

The green escape

Anna Webb and Mini Bull Prudence rediscover their London surroundings.



ABOUT ANNA

Dog and cat lover Anna Webb is the co-presenter of BBC London's 'The Barking Hour'. She also appeared regularly on 'The Alan Titchmarsh Show'. Find out more at www.annawebb.co.uk

After a three-year 'sabbatical' in the Shires, I wasn't sure how I'd feel walking the dogs in a London park. I had left London as the hound pound boomed and dog ownership soared, and I resented that my local park, Clissold Park, had become so over-crowded.

One sunny afternoon, Prudence and I went for a stroll down memory lane, with a stomp around Clissold Park. The tree-lined vista was heaving with people, skateboards, joggers, footballs, cyclists, dogs, children, and prams. Despite there being a notable positive change towards dog training, it was hectic.

Navigating one distraction after another, we didn't enjoy the most relaxing walk — the space just wasn't the same. Prudence was in a state of high excitement when we passed the new skateboarding rink. A chance meeting with Eric, the famous skateboarding French Bulldog, sent Prudence into a froth. Her skateboarding skills are not bad, but Pru will never match Eric's natural flair.

MARVELLOUS MARSHES

Panting in her usual train-like fashion, she'd just about calmed down by the time we got back to our 'patch'. Fortunately, we're now living within spitting distance of one of London's surprises: the Hackney Marshes.

We're blessed to have landed in this spot, in the heart of creative Hackney, with 137 hectares of its historic marshes

right beside us. Apart from providing a boost of oxygen to balance our air quality, this mass of grassland, meadows, riverbanks, and woodland is just perfect for Prudence.

Designated as a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation, the Marshes have been restored into manicured countryside, offering a vital habitat for over 70 species of birds, including grey herons, kingfishers, and sparrowhawks. Hundreds of different plants, flowers, and trees provide 30 species — such as butterflies, hedgehogs, dragonflies, bats, squirrels, rabbits, and foxes — with a nature reserve that's an urban paradise.

Best of all, it's ideal for accident-prone Mini Bulls, as there are no wheat fields to get lost in, nor tractors spraying insecticides to avoid. Arguably more educational than a 'real' country walk, our romps on the Marshes are a sensory sensation for Prudence.

One problem, though, is the proliferation of bees. Transferring one compulsion (pigeons) to another means a new training routine, before Prudence gets stung.

That's not the only thing: after a sticky situation with a cyclist, Prudence's sideways lunging also has to stop. We were strolling along the pathway by the riverbank, heading to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. An angry cyclist attempted to overtake us, just as Prudence lunged to the right. Amid the screeching, swerving, and wobbling, Prudence got the measure: this cyclist didn't like dogs. Thankfully, no one was hurt.

URBAN PARADISE

One part of Hackney Marshes through which we love walking is the Middlesex Filter Beds. Built by the East London Waterworks Company in the mid-1800s, it's been transformed into a 10-acre sanctuary for wildlife and amphibians, mainly toads.

It's also home to London's own 'Stonehenge', sculptor Paula Haughney's monumental



Anna, Prudence, and English Toy Terrier, Dexter, enjoy a meadow in the city.

'Nature's Throne'. Made from huge granite blocks salvaged from an old engine house, it makes a great sit/stay training location.

Prudence doesn't know how lucky she.



Watching the crickets.



Prudence practises her sit-stay on 'Nature's Throne'.