

Rickmansworth Waterways Trust

Strolls from the Lock Number 15 – To Harefield and Ruislip Woods

Time approximately 3 hr 40 min (plus train journey)

Distance 8 miles (Return from Northwood to Rickmansworth by Metropolitan line tube train)

From the Lock Centre, turn right onto the towpath and continue to Springwell Lock, passing Stockers Lock. This will take about 25mins. There is a succession of lakes to the right along here, the result of quarrying for gravel in the middle of the last century. Cross over the canal and follow the road past houses to the left and right. Take a track on the right signposted #U4/Hillingdon Trail (HT)/Colne Valley Trail (CVT). Where this bears left, take the footpath (FP#U5/CVT) straight ahead, running parallel to the canal. This leads into Summerhouse Lane and past some buildings which used to be part of the Coppermill industrial complex. At a T junction with a main road, cross to Jacks Lane almost opposite. This becomes a footpath at the end of the tarmac. There are a couple of narrow boats in docks alongside the canal here bearing the names of canal carrying companies on their sides.

A little further on, the footpath meets a small road. Black Jacks Lock is on the right, flanked by a 17th Century thatched cottage on one side of the canal, and a mill mentioned in the Domesday Book on the other. Carry straight on to a sharp left hand bend in the road where there is a footpath (FP#U15/HT) directly ahead. The Hillingdon Trail is now followed until Ruislip Lido. Fine views of Broadwater Lake, the largest of the flooded gravel pits in this valley, can be seen as the path climbs the hill and through a belt of trees. At the signpost, turn R (FP#17/HT). This becomes FP#U22, which crosses a small road to emerge on a main road (Church Hill). You are now in Harefield. Turn right onto the main road.

Walk for about ½ mile until you see the Countess of Derby's almshouses on the left, built in 1637. Turn left onto a small road just past these then left again onto a footpath (FP#U25/HT). The road leads to St Mary's Church, built between 1100 and 1500. Queen Elizabeth I stayed a few days at Harefield Place, which was next to the church, as guest of the Countess of Derby and her husband. In the churchyard is an A.N.Z.A.C. memorial to over a hundred men (and one woman), who died in the Australian Military Hospital in Harefield during the First World War. Harefield can also claim 3 recipients of the Victoria Cross, one of whom is also buried in the churchyard. The interior of the church has a fine collection of old monuments.

Follow the path up the hill and past 2 ponds on the left and one on the right. At the top of a field, turn right and keep the fence on your left (FP#U32/HT). At the corner, go over 2 stiles to follow the path (HT) which goes to the left along the edge of a wood. Keep left when you join another path until you enter Bayhurst Wood. This is the first of the separate woods which comprise Ruislip Woods, totalling over 700 acres. These are coppiced every 10 or 20 years to encourage a varied flora and fauna.

Ignore a sign, just past some picnic tables, which points right for the Hillingdon Trail, and instead, walk straight on to reach a car park, then along the access road to a main road (Brakespear Road North). Cross over and walk to the right for about 20feet to enter North Riding Wood/Mad Bess Wood via a stile. There are HT signs, either on tall metal posts or short wooden ones at stages through this wood. The path turns left after crossing a stream and then right after a further 5mins. A wide track leads to Ducks Hill Road (15mins).

Cross over and to the left, to an entrance to Copse Wood. Follow HT signs to a gate leading into an overgrown field. This is Poor's Field, first recorded in 1295 as common wasteland, and grazed by cattle until 1956. Walk down the hill to reach a track which passes alongside Ruislip Lido. Ruislip Lido was built in 1811 by damming and flooding the lower part of the valley to provide water for the Grand Junction Canal (the forerunner of the Grand Union Canal), which it did from 1816, and also to supply drinking water. A culvert was built to take the water to the canal at Hayes Bridge, seven miles from the Lido. The Rivers Colne and Brent, which now feed the canal, could not be used at that time because the millers on these rivers objected to any water extraction. However, the water in the Lido was mainly surface run off so became polluted and therefore not used as a feeder after 1851. The reservoir was reopened as a lido in 1933 for swimming and boating. The narrow gauge railway opened in 1945. Other problems then developed of low water levels, exacerbated by swallow holes which would open up to drain the water away, plus worries about possible flooding of new housing. The Lido was closed for swimming in 1992.

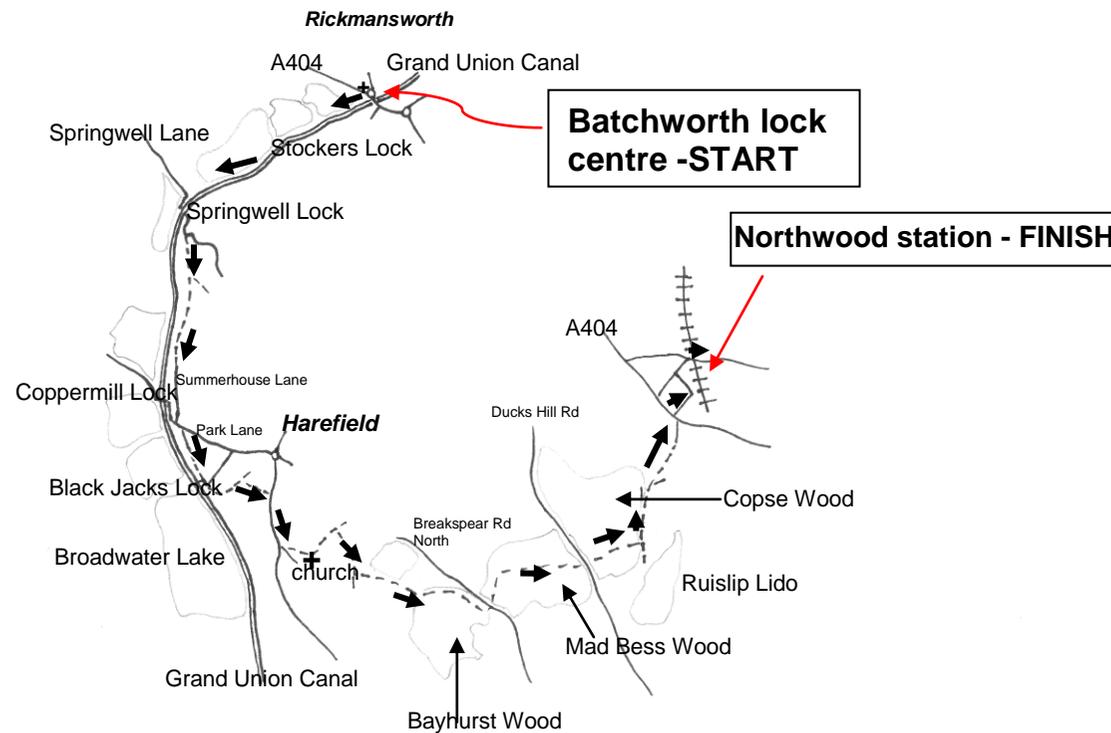
Turn left when a track is reached (a right turn leads through the gate to a miniature railway station and the 'Waters Edge' pub). This is the point at which we leave the Hillingdon Trail. After about 10mins, you will reach a small pond directly ahead. Take a path leading to the right, cross a stile, through a metal pinch gate and onto Northwood Hills golf course (FP#R28). The path becomes a track which crosses the fairway, and then a small road (Hills Road). At the main road (A404), turn left then first right (into Murray Road). Turn right at a T junction (Maxwell Road) and right again at a small roundabout. Northwood Tube station is on the right close by.

These walks are written by Jillian Christensen and are provided free by The Rickmansworth Waterways Trust but a minimum donation of 20p is suggested to help support our education programme. Thank you!

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