

**Swimmer** OUTDOOR  
presents

# BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO OUTDOOR SWIMMING



**1**  
PART

\* WHERE TO SWIM \* TECHNIQUE & SKILLS \* KIT GUIDE \* EXPERT ADVICE



# Editor's letter



Welcome to the world of outdoor swimming! If you haven't yet taken the plunge into swimming outdoors, part 1 of our two-part guide in association with ProWetsuit.co.uk, Europe's swim wetsuit specialist, will introduce you to the joys of the open water as well as giving you practical advice on how to start your swimming journey, improve your stroke technique and train for your first open water event. Plus, we've got tips and advice from all kinds of outdoor swimmers – whether you want to swim your first mile or cross the English Channel. So take a deep breath and dive in – the water's lovely!

Part 2 includes a training plan for your first open water mile, the joys of mass participation events and developing open water skills.

Happy swimming,

Jonathan



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Printed in the UK by Pensord Press Ltd on behalf of ZG Publishing Ltd



# WHY SWIM OUT

## Swimming outdoors offers so much more than the pool, says Simon Griffiths

**O**utdoor swimming is: an adventure, a community, fitness, wellbeing, a race, a meditation, a way of life... The rewards of swimming outdoors are many and varied and this guide is here to support you to take that first leap into the big blue beyond...

For years, authorities have been warning us against swimming in open water. They say it's cold and dirty, that there are hidden undercurrents and weeds that can entangle you and drag you down, and if you do happen to survive the initial swim, you'll probably get ill afterwards. Later we'll bust these myths and show you how you can swim outside safely, but firstly we want to answer a more fundamental question: why should you swim outside?

Perhaps the main draw – plain and simple – is that it's very enjoyable. If you haven't experienced outdoor swimming, that can sound surprising. If you're used to swimming pool temperatures for example, entering open water can give you quite a shock (literally) but with a bit of practice you can tolerate, and even thrive in, a wide range of natural water temperatures.

Swimming in cool water is a whole-body sensual experience. There's an initial period of discomfort followed by a spell of feeling invigorated and energised.

Swimming in a pool can also be enjoyable too, of course. There is something special about being immersed in water. Perhaps it's because it's the closest we can get to flying. In open water you also get the pleasure of being outside – immersed in nature as well as in water.

Swimming outdoors also gives you more opportunity to play. You can leap off rocks, swing from trees into the water and dive through waves. And it doesn't matter if you are nine or 99 years old. As well as enjoyment and fun there are outdoor swimmers who





# INDOORS?

take up the sport for the challenges it offers and the satisfaction that comes from achieving things they previously thought of as impossible.

A first step for many new open water

swimmers is to sign up for a mass participation swimming event. We like the word 'event' rather than 'race' as often, for the majority, these swims are not about racing but about overcoming a personal challenge and completing the distance. A typical

beginner's distance is a mile and there is a wide range of events in different locations and types of water around the world offering this. In the UK, many swimmers will use a wetsuit for their first open water race (some organisers make

wearing a wetsuit compulsory) but that's not the case for all races.

A mile equates to a little over 64 lengths of a standard 25m swimming pool but it's a totally different challenge in open water. Firstly, the water temperature will most likely be cooler than the pool and while a wetsuit does offer some protection you still feel the chill on your face, hands and feet. A wetsuit can also

feel restricting so combined with the shock of the cold this can cause some people to panic. But don't worry, you can overcome this with a bit of practice.

Secondly, in a pool you have the opportunity

to rest at every turn. Not so in a lake or the ocean. Even the push off from the wall at each turn gives you a second or two to rest your arms whereas outside they are in constant motion. Then, because you don't have a black line to follow, it's much harder to swim straight. These means an open water mile is 'longer' than a pool mile and for most people will be slower.

Other differences are limited visibility, rough conditions, other swimmers in close proximity, depth, distance from the shore and the possibility of encountering wildlife or swimming through plants. It's no wonder people feel a huge sense of achievement after completing an open water swim for the first time. On the plus side, because you're not changing direction every 25m, swimming a mile outside can, in some ways, feel easier than in the pool.

**SWIMMING IN COOL WATER IS A WHOLE-BODY SENSUAL EXPERIENCE**





## MICHELLE CASTRO

**Age:** 32

### Swim Highlights

2016 was the start of my outdoor swimming journey. I took part in an organised trip with the "This Girl Can" group from Active Northumberland to swim with seals at the Farne Islands. Outdoor swimming has allowed me to make new friends and has given me a newfound confidence to swim in pools, lakes and the sea. My aim is to take on a swimrun race and work towards an Ironman.

### What does outdoor swimming mean to you?

Outdoor swimming means getting out of my comfort zone. It's about enjoying your surroundings and embracing nature. Only last year I

was afraid of open water swimming, but not any more...

### Favourite Swim Spot

Tynemouth has a beautiful sandy beach with a spectacular historic backdrop of Tynemouth Priory and Castle.

### What are your top three tips for beginners to outdoor swimming?

Practise getting in and out of your wetsuit – it's not as easy as it looks! Purchase a good pair of anti-fog swimming goggles. Swim with other like-minded people. It makes it more fun and there's safety in numbers, in case you get into any difficulties.

### What kind of training do you do?

I am currently having swimming lessons as I still

feel there is a lot to learn and I want to improve my technique.

### What would you say to someone considering getting into outdoor swimming?

Feel the fear – and get in the water anyway!



I want to improve my technique

## DELAZE GAZO

**Age:** 26

### Swim

### Highlights:

Participating in a 4x50m relay at the London Aquatics Centre during the European Aquatics

Championships as part of Swim London (an adult learn to swim course) and the Great Newham London Swim.

### How did you first get into outdoor swimming?

I decided to participate in the Swim London programme and open water swimming was part of the course. Everything I had learned about swimming before then came from primary school swimming lessons. Despite having poor technique, I could will myself to 25m because I was armed with the confidence that being able to touch the bottom with my feet brings.

### What does outdoor swimming mean to you?

Freedom

### What made you take up outdoor swimming?

I've always had this visual in my head of diving off of a boat into the sea. I couldn't really swim, so I couldn't safely enact it. Participating in Swim London was the first step to realising it.

### What are your top three tips for beginners to outdoor swimming?

Relax and focus on the swim feeling natural: 'Stroke: 1, 2, 3, breathe... 1, 2, 3, breathe.' The transition from the pool to open water was easier than I anticipated. The wetsuit aids your buoyancy. It's mainly a mental hurdle to overcome. The rest comes with practice.



Relax and focus on feeling natural

## ← Distance matters

Some swimmers like to push the barriers through ever longer distances. If you've done a mile, why not try two miles or five kilometres or ten kilometres – the swimming marathon.

For the purists though, real marathon swimming is done without a wetsuit. Not only do you have to train your body and mind to do the distance, you have to deal with the cold and, in the sea, possibly jellyfish stings. Removing your wetsuit and swimming outdoors without one for the first time can be very nerve-racking. You lose the warmth and buoyancy benefits. But it can be incredibly liberating. Your arms and shoulders are no longer

restricted and you sense the water over your entire body.

The pinnacle of marathon swimming challenges is often considered to be the English Channel. This 21-mile swim can take anywhere from seven hours (the current world record, held by Trent Grimsey, is 6:55) to 28 hours and 44 minutes (the current slowest swim record held by Jackie Cobell). For the swim to be recognised as 'official' you need to do it without a wetsuit and follow specific rules regarding your costume and swim cap.

The English Channel is not the only marathon swim in the world. Others include the Cook Strait in New Zealand and the North

Channel between Ireland and Scotland. All these swims offer different challenges in terms of currents, water temperatures and possibly wildlife encounters.

## Ice breakers

Another way outdoor swimmers challenge themselves is with temperature. Historically,

YOU CAN LEAP OFF ROCKS AND SWING FROM TREES INTO THE WATER

## GERALDINE TREACHER

Age: 37

**Swim highlights:** Lake Zurich, 26.6km, no wetsuit. Age group silver in the 2016 British Open Water Swimming Championships. Four-woman team English Channel relay.

### How did you first get into outdoor swimming?

I initially tried some of the shorter mass participation events and really enjoyed them. The highlight was a river swim from Hampton Court down to Kingston. There was something inexplicably attractive about swimming with the current in silty water down the Thames, where people aren't really supposed to be, and feeling integrated into the landscape and the river, and seeing everything on the river bank from a perspective that you don't usually get.

**What does outdoor swimming mean to you?** The thing I am constantly struck by is the outdoor swimming community: the enthusiastic

energy generated by other groups of swimmers. There are so many interesting, mad, life-loving people who participate, and every local group I've encountered has been incredibly welcoming. I also really like that women and people of all ages are genuinely involved.

### What made you take up long distance swimming?

I used to do a lot of mountain biking, but had to stop because of knee problems. Open water swimming was the obvious replacement. And, then, once I'd done a few 3km events and felt confident about them my addictive/obsessive personality kicked in and I found myself setting goals to swim further and further. In 2013 two friends asked me if I'd like to join them swimming the Gibraltar Strait from Spain to Morocco the following summer and I said yes because I couldn't think of a good reason to say no. Completing that swim, which was 16km for us, was the point at which I felt I'd properly and slightly by accident become a long distance swimmer.

### Favourite swim spot?

There are so many beautiful spots. I swim with the Serpentine Swimming Club in Hyde Park, which is fabulous because it feels like an oasis of outdoor calm in the middle of London. But my favourite spot has to be at Mt Maunganui in New Zealand. Beautiful golden sand, rugged beach, big waves,

and a small island to swim around.

### What are your top three tips for beginners for long distance swimming?

It's easy to get in and swim but if you're planning to get some distance under your belt then spend some time on your technique before you ramp up the miles. This will help you swim faster, but much more importantly, will help prevent repetitive strain sports injuries. There's nothing worse than succumbing to a shoulder injury two weeks before your event of the season. Stretching and sports massage can help you recover and prevent injury. You need to give yourself time to acclimatise to cold water. I've found that I get more acclimatisation benefit from longer swims in water that is a bit on the cold side than from shorter swims in very very cold water. For me cold resilience is an ongoing challenge but I persist!

### What kind of training do you do?

I'm a member of Out To Swim, which is the London LGBT masters swim club, and the club sessions give me a good mix of aerobic and higher intensity training. I also train with Wswim, a weekly session for women wanting to get into club and open water swimming, run by swim coach Emily Chong. Once a week, and more if possible over winter, I head to the gym for a strength session.



Cold resilience is an ongoing challenge

a few swimmers have swum year-round in locations such as Brighton, the Serpentine and Tooting Bec Lido, even going so far as to break the ice to get at the water. As autumn turns to winter and temperatures plunge these swims tend to get shorter – sometimes as short as a minute or two – but fans of extreme cold water say they feel great all day afterwards. Many also believe it boosts their immunity against winter colds.

In more recent years, as cold water swimming has gained in popularity, winter swimming has been formalised into events and there is even a Winter Swimming World Championships.

In brief then, outdoor swimming offers

hundreds of ways to enjoy and challenge yourself and it doesn't matter if you're fast or slow, young or old. There's space for everyone. As for the safety fears, you can never make swimming totally risk free but through a bit of planning, common sense and the right precautions you can minimise the chances of coming to any harm. The benefits of swimming outside are many and varied and for some it becomes a life-long passion.

Our aim in this introductory guide to outdoor swimming is to show you some of the places swimming might take you if you free yourself from the confines of the pool, and how to get there.

## JASON BETLEY

Age: 47

**Swim highlights:** English Channel, 2014, 13 hours 59 minutes. Strait of Gibraltar, 2015, with Helen Gibbs, in 3 hours 16 minutes, the fastest Britons to make that crossing. Catalina 2-way, September 2015, 64 km, 28 hours 12 minutes

### How did you first get into outdoor swimming?

In 2012 I swam the Great East Swim 2 mile event in a wetsuit. This was after about a year of steadily gaining fitness in the pool following a rest from swimming of about 22 years.

Despite this being my first proper 'event', I decided straight afterwards that I was going to swim the English Channel.

### What does outdoor swimming mean to you?

I find a wonderful satisfaction in having the freedom and confidence in my own ability to strike out from shore on a swim that most people would never even dream of. It's fun whether you are cutting serenely through mirror conditions or fighting chop and confusion, there's hardly a swim I have ever regretted!

### What made you take up long distance swimming?

The prolific and successful long distance swimmer Dave Barra has a saying that 'If something is worth doing, it is worth overdoing'. I am right with him on that one.

**Favourite swim spot?** La Jolla Cove near San Diego.

**Blog:** swimsequence.wordpress.com



Strike out from shore





# WILD SWIM

**Daniel Start, author of *Wild Swimming*, shares his tips for taking the plunge**



## **What is wild swimming and why do it?**

‘Wild Swimming’ is the ancient art of swimming in natural waters such as rivers, lakes and waterfalls, as well as the sea – the sort of places our great grandparents learnt to swim in and the only places before swimming pools were invented in Victorian times. Today there is something slightly naughty, a little bit adventurous and wonderfully invigorating about wild swimming. Getting in, and out, is as much a part of the ritual as the swim itself. Some like to tiptoe, but I like to jump (if I have checked the depth first) and it’s the sheer fun of a day spent by the river that makes wild swimming a perfect escape.

From Celtic enchanted pools to early Christian river baptisms, through to Wordsworth and Coleridge frolicking in Lake District waterfalls, there has always been a strong tradition of wild water swimming in Britain. The health and psychological benefits of dipping in natural waters have long been known – and our many spa towns are a testament to this. Florence Nightingale and Charles Dickens both claimed to have been cured by traditional forms of ‘hydrotherapy’. First, a one-off dunk, particularly in cold water, creates intense vasodilation, pumping out muscle lactates, and bringing fresh blood to the extremities. The Turks and Romans understood this with their hot-cold plunge pools, and so does Paula Radcliffe, who always took a cold shower before a race. Second, after regular swimming, a process known as cold adaptation kicks in. Not only does this reduce your body’s sensation of coldness (making even the coldest water quite pleasant), it is clinically proven to boost mood, libido and the immune system – as shown in NASA experiments from the 1980s and more recent studies of year round swimmers immunity from colds and flu. Finally, a cold dip also provides a psychological kick start. A powerful endorphin shot is →

THE HEALTH AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF DIPPING IN NATURAL WATERS HAVE LONG BEEN KNOWN



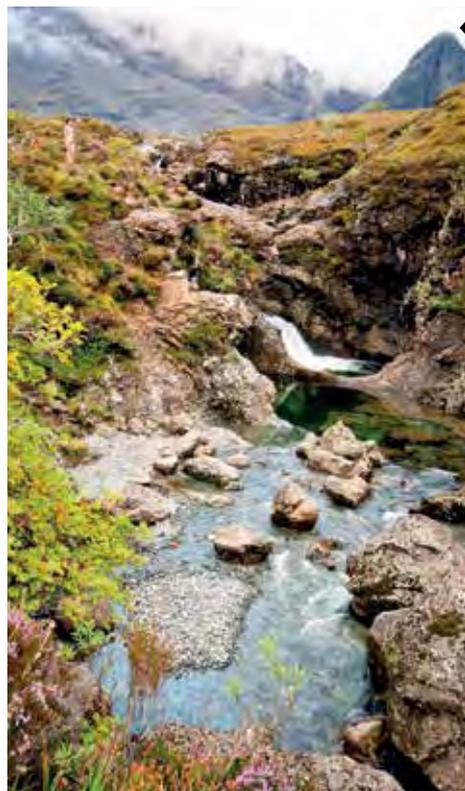
**LOWER DWILI WATERFALLS**  
Afon Nedd Fechan,  
Ponneddfechan,  
Glynneath

# MING GUIDE

**OVERBECK BRIDGE,  
WAST WATER, LAKE  
DISTRICT**  
England's deepest lake  
under the dramatic  
backdrop of England's  
tallest mountain.



**PORT MEADOW**  
Oxford



**FAERIE POOLS**  
Skye

← released and this natural high raises mood, elates the senses and creates an addictive urge to dive back in.

So why has it taken so long for wild swimming to come back into vogue? The industrial decades of the 1950s and 1960s decimated our rivers with unimaginable pollution, however thanks to European policy our rivers and lakes are cleaner now than they've been in living memory. Hidden havens for wildlife once more, these secret corridors into forgotten corners of our countryside are places to swim with kingfishers and otters. Bobbing along with a frog's-eye view of the world, wild swimming is the perfect way to commune with nature, seek inspiration, and be humbled by the immensity and wonder of the natural world.

### How to get started

If you want to get started you need very little beyond some trunks, a small travel towel (or sarong), and ideally some lightweight aqua shoes (old trainers work fine). Plan a walk or run so you arrive hot and sweaty, and with some practice you should be able to manage 20 minutes without a wetsuit. For a longer session, or if you are heading into unknown territory – particularly the sea – you may need wetsuit. A swim cap will also conserve a huge amount of heat, and add to your visibility. Don't forget a plastic bag in which to bring wet kit back home again. You don't need to be an athletic swimmer, but you should feel confident in the water, and

**WILD SWIMMING IS THE PERFECT WAY TO COMMUNE WITH NATURE**

happy to swim underwater, ride with a current and battle with mud.

### Staying safe

To stay safe, never swim alone and remember, if this is your first time, stay or swim close to the shore. Cold water will dramatically decrease your range at first, count on being able to swim a tenth of the distance you can in a warm pool, so practise in a safe zone and increase your range slowly. If it's your first time swimming in cold water, enter the water gradually to see how your body reacts – beware of 'cold shock' which can bring on hyperventilation. When you get out, it can take longer than you think to warm up, so have plenty of clothing ready, and ideally head straight off on another walk or run.

Other health hazards can include blue-green algae, sometimes found in lowland lakes in hot summers (best avoided as it can create a rash), swimmer's itch (if you spend a lot of time wading through pond weed where snails breed) and, in extremely rare cases, Weil's disease. This latter illness is caught from rat urine,

mostly around urban waterways. It enters the skin through open cuts and wounds (wear a waterproof plaster if you have a cut). It is easily treated with antibiotics (see your doctor if you develop flu-like fever within a week of wild swimming) but if left to develop, it can kill.

## Currents

Currents aren't necessarily dangerous – you're not going to be sucked under – but they can be disorientating and may take you out into deeper water or close to an obstruction. Even shallow water, if it's moving fast enough, can knock you over and carry you away. Always consider: if I do lose my footing or get swept downstream, where will I get out? In rivers with a strong current, keep an eye downstream, and always plan your emergency exit in case you are carried downstream. Currents can be especially powerful directly under large waterfalls or weirs – never jump directly into the tumult below falling water.

In the sea, don't swim from headlands unless you understand tidal currents, and don't swim in high surf conditions – offshore rip currents can form around cove edges and along sandy beaches, in between the surf breaks, and they can carry swimmers out to behind the surf line (where they then dissipate). If this happens, exit the current by swimming parallel to the shore, and come back in on the surf. The same is true if you are caught in a fast river – swim to the shore or side where the water will be calmer.

## Swimming with friends

For safe swimming, never swim alone. Go with a friend, and always keep a lookout for each other. Even better, go with a group. You can find like-minded people by searching Facebook for 'wild swimming' groups (a wide range of regional groups and links are given on [wildswimming.co.uk](http://wildswimming.co.uk)). Or post on the 'Outdoor Swimming Society' Facebook group, where you can also find 'socials' and 'adventure swims' organised through social media. Devon, Cornwall and the Lake District are particularly active regions. Outdoor Swimmer magazine publishes a list of events each month, and these are growing in number every year. These can be a great place to meet people. Events such as the Dart 10k and Bantham Swoosh are very sociable.

Also organise your own friends. Many people don't know how much they like wild swimming until they try. Lure your mates out on a hot day. Suggest a pub walk, but along a well-known swimming river with good swimming spots (e.g. the Thames, Wey, Wye, Ouse, Avon, Dart or Wharfe). Ensure everyone brings swimming costumes and a lightweight towel or sarong. Once people are hot and active they are more likely to take the plunge, and if you are lucky you will find other people already enjoying the water, which will entice the group in.



Children, particularly, love playing in water. Encourage their love of our outdoor waterholes but keep a constant eye on all children. Watch out for signs of hypothermia (uncontrollable shivering is the first stage) as this can quickly cloud judgement and lead to slips, trips and falls. If there is a lot of splashing and jumping going on, try to encourage kids to keep their mouth closed, and avoid swallowing the water. Drink too much and it will give young tummies belly ache and the runs.

## Where to wild swim

Some people like to drift downstream on a river safari, others like to follow a mountain brook dipping in every pool or waterfall as they go. I like rope swings, river tubing and places for jumping, while others would prefer to take a canoe ride, and jump in for a swim along the way. Whatever your style you will find many places recommended in the various wild swimming guidebooks, or if you search the internet for wild swimming places or maps.

To find your own places, all you need is an Ordnance Survey map (ideally 1:25,000) and some map reading skills or download using the Viewranger app on a smartphone. On smaller rivers look for old weirs (marked by a straight line across the river) which create pools in rivers otherwise too shallow for swimming. On larger rivers, especially those with locks and boats, it should be deep enough to swim anywhere. Examine the bends of rivers, where the inside often creates a beach while the outside deepens into a deep pool. Bridges are often built where the river naturally narrows into a gorge, and these can make excellent plunge pools for bridge jumping. Bridges, fords and riverside tracks indicate there will be few problems with access. In National Park areas much of the land will be

marked orange or 'access land' with free right to roam. Lakes and rivers in these areas are often wilder and perfect for a dip, as you can get right up to the bank or shore. Waterfalls will also be marked, and many have a plunge pool where the water has scoured out a bowl.

While mountain areas will often be dramatic with waterfalls, gorges and tarns and the cleanest of waters, the water will be cold, good for short and exhilarating plunges only. Lowland areas will have warmer winding rivers and lakes, better for a longer swim, but with a greater possibility of bugs and beasts. Check the 'historic river water quality' using the Environment Agency online maps.

The following list offers some great places for beginners to have a go. →



## About the book

Wild Swimming: 300 hidden dips in the rivers, lakes and waterfalls of Britain by Daniel Start is available from Wild Things Publishing. £16.99. For more places and safety information visit [www.wildswimming.co.uk](http://www.wildswimming.co.uk)



Readers can receive 25% off and free P&P with discount code 'outdoorswimmer' at checkout

# UK TOP 10 FOR BEGINNERS

**1** **HIGHER GLEN ETIVE POOLS**  
A dramatic glen with many wonderful pink-rock river pools, easily accessible from the road. Plunge into the first set of pools or continue down to find the deep gorge section. Popular wild camping spot. Turn left a mile after The Kings House Hotel. 56.6252, -4.9052



**2** **GRANTCHESTER MEADOWS, RIVER CAM, CAMBRIDGE**  
Over two miles of meadows and swimming from Sheep's Green down to the Orchard Tea Gardens in Grantchester. Once a favourite wild swimming places of the Bloomsbury Group, including Rupert Brooke and Virginia Woolfe. 20 mins walk from the train station. 52.1907, 0.1046



**3** **SHARRAH POOL, R DART, DARTMOOR**  
The Rivert Dart has so many possibilities for swimming. Head upstream to Horseshoe Falls and eventually Sharrah pool. There are some good chutes here if you have an inner tube. 50.5301, -3.8396

**4** **WIMBORNE MINSTER, RIVER STOUR, BOURNEMOUTH**  
An old Roman ford, footbridge and popular river pool with little beach. Near the National Trust's Kingston Lacy estate and beech avenue. 50.8000, -2.0076



**5** **PORT MEADOW, RIVER THAMES, OXFORD**  
Two miles of sandy beaches and grassy meadows, though watch out for cattle. The idyllic countryside views with the church spires in the background provided much inspiration for Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland. 51.7698, -1.2881

**6** **LOWER DDWLI FALLS, R FECHAN, WATERFALL WOODS, SOUTH WALES**  
Part of a series of stunning 'forest lidos' on beautiful trails through the 'Waterfall Woods' in the Brecon Beacons. This fantastic pool sits under a wide, arced cascade. Park at Pont Melin-fach car park, off the Ystradfellte road. 51.7826, -3.5853



## 7 FARLEIGH HUNGERFORD, RIVER FROME, WILTSHIRE

England's oldest surviving river swimming club, founded in the 1930s, above a small weir with lawns, a diving board and rope swings. There's a ruined castle nearby and a great riverside campsite at Stowford Farm just upstream, which serves delicious cream teas. This is a wonderfully friendly and sociable place to wild swim.

# 8

## FAERIE POOLS, GLEN BRITTON, ISLE OF SKYE, SCOTLAND

Embued with legend and fairy tales, the famous 'Allt Coir a Mhadaidh' pools and waterfalls are tinged with jade hues due to the volcanic gabbro rocks and the mystical peaks of the Black Cuillin mountains tower overhead. 57.2497, -6.2554 T6

## 9 BLUE POOL, FRIOG, FAIRBOURNE

A very deep, green-blue rectangular pool in a great quarry amphitheatre entered by a spooky railway tunnel. Views of Cardigan Bay. 300m south of Fairbourne church, turn left at telephone box and head up into the ruined mine area. 52.6891, -4.0413 16

# 10

## APPLETREWICK, RIVER WHARFE, YORKSHIRE DALES

A pretty river pool with a small island and rapids upstream. There's a rope swing on the far side, grassy banks and field for picnics. This is a great spot to while away summer days. 54.0332, -1.9213

## JOE MINIHADE

Age: 35

I have been a wild swimmer for the past seven years. Swimming outdoors became such an obsession that I decided to retrace Roger Deakin's book *Waterlog*, which is an account of his journey swimming through the British Isles.

**How did you first get into outdoor swimming?** I'd been wanting to swim at Hampstead mixed ponds for some time, but never had the bottle. My girlfriend, now wife, convinced me it'd be the perfect way to cool off on a hot summer's day. I loved it immediately.

**What does outdoor swimming mean to you?** Freedom and peace of mind. Wild swimming helped me clear my mind of anxiety at a time I was struggling to make sense of myself. There's no better way of being in the moment. Being in open water is about survival and 'now-ness' in the purest sense.

**What made you take up wild swimming?** Beyond that first dip at Hampstead, it was the writing of Roger Deakin that truly inspired me to take it up full time. *Waterlog* is an incredible piece of work, imbued with a joie de vivre that I was desperate to experience for myself. It led me to retrace Roger's entire journey, initially as a bit of fun, but then more seriously as a way to rid myself of anxiety. The book of my journey, *Floating: A Life Regained*, is out in April.

**Favourite swim spot?**



Being in open water is about 'now-ness'

I've been lucky enough to swim all over the UK, so picking one is difficult. For every day dips, it's hard to beat Hampstead mixed pond. It's a piece of the countryside in the heart of London. But for something spectacular, you can't beat Great Popplestones Bay on Bryher in the Isles of Scilly. The water is icy, but swimming over the kelp forests with a snorkel on is unbeatable.

**What are your top three tips for beginners at wild swimming?** Don't go alone if it's your first time. Study

the body of water you're about to enter. And don't be a hero – you don't need to stay in for ages and could be putting yourself in danger if you do.

**What kind of training do you do?** I consider myself more of a dipper than a swimmer, so I don't really train.

**What kit do you use?** In summer, a pair of neoprene socks, some shorts and a pair of goggles. The latter tend to be pulled off so I can scan the horizon without a foggy view. In winter, an old surfing wetsuit, two silicon caps, boots, gloves and goggles. Shorts if I'm feeling brave.

**What would you say to someone considering getting into outdoor swimming?**

Be prepared and don't feel like you have to stay in for ages. It takes a long time to build up resistance to cold water and even now I feel it after a brief dip. And make sure you pack a flask, you can't beat a warming brew after a wild swim.

I consider myself more of a dipper than a swimmer

# OUTDOOR SWIMM

You don't need a lot of kit to get started but a few choice items will help

## SWIMMING HAT



A bright coloured swimming hat to insulate your head and make you visible to other water users. Silicone is more comfortable than latex as and gives better insulation.

## GOGGLES



TINTED, POLARIZED OR CLEAR - THE CHOICE IS YOURS

Again it's all about comfort and fit - not all faces and swimming environments are the same. Open water goggles tend to have a wider lens than pool goggles.

## EAR PLUGS



Help protect your ears if they are susceptible to infection and many swimmers say it increases cold water tolerance. There is no need to wear them if you don't want to.

## WATERPROOF SUN CREAM



You can still get burnt while you are swimming!

## CHANGING ROBE



KEEP WARM, STAY DRY

The freedom of being an outdoor swimmer may mean that your swim location doesn't have a changing room. A changing robe keeps you warm and dry and saves your blushes.

## COSTUME



Comfort and fit are key. Board shorts for men will seriously hamper your swimming and are not recommended for anything except dipping.

## CROCS



Pre and post swim footwear helps navigate pebbly riverbanks and beaches.

## TOWEL



Whatever you like! We like big fluffy ones to wrap up in after a chilly swim, but lightweight travel ones are great if space or weight is an issue.

## POST SWIM KIT

### BOBBLE HAT

It doesn't have to have a bobble, but a woolly hat is great to assist with warming up post swim.



### KIT BAG

Whatever you like, but consider a dry bag to keep your wet kit separate from the dry.

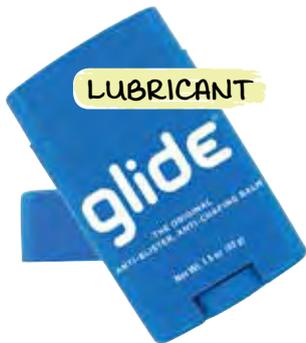


### LAYERS!

Layering up is the best way to warm up and a good woolen or synthetic base layer is key (not cotton). On top of the base layer add what you like: hoodies, jumpers etc. Down jackets are a popular toasty top layer.



# ING KIT



Avoid chaffing from your wetsuit or swimming costume with lubricant in those likely areas – underarm, neck and edge of wetsuit etc.

## NEOPRENE HAT, GLOVES AND BOOTS



These can all help keep out the cold and extend your time in the water. Particularly useful in colder temperatures.

## WETSUIT



SUITS YOU

A wetsuit is not essential but the buoyancy and warmth that it provides means it can be a good option for when you're starting out in open water.



## How to put on a wetsuit

Dan Bullock explains how to squeeze into neoprene

### STAGE ONE

Roll the upper body down, exposing the openings to the legs and gently push in your feet. Work on the very lowest sections to start with and do not move up the leg until the suit fully fits over the ankles, onto the calves and up to the knees.

### STAGE TWO

If there is loose material in the legs, the suit will end up tight around the torso. It's better to pull the suit into your crotch and expose your ankles rather than vice versa.

### STAGE THREE

Once you are happy with the fit under the crotch, ease the lower section of the torso part of the suit up and over your hips. Pull the suit higher up the chest and carefully insert one



arm. Work the hands all the way through the sleeves.

### STAGE FOUR

Once the hands are free, start the trickier process of sliding the arm material up towards the shoulders. A small amount of bunching around the shoulders is acceptable as this leaves room for the arms to manoeuvre.

### STAGE FIVE

Avoid pulling on the cord to close the zip as this stresses the stitching in the suit. It's usually easier to ask someone else to close your zip. Seal

the join around the neck with the Velcro once the zip has been fastened and make you sensitive neck skin isn't in contact with any rough edges or fastenings.

Improper handling of a wetsuit can easily damage it, so keep fingernails short and remove jewellery.

# FRONT CRAWL BASICS

Start your journey towards becoming a more efficient and faster swimmer

**F**ront crawl is the fastest and most efficient known way for swimmers to move across the surface of the water. Mastering it, however, takes time and effort as it requires a complex series of moves involving the whole body. If you are serious about improving your front crawl, we recommend taking advice from a coach as receiving direct and personal feedback will accelerate the learning process.

Meanwhile, the following guidelines written by Terry Laughlin, founder of Total Immersion, will get you started.



## STEP 1:

### INTEGRATE YOUR STROKE

Swimming efficient front crawl requires a high degree of coordination between the different parts of our body. However, our survival instinct is to thrash at the water in an uncoordinated fashion. We need to overcome our instincts in order to improve. The fastest way to improve is to reduce drag. Do this by making your entire body – from fingertips through torso to toes – as long, stable and sleek as possible. Imagine yourself switching constantly between a powerful streamline position on your left side to the same thing on your right side. This only works if your body moves as an integrated, coordinated unit.

- \* Make sure head and spine are aligned at all times. This is a particular challenge when breathing. Keep head stable and visualise moving your head-spine line constantly forward through the water – like an arrow through the air – eliminating side to side or vertical movements.
- \* Extend each arm forward and slightly downward along imaginary tracks in line with your shoulders. Press back in a straight line (no 'S'-shaped pull) and relax on the recovery. Aim for symmetry between your two arms.
- \* Keep your core engaged to minimise any wobbles or lateral movements.
- \* Focus on keeping your legs in the slipstream of your upper body. Kick as little as possible, with small relaxed movements.
- \* Drive your strokes from your core, not your arms

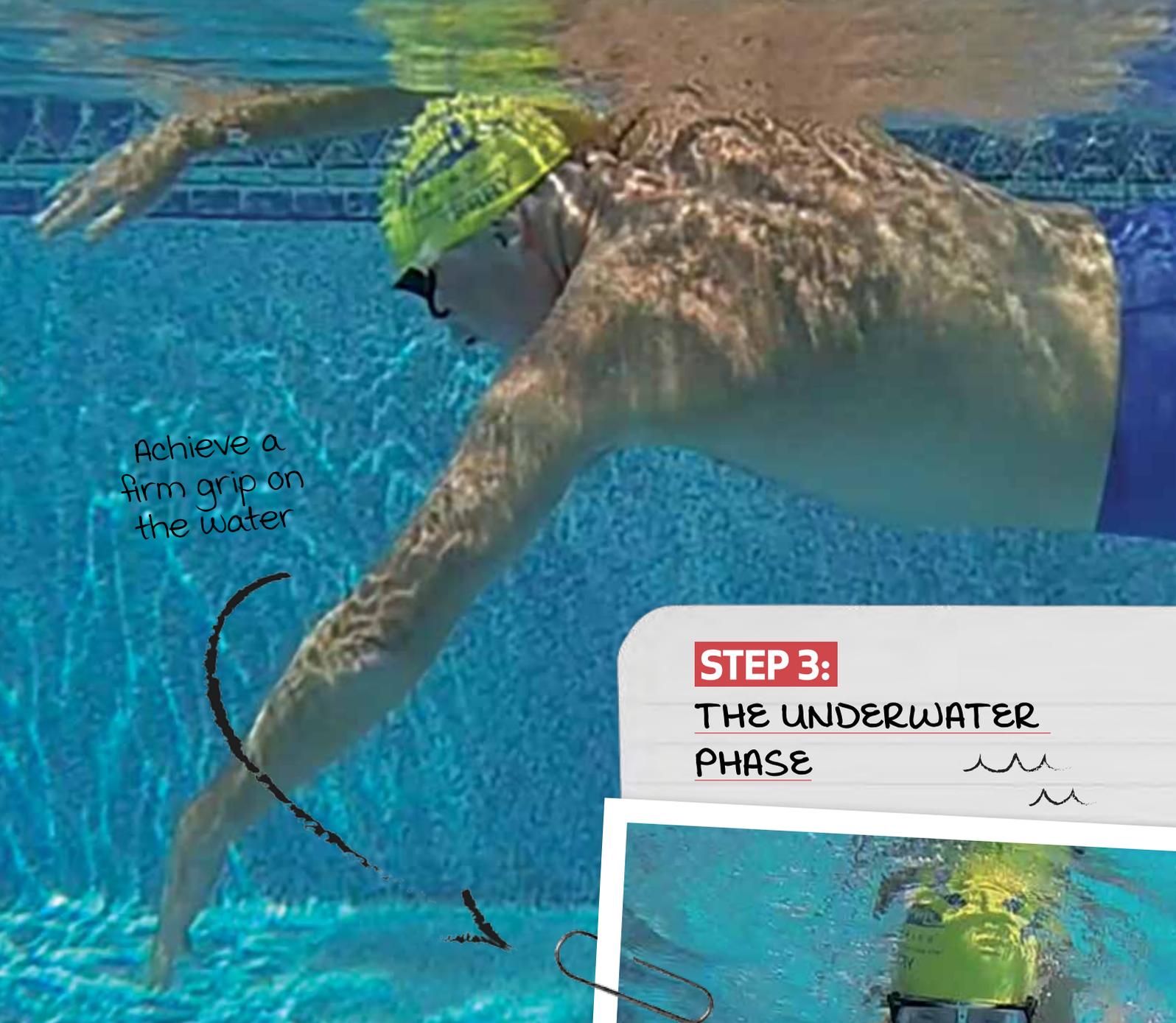


## STEP 2: ARM RECOVERY

The 'recovery' in front crawl is the movement that returns the hand from where it exits the water near your hips to where it re-enters in front of your shoulder. It is often a neglected part of the stroke as most coaches and swimmers give exclusive focus first on the propulsive underwater phase. Ignoring it is a mistake because it plays a critical role in maintaining a balanced, stable core body.

- \* Relax. As the name suggests, recovery is your chance to give your arm a little rest. Turn off all muscles from elbow down and suspend hand loosely from elbow as you bring your arm forward.
- \* A little-known "rule" of efficient swimming is that any body part moving through the air must move in the direction of travel. Do this by (i) Striving to bring hand forward from exit to entry point by a perfectly straight line; while (ii) barely grazing the water's surface with fingertips. Aim to have a gap between fingertips and water of 1 to 2 millimetres.
- \* Re-enter hand to the water just a bit in front of your head - avoid over-reach. Imagine cutting a slot in the surface with fingertips. Slide forearm through that slot.





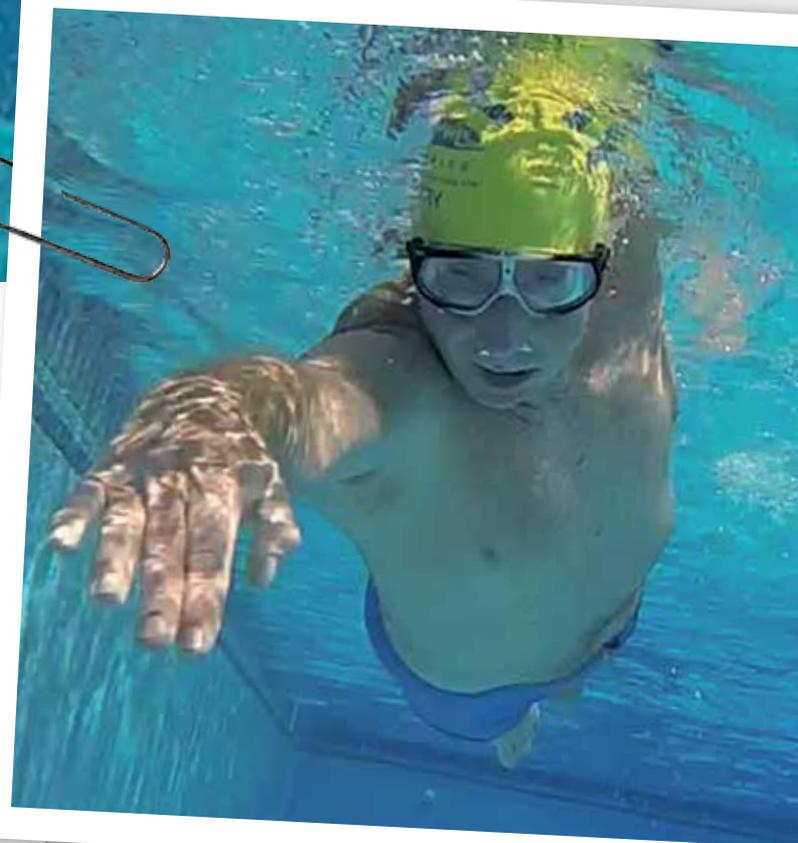
Achieve a firm grip on the water

### STEP 3:

## THE UNDERWATER PHASE



- \* The priority here is to make every stroke count. Not by applying more force to the water but by achieving a firm 'grip' on the water, and striving to move your body past your hand. After slicing your hand through the 'slot', continue on the same path forward and slightly downward until it reaches full extension. At this point, your hand should be deeper than the lowest part of your body—generally the hips. Your body should form a long, sleek, stable line from fingertips to toes.
- \* Next, 'trap' the water behind hand and forearm—fingertips pointing down and palm back. Press straight back—with precision rather than force—striving to hold your place, more than push water back. This allows powerful, tireless core muscle—rather than smaller, weaker arm muscles—to take on more of the work of propulsion. Drive forward with your opposite hip to create a sensation of moving your body past your hand rather than pulling hand backwards.





## STEP 4: SEAMLESS BREATHING

Many people struggle to swim more than a length or two of front crawl not because they lack fitness but because of poor breathing technique. Primal survival instincts drive us to try to lift the head to avoid choking on the water. Ironically, this makes choking more likely by causing the body to sink as our heads are so heavy. Even more fundamental than head position – and often as non-instinctive – is how we move air in and out of the lungs. To breathe with ease, keep air exchange constant. Start exhaling as soon as you have inhaled. And make exhaling the primary focus of the breath, while inhaling simply ‘happens’. Finally, avoid overfilling your lungs. Inhale just enough, as if you were singing.

### WORK ON THESE FOCAL POINTS:

- \* Keep head aligned with spine. This is the most fundamental skill in efficient front crawl swimming. Your head should feel cushioned by the water. Visualise head-spine line as a ‘laser’ projecting forward at all times, even when you breathe.



Mastering front crawl is a long-term – but immensely rewarding – journey. This article is an overview of that process. For a complete guide, Total Immersion offers a downloadable Effortless Endurance Freestyle Self Coaching Course. Anyone can improve. It doesn't require youth, athleticism, or special talents – only a curious and open mind and a desire to enjoy the process.

- \* Swim with your whole body – moving arms, legs and head as an integrated part of a whole-body action, synchronised with core body rhythms. As your right hand enters the water and extends forward, your left shoulder rotates out of the water. To integrate breath with body movement, simply let chin follow shoulder to air.
- \* Practise breathing to both sides. This doesn't need to be every three strokes as in traditional bilateral breathing but could, instead, mean breathing one length to right, next length to left.



# BETTER BREAST

Follow our nine steps to an efficient breaststroke technique you can be proud of

**B**reaststroke is the world's most popular stroke, primarily because it's closest of all the strokes to how humans swim instinctively. It's also a great stroke for swimming outside, especially if you want to observe nature and your surroundings, as it disturbs the water much less than the other strokes. Even if you plan to mostly swim front crawl, it's worth practising breaststroke too as it gives you a chance to work different muscles and appreciate the water in a different way.

However, many people swim breaststroke very inefficiently and waste a lot of energy. In this article, Terry Laughlin from Total Immersion explains a markedly more efficient way of swimming breaststroke. The starting point for this technique is to understand how elites swim breaststroke faster than you swim freestyle – but this doesn't mean you need to aspire to be a world-class breaststroker to learn from them. The ideas are neither complicated

nor difficult to practise so will be fun to try whatever your level. And, if you're a beginner, this is a great place to start thinking about swimming breaststroke.

## Four fundamentals

**1 OVER-AND-UNDER BREASTSTROKE** (like butterfly) is a 'wave-form stroke' in which we travel forward – a bit like a mythical sea monster – by surfacing to breathe and submerging to streamline. But because you travel much farther and faster underwater – and spend that time in a restful glide – strive to spend as much of each stroke cycle as possible in streamline below the surface. Minimise time in non-streamlined, above-surface positions.

**2 'HUG' THE SURFACE.** Wave forms have two properties: wave amplitude and wave length. When you compress amplitude you increase

### EXPERT ADVICE

Terry Laughlin is founder and head coach of Total Immersion and winner of six national masters championships since turning 55. [totalimmersion.co.uk](http://totalimmersion.co.uk)



# STROKE



length, i.e. travel farther and faster in each stroke cycle. Do this by 'hugging' the surface – swimming barely above and barely below. How you breathe is key to achieving this, as I explain below.

**3 KEEP HEAD ALIGNED.** Along with submerging in each stroke and hugging the surface, a critical skill in maximising forward motion – and energy or momentum – is to keep your head aligned with your spine during and after breathing. Lifting and lowering the chin increases up-and-down movement in the body. Breathe as if wearing a neck brace.

**4 TAKE SMALLER STROKES.** As humans (not fish) we're simply fantastic at burning energy and creating drag with our pull and kick. Unfortunately we are not so good at creating propulsion. You absolutely cannot go wrong by making your pull and kick smaller.

## 5 CRITICAL MOMENTS

Each cycle of breaststroke has several critical 'moments' during which you can greatly increase efficiency by performing several 'mini-skills.' Each moment lasts just a fraction of a second: you'll need strong and targeted focus to acquire the critical skills. To learn each, swim repeats of 25 metres or less with laser-like focus on just one thing.

### MOMENT #1: STREAMLINE

- \* This is the most critical, but easiest, skill. Spend 60 per cent or more of each stroke cycle in streamline below the surface by doing the following:
- \* **Get everything beneath the surface; leaving even a sliver of your head above the surface will slow you down.**
- \* But don't dive. Slip barely beneath the water. While in streamline: (i) release head between arms with eyes down; and (ii) streamline feet behind lower leg.

# BREASTSTROKE BASICS



## MOMENT #2: CATCH THE WAVE

Don't 'climb' back to the surface. Momentum and buoyancy will take you there naturally. Experience this by taking a single stroke – or complete a series of strokes – by holding your sub-surface glide. Feel yourself glide naturally to the surface. Repeat until you're keenly aware of the moment when your head would break the surface on its own, with no help from your hands.

## MOMENT #3: 'MINI-PULL'

A small, quick, and light hand scull coordinated with the natural forces of momentum and buoyancy maximises propulsive power while minimising muscular effort.

### Focus on the following:

- \* **'HELP' WITH HANDS.** Feel the moment just before your head breaks through the surface. At this moment, use your hands – lightly and briefly – to 'help' your head break through in the direction it's already going.
- \* **STAY ALIGNED.** Your head is moving in the ideal direction to allow an effortless breath with no chin-lift. Keeping head in-line will greatly increase power.
- \* **GRAZE THE SURFACE.** Graze the surface with your chin as you breathe. And keep your gaze on the surface at a spot just two inches in front of your nose. Make your breath 'sneaky' – as if



## MOMENT #4: MINI-KICK

Nearly everyone tries to kick too big and too powerfully, wasting energy and increasing drag while doing little for propulsion. A smaller, lighter and more precisely directed kick will create far more thrust with far less effort than a higher-powered kick.

### Focus on the following:

- \* **SNEAK YOUR LEGS.** Avoid creating drag by 'sneaking' your legs into kicking position. Keep them hidden behind your torso as you draw them forward.

- \* **KICK HANDS FORWARD.** Use this as a cue for stroke timing. Use feet to kick your hands – and your entire body – back to streamline.
- \* **SMALLEST POSSIBLE.** A smaller kick will create more thrust and less drag. Strive for the least knee-flexion and heel-separation as you 'cock' your feet for the kick. It's easy to make this movement too big, nearly impossible to make it too small.
- \* **EASY DOES IT.** Push back lightly against the water, while maximising backward pressure. Avoid kicking out, down or in. A lighter, more directed, thrust will move you forward more – and move the water around less.

## MOMENT #5: PIERCE THE WATER



Breaststroke creates a large bow wave. Do your best to minimise it while stroking and breathing. Then return underwater by 'spearing' through your bow wave. Here's how:

- \* **THREAD THE NEEDLE.** Align arms, head and shoulders to 'dart' through the smallest possible hole in your bow wave.
- \* **EXTEND YOUR HEAD.** Return your head

from above the surface to below – and between your shoulders – by extending it forward into streamline. Moving it forward, rather than down, will add significantly to forward momentum.

- \* **BARELY BELOW.** Get your head – and all body parts – barely beneath the surface. Have someone watch to ensure that you 'disappear' below the surface during glide – and that your body is aligned,



**THRILL  
TO THE  
CHILL**



## John Coningham-Rolls, vice president of the International Winter Swimming Association, explains the joys of cold water swimming

**W**hen autumn and winter are just around the corner and outside water temperatures creep downwards, the local pool's balmy water and heated changing rooms become ever more tempting.

So why do some of us continue to plunge into our favourite swim spots throughout the cold season? Aside from the famous 'feel-good factor', usually verified with great gusto by every cold water swimmer you meet (honestly, if you haven't tried it, do – you'll see what we mean), research in 1998 by Dr T Grune at the Clinic for Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Humboldt University, Germany, also suggests that consistent and short immersions in cold water may help our immune system.

When we asked members at South London Swimming Club why they swim throughout the

winter, the overwhelming response was because it is such fun. As one member explained: "In winter, swimming is my favourite social activity. Everyone is always laughing! The speedy getting ready, the knowledge that what you're doing is slightly barking, the actual getting-in bit, then the exhilaration of being truly awake, followed by the wonderful afterglow – you can't beat it."

Another says: "The high stays with you for the whole day – it's great to know you've had an outdoor adventure before breakfast, when everyone else around you is missing out and hiding from the elements."

Despite the laughs, safety is paramount, and the key point to remember is to never swim alone. This being the case, it is a great delight to see a growing number of clubs and groups across the UK springing into action and embracing the idea of winter swimming, making it feasible for more people to participate. Joining a group, or continuing to swim into winter with your current club, is the best way to approach a winter season of swimming, as this will help you overcome initial obstacles such as seeking permissions and checking out weather conditions, as most groups already do this for you.

Many swimmers ask me if they need to put on weight to swim through winter. Although I always like to point out that thin penguins are few and far between (which I find a comforting

**IN WINTER,  
SWIMMING IS  
MY FAVOURITE  
SOCIAL ACTIVITY.  
EVERYONE IS  
ALWAYS LAUGHING!**



mantra), the short answer is no. People of all shapes and sizes enjoy winter swimming but it does seem to be true that a little padding can help some people stay in the water longer.

There are, however, some basic safeguards you need to be aware of. First, be aware of your limits and don't stay in the water for too long: even a minute or two is long enough at first. Take advice from those who are more experienced than you, and if you're not sure, always do less rather than more. With winter swimming, little but often allows the body to acclimatise to the shock of cold water, and will help avoid the onset of serious hypothermia.

It is also vital to ensure that you have sufficient warm clothing to change into after your swim. When you come out of the water you will soon learn about your short 'honeymoon period' - a few minutes in which you will be able to change before you start to feel extremely cold. Get changed quickly, from head to toe, but leave your swim hat on until the very last minute, finally replacing it with a woolly hat to keep the heat in. If you're struggling, don't be shy; ask for help from fellow swimmers.

Below 5 degrees is the temperature people refer to as 'ice swimming'

In recent years our September and October weather in the UK has been relatively mild, which has eased the transition to winter. That being said, it's not

uncommon to find that a swim which seemed comfortable one week suddenly seems icy cold the next, especially as we move into October. Consequently, you should be mindful of air and water temperatures as we move towards winter and reduce your swim times and distances accordingly.

Roughly speaking, we experience temperatures of between 15 and 20 degrees Celsius in the seas and larger inland waters around the UK in summer (colder further north) and, with a bit of training, most people can swim for an hour or more at these temperatures. In spring and autumn, we might

**IT IS AT THESE TEMPERATURES WHERE YOU REALLY START TO EXPERIENCE THE BUZZ OF WINTER**

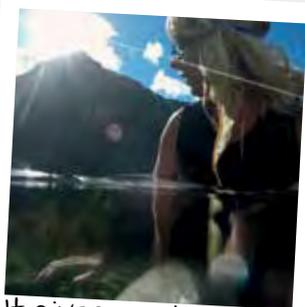
have water temperatures between 10 and 15 degrees. Experienced swimmers can still sustain long distance swims in these waters but most people start to find this a bit cold, especially towards the lower end. Between 5 and 10 degrees will be painfully cold for most people - especially when you first get in the water - but it is also at these temperatures where you really start to experience the buzz of winter swimming.

Below 5 degrees is the temperature people refer to as 'ice swimming'. At this temperature my hands sting and I get the 'ice-cream head' syndrome - a similar feeling to gobbling an ice-cream too quickly. Swimming a mile in water

below 5 degrees is described as an 'Ice Mile' and is a significant (and potentially dangerous) challenge that should only be attempted by experienced swimmers under close supervision. Quick dips are the order of the day for the majority of us.

When it comes to swimming attire, whether you opt for a wetsuit or not, a swim cap is vital to help keep the heat in. To mitigate the cold you may also want to consider wearing two swim hats, or a neoprene cap, plus ear plugs, gloves and booties. Many die-hard winter swimming enthusiasts will insist that for the best experience you should face the elements with a just swimsuit and hat, and you may find that many winter swimming competitions do enforce strict clothing rules. However, please don't let that put you off winter swimming for fun. If you want to swim in a wetsuit, do. If you want to wear gloves and boots, do. Just get out there and enjoy the water.





It gives me time and space to refocus

## VIVIENNE RICKMAN-POOLE

**Age:** 43

**Swim Highlights:** The real highlight of swimming for me is the change in our seasons, I like to feel the temperatures fall and rise on my skin. It's not something that can be measured on a thermometer, it's deep, pure and internal.

**How did you first get into outdoor swimming?**

My mum was a swimmer, a hardy soul from the Orkney Islands from a time where swimming only happened outside in the sea or harbour pools. She ensured I was swimming as soon as I was old enough to go in the water. Childhood photos and memories are of swimming in streams, rivers, gravel pits and the sea where I grew up in the New Forest.

**What does outdoor swimming mean to you?**

It has many meanings, but I would say that most of all it gives me time and space to refocus my creativity, to give clarity of thought, to explore the vast nothingness under the surface. It feeds physical cravings for warmth (this is metaphorical rather

than the temperature), depth, to be enveloped in the silky softness. It also means time alone, which I value immensely, yet it can equally mean a quite joyous time with others. The two experiences are very different. I like both.

**What made you take up wild swimming?** I am not sure I have ever taken it up, it's just something I have always done. It is just 'swimming' after all. I have swum more outside since moving to Snowdonia 15 years ago. Who wouldn't want to swim outside when you live right next to hundreds of beautiful lakes?

**Favourite swim spot?** Llyn du'r Arddu, situated on the flanks of Snowdon. It's a bit of a walk up to it from the village where I live, so not somewhere I visit everyday. It's location, blue azure water, and connection to the local area through its many tales of love and loss make it an awe-inspiring place.

**What is your top tip for beginners to wild swimming?** Read a weather forecast and be aware of the effects the weather has on bodies of water.

# TAKE THE PLUNGE

## WITH A SWIMMING HOLIDAY

The growing range of swimming holiday options includes guided tours, training camps and events – and there are lots of great resources to support a DIY trip. By Jonathan Knott

**T**here is an increasing array of options for making swimming the focus of a well-deserved break. But what exactly is a swimming holiday, and how do you choose the right one? We've set out the key options below.

### Guided swimming tours

On a guided swimming tour, a specialist company leads guests through a series of open water swims based in a particular part of the world.

The first company to do this was SwimTrek, who kicked off with a week-long trip to the Greek Cyclades islands in 2003. Founder and director Simon Murie says that a tour company can take care of potentially headache-inducing logistics, such as arranging safety boat support and gaining any necessary permissions from the relevant authorities. "We give people the opportunity to swim in locations that aren't that straightforward to swim in if you're just doing it by yourself," he explains.

Opportunities for swimming tours have grown considerably since then. SwimTrek now runs tours in more than 30 different destinations around the world, lasting from one

to eight days. Island-hopping holidays in the Mediterranean remain popular. But Murie says that there is also increasing interest in more challenging and exotic trips. SwimTrek now offers adventurous tours like a trip through the Outer Hebrides based on an old-style square-rigged ship, as well as "dream destinations" including the Galapagos Islands and the Maldives.

And there are now a number of other companies offering swimming tours – each with a different twist. Some focus on a particular geographic area – like the Big Blue

Swim (Greece), Gone Swimming (Wales), or Real Swim Adventures (New Zealand). And each company has its own personality and approach. Gone Swimming's trips have flexible itineraries, decided as a group each

morning. On SwimQuest's trip to Arisaig in Scotland you can stay in a house with a grand piano and a games room, while on a Strel Swimming Adventures holiday you could be accompanied by the celebrated long distance swimmer, Martin Strel.

Swimming tours typically include accommodation and some meals in the price, but not travel to and from the destination. →

EACH COMPANY  
HAS ITS OWN  
PERSONALITY  
AND APPROACH



# SWIMMING HOLIDAYS



Images: SwimQuest



Kate Rew's DIY adventure in Iceland

← Prices range from around £100 to almost £3000, depending on the destination and length of the trip.

## Swimming events

There are a growing number of organised swimming events in the UK and further afield. These range from warm water events like the Barbados Open Water Festival, a five-day celebration of open water swimming, in the Caribbean, to those in colder temperatures, such as the Big Chill Swim in England's Lake District and the biennial World Winter Swimming Championships (in Tallin, Estonia in 2018).

Whether they are travelling abroad or staying in the UK for an event, many participants choose to make a holiday of it – something that organisers also often encourage.

## Training camps and coaching trips

If you want to improve your swimming, a coaching-focused trip could be for you. Some coaching companies run residential open water training camps. Total Immersion Swimming runs these in places ranging from Hawaii to Maritius, and Ocean Walker holds a range within the UK and overseas. SwimQuest and SwimTrek also each run coaching trips in the Balearic Islands for a range of abilities. Simon Murie says that SwimTrek's coaching week for beginners in Mallorca, involving pool and open water swimming, is a good first foray for newcomers. "Some people use that as a first step to coming on a further trip when they feel more comfortable," he says.

## Wellness retreats and multi-activity holidays

Some breaks and retreats offer a more gentle approach to outdoor swimming. Trips combining yoga and wild swimming are common. The Zest Life runs two-day wild swimming and yoga retreats in Anglesey, Wales. Gone Swimming's 'Pleasure of Adventure' holidays combine outdoor swimming with yoga or stand-up paddle boarding (SUP), and Art of Swimming runs workshops and courses teaching the Shaw Method technique at Champneys spa resorts.

For a more active multi-activity option,

SOME BREAKS AND RETREATS OFFER A MORE GENTLE APPROACH TO OUTDOOR SWIMMING

Swimrun, a sport that began in Sweden involving alternating runs and open water swims, is now growing in popularity in the UK. Race locations include the Isles of Scilly, Wales and Scotland.

## DIY swimming holidays

Of course, there's always the option of planning your own trip. Kate Rew, founder of the Outdoor Swimming Society (OSS), finds

that this is a great option for family holidays with her husband and two young sons. The family recently swam its way around Iceland (when her sons were two and three), dipping into 17 hot pots and pools in 10 days, and has also made trips to Wales and Scotland.

Rew says that having a concrete goal helps a trip transcend the day-to-day chores that travelling with children entails. "For me having that structure to a trip, that mission, whether it's to swim every day of a trip away or to swim in as many tarns as possible, is what elevates a trip from a holiday to an adventure," she says.

There are a number of good printed and digital sources of information and ideas that can support planning a wild swimming holiday. Printed guide books include as Rew's Wild Swim (UK) and guides to the UK, France, Spain and Italy and Sydney, Australia, from Wild Things Publishing.

There are a growing number of digital resources, too. The crowdsourced OSS map at wildswim.com lists many swimming spots within the UK and abroad, and there is a new function for people to add 'collections' of swims – "like Spotify for swimming", says Rew. And Wild Things Publishing provides some of its books as apps. "People find the apps very helpful as they provide a big Google Map for planning and linking places together, plus you don't need to carry the books," says the company's co-director Daniel Start.

Start recommends Dartmoor, the Brecon Beacons, Snowdonia, the Yorkshire Dales, and the Lake District as areas with lots of good swimming day trips. And while he believes that wild camping is a great way to enjoy the "ultimate magic" of a dawn or dusk swim, this is only legal in Scotland and Dartmoor. So his advice is to "be sensitive – arrive late, leave early, and leave no trace."

## How good do I have to be?

If you aren't a speed demon in the water, it shouldn't hold you back. On guided swimming tours, it's common for guests to be split into groups based on speeds. And some holidays, like SwimTrek's trip to the Dalmatian islands in Croatia, are designed to involve shorter swim distances. A lack of open water experience isn't a barrier either. SwimQuest says that about a third of its guests in 2016 had never swum in open water before.

If you have any questions, holiday companies and event organisers should be able to provide more information. With such a wide range on offer in terms of budget, location and level of challenge, the chances are there will be something to suit you.