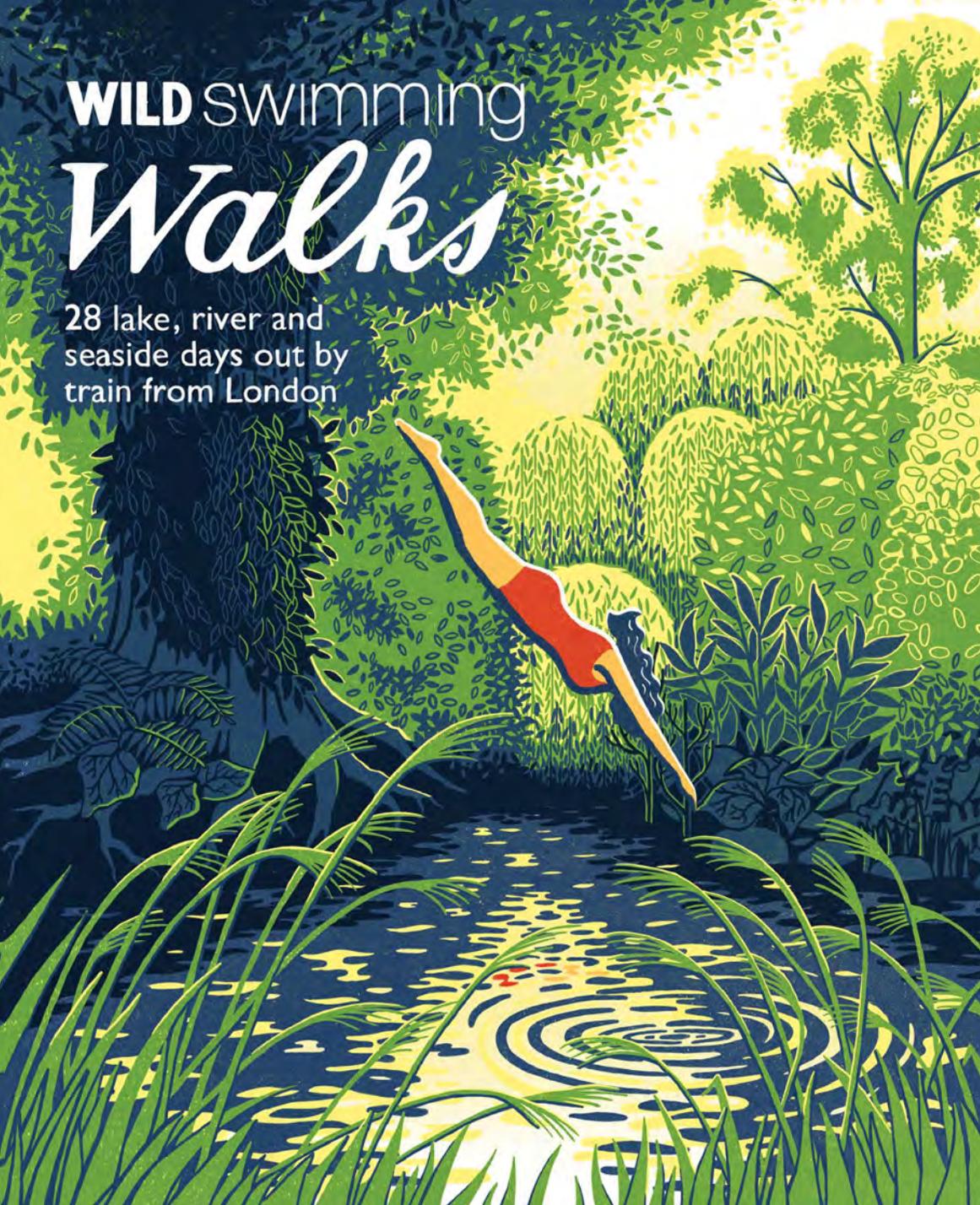


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The Kenwood Ladies' Pond on Hampstead Heath has been a women's swimming pond since 1926. World famous for its history and idyllic setting, it has become a magnet for London residents and visitors alike. Margaret Dickinson (editor) is a year-round wild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



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## Walk 8

# HATFIELD PEVEREL CIRCULAR, ESSEX

A short train ride from London, this peaceful rural walk through ancient Essex countryside offers several swims in the clear waters of the Chelmer.

**T**he main attractions of this walk are gentle, rural landscapes and the River Chelmer with its dark, clear waters and reed-fringed banks. The river above Paper Mill Lock 4 is heavily used by canal boats and does not look suitable for swimming, but downstream there are many opportunities to enjoy water that is clean and quite deep with only the gentlest of flow, although access may be a bit muddy. For over a mile the route follows the river and this section provides a perfect opportunity for a long, linear swim if someone is willing to carry your clothes or if the day is warm enough to walk back upstream to collect them.

The Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation was built to link Chelmsford with the Blackwater estuary at Heybridge near Maldon. It was proposed as far back as the 17th century, but opposed by the people of Maldon who feared a loss of trade if boats could carry on to Chelmsford. Work eventually started in the late 18th century and it was eventually opened in 1797.

We first did the walk in October when few of us wanted to swim, and there was some concern about the interest of the walk for non-swimmers. We need not have worried – everyone was pleasantly surprised by the deeply rural feel of the area and the richness of vegetation. Early on we passed a thick hedgerow of hawthorn and spindleberry. In some fields farmers had planted wild flowers and in one place we passed bands of viper's bugloss, flax, mustard, and rat's tail radish, while further on we saw pale pink mallow, evening primroses and the remnants of thistles. Walking the route again in April we heard and saw many birds, including a nightingale and a willow warbler, whitethroats,

### INFORMATION

**DISTANCE:** 11 miles with a shorter option of 8 miles.

**TIME:** 5 to 6 hours.

**MAP:** OS Landranger 167 (Chelmsford) and 168 (Colchester); OS Explorer 183 (Chelmsford & The Rodings).

**START AND END POINT:** Hatfield Peverel station.

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** Train from Liverpool Street or Stratford.

**PLACES OF INTEREST:** The Chelmer Navigation; Paper Mill Lock; St Mary the Virgin, Little Baddow; Little Baddow Hall; Little Baddow United Reformed Church; Hoe Mill Lock.

**SWIMMING:** River Chelmer.

**REFRESHMENTS:** The Swan Inn, Hatfield Peverel (CM3 2DW, tel 01245 380238); The Stables Tea Room at Paper Mill Lock (CM3 4BS, tel 01245 225520).



swallows and shelduck, and chanced upon hares chasing each other in the fields.

The Chelmer is first reached at a place where there have been mills for hundreds of years, but the name Paper Mill Bridge commemorates the first paper mill in Essex, opened in the 1750s. This is the point where it is possible to shorten the walk by turning downstream, but it is worth first visiting Paper Mill Lock and the Stables café, which sells wonderful cakes.

The full route makes for a better walk, with additional places of interest and lovely views across the valley. It passes the church and manor of Little Baddow, now about a mile away from the modern settlement. The church of St Mary the Virgin apparently has medieval wall paintings, but it was locked when we passed. Roughly opposite the church is Little Baddow Hall, a fine half-timbered, pink-washed building dating from the 14th century. Nearby is Little Baddow United Reformed Church, built in 1708 and one of the earliest Non-conformist chapels in East Anglia. The village was a centre of Puritanism and is associated with two famous preachers, Thomas Hooker and John Eliot.

In the chapel grounds there is a local history centre (open Tuesdays and Thursdays 10am to 12pm and Wednesdays and Sundays 2pm to 4pm).

The patches of woodland around Little Baddow are remnants of the great forest which once covered most of Essex. Our route passes through Holybred Wood, a beautiful stretch of mature woodland with hornbeams, holly and wild service trees. There are bluebells in the spring and woodpeckers are supposedly common, although we did not see or hear one. The Little Baddow Millennium Walk, which our route coincides with very briefly, is a circuit of around seven miles passing through some of the other woods.

After the optional loop, the walk takes you past Ulting church which, in the Middle Ages, was a busy pilgrimage destination associated with a statue of the Virgin Mary. Recently, it has been the focus of a minor local conflict because the churchyard was a popular spot to picnic and swim, but the vicar objected to this. We could see a tempting lawn, but with so much accessible river close by there is clearly no need to swim just there.

The last part of the walk heads through fields and small woods, past some fishing ponds to reach Hatfield Peverel near the site of a Benedictine priory, said to have been founded by Ingelrica, the Saxon wife of Ranulph Peverel, to atone for her sins – especially that of being mistress to William the Conqueror. Little remains of the priory except the name, attached to an 18th century house nearby, and part of the parish church of St Andrews. The Peverel that the town is named after is probably Ranulph's son, William, who may have fought in the Battle of Hastings and to whom William the Conqueror granted land. However, the long history suggested by the name has left few traces in the present.

**1 HATFIELD PEVEREL**

From the station keep straight ahead to cross a bridge over the A12 and turn right onto the B1137. Turn left into Church Road after the Swan pub. Follow the road past the cricket ground then look for a signed footpath through a kissing gate on the right immediately after the Scout and Guide hut. Follow the path with allotments on the right, then fields on both sides.

**1 mile**

**2 OVER A STREAM**

Briefly join a minor road to pass a thatched house on the left, continuing on the footpath ahead. After about 150 metres the path crosses a stream. Take the straight path up the field along the left side of the hedge. Continue until you reach a lane. Turn right, pass one house and look for the footpath on the left.

**1.5 miles**

**3 TO PAPER MILL BRIDGE**

After crossing a bridge over a ditch, ignore a cart track on the left and continue diagonally across two fields towards a house (Botters Farm) and thatched barn. Take the path to the right of the barn. After a stile and a little bridge take the left-hand path downhill. At the bottom, bear right to pass a breezeblock barn on your left and take the path half-left diagonally across a field. On the far side continue right on the path with a hedgerow on the left. Continue ahead on a tarmac track. At the road, turn left to cross the Chelmer Navigation by Paper Mill Bridge.

**2.5 miles**

**4 ROUTE OPTIONS****(a) The shortcut**

Turn left downstream after the bridge on a river path. After half a mile near a bend in the river a path from the right is where the main route joins. Continue the directions from 6, and deduct three miles from subsequent distances.

**(b) The main route**

Turn right on the footpath along the far side of the river, passing Paper Mill Lock, the Stables café and narrowboat moorings. Follow the river path upstream, noticing a church, St Mary the Virgin, across the fields. When you can see the road bridge ahead, turn left on a marked footpath just before a footbridge where a stream joins the main river. Follow the path across the fields towards the church you saw earlier. Cross the footpath below the graveyard and pass to the right of the church.

**4 miles**

**5 AROUND LITTLE BADDOW**

On reaching the road turn left. Continue until you pass the United Reformed Church, then turn left on the footpath in front of the house on the opposite side of the road; the path may be slightly overgrown. After crossing a bridge over a ditch, keep left of the telegraph pole to pick up a cart track that leads across the field, with Holybreds Farm some distance away to the right. At a T-junction with another path turn left and soon right over a small bridge with a handrail, briefly joining the signed Little Baddow

Millennium Walk. Enter Holybred Wood and leave the Millennium Walk at the signed footpath to the right. Walk up through the wood to the road and turn left. Continue past some newish houses to North Hill where you turn left and immediately right into Tofts Chase. After some way, look for a footpath sign by an oak tree on the left, opposite a small house. The path crosses fields to the Chelmer. At the bottom of the last field, turn right along a faint path that skirts a thicket to join the river. This is where the shortcut rejoins the main route. Just downstream there is a bench and a good entry point to the river – an ideal spot for a picnic and swim.

**6 miles**

**6 BESIDE THE CHELMER**

Walk on downstream passing a high arched footbridge, a lock and Ulting church on the far bank. This is an idyllic place to swim. Find a gap in the vegetation on the bank and expect a bit of a scramble to get out.

**7.5 miles**

**7 CROSSING THE CHELMER**

Cross the bridge over a side channel by a weir. On reaching the road at Hoe Mill (note the information board about the history of the area), turn left to cross the Chelmer and right onto a path along the north bank. Soon there is a seat and then, at a slight bend in the river, another good swimming place.

**8.5 miles**

**8 PAST FISHING PONDS**

Look for a signed footpath on the left, which skirts a gravel pit reserved for fishing. Don't be tempted by the broad ride: the path veers right to cross a stream and shortly meets a road. Cross and continue up the left-hand side of a field. Cross a stream to enter the next field taking the path to the right. Pass the corner of a reservoir on the left, resist the appealing path along the side of the lake and instead follow the path that goes right, later with a hedge on your left. Continue along the right-hand side of the final field. On reaching the road turn left to reach a slightly more main road.

**9.5 miles**

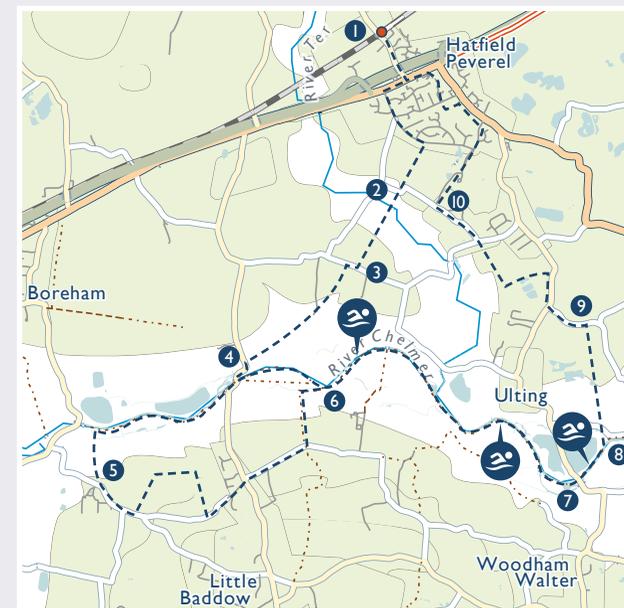
**9 TOWARDS HATFIELD PEVEREL**

Turn right, pass a house (Couchman's) and look on the left for an overgrown footpath sign. Follow the path parallel to the road with a metal fence on the left. At the far corner of the fence turn left, keeping it on your left and later pass another flooded gravel pit on your left. Follow the path, which veers right to become a grassy ride between a hornbeam hedge and a wood of oak and alder, then leaves the grassy ride to the left and continues between a fence and a hedge to a road.

**10 miles**

**10 INTO HATFIELD PEVEREL**

Turn left, then right into Sportsmans Lane. Take the signed footpath to the right between hedges. The path continues with a



field on the right, passes the grounds of a big house, the Priory, to the left and then the cemetery of St Andrew's church. After passing allotments turn left at the path T-junction to reach the road. Turn right here. Walk past the school and just beyond the entrance to the junior school turn left on the path between neatly clipped high hedges. Follow the tarmac path along the length of the recreation ground and, after bending around the end of the ground, leave at the far corner. Continue along the path for about 50 metres until there is a path on the right (opposite a lamp post). Follow the path across several residential roads to the main street



of Hatfield Peverel (B1137), almost opposite Station Road. Retrace your steps to the station.

**11 miles**

*Margaret Dickinson, Liz Valentine, Ros Bayley.*