

# WILD swimming *Walks*

Dartmoor and South Devon  
28 lake, river and  
beach days out

Sophie Pierce  
Matt Newbury

A stylized illustration of a woman in a red swimsuit sitting on a rock by a waterfall, with another person swimming in the water below. The scene is set against a backdrop of large, rounded hills and a bright yellow sun.

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## WILD SWIMMING WALKS

Leads you on 28 adventures into the beautiful scenery and wild swimming paradise of Dartmoor and South Devon. Discover wooded river pools and tumbling waterfalls, secret coves and amazing sea caves, safe in the company of Devon's two most intrepid and fun-loving explorers.

All the walking routes include places to swim and ideas for pubs and refreshments along the route.



**WILD  
THINGS**  
PUBLISHING





Sophie Pierce lives on the edge of Dartmoor and started the South Devon Wild Swimming Club after getting caught in a rip-current during a New Year's Day dip. She has worked as a reporter for the BBC for 20 years.



Matt Newbury is a writer and marketing specialist born and raised in Devon. He has completed many swimming challenges including escaping from Alcatraz and swimming to the Isle of Wight.



Sophie and Matt are authors of *Beyond the Beach: the secret wild swims of Torbay*.

If you like *Wild Swimming Walks* you might also like these other titles from **WildThingsPublishing.com**



# WILD SWIMMING SAFETY



**S**plan your walk, taking necessary supplies and protection; don't forget water, a map, compass and waterproofs, especially on the moor.

Remember that cold water can limit your swimming endurance. If it is your first outdoor swim of the season, be careful to enter the water slowly and acclimatise. Stay close to the shore until you are comfortable. Wear a wetsuit for added warmth and buoyancy. Do not overestimate your ability. Remember that the cold water quickly creates hypothermia – shivering is the first stage.

Don't enter water without first establishing an exit point, especially in fast-flowing water. Never jump or dive into water without first checking the depth and whether there are any obstructions. Even if you have jumped/dived there before, always check every time. Large obstructions like tree branches and rocks move about underwater and an area that was previously clear may well be blocked.

Swim in a group wherever possible or, if swimming alone, let people know your movements and take extra special care.

Take extra care following heavy rainfall, when rivers might be in spate and flowing much faster than normal.

Watch out in high surf - rip-currents can form which take you out to sea, to behind the breaking waves. Swim perpendicularly from them to escape, then body-surf back in.

Beware of tidal currents, especially near estuary mouths and around headlands, especially at mid-tide, and on fortnightly spring tides, when flows are strongest.

If you are concerned about water quality, cover cuts and open wounds with plasters and do not swim front crawl.

## TIDES AND WEATHER CONDITIONS FOR SOUTH DEVON

When planning a swim on the South Devon coast, it's very useful to look at the wind forecast as well as the tides. If you want calm water, you need to know which way the wind is coming from. The prevailing winds in Devon are south westerly, and if this is the case, then choose a swim spot that faces east. Conversely, if the winds are easterly, then it's a good idea to pick a west or south west facing beach. The principle here is that you don't want the wind blowing from the sea onto the land, as the sea is more likely to be rough. Tides are of course very important. Before you go, find out what the tide is doing; it is important to know whether it's going out or coming in. The interesting thing to note about tides in South Devon is that on spring tides (the biggest tides, occurring at the time of the full and new moons), high water will always be at about 6pm, while low water will always be at about noon.



# SHARRAH POOL CIRCULAR

Experience the raw purity of the River Dart rushing through a wooded gorge, a steep ascent to a remarkable tor, and a picturesque Dartmoor village.

**Y**ou start in ancient woodland, walking past a whole series of cascades, chutes and pools, many of which are suitable for swimming in. This is one of the most beautiful stretches of the River Dart. The water is invariably clear, passing as it does over pure granite. You can normally see trout, as well as minnows and bullheads in the shallows. The woods are gorgeous at all times of the year, whether in the starkness of winter, in the acid green growth of spring, or in the autumn, when fungi, including penny buns, chanterelles and hedgehog mushrooms can be found. After about a quarter of an hour's walk you climb a steep hill to the top of Holne Cliff, from where you can see down to a big pool below. This is known locally as Betsy's Pool, and is off Wellsfoot Island, which has a sandy beach. There are also amazing views up the Dart Gorge from the top of Holne Cliff.

You go down the other side of the hill and keep walking until you reach a spectacular waterfall ③, which you need to cross. You are now walking high above the river, and down below are various islands. Eventually you reach a stile, and a few minutes further on you reach Sharrah Pool ④. It is unmistakable, because it's absolutely huge. It has a most magical waterfall at the top, with enormous rocks, one of which has been christened Elephant Rock by outdoor swimmers. The thing to do is the 'Sharrah Chute', which involves climbing onto Elephant Rock, and then jumping out into the current and getting swept down like a cork popping out of a champagne bottle. Just down from the cascade, you zoom through a rectangular channel, with 'walls' of granite, before the pool opens out into a vast oval. Once floating in the pool, if you look upstream and then up, you will see the rocky buttress of Bench Tor, overlook-

## INFORMATION

**DISTANCE:** 5 miles

**TIME:** 3 hours

**MAP:** OS Explorer Dartmoor OL28

**START POINT:** Newbridge (SX711 708, TQ13 7NT). Park in the small car park by the road on the Ashburton side of the bridge

**END POINT:** Newbridge

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** Buses: the X38 from Exeter and Plymouth, and the 88 from Newton Abbot and Totnes. Then you'll need to taxi to the start point

**SWIMMING:** Sharrah Pool (SX 697 716) on the River Dart, plus numerous smaller pools

**PLACES OF INTEREST:** Sharrah Pool, Bench Tor, Holne Parish Church (which is notable for its rare medieval painted roodscreen)

**REFRESHMENTS:** The Holne Tea Rooms, a wonderful village enterprise, with excellent food and friendly villagers serving it (01364 631188, TQ13 7SL). The Church House Inn at Holne, a traditional country pub (01364 631208, TQ13 7SJ)







ing the pool like a castle standing sentinel. It's not known how the pool got its name. Some think it may be a corruption of 'Sarah's Pool', but as to who Sarah was, nobody knows.

Once you've enjoyed a swim, the walk then takes you on a virtually vertical climb, about five hundred feet up to Bench Tor. You'll get so hot climbing up through the woods you'll probably want another swim, which is possible towards the end of the walk. Once you get to Bench Tor ⑦ the views down over the Dart Gorge are absolutely magnificent. You can hear the rush of the river, as well as see it, and you can even make out Sharrah Pool down below. Eric Hemery, in *High Dartmoor*, says the Tor was described as 'Benjay Tor' in the first edition of the OS one inch map in 1809, and he calls it 'Benjy Tor. However, Bench Tor would seem a suitable name, as unlike most Dartmoor tors it is much wider than it is high. It spreads in groups of rock along a promontory, and according to Hemery, one of the outcrops was once known as 'Eagle Rock', probably because of the habitat's wild, isolated suitability for the bird, before it disappeared and fled to Scotland.

Once you've explored all around the tor, and taken in its tremendous views, you then walk south and pick up the road to Holne ⑧. This is a beautiful Dartmoor village, with a particularly good tea shop, run by volunteers. They certainly don't stint on the cream in their cream teas! Or if that doesn't take your fancy you can have a refreshing pint in the pub.

After a pit stop, it's pretty much downhill all the way back. You head along the footpath down through a couple of fields and then pick up the path by the river, just near where you started. There are several pools along here if you fancy another dip before going home.

# DIRECTIONS

1 Walk along the eastern/southern bank of the Dart, keeping the river on your right.

**0.1 miles**

2 After about five minutes you will reach a fork – with a signpost to Holne pointing to the left hand fork. Ignore this and stay on the path going alongside the river.

**0.3 miles**

3 After about 35 minutes walk – in which you ascend a big hill and go down again - you cross a waterfall.

**1 mile**

4 After another 10–15 minutes walk you will reach a stile. Head over and down the path where you will see Sharrah Pool up ahead on the right.

**0.5 miles**

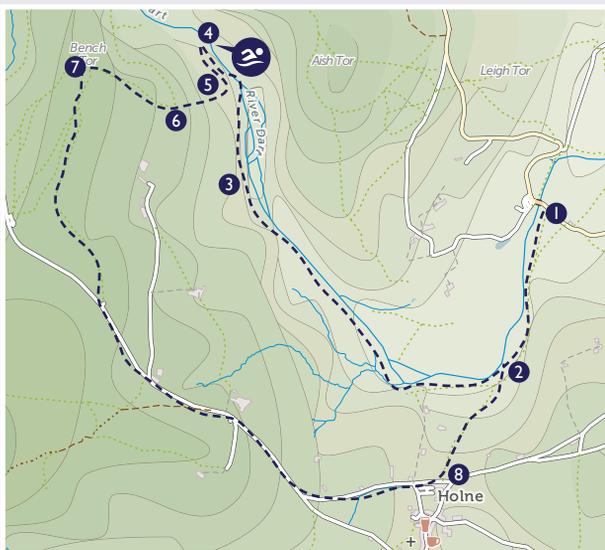
5 After a swim, come back to the stile and turn immediately right and follow the fence right up through the woods - a very steep climb. Follow the path until it comes out of the woods, and along to a field gate.

**0.3 miles**

6 At the gate turn right and follow the field boundary on your left, and then bear right to Bench Tor which you will see up ahead.

**0.3 miles**

7 Once you've explored Bench Tor, turn back and follow the stone wall on your left. It will take you to the road, where you turn left and walk down into the village of Holne.



**2 miles**

8 Once you've explored Holne, re-join the road where you will find a fingerpost sign to a path which leads you down through fields and back to the river.

**0.3 miles**

9 The path links up with the very first section of path; follow it back up to your car.

**0.4 miles**