

Swim With Rolf

(lost BBC One Rolf Harris educational show; 1971)

Swim With Rolf is a four-part BBC One educational show. Presented by Rolf Harris, it aimed to educate and encourage younger viewers to take up swimming, including by learning to float, breathe within the water, the various strokes involved in swimming, and diving. Broadcast from April to May 1971, the show alongside many other shows made Harris be deemed a national treasure within British and Australian society.

Background

The show was conceptualised as part of the United Kingdom's "Teach them to swim" campaign, which aimed to encourage an increase of young people becoming confident swimmers and reduce drowning cases. Harris starred in a public information film promoting the campaign, explaining how he nearly passed away aged three after accidentally ending up in a river, only barely escaping after scrambling to the riverbank. He noted his parents immediately began teaching him to swim, lessons that would contribute towards him becoming a confident, Western Australia backstroke champion swimmer during the 1940s and early-1950s. He also stressed how teaching children at a young age would ensure their safety in the water, explaining he taught his daughter to swim as soon as possible.

Produced by Michael Grafton-Robinson, and directed by Douglas Hespe, *Swim With Rolf* primarily aimed to not just provide swimming education, but encourage young and older viewers alike to gain sufficient confidence within the water. According to *Radio Times*, Harris felt examples and demonstration were critical in developing one's swimming capabilities. Each episode lasted around 25 minutes. Episode 1 was broadcast on April 7, 1971, with Harris first showcasing how to float, a fundamental step in learning to swim. A week later, Harris demonstrated in the second episode how to properly breathe while in the water. The show's third episode, broadcast on April 21, intensified the lessons, with Harris teaching the breaststroke, then backstroke, front crawl, and presumably butterfly as the synopsis stated the presenter would "show how to do them all". The show concluded a week later by teaching viewers various types of diving into the water, giving tips to children present at London's

National Sports Centre. The episodes were repeated in May 1972, and April 1973, before never airing again on BBC television.¹

Harris would continue teaching swimming, including in the 1982 film *Rolf Harris Water Safety*. Harris' long career in television, music, and painting would contribute towards him becoming a national treasure within both the United Kingdom and in his native Australia.

Availability

Ultimately, *Kaleidoscope* determines that the *Swim With Rolf* episodes no longer exist within the BBC's archives. It is therefore a victim of the BBC's tape-wiping policy, where its tapes were reused to save costs in recording new programs. No other recordings, nor images of the show have since resurfaced.

The above is summarised from

[https://lostmediawiki.com/Swim_with_Rolf_\(lost_BBC_One_Rolf_Harris_educational_show;_1971\)](https://lostmediawiki.com/Swim_with_Rolf_(lost_BBC_One_Rolf_Harris_educational_show;_1971))