



## **Open Water Snorkelling - Frequently Asked Questions**

Each summer term we have several opportunities to go on open water dives in Lakes, Rivers, or the Sea. We've been asked several questions about these dives and so we have put together this selection of FAQs to provide a guide to Snorkelling in the open water.

### **Why do we have Open Water snorkel dives?**

- Gain qualifications
- To see marine life!
- Practice in UK waters so if you go abroad you can snorkel with confidence
- Have fun!
- Gain experience
- Preparation for SCUBA diving

### **What happens on the Open Water snorkel dives?**

On arrival we set-up camp and after a safety briefing we split into groups. Each group includes an experienced instructor who leads the dive tailored to the experience of the snorkellers. Each snorkeller is assigned a 'buddy' who stay together in the water. Dives typically last between half an hour and an hour. We usually aim for 2 to 3 dives on a full day. Some of the dives are to explore the area and others to learn new skills such as using a compass. At the end of the session, we de-brief before packing up and heading home.

### **Who should go?**

All members are encouraged to come on dives, at the early stages these will be familiarisation dives and as you get more experienced you can move on to learn more skills.

All members will need to go on open water trips to complete the BSAC training.

### **What types of trips do you have?**

Broadly there are three types of trips:

#### **1) Morning trips to local inland lakes:**

These are for training and familiarisation. We usually go to Wraysbury near Heathrow, which is a dedicated diving lake so we share it with SCUBA divers, Free divers and open water swimmers. We quite often meet up with other snorkelling clubs there. They have a calm lake with good access and a number of sunken cars, boats a bus and even a 737 Cockpit to see under the water. They also have good facilities for changing with hot drinks and food.

These trips are especially useful to introduce members to snorkel diving outside.

Part of the Advanced Snorkel Diver syllabus can also be covered here.

#### **2) Day Trips to the coast:**

We often go to the south coast on day trips, usually on a Sunday; dive sites include Pagham or Selsey in Sussex, occasionally we go down to Dorset. We usually take our club boat so we can have a mix of shore dives from the beach or boat dives.



Depending on the tides we sometimes go to the pool session first and then go to the dive, although if the tide is such we need to go earlier we will go straight to the site, leaving some instructors and those not coming to the dive at the normal Sunday pool session.

### **3) Weekend trips:**

*Swanage weekend* – This is a family holiday for the entire club and is traditionally over the August Bank Holiday. We stay in and around Swanage and visit several dive sites in Swanage and other places along Dorset’s Jurassic coast, some of which can only be reached using our boat.

*Experienced snorkeller’s weekends:* These are usually at the end of July and are for the more experienced snorkelers, i.e. have completed a number of open water dives. We tend to go a little further afield such as Cornwall, Pembrokeshire or North Devon/Lundy Island. We sometimes take our club boat or charter a hard boat with a skipper who knows the local area.

#### **How do we get there?**

We drive to the sites, as they are not easily accessible by public transport, and we have a lot of equipment to take. We encourage parents to bring their children. The club does not arrange transport, although parents do sometimes arrange lifts or car shares on their own initiative.

#### **How much does it cost?**

We ask for a contribution to costs (i.e. boat petrol, launch fees, etc.) of £15 per day for each snorkeller. Open water sites such as Wraysbury also charge a local fee payable to them, but members are not usually charged by the club for these trips.

#### **What do we need to bring?**

The club provide weights, weight belts and lifejackets. Members are required to bring their own wetsuits. Gloves and hoods are a good idea. Of course, snorkel, mask and fins are required. We recommend warm clothes, windcheater, and towels for after the dives. We will issue a full list of suggested kit to bring.

#### **What should we look for in a wetsuit?**

A wetsuit is essential for snorkelling in UK waters. They keep us warm and provide protection from abrasions and even help prevent sunburn. Wetsuits are made of Neoprene and work by letting water in and keeping a little in in so it is warmed up by the body heat. Therefore, a good fit is important. If it is too loose the water can ‘flush through’.

A full-length wetsuit is required for UK waters. You will soon get cold in a ‘shortie’. Some even choose to wear a ‘shortie’ over a full-length wetsuit. Ask for guidance from an instructor before buying. It is also possible to hire from some shops.



### **Where can I get a wetsuit?**

See the club website for a list of Dive shops, some also offer a hire service. As this changes frequently, we recommend that you call before going.

Wetsuits are also available online, one supplier is 'Water sports warehouse'  
<http://www.watersportswarehouse.co.uk/shop/wetsuits/junior-wetsuits.html> There are others.

The club has a small number of wetsuits that have been donated by members overtime, which are available to borrow. This is very limited as we don't have the resources to manage or buy a stock.

If you'd like to borrow one, they are available on a first come first served basis. Please ask Graham. We usually hold a 'try a wetsuit' session at the end of the Spring Term/early in the summer term, when members can try their own suits for fit, as well as try the loan suits. If one does fit they can then borrow it for the season.

### **Can I bring the family?**

Absolutely! We welcome everyone to come and make a family day of it. Especially when we are at the coast you can enjoy the beach, go for a swim, go sight-seeing nearby, or just watch us!

Although family members can't join us in the water, they are welcome on the beach, and they can enjoy the beach, for example siblings often enjoy beach combing or rock pooling, under their parent's supervision.

We encourage parents to help with our dive preparation as well as helping the youngsters with their kit, for example helping to launch the boat or helping to keep records of the dives - but of course you can just sunbathe!

### **When do you go?**

Lake dives and day trips to the coast are during the summer term.

Our family Swanage weekend is over the August Bank Holiday. Our experienced snorkellers weekend is scheduled to miss our pool training commitments, normally at the end of July.

We issue a full schedule in the spring term so you have plenty of notice.

### **What about the weather?**

Well yes this is England, so all our trips are weather dependent!

We have our dives in the late spring and summer so actually the weather is usually OK. Indeed, the weather is less of a factor when going to the lakes, but we still have to be sure that the temperature is OK and not too unpleasant.

When going to the sea we're particularly interested in the wind levels and direction as this will affect how smooth the sea is. It has been known to have to cancel a dive on an otherwise beautiful sunny day because of a strong wind.



We will send an e-mail round if a dive has to be cancelled. This will be typically after the 6pm weather forecast update on the Friday before the dive.

### **Where do I get directions and details for the sites?**

Around a week before the dives we will send you some details of the dive including directions and the meeting point. If you are expecting to come and haven't heard from us please either call the number below or email the club account [dorksnorkclub1@gmail.com](mailto:dorksnorkclub1@gmail.com)

### **Can I drive the club boat?**

To oversee the boat you need to be a qualified BSAC boat handler. However, we do try to make opportunities for members practice boat handling skills under supervision over the season.

We usually have a dedicated boat handling session at the beginning of the season to give people the opportunity to experience driving the boat, while also giving the boat its early season 'sea trial'.

Over 14s can take the BSAC boat handling qualification. BSAC run this as a regional skill development course which we sometimes send members to. Alternatively, our sister club Dorking BSAC (SCUBA) have qualified boat handler trainers and have in recent years trained a number of our members. Please speak to the diving officer if you are interested.

### **How do I sign-up?**

Once the schedule is issued for the summer, we place a sign-up sheet on the reception desk. Simply 'sign-up' on the sheet or email the Diving Officer. Please try to give as much notice as possible if you would like to come and likewise if your plans change. We have to keep to certain ratios of Instructors and dive managers to members in the water and we have a limited number of qualified people, so we have to plan our resource in advance. If people do turn up on the day without confirming in advance, it is possible that we may not have enough open water qualified instructors and not be able to take you in.

### **What if I can no longer make a dive I've signed up for?**

Of course, we all understand plans change and things come up that mean you can't make the dive or boat trip. However, please give as much notice as possible. We have to manage our numbers attending the dives and trips and sometimes we have to 'press gang' an extra instructor to come or decline a place to someone who wants to come. The more notice we have the more likely we can offer the place to someone else or adjust our instructor numbers.

### **How does COVID affect Open Water events?**

We will follow the latest government and BSAC guidance. The open water events are outside, so this helps protect us. However, depending upon what the guidance is at the time we may have to take extra precautions e.g., limit the numbers on the boat to allow spacing. We will update members on any specific actions or affects before the dives. The club has a risk assessment for all dive activity that states, "*The existing 'fitness to dive' assessment will be enhanced to remind members that if they show any symptoms of a virus, that they should let the club know*". This could be any virus, and it is our responsibility as part of our duty of



care to ensure that we protect other members of the club. Therefore, we would be grateful if you show consideration to other members and avoid coming if you have any symptoms of COVID. We would also remind you that it is policy that you should not dive with a cold as the water pressure on the ear can cause damage.

**What if I have other questions?**

No problem, simply ask your instructor or the Diving Officer.

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