

Open Water Questions Answered

1. What is the difference between open water and wild water?

Open water swimming usually takes place in an approved lake. Competition open water also takes place in rivers and occasionally the sea. Open water swimming is at a designated and supported location. There will be people with responsibility there. They will check the water quality is safe, the temperature, and will be trained in emergency procedures. Some locations will have personnel in kayaks on the water and some will just have lookouts on the shore.

Wild water swimming you are completely on your own. You have found some water somewhere and you enter completely at your own risk. This is highly dangerous even for experienced open water swimmers. You will be completely unaware of submerged dangers, marine life, and water quality. It is an unbelievably bad idea.

2. What do I need?

Goggles and a brightly coloured hat. Not black or grey or any dark colour. The personal at any open water venue will not let you enter the water in a dark hat. Your OOJSC hat will be fine. It is easily spotted against dark coloured lakes and identifies you are a serious swimmer to personal at the lake.

A swimming wetsuit is recommended. These are different to surfers and windsurfing. They are much thinner around the shoulder and under the arms to allow for stroke movement. Speedo do swimming wetsuits as do Zone3 and BlueSeventy. Make sure you wear it the right way around. The zip will be at the back. A wetsuit will make you more buoyant in the water and will allow you to swim using less energy than you would in the pool as it smooths out the body.

Body glide for around the neck if wearing a wetsuit. I wear a rash vest under my wetsuit as well to protect the back of my neck.

Flip flops, sliders, crocs to get to and from the lake.

Ear plugs. I just do, not necessary but the water is not like the pool or your bath.

<https://amzn.to/2U2RjrG>

Some lakes insist on a tow float. Always a good idea as they provide something to hold onto if you get tired and make you much more visible in the water to spotters and other lake users. <https://amzn.to/2Xol86O>



3. Is it cold?

The pool is around 26c and the lake will be colder. However, the wetsuit will keep you warm once you get going.

Whatever the temperature you must acclimatise before setting off. That means getting in and spending at least 30 seconds swimming a bit of slow breaststroke with full head submersion. This allows the body to get used to the temperature change, so you aren't gasping for breath 30 seconds into your swim.

4. Can I see underwater?

In most cases yes, but not like in the pool. You can usually see about 2m's although in some man-made lakes from chalk quarries it can be crystal clear.

5. How should I get into the water?

Slowly. Acclimatise for at least 30 seconds before swimming. This means complete head submersion to get used to the temperature a few times. Setting off immediately in cold water can lead to breath gasping. Get in and do some breaststroke arms and get your head under. Do not leave your depth until you are ready and comfortable.

6. Are there fish in the lake?

If there are, I have never seen them. You will be much bigger than any fish and the noise of swimming will scare them away.

7. Are there reeds and plants in the lake?

Probably. You can always ask the venue personal where any reeds are. They are just plants, like you have in the garden. You can always swim around them if you come across them.

8. What is on the bottom?

Probably silt. Quite a soft squidgy feeling between the toes. As soon as it is deep enough push off into your old person breaststroke and acclimatise.

9. What stroke should I do?

Virtually everyone will swim front crawl. Extend your stroke and really reach forward. Reduce your kick to almost just keeping your balance. Your leg muscles are big and if used extensively will tire you.

10. How do I swim in a straight line?

You will need to sight. Ideally once every 6 strokes. Swim bilaterally with the water line between your goggles and hat. Breath on the 1st and 4th stroke and sight on the 6th by just lifting your head out just enough to see. Do it quickly so you do not lose the rhythm of your stroke. If you lose sight of the buoy you are aiming for for two or three sights, stop swimming, tread water, and locate it. If possible, look for landmarks behind your target buoy that maybe easier to spot than the buoy itself. Do not just follow the swimmer in front. They could be going wrong. Take responsibility and sight on your 6th stroke. Stroke 1 breath right, stroke 2 swim, stroke 3 swim, stroke 4 breath left, stroke 5 swim, stroke 6 sight forward and repeat.

When you get to your target buoy swim a few strokes past and then tread water whilst locating the next one. Looks for landmarks behind the buoy to help and enjoy your next section.

11. Can I swim wherever I like?

No. Open water swimming lakes will have set swim routes. The location personal will provide details of the routes marked out by buoys and the approximate distance of each route. You must stick to the designated routes for your own safety. These are where spotters and other lake users expect swimmers to be.

12. What should I do when I get out?

Clean all your equipment thoroughly and have a good drink. I hang my wetsuit on a clothesline and hose inside and out. Rinse your goggles and your hat and anything else.

13. What if I feel ill after?

Call 111 and tell them when and where you were swimming. Also call the venue to report you are ill.

14. What if I feel ill or exhausted whilst swimming?

Stop swimming and tread water. If you require assistance float on your back with your arm in the air. If you have a tow float use it for support. If a kayak is there for assistance gently hold the front tip when instructed. Holding on to the side will capsize the kayak.

15. Does Orpington Ojays do Open Water swimming sessions.

No. We only do pool-based swimming. Several our team including swimmers, coaches and parents though enjoy open water so you might see faces you recognise in the water or perhaps working at some of the locations.

16. Where do others swim?

Chipstead Lake <http://www.triswim.org.uk/triswimopenwater/>

Leybourne Lake <https://www.facebook.com/LeybourneLakesWatersportsCentre/> / <https://www.leybournelakewatersports.co.uk/>

St. Andrews Lake <https://www.standrewslakes.co.uk/activities/swimming/> / <https://tinyurl.com/ydecynfz>