

After a good start to the season (see previous report), STAM Open Water swimmers carried on swimming far and wide. Not all of us are lucky enough to be paid for getting wet – pity poor Belinda having to be a scuba-diving film stunt double in Majorca – but at least we can choose the conditions that we swim in. Belinda didn't really enjoy being submerged in a tropical thunderstorm on the same job.



Denham remained the most reliable of the local lakes: warm, clean and consistent, it has, deservedly, become very popular, especially at weekends. It's a pity we are still waiting for the showers to be upgraded. For those of you who can manage an early mid-week swim, Wednesday mornings is the time to go and there were some fine evening swims too. Heron, a little further around the M25, was also very popular with a number of STAMers, having very clear water, friendly organisers with good safety support, good showers and an on-site café!

There was some anticipation for the opening of Willen Lake in Milton Keynes but the actual experience was a little disappointing, as Craig reported.

The water isn't great, visibility about arm's length but lots of floating sediment which swimming through it reminded me of when the Millennium Falcon makes the jump to hyperspace. They also have recurring blue green algae so best to check Facebook to make sure session is on. Getting out is not good, you have to climb onto moving plastic pontoon and cost is a little more as on top of £6 for NOWCA members, parking is £1:50 for 2 hours, £2:50 for 4. HOWEVER the person running it is cheerful and helpful, showers are very hot and powerful, free help yourself tea and coffee, nice pub next door, IF M1 flowing, only 35 mins from lake to chippy in Harpenden (same as Denham). We felt it was worth a visit and keep an eye on in case the water quality changes and they resolve the getting out issue, but will not be making it a regular.



Algae was a problem at a couple of other lakes, too. Stanborough Lake in Welwyn is so easy and quick to get to, but we found the quality of the water less than satisfactory. It was no surprise in September when they cancelled open water swimming for the rest of the season. And then Heron Lake was struck. The pity of this was the timing – just before the annual night swim that a number of our group had signed up for. Hopefully next year, the conditions will be better and we won't have to head around the world to find good quality water, as many StAMers did.

Alex swam among the boats in the clean waters of Seattle, although he might have regretted sharing his picture on What'sApp after some members threatened to join him for his honeymoon.



Swimming in the sparkling waters of Del Valle lake, new member Jason made us all yearn for some Californian warmth. Heather took a break from the northern Autumn to soak up a bit of South African sunshine.

Was slightly concerned about the ornamental crocodile on the bank of the lake.



In Berlin, they take the meaning of 'skins' literally. Swimsuits were strictly optional at Teufelssee, as Vicky G found out ('see' is German for lake, of which there are many around Berlin). In fact, swimming in the nude is widely practised throughout Germany and was tolerated and even encouraged in the former GDR.

If you can bear the cold – and Craig demonstrated throughout the season that he could – Scotland offers great swimming sites, especially if you can dive into the water from a yacht. Frances and Craig joined Vicky P and Rhodri on their boat as they sailed from Inverness through the Caledonian canal to Oban.



Closer to home, (the other) Craig, Sarah, Liz and David made use of Loughrigg Tarn in the Lake District to perk up their appetites.

As always, big breakfasts are our secret weapon for survival. Duran's, the favourite breakfast café, didn't fail to disappoint, but that did not stop swimmers from trying out other hostelrys, including coffee and cake on the mound. Several members of the group – Matt, Belinda, Christina, to name a few - doubly earned their breakfasts by including a park run in their weekends.



And Craig was very distressed that his beans came in a ramekin 🤢🤢🤢



The colour of choice for Craig this year was silver. He came second in his age group in the 5km event in the Open Water National Championships at Nene Park, Peterborough. Wanting more, he then swam the 3km event in skins, simply for the pleasure of it.



In October, Frances and Craig achieved their silver bands for 50+ swims at Denham with NOWCA.



Our What'sApp group are friendly and helpful. There was plenty advice for a request for how to improve hip stability,

but Frances had to turn to Outdoor Swimmer for help with 'lake nose'. Don't let that put you off, though. Whether you're going for gold, like Craig and Frances, perhaps wanting to be a keen regular like Gary and Brian, or simply just dipping in when you can, join us for the next Open Water swimming season.



Email vicky@stamsc.co.uk to be added to the What'sApp group.

And if you're really hardy, you can join the select group of one or two who will be swimming through the cold months. Bray Lake in Maidenhead has open water sessions throughout the winter. For further details, go to the website at:

<https://www.braylakeswimming.com/>