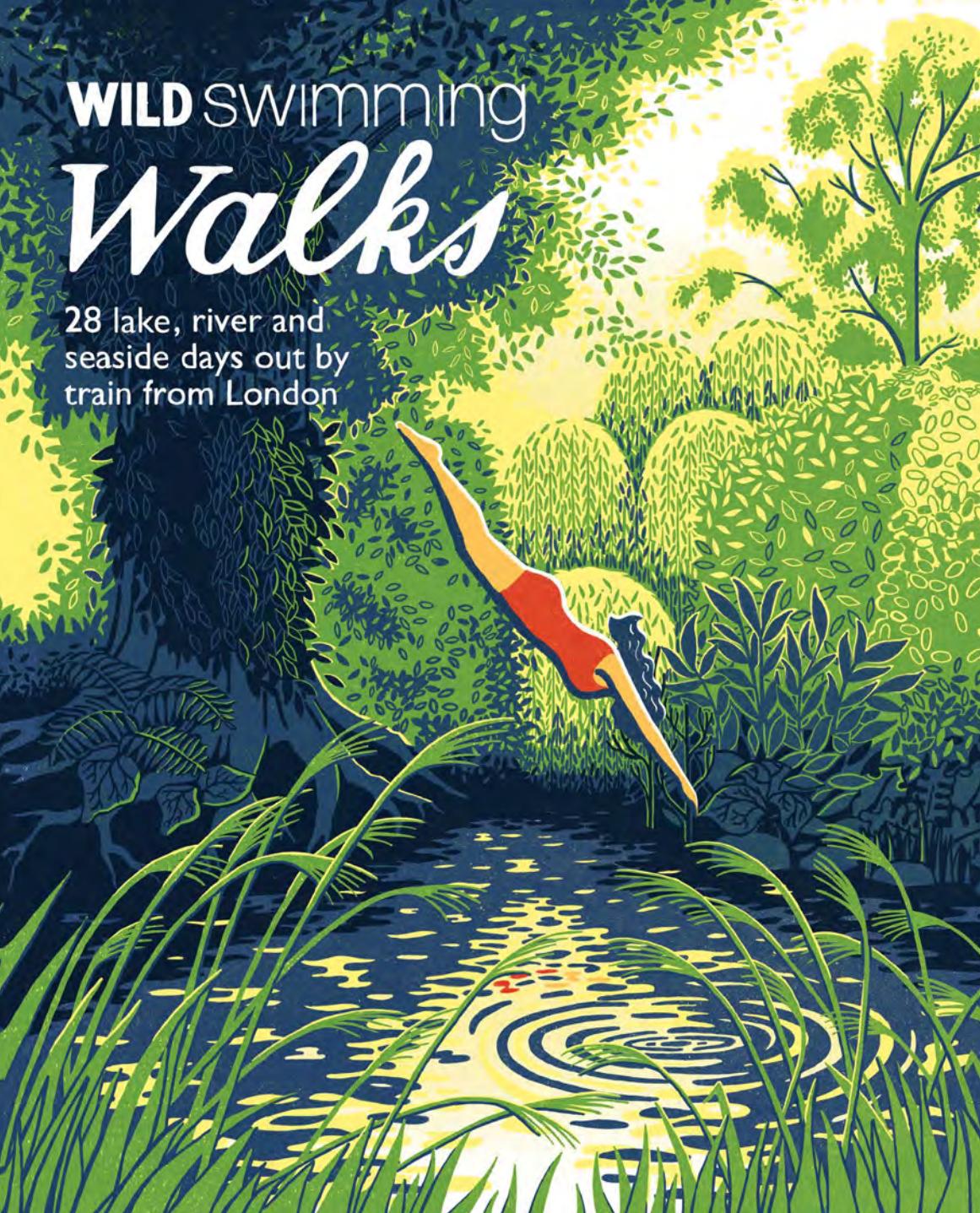


WILD Swimming Walks

28 lake, river and
seaside days out by
train from London



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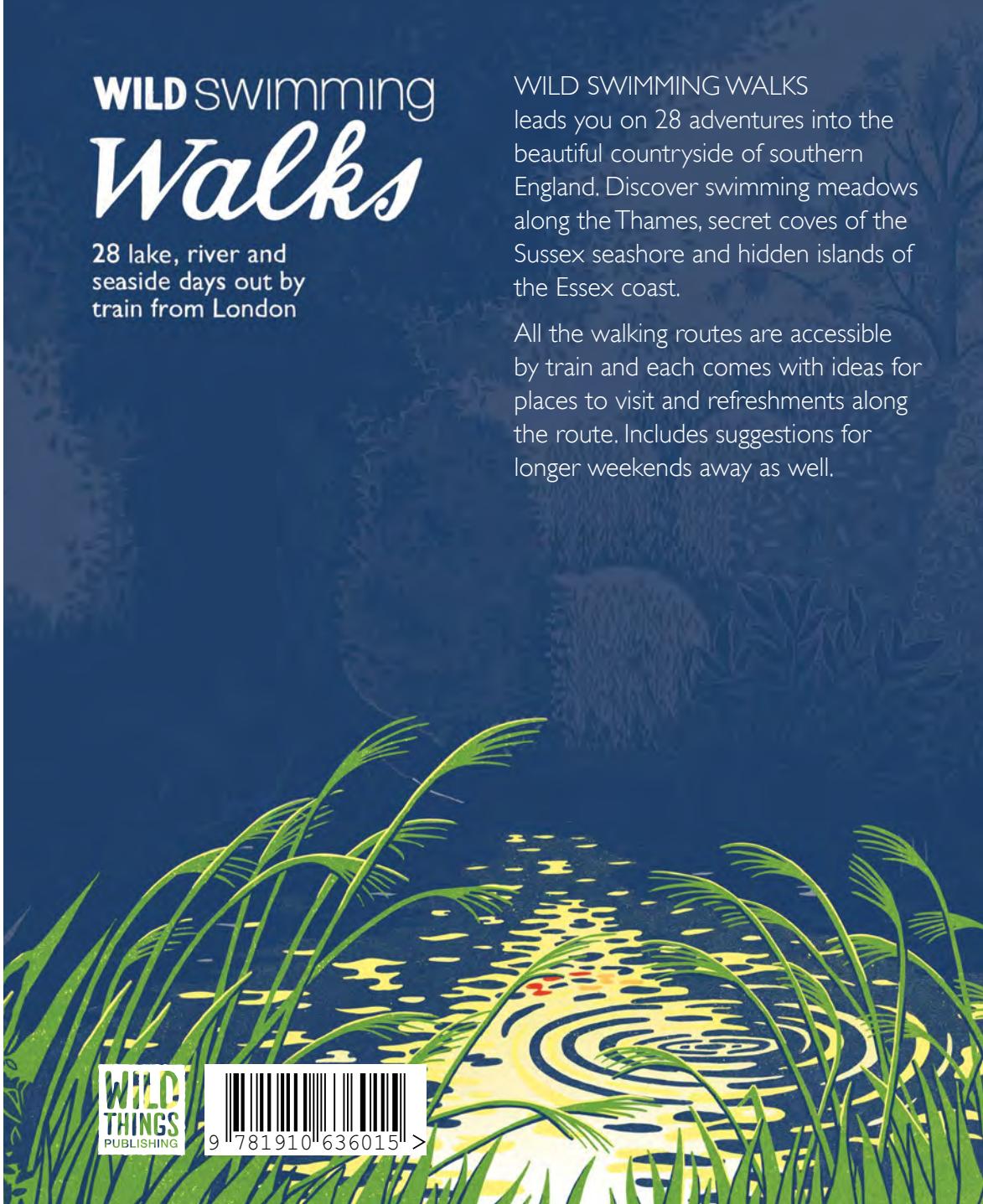
£14.99



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 4

FARNHAM TO FRENSHAM GREAT POND OR TO BENTLEY STATION

A varied walk (with shorter and longer options) through woods, meadows and heathland with two contrasting swims.

This walk offers a glorious day out exploring varied landscapes over good terrain with several little gems to discover. It is great for dogs, too, as they will meet friends along the way and are allowed at the Frensham Ponds if they are on leads. The main swim is in Frensham Great Pond 7, which looks like a natural lake but in fact is artificial, dug out in the Middle Ages as a fishpond for the Bishop of Winchester. There are also swims 4 in the young River Wey, which feeds the ponds and is small here, only just deep enough to swim in places, yet pretty, clear and surprisingly cold.

On a hot, sunny August day the swim in the Wey was wonderfully refreshing and, although only a short walk from a busy common by Tilford Bridge, it felt quiet and secretive. We entered the water down a steep bank where a fencepost provided a handhold but further on, near a bench, there is an easier entry point although the river is shallower there.

Frensham Great Pond was very different with cheerful crowds enjoying the sandy beach and tepid water. It is a popular place for families and there is a car park and café. The pond is used by a sailing club and swimmers are not supposed to go beyond a little roped-off area which, during dry weather, can be too shallow for comfortable swimming. Some of us slipped under the rope after checking that the boats were far away. Another time in November the beach was deserted and the water deeper and, of course, colder. Despite having few customers the café was open and provided a very welcome hot tea.

There are many points of interest on the walk. Not far from the start there is a strange carved bench 1 made by local art students, and soon afterwards look out for Billy the alpaca in a field to the

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 8 miles to Frensham Great Pond; 13 miles to Bentley Station.

TIME: 4.5 hours or 7 hours. Map OS Landranger 186 (Aldershot and Guildford); OS Explorer 145 (Guildford and Farnham); for the Bentley option only, OS Explorer 144 (Basingstoke).

START POINT: Farnham Station. **END POINT,** short route: Bus stop by Frensham Great Pond; long route: Bentley Station.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Train from Waterloo to Farnham. From Frensham Great Pond: bus to Farnham Station from nearby stop on A287 (at time of writing an hourly service on bus 19 is operated by Stagecoach but no service on Sundays, see www.stagecoachbus.com); Fox Taxis (tel 01252 856242). From Bentley: train via Farnham to Waterloo.

SWIMMING: In the River Wey and Frensham Great Pond.

PLACES OF INTEREST: Moor Park House; World War II defences; the Wey Valley; Frensham Common.

REFRESHMENTS: The Barley Mow pub, Tilford (GU10 2BU, tel 01252 792205); tea stall at Frensham Great Pond; The Bluebell pub, Dockenfield (GU10 4EX, tel 01252 792801); Café on the Green, Alice Holt Forest Centre (GU10 4LS, tel 01420 520212).





right of the path. Apparently he has a habit of breaking out and turning up unannounced in local gardens, but is always welcomed.

Moor Park House ②, near where the route leaves the North Downs Way, is not open to the public but displays an information board. Once famed for its gardens, it belonged to Sir William Temple, whose secretary was Jonathan Swift, author of *Gulliver's Travels*. The garden is now turfied over, with a retaining wall. A little further on are the remains of a World War II pillbox ②, part of the GHQ (General Headquarters) Line, a system of defences built across England to delay German forces in the event of an invasion. There is another pillbox in the valley near the ruined Waverley Abbey, and more in Moor Park. These, and the river's natural defence, were a crucial part of the defence plan.

The path continues through beautiful woods to pass a cave, now with an ornate gated entrance, known as Mother Ludlam's Cave ②. The story goes that in the Middle Ages the local water supply dried up, then a monk from Waverley Abbey found the spring inside the cave, so the abbey again had an assured supply of water. Mother Ludlam is the subject of another set of legends. The best known

version is that she was a kindly white witch who lived in the cave and lent utensils to poor people, until one day a cauldron was not returned and she flew into a rage. The borrower sought refuge in Frensham church, and the cauldron remains in the church to this day and is believed to have been used for brewing church ale.

The ruins of Waverley Abbey ③ are barely visible through the trees in summer. They can be reached by making a small detour but are worth a longer visit than there may be time for on this walk.

Just past Tilford, and near to where we swam, the Wey runs through well maintained woodland. Along the banks here we came across two rangers picking Himalayan balsam. They told us that the invasive species had quite taken over the waterway but that systematic picking had almost eradicated it. Another passer-by told us he had just seen a kingfisher.

The longer route beyond Frensham Pond to Bentley passes through fields and beautiful woodland surrounding Alice Holt Lodge, a Forestry Commission research station. On a warm June day there were foxgloves and orchids, skylarks singing and several kinds of butterflies.

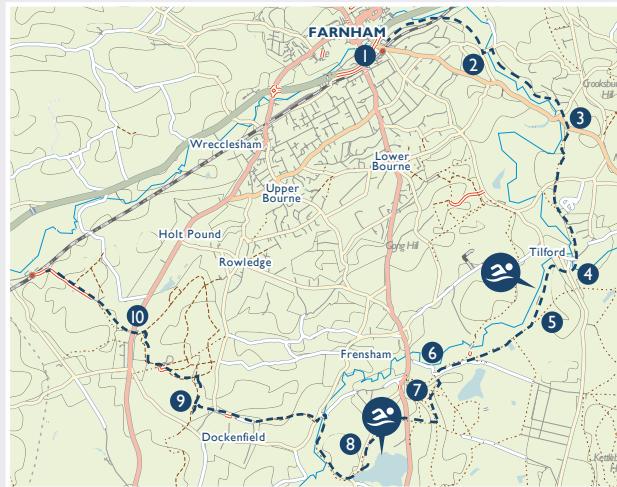
DIRECTIONS

1 FROM FARNHAM STATION

Exit from Platform 1. Ahead of you is Station Hill, heading down to the busy A31. At the corner with the A31 dual carriageway there is a hard-to-spot waymark for the North Downs Way. Turn

right along the A31 and very soon turn off it right on a lane signposted North Downs Way. The lane soon runs beside the River Wey on the left, with some attractive houses on the right. After less than half a mile

it bears right under the railway and continues with woods on the right and the valley floor on the left. Ignore a couple of paths heading uphill right but just before the track enters an open meadow turn off it to the right,



still following the North Downs Way, through a little gate by a carved seat. When the path reaches a minor road follow the road left and continue as it bears left again after about 100 metres, with a sign indicating Surrey Cycleway Link.

1.25 miles

② MOOR PARK HOUSE

Cross the river and walk past the new-build complex on the right hand side to reach Moor Park House. Opposite a cycle track on the left take a FP to the right, leaving the North Downs Way, to go through a little metal gate beside bigger gates onto a driveway past Moor Park House. The driveway turns into a path, passes remains of World War II defences and continues through woods past Mother Ludlam's Cave.

2.25 miles

③ TOWARDS TILFORD

On reaching a road turn right and almost immediately left at a road junction. After about 150 metres turn right onto a byway, which goes gently downhill through woods. After about quarter of a mile follow the byway to the right, ignoring a path straight on. On reaching a minor road cross and continue on a signposted track the other side. Be careful to avoid a house drive by following waymarks along a narrow, fenced track with a house on the right and a farm building housing a garage on the left. The track becomes a shady lane and soon goes slightly downhill through a tunnel of holly trees, becomes a tarmac lane with houses (under construction when we visited) on the left and turns left just past the houses. Do not follow it left but take a bridleway slightly to the right and parallel to the Wey. This joins a road at Tilford near a bridge and small weir where the bank on the far side is a popular picnic spot and paddling place.

4 miles

④ TILFORD GREEN

Turn right to cross the bridge and follow the road straight on passing a large green on the left

and the Barley Mow pub on the right. On reaching a somewhat complex junction, head across the road to the entrance of a plant nursery and take a well concealed FP that runs to the left of a house and the right of the nursery (behind conifers). After about 100 metres you can reconnect with the river and a smaller path on the bank where you can choose a spot to swim.

4.25 miles

⑤ TO PRIORY LANE

The path continues by the river, then veers away and comes out onto a tarmac track. Keep right here and continue as the track gradually turns into a dirt track which passes some houses on the right, goes through a metal gate and becomes a path with wire both sides. When we walked it there were pigs in the pens on both sides. There is a boardwalk because the path becomes swampy in bad weather. Where the track joins a bigger, sandy lane, turn right onto it and continue through mixed wood, pine and bracken to reach a very minor road, Priory Lane.

5.5 miles

⑥ FRENSHAM LITTLE POND

Turn left on the road and after a few paces take a path to the right. Follow this until you see ahead a small building and a paddock. Then veer right to go up a small rise from where you will see Little Frensham Pond to the left. Walk along the bank

keeping the pond on the left but when the bank veers left keep to the track, which goes straight on and uphill across open heathland (which, when we walked it showed signs of fire and of new planting with birch). At the top of the hill there is a bench; if you stand on it you can just see Frensham Great Pond.

6.5 miles

⑦ FRENSHAM COMMON

Turn left on a sandy track and take the first waymarked track on the right downhill towards the main A287 road between you and Frensham Great Pond. Before reaching the road take a waymarked path left which eventually leads you onto the road by bus stops. Cross the road and find a sandy path between areas of fenced ground to arrive at Frensham Great Pond. Follow the bank for about 50 metres to a beach. Visible, away to the right, is a wooden block with a café and also a car park.

8 miles

For the short route: after swimming return to the road to catch a bus. For the longer route:

⑧ TO DOCKENFIELD AND BATT'S CORNER

After swimming follow a path round the pond to the right with the pond on the left. When the path joins a road bear left to continue in the same general direction. At a bend take a signed path to the right through a wooded valley beside a

stream, which widens into a pool, contracts into a stream again and joins the River Wey. Ignore a bridge on your left and continue to a road. Turn left to cross the Wey, turn left again at a road junction and then take a FP on the right just before a house. After about three quarters of a mile, a house (Orchard End) comes into view. Continue in the same general direction on varying track surfaces through the scattered houses of Dockenfield, bearing left at Keeper's Cottage, to reach a T-junction at Batt's Corner just after the Bluebell pub. Turn left to another T-junction where you turn right towards Bucks Horn Oak.

10.5 miles

⑨ ON SHIPWRIGHTS WAY

Soon after the T-junction take a bridleway to the right, opposite Abbotswood Lodge and signed Shipwrights Way. It wanders through the woods to the Alice Holt Forest Centre and then on to the main A325.

11.5 miles

⑩ PAST ALICE HOLT LODGE

Cross with care and continue on the Shipwrights Way. After about a third of a mile, you pass the Forestry Commission's Alice Holt Lodge on your right. Continue on the tarmac track to reach the station.

13 miles

Margaret Dickinson, Sally Davey and Tim Loonen, Liz Valentine.