

Open water swimming near Derwentwater Independent Hostel

I recommend that you use Ordnance Survey Explorer maps (1:25 000) to find the swimming locations and plan your walks. OL4, OL5, and a tiny section of OL6 (Angle Tarn is just off the OL4 map!) cover the places I have mentioned. There are many more great tarns, lakes and rivers beyond the area I have covered, so let me know if you want other recommendations. I am sure you will make your own discoveries too.

The nearest big lakes to the hostel, suitable for swimming, are Derwent Water (on our doorstep), Bassenthwaite Lake, and Buttermere. All of these locations can be reached by foot, bus, car, or bike within a day.

The River Derwent, and its tributary, the River Greta, both have some good paddling and short-distance-swimming spots. The Derwent flows down the Borrowdale Valley, into Derwent Water, and on to Bassenthwaite Lake, while the Greta flows west through Keswick, joining the Derwent just upstream of the footbridge to Portinscale. At the southern end of the Borrowdale Valley, Langstrath Beck, Stonethwaite Beck, and Grains Gill have some wonderful little waterfalls and plunge pools.

The mountain-side tarns (small lakes), occupying ice-carved corries, are really magical. They are often very quiet and secluded, with exciting options for lead-in walks. The steep-backed corries, generally facing north or north east and deepened by ice in the glacial periods (the last glaciation in the Lake District ended about 11 000 years ago) now form perfect swimming pools, with cold, clear water and dramatic views. The closest corrie lakes are Scales Tarn (on the slopes of Blencathra), Bowscale Tarn (on the slopes of Bowscale Fell), Angle Tarn (beneath Bowfell), and Bleaberry Tarn (beneath Red Pike). These all have good stony entry points, and very clear water.

Other tarns nearby include Watendlath (big but a bit busier, with fishing and rowing), Blea Tarn on the northern side of Ullscarf (big and very quiet), Dalehead Tarn (halfway up Dale Head but in a more spacious grassy area than other high tarns, and reedy in places), and Dock Tarn (small and quite boggy, but good for wildlife and connecting with Watendlath).

There are great options for walking between Angle Tarn, Sprinkling Tarn (backed by Great End) and Styhead Tarn, high up in the Scafell Pike area. These can sometimes be 'busy' with wild campers, but there are several good entry points, allowing you to choose a quiet spot. There are also lots of little tarns on the very quiet area between Glaramara and Allen Craggs. These are great for refreshing dips on a hot day.

A good list of tarns and their grid references can be found here:

http://www.leaney.org/tarns/tarn_list.php

Kayak support

Platty+: John and Sarah Platt provide excellent hire and tuition, based at the Lodore landings at the southern end of Derwent Water, in front of the Mary Mount Hotel. Approx. 20 minute flat walk from the hostel. Single kayak costs £8 per hour. <http://plattyplus.co.uk/prices/> Tel: 017687 76572

Derwent Water Marina: Based in Portinscale on the opposite side of the lake to the hostel. Single kayak costs £9 per hour. <http://derwentwatermarina.co.uk/boat-hire/> Tel: 017687 72912

You can launch your own kayaks etc at the bottom of the hostel driveway.

Derwent Water

On the eastern side (our side) there are some wide bays, with Calfclose Bay being the best one for safe and peaceful swimming.

On the western side there are some very pretty little bays, with some good stony entry points, but the Keswick Launch passes quite close to the shore so when the launch is running you should not swim too far out into the lake. It is lovely to walk along the lakeshore path and find a quiet spot.

On both sides of the lake the mid sections are best. The southern end is a bit reedy and the northern end can get a bit shallow and busier with rowing boats and the Keswick Launch. Blue-green algae can also be a problem at the northern end.

Barrow Bay: at the bottom of our driveway. Turn right if you want to go to Ashness Jetty, but be careful of the Keswick Launch, which stops at the jetty! We have timetables at the hostel to help you work out when the launch will be passing.

Turn left for the deepest entry point, at the mouth of Barrow Beck (just before you get to the footbridge). There are some large stones here which are quite good for putting your stuff on (if they are not covered by the lake!). Since Storm Desmond the lake bed has become quite muddy, so this entry point is not as good as it used to be, but it is ok if you go closer to the tip of the peninsula and flop into the water quite quickly.

Calfclose Bay: my favourite place for swimming in Derwent Water. The Keswick Launch does not go into the bay and so it is very safe for swimming. If the lake is low enough you can walk along the shoreline from Ashness Jetty to Calfclose Bay. If not, there is a footpath along the Borrowdale Road. Follow this for about 1km and then, opposite the exit lane from Great Wood, turn left down a path to the lakeshore. Once on the lakeshore path, turn right and you will reach Calfclose Bay in about 100m. It is also fun to do a linear swim along the shoreline, from Ashness Jetty (I recommend getting in just north of the jetty) towards Calfclose Bay.

River Derwent: there is a beautiful, clear, deep point beneath the 'Chinese Bridge', about a 30 minute walk from the hostel. Walk south along the lakeshore from the hostel. The path crosses the road at Kettlewell Carpark and then re-crosses at the Lodore Hotel. Shortly after the Lodore Hotel, at the foot of a small hill, you will see a wide gravel path on your right, leading to the 'Chinese Bridge'.

Another great spot for a little swim is just south of the Hollows Farm campsite, on the track from Grange. There is a 'beach' on the west side of the river, and you can swim upstream a little distance.

Other swims and dips near Derwentwater Independent Hostel

Watendlath Tarn. Grid reference on OL4 map: NY 275161. Some parts of the lakeshore are private and so there are not many entry points. Popular walking and fishing spot. There is a farm and a couple of cottages and so it is not the quietest place for swimming, but it is a really beautiful location. Public toilets, NT car park, and a café in the summer months. From here it is a good walk to Blea Tarn or Dock Tarn. Watendlath means 'water end barn'.

Dock Tarn. Grid reference on OL4 map: NY 274144. Shallow, peaty, quiet. Good for bird spotting. Lily pads and frogs etc.

Blea Tarn. Grid reference on OL4 map: NY 291140. Excellent for a proper swim. Very quiet and secluded. One side is grassy (and boggy when wet). The other side has some good rocks for putting stuff on and entering with ease. No clear paths – just find your own way. Beautiful clear water. Blea is the Old Norse word for blue.

Stonethwaite and Langstrath Beck pools. Walk, drive or get the 78 bus to Stonethwaite (approx. 5 miles south of the hostel on the Borrowdale road). At the Stonethwaite bus stop turn left to go down a dead-end lane. You will pass Borrowdale School on your right. Then you can either go across Stonethwaite Bridge (for the north side of the beck), or you can walk past the Langstrath Inn and take a footpath through the campsite. Further upstream there are a couple of crossing points, so you can easily explore both sides.

Alternatively, you can start from the Hazel Bank Hotel in Rosthwaite, walking along the Cumbria Way, parallel to Stonethwaite Beck. You can also descend to Stonethwaite Beck down a steep stepped path from Dock Tarn. Options aplenty! There are lots of little pools and cascades along the Langstrath and Stonethwaite becks. Higher up the Langstrath Valley you will find Black Moss Pot, a popular place for jumping off a ledge into a deep pool.

Angle Tarn. Grid reference on OL6 map: NY 245076. Angle Tarn sits beneath Bowfell. Quite a few paths lead to it and so it can get a bit busy, but this is all relative! It is a wonderful place to swim, sitting high up amongst the fells.

Sprinkling Tarn. Grid reference on OL4 map: NY 228091. Quieter and more secluded than Styhead Tarn, but not far away. This is very pretty, nestling beneath the imposing north face of Great End.

Styhead Tarn. Grid reference on OL4 map: NY 222098. This is a popular picnic and wild camping spot, near a big junction of paths (for paths to Wasdale, Scafell Pike and Great Gable). It can get quite busy here on a sunny weekend! It is suitable for a proper swim, with several good entry points.

Grains Gill pools. Grains Gill flows down to Stockley Bridge, and it is great for ghyll scrambling and refreshing dips. There is a very good path going from Stockley Bridge to Esk Hause, and it is in this area that you can veer away from the path and choose your dipping points.

Buttermere. National Park car park grid reference on OL4 map: NY 172169. This is a fantastic lake for swimming. There are no public pleasure boats and you hardly ever see rowing boats or kayaks. Except for the eastern end (private land) you could enter almost anywhere around the lake. At the western end there are a couple of cafes, a pub, and a car park. The lakeshore path makes a wonderful flat walk. The lake is 1 ½ miles long and ¾ mile wide: a good size for trying to swim a width or a length if you like to 'get to the other side'! The 77 bus goes from Keswick to Buttermere from Easter to October.

Crummock Water. Grid reference on OL4 map: NY 152208. This is a really quiet, beautiful lake, connected to Buttermere by a stream and a couple of footpaths. The 77 bus goes past Crummock Water, and I usually get off at Lanthwaite Green and walk through peaceful woodland to the northern end of the lake, where there are a couple of little beaches. The water is so clear!

Bleaberry Tarn. Grid reference on OL4 map: NY165154. I love this one! It is a great walk from Buttermere, taking a steep, stepped path from the foot of Sourmilk Gill, ascending through beautiful trees to a stile. Once above the tree line, a good path winds up the fell side, coming close to Sourmilk Gill near the top. The tarn eventually appears as if by magic! The tarn is a wonderful circle, overlooked by Red Pike. When you are in the tarn, looking north, it is like an endless pool.

Dalehead Tarn. Grid reference on OL4 map: NY 230152. There are a few good walking routes to get to this one, situated in a grassy area (boggy in places) beneath the eastern flanks of Dale Head. Ascend via Rigghead Quarries (disused) from Rosthwaite, or up the track from Little Town (Newlands Valley). Another good route is from High Spy. The tarn is often quite quiet, reedy and quite boggy around the edges.

Little reservoir beneath Robinson. Grid reference on OL4 map: NY 215177. The little reservoir does not have a name, but I call it Little Dale Tarn. Nestling between Hindscarth and Robinson, it is usually deserted! Very small and cold as it is often in shadow, and there is a stream flowing into it. Due to the small dam, once you are in it, it feels like an endless pool, with fantastic views north down the Newlands Valley.

Bassenthwaite, between Bowness Bay and Scarness Bay. Bowness Bay swimming spot grid reference on OL4 map: NY 219294. Bassenthwaite is a big lake, 4 miles long and $\frac{3}{4}$ mile wide, but it is also one of the shallowest. There is a sailing club at the northern end but there are no public pleasure boats and so it is relatively quiet. The good swimming spots are not immediately obvious and unlike Derwent Water, it does not have a clear lakeshore path. However, on the eastern side there is a lovely walk across fields from Mirehouse to Broadness Farm, where you can make your way to the lakeshore at Bowness Bay. This then goes round to the Scarness Holiday Park, where the path takes you inland again. You can get into the lake on the western side, but the A66 runs very close to the shore and so it is not as peaceful. The X4 bus goes from Keswick to Cockermouth along the eastern side of Bassenthwaite Lake (A591 road). The village of Bassenthwaite is quite far from the lake so it is best to ask for the Mirehouse or Ravenstone Hotel stop.

River Greta. Lots of paddling places along the River Greta, with paths on both sides of the river. The Greta flows past Threlkeld and through Keswick. Check with National Park on footpath status as post-storm repair works and bridge replacements are ongoing.

Scales Tarn. Grid reference on OL5 map: NY 328281. This is a really dramatic setting, high up on the flanks of Blencathra. The water is beautifully clear, with good stony entry points near the neck of the tarn. It is a popular picnic spot on a good-weather-day, but it is well worth a visit. The jagged arête of Sharp Edge towers above the tarn, and you truly feel that you are on the side of a mountain. You can swim properly in this one.

Bowscale Tarn. Grid reference on OL5 map: NY 336313. Situated on the northern side of Bowscale Fell, with clear water and good stony entry points. Very quiet and sheltered. There is a good path (a track at first) from a layby on the Mungrisdale - Mosedale road, going all the way to the tarn lip. But you cannot see the tarn until you go over the lip on a smaller grassy trod. Wordsworth wrote about Bowscale Tarn, and the immortal talking fish it shelters, in his poem 'Song, at the feast of Brougham Castle' (1888):

And both the undying fish that swim

*Through Bowscale Tarn did wait on him
The pair were servants of his eye
In their immortality
They moved about in open sight
To and fro for his delight*

Grisedale Tarn. Grid reference on OL5 map: NY 348120. Situated between Fairfield and Dollywagon Pike. The easiest way up to the Grisedale Tarn is via Little Tongue Gill or Raise Beck, from the A591. This is particularly handy if you are travelling by bus from Keswick or Grasmere (555 bus). The tarn sits deeply, with not many easy entry points, but near the neck of the tarn, or with a little effort, there are plenty of quiet places to get in. People tend to congregate where the path crosses the neck of the tarn, so you can easily find a quiet spot a little further round. It is pretty big and a good one for a proper swim.