

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*.

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



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.

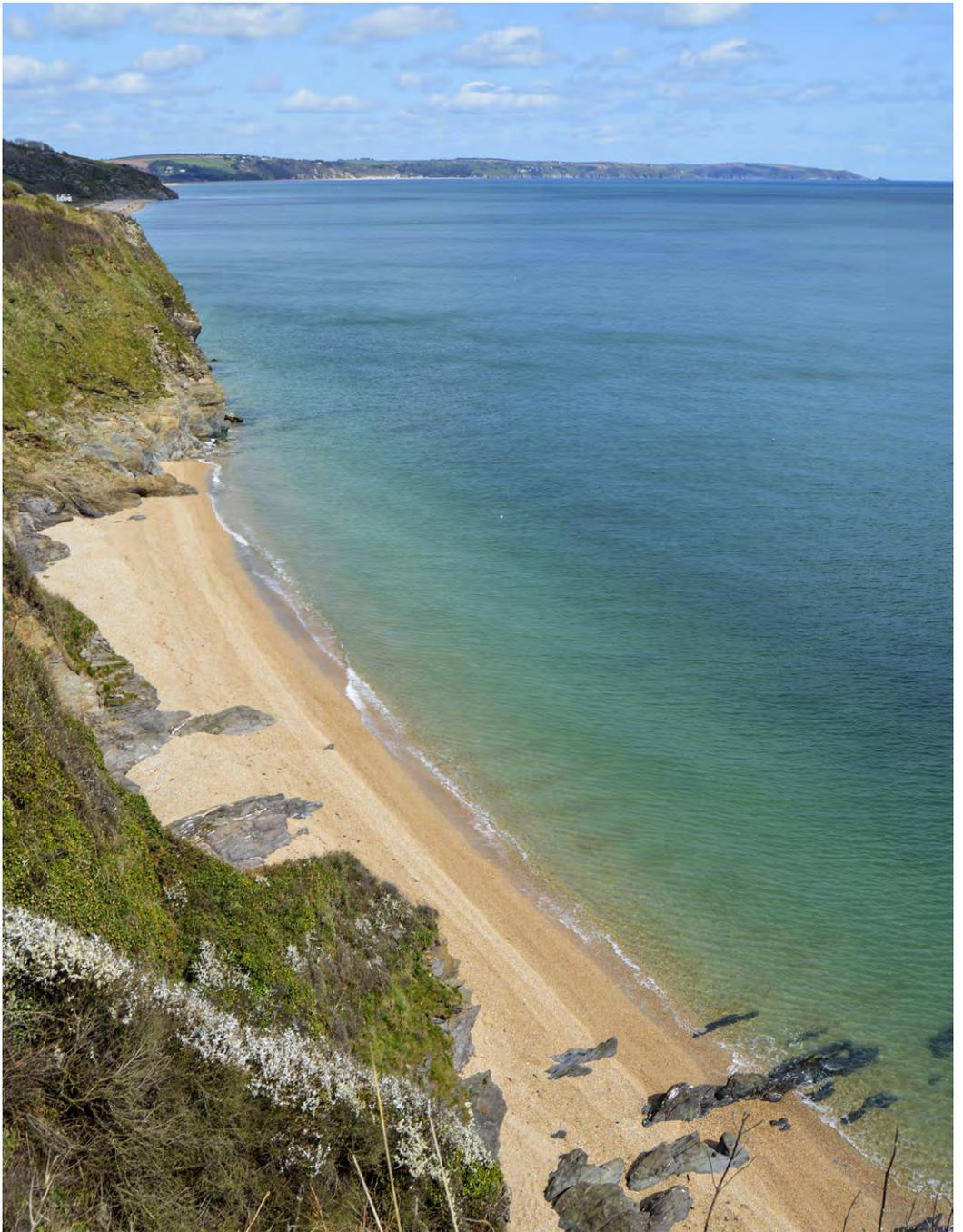
Watch out in high surf - rip-currents can form which take you out to sea, to behind the breaking waves. Swim perpendicularly from them to escape, then body-surf back in.

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 22

BEESANDS TO HALLSANDS CIRCULAR

This stunning circular coastal walk takes in charming fishing villages, magnificent countryside and a swim to a ruined village.

Our walk begins in Beesands, an amiable seaside village with a permanent population of around 100 people and several converted fishermen's cottages, now available as popular holiday lets. Park for free next to Britannia @ the Beach, a seafood shack, waiting to reward you with delicious fish soup and seafood treats on your return. This is the retail outlet of Britannia Fisheries, which provides fish and shellfish to restaurants right across the region. Crab, lobster, bass, mackerel, turbot, skate and lemon sole are often landed at Beesands, as well as diver-caught scallops, mussels, clams and oysters.

Begin your walk with the sea on your left and the striking Start Point Lighthouse in the distance. Several of the fishing cottages you pass have porch seats built into the entrances, which would once have provided views out to sea for wives eagerly awaiting the return of their fishermen husbands. Today the sea defences block some of this view, but not for us upright walkers. When we visited, one of our group described the view (from the Daymark tower above Dartmouth to the left, around to the lighthouse to the right) as a wide-screen cinematic panorama. She pointed out that much of the Devon coast has smaller bays with natural rocky arms to cradle them, while this bay is completely open and exposed.

On your right you'll pass the Cricket Inn, which dates back to 1867 and is another great place to enjoy freshly caught seafood. Its surprising claim to fame is that a pre-Rolling Stones Keith Richards and Mick Jagger played their first ever gig here. Apparently Richards' family regularly spent holidays in the village and one summer they invited an adolescent Mick along, who complained about the lack of young girls in the area. The pair turned to music to fill the void and the rest is history. It's not the

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 3 miles

TIME: 3 hours

MAP: OS Explorer South Devon OL20

START POINT: Car park at Beesands (SX 819 405, TQ7 2EH)

END POINT: Car park at Beesands

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Coleridge Community Bus runs to Beesands and North Hallsands from Kingsbridge on Fridays only. Call 01548 580402

SWIMMING: North Hallsands (SX 817 389) to the ruined village and back; the beach at Beesands (SX 819 404)

PLACES OF INTEREST: Beesands, ruined village at Hallsands

REFRESHMENTS: The Cricket Inn is popular with locals and visitors alike, serving seafood including crab, lobster and scallops caught in Start Bay (01548 580215, TQ7 2EN). Britannia @ the Beach (affectionately known as 'The Shack') is a combination of a fishmonger, village store and unique seafood café (01548 581168, TQ7 2EH). Their crab soup is to die for!

only unexpected rock and roll connection we will uncover along the way.

The walk joins the coast path at a thatched cottage and the track soon leads you up to magnificent exposed fields, strewn with bracken. The path will take you around Tinsey Head, which is carpeted with bluebells in the spring and boasts tempting glimpses of sparkling waters below. Looking out across Start Bay, you'll spot the Skerries Bank Bell Buoy, which marks the north eastern end of a notorious shallow shingle bank that has been the cause of countless shipwrecks. The Skerries Bank stretches across to the lighthouse and is legendary for plaice fishing.

Also on the hunt for fish are the guillemots and razorbills you'll see sitting on the polished sea, like surfers waiting for the perfect wave. Every now and again they dive deep into the waters below and the lucky ones will return to the surface with a dark silver prize glinting in their beaks. In the summer months the cliffs are also home to a breeding colony of kittiwakes. You should keep an eye out for kestrels soaring on the wind too, hunting land-based prey. Sightings of basking sharks and dolphins are also common in the bay.

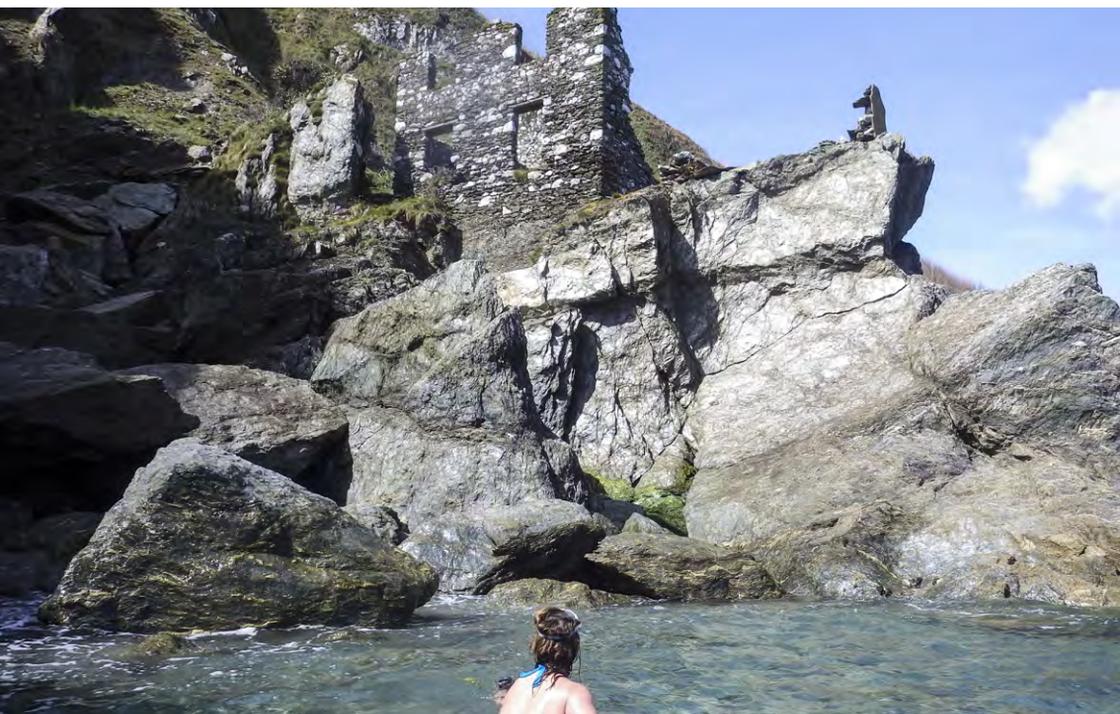
The shingle beach at the small hamlet of North Hallsands (known locally as Greenstraight) is backed by a reed bed and is popular with local fishermen, who inform us they often catch bass, flatfish and plaice from this picturesque spot. It's also popular with pop stars. Blur's Damon Albarn (who has a holiday home nearby) was inspired to write the Gorillaz album *Plastic Beach* after taking a stroll at North Hallsands and discovering lots of plastic particles washed up between the pebbles. It led to a meditation on the state of our oceans and the discovery that there is a huge expanse of debris floating in the Pacific Ocean. On the album, the

Gorillaz characters exist on the floating rubbish tip.

It is fun and fascinating to swim to the lost village ③. At low tide you can scramble along the shore but be careful not to get cut off. Alternatively if you walk up towards the coastguard cottages on the headland, there is a viewing platform looking over the ruined village. A detailed information board also shares the wretched tale of how a once-thriving fishing village was condemned by the stupidity of man. A giant dredging operation to supply gravel for the building of the naval dockyard at Devonport saw half a million tons of shingle removed from the Skerries Bank. The massive operation caused the beach level to drop by four metres, leaving the village exposed to high tides and easterly winds. Several buildings were destroyed or damaged during storms in 1903 and 1904, and urgent action was taken, including the building of a new sea wall. However a major storm in 1917 caused further destruction and the village was abandoned. All in all, the dredging ultimately caused 37 houses to slip into the sea. The information board includes a poignant poem by John Masefield:

*“But that its wretched ruins then
though sunken utterly
will show the brute greed of men
helps feed the greedy sea.”*

Swimming to the ruins is unforgettable. You head south from the beach, with the coast on your right, passing Wilson's Rock. The village is a melancholy site, with the remains of houses hanging off the cliff; amazingly you can still see bits of furniture. It's incredible to think that in the 1800s, the village was home to 159 people. There was a pub called the London Inn with





stables and a piggery, a shop with a post office, a grocery, a community centre and even allotments. Nearly all the men in the village made their living from fishing, with women and children posted on the clifftops looking out for shoals of fish. Fishing boats were stored on the beach and, in really rough conditions, Newfoundland dogs were trained to swim out into the waves and return with the boats' ropes clenched between their teeth.

When you are ready to continue the walk, head up the steps towards Prospect House ③ (also known as Trout's Apartments), which resembles something from the New England Coast and hides a remarkable history. It was originally built by two tenacious sisters who had lost their homes and livelihood when the village was destroyed. With a compensation payment they bought a plot of land, and then with a loan the plucky pair employed an out-of-work blacksmith to make bricks from the shingle on the beach. They used the 8,000 bricks to build a small guest house with their bare hands. This developed into the Trout's Hotel, which thrived for 30 years before being extended into the coastal apartments you see today.

It's a really pleasant walk back through the several ancient green lanes dating back centuries. It's incredible to think that people may have been travelling along these same routes as far back as the Bronze Age some 4,000 years ago. Look out for the willow growing by the stream, which would have provided the materials for making crab pots. It's then a genuinely spectacular walk down the side of fields and back to your starting point, where refreshments in the inn or seafood shack must be on the cards.



DIRECTIONS

1 Park for free by Britannia @ the Beach in Beesands. Walk to the right (with the sea on your left) and follow the coast defences past cottages and the Cricket Inn. At the sign saying No parking turning beyond this point, turn right past the thatch cottage and follow the sign saying Hallsands Im.

0.1 miles

2 Once out of the village and on the coast path, follow it through several gates and finally down onto the beach at Hallsands. Walk to the end of the beach and if you are wanting to swim to the ruined village, change into swim gear near the slipway.

0.7 miles

3 To view the ruined village from the shore, take the road to the southern end of the village and climb a long flight of steps, until you reach Prospect House/ Trout's Apartments. Bear right down the road and then after about 150 metres turn right opposite Trout's Car Park and climb over the stile onto the public footpath. You will see the viewing platform ahead. After admiring the ruins below, return to the main beach.

0.3 miles

4 Go back to the northern end of the beach, turning left after the gate. Continue along the path, passing a pond on the left before bearing right into a green lane.

0.4 miles

5 After about 200 metres and by a small stream, turn right onto a track which becomes another green lane. After you reach Higher Middlecombe Farm, bear right up the green lane to follow the red waymarker. When you meet the surfaced road, turn right and then after about 100 metres turn right again to follow a green waymarker for Beesands.

0.5 miles

6 Follow the fields down towards the sea and then turn left following the waymarker. When you reach the coast path, turn left and retrace your steps back to Beesands.

0.8 miles

