

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*.

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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 6

TAVY CLEAVE CIRCULAR

This walk takes you into the famously rugged and mysterious River Tavy valley, home to two of the most magical pools on Dartmoor.

This area has been celebrated for its beauty since Victorian times, when Romantic painters such as Frederick Widgery popularised it with artists and a new breed of tourist. While the early part of the walk is easy, the return leg is on unmarked and indistinct paths over open moor, which can be wet and difficult to navigate in mist and cloudy weather, and skirts sheer cliffs. If conditions are difficult then the safer option is to retrace the outward route from Sandy Ford back through the Cleave.

The walk starts by Nattor Farm, built in the 14th century, and which for around two centuries was farmed by the Reep family. They supplied milk to Dartmoor Jail, and in 1939 received an award of £2 for capturing two escaped prisoners. After passing the farm you then follow the Mine Leat, a small man-made waterway which in the 19th century powered seventeen water-wheels servicing three different mines producing tin, copper, lead, silver and even arsenic. It races along, like a sort of water-powered bobsleigh run, and is a fun place to take an inflatable; you can whizz down like a bullet!

Once you reach the head of the Mine Leat, where it siphons off water from the Tavy, you cross it ② and start to walk along the river. The river bends around to the left and you are in the Cleave. The Tavy Tors tower over you on the left and the river reveals its secret magic, with two really amazing pools, which must be among the most remote – and dramatic – on Dartmoor. Samuel Rowe, in his *Perambulation of Dartmoor* of 1848, conjures up an evocative picture of a somewhat fairy-tale scene, describing Tavy Cleave as “a magnificent range of castellated tors with which Nature appears to have fortified this fine peninsular hill, while the rapid

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 5.5 miles

TIME: 4 hours

MAP: OS Explorer Dartmoor OL28

START POINT: Lane End car park (SX 537 823, PL19 9NB) near Mary Tavy

END POINT: Lane End car park

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Bus to Mary Tavy; the 46 from Okehampton, Plymouth and Tavistock; the 95 from Horndon and Tavistock; the 188 from Halwill Junction and Tavistock. Then taxi to the starting point.

SWIMMING: Staircase Pool (SX 554 830) and the Devil's Kitchen (SX 555 832): both pools with waterfalls and calm areas

PLACES OF INTEREST: Tavy Cleave Tors, Watern Oke prehistoric village

REFRESHMENTS: The Elephant's Nest Inn in Horndon is the closest pub to the walk. A characterful gastro pub with good ales and wine (01822 810273, PL19 9NQ). The Mary Tavy Inn is cosy with reasonably priced pub food, and nice B&B rooms in a building just by the main pub (01822 810326, PL19 9PN).





stream sweeps round the headland, and forms an effective moat to the titanic citadel above.” And he is right. Inside the Cleave, with its plunging cliff sides and its tors up on high, like battlements standing guard, you feel as though you’re in a secret, barricaded kingdom of waterfalls, basins, pools and above all, the ever-present sound of rushing water. The river is unusual on Dartmoor in that at many points through the Cleave it runs over a series of flat granite floors, rather than the usual boulders.

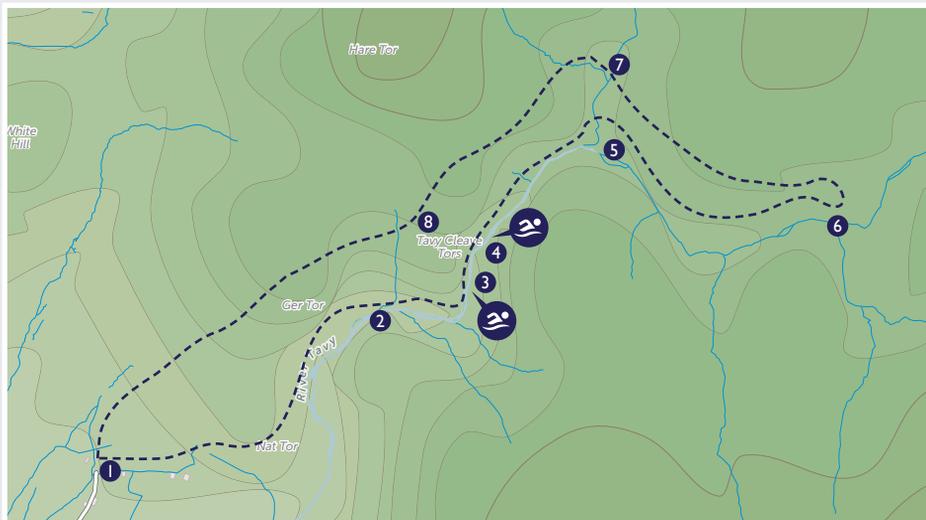
The two pools are about three hundred metres apart. The first ③ has no name, but we’ve decided to call it ‘Staircase Pool’ on account of its extraordinary angular waterfalls over a number of granite steps, perfect for playing among the cascades. You can get a really good head and shoulder massage by bracing yourself against the waterfall; you can even get your head behind the thundering water which is quite a surreal experience. The pool below the waterfall is quite shallow so watch out for knocked knees. The second pool is the Devil’s Kitchen ④. No one knows why it’s so-called, but it is superb. A seven foot waterfall plunges down into a narrow channel which opens out into a beautiful oval deep pool. The pool is surrounded by huge pink and grey rock platforms, adorned by strange black lichen, like the flock wallpaper you find in an Indian restaurant. Endless fun is to be had in the falls, followed by calm floating in the serene pool. While you are swimming you feel that you are completely in the wild, as far away from the stresses of the 21st century as you could possibly be.

The walk continues up the river. If you are lucky you can see herons, ducks and grey wagtails fishing for brown trout, dabbling for weed or

catching mayflies respectively. Small lizards bask on sunny rocks. The walk is now more bouldering than walking, as you continue upstream along the clutter-strewn valley side. Amicombe Brook joins the Tavy at Sandy Ford ⑥. You can see the impressive mass of Fur Tor ahead, described by William Crossing as “perhaps the grandest of the Dartmoor tors....a wilderness of stone.” There is some disagreement about the name. It is Fur Tor on the Ordnance Survey map, but Eric Hemery, writing in 1983 in *High Dartmoor*, calls it “Vur Tor”, because he says this is what the moormen call it. He is scathing about its translation into Fur Tor: “I record my unconditional and deep-felt dislike of this slatterly misuse of traditional Dartmoor place names.”

There are some pools you can dip into below Sandy Ford if you’re getting hot. The walk then takes in the Watern Oke early Bronze Age settlement. Here there is a group of 90 hut circles in various states of decay. If you look carefully you will be able to make out some in good condition, with their entrances still to be seen. After this you cross Rattle Brook where it is joined by the Dead Lake stream. The crossing point is marked with a boundary stone marked WD 21. WD stands for War Department; it’s one of several to mark the Willsworthy firing range. They’re thought to date back to about 1900.

The final leg of the walk involves a climb that takes you above the Cleave, and to the Tavy Cleave Tors themselves. The view back down the valley from here is spectacular and well worth the effort. Just be careful, as some of the drops are quite precipitous. As you continue towards the finish you can see Bodmin Moor in the far distance, and Brent Tor, with its distinctive chapel on top, to the south west.



This walk is in the Willsworth range, so do check firing times before you go on the government website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/dartmoor-firing-programme.

1 From Lane End car park walk directly east along the track to Nattor Farm. From there, follow the Mine Leat on your left, until it reaches the River Tavy – about 25 minutes walk.
1 mile

2 Cross the leat at the concrete bridge, and with the Tavy on your right, follow it upstream. You can walk close to the river in the summer, but in the winter it can be boggy and you may have to walk higher up. After about 15 minutes the river bends round to the left; just round the bend you will see the valley ahead. This is where the Cleave starts.
0.3 miles

3 The first pool we have christened ‘Staircase Pool’ – this can be found about 10 minutes walk after the bend.
0.1 miles

0.1 miles

4 The next pool, the Devil’s Kitchen, is another ten minutes’ walk.
0.1 miles

0.1 miles

5 Carry on up the valley and you will see Rattle Brook entering the Tavy. Ford the river and carry on upstream.
0.4 miles

0.4 miles

6 After about 25 minutes you will reach Sandy Ford where the Amicombe Brook joins the Tavy. You then turn to head back and make your way north west over the crest of the hill, to see Watern Oke prehistoric village.
1.2 miles

1.2 miles

7 You then need to cross Rattle Brook at Dead Lake Foot, where Dead Lake meets Rattle Brook. It is marked by a boundary stone. Head straight up the other side of the valley and bear south west along an indistinct path around the hillside, above the Cleave, heading for the Tavy Cleave Tors which appear ahead about 20 minutes after leaving Rattle Brook.
1 mile

1 mile

8 Continue along the indistinct path, following the contours of the hill west towards Ger Tor. From Ger Tor you can then pick up a path downhill back to the car park.
1.2 miles

1.2 miles