

Floating: A Life Regained

Joe Minihane

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After Joe Minihane quit his journalism job to go freelance, he soon found himself having to write dull technology stories, all along wishing he could be a travel writer instead. He was in a state of constant anxiety about finances, which provoked feelings of being a failure.

In 2010, he took up wild swimming, mostly in England's ponds and rivers, as a way to train himself to stay in the moment and quiet his mind; "I swam to fix myself," he recalls. In *Floating: A Life Regained*, he recounts how, over the course of two and a half years, he battled depression by reprising the outdoor swimming challenges undertaken by his hero, the late English nature/travel writer Roger Deakin, in *Waterlog*, which here becomes a kind of sacred text. Minihane first documented the journey on his Waterlog Reswum blog.

Whereas Deakin had a moat at his Elizabethan farmhouse in Suffolk to use as a daily practice site, Minihane had London's Hampstead Ponds. Neither a naturalist nor a strong swimmer, he was perhaps not an obvious candidate to recreate Deakin's feats. Since he didn't drive, he caught rides with fellow swimmers or prioritized sites near train stations. Outdoor swimming always brought its fair share of worries, like a dread of nibbling fish or "the tortuous task of disrobing" in out-of-season cold. Worse, his bicycle was once struck by an SUV, and he couldn't swim while he waited for his broken wrist to heal.

The book is many things: a quest narrative, an atmospheric travel book ranging from the Yorkshire Dales to the Scilly Isles, and a record of psychic transformation. Minihane calls it "part homage, part personal mission to find my own place in Roger's tale." That habit of referring to Deakin chummily as "Roger" somewhat grates, but it emphasizes the author's sense of intimate connection with the mind behind *Waterlog*.

Clearly this is about more than just swimming; it's about finding what produces fulfillment and camaraderie. "As much as being in the water is about escape," Minihane writes, "it is also about joy. Sharing swims like this made me happy."

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