

The Parks Trust Self-Guided Walks: Willen Lake North

Walk by Peter Burrett, Tuesday 24th September 2013

Start point

Turn off Danstead Way (H4), between Tongwell and Willen roundabouts, into Hooper Gate. Turn left where the road forks and after a short distance you enter a sports field complex. Proceed across several speed bumps to the free parking area behind Willen Pavilion.

Walk overview

This is a circular walk with a linear excursion up and down a short stretch of the Grand Union Canal. It finishes at the same car park.

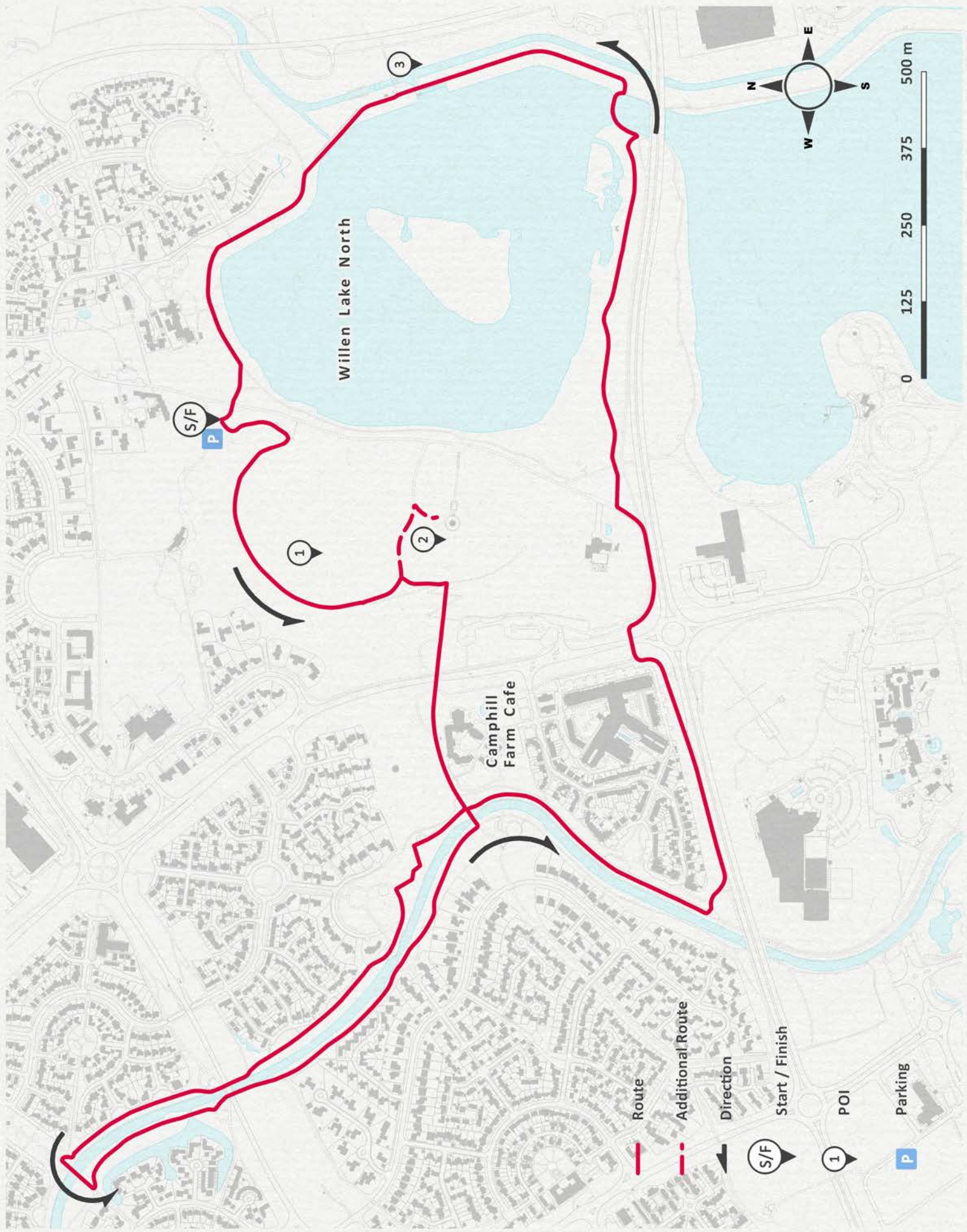
The walking is along footpaths of varying quality from hardcore to gravel, red ways and bark bridleways. The nature of some of the footpaths together with one or two inclines means the walk is unfortunately not suitable for wheelchair users.

Distances & times

Circular walk; Car park – Peace Pagoda – Grand Union Canal – Willen Lake North - car park = 4.2 miles, 120 minutes.

There is a café at the Camphill Farm Trust, open 10.30 to 16.00 from Monday to Friday and serving fresh vegetarian food. There are also many benches / picnic tables along the way where you can enjoy your own refreshments.





The circular walk

Facing the rear of Willen Pavilion and its cricket pitch, turn right and proceed past a Parks Trust sign for "Willen Lake North" and through a smaller car park. At a meeting of paths, take the right hand option signed "Peace Pagoda / Temple" and "Willen Lake South". The path takes you across a bridge over a small brook then through a wood before opening out at some picnic benches into a wide grassy amphitheater. You will see the Peace Pagoda directly in front of you, and Willen Lake North to your left.

The path bears right, following a crescent-shaped route around the periphery of the grassy area. You gently gain elevation to give panoramic views across the lake and as far as the distant Brickhill woods. Enjoy the view from one of several benches along the path.

In the hollow of the amphitheater you will see the outline of The Labyrinth, one of several Buddhism-related enlightening features around the lake. It was made in 1985 and is a similar design to an ancient turf maze at Saffron Walden in Essex. In the centre the shape of an oak tree is formed as a symbol of peace.

In the middle of the lake you will see an island, known locally and unofficially as "Goat Island" because a small herd of goats live there, foraging for themselves under the care of the Parks Trust. *(It must be said that no sign of any goat has been seen by this observer for some time!)*



Follow a gravel path to your left that sweeps down to the Peace Pagoda. Built by the monks and nuns of the Nipponzan Myohoji, this was the first Peace Pagoda to be built in the western hemisphere and enshrines sacred relics of Lord Buddha. It was inaugurated on 21st September 1980, and a thousand cherry trees and cedars are planted on the hill around the Pagoda in remembrance of the victims of all wars.

Follow the gravel path back to the higher path you were previously following. Take the series of flights of steps that soon appear on your right. An alternative zig zag path down is available if you wish. At the bottom of the steps, with the main car park serving the Peace Pagoda to your left, join the red way opposite that takes you across a bridge over Brickhill Street (V10).

The red way bisects the grounds of The Camphill Farm Trust. On the right is an extensive area of vegetable gardens, to the left the Trust's buildings, including its café and shop, the latter opening 10.30-16.30, Monday to Friday. Founded in 1981, Camphill Milton Keynes provides support and a meaningful working life for adults with a wide range of learning difficulties.

Just before a footbridge over the Grand Union Canal, turn right off the red way onto a poplar-lined footpath signed "Canal Broadwalk" and "Linford". Just beyond a children's play area, turn left onto a wooden boardwalk that traverses marshy ground. At the end of this boardwalk, turn left onto a footpath.

(Note that the footpath followed on this side of the canal is not the towpath / bridleway immediately along the canal's edge, although this runs parallel with the hardcore pathway described and can be taken as an alternative if preferred.)

Carry on past a footbridge over the canal then under Danstead Way (H4) at bridge 79D. Take the next footbridge – which links Bolbeck Park and Pennyland - over the canal, then turn sharp left onto a path down the opposite bank. There are some fine weeping willows in this vicinity. On the right you will see the Pennyland Basin, offering sheltered moorings off the canal for some properties on the estate.

Cross a footbridge over the entrance to the basin, pass under Danstead Way again and continue on the footpath running parallel with the canal. Go past a footbridge via two flights of steps before taking the next brick-built footbridge over the canal near a children's play area, then turning immediately right onto a footpath on the opposite side signed "Canal Broadwalk", "Newlands" and "Campbell Park".



With the canal on your right you pass a housing development on your left. As is often the case along the canal side generally, a grey heron was observed here. Take a short section of red way on your left that soon joins another red way running parallel with Portway (H5). Turn left here.

At a bus stop the red way dips left and follows the boundary of the Lovat Fields Retirement Village. Take a right turn under Brickhill Street (V10) into Willen. Here a red way and bridleway run parallel. Turn right and follow either, signed "Peace Pagoda / Temple", parallel with Portway (H5). Where the route veers left away from Portway (H5) you will see a stone circle in front of you.

The stone circle was built for the Millennium on the Midsummer sunrise line that runs through Milton Keynes. There are two concentric circles. The design draws on the North American medicine wheel, a universal symbol of peace. It was inspired by the legends of the Hopi (native American) Nation, as well as ancient British stone circles. The outer circle is divided into quarters to represent the elements of fire, water, air and earth.

Just before the stones, turn right onto a bark path / bridleway, crossing a red way after a short distance. This is a peaceful, little used route that takes you through woodland glades and past a Parks Trust bird hide on Willen Lake North. Here an information board details the many breeds of wildfowl and wader that can be seen, including curlew and grebe.

At a junction of paths turn left and proceed over a footbridge that marks the boundary between Willen Lakes North and South. Turn left onto a footpath signed "North Lakeside Walk". This follows an elevated ridge between Willen Lake North on the left and the River Ouzel on the right. There are splendid views westwards from this path towards the Peace Pagoda, the church in Willen Village and, further along, the distant skyline of Central Milton Keynes.



You pass through a weir complex, where there is one moderate incline, past a signpost to "Willen Village" then, on your right, past a row of old cottages that form part of the original village of Willen. At a Parks Trust information board on Willen Village, turn sharp left and walk in front of Willen Hospice.

At a path junction beside a bench, turn right. Cross straight over a red way and proceed back to the car park at Willen Pavilion.

