

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.

WILD swimming *Walks*

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

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 24

MILL BAY CIRCULAR

An energetic walk through rolling farmland with spectacular clifftops and headlands, taking in some remarkable military history and a swim from a secluded beach.

Our walk starts in one of the two National Trust parks near their Coleton Fishacre property, which is well worth visiting either before or after your mini-adventure. It was the home of Rupert and Lady Dorothy D'Oyly Carte. Built in the Arts and Crafts style, it has extravagant Art Deco interiors and a garden full of exotic plants. The property runs right down to the sea, where there is a small seawater pool (sadly no longer accessible by foot), which was no doubt the location of several Jazz Age shindigs. The music of Gilbert and Sullivan would also have been prevalent, as Rupert's father Richard was the impresario behind their operettas. When he wasn't building on his father's legacy, expanding his hotels like the Savoy and revitalising Gilbert and Sullivan productions, he enjoyed fast cars. Indeed he was once fined £3 for driving 19 miles an hour in 1902. He also enjoyed yachting and chose to build a property on this stretch of coast after sailing past, correctly believing it to be one of the most beautiful in the world.

The walk takes you down past some stunning National Trust properties which are available to rent, including Higher Brownstone Farm and Crockers Cottage. Look out for a rookery in the tree just below the farm. A gate takes you from the farm track and onto an ancient lane where centuries of hooves and feet have worn the land away to create a holloway **3**, with the bedrock exposed beneath. The shady bucolic track passes pretty woods and a bubbling stream over the low wall to the left, carpeted with the yellow of Wordsworth's favourite wild flower, the lesser celandine, every spring. Crossing the bridge over the brook you'll pass some

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 3 miles

TIME: 2-3 hours

MAP: OS Explorer South Devon OL20

START POINT: Higher Brownstone car park (SX 904 509, TQ6 0EH)

END POINT: Higher Brownstone car park

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Kingswear can be reached by steam train from Paignton, or by ferry from Dartmouth. Buses include the 18 bus from Brixham, the 120 bus from Paignton. The main buses to Dartmouth are the 3 from Plymouth and the X64 from Exeter

SWIMMING: Mill Bay Cove (SX 893 504)

PLACES OF INTEREST: Coleton Fishacre, Mill Bay Cove, Brownstone Battery, The Daymark

REFRESHMENTS: The 15th century Ship Inn in Kingswear has great views of the River Dart from its terrace (01803 752348, TQ6 0AG). There is a nice café with lots of outdoor space at Coleton Fishacre. They are also happy for you to eat your own packed lunch at their picnic tables (01803 842382, TQ6 0EQ).



picturesque cottages, as well as a plough and a traditional red phone box. You are entering one of the most desirable addresses in the south west, with some impressive properties to match.

As you turn from the lane to begin the descent to Mill Bay you'll pass a memorial to Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Jones **4**, the former commanding officer of 2nd Battalion Parachute Regiment, who was killed in action during the Battle of Goose Green in the Falklands War. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross and

this section of the coast path is dedicated to his memory. The walk continues down the wooden steps and through Warren Woods to the beach and a castle-like structure **5**. Originally a lime kiln built in the early 19th century, it was later converted into a boathouse and watermill. The parapet and turret with their battlements and the arched Gothic doorway were added towards the end of the century, to make the structure resemble a castle. It certainly adds a touch of the Famous Five to the swim.

If you are here at low tide, the shingle gives way to sand and you'll find yourself in rock pool heaven. At a higher tide, you'll be able to swim out a short way and then off to the right to discover an impressive cave, the height of at least two buses, which you can swim through. This takes you around a corner and back out through another entrance, depositing you a surprising distance from where you started. Swim around the rocks and back towards the shore, or cross to the other side of the bay to discover a secret lagoon. It's an idyllic little spot to float around in circles watching the boats arriving or leaving the mouth of the estuary, or looking up to the pines above the millionaire mansion of Warren House, where our energetic journey will continue.

It's certainly a robust ascent up to The Warren **6**, but you are rewarded with a scented nature reserve of Monterey and Corsican pines, with their needles forming a soft path underfoot. You'll spot lots of these trees along this stretch of coast, which are surprisingly tolerant of the harsh salty sea winds which can batter them during the winter months. You'll walk around the edge of Newfoundland Cove, named after local explorer Humphrey Gilbert who colonised the Canadian province. In the past a fleet of up to 150 vessels would sail from Dartmouth to the fishing grounds





of Newfoundland at the start of each season, and return with a valuable catch of cod that had been salted and dried from the transatlantic voyage home. The catch would then be exchanged for wine and other luxury goods. The views from here are truly spectacular back down to Mill Bay Cove and Dartmouth Castle, across the mouth of the river. Keep an eye out for falcons, swooping at speeds of up to 200 miles an hour to catch their prey. Other rare birds that can be spotted along this stretch of coast include skylarks, linnets and curlew bunting.

Eventually you will reach the clearing at Inner Froward Point and Brownstone Battery ⑦. It's common to spot wild ponies here, which the National Trust use to keep down the scrub and encourage maritime plants and butterflies to flourish. The gun battery was one of several built along the south coast in 1942, as a defence against German U-boats. Brownstone Battery was armed with two six-inch guns recycled from a First World War battleship, with a range of

over 14 miles. At night a powerful search light would light up the water below, looking for enemy ships. It seems incredible now that the battery was once manned by up to 300 soldiers, with the cliffs below strung with razor-sharp barbed wire.

The National Coastwatch Institution also have a station at the site. They are a voluntary organisation and registered charity who provide a visual watch along the UK's coast and welcome visitors, so do pop in and say Hi. Their twin duties are to keep a watch over the local coastal area (from Start Point in the west to Brixham in the east), as well as the coast path itself. As you can imagine, this stretch of water near the mouth of the Dart is incredibly busy and the NCI Froward Point alerts Falmouth Coastguard to potential incidents and those in progress. From the lookout there are fantastic views across to the Mewstone, named because it is a nesting site for seabirds including gulls – otherwise known as mews. The rocky island is also the most easterly 'haul-out' for grey seals in the English Channel. The keepers keep a record of seal sighting, as well as marine mammals and sea birds for the relevant wildlife organisations.

It's a bit of a slope back up to the car park, but take a breather to visit the towering eight-legged Daymark ⑧, resembling something from the cover of a 1970s concept album. The remarkable structure, the height of two Olympic-sized diving boards was built in the 19th century by the Dartmouth Harbour Commissioners as a day beacon (a sort of daytime lighthouse) to help guide mariners to the entrance of Dartmouth Harbour. Built on such a high exposed plane, the views from here are magnificent and this otherworldly tower, just a short stroll from the car park, makes the perfect finish to this picturesque swim walk adventure.

DIRECTIONS

1 Walk out of the car park and turn left onto the lane and follow it down the gentle slope. Take the right hand fork following the public footpath signposted Kingswear.

0.3 miles

2 Walk past Higher Brownstone Farm on your right and continue down the farm track past the yellow farm cottages. Go through the gate on the left and onto an ancient holloway.

0.1 miles

3 Continue down the sunken lane, which can be quite wet and slippery, and cross a small bridge over a stream and past some quaint cottages and a red phone box. Follow the lane around to the left, pausing to take a photo down the valley to where you can see our swim stop at Mill Bay Cove with its small castle-like structure.

0.4 miles

4 At the end of the lane turn left, following the sign for Froward Point, and past the memorial for Lt. Col. Herbert Jones. Walk down the steps through the wood, and turn right at the bottom and through the gate to Mill Bay.

0.1 miles

5 After your swim, head back through the gate, over the bridge and right on to the track before ascending the steep steps up the hill.

0.1 miles



6 At the top, the path winds its way through the pinewoods, before levelling out and revealing stunning views over to the mouth of the estuary and Start Bay beyond. Follow it up and down until you reach the clearing at Inner Froward Point and the remains of the World War II battery.

0.7 miles

7 From the battery, walk up the steep lane following signs for Brownstone car park.

0.4 miles

8 You will reach the iconic Daymark on your right, which is well worth crossing the field to visit. Then return back onto the lane and up to the car park where you began.

0.6 miles