



Viewpoint

The Pacific in a pond



Time: 15 mins

Region: South East England

Landscape: rural



Location:

Swanbourne Lake, Mill Road, Arundel,
West Sussex, BN18 9LH

Grid reference:

TQ 01766 07977

Keep and eye out for:

The extraordinary variety of waterfowl,
water colours and patterns

Swanbourne Lake is an oasis of a kind. There is usually very little standing water in chalk country, as it percolates down through these porous rocks, leaving few natural ponds or lakes. The 'bourne' part of the name hints that this lake is fed by a spring. The lake itself is an artificial one, but that is true of so many ponds and lakes in southern England, where the geology and lack of glaciers never favoured them.

Swanbourne Lake is beautiful, strikingly so in sunlight, but beauty is a rich landscape's best disguise – there are always intriguing clues, signs and patterns to be discovered if we peer through the beauty...

**Why is Swanbourne Lake one of the natural navigator
Tristan Gooley's favourite viewpoints?**



For decades before visiting Swanbourne Lake, I had been frustrated. The great seafaring cultures, like the Vikings, Arabs and Pacific Islanders, each had their own impressive history of reading water. I have been studying this water wisdom since my early twenties, having been seduced by the 'kepesani lemetau' - the water lore - of the Polynesians and desirous to possess the isharat - the skill of reading water - of the Arab navigators. But a great frustration sprung from my inability to marry the wisdom these cultures had gained with my experience of seeing water nearer home.

That all changed when I noticed that the ripples in the pond in my back garden bounced off a rock and created exactly the same patterns that form around islands in the Pacific. The penny dropped: it is possible for us to see and experience the things that these great water experts did very close to home, the key is appreciating that scale is not a barrier. We can learn so much about the behaviour of great oceans, just by looking at a body of water like a small lake.

Look out across any water when there is a breeze and you will see ripples marching across the surface. When these ripples encounter any obstacle, an island, a rock, even a clump of water lilies, notice how certain patterns are created on each side of the 'island', however small it is.

These patterns are the same as the ones the Pacific Islanders would sense in their outrigger canoes, giving them the ability to sense where land was, long before it became visible.

After making this discovery in a pond, I ventured out to Swanbourne Lake regularly to watch these effects on a slightly larger scale. It was in the beautiful setting of this lake that I was able to build my collection of signs and patterns worth looking for; it now stands at over 700. Each of these signs gives us something to look for in the water, but none of them reduce the beauty of the landscape before us.

You can look for these signs at your nearest lake or even your garden pond. We can even learn about water currents by making a cup of tea.

Water colours

You can measure the size of raindrops by looking at the colours in a rainbow - the more red in a rainbow, the bigger the drops will be. We can also learn plenty about the colour of water by running a bath - it is clear to start with, but is a light blue when the bath is full. This is because water absorbs reds and oranges in the colour spectrum but lets blues and greens pass through.



Written and photographed by author and natural navigator Tristan Gooley, whose books include *How To Read Water* and *The Walker's Guide to Outdoor Clues and Signs*

Author photo: © Micha Theiner