

# 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*.

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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.



## Walk 26

# BROADSANDS TO ELBERRY COVE AND CHURSTON COVE CIRCULAR

Ancient woodland, incredible views and fascinating history, this magnificent walk in a spectacular corner of South Devon seems unchanged since Agatha Christie strolled these same paths.

**I**t's worth pausing by the sea wall at Broadsands Beach before you begin this magnificent mini-adventure. Up on the hills overlooking the beach you can see two of Brunel's lofty viaducts, which today carry passengers on the Dartmouth Steam Railway between Paignton and Kingswear. Spin around and you'll take in the traditional beach huts off to your left and then some of the best views in the bay across to Paignton, Torquay and as far as the Dorset coast on a clear day.

The start of the walk takes you past the swanky new pastel-coloured huts (with porches and electricity, don't you know) and then up and around Churston Point. From here you'll be able to see the end of Brixham's half mile long breakwater, a protective arm for this charming fishing port. You'll also spot some black dots on the water in the distance; this is a mussel farm which is run by shellfish producer Brixham Sea Farms. The mussels are a naturally occurring hybrid of the native blue mussel and the Mediterranean mussel. The farm hangs them on ropes where they are left to drift just off the surface of the sea bed until the seed mussels take hold.

The first glimpses of Elberry Cove are a real treat, with its shingle beach spilling into the sparkling turquoise waters. At the far end of the beach you'll spot the remains of Lord Churston's Bathing House ③, dating back to the 18th century. Lord Churston was the owner of nearby Churston Manor, and a passionate swimmer. The romantic building was originally three storeys, with a ground floor that would flood as the tide came in, so he could swim straight out

## INFORMATION

**DISTANCE:** 3.5 miles

**TIME:** 4 hours

**MAP:** OS Explorer South Devon OL20

**START POINT:** Broadsands car park (SX 897 572, TQ4 6HL)

**END POINT:** Broadsands car park

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** No. 12 Bus from Torquay, Paignton and Brixham

**SWIMMING:** Elberry Cove (SX 902 570), Churston Cove/Fishcombe Cove (SX 918 570), Broadsands (SX 896 574)

**PLACES OF INTEREST:** Lord Churston's Bathing House, lime kilns, Churston Court, Church of St. Mary the Virgin

**REFRESHMENTS:** There are cafés at Broadsands Beach and Fishcombe Cove – both are seasonal. Churston Court is an historic manor house which is now a hotel and bar (01803 842186, TQ5 0JE). Shoals in nearby Brixham is a café in a beautiful setting by the lido, and has been set up by a local fishing family. Great food and atmosphere (01803 854874, TQ5 9AE)



into the sea through a gated doorway. The designer bathing machine also boasted an early version of a hot tub, with a fire heating up sea water to warm the chilly Lord after his refreshing dip. One of Lord Churston's more famous guests was the future Edward VII, who visited Elberry Cove in 1879 when he was still the Prince of Wales.

It may have been only a quarter of an hour or so since you began the walk, but a swim break here is hard to resist. Avoid the far end of the beach near the bathing house as, incredibly there is a water ski lane here, with boats churning up the water above the eelgrass beds, which are breeding grounds for seahorses. There are also undersea freshwater springs in this area, which can be seen bubbling up through the sea on a calm day. Swim out hugging the coast to the left and you'll be able to enjoy an amazing under-water garden of colourful seaweed and discover sunbathing and jumping rocks. At lower tides this is also a wonderful area for a spot of rock-pooling.

Elberry Cove was a filming location for one of the final scenes in the 1964 film *The System* starring Oliver Reed and directed by Michael Winner. An outrageous beach party takes place here, while scenes were also filmed in the bathing house, which was far more intact at the time. The beach was also a favourite swimming spot of Agatha Christie and indeed the body of Sir Carmichael Clarke was discovered in a field "overlooking the sea and a beach of glistening stones" in *The ABC Murders*.

The steep path from the cove takes you up into Elberry and Marrison Wood, a long narrow stretch of woodland separating the golf course from the sea. You'll catch tantalising glimpses of the sea through these semi-ancient and shady trees, which have been here for over 400 years and include larch



and sweet chestnut. In the spring these woods are carpeted with dog's mercury and drifts of bluebells, while later in the year, the autumnal palette includes the red berries of butcher's broom and the pink fruit of spindle. Several fishermen's paths run off to the left as you walk through this mile and a half stretch of woodland, although be warned, as some paths end in sheer drops down onto the rocks along the stretch of coastline known as Seven Quarries. Much of Torbay's building stone came from these limestone quarries in the 19th century.

The first glimpse of Churston Cove 4 is spectacular on a sunny day. Boats are often moored just off the shore of this delightful pebbly beach, backed by woodland, giving it a real Mediterranean feel. Before descending, it's worth walking out to the point and taking in the full sweep of the panorama – without doubt one of the best views in the bay. You'll also be able to see the tempting sight of nearby Fishcombe Cove and its small café. A swim between the two coves could be a fun idea, before enjoying a picnic on the



beach and then continuing your adventure. It's widely believed that William of Orange landed his men and artillery here in 1688, before making his renowned landing in Brixham itself.

After you are suitably refreshed, the walk continues up through the woods at the rear of Churston Cove into an area known as The Grove 5. Within a couple of minutes of entering the woods you'll notice how incredibly quiet and atmospheric this place is. You'll pass through some tree sculptures that were created by an artist called Jack Tree, with the help of local Brixham students. The idea was to create an amphitheatre with carved pillars and tablets overlooked by nine carved faces keeping a watchful eye on the once much-vandalised woodland. Sadly the sculptures have started to decay, but you can still see how beautiful they once were.

You'll also stumble upon a couple of old lime kilns in the woods. Quicklime was an important commodity in the 18th and 19th centuries and it was used to make mortar, plaster and limewash, as well as being added to soil to reduce its acidity. You'll eventually come up out of the woods and along a track with views across to the pretty village

of Churston Ferrers and the sympathetic barn conversions of Churston Court Farm.

Arriving in the village, it's definitely worth a well-earned refreshment break at Churston Court, which has been welcoming people for centuries. The magnificent Grade I listed 12th century manor house is certainly impressive, with large inglenook fires and various rooms to explore, walls covered in original paintings, portraits, tapestries and armour. There are also 17 guest rooms available at this inn, many with four-poster beds. The venue is understandably popular for murder mystery evenings. As you'd expect there's also a ghost: a monk is said to roam the old kitchen.

The former guest list at Churston Court takes in everyone from Sir Humphrey Gilbert (the half-brother of Sir Walter Raleigh, who colonised Newfoundland) to Bruce Reynolds, one of the Great Train Robbers who apparently hid here prior to his arrest in Torquay in 1968. Agatha Christie was also a friend of Lord and Lady Churston and a regular visitor when holidaying at nearby Greenway. She would attend services at the adjacent Church of St. Mary the Virgin 6, which you will pass as you continue the walk. She even donated the royalties from her Miss Marple short story *Greenshaw's Folly* (which appears in *The Adventure of the Christmas Pudding*) to buy a new east-facing stained glass window for the church in 1955.

The walk continues right through the middle of Churston golf club, which is said to be Christie's inspiration for writing *The Murder on the Links*. You'll then follow a track down past fields of horses and with more magnificent views, finally passing Elberry Farm, a working farm and B&B and back to Broadsands car park where you began. After all of that healthy exercise you've definitely earned an ice cream or hot chocolate.

# DIRECTIONS

1 From Broadsands car park, head east with the sea on your left, past the new beach huts and turn right onto the coast path following the sign saying Torbay Circular Countryside Walk. Continue up the steps onto the grassy slope and follow the red path around Churston Point headland.

**0.4 miles**

2 Walk through the kissing gate, past the information sign and follow the path through the trees, bearing left to drop down onto the shingle beach, Elberry Cove. If you are swimming, do so from the nearside of the beach before continuing across the shingle towards the ruined bathing house.

**0.1 miles**

3 Walk through the entrance in the wall to the right of the bath house and up the steps, snaking through the trees. When you reach a large tree in the middle of the path (actually two trees, a sycamore and an ash), bear left to another gateway and a path down through Elberry and Marridge Woods, with the golf course on your right and the coast on your left.

**0.9 miles**

4 After about 20 minutes' walk, turn left at the next waymarker and then down the steps to Churston Cove. Enjoy another break here and perhaps a return swim over to Fishcombe Cove off to the right.

**650 feet**

5 Walk towards the near end of the beach (and not in the direction

of Fishcombe) to enter The Grove. Walk up past the lime kilns and bear left at the next waymarker and then out of the woods through a stone gate and follow the sign for Churston Ferrers to the right, climbing over a stone stile. Walk along a section of the John Musgrave Heritage Trail to Churston Court Hotel.

**1.1 miles**

6 When you leave the hotel, walk past the church and then turn left past Churston Court

Farm and walk straight ahead towards Broadsands and Links Close. Then turn right and immediately left and through a kissing gate onto the golf course.

**0.3 miles**

7 Follow the path over the course and through the yellow posts and then walk through bushes to a track. Turn right heading towards the sea and down the long track and through another kissing gate. Turn left at the fork, past the farm and back to Broadsands car park.

**0.6 miles**

