

The perfect base for a Wind in the Willows weekend: a stylish B&B in the Chilterns

Extract from Rhiannon Batten's Guardian article.

Strolling through a deep tangle of beech trees to get some fresh air after a long drive, I think of the scene in Kenneth Grahame's wistful story *The Wind in the Willows*, where Mole gets lost in the Wild Wood. "There seemed to be no end to this wood, and no beginning, and no difference in it, and, worst of all, no way out."

I've come to South Oxfordshire to explore what was once Grahame's old stomping ground. Although I don't share his character's fear of the woods, I do share his own wonder for this part of the country, close to suburbia yet wrinkled with pockets of wildness. It's one of those spring days when the light feels elastic and daffodils brighten the verges of muddy lanes. The moon is rising, however, and smoke drifts from the chimney of a cottage just beyond the woods. Nocturnal creatures may be rousing but I'm feeling the pull of a cosy burrow. I leave the trees and head back to my accommodation, Bonni B&B, in Hill Bottom.

In the summer, visitors come to follow Grahame and Jerome K Jerome's leads, messing about on, or by, the river (there are paddleboards or a boat with skipper to hire), or venturing out on expeditions to Oxford, Windsor and London (all reachable in under an hour by train from Goring or Pangbourne).

Borrowing one of B & B's bikes, I start with a gentle 10-minute pedal downhill to Whitchurch-on-Thames. First stop is the [Modern Artists Gallery](#), where I watch light glinting off Alice Cescatti's gilded paintings as owner Peggy Brodie tells me of the farmhouse up the road where the seeds of Womad music festival were sown. Detouring east, I pass alpaca-nibbled fields and watch red kites circle overhead on my way to [Lin's Veg Shed](#); its wholesome-looking vegetables and salads can be bought steps from where they have been grown.

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In Whitchurch I pedal past the Greyhound pub and over the river into Pangbourne. Grahame's former home is here, still a private house. Although he wasn't living here when he wrote *The Wind in the Willows*, Pangbourne has echoes of picnic-loving Ratty, with its cheese shop, bakery and Italian deli.

Cycling back to Hill Bottom to drop off the bike, I finish my day on foot, walking a few miles to Goring-on-Thames and Streatley along a riverside route through the Goring Gap, a topographical half-pipe where the Thames slices through chalk hills. My route joins the Ridgeway, Britain's oldest road, as I cross the river, and the landscape feels timeless as I pass pretty brick and flint cottages, ancient churches, a mossy-roofed mill and pubs with elbow-polished bars.