

# 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.

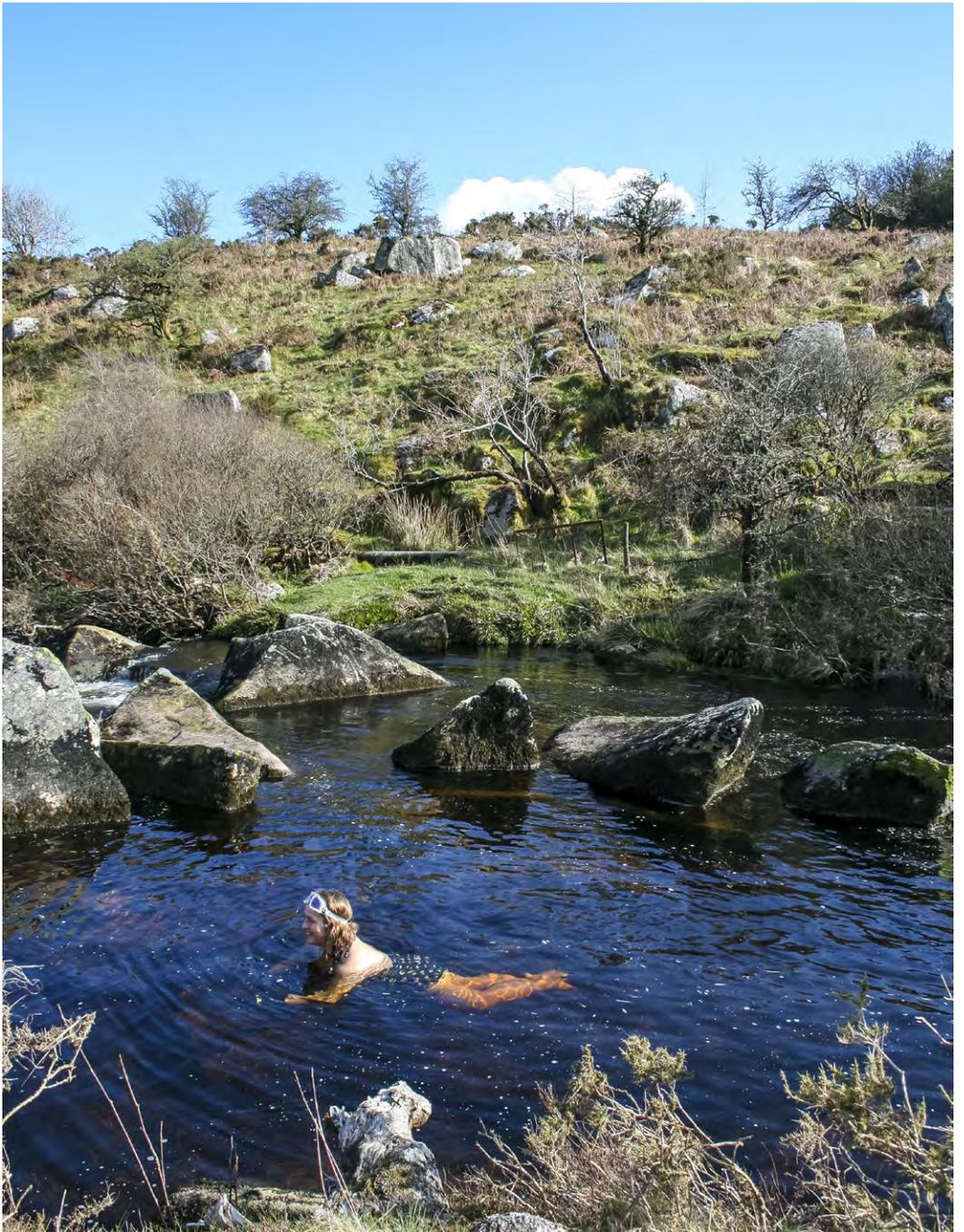
Watch out in high surf - rip-currents can form which take you out to sea, to behind the breaking waves. Swim perpendicularly from them to escape, then body-surf back in.

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 5

# KESTOR ROCK, SCORHILL AND GIDLEIGH CIRCULAR

A glorious walk taking in fascinating ancient monuments, including one of the best stone circles on the moor. We cross the lovely North Teign River, with two swimming opportunities.

The walk starts at Batworthy, where large numbers of flint tools have been found, which are thought to date back to the Mesolithic period, 12,000 to 6,500 years ago. As will soon become apparent on the walk, this area of Dartmoor has been occupied by man for many thousands of years.

The first stop is at Kestor Rock ②, which has an unusual natural basin at the top, full of water. The Victorians were fascinated by the basin, believing it was the focus of ancient Druidical ceremonies, with some quite gruesome ideas about it being used to collect blood from human sacrifices. It's about three feet deep and is thought to be the biggest on Dartmoor. At one point a fence was put around it to stop sheep falling in; the holes for the posts are still there. There are wonderful views from the top of the tor; to the south east you can see Middle Tor and Frenchbeer Rock. Over to the south west you can see the Long Stone ③, the next stop on the walk.

From Kestor, you head south west along the track towards the Long Stone ③, which is part of the amazing complex of stone rows and standing stones of Shovel Down, classified as a PAL – or Premier Archaeological Landscape – by Dartmoor National Park. The experts there say: “Shovel Down is the location of a complex of prehistoric ritual monuments, constructed about 4,000 years ago. The presence of five stone rows, a possible stone circle, standing stones and associated burial mounds (cairns) makes this one of the most complex and significant ritual landscapes on Dartmoor.”

It is also home to prehistoric field systems, from a slightly later period, about 3,500 years ago. During this time Bronze Age man started dividing up land into fields, and the boundaries are known

### INFORMATION

**DISTANCE:** 5 miles

**TIME:** 4 hours

**MAP:** OS Explorer Dartmoor OL28

**START POINT:** Car park near Batworthy (SX 662 867, TQ13 8EU). On the minor road beyond Teigncombe, two miles west of Chagford

**END POINT:** Car park near Batworthy

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** Buses from Exeter, Newton Abbot and Okehampton to Chagford. Then taxi to the start.

**SWIMMING:** Downstream of clapper bridge (SX 655 870) and Tolmen Stone (SX 655 871), North Teign

**PLACES OF INTEREST:** Kestor Rock, the Long Stone, Scorhill Circle, the Tolmen Stone

**REFRESHMENTS:** The Courtyard Café, Chagford, an organic wholefood café with great cakes (01647 432571, TQ13 8AE). The Three Crowns Inn, Chagford is an ancient granite thatched building which is worth a visit just to see the historic interior. It serves reasonably priced pub food (01647 433444, TQ13 8AJ).



as reaves. Look out for low, stony, vegetation-covered banks; these are the reaves, and they can be seen mainly in a north east/south west direction. You can also see the remains of the early farmers' round houses, in the form of stone hut circles.

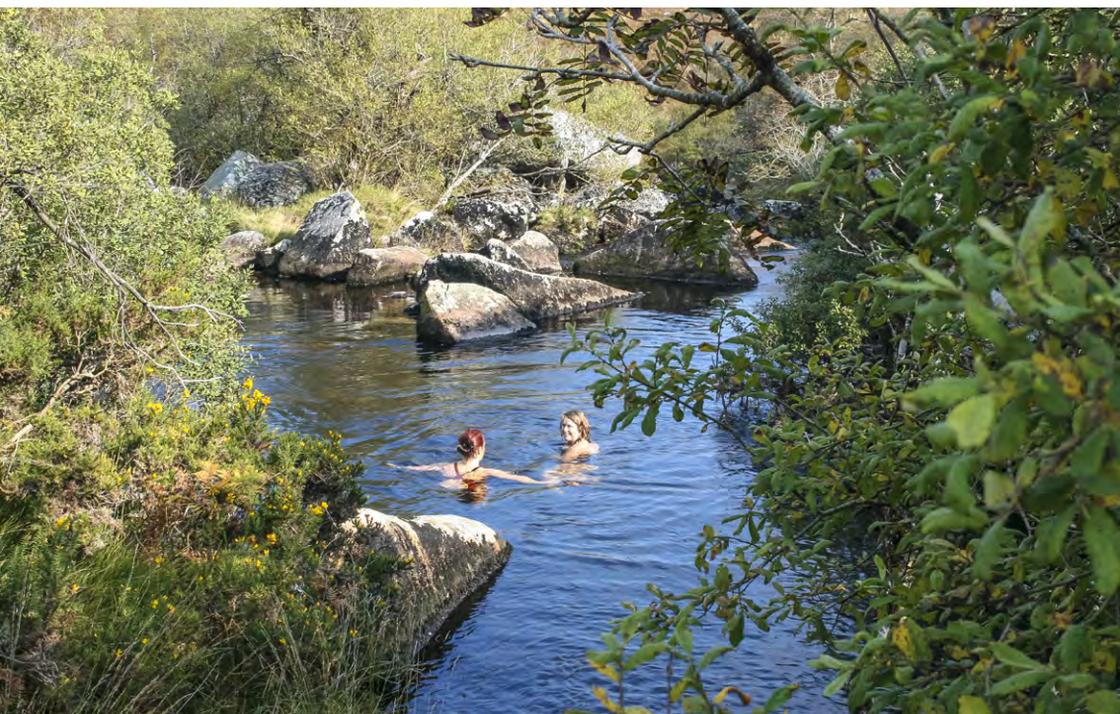
The most prominent of the monuments is the Long Stone. In later times it was adopted as a boundary stone for the three parishes of Chagford, Gidleigh and Lydford (it has the letters C (Chagford), GP (Gidleigh Parish) and DC (Duchy of Cornwall) carved onto it). Think of the outrage there would be today if someone decided to 'graffiti' an ancient monument! There are several double stone rows ④, which Samuel Rowe, in his 1848 *Perambulation of Dartmoor*, describes memorably as "parallelithons". He believes the stone rows were what he calls 'processional roads' of Druidical worship, leading to the Scorhill Stone Circle; there is no real consensus though on what these monuments were for. Other theories are that they were used for worship, or for studying the sun and the moon. Whatever the truth, these historic remains are fascinating.

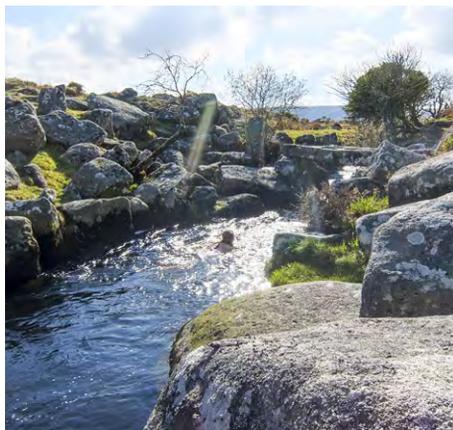
After exploring the stone relics, it's time to head back northwards and cross the North Teign by the picturesque Teign-e-ver clapper bridge ⑤. Although it feels very ancient, and indeed many clapper bridges do go back to medieval times, English Heritage lists it as being probably of 19th century construction. The first swimming spot is a short way downstream from the clapper bridge, by another, much more rudimentary clapper, described by Eric Hemery in *High Dartmoor* (1983) as "badly sited and crudely built", although he describes the area here, between the North Teign and the Wallabrook, as a "wild and beautiful place".

There is a remarkably rectangular channel just below the rudimentary clapper; this is because it is partially man-made, by tinnerns who walled up the sides to accelerate the current. It's a great little swimming spot; while not the place to do your lengths, it is a fun place to wallow and to play in the waterfalls below. The setting is totally idyllic.

The water then tumbles over a series of cascades, which include the extraordinary Tolmen Stone, a huge boulder with a natural hole in it. Many legends surround this stone, including that if you stand in it you will be cured of whooping cough and rheumatism. There are also claims that the Druids used it for purification and fertility ceremonies.

A little further down is the next pool – broader and rounder than the first, and bordered by rowans. After a refreshing dip, you can walk north for about five minutes to find the Scorhill stone circle ⑦, described by Samuel Rowe as "by far the finest example of the rude but venerable shrines of Druidical





worship in Devonshire”. It is also one of the best preserved, and least interfered with. Aubrey Burl in his *Guide to the Stone Circles of Britain, Ireland and Brittany* has a few reservations but is still impressed: “...even with two horrible cart-tracks lurching through it, the ruin retains a bleak grandeur.”

As you walk uphill away from the circle, make sure you look back at the view of it, as it is arguably better than when you’re up close. The vast, almost barren-looking moor sweeps up behind the circle; if the sun is setting behind the stones the picture is complete. When you reach the crest of the hill, there are more spectacular views, and looking to the right you can see Kestor Rock, where we started.

The walk then takes you off the moor and down a picturesque Devon lane with some beautiful granite cottages. You pass through private woodland, mostly of farmed fir trees, before hearing the enticing sound of the river again, which you cross via a wooden clam bridge. It’s a steep climb up the other side before you rejoin the road which takes you back to the starting point.

If you’ve got the energy after your ascent, it’s worth looking at the Bronze Age Round Pound which is just on the right of the road before the parking place. You can clearly see the circle of stones enclosing what would have been the settlement inside. There is evidence that it was used by Iron Age people too. In the 1950s it was excavated and an anvil was found, along with a pair of pits that were used for iron smelting. Later on, in medieval times, it was used again, as some kind of shelter.

# DIRECTIONS

1 From the car park, you can see Kestor Rock on the hill to the south; take the path directly to it.

**0.3 miles**

2 From Kestor, you can see the Long Stone to the south west. Take the path that leads directly from Kestor to the Long Stone.

**0.5 miles**

3 At the Long Stone, take the path to the right, to the north; you feel as though you're heading back towards the car park.

**0.3 miles**

4 You reach two double stone rows – follow the path by the left hand stone row. Walk along the path with the wood and stone wall some distance to your right.

**0.7 miles**

5 You reach the Teign-e-ver clapper bridge. Turn right and walk along with the river on your right. After a few minutes you reach the first swim spot, by a second, very crude, clapper bridge. You are on a little peninsula; to reach the Tolmen Stone and next swim spot, walk on to the end of the peninsula and cross back over; walk a short way downstream and you will find the Tolmen Stone, and just downstream from that, the second swim spot.

**0.1 miles**

6 Retrace your steps and cross a second clapper bridge over the Wallbrook, and follow the path north east to Scorhill Circle.

**0.2 miles**

7 After looking at the circle, take the track north east which takes you off the moor via a wooden gate.

**0.5 miles**

8 Walk down the lane and turn right at the T junction, following the sign for Berrydown and Gidleigh. There is a wooden fingerpost saying Mariners Way, Teigncombe and Road to Kestor Rock.

**0.8 miles**

9 You will reach a gate on the right which says Gidleigh Wood. Take the track through the gate and into the woods. The path splits; take the right hand fork.

**0.4 miles**

10 You will start hearing the sound of the river to your left. Ignore the path sign to the right; walk along with the river on your left. Follow the path to the left, following the sign with a yellow arrow that says Path. Cross the clam bridge and follow the path uphill to the right. Keep going uphill, cross a track, and at the top turn right, following the public footpath sign. Then turn left, following the Path sign.

**0.5 miles**

11 Go through a gate/stile, then turn right into the lane at the top. Follow the lane back to the car park.

**0.4 miles**

