

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.

WILD swimming *Walks*

Dartmoor and South Devon
28 lake, river and
beach days out

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*.

If you like *Wild Swimming Walks* you might also like these other titles from **WildThingsPublishing.com**



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.

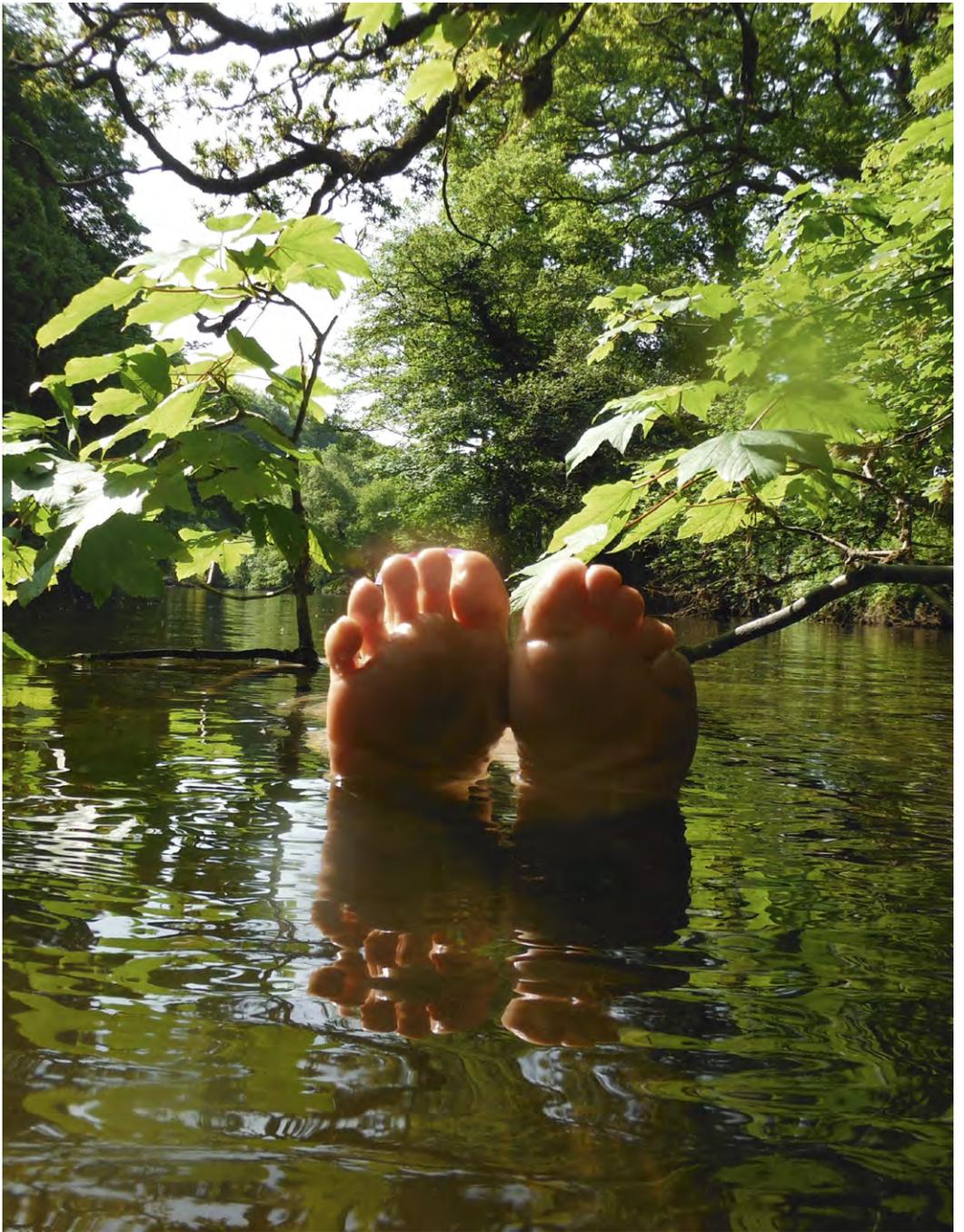
Watch out in high surf - rip-currents can form which take you out to sea, to behind the breaking waves. Swim perpendicularly from them to escape, then body-surf back in.

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.



STAVERTON CIRCULAR

An old fashioned jape taking in steam trains, riverside rambles, adventurous swim spots, nature reserves, charming villages and some well-earned refreshment in a local pub.

The short distance of this walk makes it reasonably accessible. Nevertheless you do get the impression that you are in the middle of nowhere, and a million miles away from home. A fun way to start this picturesque mini-adventure is by jumping on board the restored steam train at Littlehempston station in Totnes and chugging your way up to Staverton station. The track runs along the River Dart; make sure you sit on the left side of the train for the best views on the all-too-brief outbound journey. Alternatively you can travel from Buckfastleigh, and again the train follows the river, but from here you need to sit on the right to get the best views. Somewhat ironically the line must be the only one actually opened by Dr Richard Beeching, who as the head of British Rail had closed tracks and stations across the country. When the route was reopened in 1969, someone with a quirky sense of humour thought it might be amusing to invite Beeching to declare one open for a change.

Stepping off the train at Staverton you feel like you have walked into a gentle Sunday evening television drama, and indeed the station has been used as a location in everything from the *Hound of the Baskervilles* to *Five Go Mad in Dorset*. The charming country station looks the same as it would have done 100 years ago when it served the nearby village, as well as the 18th century corn mill and local farms, including those producing Devon cider. Real ale fans will also want to look out for the annual 'Rails and Ales' beer festival, held at the station every August bank holiday.

INFORMATION

DISTANCE: 2 miles

TIME: 1-2 hours

START POINT: Staverton Station (SX 783 637, TQ9 6FE). If you are planning to take the steam train (late March till end of October), park at one of the public car parks in Totnes and walk to Totnes Littlehempston Station, which is about 500 metres from the mainline station. Alternatively you can get the train from Buckfastleigh. The award-winning station has been built entirely from buildings and artefacts from GWR stations around the west. Or you can park at Staverton Station. Tickets cost 50p and are available from the station

END POINT: Staverton Station

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Totnes has a mainline railway station and various bus links including the Gold bus service between Torquay, Totnes and Plymouth, the 88 from Newton Abbot and the X64 from Exeter

SWIMMING: Staverton Weir (SX 786 638), Still Pool (SX 791 636)

PLACES OF INTEREST: Staverton Bridge, Staverton Weir/Leat, Staverton Village, Staverton Nature Reserve

REFRESHMENTS: The Sea Trout Inn in Staverton is a long-established pub and hotel (01803 762274, TQ9 6PA) which prides itself on being dog-friendly. Just up the road from Staverton Station is the charming Staverton Bridge Nursery and Café, which bakes its own bread and grows its own salad (0786651 088, TQ9 6NU)



Once you have fulfilled all your *Railway Children* fantasies, walk out of the station, cross the tracks and check out the pretty little bridge. Staverton or Stouretona means ‘the village by the stony ford’ and a crossing at this spot provided a route up to Dartington for centuries, before the present stone bridge with its seven stone arches was built around 1413. The photogenic structure even inspired a successful folk trio to call themselves Staverton Bridge in the 1970s. As tempting as it may look, you can’t enter the water from here as the banks are private, including that of the mill, which has been converted into eight luxury dwellings. Indeed there is a very official looking sign warning canoeists not to egress here, so it’s up to you if you decide to swim.

The walk takes you past the 18th century mill, which was built as a water-driven corn mill before being taken over by a group of gifted craftsmen in the 1930s, who had been restoring the Great Hall at Dartington. The beautiful building is both a Scheduled Ancient Monument and listed as Grade I. The walk takes you past lots of old railway stock, including one truck used to transport Teign Valley granite, and into the woods following the river. If you stop by the black and white bollard and then turn immediately back on yourself and through the two old gate posts, you can catch one of the few glimpses of the bridge that doesn’t involve trespassing.

It’s a delightful riverside walk through the trees, past several small beaches, until you reach the weir, originally built by fishermen. Some people like to swim here, while the area is also popular with canoeists who head down river through a fast chute in a broken section of the weir. The annual River Dart Raft Race also passes here.

You’ll then arrive at Staverton Leat ② where the Totnes Renewable Energy Society are currently working on a plan to introduce a 100KW hydro power plant that can generate clean renewable electricity for Totnes. The site previously generated electricity for the Dartington estate in the 1920s. The plan is to generate electricity from an Archimedes turbine, as well as regenerating the leat and creating a new fish pass to help the up-and-down-stream migration of river life. The River Dart Country Park, further upstream, became the first place in the UK to use an Archimedes turbine for grid-connected power generation back in 2007.

Cross over the leat, over the top of the sluice gate, and enter what feels like a wooded island from an adventure story, with gnarly roots underfoot and the slow flow of the rust-coloured river glimpsed through gaps in the lush green jungle. It’s a beautiful spot, completely unspoilt, and it’s worth taking a moment to enjoy the river’s lazy flow across the submerged pebbles, dappled by a canopy of overhanging trees. Carry on further over a bridge made from two old railway sleepers and onto a bench near a tree in the middle of the path. Here you can drop down onto the earthy beach and swim at the aptly named Still Pool ③.

This popular swimming hole straight out of a Mark Twain story has been popular with generations of swimmers and it’s easy to understand why. This naturally dammed playground has everything you need - a deep channel to swim through, a pebbly beach on the far shore to conquer and jumping rocks and a rope swing for the adventurous. The rugged old oak tree on the far shore has steps built into the trunk and has become a rite of passage for brave youths (and the odd wild swimmer) who jump



into the peaty waters below. Obviously always check the depth first, as rivers can change all of the time.

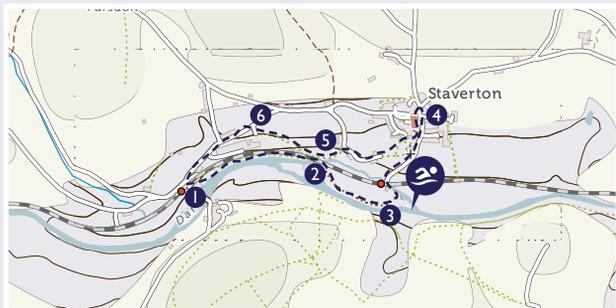
The walk continues across a private field (with access) and over the tracks at Nappers Halt and up towards the village 4. You'll pass St Paul de Leon church, which recently celebrated the 700th anniversary of an edict by Bishop Walter de Stapleton to pull down the original Norman church and build a more capacious one. The vicar and parishioners were given 18 months to complete the enormous task. The new, bigger church wasn't always big enough though. Such was the size of the slate quarrying community living in the area in the 1850's, another church had to be built for their community at Landscope.

Continuing up the hill you'll pass The Court Room, which once housed an ecclesiastical court in centuries gone by and now serves as the village hall. It's then on to a refreshment stop at the dog-friendly Sea Trout Inn. Dating back to the 15th century, this popular inn also has exclusive rights to fishing on the nearby stretch of river, and is understandably popular for fishing breaks.

The walk continues down a footpath around the rear of the church and past charming cottages and artisan businesses, before heading back down towards the railway track and into a nature reserve 5 owned and managed by Staverton Wildlife Regeneration Society. When the council was about to sell off this area of untouched woodland of considerable ecological importance in 2014, a group of parishioners formed a community society to raise funds to purchase the land themselves. A boardwalk takes you through the nature reserve before you head up some steps and walk past the pavilion and playing fields, and onto the lane. It's then just a short walk back to the station past charming B&Bs and an antiques shop.



DIRECTIONS



1 Cross over the tracks and turn left onto the gravel track down the side of the old mill building. Continue along the riverside walk and pass the weir until you reach workings at the leat. Turn right to cross the sluice gates and into the woods. **0.4 miles**

2 The path winds its way through the woods with all tracks leading out again, but if in doubt take the left fork. Continue over a bridge made from two railway sleepers and

on until you come to a bench near a tree in the middle of the path. Walk down the slope onto the 'beach' by the swimming spot, Still Pool. **0.3 miles**

3 Continue the walk by going back up the bank and turning right. Cross the private land (with access) and through the gate, turning left down the track. Cross over the railway at Nappers Halt and over the leat, before heading up the lane into the village. Pass the church and

the village hall and you will find the Sea Trout Inn on your left. **0.4 miles**

4 Once refreshed, leave the pub and walk back down the lane and turn right onto the footpath just before the church. Continue down the track and onto a lane turning left at Sweet William Cottage and into the woods. **0.4 miles**

5 When you reach the railway tracks, don't cross them, but instead walk into the nature reserve through the wooden gate. Follow the wooden walkway through the reserve and then up some steps to emerge just below the tennis courts. **0.1 miles**

6 Walk along the bottom of the playing fields, past the playpark and then left onto the lane. Follow this back to the station where the walk began. **0.1 miles**

