

The Great British

# Walk

National Trust

tip with ALTH



## A secret walk at: Stowe

Mark Rowe, our walking pro, has discovered this secret walk for you to explore. Now you can follow in his footsteps...

He fell in love with walking in the wilds of Hertfordshire, while growing up in the suburbs of north London.

Today, Mark has worked regularly for the Trust's Great British Walk and The Independent on Sunday. He is also a contributing editor to BBC Countryfile Magazine. He is however, still learning how to fold an OS map in a force eight gale.

### A bit of background

The Dukes of Buckingham created the gardens of Stowe to represent the 'path of life', and every element of its monumental architecture, from temples to bridges and arches oozes with resonance and guidance on how they felt life should be led.

*"Stowe house was the axis: you were intended to keep on the narrow path, which takes you across the lake and to the triumphal arch, or 'pearly gates' that took you out of this world."*

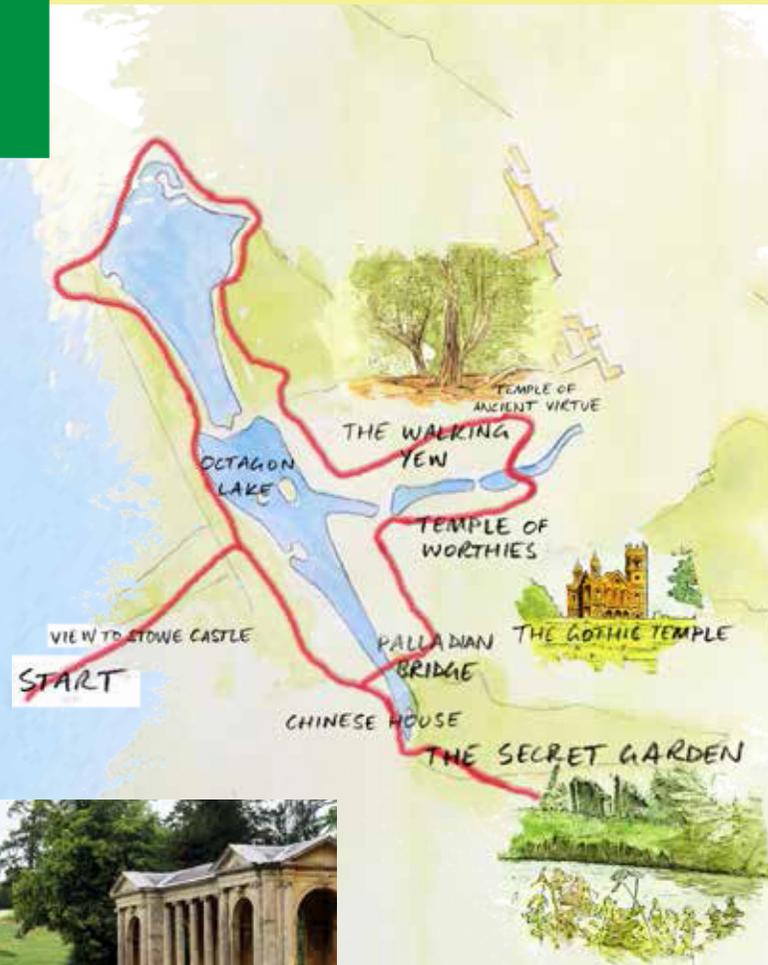
– Barry Smith, Head of Gardens and Estates

### THE SECRET



Remember those magical childhood tales of hidden, secret gardens, which you crept into through a creaky, wooden door mantled with ivy?

Stowe's secret garden has been a genuine secret for many years. Now though, it is the centrepiece of a dreamy walk around the estate.



# The walk

As well as our secret garden, Stowe has several other hidden gems.

## Look out for the castle

We have barely begun our walk when I spot a castle far to my right. Except it's not a castle but a farmhouse topped with battlements - a playful 'eyecatcher' intended to create atmosphere.

## Draining the lake

The main drive leads to Stowe's landmark ornamental Octagon Lake. This autumn the lake is being drained in order to enlarge the spillway and prevent any flooding. While this means relocating its swans, perch, pike and roach, it will also give visitors the chance to glimpse into Stowe's past and see the original dimensions of the lake.

## Eastern temples and exotic fruit

We pass a Chinese temple, a 19th century pheasantry and a cascade named for a former gardener (James Brown) who won a medal for cultivating a pineapple that weighed 23lbs and stretched 33 inches around the waist.



## THE SECRET The secret garden



We reach the wooden entrance to the secret garden. Tom's Midnight Garden is at the front of my mind as we unlock a door to another world. It's nice to think that the rustling leaves behind me may just be fairies and pixies running around when my back is turned.



*"I want to leave it in a state that looks like you've just come across it. It's completely separate from our landscape garden and has a completely different feel to it."*

– Barry Smith

## The Gothic Temple

As well as Stowe's 'sham' Castle, there are many architectural delights to look out for. Step onto the sandstone Palladian Bridge and you'll see that the path slopes up towards a striking Gothic Temple.



## The walking yew



We amble around the Octagon Lake, past elegant temples to another show-stopper, a giant walking yew. This centuries-old tree has over time dipped its branches

into the soil and slowly these have grown into trunks of new trees, enabling the yew to 'walk' across the grounds.

## An unexpected view

Barry leads us to the Doric Arch which is apparently one of the best views of Stowe. As I look down at some sweeping lawns fringed with shrubs; it's pleasing enough but I feel I'm missing something.

*"The thing about Stowe is that is all about surprise. The planting creates a backdrop that draws your eyes away from the main thing - and then, wow!"*

– Barry Smith

Now I see what he means as, standing with our backs to the arch, we can see right across Stowe to the Palladian bridge a mile away and beyond that, our fake castle.

## Listen out for the waterfall

We meander around the lake and lurch off down a gentle slope to a lovely cascade of water flowing from the lake.

*"You can hardly hear the waterfall when you're above it. I've been here seven years and didn't know about it. Then I heard the sound of water one day when there was no wind and wondered what it was."*

– Lyn Jopling, Visitor Experience Manager

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