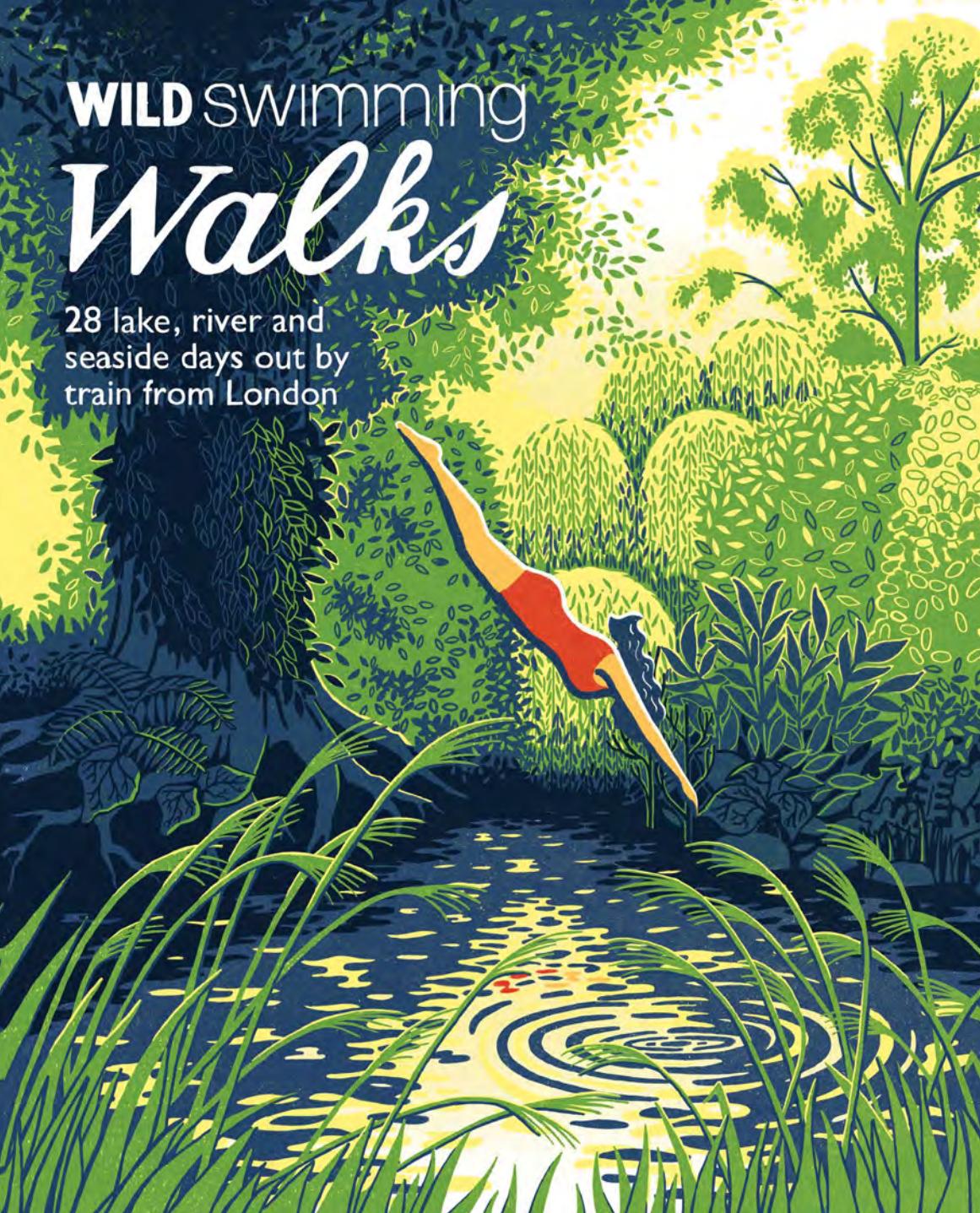


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train from London



THE FAMOUS SWIMMING LADIES of London's Hampstead ponds share their favourite walks with a dip. Leave the car at home this summer with 28 days out across southern and eastern England.

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Includes downloadable route information to print out, or take with you on your phone or tablet.

£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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WILD Swimming Walks

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THE SERPENTINE, HYDE PARK



A swim in London's central park, passing the palaces of power and some key sites of popular protest.

The Serpentine is home to the oldest swimming club in Britain, having celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2014, and hosts the best known group of winter swimmers in the UK. The Serpentine Swimming Club (SSC) held its first Christmas Day Race in 1864. It was then men only and the club's facilities consisted of a bench under an elm tree where members could leave their clothes. Nowadays the club has a basic indoor changing area separate from the public facilities but, if you visit during public opening hours, you will be able to use the Lido's changing rooms, buy coffee and ice-cream at the café and sit on the manicured lawns. The club still organises races every Saturday and its Christmas Day Peter Pan cup is named after JM Barrie, who was a supporter although not a swimmer.

According to the SSC website, women were not able to swim in the Serpentine until the Lido opened on June 16th 1930. On the opening day, throngs of women queued to get entry and the first in, 21-year-old Kathleen Murphy of Pinner, had arrived at 5am.

By the 1960s some women were swimming with the club throughout the year. An early pioneer, police officer Gail Oxley, would race down from a parked squad car, do a quick change out of uniform, sprint through the water, then run back to the car. Luckily an emergency call never caught her out. Alan Titmuss, in his book on the club's history, *Breaking the Ice*, recounts the reaction of one of the older members to Gail's quick change of apparel: his glasses steaming up! Attitudes have since moved on – shared changing for club members no longer seems a problem.

The lake hosted the men's and women's open water swimming and triathlon events in the London 2012 Olympics. You can enjoy the delights of swimming in the Serpentine at a more leisurely

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 4 miles.

TIME: 2 hours.

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

START POINT: Leicester Square Underground Station.

END POINT: Marble Arch Underground Station.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Northern or Piccadilly lines to Leicester Square; Central line from Marble Arch; buses.

SWIMMING: The Serpentine Lido and its accompanying paddling pool is open to the public every day in high summer from 10am-6pm and for parts of May and September. There are lifeguards and basic changing facilities and entry is £4.60 adult, £3.60 concessions, £1.60 child. Visit www.royalparks.org.uk or call 020 7706 3422 for full details. Members of the Serpentine Swimming Club swim every day between 6am and 9.30am.

PLACES OF INTEREST: Trafalgar Square; Banqueting House; government buildings in Whitehall; Parliament Square; St James's Palace; the Royal Parks.

REFRESHMENTS: St Martin-in-the-Fields Café in the Crypt (WC2N 5DN, tel 020 7766 1158); Serpentine Bar and Kitchen (W2 2UH, tel 020 7706 8114); Lido Kiosk and Lido Café Bar (W2 2UH, tel 020 7706 7098); Serpentine Gallery Pavilion (summer only, W2 3XA, tel 020 7402 6075); coffee van at Italian Gardens.



pace, or simply soak up the sun and the sky, sheltered from the hustle and bustle of the city beyond by the magnificent trees. Look out for the solar-powered passenger boat, the Solarshuttle, silently criss-crossing the lake.

The lake was created by damming the Westbourne River in the 18th century and was one of the first examples of the English preference for landscaping parks to make them look natural. By then the park had been open to the public for 100 years. Before that it was a hunting reserve, created for Henry VIII. Hyde Park is still owned by the Crown. The Princess Diana Memorial Fountain **5** is just outside the Lido and a playground dedicated to her is to the west of the lake in Kensington Gardens.

Before reaching the Serpentine, the walk takes us through the compact area where political power over England, Britain and then the British Empire has been exercised for a millennium. The medieval monarchs ruled from their Palace of Westminster, site now of the Houses of Parliament. Henry VIII moved the court and its offices to Whitehall Palace. The royal family later moved to St James's Palace **3**, which is still the address for the official business of the monarchy and home to some family members.

Halfway down Whitehall is one good place to pause. It was outside the white stone Banqueting House **1**, the only surviving part of Whitehall Palace, that Charles I was executed. A temporary platform was built and the king had to step over the sill of a first floor window to go to his death.

A statue of Charles, looking too small for his horse, as in life, is on the roundabout in front of Nelson's Column. His nemesis, Oliver

Cromwell, leader of the Parliamentary forces that defeated Charles, stands at the other end of Whitehall in front of Westminster Hall **2**. This medieval building, now part of the Houses of Parliament, is the only remnant of the original Palace of Westminster.

To balance this tour of power, the walk begins in Trafalgar Square, which has been the scene of public demonstrations since it was built in the early 19th century. The largest ever demonstration, when millions protested against the Iraq War, took place in 2003, and one of the longest lasting was the protest against apartheid outside South Africa House, which ended with the release of Nelson Mandela.

The walk ends at Speakers' Corner **6**. Now mainly deserted – the internet having provided everyone with their own soap box – information boards record how this part of Hyde Park was the site of countless demonstrations before being officially designated as a place where people could speak publicly. Its deeper history lies in its proximity to the site of the gallows at Tyburn, where 50,000 people were executed by the state over six centuries until 1783.

Everywhere along the route you will see memorials to those killed in battle and statues of military leaders, many commemorating wars of the British Empire. Some recent commissions, such as the memorial to the women who served in World War II **1** and the Memorial Gates **4** honouring the contribution of Indians, Africans and Caribbeans, give belated recognition to those not previously commemorated.

Quite a slice of history, but the calming water of the Serpentine awaits.

1 TRAFALGAR SQUARE

Start from Leicester Square Underground Station. Walk down Charing Cross Road and into the centre of Trafalgar Square. The South African Embassy is on the east side, and the National Gallery on the north. Walk round the square, passing Nelson's Column on your left. Cross to the roundabout in front of Nelson's Column. Head down Whitehall towards the tower with Big Ben. Cross to the left side at Horse Guards Avenue to read the information board outside the Banqueting House.

0.5 miles

2 WHITEHALL AND PARLIAMENT SQUARE

Pass the Ministry of Defence, the Women of World War II Memorial, the Cenotaph and the entrance to Downing Street on the right. At the traffic lights, cross Bridge Street and walk past the Houses of Parliament to the statue of Oliver Cromwell. Retrace your steps. With

Westminster Abbey to your left, cross onto the grass in the centre of the square to inspect the statues of key political figures, including Nelson Mandela and Winston Churchill. Cross the road to the left of Abraham Lincoln, and turn left. Turn right in front of Central Hall Westminster, and walk to the end of Storey's Gate. Turn left, then immediately cross the road at the pedestrian crossing and walk ahead on Horse Guards Road. Pass the Cabinet War Rooms on your right and turn left into St James's Park.

1 mile

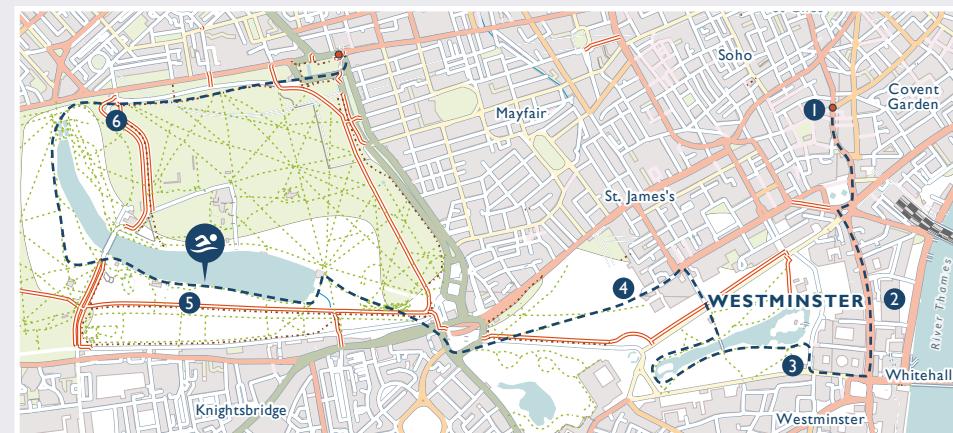
**3 ST JAMES'S PARK**

Follow the path along the south side of St James's Park Lake, round the west end and back along the north side (or take a shortcut across the bridge). When you reach the bridge, turn left, cross the Mall and go ahead into Marlborough Road. Turn left as you follow the wall of St James's Palace. Turn right passing 8 Cleveland Row and Selwyn House. Turn left.

2 miles

4 HYDE PARK AND THE SERPENTINE

Go through the gated path to join the Queen's Walk. Green Park is ahead of you and Buckingham Palace to your left. Head slightly to the left to see Fallen Leaves, the Canadian War Memorial, then keep going roughly parallel to the road on your left to reach the Memorial Gates. Cross the roundabout and walk through the Wellington Arch, past the Australian and Royal Artillery war memorials. Cross onto



the triangular traffic island then in through the gates of Hyde Park. Cross the two lanes of the road within the park, turn left along the side of the sandy horse track then take the path that goes off diagonally right. Walk through the rose garden, exiting at the end to the left then walk ahead and slightly to the right to reach the large natural stones of the Holocaust Memorial Garden. Cross the road and turn right, then left to walk along the south side of the Serpentine Lake. Keep going until you reach the Serpentine Lido.

3 miles

5 TO LONG WATER

After your swim, continue along the side of the Lake. Just after passing the Princess Diana Memorial Fountain take the left hand fork, cross the road and turn left to the Serpentine Gallery and Pavilion (summer only). From the Gallery strike out across the park to return

to the bank of the lake, now officially the Long Water. Follow the lake to the Italian Gardens. Cross at the top and walk back along the north side of the park, picking a route not too close to the busy Bayswater Road.

4 miles

6 SPEAKERS' CORNER

Keep going until you see the notice boards of Speakers' Corner between the Marble Arch roundabout and Park Lane stretching down to the right. Walk ahead to the tube station.

Ros Bayley, Cath Cinnamon.