



Three Common ways round the Pen Ponds

Walk 1: Ham Common

Distance: 9 km=5½ miles

easy walking

Region: Greater London, Surrey

Date written: 14-oct-2019

Author: Thwelder

Last update: 25-feb-2025

Refreshments: Pembroke Lodge, Petersham, Ham House, Pen Ponds

Map: Explorer 161 (London South) or the wider A-Z

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

River, woodland, parkland, ponds, historic village and house

In Brief

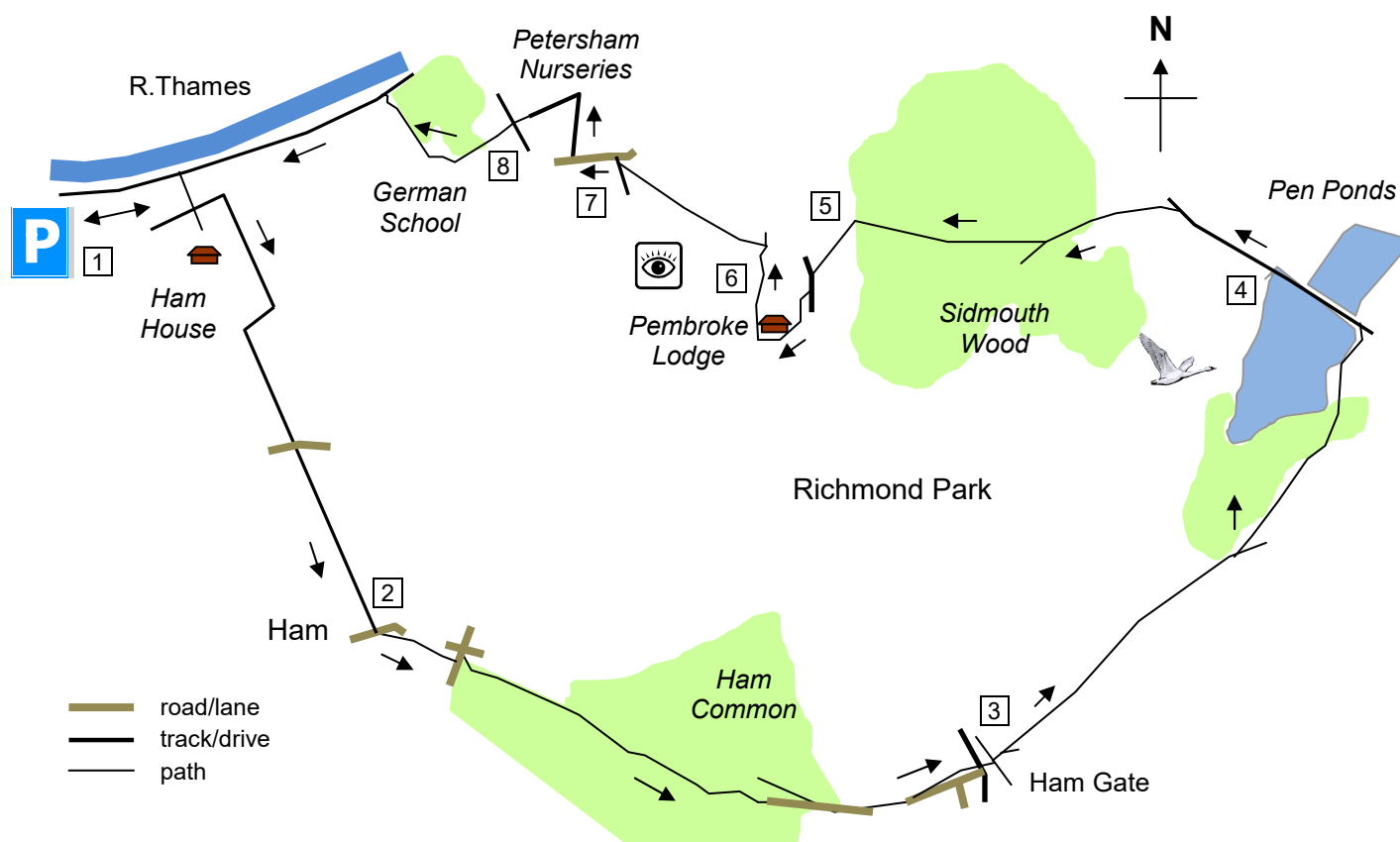
Wherever you live in S.W. London, a walk round the Pen Ponds is one of those little regular excursions that becomes part of the regime. Because they are positioned roughly in the centre of Richmond Park, visitors come from various directions to go round the ponds, beginning in one of the attractive outlying boroughs.



There are no nettles on this walk and any sensible footwear and attire is fine. All these Pen Pond walks are timeless and seasonless. Your dog is welcome to come along (with a lead please because of the deer in the park!).

The walk begins at the **Ham Street** car park by the river near Ham House postcode **TW10 7RS**, www.w3w.co/exams.trap.wisdom. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Walk 1: Ham Common



The finest treasure from that period that you are likely to see, Ham House was built in 1610 by Sir Thomas Vavasour, possibly to get away from court scandals caused by his lascivious sister Anne. It was William Murray who took the lease. He was whipping boy to the future King Charles I (the royal person could not be touched) and, as you might imagine, a well-rewarded close bond developed between them. After the Civil War, the Tollemache family (later Earls of Dysart) resided here till very recently, when the house passed to the National Trust. The house is open every day, except Christmas, from 12 noon and the 17th-century garden from 10 am.

- 1 From the car park near Ham House, go to the river side and walk along the path with the river on your left for about one minute, till you see Ham House on your right over the grass. Turn **right** across the grass towards the house. A short distance before the entrance gates, you meet a tarmac path. Turn **left** on the path and stay on it as it turns **right** and runs beside the wall of Ham House garden on your right. *Ham Polo club can be soon on your left and at the weekend you may see a match in progress.* At the end of the wall, turn **right** on a sandy path. In the corner of two brick walls (*), turn **left** onto a long lime avenue. *(Most walkers cut across diagonally as a short cut.) Looking back, you can see the rear of Ham House through the iron gates: this long avenue was an imposing "drive" leading up to the great house in olden times. On the right, behind the hedge, is the Manor House. The avenue crosses a road and continues. On your right is the Grey Court School, a mixed sixth-form academy. The lime walk ends at a road beside the Green of Ham Common.*

- 2 Turn **left** on the road and immediately fork **right** on a gravel path across the Green. Where the gravel ends, continue over the grass towards a road crossing with traffic lights. *Just on your left on the main road the New Inn offers a refreshment stop.* Cross the main road by the lights and take a path directly opposite which curves **right** into Ham Common Woods (a Local Nature Reserve). Keep **left** shortly and follow this path, never straying too far from the sound of the road on your left, soon coming close to the road. *On your left is Ormeley Lodge, built in 1715.* The path veers off into the dark woods again. Eventually, your path emerges by another sign board for Ham Common, onto the road. Cross the road and turn **right** on the footway, keeping straight on at a road junction and going through the entrance gate into Richmond Park. *WCs are on your left (now open again).*

WC

Richmond Park is the largest London Royal Park, larger than a 3km x 3km square. It was a hunting park under Charles I in the early 1600s. The park is also a nature reserve, especially known for its ancient oaks and deer.

- 3 Keep straight ahead uphill on a wide sandy path parallel to the road on your right. *Immediately on your left is the Ham Gate Pond and shortly, down on your right, the Ham Dip Pond.* At the top, go straight across the main arterial road to a path which bends right diagonally to join a wide tarmac drive, often busy with strolling families, horses and the occasional disabled driver. At a junction where the tarmac bends right to the Isabella Plantation (visited on another Pen Ponds walk), keep straight ahead on a narrower track. After a stretch of open country, you pass on your left a dense fenced-off wood. Immediately leave the tarmac by forking **left** onto a rough path which runs close to the wood on your left. In 350m, at the end of the path, bear **left** under tall oaks to join a path which runs along the bank of the large Upper Pen Pond on your left. Bear **left** shortly on a wide path, a causeway dividing the Upper Pond from the Lower Pond on your right.

The Pen Ponds were dug in 1746, not for decorative reasons but to drain a marshy area, and they were originally called the "Canals". They grew in size due to excavation work and were used to rear carp for food. The outflow is mainly into the Beverley Brook.

- 4 At the end of the ponds, keep straight ahead on a sandy gravel path which you can see rising ahead towards the woods in the distance. But, after less than 300m, just as the path curves right, **leave** it by forking **left** on a grass path, going over a crossing path and keeping to the left of a marker post. Soon you reach a fenced-off wood. Keep straight ahead beside the wood on your right. *The pollarded oak tree with a fence round it is the Royal Oak, said to be 750 years old.* In under 150m, you come to a crossing path by some scraggy oaks. Turn **right** here through a kissing gate into the plantation known as Sidmouth Wood. The path runs in a generous public corridor between fenced areas of the wood. After a scenic ½ km you emerge through a kissing gate into the open with the creamy Pembroke Lodge visible ahead behind trees.

- 5 Take a diagonal path on your left, heading towards the car park. Keep **left** through the car park, passing loos, an info hut and snack bar, and turn **right** through the gates into the garden of Pembroke Lodge. (If you have a dog, you can't enter: in this case, go **left** and keep **right** around the border fence to the other side from where you can see Petersham Gate.) Go through the building or, if you don't want refreshment, round it to the left, and go out to the terrace where you have a magnificent view of the Thames

WC

with Petersham, Ham House and Twickenham in view, including the famous rugby stadium.



Pembroke Lodge began as a house for a park keeper. It was enlarged and rented by Elizabeth, Countess of Pembroke, a great beauty. It was used in Victorian times for government business with a host of eminent visitors. . During the last war it was became a centre for Army Intelligence, including in its membership actor David Niven. Now the Lodge is a restaurant and centre for visitors, and a favourite location for weddings, because of these fabulous views. The gardens, as you will see, are also remarkable, including Poet's Corner, a Laburnum Walk and the sightline at King Henry's Mound.



- 6 Turn **right** along the terrace. (Occasionally part of the terrace is closed for a wedding reception, in which case you can bypass that part using the stepped flower garden.) Continue under tall trees, soon passing a large oval flower bed. *On a clear day you can make out Windsor Castle just to the left of the Heathrow Airport buildings.* Immediately after the flower bed, keep **left** and turn **left**, down steps and out through a metal gate into the open landscape of Petersham Park with views ahead. *Petersham Park was formerly the garden of a now-demolished lodge, incorporated into Richmond Park in 1835, with fine cedar trees and a newly-planted disease-resistant elm avenue.* Keep straight ahead on a descending path. At the bottom, your path veers **right**, leading on your right, to the metal gate of the Petersham entrance to the park. *There are free toilets next to the playground (although the playground is undergoing renovation).* Exit here to the narrow but busy road.



- 7 Turn **left** and, after a short distance, cross over at the pedestrian lights. Continue along the main road for nearly 100m where you will see a white wall with a sign *To Petersham Nurseries*. Turn **right** here on a brick path. You quickly pass on your right medieval Petersham church (known for its host of memorials) and its cemetery, definitely worth a visit. *One of the graves is of George Vancouver (1757-1798), who commanded the expedition to the American Northwest and gave his name to that city and island of Canada. He spent his last years in the Navigator's House (see below).* Continue on the drive and turn **left** in the corner. *(In dry weather, some walkers prefer to keep straight on at the corner into Petersham Meadows, with cattle in summer, turning left on the Thames Path, passing River Lane and Petersham Lodge Woods.)* In a short distance, often gridlocked with cars, you reach on your left Petersham Nurseries.



Petersham Nurseries began when a hippy couple, Gael and Francesco Boglione, tired of exotic travel, moved into nearby Petersham House. The Nursery was then in need of renovation. They applied their love of simple detail to opening a now famous outlet for plants, trees, furniture and antiques. Best known of all is the café which once held a Michelin star, where you can grab a plate and take lunch in the greenhouse on homemade lasagne in a tangle of hanging plants and statuettes. Petersham Nurseries also run a shop and a large restaurant near Covent Garden.

Just outside the entrance to the Nursery, keep **left**, tight against the wall, on a narrow passage.

- 8 The passage ends at a tarmac lane. Cross straight over to a narrow path on the other side. The white house on your right is Petersham Lodge. *For an account of its colourful history, see the "Richmond and Twickenham" walk in this series. On the left is the Navigator's House.* This rather dusky passageway finally leads out to a junction. Turn **right** and immediately fork **left** on a path beside some playing fields on your left. They belong to the German School.

The German School was set up by the Federal Republic in 1969, but it has a bilingual tradition and students can take international or German exams. It promotes German culture which must make for quite a merry school year, with the Oktoberfest, Osterbrunnen (garlands and Easter eggs), Frühschoppen (pub merrymaking before Sunday lunch) and the famous Christmas Market.

At the end of this bendy path, ignore a stile on your left* and go over a wide bridge [winter 2025: closed for essential repairs (use the stile)] to the river side. Turn **left** on the towpath, passing several memorial benches. (* The stile is a “dry” route to Ham House, in case the towpath is flooded by an exceptionally high tide.) On your right soon is a perfect view of Marble Hill House (see the entertaining account in the “Twickenham and Richmond” walk in this series), then the Twickenham Ferry, whilst on your left is a path giving you another chance to visit Ham House. Finally you reach the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Ham Street car park is easily reached via Ham Village. If you come via Richmond Park, exit at Ham Gate, cross by the traffic lights with Ham Green on your left and turn **right** at the end on Ham Street. The car park is at the distant end, by the riverside. If it is full, you can park beside the green near the wall of Ham House, 400 yds before the river. You can take a narrow passage from here to the corner marked (*) near the start of the route.

By bus/train: bus 65 runs between Kingston and Richmond stations with a stop at Ham Common.

fancy more free walks? www.fancyfreewalks.org