



# Wiltshire Wild Swim... and Glove Dippers



Bad weather means Ella Foote gets to swim with two groups for the price of one



I was invited to join the Wiltshire Wild Swim group by founding members Kristy Field and Sarah Webb. I was 24 days into my annual swim project, Dip a Day December, so when I arrived I wasn't surprised to find Christmas hats and mince pies on the agenda. I am sure it will seem a little strange when you are reading this at the start of February, but what a warm, friendly and festive welcome I was given.

Despite being set up only last summer, Wiltshire Wild Swim have 27 winter swimming members with a further 25 swimmers waiting to join this summer. They swim at four locations all within 10 minutes of Bradford-On-Avon, mainly swimming in rivers. Their regular swim time is every Sunday at 8am but, like all good swim groups, they also swim through the week when they feel like it.

## GLOVE DIPPERS

Heavy rain and strong flow in the River Avon meant that our swim had to be moved to a different location. But our alternative swim spot turned out to be a real gem. Glove Factory Studios is a workspace hub based in an industrial heritage building nine miles from Bath. There are two small lakes, home to

the Glove Dippers. You can get access via an annual club membership. Once you have had an induction, providing you swim with a buddy, you can swim when you like. The lakes are manmade and spring fed. The water quality is regularly tested and the 100 metre length makes it a lovely space to dip, train and swim. Plus, there is a café!

## DODGING GOOSE POO

It is a cold overcast day with the sun trying to break through as I am led across open fields. We change quickly, dodging goose poo. I get in first; it is a pleasant temperature for winter, around seven degrees. A queue of swimmers forms and files into the water, like a well-choreographed dance. Deep breath, submerge and then smiles. We swim in clockwise circles, chatting. A few put their heads down to swim, but mostly I can hear laughter.

As we swim Sarah and Kristy tell me about how Wiltshire Wild Swim started with an unprepared swim in May ending with a kilometre walk back to their stuff in nothing but their swimsuits, shivering but happy! From there the group grew through word of mouth. I chat to other swimmers who gush about winter swimming and the joy it brings them. The lake gets quieter and we slowly empty out, dry off and share festive sweet bites 🍪

You can find the Wiltshire Wild Swim group on Facebook and the Glove Dippers at [glovedippers.club](http://glovedippers.club)

If you would like us to join your group or club for a swim, email [editor@outdoorswimmer.com](mailto:editor@outdoorswimmer.com)

SWIMMERS FILE INTO THE WATER, LIKE A WELL-CHOREOGRAPHED DANCE

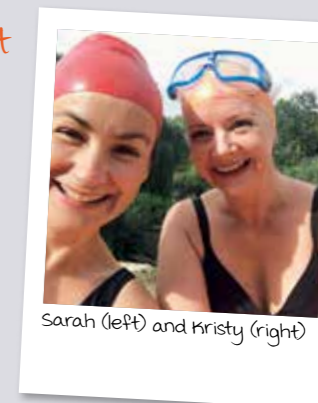


## Quick Q&A with Wiltshire Wild Swim founders Kristy Field (KF) and Sarah Webb (SW)

How did you get into outdoor swimming?

**SW:** I loved swimming in the sea as a child, having grown up in Kent but was a bit fearful of rivers until recently. Friends inspired me to take the plunge and with every swim I've grown in confidence.

**KF:** I've always loved swimming but never swimming pools so when Sarah encouraged me to swim in a river with her it was akin to an awakening! The realisation that I could swim outdoors was huge for me.



Sarah (left) and Kristy (right)

What inspired the group to start?

**SW:** Kristy and I met up on a warm evening in May last year for a swim in the River Avon. From that point we were hooked. Friends were interested in joining us and the group quickly grew through social media and word-of-mouth.

**KF:** We both were getting so many benefits, physically and mentally, from outdoor swimming that we wanted other people to experience that too. We invited our friends at first and quickly it escalated to a group of 30 swimmers.

Have you had any problems with authorities or people preventing you from swimming?

**SW:** No, on the whole people have been very encouraging and inspired by what we're doing. The only thing preventing us from swimming at one spot was a dead sheep! But we can happily say it's been washed over the weir now.

**KF:** We are very careful to swim with respect for others, the environment and make sure we leave no trace. Aside from the odd grumpy fisherman we've not encountered any problems so far.

What are the group's ambitions for the next year?

**SW:** We had our first AGM in January. The year hopes to include fundraising, exploring swim spots further afield, taking part in swim events, welcoming new people to the group and sharing our love and passion for outdoor swimming with them.

**KF:** I would like to see our group form local community links, encourage more people into the water, raise money for charity and participate in some events as a team.