

# WILD swimming *Walks*

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

Sophie Pierce  
Matt Newbury



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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.



# CELLAR BEACH CIRCULAR

This is a simply gorgeous walk and swim, taking in huge and rugged cliffs, with vertiginous and far-reaching views, as well as the softer scenery of the Yealm estuary.

**C**ellar Beach is an idyllic place to dip, and, if you're feeling a bit more energetic, you can swim up the estuary to the pub in the village. The walk starts in the picturesque village of Noss Mayo ❶, which clusters around a creek of the Yealm estuary. Its origins go back to the 13th century, and there is an unusual story about the name. Apparently King Edward I gave the manor to a fellow called Mathew Fitzjohn, and so it became known as Noss Mayo – Mathew's nose. Maybe he really did have a notable nose, or perhaps, more prosaically, the name refers to the promontory on which the village sits.

The first part of the walk is the hardest, as you ascend from the village, past fields and the odd cottage, to the coast path ❷. Once here, it's pretty much flat or downhill the rest of the way. On the coast path, the views are absolutely spectacular, both downwards to the craggy and tantalisingly inaccessible coves below, and out to sea, where you should be able to see the Eddystone Lighthouse on a clear day. You walk along a wide path known as Revelstoke's Drive. It was created by Edward Baring, a Victorian financier and Director of the Bank of England, who had his country estate here, and took the name Lord Revelstoke when he was made a Baron. He built the drive so he could enjoy the panoramic views from the comfort of his horse-drawn carriage. The first headland you reach, Blackstone Point, has a wall around it, which was built to prevent the horses from tumbling down the cliffs below.

As you walk around from Blackstone Point, you will see a picturesque cottage ahead, right on the coast path. This is Warren Cottage ❸, which Lord Revelstoke used as a tea house for summer parties. What fun it must have been to travel out in the carriage

## INFORMATION

**DISTANCE:** 4.5 miles

**TIME:** 2 hours

**MAP:** OS Explorer South Devon OL20

**START POINT:** Car park by the tennis courts in Noss Mayo (PL8 1EH, SX 547 474)

**END POINT:** Car park by the tennis courts in Noss Mayo

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** Number 94 Bus from Plymouth. Mon-Sat

**SWIMMING:** Cellar Beach (SX 531 475) River Yealm estuary at Kilpatrick Steps (SX 540 477)

**PLACES OF INTEREST:**

Revelstoke Drive, Cellar Beach which is sandy at low tide

**REFRESHMENTS:** The Ship Inn, Noss Mayo has a lovely setting overlooking the harbour with wooden floors and log fires in winter. It also has fun, clear 'pods' you can sit in outside, enjoying the views while staying warm (01752 872387, PL8 1EW). Also the Swan Inn (01752 872392, PL8 1EE). At low tide you can walk across to the Dolphin Inn in Newton Ferrers (01752 872007, PL8 1AE)



along the top of the cliffs, before stopping for a huge spread - no doubt taken out by the servants in advance. It's even rumoured that the future Edward VII took tea here.

As you continue to walk along the coast path, you will see a triangular shaped island. This is the Mewstone, which, amazingly, was inhabited in Victorian times by a series of individuals, the last of whom was called Samuel Wakeham, who lived there with his wife Anne, some chickens, some pigs and lots of rabbits. Apparently it was quite a popular destination for day trippers from Plymouth, who would pay a crown to go out in a boat and call on Sam on the island. He even took the trouble to carve steps in the rocks, to assist the ladies as they came ashore.

The path continues bearing north towards the estuary, with beautiful views down to inlets and lagoons below. At the mouth of the estuary is a sandbar. There's a local tradition of playing cricket there on the rare occasions when there are very low spring tides, when it's exposed just long enough for a quick game!

Cellar Beach ⑦ is just inside the mouth of the estuary, and at high tide it gets covered by water. It doesn't matter, as there is a huge rocky outcrop which soaks up the sun and is a great place to sit and relax; it's also good to swim off. The name Cellar is thought to refer to the temporary storage buildings the fishermen used to build on the beach, to house their equipment. You may notice that the locals refer to it as Cellars Beach. This is because its original name was 'Old Cellars Beach'.

It is enormous fun to swim from Cellar Beach up the estuary to The Ship Inn in Noss Mayo. It's a distance of about 1½ miles, but do use the incoming tide to help you. The tidal push



is strongest three-four hours after low water. Alternatively, for a shorter but equally enjoyable swim, you can get in at Kilpatrick Steps, just past the cluster of houses around the old Toll House, further along on the walk (see below), or indeed at any point along the estuary where you can get in. It is important to wear a bright swimming cap so you can be seen by the many boats in the estuary.



This swim is particularly magical. When you're being moved along by the incoming tide, it's a bit like flying as you whizz over the seabed below. The water is usually clear and you may see shoals of sand eel, as well as bass and mullet. As you get further up the estuary, it's apparent that it's a haven for people who love 'messaging about in boats', and you'll pass all manner of craft. The Yealm is home to a particular sort of sailing boat, the Drascombe, which was designed by John Watkinson in the 1960s. These boats were first built in a yard in the village, and have an enthusiastic following; the Drascombe Association describes them as "simple, rugged and seakindly".

If you do go for the estuary swim there will hopefully be walkers in the party to carry your stuff on to Noss Mayo. The final part of the walk, which pretty much goes alongside the swim, involves taking the path back up from Cellar Beach, and continuing along through exceptionally pretty woods, with beautiful views through the trees to the estuary below. You pass the Toll House for the original Yealm Ferry; the old toll sign is still there. It cost you three old pence to take a 'horse or an ass' on the ferry, and one penny for a bag of potatoes. Just after the Toll House and other houses around it you will pass Kilpatrick Steps on your left, another lovely swim spot.

The path becomes a single track road, which continues through the woods alongside the estuary, and finishes in the village by The Ship. This pub does a particularly good line in hot chocolate, with squirry cream on top, perfect for warming up after the swim!

# DIRECTIONS

**1** From the car park, turn left up the lane, with the houses on your right.

**0.1 miles**

**2** The lane turns into a track. There is a sign saying No Through Road; keep following the track.

**0.5 miles**

**3** After about 20 minutes the path hits a road, you will see a gate straight ahead with a sign saying Coastal Footpath and Worswell Farm. Turn left along the road and soon right by a car park. There is a sign saying Public Footpath / Coast Path. You get to a gate which says Keep Dogs Under Control – go through here, turn right and follow the coast path west with the sea on your left.

**0.5 miles**

**4** Follow the path past Warren Cottage, and keep going.

**0.7 miles**

**5** Follow the path around the headland at the mouth of the estuary and follow it into the woods with the estuary on your left.

**0.2 miles**

**6** Once out of the woods, you pass a valley with fields and a stream on your left, and then get to some cottages on your right.

**0.5 miles**

**7** It is easy to miss the turning down to Cellar Beach. It's on the left, opposite a large Arts and Crafts style house, which has a weather vane with a ship on it. There is a



small wooden sign with the yellow National Trust acorn on it, saying Cellar Beach. Take this left hand turning off the main path and follow it down to the beach.

**670 feet**

**8** Coming back up from the beach, turn left at the Arts and Crafts house and follow the path. Just past the gate and a parking area on the left, there's a path to

the left going down into the woods. Take this path.

**0.2 miles**

**9** Follow the path behind the cottages and the Toll House and past Kilpatrick Steps (another swim spot). Keep going and you will pick up a road which takes you along the estuary and back to the village.

**1.1 miles**