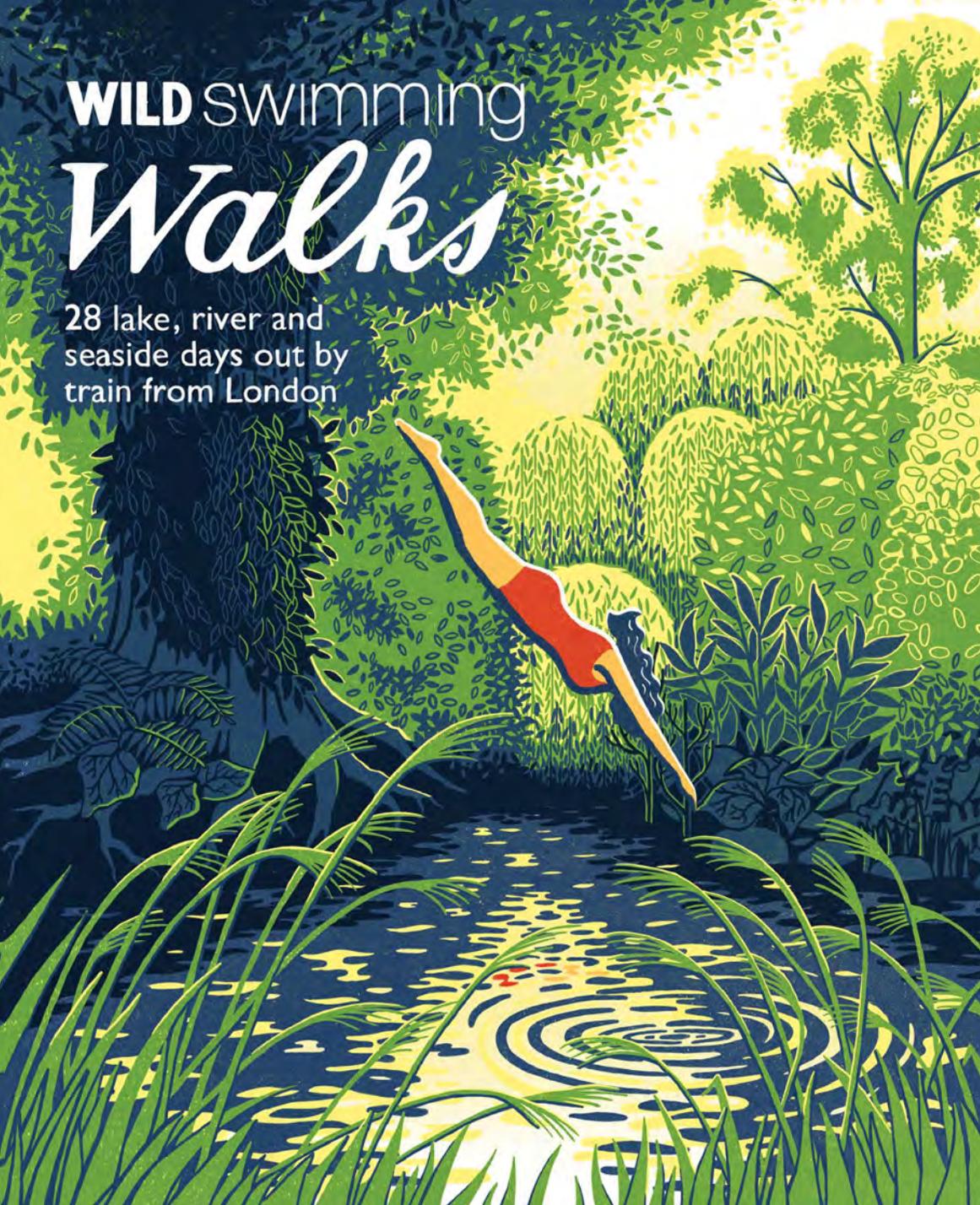


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The Kenwood Ladies' Pond on Hampstead Heath has been a women's swimming pond since 1926. World famous for its history and idyllic setting, it has become a magnet for London residents and visitors alike. Margaret Dickinson (editor) is a year-round wild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



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Walk 5

RICKMANSWORTH CIRCULAR

A gentle walk easily reached from London yet with a truly rural feel. Enjoy a swim in the River Colne and possibly Bury Lake.

Although this walk is within the M25, much of it feels like deep countryside. The highlight is the string of great lakes that run along the Colne Valley. They are flooded gravel pits, dug out originally to supply the construction industry building an ever-expanding London. The gravel was deposited by an ancient river, ancestor of our Thames, which – before the Ice Age – flowed up the Colne Valley on its way to join the Rhine.

The starting point, Rickmansworth ❶, is built at the confluence of three rivers: the Gade, the Colne and the Chess, and contains a few medieval houses amidst indifferent modern development. The route passes St Mary's church ❷, an attractive building although not as old as it looks. Nearby Stocker's Lake is home to many waterfowl, especially during the winter months. Walking the route in mid-September, we saw house martins and great crested grebes, beautiful red guelder rose leaves and berries, and feasted on many sweet blackberries along the way.

Putting this walk in the Ponds section of this book is a gesture of optimism because the ideal swimming place would be Bury Lake ❸ where, at the time of writing, the right to swim is contested. It was a popular swimming place until the late 1980s (indeed one of us has still vivid memories dating back over 50 years of an idyllic day spent relaxing there after A level exams). Then the Three Rivers District Council banned swimming on the grounds that there were health and safety issues to do with occasional algae blooms, deep water and possible risks owing to shared use with a sailing club. Since 2006 there has been a vigorous campaign to get the ban removed. KLPAs member Molly Fletcher has played a leading part in this, and when

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 6 miles.

TIME: 3 hours.

Map Landranger 176 (West London); OS Explorer 172 (Chiltern Hills East).

START POINT: Rickmansworth Underground Station.

END POINT: Rickmansworth Underground Station.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT:

Metropolitan line or Chiltern Railways from Marylebone (shorter journey time but less frequent service).

PLACES OF INTEREST:

Rickmansworth village; Stocker's Lake Nature Reserve (WD3 1NB, tel 01727 858901).

SWIMMING: In Bury Lake if it becomes permitted, otherwise a dip in the River Colne.

FRESHMENTS: Plenty of pubs, cafés and restaurants in Rickmansworth, including The Oaks gastropub, West Hyde (WD3 9XP, tel 01895 822118).

members of the River and Lake Swimming Association handed a 700-signature petition to the Three Rivers District Council demanding they be allowed back in the water there was a moment of apparent success when ‘No swimming’ signs were removed. Later, however, the council decided to uphold the ban, and the sailing club that uses the lake remained opposed to reinstating swimming. When we were there in 2013 the situation was

unclear. We did not see a ‘No swimming’ sign, but there was no barrier separating a swimming area from boats as there used to be in the days when it was a recognised bathing spot.

Bury is one of 25 lakes in the Colne Valley and it seems so sad that not one of them is for swimming. We hope that reason will prevail and people will again be allowed to swim at their own risk in this lovely stretch of water.

DIRECTIONS

1 RICKMANSWORTH

Turn right out of the station and then right underneath the railway and downhill to a main shopping street, High Street, where you turn left. Continue along, then turn right at the crossroads into Church Street, down to St Mary’s church.

2 ST MARY’S CHURCH

Go through the churchyard, cross the road and turn right to a roundabout, which you go round to the left towards a bridge carrying the main road over the Grand Union Canal. From the bridge, just before a zebra crossing, take steps on the left down to the canal towpath. Go under the bridge, continuing in a westerly direction. You soon see a large Tesco on the other side of the canal on your left. Here, just after a bridge over a side stream, go slightly to the right and then left to follow a track

(signed Batchworth Lake Circular Walk) parallel to the canal and beside a lake which leads you round and then towards a car park. Bypass the car park by veering left and you come to a second stretch of water, Bury Lake, the focus of the campaign to restore public swimming.

3 BURY LAKE

Go along the south side of the lake on a narrow, slightly overgrown path. At the far end you see a building which is the sailing club. Walk past it then turn right onto the FP between Bury Lake on your right and Stocker’s Lake on your left. Follow this path until you reach the River Colne, then take a path to the left (signed to Springwell and Inn Lakes) alongside the river, with Stocker’s Lake on your left.

1 mile

4 RIVER COLNE

This is the place where a dip in the Colne is possible. The river is fast flowing and quite shallow with a firm bottom. Further along, it becomes deeper and slower but lacks a safe entry point as the banks drop steeply down, and the bottom is soft and muddy. Further down there is a place below a weir that might be suitable but, being close to a car park, it is rather public. Refreshed from your swim, continue along the path beside the River Colne, bearing right with the river after the weir, until you reach a road (opposite Willow Court).

5 FOLLOW THE CANAL

Turn left and walk down the road to meet the canal. Turn right along it for a short distance then go left over the bridge at Springwell Lock, joining the Hillingdon Trail (HT).



DIRECTIONS

6 HILLINGDON TRAIL

Turn right over the bridge onto a little road. Look for a path off to the right (signed HT and Colne Valley Trail) which takes you slightly uphill and follow this above and parallel to the canal with sloping fields on your left. Ignore the left turn uphill (on HT), instead keeping straight ahead on the Colne Valley Trail, with the sewage works away to the right, until you come down to the waterside near West Hyde.

3.5 miles

7 WEST HYDE

Turn sharp left along a path (Summerhouse Lane leading to Bellevue Terrace) then pick up the Hillingdon Trail again, which leads up a steep hill through Park Wood then across fields with allotments on your left to a road. Turn left here for a short distance then first right into Plough Lane, following the London Loop signs. This leads over a stile into a field. Follow the path through several fields, eventually joining a track which takes you out to the busy Harefield Road.

4.5 miles

8 APPROACHING RICKMANSWORTH

Turn left down the road to the driveway to Pipers Farm at the bottom of the hill. Here you will find a footpath on the right that starts just by the driveway and runs roughly parallel to the road. It climbs up through some trees then along the edge of a golf course before gradually dropping

down to a minor road. Follow this to the right, then veer left and either continue or take a short footpath to a road where you turn right. The road passes Tesco on your left and soon joins the big main road by the roundabout near St Mary's church. Retrace your steps to Rickmansworth tube.

6 miles

Margaret Dickinson, Liz Valentine

