

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 river with a waterfall, and another person swimming in the water. 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*.

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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.

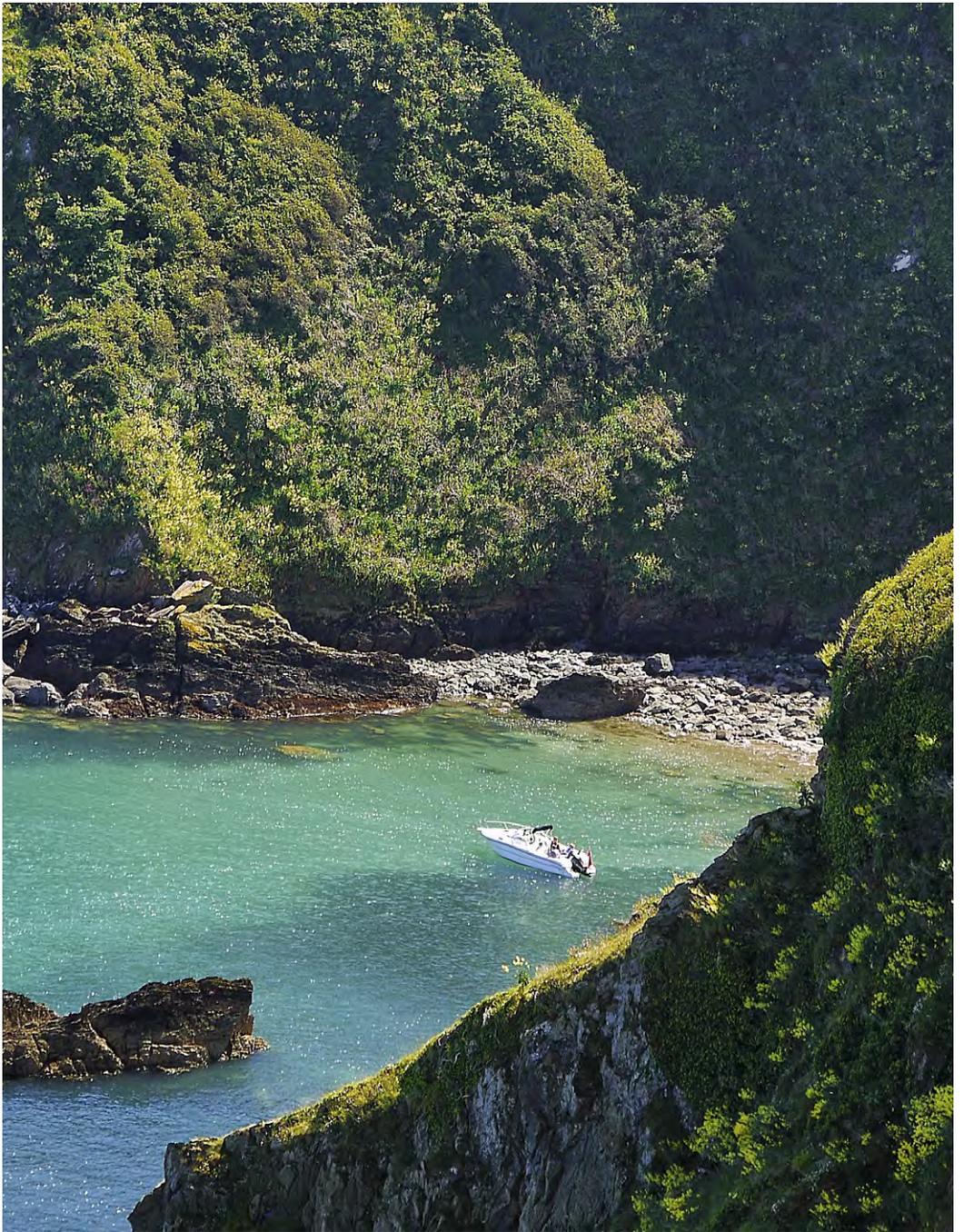
Watch out in high surf - rip-currents can form which take you out to sea, to behind the breaking waves. Swim perpendicularly from them to escape, then body-surf back in.

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 23

LITTLE DARTMOUTH, COMPASS COVE, SUGARY COVE, CASTLE COVE CIRCULAR

A glorious coastal walk with spectacular views. It takes in meadows, pasture and woods, culminating in a thrilling swim through a high sided chasm linking Sugary and Castle Coves.

The minute you start this walk you are assailed by stunning views to every side. Walking down towards the coast path you can see the famous Daymark in the distance on your left. It is a huge octagonal stone tower which was built in 1864 to guide mariners in to Dartmouth. It is visible for miles, including from Dartmoor. Meanwhile on your right, you can see all the way down to Start Point with great views of the long shingle beach at Slapton Sands.

As you walk, especially if it's a lovely summer's day, you'll quickly become aware of what a busy place Dartmouth is for mariners. Nearer towards the mouth of the estuary, you'll see all manner of boats out and about, from the little white sails of dinghies, through to fishing and pleasure boats, and the odd cargo ship further out to sea.

There are usually cattle grazing in the fields above the coast, including an unusual herd of British Whites, one of the oldest breeds in Britain. They are white, with black ears and noses. They are very gentle and are unusual in that when they have calves, they take it in turn to watch over them while the rest of the herd grazes. Also, look out for linnets, stonechats and yellowhammers which can often be seen.

You may notice some small islands out to sea. The smaller, nearer one is the Western Blackstone. Further out and larger is the Mewstone. The walk then takes you down a picturesque valley, with a triple fingerpost at the bottom. This is where you can head off to Compass Cove 5 if you wish to. This is a lovely little beach with

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 3 miles

TIME: 3 hours

TIDES: If you wish to swim through the chasm at Sugary Cove, you need to time your walk to coincide roughly with high water – give or take an hour either side. You need to allow an hour from the start of the walk to get to Sugary Cove.

MAP: OS Explorer South Devon OL20

START POINT: Little Dartmouth car park (SX 874 491, TQ6 0JR)

END POINT: Little Dartmouth car park

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Buses to Dartmouth from Plymouth and Brixham. Steam train from Paignton to Dartmouth

SWIMMING: Compass Cove SX 884 494, Sugary Cove SX 885 501, Castle Cove SX 886 502

PLACES OF INTEREST: Dartmouth Castle

REFRESHMENTS: The Castle Tea Rooms by Castle Cove, is a charming café overlooking the castle and estuary serving locally caught crab, as well as cream teas (01803 833897, TQ6 0JN). There are plenty of pubs and restaurants in Dartmouth itself, including 'Alf's' - Café Alf Resco – a bit of a Dartmouth institution, renowned for its breakfasts and friendly atmosphere (01803 835880, TQ6 9AN)



a cave and lots of rocks for climbing. It has some unusual orange pebbles. It is quite a sun trap and a great place to hang out for an hour or two - and enjoy a dip of course!

There is more to this beach than meets the eye though. It contains the ruins of an old Victorian cable house, which was used to pioneer an early form of communication. In 1884 an undersea telegraph cable was laid to Guernsey. It was 92 miles long, and electric signals were transmitted over wires to send messages. It was in use until the 1950s, except during the German occupation of the Channel Islands in World War Two, when it was severed.

Further on from Compass Cove is Blackstone Point ⑥, where there is a raised beach, consisting of a series of rocky ledges, where many people like to fish. This is also a great place to swim from when it is calm, as the water is incredibly clear. However the main swimming destination is Sugary Cove ⑧, the next stop on the walk. You descend through attractive woods which are full of bluebells in May, to find a small beach bordered by angular slate cliffs.

It is best to visit the beach at high tide, so as to get the most exciting swim. Head out into the bay, keeping to your left. Keep looking to your left, and you will see a gap in the rocks. This leads into a spectacular channel, linking through to Castle Cove next door. We call it the 'Ravine'. Swimming through here is an amazing experience, although do not attempt it if the sea is rough. The rocks tower up either side of you, and there is a small oak tree leaning overhead. The play of light on the rock walls is entrancing, and when the water is calm and clear you may see fish, spider crabs and starfish. You emerge at Castle Cove where the dramatic atmosphere continues, as the castle overshadows the scene. Slightly more prosaic is the sign on the





rocks below the castle, warning of the danger of the rising tide!

This sign – along with one reading ‘6 knots’ is on a concrete platform just below the castle, which dates from Victorian times. Castle Cove was, and still is, the town’s main beach, but is small and virtually disappears at high water. So the townspeople decided to create a bathing platform on the rocks, and connected it via a bridge to the little beach, so it was accessible at all states of the tide. Sadly now the connection to the bridge from the beach has been washed away, but it is still fun to swim to the platform, and it is a great place to dive and jump from at high water.

If you have non-swimmers with you they can bring your stuff along to Castle Cove and meet you there, or else it is just as easy, and probably more enjoyable, to swim back the way you came and enjoy seeing it all again from a different angle. We often get close up to sea birds here, as they like to perch on the rocks and don’t seem to notice you when you’re in the water – if you’re quiet. Oyster catchers are particularly common, and are a beautiful sight with their bright orange bills and legs. It is really interesting to stop and observe these birds at such close quarters.

Dartmouth Castle is well worth a visit. Construction was started in 1388 to defend the port, and it contains numerous exciting guns, cannons and the like. It has an amazing position, built right on top of the rocks, almost overhanging the water, and incorporates the ancient church of St Petrox. It was fought over by the Royalists and the Parliamentarians in the English Civil War, and also played a role in the First and Second World Wars.

The walk finishes by taking you inland, through a farm, but the amazing views continue as you are still high up.



DIRECTIONS

1 From the car park walk south along the track with the sea ahead of you.

0.4 miles

2 At the stile turn left and walk east with the sea on your right.

0.3 miles

3 Turn left through the gap in the stone wall and continue with the sea on your right. You're now walking north, towards Dartmouth.

0.1 miles

4 After an ascent you reach a fork in the path – take the right hand fork. This path takes you down a picturesque valley.

0.5 miles

5 At the bottom you will see a sign to Compass Cove on the right. If you wish to visit it, go off here, and then return to the main path and follow it with the sea on your right.

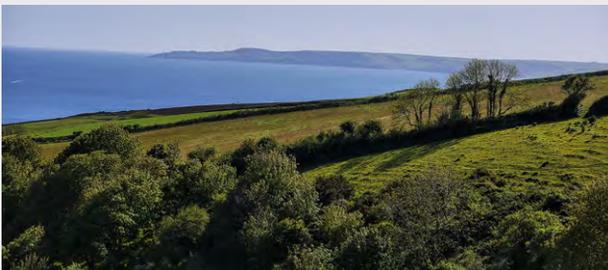
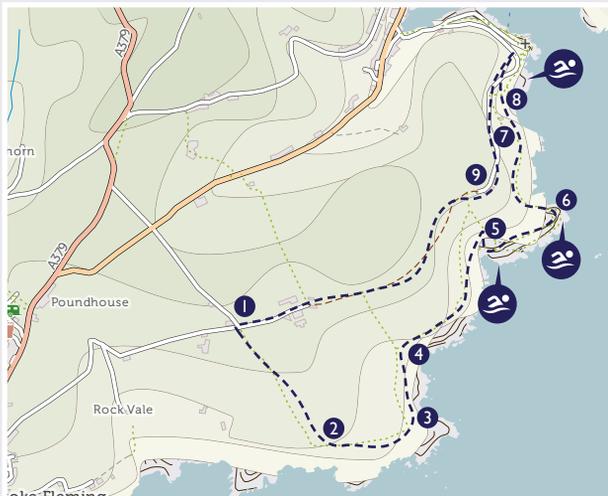
0.2 miles

6 At the next headland, which is called Blackstone Point, you can do another diversion by climbing through a hole in the hedge and going onto some rocky ledges below which are fun to swim off on a calm day. Otherwise follow the path which starts to ascend through woods.

0.4 miles

7 You reach a fingerpost with a bird box on top, with Compass Cottage on the left. Just past the fingerpost there is a path on the right down to Sugary Cove.

0.1 miles



8 Leaving Sugary Cove, do not take the same path back up as it is very steep. Instead, take the other footpath up from the beach and bear right; this will bring you out on Sugary Green and the road. If you wish to visit the castle, follow the footpath off to the right of the road which takes you down to the castle. Afterwards retrace your steps and follow the lane back to Compass Cottage where you take the right hand fork.

0.2 miles

9 You reach a gate with a sign saying Private, Coastguard Rescue, Police and Emergency Vehicles Only. Go through here, and through the stile into land with the National Trust Little Dartmouth sign. Head through the farm, following the Public Bridleway to NT car park sign, which takes you back to the car park.

1 mile