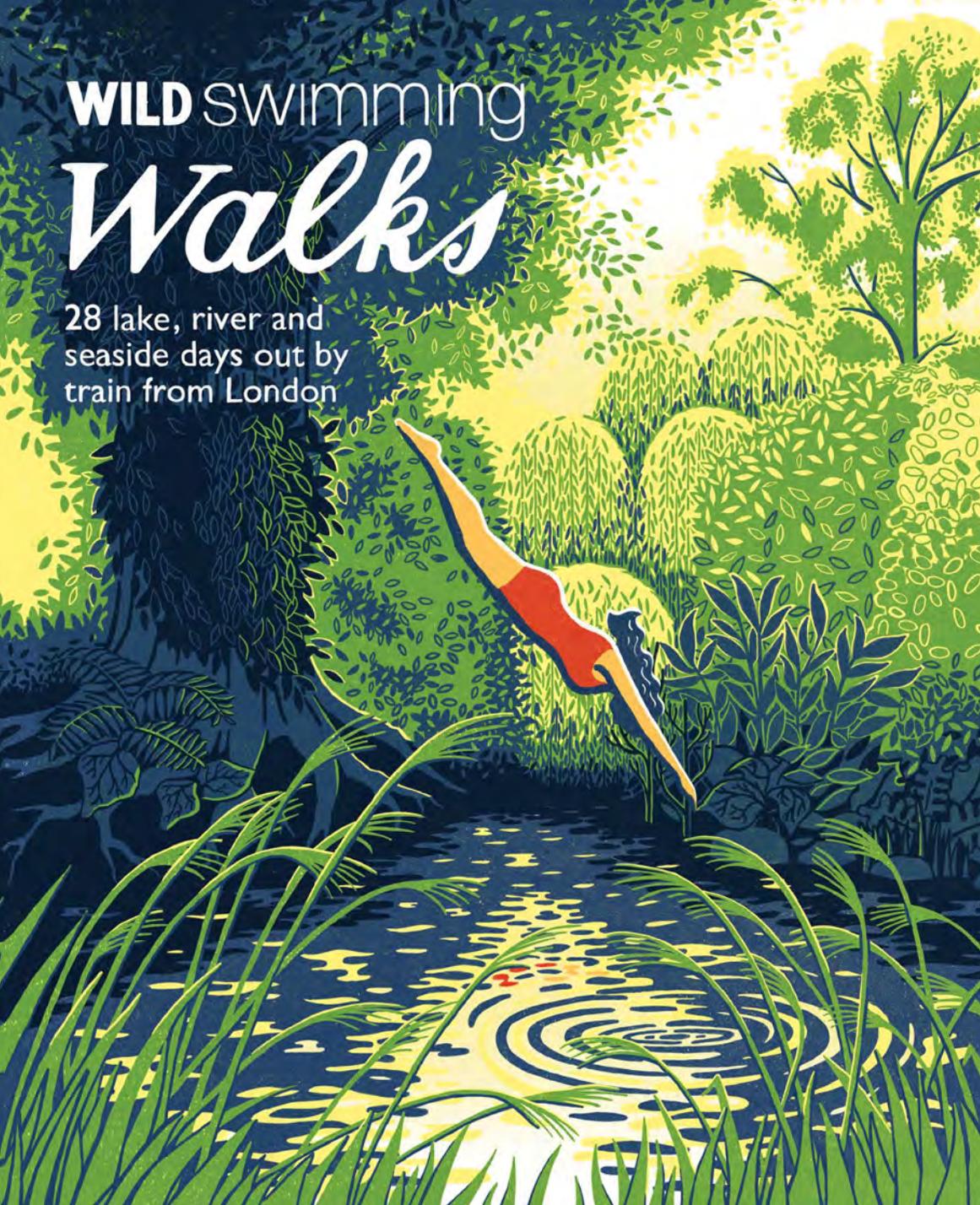


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The Kenwood Ladies' Pond on Hampstead Heath has been a women's swimming pond since 1926. World famous for its history and idyllic setting, it has become a magnet for London residents and visitors alike. Margaret Dickinson (editor) is a year-round wild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



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Walk 1

HAMPSTEAD WATERS, HAMPSTEAD HEATH

A short walk on Hampstead Heath taking in some of its wildest, wooded areas, exploring all its bathing places and offering three swims.

The bathing ponds on Hampstead Heath belong to two chains of ponds fed from different streams. This walk follows the Hampstead chain upstream then crosses the watershed to follow the Highgate chain downstream. Unfortunately, major engineering works are planned along the route so during parts of 2015 and 2016 walkers may have to weave their way around building sites. Details about the plans and opposition to them can be found in the introduction to this book, page 22-23.

Despite their natural appearance, the ponds are artificial, created as reservoirs between the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 19th century. They have all evolved since then and each has its own individual character and particular permitted uses. Some are known by names and others by numbers. The Hampstead chain starts from the bottom with three ponds separated from each other only by causeways ❶: Hampstead Number 1 Pond, especially popular for watching waterfowl; Hampstead Number 2 Pond, where fishing is allowed; and then the Mixed Bathing Pond, a triangle of water edged by trees on the upper two sides. Above the Mixed Pond is a secluded, wooded valley where two streams meet, one flowing from Viaduct Pond and the other from the Vale of Health Pond. The viaduct after which the former is called looks like a decorative folly but was built in 1844 in anticipation of a housing project by Thomas Maryon Wilson, Lord of the Manor of Hampstead and one of the most determined developers against whom preservationists campaigned.

From the Vale of Health ❷ the walk crosses a wooded ridge and enters the landscaped grounds of Kenwood House ❸, which is free to visit and full of great paintings including a Rembrandt,

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 3.5 miles.

TIME: 2 hours.

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

START POINT: Hampstead Heath Overground Station, South End Green.

END POINT: Gospel Oak Overground Station or Highgate Road bus stop.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: To South End Green take the London Overground, buses 24, 46, 168 and C11, or Northern line to Belsize Park and walk about 15 minutes. From Gospel Oak take London Overground; from Highgate Road buses C11, C2 and 214.

SWIMMING: In Hampstead Mixed Pond, Kenwood Ladies' Pond or Highgate Men's Pond; Parliament Hill Lido. Charges (2014): £2 (£1 concession) for ponds; £5.50 (£3.50 concession) for the Lido.

PLACES OF INTEREST: Kenwood House and grounds; The Vale of Health.

REFRESHMENTS: Pubs and cafés in South End Green; Kenwood Brew House (NW3 7JR, tel 020 8348 1286), Kenwood House; Parliament Hill Café (NW5 1QR, tel 020 7485 6606) near the Lido; cafés, restaurants and pubs in Swain's Lane and Highgate Hill.



a Vermeer and some of Angelica Kauffman's grand classical scenes (a genre of painting considered at the time unsuitable for women artists).

At the top of the Highgate chain are two ornamental lakes overlooked by Kenwood House, Wood Pond and Thousand Pound Pond. A stream runs from them back into Hampstead Heath and down to the Stock Pond, which is particularly lovely on a dull day in late summer or autumn when the trees are in leaf but the light is soft. Separated by a stretch of woodland is the most important pond for us, Kenwood Ladies' Pond 7. The view from it looking downstream is of the Bird Sanctuary Pond, important for the boggy habitat round its edges and the many birds that nest there, including kingfishers and a pair of swans.

Below it is the Model Boating Pond, used now more for fishing than sailing model boats. This

pond will be the one most altered if the proposed engineering works go ahead, because the dam will be extended substantially and the pond enlarged and reshaped. Below the Boating Pond lies the Men's Pond 8, the largest of all the swimming places, then Highgate Number 1 Pond, the preferred place for dogs to swim.

Parliament Hill Lido 9, at the end of our walk, is a large rectangle of bright turquoise water surrounded by a classic 1930s style structure of red brick, concrete and glass, looking as defiantly artificial as the ponds look natural. In 2005 it was refurbished, made shallower and relined in steel. Some people regret the loss of the old diving boards while others wish modernisation had advanced further to include a heating system. In recent years it has become increasingly popular, especially with families and long-distance swimmers who train there.

DIRECTIONS

1 HAMPSTEAD NO 1 AND NO 2 PONDS

On leaving Hampstead Heath Overground Station, cross South Hill Park to take the path ahead uphill under trees to the Heath and past a large pond on the right, Hampstead Number 1 Pond. Continue past a narrow, tree-lined causeway and Hampstead Number 2 Pond on your right. Turn right to cross the causeway between Number 2 Pond on the right and the Mixed Pond on the left. At the end of the causeway turn left on a path with the fence

of the Mixed Pond on the left. This leads to the pond entrance and the first swim.

0.5 miles

2 FROM THE MIXED POND

After swimming, leave the pond and turn sharp left onto an earth path with the pond enclosure on the left. At the end of the enclosure the path divides. Avoid a narrow branch straight on and take the better marked one veering slightly right uphill. On reaching a surfaced path turn left to walk above the stream valley,

with a grassy space, the football pitch, on your right. An avenue crosses the path; turn left down it. At the bottom of the hill turn off right on an earth path which rises slightly, leaving a small stream on your left, to reach Viaduct Pond.

0.75 miles

3 VIADUCT POND TO THE VALE OF HEALTH

Turn left along the bank with the pond on the right and take a barely visible path along the lower edge of a sloping meadow with brambles to the left. At the corner

of the meadow the path appears to end, but in fact drops steeply downwards through bushes and crosses a little stream by a low wooden bridge. It then winds up through woods to reach a partially surfaced level track. Turn right to find the Vale of Health Pond on your left, the highest pond of the chain.

1 mile

4 THE WATERSHED

Where the pond ends continue past some of the houses of the Vale of Health settlement and some caravans. The track then leads quite steeply uphill to a grassy, open area. At a path junction, follow the path with woods on the left and the grassy space on your right. At the

end of the open space the path plunges into woods and wanders along slightly up and down until you come to a place where there are paths in all directions. Veer left and you should shortly see some railings, which mark the boundary between Hampstead Heath and the grounds of Kenwood House. When you reach a gap in the railings go through it.

1.5 miles

5 KENWOOD

Follow the gravel path to the left to reach another grassy area with patches of trees on the right. The little white house ahead and slightly to the left is the Old Dairy of Kenwood House. Shortly before the

Dairy the path forks; take the right fork to a gate where you enter the grounds of Kenwood House (the large white building ahead). Here you have a choice. (a) Turn right and walk down to the first ponds of the Highgate chain, then turn left to walk beside the ponds, the second of which appears to be crossed by a white bridge. At a surfaced path, turn right as if to cross the bridge, which will be revealed as a fake, built for effect on the pond bank. (b) Walk on towards Kenwood House and along the terrace from where you see the ponds below across a sloping meadow. Follow the path round to the right and down to rejoin the pond-side route.

2 miles

6 TO THE LADIES' POND

The path goes through a wood with a fence on your right, past a great tree and then slightly uphill. Ignore various turnings and continue more or less straight ahead to a gate out of the wood and back into Hampstead Heath. Turn left downhill on a surfaced path towards trees surrounding a small pond known as the Stock Pond. Pass the pond on your left then turn right at a T-junction along a rough road overhung with trees and edged on the right by railings and on the left by a fence concealing large houses. This is Millfield Lane. Shortly on the right is the entrance to Kenwood Ladies' Pond where women can have a second swim.

2.25 miles

7 TO THE MEN'S POND

On leaving the Ladies' Pond turn right and walk on along Millfield Lane from where you may glimpse the Bird Sanctuary Pond on your right through trees. Just before reaching a road take a path branching off right downhill to a causeway between the Bird Sanctuary Pond on the right and the Model Boating Pond on the left. Before the causeway turn left along the edge of the Model Boating Pond with the water on the right. At the end of the pond cross a path which, to the right, leads over the causeway between the Model Boating Pond and the Men's Pond. Go on to the entrance of the Men's Pond, where men can have their second swim.

2.5 miles

8 HIGHGATE NUMBER 1 POND

Continue with the Men's Pond on your right and turn right below the dam then left on a surfaced path to pass Highgate Number 1 Pond, on the left. You can finish the walk here by turning left to Highgate Road.

3 miles

9 THE LIDO TO GOSPEL OAK STATION

To visit Parliament Hill Lido, carry straight on instead of turning left. Turn right at a T-junction by a

children's area on the left, a café on the right and lavatories ahead. Shortly after the café turn left towards the brick walls of the Lido where you can have another swim if it is before 6.30pm. Leave the Heath by the entrance just past the Lido and turn right under the railway bridge to reach Gospel Oak station.

3.5 miles

Margaret Dickinson and Emma Beatrice Clark.

