

# WILD SWIMMING



Bell Pool on the River Dart near Poundsgate (Credit: Chris Popham)

**Chris Popham has been fascinated by open water swimming since boyhood and, with its stunning hidden beaches, spectacular coastline and ever-changing rivers, Devon offers a wealth of opportunities to indulge his obsession. As Chris explains, wild swimming is the ultimate stress-buster.**

## How did you get involved?

I was just nine or ten when my friends and I started messing about in kayaks and swimming in the River Avon near Bath. That fascination with open water never left me. Later I swam in the Wye River in Gloucestershire and the sea off the Gower in South Wales. Since moving to Devon I've explored many stunning locations including sea caves at Long Quarry Point, the rugged coast around Berry Head and the wonderful River Dart.

## What happens during a swimming session?

With the sea, beaches, river and trees in constant ebb and flow, no two swims are ever the same. A favourite swimming destination is Sharrah Pool on Dartmoor. I sometimes return with blueberries, crab apples or wild mushrooms for an exotic supper.

**“Swimming presses the factory reset button and gets things into perspective”**

## What have been the benefits?

Swimming, even if only for a few minutes, breaks me out of any mental rut I have become stuck in. Swimming doesn't necessarily provide miraculous insights or moments of epiphany but it does press the factory reset button and helps to get things into perspective.

## Has anything surprising ever happened?

One hot summer night I went swimming at Redgate Beach. With no moon and a steep cliff blocking all artificial light it was so dark I couldn't see the horizon. But the water magically glittered with greeny sparks of phosphorescent light from microscopic sea creatures. All around was an otherworldly green aura.

## How would you motivate others to get involved?

Just try it! Wild swimming is becoming increasingly popular and is no longer just about a quick splash in the sea wearing a santa hat on Boxing Day. Don't be put off by the cold water and if you are (which is normal!) then buy a wet suit which will help massively. By early May both the River Dart and the sea off Torbay are already up to 14°C which can be surprisingly pleasant – and by late summer the sea can reach a balmy 19°C. There are many places where you can have an enjoyable swim from the river bank or beach without going out of your depth. Once that becomes comfortable, perhaps go a bit further. There are now local wild swimming groups across Devon who welcome beginners and are happy to give advice and support. I would say give it a go.....

## More information

[Devon Wild Swimming Group \(Facebook page\)](#)

[Devon & Cornwall Wild Swimming \(Website\)](#)

[Devon Wild Swimming \(Google maps\)](#)

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