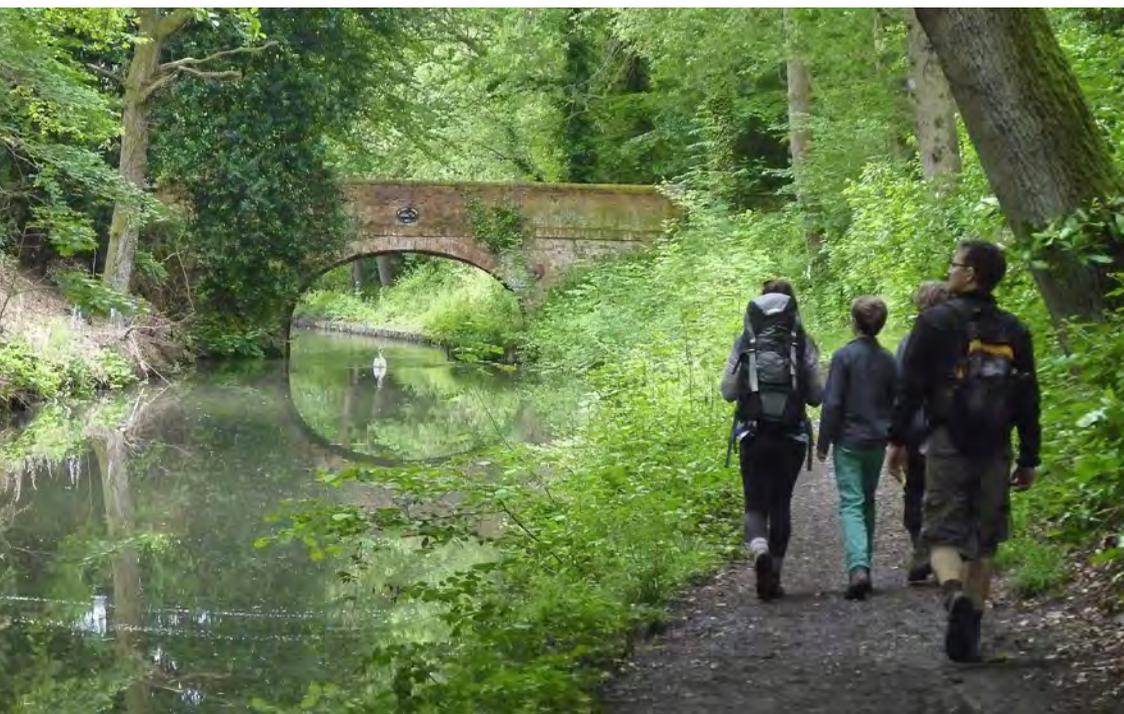
END POINT: Hook Station.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Train from Waterloo.

SWIMMING: River Whitewater, a trout stream, and in Basingstoke Canal.

PLACES OF INTEREST: The Basingstoke Canal; St Mary the Virgin, Winchfield; All Saints church, Odiham; St Mary's church, Greywell; Odiham Castle; Greywell Mill; Greywell Moors wetland reserve; Bartley Heath nature reserve.

REFRESHMENTS: The Bell (RG29 1LY, tel 01256 702282) and The Crown, a pub with a well-reviewed Bangladeshi restaurant (RG29 1PH, tel 01256 702489), both Odiham; The Fox and Goose, Greywell (RG29 1BY, tel 01256 702062); The Mill House pub, Warnborough (RG29 1ET, tel 01256 702953).



The blocked tunnel is now significant as a haunt of five species of bats.

One of the swimming places is in the canal near the tunnel. The canal is fed from chalk springs which is why the water quality, in this part at least, is unusually good. We swam in a wide, deep section almost opposite Odiham Castle ⑧. The water was pleasantly clear but very cold. Another place to swim, a little earlier in the walk, is in the River Whitewater just downstream from Greywell Mill ⑦. The water is sparkling clear and also very cold, but fast-flowing and shallow in places. The banks can be a little muddy and you need to be aware that it is a trout stream where you may meet anglers.

After the first section of canal the walk passes two lovely lakes, but neither is that suitable for swimming. Tundry Pond, in the grounds of Dogmersfield Park Hotel, has two parts. The smaller is reserved for fishing, lined with 'No swimming' signs, and feels under observation, but there are benches there making it a pleasant picnic spot. The larger pond is free of 'No swimming' signs, as far as we could see, and is warmer than the later swimming places but rather shallow, little more than three feet deep. One of our walkers found the whole area with its signs and fences

a little sinister. According to local legend, its present charm does hide a dark history because a village was supposedly cleared to make way for the ponds. Further on, Dogmersfield Lake is private and directly overlooked by Aragon Hall.

Throughout the walk nature and culture compete for interest. The route passes three fine medieval churches. St Mary the Virgin in Winchfield has a remarkable Norman chancel and Norman doorway. All Saints at Odiham has a Saxon foundation, but the present building dates mainly from the 13th, 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, with the lovely brick tower rebuilt in the 17th century. St Mary's in Greywell dates from the 12th century, is screened by great yew trees in a secluded churchyard and inside has a beautiful early 16th century wooden rood screen. Odiham Castle, built by King John on a bend in the River Whitewater, is now a romantic ruin.

The latter part of the walk goes through two nature reserves: Greywell Moors ⑦ is an area of fen and wet woodland along the Whitewater where several kinds of orchids grow in early summer. Bartley Heath ⑩ and Hook Common are areas of common land, with a long history of livestock grazing, where cattle and ponies are now used to help manage the heathland for wildlife.

DIRECTIONS

① WINCHFIELD

Turn left out of the station on a suburban road which winds through redbrick houses and past a lily pond, then leads to a pedestrian-only way through to a busier minor road. Turn right and

then at the next junction right again. Continue to the church of St Mary the Virgin on the left. Go through the churchyard to find a signed path on the far side through a kissing gate. Go through a wood, Hellet's Copse, which has bluebells

in spring and is full of songbirds in early summer, then cross a field to reach the canal. Do not cross the bridge but go left onto the towpath and turn right under Stacey's Bridge.

1.5 miles

2 THE BASINGSTOKE CANAL

Continue under Baseley's Bridge and leave the canal at the next bridge, Sprat's Hatch Bridge.

2 miles

3 TUNDRY POND

Cross the bridge and take a waymarked footpath veering slightly left onto a farm track. Pass Sprat's Hatch Farm. Go through a kissing gate beside big gates for Dogmersfield Park Estate and walk along a track that later becomes a hard track between numerous 'Beware of the bull' signs (we did not notice these on our first visit). Divert to the left over a meadow to visit Tundry Pond.

2.5 miles

4 DOGMERSFIELD ESTATE

From the pond, walk back along the hard track and take a signed and fenced path obliquely to the right between the track and a driveway. At a large gate follow a sign to the left of it. Continue on the path through a wood by Dogmersfield Lake, watched over by Aragon Hall. Walk down the driveway to a very busy road (A287) and turn left for a few yards.

4 miles

5 TO ODIHAM

Cross the road and take a rather poorly marked path on the right in a wooded area just to the left of a driveway. Fairly soon, just after a path off to the right before a fenced field on the right, take a signed path to the right through a little gate. Cross a field to a gate the other side. Cross a drive and continue on a signed path that does not go through a gate ahead but turns slightly right between a fence and hedge. Ignore a sign to the left very soon, but a little later take a signed path over a stile

on the left. Continue to cross a bridge over a small stream and follow the path over swamp-prone ground, then up a slight incline to the first houses of Odiham. The path runs between ends of the back gardens of these houses, and a large field full of poppies in summer. When the path ends at a main road, turn right and almost at once take a lane left, signed to Odiham cottage hospital. Walk past the hospital and on to find All Saints church on the right. Go through the churchyard to a square where you can see The Bell.

5.5 miles

6 ODIHAM TO THE WHITEWATER

Before the square, just after the church, turn left along a hard surfaced path to a road where, on the right, is The Crown. Cross the road and go straight on along a path between gardens. At the end turn right into a minor road and then left onto a busier road. Pass Robert May's School on the right. Cross the road and take a path right with the school building on the right. As you near the end of the buildings take a path left over a stile and head across the field, veering a little right of straight on, looking out for stiles into a lane on the far side.

There are two stiles. Take the one more to the right to cross the lane and continue on the footpath that cuts across to a road at right angles to the lane, runs beside this and then turns right to cross it. If this bit of path is very overgrown, just turn right down the lane after crossing the stile, then left at the road towards Upton Grey. Very soon there is a right turning, Deptford Lane, to Greywell. Pass this and just afterwards you will pick up the footpath on the right. This takes you over another field, through

which the footpath is very clear, and towards a wooded valley. On other side of the field, you will find yourself on Greywell Moors.

7 miles

7 ROUTE OPTIONS

The shortcut (saves just under 1.5 miles). Go through a metal gate and straight on through a small nature reserve to cross a bridge over the clear, bright waters of the Whitewater – look out for trout here. Head up and diagonally towards the top of the path that leads down to the church then rejoins the longer route.

The main route. Go through the metal gate and turn off left through another gate. Walk along the edge of a nature reserve of wooded wetlands. After about three quarters of a mile take a path that turns off to the right so sharply as to almost double back. It is a little hard to spot and seems an odd direction, but it is right if it leads to a trout pool on the left then to a mill house ahead, Greywell Mill. Just after the mill turn left then immediately right onto a path by the Whitewater. We swam a little way along here.

8 miles

8 GREYWELL VILLAGE AND ODIHAM CASTLE

Follow the stream then turn away left through the churchyard of St Mary's, Greywell to meet the shortcut. Go past the church, leave the churchyard and turn left to a nearby road. Turn right on the road to walk through the attractive village of Greywell past the Fox and Goose pub. Go straight on at a T-junction and just afterward the canal appears on the right. Turn right to join the towpath and you will see Greywell

Tunnel behind you. Continue along the canal to the ruins of Odiham Castle and the swimming place.

9 miles

9 NORTH WARNBOROUGH

Shortly after the castle turn left through a metal kissing gate, through a field to a road. Turn left and, where the road fords the Whitewater, cross on a footbridge. Go past a green, cross a second branch of the river and veer right along a lane beside a small stream into North Warnborough. At the next junction bear right, follow the road round to the B3349. (You can divert right here to visit the Mill House pub, which has an attractive garden and, inside, the old mill wheel is preserved). Otherwise, cross and continue on a concrete path. Where the concrete runs out bear left,

leaving to the right another path over a bridge. Cross the field to a gate where you cross a waterway and go under the main A287 along the side of the waterway. Continue with a stream on your left through a rural industrial estate with a farm shop and café. Turn left just before a large warehouse to cross the stream and go through a field to a stile into woods by the M3 motorway. Turn right to a footbridge and cross to enter Bartley Heath nature reserve.

10.5 miles

10 BARTLEY HEATH

The next bit of route is tricky, but pylons provide a clue. One line of pylons crosses the motorway to the right of the footbridge, but soon afterwards divides, one line turning right and the other very slightly left. A well-marked track passes near

the pylon junction and heads along the right branch of pylons. Follow this track, but only for about 70 metres, and look for a narrow path to the left roughly halfway between the first and second pylon. The path at first runs roughly parallel and to the right of the left branch of pylons, which are half hidden by trees. Soon the path crosses a small bridge over a ditch. Continue and after some distance ignore a path to the right by a line of overhead cables. Walk on to reach the B3349 just to the right of a roundabout. At the roundabout turn right onto a road leading into Hook and signed to the station, which is less than quarter of a mile away.

11 miles

Margaret Dickinson, Lydia Syson, Liz Valentine, Maggie Jennings.

