

My Richmond Park



I've been walking in Richmond Park for a good sixty years! My mum and dad were allocated a council flat on Kingston Hill when I was six. My mum was thrilled to have her own home, with a proper kitchen and central heating, an amazing luxury in those days. My dad was delighted with the location – and the first time he set off for a walk he discovered Richmond Park. My mum wasn't a keen walker at all – she was very much a lady who trotted around in high heels in those days – but I was happy to skip along beside Dad. We didn't explore very far – just popped through Kingston Gate and walked up to Ladderstile and back. I loved all the ditches and tried to jump them all, pretending I was a little racehorse (I was a very weird child).

Jacqueline Wilson

I went to Latchmere School in the 1950s. We had a delightfully eccentric teacher called Miss Audrich, who had very long, very ginger hair tied up in complicated plaits around her head, and a penchant for hand-knitted suits in violent shades of emerald or purple. She took us for Nature Study, and one fine day decided that the best way to do this was take us for a walk in Richmond Park. It was a good half hour's march from the school to the entrance of the park, but Miss Audrich encouraged us to stride out all the way to Pen Ponds. We all found this a magical spot, like a little seaside hidden in the midst of the Park. We were allowed to go wading in the shallows and most of us got soaked. We became very cold and wet and tired and found the long walk back to school a struggle, but Miss Audrich urged us onwards, singing "I love to go a-wandering" at the top of her voice and making us all sing the chorus. We all ended up with chapped legs and blisters – but we also loved Richmond Park with a passion.

I've been visiting the Park regularly ever since. When I was in my twenties I lived in a flat on the lower slopes of Kingston Hill and had the luxury of being able to stride out there for an hour or so every single day. I started to feel I knew every deer personally!

When I moved further away I still went to the Park regularly, delighting in walking from Kingston Gate right through to Richmond. Sometimes I did the river walk and then walked back through the Park. I'm a bit old and poorly for that kind of trek now, but I frequently wander through the beautiful Isabella Plantation – and I frequently have a bite to eat at Pembroke Lodge.

One of my children's books, "Best Friends", was turned into a television drama, and they used the frontage of Pembroke Lodge as the home of a grand old lady in the story. I was actually lucky enough to meet the grandest old lady who once lived in a house in the Park, the Queen Mother. She told me that Richmond Park meant a great deal to her too.

I love visiting the Park at all times of the year. I particularly like it when the fawns are born – and also love the exciting time in the autumn when all the stags are bellowing dramatically. The Park is heavenly on a warm summer's day when you hear a Skylark overhead, and magical in the depths of winter when the ponds are frozen over and children are sledging down the hills. I'm not an early morning person so I've never experienced a sunrise in the park, but I know how beautiful it is when the sun sets, and all the rabbits are scampering about. There's such an abundance of wildlife in the Park. It's marvellous that so many suburban dwellers can experience the joys of the countryside on their own doorstep.

I love the ancient oaks in the park – I used to climb inside them as a child, and recently I wrote a book called "Lily Alone" where four runaway children camp in the park and sleep in a tree at night. I do hope children reading this book might want to discover Richmond Park for themselves!

Jacqueline Wilson is a patron of the Friends and a much-loved children's author. In June 2002 she was given an OBE for services to literacy in schools and in 2008 was made a Dame. In 2008 she published a memoir, "Jackie Daydream".