

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



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.

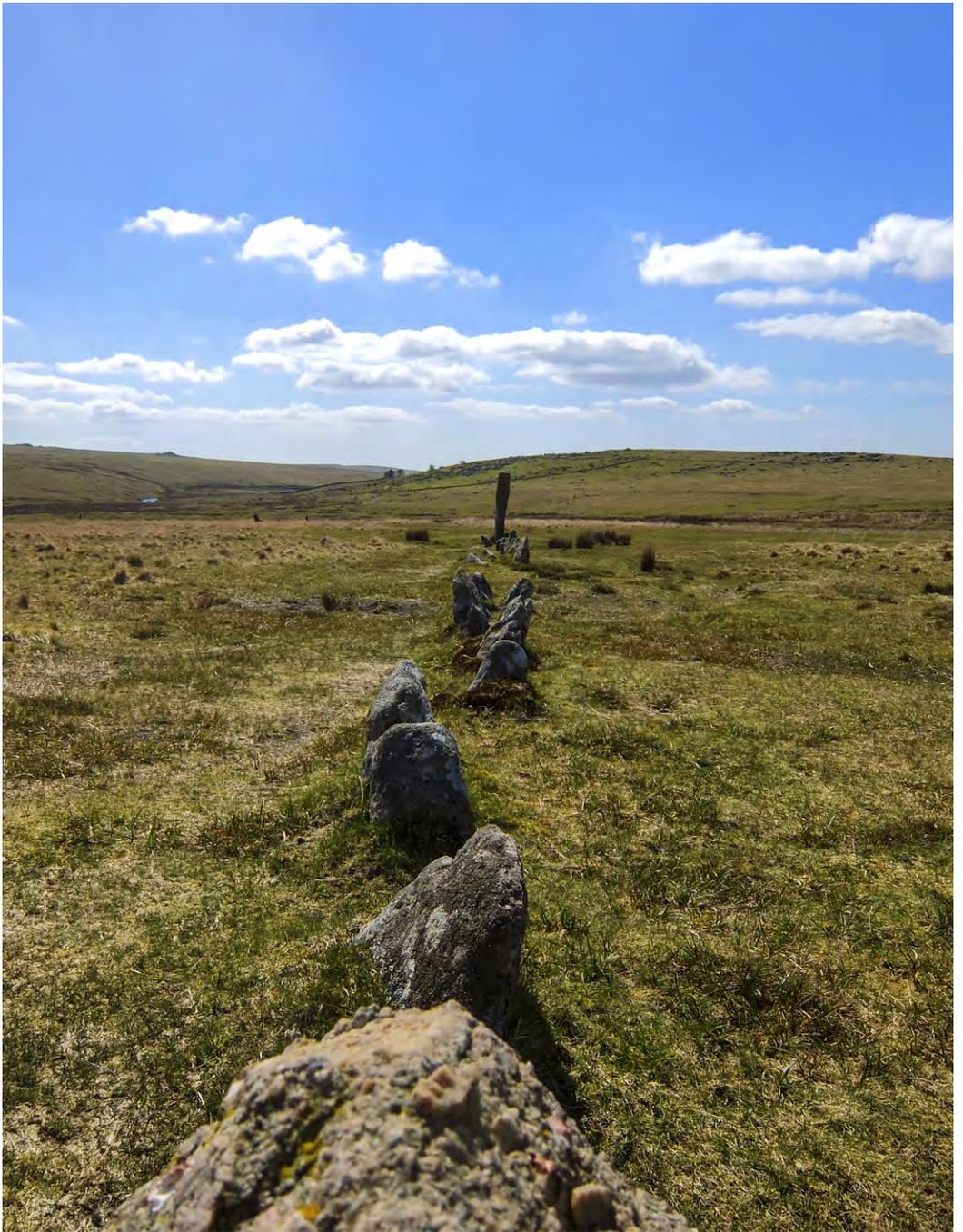
Watch out in high surf - rip-currents can form which take you out to sea, to behind the breaking waves. Swim perpendicularly from them to escape, then body-surf back in.

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 12

WARHORSE POOL AND SHAVERCOMBE WATERFALL CIRCULAR

Take in one of the most spectacular prehistoric sites on Dartmoor, a hidden waterfall and a farm which was the location for a Hollywood film.

The walk starts off along a track heading towards the north east, and looking ahead you get a glimpse of Higher Hartor Tor up on the right. Back down to the left, you can see the mountainous mass of Sheeps Tor, which has had many names over the years, with the first name – Sitelestorra – recorded in 1168. Back in 1474 it was known as Shittestor, but the rather more palatable name of Sheeps Tor is now in use.

Along the track to the left you will notice marker stones, bearing the inscription ‘PCWW 1917’ ②. These were erected by the Plymouth Corporation Water Works to mark the boundary of Burrator Reservoir. Further along you come to the fascinating remains of the Eylesbarrow tin mine which was worked in the early 19th century. To the right of the track you’ll see a large piece of wall with a hole in it to the right. This was stamping mill number two, where the mined ore was finely crushed so it could be separated from the waste. The hole is where the axle went. Most of the mine though is on the left hand side of the track.

The existence of the mine was first recorded in 1804 when shares were advertised for sale. Be careful as you explore, as many of the shaft heads are still there, in conical pits. There is what looks like the remains of a large rectangular building. This was the wheel pit, built in 1815 to house the waterwheel. You will also see what looks like a double stone row. This is not in fact a prehistoric feature, but another remnant of the old mine. It’s the remains of a so-called ‘flatrod’ system of linked iron or wooden rods, which linked the waterwheel to

INFORMATION

This walk involves crossing a river, so it's best done in dry sunny weather, when the water is low. This allows you to see the monuments to their best advantage too.

DISTANCE: 5 miles

TIME: 4 hours

MAP: OS Explorer Dartmoor OL28

START POINT: Scout Hut car park (SX 578 673, PL20 6PG), east of the village of Sheepstor

END POINT: Scout Hut car park

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Sunday bus 48 from Plymouth to Burrator Reservoir; then walk from the village of Sheepstor to the start at the Scout Hut

SWIMMING: Warhorse Pool, River Plym (SX 587 662) and Shavercombe Waterfall (SX 594 660)

PLACES OF INTEREST:

Drizzlecombe Stone Rows, Giant’s Basin, Eylesbarrow Tin Mine

REFRESHMENTS: The Burrator Inn, Dousland, known as the ‘Burrie’, serving reasonably priced pub grub (01822 853121, PL20 6NP). The Royal Oak, Meavy, is an award-winning pub in a picturesque location on the village green (01822 852944, PL20 6PJ)



the mine shafts. As the waterwheel turned it pushed the flatrods, which in turn powered the underground pumps at the mineshafts further up the hill. It must have been pretty bleak being a tin miner out working in the wilds of Dartmoor, with very few creature comforts.

The walk then takes you down the Drizzlecombe Valley with a stream running through. Here you will pass the remains of more buildings, and after you cross the stream and ascend to the brow of the hill you will find yourself among one of the most extensive Bronze Age settlements on the moor. A series of hut circles ⑤ look down on three stone rows ⑥. Hansford Worth, author of one of the most famous and authoritative guides to Dartmoor, describes them as “the most neatly arranged group on Dartmoor, and, with the possible exception of Merrivale, the sole example which shows what by our modern standards would be regarded as planning.” He was the first to write about them, and when he first observed them the terminal stones, or menhirs, were lying flat on the ground. They were re-erected in 1893. They are truly breathtaking, and contain what is said to be the tallest terminal stone on Dartmoor, known as the ‘Bone Stone’, which is over four metres high. These mysterious megaliths set the mind wondering about our ancestors. The truth is, although there are many theories about why these rows were built, no one really knows what they were for, or how they were used.

Looking southwards along the rows, you will see an enormous cairn which is known as the Giant’s Basin. It’s hollowed out at the top, probably where treasure seekers explored in the past, or where local farmers took the stones. Some important tribal leader is buried here, but whether or not the cairn dates from the same



time as the stone rows is not known.

The walk then takes you up the Shavercombe stream; a tiny, trickling watercourse. The waterfall ⑦ comes as a delightful surprise, as there is no sign of it until you are right there. As Eric Hemery puts it in *High Dartmoor*, “the stream, in its upper reach, is comparatively featureless...But the metamorphosis is to come: abruptly the granite ceases, and the brook falls headlong into a deep, dark canyon of eroded sedimentary rock, quite hidden...”. It feels like a secret room with bright-green moss-lined walls; the waterfall thunders down a vertical drop, and as you sit in the bowl of water below you feel as though you’re in an enchanted bower. The waterfall is surrounded by rowans, oaks and sycamore and is truly memorable. It’s a place to wallow and feel immersed in the secret beauty of Dartmoor.

The main swimming spot is in a weir pool ⑧, not far away, down below in the River Plym. The weir was created to siphon off water for a leat



which was needed to power a nearby tin mine. The water is an amazing golden colour; it is calm and deep, and is the perfect place for a refreshing dip. It's beautifully clear and gets the sun all day.

After your dip, the walk takes you past Ditsworthy Warren Farm, a fascinating old building which featured in the Steven Spielberg film, *Warhorse*, as Narracott Farm. It must be one of the remotest farmsteads on the moor, and is now semi-derelict and rather gloomy; Spielberg gave it a thatched roof to pretty it up for the movie. In its heyday in Victorian times, and in the first half of the 20th century, the farm was the breeding place of thousands of rabbits, bred for both their meat and their fur. It had various warreners, including one, Nicholas Ware, who had a wooden leg. He can't have found it easy, given the terrain. The final warrener was a formidable matriarch known as Granny Ware, who ruled the place with a rod of iron and who died in 1945. The farm is now owned by the army who occasionally use it for military exercises.

From the farm, as you walk back along the track, you see the fairly new rubble surface underfoot, put there to enable the film crews to get all their equipment up to the farm. This walk really does illustrate the hugely different ways in which man has used the moor over thousands of years. From the Bronze Age people, through to the tin miners, warreners and film makers, as Eric Hemery puts it, "the pageant of human endeavour on Dartmoor is here in a perfect setting".

DIRECTIONS

1 From the car park, walk past the scout hut on your right and take the track in a north easterly direction. After about 20 minutes you pass a boundary stone on your left, and then another. Both read 'PCWW 1917'.

0.5 miles

2 From the boundary stones, keep going for about another 20 minutes you reach a path on the right.

0.4 miles

3 At this junction, keep on going for a short detour of about ten minutes to see the remains of the Eylesbarrow Tin Mine. Afterwards retrace your steps to the junction

0.7 miles there and back to point 3.

4 Once back at the junction, follow the path south (to the left) and you will come across more ruins on your left. Just after three distinctive large pillars, turn left and walk down into the little valley. Cross the Drizzlecombe Brook and head up the other side.

0.3 miles

5 At the crest of the hill turn right, and you will arrive at numerous hut circles and then the Drizzlecombe Stone Rows.

0.3 miles

6 At the bottom standing stone turn left, and head for the river. Cross the river at the ford, and follow the path for a short time, with Shavercombe Brook on your



right, before turning right and crossing the stream via a small ford. Follow the path beside the stream (the stream is now on your left) until you reach the waterfall.

0.6 miles

7 From the waterfall, retrace your steps back down to the main river Plym. Walk south

beside the river until you reach Warhorse Pool – you can't miss it, as there is a weir.

0.7 miles

8 At Warhorse Pool, it's easiest to swim from the other side. After your swim, follow the path up the hill towards Ditsworthy Warren Farm. Pick up the track by the house and follow it back to the car park.