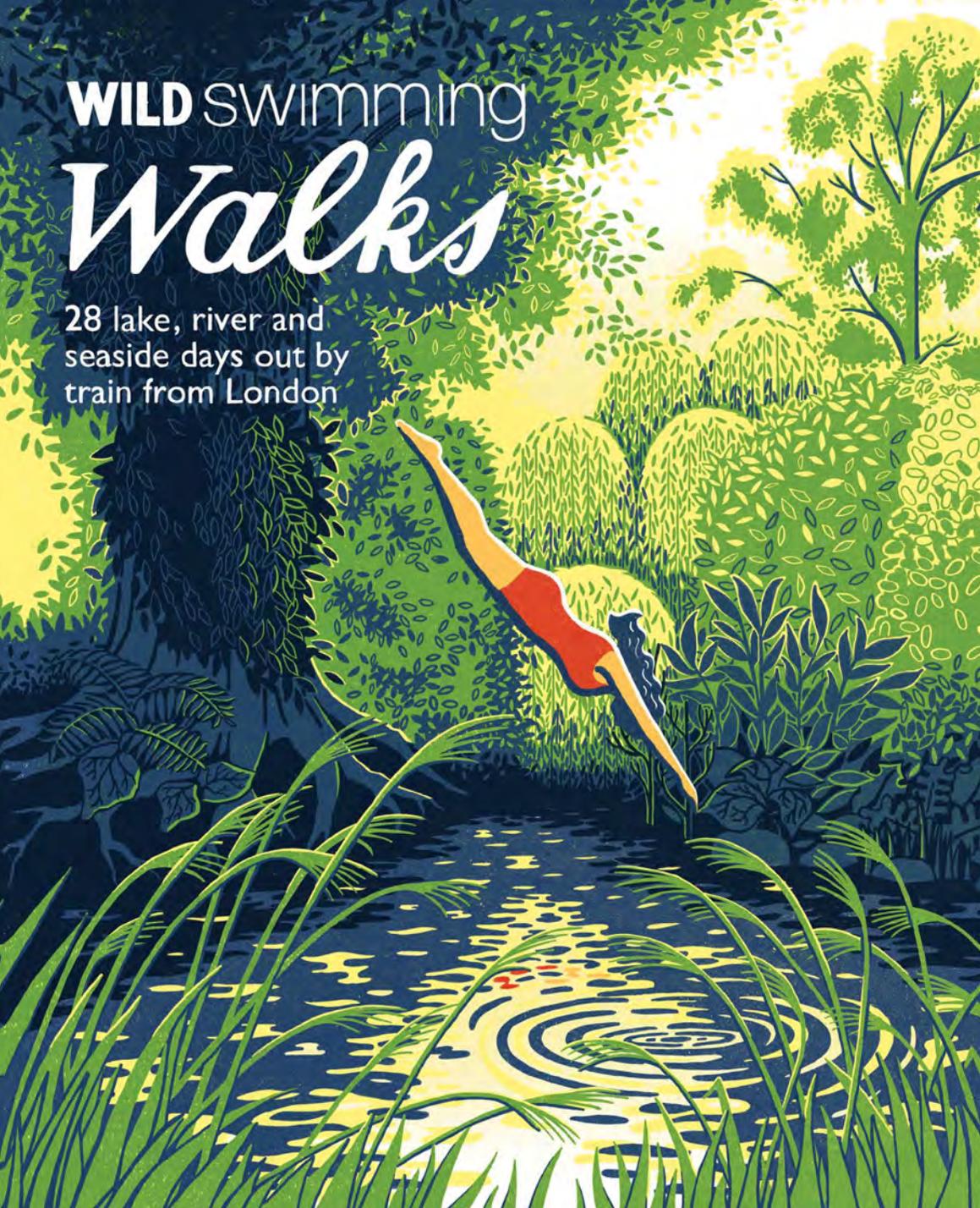


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The Kenwood Ladies' Pond on Hampstead Heath has been a women's swimming pond since 1926. World famous for its history and idyllic setting, it has become a magnet for London residents and visitors alike. Margaret Dickinson (editor) is a year-round wild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



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Walk 15

GORING AND STREATLEY TO CHOLSEY, BERKSHIRE

An easy walk through lovely surroundings with a choice of many good swimming places.

This is a glorious walk embracing wide stretches of the Thames, open meadows, woody paths and a beautiful Brunel railway bridge. With three swimming spots, you can take your time in good weather, enjoying a peaceful meander along the Thames Path with views of the Chilterns.

The villages of Goring ① and Streatley ② have not always been linked. The first bridge between them was built in 1837, and a toll was charged until 1923 when the new bridge replaced the old rickety one. Charges were based on numbers of sheep, cattle and wheels on any vehicle ‘propelled by steam, electricity or anything other than horsepower’. The two settlements had quite different histories, but both were affected by the coming of the railway which destroyed the river trade.

St Mary’s church in Streatley features in the Domesday Book and was originally Saxon. It was rebuilt in 1300 and again by the Victorians so not many original features remain, but the interior is interesting for its striped pillars and Elizabethan brasses.

We did this walk in early September on a glorious day, had three swims and spent time lounging in the open meadows and drinking tea at The Beetle and Wedge riverside restaurant-café ⑤. Without such long breaks you could do the walk easily in an afternoon.

This is an easy route to follow because it hugs the banks of the Thames for most of the way and is signposted as part of the Thames Path. The path leaves the river at Moulsoford, but otherwise, the walk is uncomplicated and you can dawdle and dream without worrying about getting lost. When the river is running fast, take care and stay close to the bank. In normal conditions it flows steadily and slowly and the swimming is very enjoyable.

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 4 miles.

TIME: 2 hours.

MAP: OS Landranger 174 (Newbury & Wantage) and Landranger 175 (Reading & Windsor); OS Explorer 171 (Chiltern Hills West) and Explorer 170 (Abingdon, Wantage & Vale of White Horse)

START POINT: Goring and Streatley Station.

END POINT: Cholsey Station.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Train from Paddington to Goring and Streatley. Return from Cholsey.

SWIMMING: The Thames.

PLACES OF INTEREST: St Mary’s church, Streatley; Isambard Kingdom Brunel railway bridge, Moulsoford.

REFRESHMENTS: The Swan pub, Streatley (RG8 9HR, tel 01491 878800); The Beetle and Wedge Boathouse, Moulsoford (OX10 9JF, tel 01491 651381).

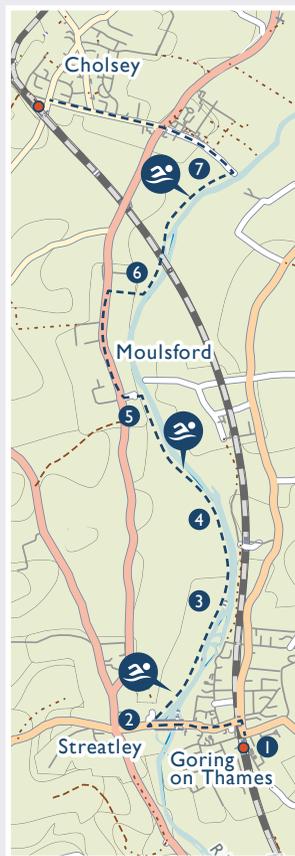
WEEKEND SUGGESTION:

Combine this walk with walk 16, Shillingford to Didcot. Instead of turning off to go to Cholsey station continue on the Thames Path either 2.5 miles to Wallingford or 3.5 miles to Benson. Places to stay include The Coachmakers Arms (OX10 0EU, tel 01491 832231), The George (OX10 0BS, tel 01491 836665) and The Partridge Inn (OX10 0ET, tel 01491 839305) in Wallingford, and The Crown Inn in Benson (OX10 6RP, tel 01491 838247). Next day continue on the Thames Path to Shillingford Bridge, about 1 mile on from Benson, where you join the Shillingford to Didcot walk.

DIRECTIONS

1 GORING

When you alight at Goring, mount the steps and cross to the left hand side of the pedestrian bridge and along a path that follows the tracks for a few yards and turns into Station Road. (If you find yourself in a car park, you are the wrong side of the tracks!) Station Road takes you past thatched cottages and a community hall to a small opening



on the right, which leads through a tiny shopping mall onto Goring High Street where you turn left. Follow the road as it bears to the right, past Pierrepoints café on the right and Goring Mill on the left, and soon you reach Goring Lock and the weir on the river.

2 STREATLEY

Cross the bridge and turn right just past The Swan pub to St Mary's church. Exit the churchyard and follow the path alongside The Swan car park. Take a right fork for the Thames Path, which passes through a wooded area and across a field, onto the towpath, where you turn left and follow the river. We swim just after the path meets the river, just beyond a gate opposite a large property on the far bank with extensive lawns reaching down to the river. Look for a small clearing in the reeds where you can get in the water.

3 Continue to Cleeve Lock which has a picnic tables and toilets.

1.5 miles

4 UP RIVER FROM CLEEVE LOCK

The walk now opens out onto beautiful wide meadows with the Chiltern Hills to your left. There are a couple of swimming spots along this stretch and it is a good place to sunbathe on a hot summer's day. You will also see a pub on the opposite bank. The story goes that there was a farmer who would regularly swim across for a pint and swim back to return home. It's a tempting thought on a hot day.

2.5 miles

5 MOULSFORD

You pass a more built-up area on your left to arrive at The Beetle and Wedge at Moultsford, which serves meals and teas. There is a pleasant outside area directly next to the water. On leaving, the path diverts away from the river and goes along the road. Follow the Thames Path signs and turn right to return to the river after passing Willow Court Lane on the left.

3 miles

6 TO FERRY LANE

As the path returns to the river, you can see the Brunel viaduct ahead of you. When you pass beneath it you can wonder at the beauty of the massive arches and crenellated stonework. Follow the river path to the Ferry Lane turning on your left. About 100 metres past Ferry Lane, we found our third swimming spot at a small clearing under a willow tree.

7 TO CHOLSEY

Retrace the path to Ferry Lane and follow it straight, crossing over a main road. Cholsey station is right at the end on the left, on Papist Way. It is a small station with no facilities, so it's worth knowing the train times in winter. In summer you can sit in the evening sun and look out over the fields while you wait for the train, which passes back through Goring on its return to London.

4 miles

Sarah Saunders.

