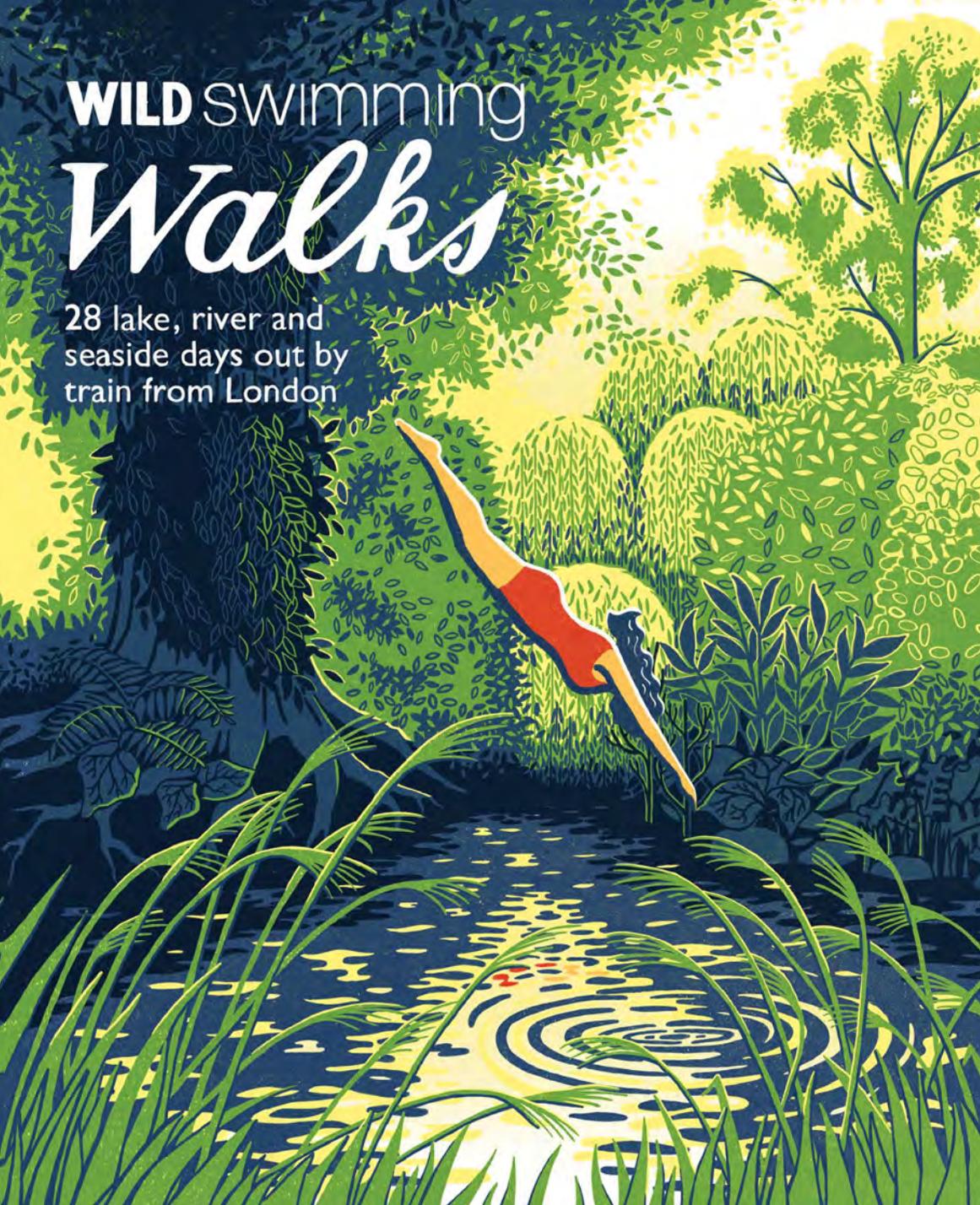


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The Kenwood Ladies' Pond on Hampstead Heath has been a women's swimming pond since 1926. World famous for its history and idyllic setting, it has become a magnet for London residents and visitors alike. Margaret Dickinson (editor) is a year-round wild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



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Walk 2

FINSBURY PARK TO HAMPSTEAD PONDS

This is an easy and surprisingly peaceful walk, incorporating a wood, historic Highgate and the most magical outdoor swimming spaces in the city.

After starting in busy, dirty, siren-shrieking Finsbury Park you quickly join a tranquil but well used path, Parkland Walk ❶. This linear green way follows a disused railway line, which once linked Finsbury Park to Alexandra Palace and was finally closed in 1970. Walking along here in the spring the sides of the path were alive with luscious green grasses, elderflowers and cow parsley. In autumn there are good blackberries to harvest. Remnants of the railway scatter the path, some overgrown, others vibrant with graffiti.

The route leaves Parkland Walk near Jacksons Lane arts venue ❷, housed in a converted church and known for innovative work in theatre, dance and contemporary circus.

On the way to Highgate, pause at Kingsley Place ❷ to enjoy the fabulous view south over London and note the house with the blue plaque commemorating Mary Kingsley, traveller and ethnologist. Soon afterwards you reach the delights of Highgate Village ❸ with its much-loved charity shops, attractive Georgian buildings and tempting pubs and eateries.

Highgate's Pond Square ❸ is a remnant of Highgate Green where there were once two ponds, made into one and then filled in and paved over in the mid 19th century. The main green area in Highgate now is that facing the elegant houses of The Grove, where Samuel Taylor Coleridge spent the last 15 years of his life at number 3 and Yehudi Menuhin once lived at number 2. No 3 was also the home of the writer JB Priestley in the 1930s and was recently bought by Kate Moss.

After dropping down from Highgate the route approaches the ponds along Millfield Lane, earlier famous as Nightingale

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 4 miles.

TIME: 2 hours.

MAP: OS Landranger 176 (West London); OS Explorer 173 (London North); London A-Z.

START POINT: Finsbury Park Underground Station.

END POINT: Hampstead Heath Overground Station.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Victoria and Piccadilly lines to Finsbury Park Station; numerous buses. From Hampstead South End Green: London Overground; buses 24, 46, 168 and C11; walk to Belsize Park tube for the Northern line.

SWIMMING: Kenwood Ladies' Pond or Highgate Men's Pond, both open all year. Mixed Pond, open May to September. All have lifeguards and charge £2 (£1 concession) day entry fee. Check www.cityoflondon.gov.uk or phone 020 7485 3873 for opening times and season ticket details.

PLACES OF INTEREST:

Finsbury Park; Parkland Walk; Jacksons Lane arts venue (269A Archway Road, N6 5AA, tel 020 8340 5226); Highgate Village.

REFRESHMENTS: Shops and cafés near Finsbury Park station; Finsbury Park café at the north end of the park off Endymion Road (N4 4LX, tel 020 8880 2681); pubs, cafés and restaurants in Highgate Village and South End Green.

Lane ④ along which Coleridge and Keats, among many others, have walked. The lane may be the last in London from which you can see the stars at night, because it is unlit. Long may it remain free from light pollution.

This walk eventually leads to the ponds described in Walk 1 and so breaks the rule followed

elsewhere that each walk offers different swims. We make this a special case because the swimming is exceptional and extremely accessible. The routes over the Heath are different but there is no need to repeat the information about the Heath given in Walk 1, so the description here ends with arrival at Hampstead Heath.

DIRECTIONS

① PARKLAND WALK

Leave Finsbury Park Station from the Station Place exit, cross Stroud Green Road and turn left, then right to take the path into Finsbury Park between the bridge and Rowan's Bowling Alley. Follow the path along the western edge of Finsbury Park until you see the sign to Highgate to the right of the narrow metal-sided footbridge over the railway. Cross the bridge and take the path off it to the right. You are now in Parkland Walk, which in a mile-and-a-half will bring you out just below Highgate Underground Station.

2 miles

② TO HIGHGATE

As you emerge from the path onto Holmesdale Road turn right to reach Archway Road, then right again, and walk up the hill, crossing the Archway Road at the traffic lights. Here you will see the famous Jacksons Lane arts venue. Walk up

Jacksons Lane, and at the T-junction turn left into Southwood Lane. Pause at Kingsley Place for the view. **2.5 miles**

③ HIGHGATE VILLAGE AND THE GROVE

There is a mini-roundabout ahead. Cross straight over and turn left along Highgate High Street to enjoy Highgate Village. Turn first right along South Grove and into Pond Square, passing on the left the Highgate Literary and Scientific Institute. Turn right when you reach The Old Hall in front of The Flask pub and cross over the road ahead. Walk down past a 'No Entry' sign and between two iron railing-fenced grassy areas and turn right into The Grove. Just beyond a rather curious single storey structure at 9D The Grove, turn left into Fitzroy Park. It is marked 'Private' and has an automatic barrier but pedestrians can enjoy a further traffic-free (more or less)

route towards the Ladies' and Men's Ponds.

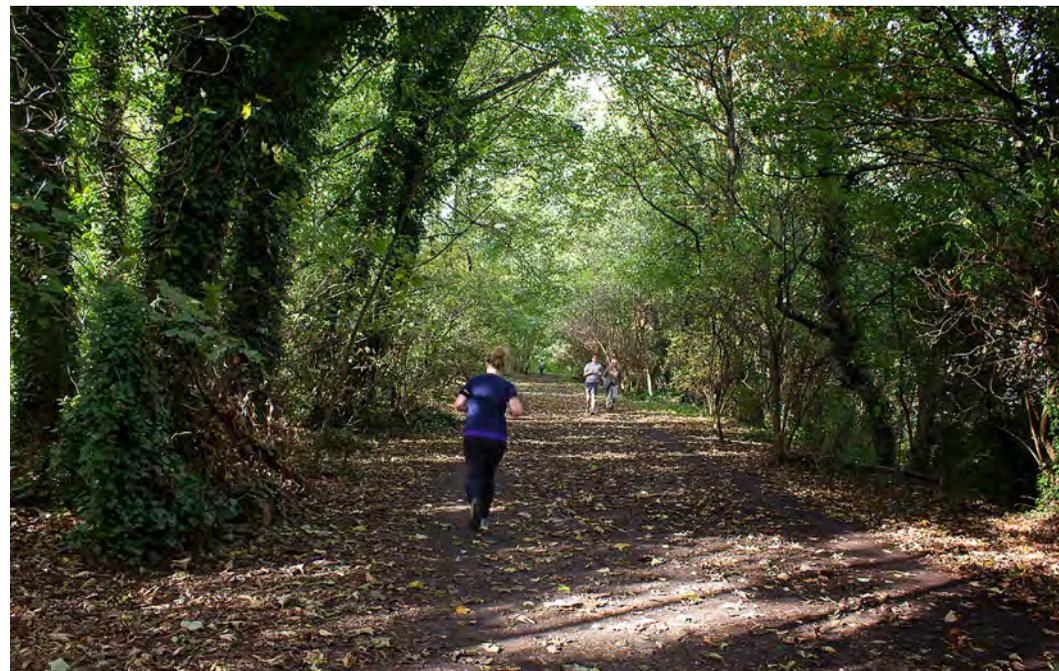
④ THE LADIES' POND

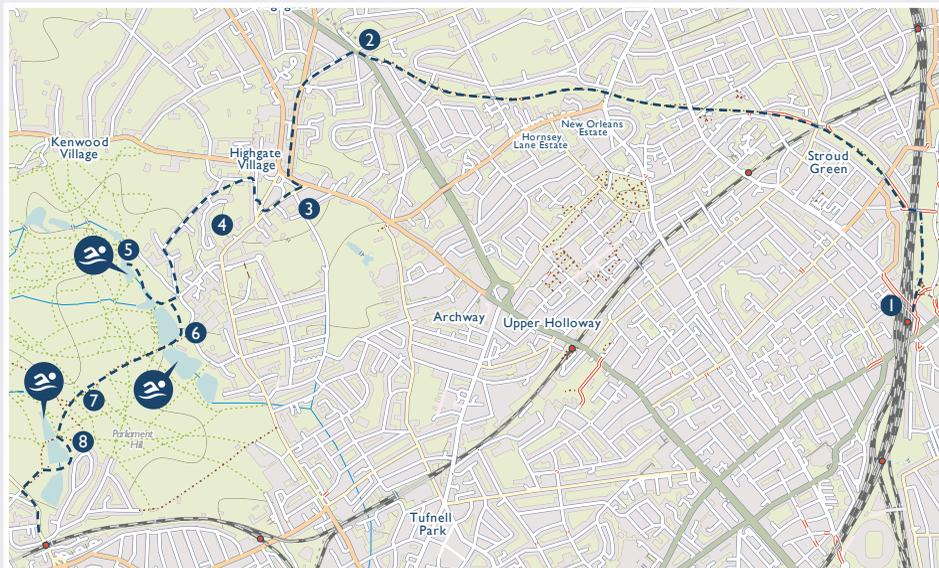
Follow Fitzroy Park to the T-junction with Merton Lane and turn sharp right into Millfield (or Nightingale) Lane, semi-surfaced and often muddy. Soon on the left you will see the gate to the Ladies' Pond.

⑤ THE MEN'S POND

For the Men's Pond go back to the junction with Fitzroy Park and Merton Lane. When a path branches off to the right onto the Heath, follow it downhill to a little causeway with the Bird Sanctuary Pond on the right and the Model Boating Pond on the left. Turn left before the Boating Pond and walk along the edge with the water on the right. The Men's Pond is the large one below the Boating Pond and the gate is on the right-hand side.

3 miles





6 ACROSS THE CAUSEWAY AND UP THE HILL

To reach the Mixed Pond cross the causeway between the Model Boating Pond and the Men's Pond and follow the path straight up the hill with an ancient hedgerow and stream on your left. Before you reach the top turn around and look back towards the spire

of Highgate Church and the ponds below. (Sometimes in the early morning you can look at this view and neither see another human being nor smell car exhaust fumes.)

7 THE MIXED POND

At the hill brow carry straight on over, ignoring a tarmac path to the

left. When you hit a T-junction of paths turn left, then immediately right down a path with shallow steps. Below to your right is the entrance to the Mixed Pond.

3.5 miles

8 TO SOUTH END GREEN

On leaving the Mixed Pond, follow the path beside the Pond to the causeway. Turn right to cross and then left to descend past the lower ponds of the Hampstead chain on a path that ends at South End Green. On your left is Hampstead Heath Overground Station and, beyond, a choice of bus routes.

4 miles

Mary Cane, Shula Hawes,
Jo Goldsworthy.

