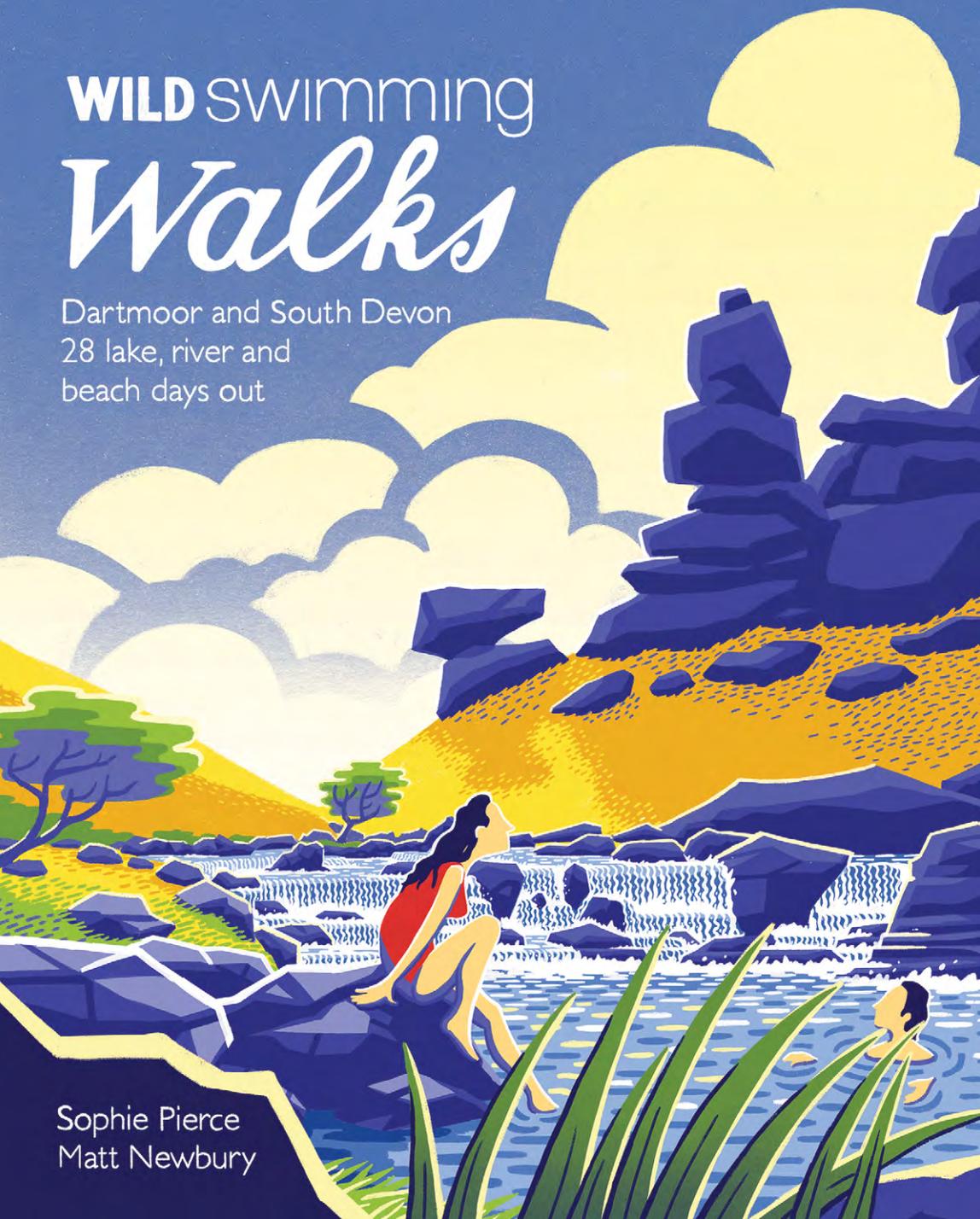


# WILD swimming *Walks*

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 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*.

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



# 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 3

# SHILLEY POOL CIRCULAR

Walk up onto the open moors with glorious views across northern Devon, discover a remarkable triple stone row, and swim in a magical pool.

The walk starts in the pretty medieval village of South Zeal ①, home to the Dartmoor Folk Festival for almost 40 years. It's a lively little place and has been since the 13th century when it was a popular stop on a trade route between Exeter and Okehampton, and on to Cornwall. The spinning and weaving of sheep's wool had become a popular cottage industry here by the 18th century (look out for the clues in local names like Tucking Mill Field and the adjacent Washing Place). Later, in the 19th century, South Zeal housed tin miners. Indeed there were so many migrant workers employed at Ramsley Copper Mine (on the hill above the village) it gained the nickname Irishman's Town. At the time the town had its own bakers, shoemakers, tailors and milliners, as well as a selection of general stores and five pubs.

Strolling around the village today you'll discover St Mary's Chapel, which was once the home of the village school for nearly 200 years. You'll also spot the Market Cross at the end of the churchyard, which was erected as a tribute to the village's medieval market, established by charter in 1298. It's also worth popping your head into the Country Store and Tea Room, a charming old shop and the perfect place to pick up some supplies for the walk.

Opposite you'll find one of the village's two pubs, The Oxenham Arms, a former coaching inn dating back to the 12th century and a monastery before that. In one of the rooms you'll discover a prehistoric standing stone in one of the walls – the original monastery was built around it. The pub can

## INFORMATION

**DISTANCE:** 4.5 miles

**TIME:** 4-5 hours

**MAP:** OS Explorer Dartmoor OL28

**START POINT:** South Zeal Car Park (SX 651 934, EX20 2JZ)

**END POINT:** South Zeal Car Park

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT:** The 178 runs between Newton Abbot and Okehampton via South Zeal.

**SWIMMING:** Shilley Pool, Blackaton Brook (SX 652 912)

**PLACES OF INTEREST:** South Zeal, Cosdon triple stone row

**REFRESHMENTS:** The Oxenham Arms is the oldest heritage inn in Devon and Cornwall, with low beams, flagged floors and mullioned windows, as well as a garden with great views across the moors (01837 840244, EX20 2JT). The thatched Kings Arms is a 14th century village local pub, serving real ales, farm cider and hearty homemade fare (01837 840300, EX20 2JP).

also claim some impressive guests including Charles Dickens, who stayed here while writing the *Pickwick Papers*, as well as Francis Drake, Admiral Nelson, David Bowie and the Rolling Stones. The pub also pops up in Charles's Kingsley's *Westward Ho!*, which references the legend of a white-breasted bird whose appearance was said to foretell a death in the Oxenham family who once lived here. 'The Ox' is also said to be haunted by both a monk and a lady.

The Dartmoor Way passes through the garden of the pub, although our walk takes you up onto the colossal Cosdon Hill, which at 550m high dominates the north east side of Dartmoor and was once believed to be the highest point on Dartmoor. That honour actually goes to its neighbour, High Willhays which is a full 71m higher. It's not the size of the hill, but what you discover when you climb it, and there are some real treats in store. The walk takes you on bridleways and tracks up onto the moor, which boast glorious views over northern Devon. Look out for Castle Drogo in the distance when you first get out onto the open moor.

Cosdon Hill was once used as a beacon (with its nearest neighbour being Dunkery on Exmoor), with fires lit in times of danger and celebration on the summit of its natural dome. It's easy to imagine a chain of beacons being lit across the region at the threat of the approaching Spanish Armada. The most impressive evidence of human activity on the hillside is the incredible triple stone row ④, known locally as The Cemetery and dating back at least to the Bronze Age. The row runs uphill to a ruined cairn and even features a pair of burial kists. The wonderful Legendary Dartmoor website ([legendarydartmoor.co.uk](http://legendarydartmoor.co.uk)) suggests that,

because they are joined by a common end slab, they could very well be a 'his and hers' grave. We've noticed that these Neolithic monuments on the moor always seem to attract curious numbers of wild animals. Are they drawn by some powerful mystical force or because they are constructed on ley lines? Or perhaps because they make excellent scratching posts? Whatever the history of the special spot, it makes a lovely place to relax and take in the peace of the moors and the outstanding views. We like this wonderful poem about Cosdon Hill, which has also been known as Cawsand in the past...

#### *On Cawsand Beacon*

*Rolling o'er the purple heather,  
In the glorious Summer weather,  
Staining lips with whortleberries,  
Sweet as any figs or cherries.*

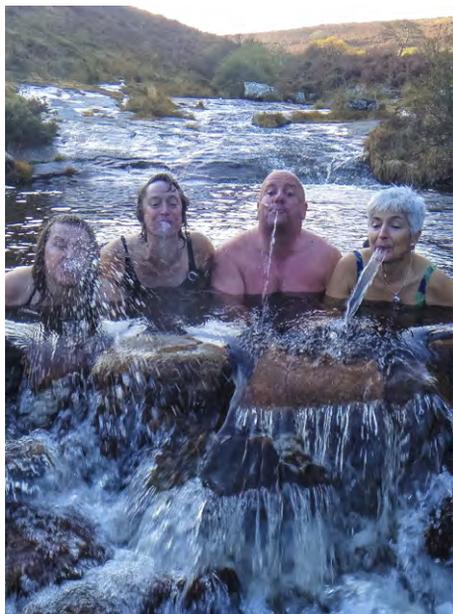
*Sipping from the crystal stream,  
Lying on the banks to dream,  
Watching skylarks soar above  
Singing, with them, strains of love.*

*Gazing o'er yon boundless plain,  
List'ning to the sweet refrain  
Of the rivulets and rills  
As they flow by distant hills;*

*Hearing voices, strange and low,  
Mystic tones that come and go,  
Seeing tors salute each other,  
Every one a friend and brother.*

*Elias Tozer - 1873*





When you are ready to make your way to one of these crystal streams, head towards the valley, looking out for evidence of an ancient hut circle along the way. It's always fun finding a spot to cross Blackaton Brook, looking for suitable stepping stones or a place where you can make a leap of faith. Then find the path that winds its way down through the gorse-covered valley, following the stream from above. You can't miss Shilley Pool 5, which is so idyllic it looks as though it could have been constructed by Hollywood set builders in the early days of technicolor. It's the perfect aquatic playground, with smooth slabs of rock forming a natural waterslide for splashing down into the near-circular pool, before swimming to the lower end, dammed by boulders to form an infinity pool. Only around a metre deep, it's still perfect for a dip, before drying off on one of the many flat slabs nearby.



Suitably refreshed, continue down through the valley and onto the lane. It's then a really pleasant walk past farm buildings and cottages with produce for sale by honesty boxes, back into South Zeal. You could pop into 'The Ox' for a well-deserved pint, although it's also worth considering the other pub in town, The Kings Arms, which is a mere baby in comparison at only around 500 years old. They have camping and host a variety of events including the annual limerick competition, read by independent performers to preserve the author's anonymity. While enjoying a pint, why not have a go? We'll start you off. There was a young man called Billy, who went for a walk up to Shilley...

## DIRECTIONS

**1** Walk back out of the car park and turn left and left again onto the High Street. Turn left just before The Mill House and walk through some old farm buildings and then out through the granite gates. Bear left across the fields following the hedge and then through the kissing gate. Turn right up the lane and walk past the red phone box, crossing straight over the road at the stop sign and onto the track signed Bridlepath to the Moor.

**0.4 miles**

**2** Continue up the hill, turning left at the Public Bridleway sign onto a walled track and past the three steps built into a wall, onto a dual concrete farm track. Follow around to the left and along a high walled path past a sign for Pixie Garden. Carry straight on at the fork following the sign for Cawsand and the Moor. At the next fork take the right through the wooden gate marked Public Bridleway. Go left at the next fork and go left of

the gate onto a high-walled path. Go through another gate and over a stream by a granite gate post and onto the moor.

**0.7 miles**

**3** Cross a couple of streams and walking between two walls, turn right where the four gates meet. Keep following the wall to your left until you reach its corner and then bear right following the path up onto the hill. As it begins to plateau, look out for the stone rows, which you should spot to the left of the two trees.

**0.6 miles**

**4** When you are ready to continue, stand at the top looking straight down the stone rows and look for the diagonal path going off to the right south east down towards the valley. Walk past the hut circle and down towards the stream, crossing where you can and then turning left to follow it down the hill. Look out for a stone wall off to the left that pretty much marks Shilley Pool.

**1.1 miles**

**5** After your swim follow the track downstream winding back down the hill and to the road. Turn left into the road and follow it back to the village. Eventually turn left by the 30mph and bridge warning sign and then left back into the car park.

**1.9 miles**

