



Stroll on: Mike Coles on his virtual walk to Marseilles

## The miles mount up on my daily walk

By Mike Coles

TV presenter and activist Clare Balding said “The gym experience is not for everyone. Salvation comes in the form of a good old-fashioned walk.”

In the middle of March, the City Lit Adult College in central London shut down and along with it my Wednesday lip-reading class. A day later, the squash club closed too. There was one chink of light: an hour’s exercise allowed each day.

### Brave new world

And so it began. Those first couple of weeks of walking were quite spooky. I was often the only person around. However, over time a favourite route evolved via Cherry Tree Wood through to Highgate Wood, around its extremities then back through Muswell Hill, Creighton Avenue, Prospect Ring and East End Road.

One of the first things I noticed was quite loud birdsong, no longer competing with traffic. Then dogs caught my attention. During all my walks I have not seen a badly behaved dog, let alone a dog fight. I started seeing the same people more or less daily. Some smiled, some

marched resolutely on.

### Marchons, marchons ...

To make things more interesting I decided to keep track of my distance covered and ‘virtually’ walk the 732 miles to Marseilles in the south of France. My fitness band and phone keeps track of the distance. The 15<sup>th</sup> June, the 91<sup>st</sup> day, found me in Civrieux, just outside Lyon, with a restaurant that’s actually famous for its frogs’ legs!

My daily average has now crept up to 9.3km per day. At this rate I should be in Marseilles on 17 July, when I hope to get a ‘virtual’ flight home. Has it done me any good? Well, a study by Harvard University reckons an hour of walking a day extends your life by four and a half years. Other interesting facts are that to ‘use up’ a pint of lager takes 43 minutes, a hot dog in a white roll takes 56 minutes but a steak pie will fuel your walking for 2 hours and 9 minutes!

## There’s a bunker in my garden... or is there?

By Roz Davy

My very own crop mark! Oh joy! As an avid fan of the archaeology programme *Time Team* I know what this constantly yellowing area halfway down the lawn of my house just off Fortis Green could be: a roman mosaic floor, a villa, maybe a bath house, but definitely something exciting.

I’ve been ignoring it for years but, now, this is the time I’m going to investigate. So, up comes the turf and the earth underneath. Mmm, doesn’t need an archaeologist to tell me that the great chunk of concrete showing isn’t that old. But... it might be covering something old. So I get in a builder and Kango hammer and the concrete gets broken up. Then we find... corrugated iron.

An air raid shelter, I hear you say. Well, maybe, but in

the wrong place and it seems like the wrong shape too. A small ‘room’ with pink plastered walls and beyond it another area filled with rubble. No entrance as far as I can see but that could be under what is now a raised flower bed.

So, no Roman villa or floor, not even an Anderson shelter, just a couple of pink plastered ‘rooms’ in the wrong place for an air raid shelter and no use as storage. Such disappointment! Does anyone have any idea what I might have uncovered?

## Ten woods within walking distance of East Finchley

By Ivor Gaber

One of the unexpected gains of lockdown has been discovering the joys on our doorstep. We’ve been walking ten woods, all within easy walking distance from East Finchley.

Most of our walks start in Cherry Tree Wood, small but perfectly formed and currently home to a veritable chorus of birds. Nearby is Coldfall, a dense and wonderful wood with a patch of water that sometimes appears to be little more than a mud pool but, after a little rain, swells to an almost mighty lake.

Across the North Circular from Coldfall is the hidden gem of Coppetts Wood, just above the Tesco superstore but a world away in terms of its dense undergrowth and surprise glades.



Time to reflect: The pond in Coldfall Wood. Photo Ivor Gaber



Open land: Coppetts Wood has a wild appeal. Photo Ivor Gaber

### Bluebells galore

But when it comes to glades few can beat the eight that Big Wood, in the middle of Hampstead Garden Suburb, boasts (at least according to the noticeboard at the entrance); though if truth be told not all are that obvious to the strolling passer-by.

But both Big Wood and the nearby Little Wood have had wonderful displays of bluebells this year. And did you know there’s an open-air theatre hidden in the middle of Little Wood?

Even littler than Little Wood is Bluebell Wood, at the

far end of walking distance from East Finchley, nestling next to Muswell Hill Golf Club and, as its name suggests, this year at least, overflowing with bluebells.

### Final four

At the opposite end of the scale from Little Wood is Highgate Wood, one of the two biggest woods on our walk, and the adjacent Queens Wood which has some wonderful woodland views (and birdsongs galore). Kenwood, the other large wood, is also one of our ten. Because of the pandemic, it was temporarily closed but is now open.

Alas, our final wood, Turner’s Wood, is permanently closed to the public. Close by Hampstead Heath extension off Wildwood Road, this private natural woodland is teeming with flora and fauna and a lake, at least it is according to Wikipedia. Now wouldn’t it be a grand way to celebrate the end of lock-down by giving us hoi polloi a chance to wander round this local jewel? I wonder who we should ask?



Private entrance: The gate to Turner’s Wood. Photo Ivor Gaber

## Top ups for thirsty trees

By Diana Cormack

Many of the trees newly planted on our pavements are protected by wire surrounds which have a notice attached. On this Barnet Council asks residents to water the saplings in dry weather, this being in addition to the borough watering them, so helping to keep our neighbourhood green.

Another group of trees benefiting from the attention of locals are those planted in the park by the Friends of Cherry Tree Wood (*The Archer*, March 2020). Three apple, one pear and a plumcot are

now growing on the area between the tennis courts and the kiosk.

With the first two years of growth being vitally important towards future development and fruit production, each tree needs

at least 20 litres of water per week until the end of September. A group of volunteers are following a rota whereby they take carry water to the park every day to supply a designated tree.