

# 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.

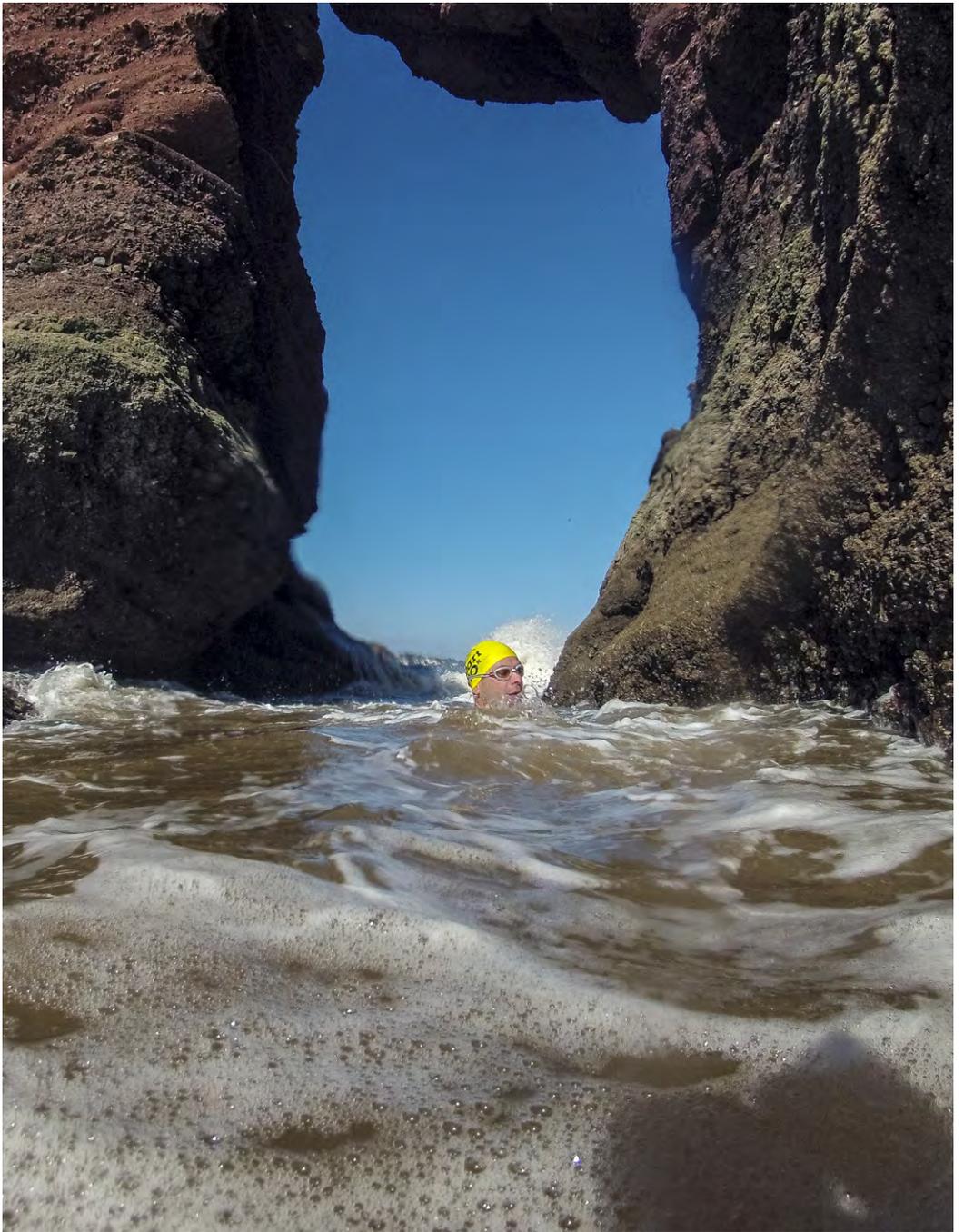
Watch out in high surf - rip-currents can form which take you out to sea, to behind the breaking waves. Swim perpendicularly from them to escape, then body-surf back in.

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.



# TEIGNMOUTH TO DAWLISH RAILWAY WALK

A stunning walk taking in Brunel's world-famous coastal stretch of railway, as well as the famous red cliffs of South Devon.

**O**n this walk you can swim around and through two of Devon's more unusual and quirkily-named rock formations and sea stacks, as well as enjoy stunning views over to the Jurassic Coast.

The walk begins at Teignmouth Pier, which was built in 1865 and once provided a landing stage for pleasure steamers and boasted a pavilion complete with a ballroom. As well as offering traditional seaside entertainment including magic lantern shows, stuntmen would also entertain the crowds. The most famous was one-legged Peg Leg Pete, who would thrill onlookers by setting himself alight and diving from an impressive height into the sea below. The Grand Pier also provided a grandstand for crowds to watch water polo matches and indeed, members of the Teignmouth Team were Devon champions for many years. The structure once marked the segregation point for bathers with gentlemen's bathing machines to the west and ladies' to the east.

The pier may have survived the bombing raids of World War II (the town was bombed 21 times) but it almost didn't survive the storms of 2014. Powerful waves ripped through the wooden floors, causing hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of damage, closing the attraction for almost six months. As one of only two piers left on the south west coast (along with Paignton Pier) and one of only 50 original structures in England and Wales still standing, it is fortunate that the pier survived. The attraction is loved by many, including local band Muse, who used the iconic pier in the publicity for their homecoming Seaside Rendezvous gigs, which took place on the nearby Den - a big green space on the seafront - in 2009.

Perambulating along the seawall past the East Cliff Café and the yacht club, you'll be participating in an activity that has been

## INFORMATION

**DISTANCE:** 3 miles (or 6 miles depending on whether returning by train)

**TIME:** 2-3 hours

**MAP:** OS Explorer, Teignmouth and Dawlish OL44

**START POINT:** Teignmouth Pier (SX 941 727, TQ14 8BB); parking on the seafront and in numerous car parks

**END POINT:** Teignmouth Pier

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** Teignmouth is served by train and buses including the Number 2 from Exeter and the 184 and 186 from Newton Abbot

**SWIMMING:** Holcombe Beach (the Parson and Clerk) (SX 957 746), Coryton Cove (SX 961 760)

**PLACES OF INTEREST:**

Teignmouth, Teignmouth Pier, The Riviera Line railway, the Parson and Clerk, Dawlish

**REFRESHMENTS:** The Eastcliff Café in Teignmouth is perfectly placed on the seafront (01626 777621, TQ14 8SH) with nice hot food including bacon baps, chips and teacakes. For a seafood extravaganza head to the Crab Shack (booking essential) (01626 777956, TQ14 8BY). In Dawlish, Gay's Creamery is an institution, serving pasties and ice creams (01626 863341, EX7 9PD).



popular since Victorian times. This coast-hugging stretch of railway line, one of the most picturesque in the world, was built to the designs of Isambard Kingdom Brunel as part of his Penzance-Paddington Line, and opened in 1846. What makes the ambitious route so stunning for passengers is also what can be its greatest threat, with the sea regularly battering this section of track. In 2014, the storms created a series of landslips which blocked the line. The seawall was so badly breached at Dawlish it left sections of railway track dangling in the air. The main rail link in and out of the south west was closed for two months. Repairs cost in excess of £35 million, and you'll be able to spot several suggestions of the Herculean effort of workers to get the line reopened in the red cliffs above you as you continue the walk.

The Teignmouth sign at Sprey Point is a good place to pause and take in the views back towards Teignmouth, the red cliffs of The Ness in Shaldon and beyond. The curious manmade headland halfway along the railway walk was built by Brunel in 1839, when he flattened a huge landslip and used it to land materials employed in the construction of the railway line. Between the wars, this spot with its amazing views became a popular location for strolling holidaymakers. There was a 'Halfway Café,' a tea garden and a games area where they could play bagatelle and table tennis. When the Second World War broke out, military defences were built here and the café closed, never to reopen.

Continuing on towards the tunnel, look out for an old lime kiln on the other side of the railway track, used in the construction of the line. You'll also see more groynes half buried in the sand. These are wooden structures built at right angles to the coast, to prevent the sand and pebbles being carried away by waves and tides. These make Teignmouth the





perfect place for swim training, with these wooden distance markers along the route.

Parson's Tunnel is the longest in a series of five impressive tunnels cut through the red cliffs here (Parson's Tunnel, Clerk's Tunnel, Phillot Tunnel, Coryton Tunnel and Kennaway Tunnel). You'll also be able to see the 'Parson' and 'Clerk' to the right of the tunnel – although this is the source of some disagreement. Locals think that the 'Parson' is the stack on the end of the cliff (which goes out of view closer to the tunnel), while the 'Clerk' is the stack just off the shore. The OS map begs to differ, calling the stack in the sea 'Shag Rock'. Who is right is anyone's guess. We've also heard it referred to as 'witches hat' and even 'Cock Rock'. It used to be much larger, but it lost its head in a storm in 2003.

As you'd expect there's a legend attached to the name of the rocks. When the Bishop of Exeter fell ill, an ambitious local priest had his eye on succeeding him following his demise. This parson and his clerk would often make the journey to Dawlish, where the Bishop was convalescing, to check on his

health. One night they made the journey during a terrible storm, and they found themselves lost on Haldon Moor. In his anger and frustration the priest shouted at his clerk that he would rather have the devil himself than him for a guide. At that very moment, a horseman appeared from nowhere and offered to be their escort. After a few miles they came across a dazzlingly lit mansion in Holcombe and the guide invited them in to sample his hospitality. While they were enjoying a sumptuous feast, news arrived that the bishop had died. Eager to secure his chance of promotion, the priest hurried the clerk and the guide to leave at once. However, when they jumped on the horses, the beasts refused to move. When use of his whip and spurs failed, the angry priest yelled "Devil take the brutes." At once the gleeful guide cried "Thank you sir" and shouted "gee up". The horses galloped over the cliff, carrying the parson and clerk on their backs. The devil then turned them to stone, forever pointing seaward as monuments to greed and ambition.

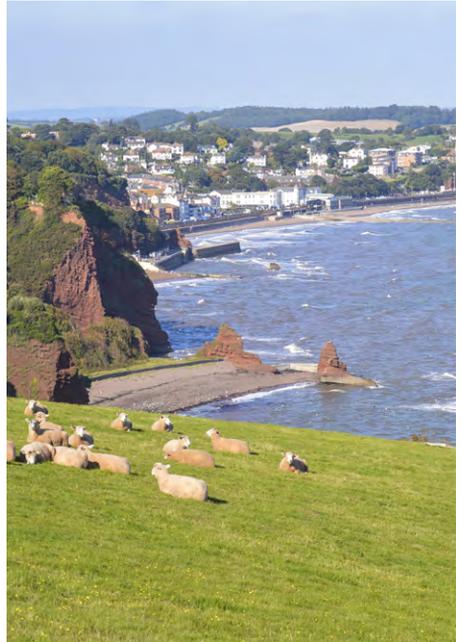
You can swim anywhere along the beach of course, but we like to get in right at the northern end, just by the Parson and Clerk, and the railway tunnel. Swimming through the enticing arch at the end of the protruding cliff is an amazing experience, best done on a flat sea, but we once had enormous fun in easterly winds, being bounced towards it and whooshing through. When it's calm, and the sea is clear, it can be truly serene, swimming underneath the beautiful red sandstone of the arch above, and going through to the secret beach that is only accessible to swimmers or boaters. You may well meet a kayaker or two.

After the swim, the steep walk up the evocatively titled Smugglers Lane should get you nicely warmed up, while imagining the clandestine activities that inspired the name. Illicit goods would be

transported up this lane from Holcombe Beach to the village of Holcombe itself. According to local legend there is also a cave near the Parson and Clerk that leads to the garden of Sunnylands, a house which you'll pass as you walk along the main road at the top. Indeed when the railway tunnel was being built, workers apparently cut through a smugglers tunnel and blocked it off. A friend of ours, Gilly, who grew up in the area, shared these tantalising details:

“I’ve numerous, fond childhood memories of swimming at the Parson and Clerk, intermittently having to leg it up the stone steps to snatch train numbers on passing locomotives for my dad. There used to be a cave there - but we’re going back 40-odd years since I last rounded the rocks, so rose-tinted memories might reveal only a semi-pathetic underhang instead. I first discovered it swimming round the corner from Coryton to Shell Cove. The tunnel was rough-cut cold, with slimy steps up inside, and a horizontal ledge or two with portholes looking out to sea. I never did dare venture to the top - I was stopped in my tracks by an ear-splitting roar as contrails in red, white and blue streamed past my port-hole vista. Yep, the Red Arrows were back in town for their annual aerobatic display!”

After a brief walk along the busy A379 you are soon on the South West Coast Path and walking a track sandwiched between two hedges that were laden with juicy blackberries when we researched the walk. Suddenly the hedge drops on your left to reveal the most extraordinary view down over Dawlish. The two rocks you can see below are Horse Rocks (the horses of the doomed Parson and Clerk), with Shell Cove just before them and our next swim stop at Coryton Cove just beyond that. On a clear day you can see a great deal of the Devon and Dorset Jurassic Coast World Heritage



Site, which stretches from Exmouth right around to Swanage. The path becomes really steep as it drops down towards the railway line (look out for the Smuggler's Inn on your left), before climbing back inland past some highly manicured lawns and back to the road.

After walking past some desirable properties on the Old Teignmouth Road, you'll enter Lea Mount Park, with more wonderful views down to Dawlish. Indeed this viewpoint appears in many early postcards of the seaside town. It's then down the cliff path to the beach for a well-deserved swim and refreshments. Coryton Cove used to be known as the gentleman's bathing place and was once the training ground of local Fred Holman, who won a gold medal in the 200-metre breaststroke at the 1908 London Olympics (four years after the stroke was first introduced). It's a lovely spot for a dip, with Horse Rocks off to the right (one does actually resemble a sea horse), and the gap at the Parson and Clerk viewable in the distance. It's also a great place to swim at sun or moonrise, as it faces east. We once had a wonderful moonlit swim here with a fire. Shell Cove is reachable by walking along the shore at very low tides, but be careful not to get cut off.

After your swim, stroll back past the beach huts and Old Maid Rock in the sea and round the corner past Cowhole Rock into Boat Cove. If there aren't waves crashing over, walk along the seawall known as the Kings Walk, which was built to celebrate the coronation of Edward VII. You'll then arrive at the three pedestrian archways under the railway track called the Colonnade Viaduct. The beach here was once known as the ladies bathing place, a safe distance from the men swimming over at Coryton Cove. You are now in the quaint seaside town of Dawlish, famous for



the black swans, which have inhabited the brook since at least the early 1900s.

Once you've enjoyed a delicious ice cream or mouth-watering pasty from Gay's Creamery, run as a family business since 1925, it's then over to the station for the return train journey along the stunning stretch of coast. Make sure you sit on the left hand side for the wonderful sea views that have enchanted passengers for the past 170 years. Don't forget to try and hold your breath through one of the tunnels - you get to make a wish if you manage it! Back in Teignmouth, it's well worth visiting the Teign Heritage Centre, which boasts a restored Victorian bathing machine, old pier slot machines, diving treasures and a fascinating look at the town's long and remarkable relationship with the sea.

## DIRECTIONS

**1** Walk north along the promenade from the pier with the sea on your right, and continue past Teignmouth Lido and the Teign Corinthian Yacht Club as the sea wall meets the railway. Continue past the enormous Teignmouth sign and on towards the railway tunnel.

**1.4 miles**

**2** Drop down onto the beach at one of the last sets of steps for the first swim at Hole Head near Parson's Tunnel. After your swim, go back up the steps and under the archway onto Smugglers Lane. Walk up the steep hill to the main road. Carefully cross the busy road and turn right along the pavement. At the coast path sign, cross back over the road to turn right onto Windward Lane.

**0.3 miles**

**3** After a short distance, turn left to join the South West Coast Path. Follow the path around the back of Hole Head and down the steep hill to join the railway again. Cross over the small bridge and then up the hill and out to the road again.

**0.7 miles**

**4** Walk up the wooden steps onto the road. Turn right to follow the old Teignmouth Road and past some rather nice houses. Turn right into Lea Mount Gardens and follow the path left and down out of the gardens. Turn right at the fork and wind down the cliffs, turning right again to get to Coryton's Cove.

**0.4 miles**

**5** After a swim, follow the path past the beach café and beach huts and

around the corner past Cowhole Rock and the breakwater to again join the railway line. Continue along the sea wall, left under the railway arch and then right along to the station. Cross over the tracks for the return train journey to Teignmouth. There are about four trains per hour at peak times and one each hour off-peak.

**0.5 miles**

To return to the pier in Teignmouth, walk straight out of the station, cross the road and walk down Station Road. Cross the road and onto the Triangle. Bear right and then cross the road at the new Pavilions art centre. Turn right and then left at the Tourist Information Centre to walk between the bowling club and the Den to reach the pier.

**0.2 miles**

