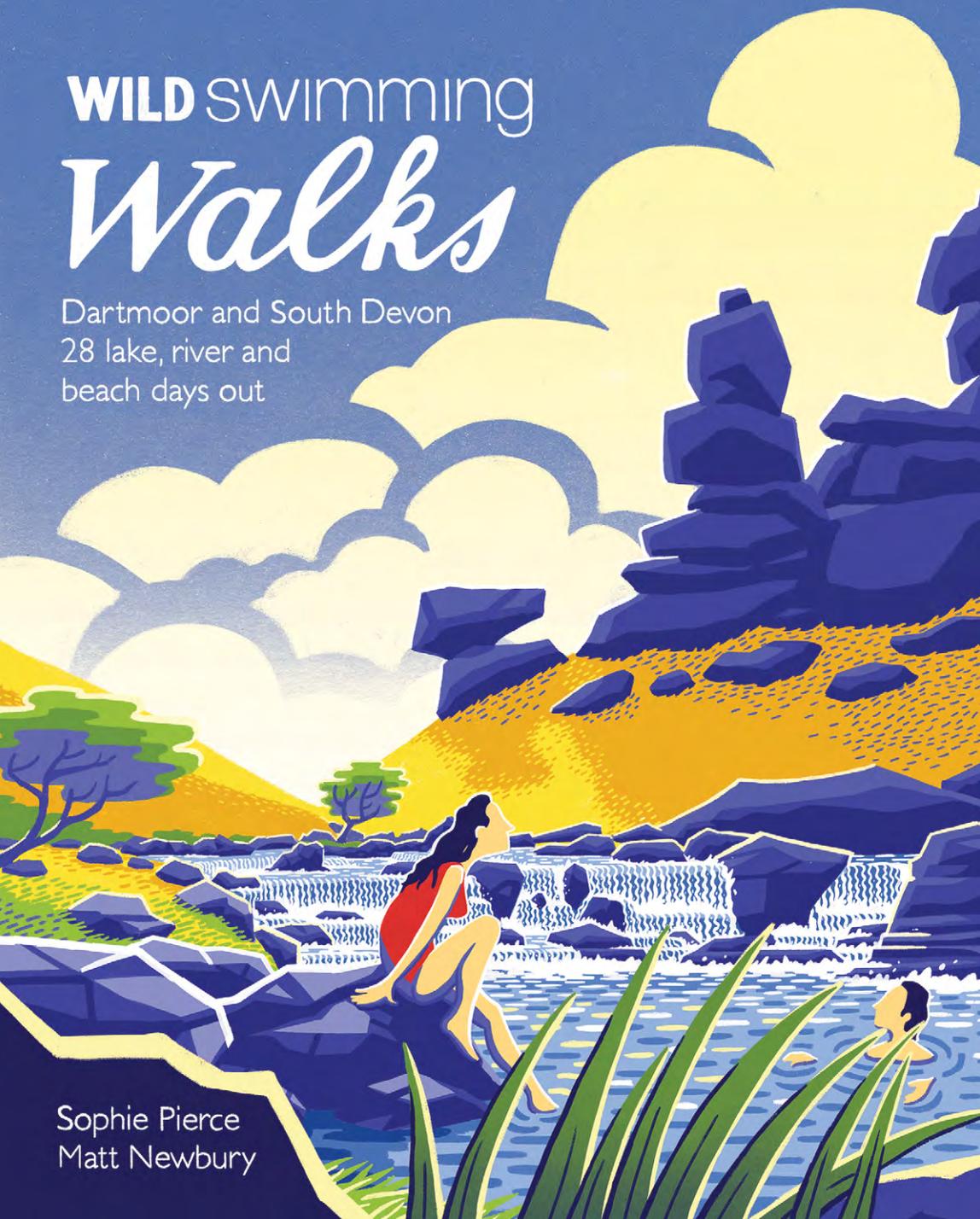


WILD swimming *Walks*

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*.

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 4

TEIGN GORGE CIRCULAR

This is one of the most popular and scenic walks in Devon, taking you from a hilltop castle and down a spectacular wooden river valley with pools.

Castle Drogo is Britain's newest castle, built in the 1920s by a social climber called Julius Drewe. At the end of the 19th century he made his fortune through importing tea and then branched out into owning one of the UK's most successful retail chains. Rich enough to retire at just 33, he wasn't content to just relax and enjoy the company of his wife and five children and fish to his heart's content, but set about creating his own vanity project.

The well-heeled wannabe found that the aristocracy didn't accept his new-found wealth, so he carried out a 'Who Do You Think You Are' style investigation with his own personal genealogist. The expert found a link between him and the wealthy Drewes of Elizabethan Devon and he even added the extra 'e' to his surname to seal the deal. If that wasn't outrageous enough, the genealogist even managed to find him a family seat by suggesting a vague family link with a 'Dru' or 'Drogo' who had fought alongside William the Conqueror and also a Drogo of Teignton – whom the local village of Drewsteignton was named after. Once he had legally joined the aristocracy, he started building his very own castle, the ultimate in arrogant grand designs.

You'd be hard pushed to buy a Dorset beach hut for £60,000 these days, but the amount of money Julius Drewe pumped into his vanity project back in 1910 would be worth about £40 million today. On his 55th birthday in 1911 he commissioned the renowned architect Edwin Lutyens to build his dream castle. Tragically, Drewe died just a year after his expensive dream was finished in 1930. The next generation of his family found themselves victims of his quirky design. He'd rather foolishly insisted that there were no windowsills or guttering.

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 4 miles

TIME: 2 hours

MAP: OS Explorer Dartmoor OL28

START POINT: Castle Drogo. Park in the main car park at the castle (SX 725 902, EX6 6PB)

END POINT: Castle Drogo

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Take the Dartline Coaches Bus 173 from Exeter bus station (passing Exeter Central train station). Operates Monday to Saturday. The bus drops passengers off at the bottom of Castle Drogo's drive

SWIMMING: Drogo Weir/Salmon Leaps (SX 723 897), Fingle Weir (SX 740 898)

PLACES OF INTEREST: Castle Drogo, Drogo Weir and Salmon Leaps, Hydro Electric Plant, Fingle Bridge, Drewsteignton

REFRESHMENTS: Fingle Bridge Inn is a popular riverside pub, well situated for a halfway pit stop (01647 281287, EX6 6PW). The café at Castle Drogo has an outside patio for when the weather's nice (01647 433306, EX6 6PB). The Drewe Arms in Drewsteignton village is a 17th century thatched pub serving real ale and classic pub grub and a choice of accommodation in either four poster beds or a cheaper bunk house (01647 281409, EX6 6QN).



The ridiculous levels of leaks led his heirs to hand over the castle to the National Trust in 1973. During an ambitious five year restoration project, the trust will remove and return 2,355 granite blocks weighing 680 tonnes, and shift entire battlements to allow them to install a new roof the size of two football pitches. They will also be refurbishing more than 900 windows, containing 13,000 panes, to stop them leaking and replacing almost 40 miles of pointing. It's due to be completed in 2017 at a cost of £11 million.

Today's walk takes you from the car park near the castle and winds down into the gorge along Hunter's Path and around Hunter's Tor. The views down into the lush valley as you begin to descend are magnificent and it's easy to understand why Julius Drewe chose this location for his castle. After entering the gorge and walking past the iron bridge you'll come across Drogo Weir ③, which was built in 1928 to serve the hydroelectric plant just downstream. The 75-metre pool makes a perfect wild swimming spot, shaded by woodland and with a handy metal jetty to enter the water. Watch out for the remains of an old submerged wooden jetty and definitely don't dive in here. Look out for dragonflies and rare water beetles.

The weir serves a double purpose and also helps stock the river with salmon, and Drewe built three impressive cascading pools at the lower end of the weir to allow the upward migration of the spawning salmon. Visit in September or October, when the river is in spate after heavy rains, to see the spectacular sight of them jumping into the weir. It's quite fun to climb into the metre-deep pools (which have smooth concrete bottoms) for a natural jacuzzi. Only attempt this when the river levels are lower, as last time we visited we noticed part of the wall of one of the leaps had been swept



away, which would make it dangerous when the river is flowing fast.

Once you are suitably refreshed, continue the walk downstream along the rocky undulating path, with beautiful views of the river as it winds its way past mossy islands and dipping pools on its way to Teignmouth. See if you can spot the rocking Logan Stone in the riverbed, thought to belong to the Druids. Autumn is a great time to visit, as the woodland takes on its glorious sepia palette, while in spring you can enjoy the carpets of bluebells and daffodils in amongst the hillside bracken.

Look out for the old hydroelectric plant, a Grade II listed building which was also designed by Lutyens. During the early part of the 20th century the castle had no mains electricity and the hydro-electricity plant was installed in the 1920s. It operated right up until 1994, even after Castle Drogo was connected to the National Grid in the late 1950s. It's currently in a state of disrepair, but the National Trust are hoping that the original manufacturer, Gilbert Gilkes, can one day make it fully operational again. You'll also notice the wall of the deer park next to the building.

The path continues alongside oaks once managed by the monks from Buckfast Abbey.



They forced the oaks to grow tall by planting birch in between. The bark would be used for leather tanning, the twigs and branches for charcoal, and the boughs for wood. Originally the trees would be cut down every 25 years as part of the coppicing, to allow new branches to grow from the stumps. Higher up through the woods are oak standards, birch and plantations of conifer. Wild swimming pioneer Roger Deakin talks about a magical stay in a hidden hut in these woods in his delightful book *Wildwood*.

When the path splits, you have two choices. If the water levels are low you can go over the rocky section that is prone to flooding in the winter months. Otherwise head left, up the steep stone steps and over the rocky outcrop at the foot of Sharp Tor. A little further along the river and through a hunting gate, you'll reach Fingle Weir 4 and a second chance for a dip. Leave your clothes on Kirsten's Seat bench and enjoy peaty waters shared with salmon, trout and even otters! You can see the remains of a leat that used to supply the Fingle Corn Mill, which burnt down in 1894.

Continuing the walk, the gorge widens and you'll be able to see Prestonbury Castle Iron Age hillfort above Fingle Bridge, facing its dramatic partner, Cranbrook Castle, on the opposite side of the valley. Both were built by the Celts to guard the Teign Valley over 2,000 years before. These days the only invaders are the hordes of tourists who descend on this picturesque spot every summer. The bridge itself was originally a packhorse bridge, built in the 18th century to link Drewsteignton to Moretonhampstead. It replaced the old stepping stones you can still see upstream.

Formerly known as the Anglers' Rest, the Fingle Bridge Inn 5 started life as a tea shelter founded in 1897 to offer refreshments to fishermen, early tourists and people bringing grain to the mill. You might need some refreshment yourself, before the walk continues up a very steep hill to the top of the valley you have just walked down. Aching calves are a small price to pay for yet more stunning views over the canopy of trees in the deep wooded ravine of the Teign. The Hunter's Path takes you over the top of Sharp Tor and then onto Piddledown Common – a name that children and those of us in our second childhoods still find hilarious.

You can head into Drewsteignton from here, a picturesque village served by the charming thatched Drewe Arms. The pub was originally managed by Mabel Mudge from 1919 until 1994 when she retired at the age of 99, making her the oldest pub landlady in the country. Acclaimed sculptor Peter Randall-Page also lives nearby and you can see several of his works in the village's community garden. Alternatively return to Castle Drogo where one Englishman's home really was his castle. Well, almost.

DIRECTIONS

1 From the car park head onto the road towards the castle and then follow signs for Teign Valley Estate Walks. Follow the sign Hunters Path to Iron Bridge and Chagford. This will take you through a gate and down a hill before you turn right, still following Hunter's Path.

0.6 miles

2 After another gate, the path eventually bends to the left following a stream and signs now say Fisherman's Path. Follow the single track tarmac drive over the cattle grid and stay left at Gib House. Cross the V-shaped stile, and walk past the iron bridge (don't cross it) down to Drew's Weir and pool, and the Salmon Leaps.

0.5 miles

3 Following your swim, follow the river downstream along Fisherman's Path. This beautiful path follows the Teign past the hydroelectric plant on the opposite bank, with a climb up and down the base of Sharp Tor, with some very steep steps.

1.3 miles

4 The path eventually splits into two. The right-hand fork takes you to a second swimming spot created by a weir in the river. Look out for a bench marked Kirsten's Seat. When the water levels are higher there is a small, natural slide down the left of the dam, following the curve in the river's bank. The waters can be quite shallow here in the summer months.

0.2 miles

5 From here it is a short walk continuing along by the river to Fingle Bridge and a stop at the Fingle Bridge Inn for refreshments.

Continue on from the pub along the road and car park before turning left following signs for Castle Drogo. This is a very steep climb, which takes you onto Hunter's Path and through a small gate between granite posts

(Hunter's Gate) and onto the top of Sharp Tor with spectacular views of the Teign Valley.

1 mile

6 Continue along the path through the gate onto Piddledown Common, along a path lined with gorse, and back to the car park at Castle Drogo.

0.3 miles

