

# Bath Dolphin Swimming Club De Alkmaarse Waterratten

Easter Exchange Information Pack  
for parents & swimmers



Founded 1899

**BATH  
DOLPHIN**



**SWIMMING  
CLUB**

(Affiliated to Somerset County A.S.A and A.S.A. South West Region)

President: Mrs S Woolley

### **BATH / ALKMAAR EXCHANGE INFORMATION PACK**

Bath's twinning arrangement with Alkmaar is the oldest of its entire foreign twinning links, forming in 1947, and Bath Dolphin & DAW (De Alkmaarse Wateratten) have been two of the mainstays of that arrangement. The exchange with DAW has been in existence since 1948 and is the longest running exchange in England.

Throughout the 60's, 70's and 80's, many exchanges have taken place and the current incarnation of the event has been running since 1990 when BDSC travelled to Alkmaar. Many of the participants on that trip in 1990 are still with the club and help organise the exchanges to this day. The latest exchange was in 2016 and was the 30th exchange between the two clubs.

Initially the exchanges were every two years but, after a suggestion from two Alkmaar & Bath swimmers, it was decided that to try and encourage friendships to blossom, we would hold two back-to-back exchanges followed by a year off and this has been happening since 2003 (2003 Bath, 2004 Alkmaar, 2006 Bath, 2007 Alkmaar etc.). The main idea is that a swimmer travels to Bath one year, and acts as a host to their host swimmer the following year, helping to cement a friendship which will hopefully last many years. Over the years, some great friendships have formed, with swimmers (and ex-swimmers!) being invited to weddings in the other country as well as being invited for holidays or catch-ups outside of the official exchanges.

This information pack is designed to help you feel at ease about either hosting swimmers from DAW or sending your child over to Holland for the trip. These exchanges are a lot of fun, especially for the children, and the swimmers' relationship with their hosts is an important part of the success of the exchanges. Any families who host a Dutch visitor are given priority for the return trip the following year.

If you have any questions, doubts or concerns, please contact a member of the committee who will be happy to help and advise.

Sincerely,

*Paul Sartain*

*Barbara Cutting*

*Sue Woolley*

*Paul Brake*

*Phil Brake*

Alkmaar Exchange Committee

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since 1990, the format of the exchanges between the clubs has remained fairly static, although the early exchanges were actually held over a full week, not just a long weekend. This became difficult to keep up due to school holidays and work commitments for host families so we have settled down to Maundy Thursday to the Tuesday after Easter Monday inclusive. Both the Thursday and the Tuesday are travelling days for the visitors so host commitments commence on Thursday evening and finish at the crack of dawn on the Tuesday.

The swimmers are accompanied by a small group of adult chaperones, usually club officials, and will, by-and-large, spend the weekend within the large group. There will be free times throughout the weekend and these are spent depending on the host family. Further information can be found later in this guide.

The children will be paired up within age groups and will always be of the same gender. Where a family is able to host more than two, there could also be potential for a group of three (or more) to stay together.

For those who remain in the club for a period of 5 years or more, these exchanges provide an opportunity to keep in touch with new friends made from Holland as there will be an opportunity to experience four exchanges at least. Of course, social media makes this all the more easy but meeting up and spending time helps to cement relationships. Both committees contain members of the clubs who have been involved with the exchanges for a long time, a few of whom actively meet up outside of the official exchanges as they are genuine friends.

Whilst fun and friendship is the main aim there is, of course, the matter of the gala which is always held between the two clubs. Contesting the Dilys Brake & Graham Cutting Memorial Trophy, the two teams meet over the weekend for a head-to-head gala which is usually very competitive. Outside of this, there is usually at least one training session to attend with the rest of the time set aside for fun.

As you would expect, these exchanges are what you make of them but, rest assured, the experience is memorable for both parties and a fantastic opportunity for your children.

## Hosting In Bath

Two of the (many) things you may be worrying about will be sleeping accommodation and feeding. Fret not – mattresses/airbeds on the floor are very acceptable and anything else is a bonus! As long as your guests are warm, dry and comfortable in your home, they will be happy. More important is the interaction between the visitors and your own children – we encourage as much interaction as possible by going on the trips, hanging out with each other during the free time and just actively engaging each other. The Dutch children will have good English so communication is not as difficult as you might think. We will always try and match your guests' ages to your child's age.

As for the food, we only ask that you provide meals when you are at home and lunches for the excursions. We will tell you if there are any particular dietary needs but, otherwise, they have a diet high in dairy and meat and will be very happy with pasta dishes etc. A lot of our food is quite fatty for them but you can mix in some traditional meals to give them a good view of being British so you should consider a Sunday Roast, steak and kidney pie or a fried breakfast! They all find our tea too strong so beware if you offer them a cup, they won't be expecting something so strong if they have not been here before (what we consider weak is still too much!).

After a full day of travelling to Bath, your guests will be extremely tired but could also be hungry so it is a good idea to plan something for supper in case they are. For many of the children, this will be their first experience away from home so it is likely that they may turn down food in order to retire to the safety of their beds!

Meals will usually be required on Friday evening, Saturday before (or after) the gala, and Sunday & Monday evenings. Packed lunches will be required for the day trips and you will need to consider what happens for lunch on the Friday and Saturday during the free time during the day – although the visitors will bring money with them, we do not expect them to spend it on food (unless they are older and choose to).

A typical diary of events looks something like this;

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| Thursday | Arrive in Bath around 19:00   |
| Friday   | Bus tour, free time to explore, training at approx. 16:00, skittles evening |
| Saturday | Civic Reception with the Mayor of Bath, Roman Baths Tour, free time, gala   |
| Sunday   | Full day excursion, returning at approx. 17:00                              |
| Monday   | Shorter excursion, returning at approx. 14:00, farewell party               |
| Tuesday  | Coach leaves for journey home around 07:00                                  |

Excursions and events are not always communicated ahead of time because we often have to wait and see what the weather will be doing. We try and confirm as much as possible ahead of time and coming up with new ideas, within budget, is always the challenge! There may be opportunities for your child to join in with the trips but this will be dependent on space on the coach and the number of tickets available. Again, this will be communicated nearer the time or as the weekend progresses. We try and offer as many host family swimmers a space as possible.

The free time elements, and the Sunday evening, are the only times we ask hosts to do some planning. Most of the children would enjoy spending some time in Bath, exploring and shopping but we also encourage you to get together with other host families to arrange something else if possible. Depending on the weather, you could meet up with other families for a barbecue on the Sunday evening or maybe go bowling. Another suggestion is that there is a strong likelihood that your visitors won't have played golf before as there are so few courses in Holland (land is too precious to waste on golf courses) so a trip to the approach course is always a winner. Be creative and give the children something to remember! The free time on both the Friday and Saturday tends to be from late morning to around 15:30.

Your guests will require lifts to and from the meeting points each day – times and places will always be included in the programme. Also, host attendance at the goodbye party on Easter Monday is also required.

If you have hosted before, you will be aware of the tradition of providing a gift to the host families. The swimmer(s) you are hosting will bring a gift for your family, and their favourite things to bring to us include cheese, chocolate sprinkles (which they eat on bread and toast) and Jodenkoken (biscuits from Alkmaar). You do not need to give a gift to the children you are hosting but if you want to do something, we recommend you include them in your traditional Easter celebrations, be it chocolate eggs or something else. Swimmers sometimes like to make trades of hats or t-shirts so it might be a good idea to see what you have spare.

Be confident in your hosting abilities and don't be afraid to volunteer. Past host families speak highly of their experiences, even if they were reluctant to begin with. Please, ask around and get some insights and tips. The more host families we can get, the more children can come and visit.

## Travelling to Alkmaar

The main event in the calendar every three years is always the trip to Alkmaar. All swimmers aged 12+ are invited to participate and we always encourage as many as possible to take the plunge. Participation is always dependent on the number of host families DAW can muster, much as it is the other way around so although we can't guarantee a trip for every person who wants to go, we will take as many children as possible. Children who were members of a host family previously are given preferential treatment.

Your child will partner with at least one other swimmer from BDSC and stay with a Dutch family. Choices of who children stay with as their partner are left up to the children to the most part. Where we have odd numbers, the committee may need to be involved in discussing the situation with the children, but the application form will allow each child to name their preferred partner. Children will be allocated families where the swimmers from both teams are roughly the same age.

Your child will travel with BDSC to Alkmaar via coach and ferry, usually via Dover/Calais. Depending on the time of the ferry, the party tends to depart at around 0700 on Maundy Thursday, returning around 1900 on the Tuesday following the Easter weekend. Full details will always be communicated nearer the time.

There will be mandatory driver stops throughout the journey and some drinks and snacks will be available on the coach but we advise bringing the following for the journey:

- Packed lunch in a carrier bag – try to avoid using a lunch box as this just creates more items to look after
- Plenty of water/drink – the coach has a toilet
- Entertainment – we do not advise anything expensive i.e. tablets but card games, MP3 players & books etc. are all acceptable

For the weekend itself, it usually follows a standard timetable which may look something like this:

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| Thursday | Arrive and meet hosts in the DAW clubhouse                   |
| Friday   | Attend the opening of the Cheese Market, free time, training |
| Saturday | A smaller excursion/walk/activities                          |
| Sunday   | Free time, gala  |
| Monday   | All-day excursion, leaving party                             |
| Tuesday  | Travel home  |

We do not know what the activities will be until we get there so we always suggest taking a selection of clothes which will provide cover for different weather and potentially older footwear for something a bit muddy/dirty (the walk has been through woods before). On previous visits, we have been to Volendam, Egmond and Amsterdam, visited De Princes Cheese Factory, Zuiderzee Museum and Broekerveiling (a magnificent old auction house where the children take part in auctions) and been on boat trips on the canals, had traditional Dutch games evenings and travelled to Schroot to walk amongst the protected sand dunes.

If you have hosted before, you will be aware of the tradition of providing a gift to the host families. It is almost impossible to know how many children are in the host family, so we recommend taking gifts which cover a number of people. Traditional English foods are always a good option – custard creams, marmite & marmalade do not seem like obvious gifts but, to the Dutch, they are completely different to anything they have over there. As an example, their favourite things to bring to us are cheese, chocolate sprinkles and locally made biscuits. If you want to assume 2-3 children per family, Easter chocolate is also a good idea. You may decide to go for something like an ornament, which is also fine. Again, we recommend something traditional and maybe something to do with Bath or the local part of the country. You don't have to spend a lot and we encourage you to liaise with the parents of the child your child is staying with to share the cost (and avoid duplicates!). Swimmers like to make trades of hats or t-shirts so it might be a good idea to see what you have spare and maybe take a couple of extra items.

There is no need to be concerned about diets, we will provide the Dutch committee with any dietary or medical requirements and this will be communicated fully to the host family. Their diet is not dissimilar to English food, it is just higher in dairy, lower in fat and sometimes a little strange to us (chocolate sprinkles on toast!?). For those who are curious, the hot snacks found in vending machines throughout the towns are well worth a try!

The host families will generally have good English, the children especially so, so nobody should have communication problems. It's natural for you and your child to be wary of an exchange to a different country but the Dutch are so friendly and they always do their very best to look after us well. The main group will be together for a large majority of the trip but it's the time spent with the hosts which usually create the best memories – rowing on the canals, tulip picking, bicycle rides through the country and a match at AZ Alkmaar have all been experienced.

Please ask anyone, especially the children, who has been on previous exchanges if you are worried because their experiences will allay your fears, these are amazing trips to be involved in.

