

# 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 yellow 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*.

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# 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.



## Walk 15

# MOUNT BATTEN PENINSULA CIRCULAR

An unusual walk taking in the fascinating maritime history of Britain's Ocean City, with amazing views of Plymouth Sound and plenty of swims along the way

**T**oday's walk starts from Jennycliff car park, which boasts impressive views across Plymouth Sound on a clear day. From left to right you should be able to see the Plymouth Breakwater, the headland at Penlee Point and the villages of Kingsand and Cawsand in Cornwall, Mount Edgcombe Country Park, Drakes Island, the Tamar Estuary and Plymouth Hoe. Jennycliff itself takes its name from the jennies (female donkeys) which once grazed here. The walk takes you down past the café and past a large South West Coast Path marker stone. These large white stones signify you have also joined Plymouth's Waterfront Walkway, a 9.3 mile trail featuring art works and interpretation boards illustrating the city's rich heritage.

Once you have paused at the benches on the headland above Rum Bay for yet more wonderful views, the path takes you past another marker stone and down to Batten Bay ②. This is a great swim spot at high tide and also a popular place for rock pooling and crabbing at low tide when the rocks are exposed. Look out for the velvet swimming crab with red eyes and aggressive fighting tactics! The views as you swim out are wonderful, while there are some rocky gullies to explore off to the right, where you might also spot shags and oyster catchers.

The bay is also popular with snorkellers, with a limestone reef offshore, as well as eelgrass beds and even shipwrecks. There's plenty to spot in the water below, including seahorses, pink sea fan, dead man's fingers, sea slugs, sea cucumbers, crabs, anemones and pipefish. Incidentally if you do see a large dorsal fin in the waters during the summer months, you may have spotted the

### INFORMATION

**DISTANCE:** 2.5 miles

**TIME:** 2-3 hours

**MAP:** OS Explorer South Devon OL20

**START POINT:** Jennycliff Car Park (SX 492 523, PL9 9SW)

**END POINT:** Jennycliff Car Park

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** From Plymouth catch the First Devon and Cornwall service 2 to Hooe Road and then it's an 8 minute walk to Jennycliff. In the summer the 54 bus service runs directly to Jennycliff from the city centre. You can also take the ferry across from the Barbican and start and finish the walk from there

**SWIMMING:** Batten Bay (SX 488 530), Clovelly Bay (SX 493 531), Hooe Lake (SX 497 527)

**PLACES OF INTEREST:** Mount Batten Tower, the Breakwater, Mount Batten Peninsula, Turnchapel, Hooe Lake

**REFRESHMENTS:** Jennycliff Café serves hearty breakfasts and delicious fish and chips, all served with incredible views (01752 402358, PL9 9SW). The Clovelly Bay Inn is a very popular village inn in Turnchapel, renowned for its food and ales, and with a beach on the doorstep (01752 402765, PL9 9TB)



second largest species of shark in the world. Don't worry, it's only a plankton-eating Basking Shark.

After your swim, the walk continues past the bay and up the hill to the Mount Batten Tower. The Mount Batten Peninsula (or Howe Stert as it was known before the Civil War) is almost certainly the oldest settlement in Plymouth. There was a thriving community here from at least 1000 BC until the Roman era, as many Bronze and Iron Age artefacts have been discovered here. The tower itself dates to the 1650s and the Dutch Wars, and is named after Vice Admiral Captain Batten, who commanded the naval forces defending the peninsula during the English Civil War. The tower remained in defence use until the 1770s and was later used as a naval and coastguard look-out and signal tower. The tower is only open to the public on special occasions, but the views from the hill are magnificent.

Steps take you down to the Mount Batten Breakwater ③ and another marker stone engraved with the image of a seaplane and a hint at the area's history. The peninsula was used for seaplane trials in the early days of the Royal Naval Air Service, which established a seaplane station here in 1917 to defend the South West. This became RAF Catterwater and was renamed RAF Mount Batten in 1928 at the suggestion of one Aircraftman Shaw, better known as TE Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), who was stationed here. The base became particularly active during the Second World War, when it also became the target for German air raids. Post-war it became a maintenance unit and later an RAF School of Combat Survival and the Marine Branch for Air/Sea Rescue. The RAF sold Mount Batten in 1992 and the area was redeveloped as a recreational area and centre for water sports.

There are great views from here across to The Hoe, which is Plymouth's waterfront park, with its iconic red and white lighthouse, Smeaton's Tower. The lighthouse was moved here from the Eddystone Rocks when it was replaced with a new lighthouse in 1882. Just slightly to the left of the lighthouse you should also be able to spot the renovated Art Deco Tinside Lido jutting out into the water. The Plymouth members of Devon and Cornwall Wild Swimmers meet here for swims throughout the year, on the steps by Tinside Beach.

The walk continues past the Mount Batten Pier, where you can catch a ferry across to the historic Barbican. This charming area is home to the Mayflower Steps where the Pilgrim Fathers set sail on their voyage to the New World in 1620. The Barbican is also home to the National Marine Aquarium and, more importantly, Plymouth Gin! Look across to the right before you pass the Hotel Mount Batten and you will spot a replica of the propeller of a Sunderland flying boat. The slipway you pass is the starting point of the swim section of the annual Plymouth Triathlon.

As you continue around the peninsula you will spot code words embedded in the walkway. In the early 20th century, seafarers would use telegraphs to communicate with those back home. However, they were charged by the word, meaning a long message could become very expensive. To get around this problem, Captain DH Barnard devised *The Nautical Telegraph Code* in which one word stood for a particular message. The messages can be found all along Plymouth's Waterfront Walkway, although you'll need a copy of the book to uncover the meanings.

The walk continues past the Mount Batten Centre for water sports and alongside the Catterwater, which is the estuary of the River Plym. The path



then winds through a boat yard and into the Yacht Haven area, an impressive marina in the shelter of Clovelly Bay. After walking up the steps, you then drop back down into the olde-worlde village of Turnchapel, ④ with funky colourful buildings including the Clovelly Bay Inn. This popular pub has two entrances, one advertising Ales and the other Vittles and is well worth a refreshment stop. There's also a small beach in front of the pub, should you fancy a different type of refreshment.

Next you'll pass Turnchapel Wharf, which was the former home of 539 Royal Marines Assault Squadron and is now a waterfront site for various marine businesses including Princess Yachts. You'll then turn right alongside Hooe Lake ⑤, a tidal creek off the Plym Estuary. The four pillars in the water once carried a railway from Plymouth to Turnchapel when it was a thriving centre for shipbuilding and repair. At low tide the decaying hulks of a several old boats can be spotted in the creek, making for great photo opportunities. It's also lovely to swim here at high tide, from the small beach halfway along. At the end of the creek a dam separates Hooe Lake from freshwater Radford Lake and you'll be able to spot a folly built in the early 19th century, known as Radford Castle.



After a short stint walking up the hill along pavements and past some uninspiring architecture, you'll soon turn onto a welcome grassy path which leads you back up to the car park. Jennycliff Beach, about a five minute walk from the car park is another lovely place for a final swim, but at the time of writing it was closed due to cliff falls. Looking out over this green clifftop, it's easy to forget how close to a major city you are. But Plymouth bills itself as 'Britain's Ocean City' for a reason, and this unusual swim walk has certainly proved why.

## DIRECTIONS

➊ From the car park at Jennycliff walk in front of the café across the grassy area to the right towards the stone with the acorn symbol on it, and onto the South West Coast Path. Follow the path around the headland above Rum Bay, past the benches to another stone marked South, then towards the wooden footpath sign in the bottom corner of the field. Follow the hedged path down and then left onto the pavement.

**0.5 miles**

➋ Turn left down the wooden steps and onto the beach for a swim stop at Batten Bay. Following the swim, walk back up the wooden steps and turn left along the pavement and then turn left at the Breakwater sign. Then go up the hill to Mount Batten. The steps then take you down towards the Breakwater.

**0.3 miles**

➌ Walk past the waymarker stone with the aeroplane on it and along the waterside path past the foot ferry. The path now curves along the Cattewater (the estuary of the River Plym), past the Mount Batten Centre for water sports and through the boat yard. Turn left down past the metal buoys and follow the Coast Path signs for Turnchapel, winding through the Yacht Haven area. At the top of the steps turn left and then left again, past the blue plaque for TE Lawrence and down into Turnchapel and the Clovelly Bay Inn. There is another potential swim spot from the beach in front of the pub.

**0.7 miles**



➍ Continue through Turnchapel, then right at the end and past Princess Yachts. At the end turn right along the tidal creek past the old railway bridge supports into Hooe Lake. There are several places along here you can enter the water for a swim at high tide.

**0.4 miles**

➎ Continue along the side of the lake, then turn right onto Hooe Road and then left onto Jennycliff Lane. Walk up the hill and then turn left onto the grassy track and back up to Jennycliff Car Park.

**0.5 miles**