

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.

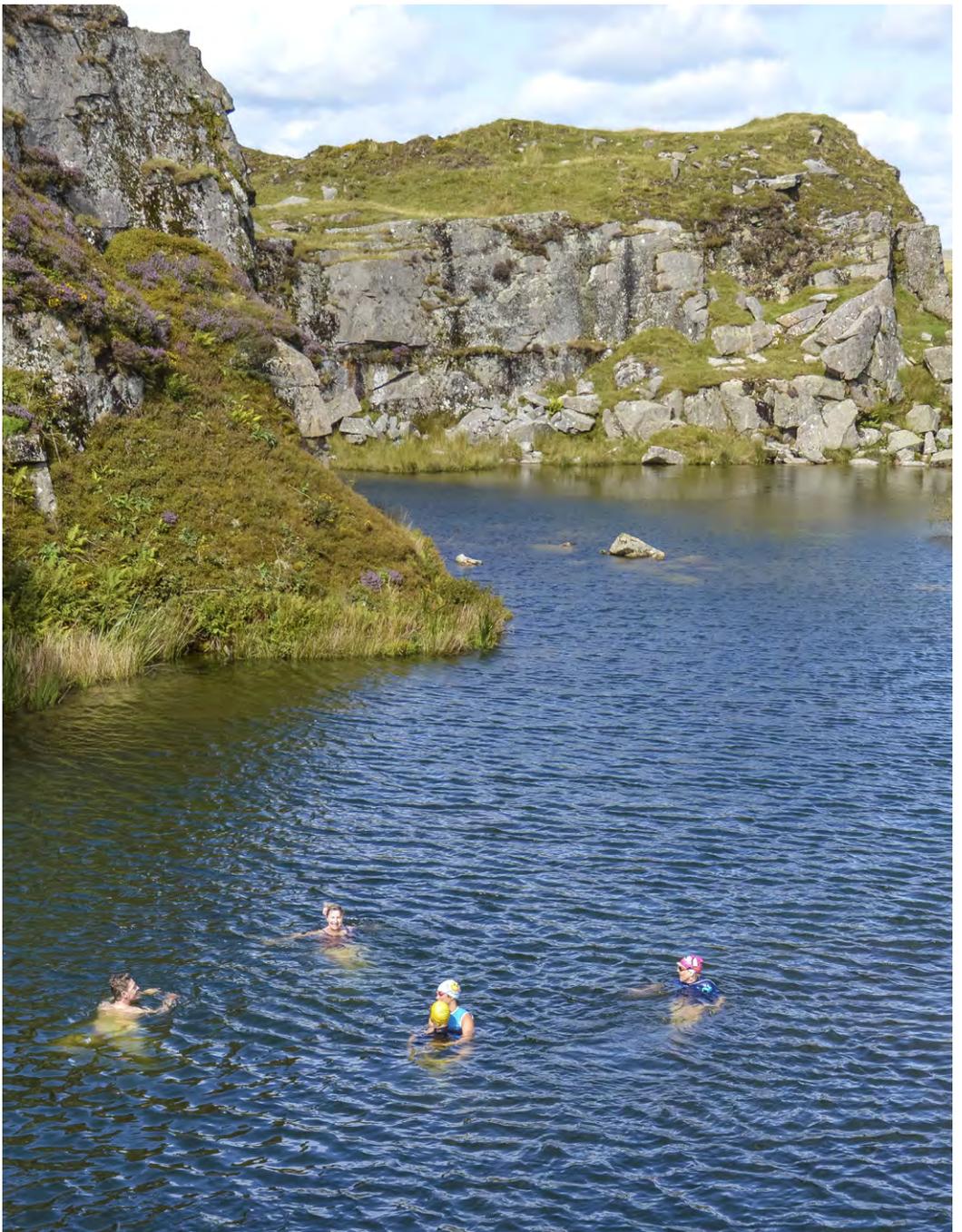
Watch out in high surf - rip-currents can form which take you out to sea, to behind the breaking waves. Swim perpendicularly from them to escape, then body-surf back in.

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 8

FOGGINTOR QUARRY AND THE PILA BROOK CIRCULAR

A fascinating adventure through Dartmoor's incredible history and wild nature, taking in a truly unique dip and some breathtakingly beautiful views.

As car parks go, Four Winds is both fascinating and melancholy. Foggintor School once stood here, built straight after the First World War for the children of the quarrymen working at Foggintor, Sweltor and Merrivale. As you can see from the walls that remain around the car park, it was an expansive building with a wood block floor, a leat supplying the water and even central heating – the pipes of which were used to warm the children's pasties. Outside there was a garden with chickens, a goat, rabbits and a beehive. The headmaster to the 55 children was Fred Stoyle, the youngest headmaster in the country.

As the quarries closed and the workers moved away, the school became unviable and it closed in 1936. The building became a private residence renamed Four Winds, although it later fell into disrepair and Dartmoor National Park Planning Authority arranged for it to be demolished in 1964. The headmaster's son Ivan planted the school Christmas tree in the garden in 1924 and you can still see the large evergreen tree growing over the rear wall of the car park.

The walk takes you east out of the car park and up onto Merrivale Down, in the direction of the FM radio and television transmitter at North Hessary Tor. It can be a bit boggy near the leat. You'll soon spot the track leading south to Yellowmeade Farm, but look out for a small hidden pool on the way. This is West Mead Quarry, which was owned and worked by Eric Green and his brother. Eric started working at what was his uncle's quarry aged just 16 and worked for eight hours a day using a 4lb lump hammer. You might also spot

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 4 miles

TIME: 2-3 hours

MAP: OS Explorer Dartmoor OL28

START POINT: Four Winds Car Park (SX 560 748, PL20 6ST). The car park is two miles west of Princetown on the Tavistock Road (B3357). It's not named, but is the middle of three car parks on this hill and easy to recognise as it has walls and trees round it.

END POINT: Four Winds Car Park

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: The 98 bus service runs between Tavistock and Yelverton (via Princetown) from Monday to Saturday

SWIMMING: Foggintor Quarry (SX 566 736), dipping pools in the Pila Brook at Little Wonder Bridge (SX 548 741)

PLACES OF INTEREST: Four Winds Car Park, Foggintor Quarry, Dartmoor Way, Kings Tor, Merrivale prehistoric monuments

REFRESHMENTS: The Plume of Feathers in Princetown is a great historical inn with slate floors, wooden beams and granite walls, and also offers camping in the field behind, as well as a bunk house (01822 890240, PL20 6QQ). The Dartmoor Inn in Merrivale is a traditional pub run by a local farming family, serving meat reared on Dartmoor and their own farm, and pasties baked in nearby Tavistock (01822 890340, PL20 6ST).



a former explosives store at the quarry before you continue up the hill to the track, over the heather, gorse and fern.

Turning right onto the track, you'll pass Yellowmeade Farm, which is now offering accommodation with stunning moorland views. After the farm you'll spot a metal gate on your right. If you look left from here towards the mast on the hill you'll notice a curious standing stone that doesn't seem entirely natural. If you walk up to it you'll see the letter T carved in one side and an A in the other. This is a TA way marker stone on an old medieval packhorse track. They marked the way between the important stannary towns of Tavistock and Ashburton, the T and the A.

You won't spot Foggin Tor itself, as it no longer exists. It was quarried away, leaving the craggy pit filled with clear water that has long since been reclaimed by nature. As you get closer you will see the remains of Hill Cottages and the manager's house. The quarry ❸ operated for 118 years, employing more than 400 men and supplied granite for London landmarks including Nelson's Column. The granite was also used to build much of Princetown, as well as the huge and imposing Dartmoor Prison.

There are countless myths and legends associated with the moor, and Foggintor Quarry had its own for a while. Between around 1955 and 1980 there were rumours and sightings of eerie humanoid figures lurking in the quarry at night and the locals started to call them the 'Shadow Men'. However, it was later revealed that they had been elite soldiers on top secret training missions. The army still uses the quarry from time to time, while it's also become popular with walkers, climbers and wild swimmers. Not that the latter is anything new. The children of the

quarrymen would swim in the quarry pool in the summer and ice skate on it in the winter.

You can enter the quarry and scramble around its left hand walls to reach the deeper water at the far end, or edge around the outskirts and enter from the south. Swim shoes are recommended as there are some sharp submerged rocks, but it's magical once you are in. Swim through the slate-coloured water near the sheer grey cliffs. They rise some 15 meters into the sky, topped with the invading green of the ferns and the gorse with its buttery yellow flowers, the moor restating its claim on this beautiful, plundered valley. It's fun to swim out to the tiny reedy islands or float on your back as the clouds drift past the craggy walls above. If you are braving a bracing winter swim, the moorland mist may just pour over the edge to join you.

Once you've swum and picnicked, climb out of the south of the quarry to walk along what was once a tramway ④ built in 1823 to allow granite to be taken to Plymouth in horse-drawn trucks. The tramway was rebuilt by the Great Western Railway in 1883 to carry steam engines and coaches out as far as Princetown. It now forms part of the Dartmoor Way, a stunning 95 mile-long circular route through Dartmoor National Park. As you skirt around the imposing King's Tor, look out for the old cutting and sidings of what was once a 'halt' where trains could stop when a flag was raised.

You feel as if you've slightly gone off-piste as you pick your way through boulder-strewn grass. Look out for evidence of quarrying in the form of blocks with holes drilled along their sides, split by feathers and tares. These were metal tools inserted into the holes before being struck with a mallet to cause a break in the granite. As you

go over the stile and head downhill towards the rocks of Hucklen Tor and the edge of the trees, don't forget to admire the panoramic view. On a clear day you will see views of Vixen Tor straight ahead, the River Walkham valley to the south, Great Staple Tor to the north and Bodmin Moor on the horizon.

Once you join the bridleway in the woods, you'll cross a lovely stream, the Pila Brook, a tributary of the River Walkham in the valley below. You cross the wonderfully named Little Wonder Bridge ⑦, which you can stand underneath, despite it seeming tiny. This has plenty of plunge pools downstream, which can be reached by a short scramble. The bridle path takes you through the grounds of Longash Cottage, which was once a farm. In the days when Foggintor School was open, the headmaster's son used to walk here every evening to collect milk for the school children to have at break time the following day. After 10 minutes of being watched by curious black Galloway cattle, you'll come to Hillside Cottage, and back to the main Tavistock Road.

Here there is a chance to paddle in the River Walkham, at the oxbow of the old road where the bridge crosses it. Perhaps more importantly, you can also refresh yourself at the Dartmoor Inn ⑧, below the imposing scar of Merrivale Quarry. The 140-year-old pub has a couple of quirky literary connections. Novelist and writer Eden Phillpotts named it The Jolly Huntsman in his novel *The Mother*, with the story set near King's Tor. Meanwhile in *Westward Ho!* Charles Kingsley described it thus:

"On the middle of the down stood a wayside inn; a desolate and lichen-spotted lump of granite, with windows paper-patched and rotting

thatch kept down by stones and straw-banks; and at the back a rambling court-ledge of barns and walls, around which pigs and barefoot children grunted in loving communion of dirt.”

Today you will be pleased to know it's a really cosy hostelry, renowned for its excellent food.

Merrivale or Tor Quarry was the final Dartmoor quarry to close, in 1997. The New Scotland Yard building is faced with granite from here, while the quarry was also involved in the audacious sale of London Bridge to an American in 1968. When the bridge from the nursery rhyme really was falling down in 1967, a clever PR man in the city of London suggested it could be sold to the Americans as a tourist attraction. Incredibly the ruse worked and an oil entrepreneur purchased it for £1,000,000, although contrary to a popular legend he didn't actually think he was buying Tower Bridge.

The story of American excess continues when the granite blocks, originally mined from Hay Tor quarry, were individually numbered and then transported back from London to Dartmoor and the Merrivale Quarry. Here they were trimmed to size and refinished before being transported by sea to the Port of Houston, Texas and then by rail to the shore of Lake Havasu in Arizona at a further cost of \$7 million. However, the businessman wasn't quite the dumb Yank everyone suspected. Property sales at the planned community he had established a few years earlier went through the roof and he easily recouped his outlay with a tidy profit. The bridge became the second most popular tourist attraction in Arizona after the Grand Canyon, while over the past 50 years the population of the city has grown from nothing to 53,000, thanks in no small part to the publicity generated by the incredible story.



After a pub stop, head on back to the car park through Dartmoor's most famous prehistoric monuments, the Merrivale Ceremonial Centre consisting of stone rows, a standing stone, a stone circle and several round stony burial mounds or cairns 9. Known also as the site of the Potato Market or Plague Market (after a time when food was left here for plague victims), these 4,000-year old arrangements of small and large stones wander monolithically up the hillside in double rows. Interestingly it's been suggested that Dartmoor ponies were used to transport most of the megalithic stones across Britain and, when this system came to an end, they were left to go feral.

The walk through the 4,000-year old ritual complex, up over the wild moorland and back towards the old Foggintor School car park, perfectly captures what a remarkable place Dartmoor is.

DIRECTIONS

1 Head east uphill from the car park and across the moor towards the television mast at Princetown, keeping parallel to the road until you come to a track leading south to Yellowmeade Farm.

0.3 miles

2 From here it is a level 20 minute walk along a tramway to the unmistakable ruined buildings and massive granite spoil heaps of Foggintor Quarry. The main water-filled quarry is entered off the track to the left.

0.7 miles

3 At Foggintor, follow the track south out the quarry for a few minutes and then take the second track to the right.

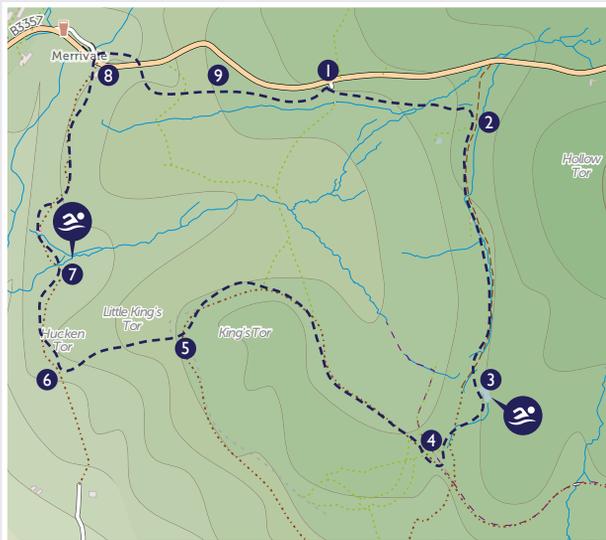
0.2 miles

4 This track is broad and level and was once the Plymouth to Princetown Railway Track before it closed in the 1960s. Now part of the Dartmoor Way, the track heads north west and skirts around King's Tor.

0.9 miles

5 After about 25 minutes the track forks again. Take the right hand, outer track and almost immediately head off the track downhill towards a granite wall with a large timber ladder stile over it. Climb over the stile and head downhill towards the rocks of Hucken Tor and the edge of the trees.

0.4 miles



6 After winding your way through outcrops of granite, you will come to a well-defined bridle path in the woods. Turn right onto this (north) and after 15 minutes you will cross a lovely moorland stream, the Pila Brook, a tributary of the River Walkham in the valley below.

0.3 miles

7 Leaving the stream behind, keep following the bridle path to the north through the grounds of Longash Cottage and then Hillside Cottage and back to the main Tavistock Road.

0.6 miles

8 After a possible pub stop at the Dartmoor Inn, head up hill to the east along the main road (B3357) and then branch off to

the right as soon as the open moor is reached again.

0.2 miles

9 Follow the wall to the top of the ridge until you see the start of the prehistoric monuments. Once sated with these features, the old Foggintor School car park is just a bit further up the hill.

0.4 miles