Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Three Common ways round the Pen Ponds Walk 3: Sheen Common and Richmond

Distance: 8 km=5 miles — easy walking

Region: Greater London, Surrey — Date written: 2-nov-2019

Author: Thwelder — Last update: 30-jul-2023

Refreshments: Richmond

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

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

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Windmill, woodland, parkland, ponds

In Brief

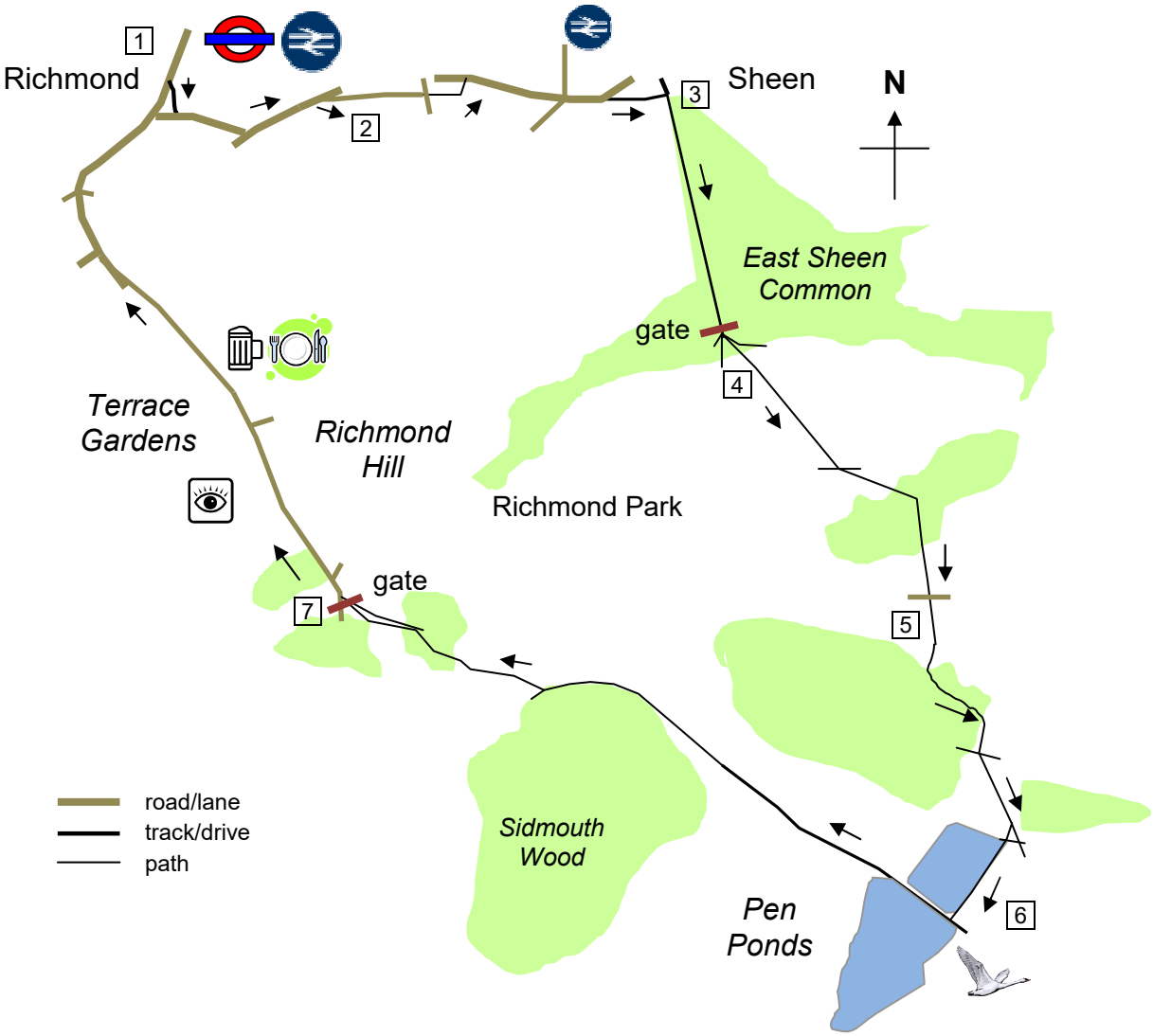
This third “Common walk” round the Pen Ponds really deserves to take first place, because, as far as Richmond residents are concerned this is, after all, *their* Park. It is here within the borough that there are most gates into the Park (Ham, Richmond, Bishops, Cambrian, Bog and Sheen). Yet a few centuries ago, this walk would have been called “Sheen and the Common Land” because Richmond was a small village called … “Shene”! If truth be told, Richmond is a town in Yorkshire, so much beloved of Henry VII that he named his new residence Richmond Palace. The town was then named after the palace. Until recently, the town was under the jurisdiction of Kingston. It became a borough in its own right in 1890.

This walk comes from the centre of the proud township, by the “back door” through Sheen Common. After the Ponds, it takes you on the classic scenic descent from Richmond Hill with the views over the Thames so admired by artists.

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 **Richmond Station** (main line or Underground) , post code **TW9 1DN**, w3w:resist.water.sting, or in a town car park. You can of course also park at the Pen Ponds, with a great choice for a refreshment break in Richmond. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



1 Turn **left** out of Richmond Station on the busy main shopping street. In 100m, just before a bus stop, turn **left** into a narrow passage, Waterloo Place, with its terrace of bijou cottages. At the end, turn **left** on the main Sheen Road. Here, you can shortly catch any one of numerous buses (33, 337, 493, 969) along the main road, getting off at the Manor Road stop, just past the traffic light junction. However, walking this section is perfectly pleasant. You pass more shops including Gail's coffee/bakery. Historic houses include *Marshgate House* of 1702 and, on the right-hand side, *Court Lodge*, scene of a recent development battle. After passing the traffic lights at Church Road, continue a short distance and fork **right** on Worple Way.

2 *Immediately on your right is Houblon's Almshouses, built in the mid-1700s by two wealthy sisters.* Go past Alberts Deli (another good snack stop) and the *White Horse* pub, continuing on this road of terraced houses, followed by a narrower passageway. Cross Kings Road and continue straight over along Peldon Passage. At the end, turn **left** and **right**, back on the main road. *On the other side are more famous almshouses, first the Church Estate from 1843 and then William Hickey's built in 1834 "for Ten poor Men and Ten poor Women". The Charity which runs them dates from 1600.* Continue past an oblique junction. (The road on your left comes from North Sheen station, a possible arrival point.) In another 100m, at the start of the large Courtlands tenement building on your right, fork **right** on a tarmac path [2023: the

footpath sign points the wrong way!] which crosses a driveway. At the end, turn **right** through a small wooden gate beside a wooden barrier into East Sheen Common.

Sheen Common was once part of the general common land before Richmond Park was enclosed by a wall. In the 1700s, it adjoined farmland owned by George III (nicknamed "farmer George") and was linked by a road to Kew Palace. In 1845 the Common was owned by the Lord of the Manor until the East Sheen Common Preservation Society obtained the freehold in 1880. Now it is owned by the National Trust and leased by Richmond Council. East Sheen Common consists of deep woodland, but also boasts a cricket field, tennis courts and a bowling green.

3 There are several ways across the Common worth exploring: the way chosen is only the most direct of several. Immediately take the **right** fork, a long straight surfaced path. *On the right you can soon catch a glimpse of East Sheen Cemetery which is definitely worth visiting on another day; it hold the graves of, among others, actors Roy Kinnear and Fulton McKay.* You exit the Common finally through a metal gate, known as Bog Gate, one of the thirteen gates of Richmond Park, built in 1736 and originally known by the more cultivated name of Queen's Gate.

4 Begin your traverse of Richmond Park by walking straight ahead, ignoring a peripheral path on your left. But, in only 10m, fork **left** on a much narrower path. This path quickly crosses several other paths and takes you across the grass, heading for a large patch of woodland in the distance. As you come nearer, you will notice an oak tree ringed by a circular fence – your first destination. As you pass the oak tree, turn diagonally **left**, crossing a sandy path and following the edge of the bracken on your left. Your path skirts the wood and then curves right through its centre. You reach the entrance gate to an enclosure known as *Two Storm Wood*. Pass the entrance on your left without going in (except for a quick tour?) and keep straight on after the corner of the wood, down to the road.

5 Cross the road to a grassy path opposite, passing a small reedy pond on your left. The path rises gently and passes a bank of bracken on your right. Now turn **left** to skirt the wood, passing some fenced-off sections on your right. Keep ahead till you come out into a wide open space. Keep **right**, still close to the wood, passing a bench and reaching a wide straight "ride". On your left you can see the White Lodge.

White Lodge was built as a hunting lodge for George II and was subsequently frequented by other royals and prime ministers. It now houses the Royal Ballet Lower School.

Turn left on the wide ride and, in only 5m, go diagonally **right** on a grassy path. Cross a brick bridge and keep **right** to reach a bank and a seat over-looking the Lower Pond.

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.

6 Take a narrow path with the pond on your right and turn **right** on a raised path between the Upper and Lower Pond. After the ponds, follow the wide track ahead, slightly uphill. At the top of the slope, continue with a wood on your left, now not far from the road on your right. Keep **left** beside the

wood and shortly fork **right** when you see a large redbrick building, marking the exit at Richmond Gate. Take any choice of path to the gate, where you meet a junction of roads, and exit, crossing the road near that large building (the Star and Garter) and turning **right** towards the town.

7

You shortly have terrific views on your left down to the Thames – a scene famously painted by Turner. *Also on the left is Wick House, bought by Pete Townshend of The Who. The creamy brick house, Downe House, that you will soon pass on the right was bought by Rolling Stone Mick Jagger and his Texan wife Jerry Hall.* Stay on the terrace that runs beside the road, soon passing through the top of the Terrace Gardens. Not long after passing Friars Stile Road on your right, Richmond Hill begins to descend. There are several interesting shops on your right and a little green on your left with a "boat of flowers". Join the main road and bear **right** on George Street, the main shopping street. Continue ahead, passing a few retail and nourishment stops to soon reach, on your right, Richmond Station where the walk began.

Getting there

By train or Underground: Richmond Station, frequent daily services.

By car: park at the free Pen Ponds car park, accessed from a junction near Robin Hood (pedestrian) gate. A huge choice of opportunities for lunch then await you in the town of Richmond.

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