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Published by East Finchley Newspapers, P.O. Box 3699, London N2 8JA. www.the-archer.co.uk

In praise of Highgate Ponds

By Daphne Chamberlain

They say that swimming is good for you and Frieda Schweizer, of Cherry Tree Road, unbelievably 90 last month, certainly bears that out.

She still swims regularly at the Oasis, preferring the outdoor pool because it's actually warmer, but don't imagine that Frieda is deterred by low temperatures. She swam in Highgate Ladies' Pond on Hampstead Heath for 75 years, but now finds getting there a bit of an effort.

The Heath has three swimming ponds - a mixed one on the Hampstead side, open only in summer, and Highgate Ladies' and Men's, both available all year round.

Jennifer Adams from the Corporation of London, which manages the Heath, spoke to *THE ARCHER* about them. She estimated that as many as 2,000 people a day have visited the ponds in extremely hot weather, dropping to a maximum of 40 hardy souls in winter.

A visit means as many swims as you like, though many ladies choose just to

sunbathe in the surrounding flower-filled meadow. The entry charge is £2, £1 for concessions. Children over 12 must be accompanied by an adult and nobody under 12 is admitted.

Deep and cold

Non-swimmers are never allowed in. "The water is deep", said Ms Adams. "You can't stand up, it's opaque, and it's cold - usually in the 20s Celsius in summer, but if it drops below 12C in winter, lifeguards issue a warning.

"We only close the ponds because of toxic blue-green algae, which can happen in very hot, dry summers, or if we have ice. Some people want us to break the ice, but it would be too dangerous. It's sharp, and there is also the chance that swimmers could slip underneath it.

"Medical advice is that winter visitors should swim at least twice a week to get acclimatised, as they could risk heart attacks or strokes."

These are necessary precautions, but it's very apparent that visiting these



Frieda Schweizer at age 14 (left) with sister Molly at Highgate Ladies Pond, then known as Kenwood Pond, in 1929. The railings and the house are now concealed by greenery.

ponds can become addictive. Frieda Schweizer speaks for her fellow-enthusiasts when she praises the exhilarating feel of the water and the beauty of the surroundings.

Unfortunately she can no longer visit "my pond" but, despite osteoporosis, still enjoys her regular swims. "Swimming is good for you", she says, "at any age and with most conditions."

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East Finchley Community Festival urgently needs your help. The festival is organised by local people for local people. It is run entirely by volunteers - without them the festival would not exist! Can you spare some time to help?

The committee desperately needs volunteers to help with a variety of tasks throughout the weekend including stewarding, main stage set-up and other logistics. This year's festival is on Sunday 26 June in Cherry Tree Woods but help will also be needed on Saturday 25 June. If you can spare some time (a whole day, half a day or even just a few hours) to help out at the best local festival in London please ring Nick on 020 8883 4916 or e-mail: festival@eastfinchley.co.uk.

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