

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



Splan 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.

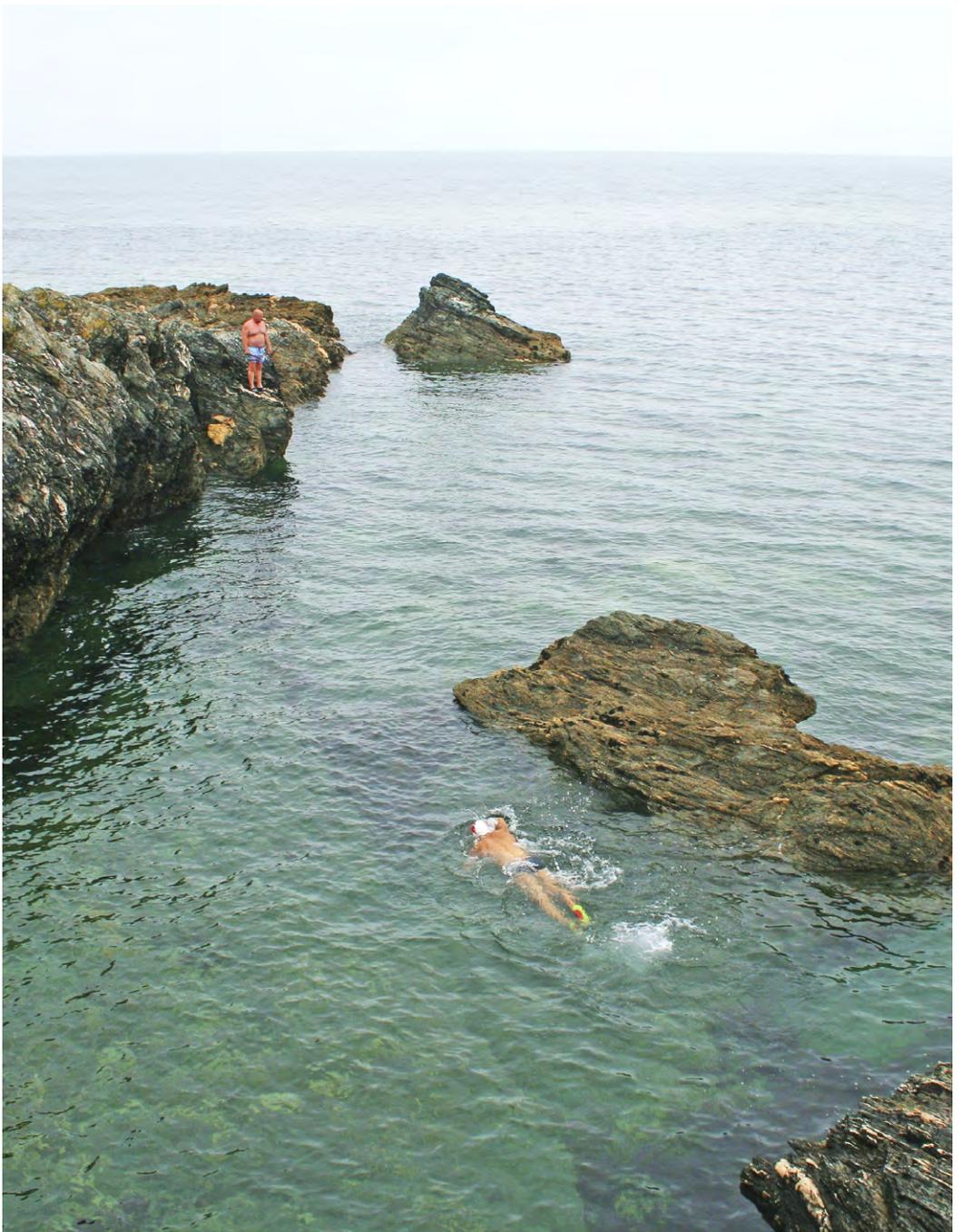
Watch out in high surf - rip-currents can form which take you out to sea, to behind the breaking waves. Swim perpendicularly from them to escape, then body-surf back in.

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 20

WOODCOMBE SANDS AND IVY COVE CIRCULAR

Gin-clear sea, rocky platforms and unusual raised beaches all feature on this beautiful walk through the remote southernmost point of Devon.

Both the beaches featured on this walk are bristling with channels and gulleys, so you can have a real adventure swimming through mazes of rocks, over beautiful colourful bedrock, and through kelp gardens.

The walk starts in the village of East Prawle **1**, which has acquired something of a cult status due to its rock star connections. The landlord of the pub the Pig's Nose used to be in the music business, and has persuaded star names including Damon Albarn of Blur, and Paul Young, to perform in the hall next to the pub. Sadly though Kate Bush, who has a holiday home nearby, has not yet been persuaded to appear.

There are lots of campsites in the village, mostly very basic in farmers' fields. Many people come down for the entire summer and it is fun to camp for the night after you've done the walk. You could then do our Start Point walk the following day and make a weekend of it (or indeed the other way round!)

As you walk down towards the sea, you will see the promontory of Prawle Point to your right. The word Prawle comes from the Anglo Saxon, meaning 'lookout', and it has served this purpose throughout the centuries, including during the Napoleonic and World Wars. HM Coastguard set it up as a coastguard station after the war, but it was closed during a period of cutbacks. In the 1990s a voluntary organisation, the National Coastwatch Institution, was set up to fill the gap and now teams of volunteer watchkeepers keep a visual watch over the coastline here. There is an interesting visitor centre which is worth a detour if you have time, and the watchkeepers are a friendly bunch.

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 5 miles

TIME: 2-3 hours

MAP: OS Explorer South Devon OL20

START POINT: East Prawle village green (SX 780 363, TQ7 2BY). Park at the green or on roads in the village

END POINT: East Prawle village green

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: The Coleridge community bus; check website for details: coleridgebus.co.uk

SWIMMING: Woodcombe Cove (SX 796 368), Ivy Cove (SX 799 369)

PLACES OF INTEREST: Prawle Point Coastwatch, Ivy Cove

REFRESHMENTS: The Pig's Nose Inn, an eccentric pub, always very busy, with good food and real ales, and baskets of knitting for you to do if you're that way inclined! Don't try and pay with a card as they only take cash or cheques (01548 511209, TQ7 2BY). The Piglet Café, East Prawle is a lovely, friendly café serving up great breakfasts and cream teas (01548 511486, TQ7 2BY)

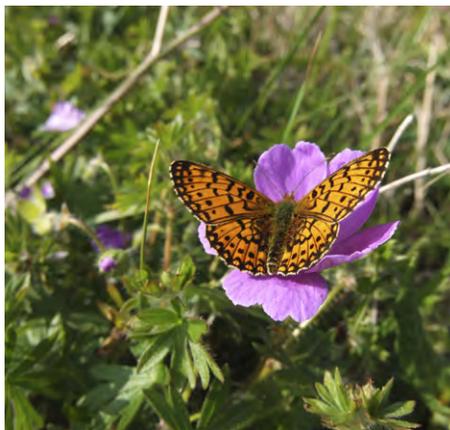


As you get down onto the coast path, you get an incredible view of Prawle Point, the 'horse's head'. It is very striking, but also infuriating as you can't get a decent photograph as you're so far away! The only way to get closer to it is in a boat. Don't, whatever you do, swim anywhere near Prawle Point, as the currents around it are really dangerous.

Down on the coast path, as you head east towards Start Point, you'll notice wheat fields, with rocky cliffs behind them. This land formation is unusual and very exciting to geologists. The cliffs behind the fields mark the old coastline, before a major period of geological change. They are formed of hornblende schist, and have a beautiful green tint. The 'raised beach', or 'wave-cut platform', which forms the coastline today was created around ten thousand years ago, towards the end of the last ice age, when sea levels were about seven metres higher than they are today, as a result of the ice sheets melting. At the same time, mud was pouring over the cliffs and settling on the flat strip of land that was left behind when the sea level dropped again, creating a fertile platform, which started to be farmed in the Bronze Age. Until fairly recently cauliflowers were farmed here, with the farmers using seaweed from the beaches as fertiliser, but at the moment wheat seems to be the crop of choice.

Continuing along the coast path, look out for birds of prey soaring above the cliffs to your left. If you're lucky you might see a peregrine falcon, but buzzards and kestrels are more likely. Look out for cirl bunting too; they can often be seen on top of the hedges, alongside yellowhammers and stonechats. Another rarity to be seen around here is the delicate pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly.

You'll pass Maelcombe House, formerly



an Edwardian mansion, which has now been demolished and is being rebuilt as a new luxury home. Local rumour has it that the new owner is a millionaire from Wales, who invented a widget which is in every single mobile phone sold throughout the world. There are lots of pretty flowers around the path here, including some roses growing down the cliff: escapees from the long-established garden. It's a house in splendid isolation and with impressive views.

You pass Horseley Cove, which is a long, wild beach but only good for swimming at high tide due to the rocky shelf. It's best to head for Woodcombe Sand ④ a truly idyllic beach, with incredibly clear water. A seemingly unused boathouse is the only sign of human presence. The bay has a beautiful bedrock of grey and white striped stone, which is stunning to swim over. There are platforms on the left hand side of the beach (looking at the sea) that you can dive off at high water (always check the depth first), as well as channels and inlets to explore. There are a couple



of islands to the right of the beach called Ballsaddle Rock, where there are lots of cormorants and other sea birds.

Ivy Cove 5, the next beach, is only 10 minutes walk from Woodcombe. You can swim between the two if you want. Until 40 years ago there was a small fishing fleet based in the cove, and it was a real working place, unlike today. The rusty old winch the fishermen used is still there. Sophie's dad went on holiday there as a boy, in 1938, and stayed with a fishing family, the Logans, who lived in the cottages above the beach. Amazingly, Bill Logan, a descendant of the family, still lives in the cottages.

In 1938 the beach was a hive of activity. The fishermen went mainly for crabs and lobster, and you can still see the iron rings in the rocks where pots and boats were anchored. Life was tough and there weren't many luxuries. Sophie's father Roger remembers how all the rubbish would get tipped out from the cottages directly down the cliff, which was consequently alive

with rats. He and his brother would amuse themselves by hiding under the tarpaulin covering the boats and shooting the rats with an air gun.

Bill Logan, the last descendant of the fishermen from the cove, tells us that the fishing stopped here when the family switched to larger, motor-powered boats, and started fishing out of Dartmouth. It is lovely that he is still there, a permanent resident with his beautifully tended garden and vegetable patch by the sea. It will probably become yet another holiday cottage when he dies.

Swimming at Ivy Cove is wonderful. You can swim along to the next beach, Lannacombe, over forests of kelp and maiden's tresses seaweed, exploring a maze of channels, and sheltered from the main body of the sea by numerous large rocks. There are several lagoons where many local youngsters learned to swim in the past.

Ivy Cove is a bit of a well-kept secret; it is not marked on the Ordnance Survey map, and there was a huge cliff fall in January 2013 which resulted in the cliff path being diverted, which has taken walkers away from the beach. So enjoy the sense of isolation and let your mind wander back to when it was a much busier place.

The walk takes you back up through a pretty wood and through the fields to the village, where you can have a well-earned pint in the Pig's Nose pub. Not only that, but it offers free wine gums and snuff, and 'stress therapy with barmaids!' If you have more time in the area then it's also worth exploring west along the coast path to the wonderful sandy swimming coves of Elender (best in the morning as it's east-facing) and Venerick 's (known locally as Moor Sands).

DIRECTIONS

1 From the village green, take the road south towards the sea, going past Mollie Tucker's field on the left. Follow the road downhill past Ash Park on the right, ignoring the public bridleway sign. Stay on the road and go past the Little Holloway campsite on the left.

0.5 miles

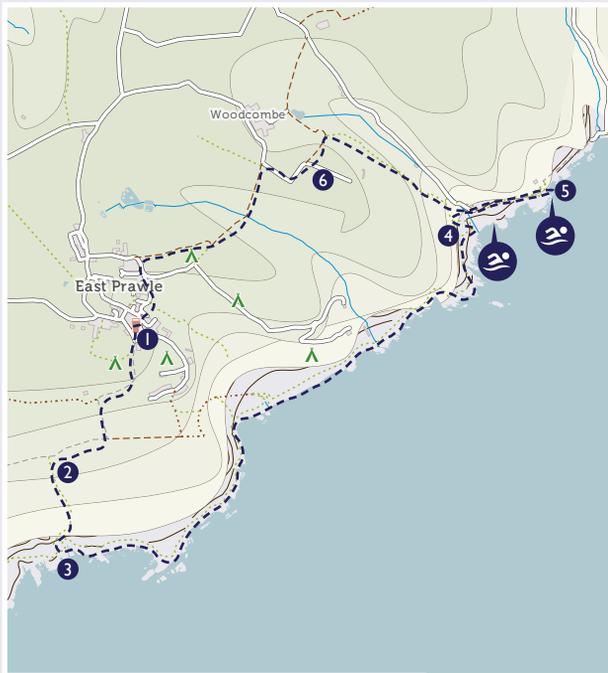
2 You will see a sign pointing left saying Public Footpath, Link to Coast Path. Turn left here and walk through the field towards the next field, with the hedge on your left. Walk past an old bath (serving as a trough!) and continue to the bottom of the hill.

0.2 miles

3 Go through the left hand stile and turn left, picking up the coast path. You are now walking east. Follow the coast path past Maelcombe House (at the time of writing, the house was being rebuilt). Keep following the path up and around a rocky headland (getting uneven underfoot) until you come to a signpost pointing right to Woodcombe Sands.

1.7 miles

4 Turn right here to go down to the beach. Coming back from the beach, re-join the coast path eastwards. Ignore a left hand sign for Woodcombe, and keep following the coast path. Ignore the sign for Lannacombe, and go straight on where the sign says Public Footpath, Ivy Cove (Dead End). Follow the path past the terrace of three cottages on the left and down to the beach.



0.5 miles

5 Coming back, retrace your steps until the sign for Woodcombe, turn right here and ascend through the wood. The path emerges onto a track. Keep going up the hill and through a five-bar gate, and continue to follow the path between two hedges. Turn left where a sign says Public Bridleway.

0.8 miles

6 You then reach a five-bar gate and turn right into the road. Keep walking and you will see a small sign with a blue arrow on it pointing right. Follow the road to the right

here. Then turn left where there is a sign saying Public Bridleway, East Prawle ½ mile. Follow the path with a cornfield on your left, down into a wood and up again. The path bears right and you then turn left where there is a sign saying Public Bridleway. This takes you back to the village.

0.9 miles