

# 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



**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 25

# MAN SANDS AND SCABBACOMBE CIRCULAR

A short but energetic walk up and down a rollercoaster section of coastal path, visiting two beautiful and secluded beaches, perfect for a refreshing dip.

A sign saying Warning Steep and Uneven Path heralds the start of a picturesque walk down through a valley between lush green rolling hills to the beckoning V of blue sea in the distance. The valley is a beautiful and deceptively relaxing start to an often thigh-straining walk as you head down through two fields to the remote beach at Scabbacombe Sands ②. As most people don't walk more than ten minutes from where they have parked their cars, and this is a good half hour from the car park, you might well have the sand and pebble beach to yourself. That said, it's popular with naturists and nudist bathers in the summer months, so who knows who you might stumble across!

It's a beautiful spot with wildflowers strewn across the grassy cliffs that plummet right down to the sea, colonised by fulmars, an ocean-going bird resembling a gull. The beach is often a treasure trove of washed-up driftwood and perfect skimming stones, while at low tide you can walk right along to Long Sands, the next beach north. Look out for some amazing geology along the way, including slate formations sculpted by the sea to resemble grey waves. It's a lovely spot for a dip, although do swim close to the shore as there are some really strong currents here, while there are also some submerged rocks off to the left. And don't forget to save a bit of energy, as you'll soon be walking up over that steep cliff in the direction of Brixham.

A brief climb followed by a short drop lulls you into a false sense of security, before the punishing ascent begins. Don't forget to take regular breathers to enjoy the views back towards the ever-shrinking beach and Scabbacombe Head behind it, and then down onto the curve of Long Sands below. If you are visiting between

### INFORMATION

**DISTANCE:** 2.5 miles

**TIME:** 2-3 hours

**MAP:** OS Explorer South Devon OL20

**START POINT:** Car park at Scabbacombe Lane, north east of Kingswear (SX 911 522, TQ6 0EF)

**END POINT:** Car park at Scabbacombe Lane

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** Bus service 22 and 24 to Hillhead from Brixham and Kingswear and then walk down to the car park

**SWIMMING:** Scabbacombe Sands (SX 919 519) and Man Sands (SX 923 534)

**PLACES OF INTEREST:** Man Sands wetlands, Woodhuish Farm

**REFRESHMENTS:** None on the walk. The nearest café is at the nearby National Trust property, Coleton Fishacre. They are also happy for you to eat your own packed lunch at their picnic tables (01803 752466, TQ6 0EQ). Or visit nearby Brixham where a fishing family has set up a café right by the town's famous lido, with wonderful views: Shoals Café on the Lido (01803 854874, TQ5 9AE).





April and June, look out for early purple orchids and the white star-shaped greater stitchwort in amongst the gorse, ferns and heather, while during the summer months, the area is blanketed with daisies and tall thistle-like teasels with their rosy-purple heads. The path flattens out for about a mile as you head towards Crabrock Point, where it's possible to walk out onto the headland to enjoy stunning views out towards Sharkham Point on the edge of Brixham.

The path now drops down to Man Sands ③ and the three coastguard cottages, which were built by Napoleonic prisoners of war. Two of the cottages (Crabrock and Ladycove) are available to rent. The cottages date back to the beginning of the 19th century when they provided accommodation for the coastguards, whose primary purpose at that time was looking out for smugglers. Rounding the corner to the beach you'll also spot an old lime kiln and the remains of an old boathouse, which were also built by the prisoners. The kiln was used to make lime to be used as a fertiliser by local farmers.

The pebble and shingle beach becomes exposed sand at a low tide, while a walk off to the right reveals rock pools and a wonderful cave to explore. Return at a higher tide and you can even swim through it if you dare, or perhaps even swim around to the next beach at Short Sands. In the cliffs the more observant might spot a small hole carved into the rock face, just big enough to conceal a person. We've heard it described as a lookout used by the coastguard to watch for smugglers and indeed a secluded hideout for smugglers to watch for the coastguard. Either way it's an amazing find and certainly hints at the very adventurous history of this beautiful beach.

How Man Sands gained its rather masculine name is unknown, but back in 1986 the skeleton of a man was actually found in the sands. According to the South West Coast Path website ([southwestcoastpath.org.uk](http://southwestcoastpath.org.uk)), workers building the sea wall discovered the grave of a young man, believed to have died in a shipwreck. Before the Reverend Hawker from Cornwall started the practice of giving victims of shipwrecks a proper Christian burial, the bodies were either abandoned on the shoreline or buried just above it.

The beach and the land surrounding it are managed by the National Trust and the wetland lagoon fed by a stream has deliberately been allowed to form on an area which was once reclaimed land used for farming. You can spot lots of ducks and waders here, as well as several special species of migrating birds. Along the route back up towards the car park you'll pass a bird hide, which is the perfect place for looking out across the wetland, with interpretation boards to let you know what to look out for.

The return walk also passes Woodhuish, a former Victorian farm also managed by the Trust. Walk up to the barn where you can see the restored cider press that is used to press apples for the annual Apple Day each October. Indeed you can smell the faint scent of apples in the air, while there is also evidence of the barn owls and bats who inhabit the barn, in the pellets and guano covering the cider press. We can only hope they scrub it down before the festival, unless this adds to the flavour of the scrumpy. On that sobering note, it's just a short stroll back up to the car park, something that your thighs will certainly thank you for.

## DIRECTIONS



① From the car park at Scabbacombe, walk out through the gate and onto the lane, following the signs for Scabbacombe Sands Link to Coast Path. When you enter the field, follow it around to the left and down the hill before joining the South West Coast Path. Take the path down to the beach for your first potential swim stop.

**0.6 miles**

② From Scabbacombe Sands, re-join the coast path and follow it back along the coast with the

sea on your right. Climb a very steep hill, which flattens out for a mile or so, before dropping down to Man Sands and the second potential swim stop.

**1 mile**

③ From the beach, head-up Woodhuish Lane, past the cider barn and Woodhuish Farm and back to the car park at the start of Scabbacombe Lane.

**1.1 miles**

