



OVER 300 OF THE BEST LIDOS,
WILD SWIMMING AND OPEN AIR
SWIMMING SPOTS IN ENGLAND,
SCOTLAND & WALES

THE OUTDOOR SWIMMING GUIDE

EDITED BY
KATHY ROGERS

THE OUTDOOR SWIMMING GUIDE

OVER 400 OF THE BEST LIDOS,
WILD SWIMMING AND OPEN AIR
SWIMMING SPOTS IN ENGLAND,
WALES & SCOTLAND

EDITED BY
KATHY ROGERS



Vertebrate Publishing, Sheffield
www.v-publishing.co.uk

THE OUTDOOR SWIMMING GUIDE

EDITED BY **KATHY ROGERS**

First published in 2021 by Vertebrate Publishing.



Vertebrate Publishing, Omega Court, 352 Cemetery Road,
Sheffield S11 8FT, United Kingdom.
www.v-publishing.co.uk

Copyright © 2021 Vertebrate Publishing Ltd.

Vertebrate Publishing have asserted their rights under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as author of this work.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-83981-106-7

All rights reserved. No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means – graphic, electronic, or mechanised, including photocopying, recording, taping, or information storage and retrieval systems – without the written permission of the publisher.

Front cover: Wild swimming in the Lake District. © *James Kirby*

Back cover: (L–R) Bude sea pool. © www.paulmeyler.co.uk / Tinside lido. © *Jay Chard* / Janet's Foss. © *Louise Kibler*, @viewswithlou / West Lake at Colwick Country Park. © *Cameron Bonser*

All other photography copyright as credited.

Design and production by Jane Beagley & Cameron Bonser, Vertebrate Publishing.

Vertebrate Publishing is committed to printing on paper from sustainable sources.



Printed and bound in Europe by Latitude Press.

Every effort has been made to achieve accuracy of the information in this guidebook. The authors, publishers and copyright owners can take no responsibility for loss or injury (including fatal) to persons; loss or damage to property or equipment; trespass, irresponsible behaviour or any other mishap that may be suffered as a result of following the advice offered in this guidebook.

SAFETY STATEMENT

Outdoor and wild swimming are activities that carry a risk of personal injury or death. Participants must be aware of and accept that these risks are present and they should be responsible for their own actions and involvement. Nobody involved in the writing and production of this guidebook accepts any responsibility for any errors that it may contain, or are they liable for any injuries or damage that may arise from its use. Outdoor swimming and particularly wild swimming are inherently dangerous and the fact that individual descriptions in this volume do not point out such dangers does not mean that they do not exist. Take care.

Contents

Introduction *pVI*

Acknowledgements *pVI*

About this book *pVII*

Your first outdoor swim *pIX*

Emergencies *pXI*

Health & safety *pXI*

Swimming & the environment *pXII*

Wild swimming: the law *pXIII*

Kit list *pXIII*

South-West England *p1*

South-East England *p35*

Central England *p69*

Yorkshire *p105*

Northern England *p123*

Wales *p151*

Scotland *p173*

Swims at a glance *p204*



Introduction

Growing up in Devon, in the summer we would abandon the busy beaches for Dartmoor's peaty pools. We would splash in tree-fringed rivers and lie lizard-like on mossy boulders. We would cycle the canal to the Lock Cottage, take the ferry across the Exe to lounge poolside at Topsham Outdoor Swimming Pool.

Indoor swimming was about lessons, lengths and endless verrucas; outdoor swimming was like walking or running or scrambling – just another way of moving through the world, of being in the open air. The very best summer afternoons are about blue skies, bare feet and damp hair. Whether in dappled sunshine or spiky rain, outdoor swimming still offers childlike joy. You'll discover outdoor swimming destinations on the flanks of mountains, on boggy moors, among farmland and woods, by the seashore and even in the very middle of Britain's biggest cities.

This guide offers you the opportunity to discover the wondrous places to swim outside in England, Scotland and Wales. Whether you've never before swum under blue skies or you begin each day with a dawn dip, it reveals the gentle rivers, friendly lidos, mermaid tarns and open swim clubs in every corner of this water-drenched island.

Please don't take good care of this book. Cram it in your backpack or jam it in your glovebox. Sit on it when the grass is wet, use it as a tiny umbrella or an impromptu plate at your post-dip picnic, circle your favourite spots and pore over it in the pub. We want this book to become your dog-eared companion, sticky

with ice cream, squidged midges and squelchy mud. We hope that you will take this book on your adventures, and when you've visited the places in this guide, find a few more secret swim spots of your own.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Poonam Ahirwar, Jessica McElhattan, Alice Noel, Eleanor Quinn, and Rebecca Wales who researched the swim spots, and wrote the descriptions for this guide. Thanks also to Kathy Rogers, Suzanna Cruickshank and Ella Foote who provided invaluable editorial feedback on the book. We also appreciate the help that we have received from lidos and swimming pools, open swim organisations and keen swimmers and photographers, who have provided information and advice, and inspirational photography. We are particularly grateful for the help from busy volunteers who work tirelessly to operate community-run pools and for those pioneering exciting new open swim venues.

About this book

The Outdoor Swimming Guide provides details of more than 400 outdoor swimming spots (including lidos and outdoor pools, wild swims and open water areas) in England, Scotland and Wales.

All of the listed locations are turn-up-and-swim spots (although pre-booking is always advisable at popular lidos during the summer and has been a requirement during the Covid-19 pandemic); very few require membership (and those that do often offer it at a nominal fee on the day). The guide provides information on how to get there, when to go, what to expect, food and drink, public transport, parking and other local amenities. It also offers practical information on outdoor swimming:

- How to get started
- Health and safety and the law
- Kit.

This book divides outdoor swimming spots into three types; lidos or outdoor pools (highlighted in **blue**), wild swim spots (highlighted in **green**) and open water swims (highlighted in **purple**).

All the locations listed offer the opportunity for an outdoor swim. In addition, we have listed spots that offer:

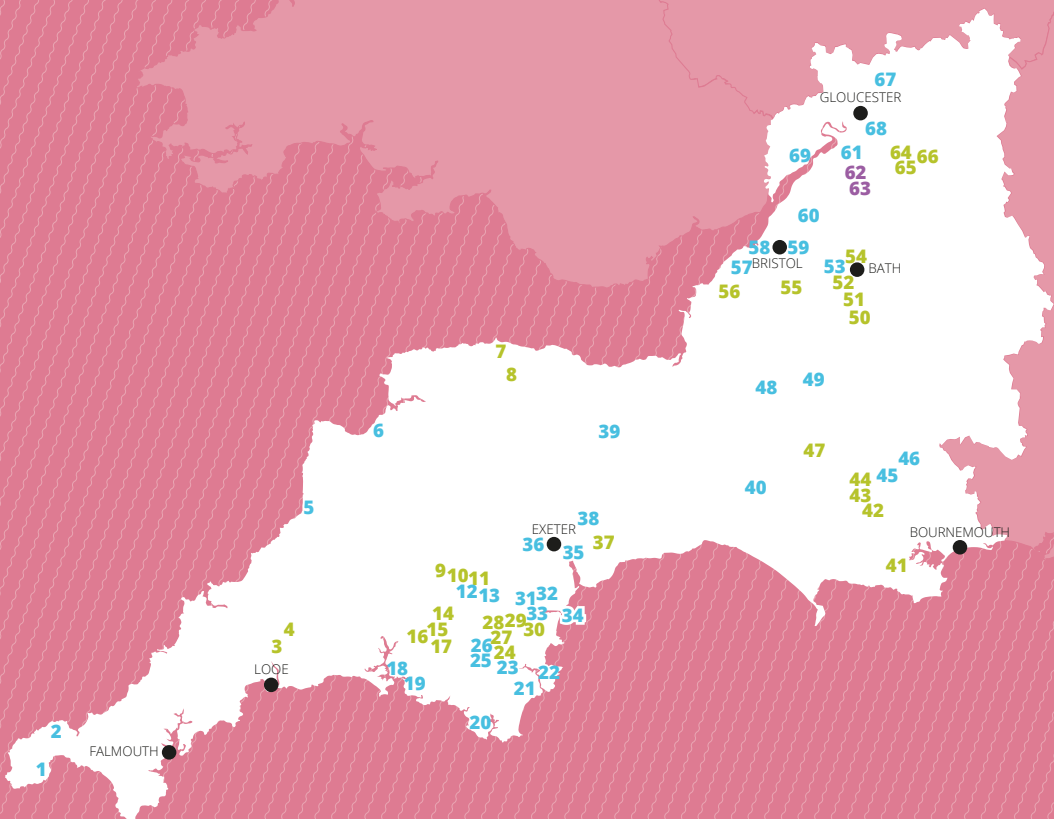
- Paddling – areas shallow enough (below 0.5 metres) to paddle, particularly for children.
- Plunge pool – a deeper area, often near a waterfall, where it is possible to submerge yourself and tread water, but there may be little space for swimming.

LIDOS AND OUTDOOR POOLS

Lidos and outdoor pools are built environments that have been constructed for the primary purpose of swimming. These include urban outdoor pools, small community lidos and tidal pools. There is a huge variation among outdoor pools: some are lifeguarded, some are not; some encourage picnics and even barbecues, some run strictly time-limited swim sessions; most discourage or prohibit smoking, alcohol (and drugs) and glass bottles or containers – many also frown on photography; most lidos and outdoor pools charge for entry, and some also charge for other facilities, such as showers or lockers. Whatever the rules and regulations, most outdoor pools offer friendly and scenic venues for a relaxing swim, and are beloved by locals and lido tourists alike.

Opening hours – lidos and outdoor pools often only open during summer months (generally between May and September). Some only open at weekends or during the early evening, particularly where the pool is shared with a local school. Opening hours are often subject to change, and may be dependent on pool maintenance, the weather or availability of volunteers – it is always advisable to check that a lido will be open before you visit.

Heated or unheated – not all lidos are heated, and even those that are increasingly are experimenting with cold or colder winter swimming sessions.



South-West England

- 1 Jubilee Pool *p4*
- 2 Hayle Outdoor Swimming Pool *p4*
- 3 Respryn Bridge *p5*
- 4 Dozmary Pool *p5*
- 5 Bude Sea Pool *p6*
- 6 Rock Sea Pool *p6*
- 7 Watersmeet *p7*
- 8 Cow Castle, River Barle *p7*
- 9 Cullever Steps Pool *p7*
- 10 Shilley Pool *p8*
- 11 Salmon Leaps *p8*
- 12 Chagford Pool *p9*
- 13 Moretonhampstead Community Swimming Pool *p9*
- 14 Cowsic Waterfall Pool *p10*
- 15 Crazy Well Pool *p10*
- 16 Magpie Bridge *p10*
- 17 Cadover Bridge *p11*
- 18 Mount Wise Swimming Pools *p11*
- 19 Tinside Lido *p12*
- 20 Salcombe Swimming Pool *p12*
- 21 Dartmouth Outdoor Pool *p13*
- 22 Shoalstone Seawater Pool *p13*
- 23 Dartington Swimming Pool *p14*
- 24 Staverton Weir, River Dart *p14*
- 25 Buckfastleigh Open Air Pool *p14*
- 26 Ashburton Swimming Pool *p15*
- 27 Wellsfoot Island *p16*
- 28 Horseshoe Falls *p16*
- 29 Spitchwick Common *p16*
- 30 Sharrah Pool *p16*
- 31 Bovey Tracey Swimming Pool *p17*
- 32 Chudleigh Community Pool *p17*
- 33 Kingsteignton Swimming Pool *p18*
- 34 Teignmouth Lido *p18*
- 35 Topsham Outdoor Swimming Pool *p19*
- 36 Cornwall House Outdoor Pool *p19*
- 37 Fluxton Weir, River Otter *p19*
- 38 Clyst Hydon Swimming Pool *p20*
- 39 Wivey Pool *p20*
- 40 Tintinhull Swimming Pool *p20*
- 41 Wareham Bridge *p21*
- 42 Fiddleford Manor *p21*
- 43 Colber Bridge *p22*
- 44 Cutt Mill *p22*
- 45 Shaftesbury Oasis Swimming Pool *p22*
- 46 Tisbury Swimming Pool *p23*
- 47 West Lydford, River Brue *p23*
- 48 Greenbank Pool *p24*
- 49 Shepton Mallet Lido *p24*
- 50 Farleigh Hungerford, River Frome *p24*
- 51 Avoncliff *p25*
- 52 Dundas Aqueduct, River Avon *p25*
- 53 Cleveland Pools *p26*
- 54 Kensington Meadows, River Avon *p26*
- 55 Rising Sun, River Chew *p27*
- 56 Yatton, River Yeo *p27*
- 57 Clevedon Marine Lake *p28*
- 58 Portishead Open Air Pool *p28*
- 59 Bristol Lido *p29*
- 60 Wotton Outdoor Swimming Pool *p29*
- 61 Stratford Park Lido *p30*
- 62 Lake 32 Outdoor Centre *p30*
- 63 Cotswold Country Park and Beach *p30*
- 64 Buscot Weir *p31*
- 65 Cheese Wharf *p31*
- 66 Lechlade, River Thames *p32*
- 67 Cirencester Open Air Swimming Pool *p32*
- 68 Sandford Parks Lido *p33*
- 69 Bathurst Pool *p33*





BUDE SEA POOL. © WWW.PAULMEYLER.CO.UK



JUBILEE POOL. © LYRA & MOTH PHOTOGRAPHY

JUBILEE POOL

50.1150, -5.5317 / Battery Road, Penzance, Cornwall, TR18 4FF / 01736 369224 / Swimming and paddling / www.jubileepool.co.uk



The striking Jubilee Pool is the UK's largest art deco, seawater lido and juts from the Cornish coast into the Atlantic Ocean. Opened in 1935, the pool was cleverly designed to cope with the full ferocity of the Cornish seas; the lido is triangular in shape and comprises a main pool, a geothermal pool and a learner pool. The pool has a strong commitment to sustainability, implementing a plastic-free policy and pioneering geothermal heating and low chemical use. The lido was seriously damaged in storms in 2014, and its restoration was only made possible by determined community support. You can top off your visit with food from the café, which specialises in local produce, and enjoy views from the terraces of golden sands stretching towards St Michael's Mount.

Access

Access via ladders, steps and ramp. Ramped access to poolside; accessible toilets and changing room; hoist (main pool), ramp (geothermal pool). Penzance railway station a kilometre away; Market Jew Street stop, 600 metres away, served by frequent buses to Heamoor, Mousehole, St Ives and other local towns. Parking on the promenade as well as St Anthony's car park.

HAYLE OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOL

50.1890, -5.4225 / King George V Memorial Walk, Hayle, Cornwall, TR27 4BL / 01736 752568 Swimming / www.hayletowncouncil.net/your-council/outdoor-swimming-pool



Kids can really make a splash at Hayle Outdoor Swimming Pool – there is a four-lane slide into the pool's shallow end. The once-unheated pool now enjoys gentle warming from a solar cover, which can boost the water temperature above 20 °C on warm summer days. The friendly, twenty-five-metre-long pool in the heart of Hayle offers grassy lawns and poolside picnic benches, or the chance to indulge in a cream tea at the pool's charming Cafe Riviere. The seaside town of Hayle is famed for its five kilometres of golden sand dunes, the Towans, but you could choose instead to explore the Family Activity Trail around the Copperhouse Pool, which starts by the swimming pool.

Access

Access via ladders, handrailed steps and slide. Ramped access to poolside. Hayle railway station 600 metres away; St Elwyn's Church bus stop, opposite pool, served by buses to Penzance, Cambourne and Truro approximately every two hours. Free on-site parking.



DOZMARY POOL. © JAMES LATUS

RESPRYN BRIDGE

50.4391, -4.6794 / Bodmin, Cornwall /

Swimming



On the National Trust's Lanhydrock Estate in Bodmin, as the River Fowey rushes under Respryn Bridge it creates a magical swim spot. Wooden decking for fishing as well as grassy banks surround the water, which is one and a half to two metres deep, and a shingle beach rests by the footbridge. Swimmers should swim against the current, which can be quite rapid. Especially in the spring, when the forest floor is covered in a blanket of bluebells, this spot with riverside walks and easy access has an ethereal beauty which is hard to beat. The dramatically Gothic Lanhydrock House is a great place to stop for a bit of sightseeing, and also has a tearoom. Further choice for refreshments can be found in Bodmin.

Access

Access via shingle beach, muddy banks or wooden fishing decks. Paths by riverside – one leads to Bodmin Parkway railway station (two kilometres away), which also has bus services to Plymouth and Padstow. Parking at Respryn Bridge, less than 100 metres away; National Trust car park a kilometre and a half away.

DOZMARY POOL

50.5428, -4.5522 / Bolventor, Cornwall /

Swimming and paddling

High on wild, bare Lorna Doone moors, reaching Dozmary Pool is an adventure in itself. Many legends are associated with this pool, including claims that it is the resting place of King Arthur's Excalibur. Even if Excalibur doesn't reveal itself, this is still a lovely spot for a dip: secluded and peaceful, the wild, perhaps haunted, moorlands which surround it have an ethereal feel. Grassy banks and small, pebbly beaches slope to the shallow water. Although the pool is generally cold, on a sunny day it feels as if the wide expanse of the blue skies go on forever. Learn more about the local legends at the nearby smugglers' haunt, the Jamaica Inn, which offers a museum and place to stay as well as food.

Access

Access via pebbly shores and grassy banks. Follow lane south from Jamaica Inn. Hourly buses to Bodmin and Launceston stop at Jamaica Inn, approximately a kilometre and a half away. Limited on-street parking in Bolventor, approximately a kilometre and a half away; do not park in passing places on narrow lanes.



BUDE SEA POOL. © WWW.PAULMEYLER.CO.UK

BUDE SEA POOL

50.8325, -4.5539 / Summerleaze Beach, Bude, Cornwall, EX23 8HJ / 01288 488118 / Swimming and paddling / www.budeseapool.org



Hidden beneath Bude's striated cliffs, the ninety-one-metre-long Bude Sea Pool was constructed in the 1930s to provide locals with a safe spot to swim in the sea. It's a steep journey down steps to the pool from the South West Coast Path, close to Summerleaze Beach. The pool is Bude's most popular tourist destination and is open all year around, and although Summerleaze Beach is lifeguarded in summer there are no lifeguards designated for the lido. You are advised not to swim in it at high tide. The pool's location, tucked beneath the cliffs and sheltered from the worst of the Atlantic Coast's weather, means that on summer days it is the perfect sunspot.

Access

Access via steps and a sloped beach. Pool is reached via steep cliff path, with steps. Bus stops on The Strand, 800 metres away, served by buses to Exeter (every two hours), Barnstaple, Plymouth and other local destinations. Paid parking at Summerleaze car park, 300 metres away.

ROCK SEA POOL

51.0407, -4.2430 / Westward Ho!, Devon / Swimming and paddling



At low tide, a submarine joy is revealed on the rocky beach at Westward Ho! – a square tidal pool reappears, freshly filled with seawater. The pool, a popular bathing spot since Victorian times, is just over a metre deep and has no facilities. Although the pool is the responsibility of Torridge District Council, volunteers also work tirelessly to ensure the pool is kept clean and free from debris. There are public toilets at the Slipway and Seafield car parks. This diamond pool lies just beneath the South West Coast Path, and while you may have to scramble over rocks to reach it, you should pause to explore the rock pools for sea anemones and hermit crabs. The town centre is a short stroll along the seafront, offering plenty of cafes for a post-dip fish and chips.

Access

Entry into water via steps at pool's shallow end. Frequent buses to Ilfracombe, Barnstaple from Nelson Road and Atlantic Way stops, 500 metres away. Paid parking at Seafield long stay car park.

WATERSMEET

51.2228, -3.7988 / Watersmeet, Devon /
Swimming and paddling



In the shadow of Watersmeet House sits a stretch of river perfect for a tranquil dip. Rocks litter the entrance to the small plunge pools, with a canopy stretching overhead. The surrounding ancient woodland is rich in wildlife, and you may spot otters, buzzards or herons. In Barton Wood on the eastern branch of the river there are waterfalls, and a further kilometre and a half downstream lies Long Pool, a deep, fifty-metre stretch of river overgrown with ferns and infused with a mystical atmosphere. For further exploration, the Two Moors Way and Coleridge Way follow the River Lyn into Lynmouth via the gorge and the South West Coast Path is a kilometre away. The tearoom at Watersmeet House offers afternoon teas and warm pasties.

Access

Access via stony foreshore and steep, mossy banks with rocks. Approximately three kilometres away, buses to Barnstaple (and Minehead in summer) stop in Lynmouth a few times a day. Pay-and-display parking at Watersmeet House.

COW CASTLE, RIVER BARLE

51.1235, -3.7258 / Simonsbath, Somerset /
Swimming and paddling

A beautiful wild swimming spot set in a scenic and remote area within Exmoor National Park, this stretch of the River Barle lends itself to both paddling and swimming. Along the centre of the river there is a pleasant, hidden pool with crystal-clear water that reaches a depth of approximately a metre and a half. The closest facilities, including a pub, tearoom and car park, are approximately three kilometres away in Simonsbath. This swim spot, in the shadow of the Iron Age hill fort of Cow Castle, makes a perfect stop on the Two Moors Way,

which follows the river between Withypool and Simonsbath; it is worth a climb to the top of Cow Castle for the views, even if only the faintest traces of the hill fort remain.

Access

Entry into water via sloping, grassy banks and convenient stepping stones. Not easily accessible via public transport: closest buses seven kilometres away in Exford, for services to Minehead. Free parking in Simonsbath, three kilometres away.

CULLEVER STEPS POOL

50.7131, -3.9764 / Belstone, Devon /
Swimming and plunge pool

Cullever Steps Pool is a small, shallow plunge pool in a natural amphitheatre under the flanks of Scarey Tor. Just downstream from Cullever Steps, this swim spot is surrounded by grassy banks and rocks which lead into the cold water. The pool is not easy to reach, requiring a bumpy drive along narrow roads (or a cross-country hike) and a walk along the tufty and often boggy riverbanks, but the reward is a tranquil spot and undisturbed swim in Dartmoor's enchanting moors. The charming village of Belstone is nearby, where the Tors Inn is a great stop for a bite to eat.

Access

Access via rough stony and grassy banks. Walk from Cullever Steps on grassy trails by river. Buses from Okehampton, Exeter and Bude stop several times a day at Belstone, two and a half kilometres away. Roadside parking at Rowtor car park, a kilometre and a half from swim spot.



SHILLEY POOL. © STEPHEN FOSTER

SHILLEY POOL

50.7049, -3.9101 / Throwleigh, Devon /
Swimming and plunge pool



Many streams and rivers bubble to life through the marshy ground of South Tawton Common, and one is Blackaton Brook. The water cascades down from dangerously boggy Raybarrow Pool, one of Dartmoor's most infamous mires, into the dammed Shilley Pool. With grassy banks and flat rocks the water is easy to access, and you can enjoy a plunge pool approximately a metre deep. The wide, flat rocks will provide a warm platform for a post-dip picnic on sunny days. This sheltered spot is one of Dartmoor's best-kept secrets, and a trip here can be combined with a walk up Cosdon Beacon, a granite-domed hill that offers panoramic views from the English to Bristol channels on fine days. The closest pubs and cafes are in South Zeal.

Access

Grassy banks and wide, flat rocks to access water. Buses from Cheriton Bishop to Okehampton stop at Moor View once each way daily. Grassy parking area near Moor Farm, north of Throwleigh, approximately a kilometre from pool; follow footpath along south side of river (not public right of way); bridleway access north of river from lane at Moorside.

SALMON LEAPS

50.6923, -3.8101 / Drewsteignton, Devon /
Swimming



The River Teign flows through woodland to Salmon Leaps, a pool beneath the twentieth-century Castle Drogo. The river flows into three Victorian stone plunge pools which provide an exhilarating tumble, but the strong current means these are not suited to children. You should avoid swimming here between October and January, when salmon leap the weir as they travel to their easily disturbed spawning grounds. In spring and summer, the stunning scenery makes Salmon Leaps the perfect place to reconnect with nature. Refreshments can be found at Castle Drogo's tearooms, less than one kilometre away but a steep climb or, approximately one and half kilometres each way, the Mill End Hotel upstream and the Fingle Bridge Inn downstream. You can also enjoy a dip at the nearby Fingle Bridge, a deep gorge surrounded by thick and enchanting woodland.

Access

Access via grassy banks. Buses from Moretonhampstead to Exeter stops at Castle Drogo a few times a day, just over a kilometre away. Paid parking at Castle Drogo (free for National Trust members) and Fingle Bridge (with toilets); roadside parking by Fingle Bridge; although Castle Drogo is closer there is a steep climb from the river.



MORETONHAMPSTEAD COMMUNITY SWIMMING POOL. © SAM FABIAN-MILLER

CHAGFORD POOL

50.6811, -3.8326 / Rushford, Chagford, Newton Abbot, Devon, TQ13 8DA / 01647 432929 / Swimming and paddling / www.chagfordpool.co.uk



Stretching along the banks of the tree-fringed River Teign, Chagford Pool draws its water from the river. Dug out by local residents in 1933, the thirty-four-metre-long pool remains very much a community effort. Recent improvements include heating and showers; there is a small paddling pool in addition to the main pool. There is a grassy sunbathing area and poolside seating. You are welcome to bring your own food, but there is also a poolside Tea Shed. This serene pool in the midst of green fields offers a lido experience in a wild environment.

Access

Entry to pool via handrailed steps and ladders. Level access to poolside. A kilometre away, buses leave from Lower Street to Exeter every three hours, as well as Okehampton and Newton Abbot. On-site parking; overflow parking in field.

MORETONHAMPSTEAD COMMUNITY SWIMMING POOL

50.6611, -3.7687 / Court Street, Moretonhampstead, Devon, TQ13 8LG / 01647 440276 / Swimming and paddling / www.moretonpool.co.uk



Moretonhampstead's pool is a community-run, twenty-five-metre lido situated on the eastern edge of Dartmoor. Open from May to September, the pool is heated by air source heat pumps and solar power. With a sectioned-off shallow end plus a separate small toddler pool, this is a great place for all the family to enjoy. The pool's timetable offers lane swimming sessions, technique tuning, aqua fit and water polo sessions, as well as general swim sessions which offer a variety of toys and floats for children to play with. The lido itself is surrounded by grassy areas, picnic tables and a sun terrace, making it an ideal place to spend a relaxing afternoon. There is also a small on-site shop selling hot and cold refreshments. To extend your day out, Moretonhampstead Motor Museum rests a short walk away.

Access

Access via steps and ladders. Level access to poolside; accessible toilets and changing facilities. Paid on-site parking at Court Street car park, which also has a bus stop (frequent services to Exeter, also Newton Abbot and Plymouth).