

Wild swimming

go wild, in nature

There are few spots in the country better than Devon for what is becoming an ever more popular way of becoming active. Wild swimming can take place in the sea, in rivers, anywhere where there is a bit of open water.

Every May in Devon is naturally healthy month, and a wide range of organisations that are part of the Devon Local Nature Partnership, promote some inspiring and innovative ways to get naturally healthy, from 'bug walks' to tai chi sessions. The campaign features real life Devon examples of ways to get 'naturally healthy' and 2016 featured the picture of 52 year old Pauline Barker out in Plymouth Sound with Smeatons tower as the backdrop.

She gives an insight into why she chooses wild swimming over any other form of exercise. Pauline is one of an increasing number of people to discover the joy of wild swimming, and, through the Devon and Cornwall Wild Swimming group she has set up, is encouraging others to follow suit.

How long have you been wild swimming, and what inspired you to do it in the first place?

I started swimming again about 6 years ago. I very quickly got bored in the pool so looked around the internet for other types of swimming and happened to come across a small event in Cornwall where a swim was being organised across the River Fowey from Fowey to Polruan and back. I got a late entry as the swim was that weekend and that was the start of it.

I absolutely loved the feeling of swimming outdoors without the concrete confines of the pool and from that swim I looked around for others - organised outdoor swims were few and far between back then.

By this time there were 5 of us with the same new found love of outdoor swimming so I set up a facebook group to see if anyone else was interested and that has now grown enormously in popularity and there are now lots and lots of swimmers and swims all over Devon and Cornwall.

What are the benefits of wild swimming?

It's bit like pressing the 'reset' button. You can guarantee that whatever stresses and strains and worries are going on in your life the feeling of being in the water and part of the whole outdoors elements will wash it away. I always feel better after a swim !!

It's all about the sensation of being part of the water and relishing the embrace of the elements. It can also be very calming to go for a solo swim and just lie back and look at the sky or invigorating to put your head down and swim for ages.....

Quotes

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What is your #whendidyoulast message for naturally healthy month?

Try something new. **If there's something you've been thinking 'I wish I could do that' or 'i'd like to give that a go' then Do It.** It can take a lot of courage to get off the sofa and take yourself out of your comfort zone - but it's worth it. I often have new swimmers coming along to the social swims that I run at Tinside in Plymouth and a common theme is that they have been watching us swim for ages either via our facebook group or by even standing at the top of the cliff looking down on the swimmers for a few weeks before plucking up the nerve to come along. Once newbies make contact with us either via facebook saying they'd like to join in or by just turning up with their cossie then they are **made very welcome and we keep an eye on them to make sure they know the ropes.** So whether it be swimming, running, horse riding, surfing - anything goes, just take that first step - find a like minded friend or two if you can and enjoy the adventure.

What makes you proud of Devon, and what is your favourite wild swimming location in Devon?

- I love swimming at Tinside because it has been a swimming spot there for decades. It gives a real feeling of history about the area.
- it's also absolutely beautiful when you're out in the swim zone looking back at the Hoe as you can see the Citadel and the flower beds as well as Smeatons Tower and the top of the Dome from a completely different viewpoint.



It's also a treat when the navy ships or submarines or the ferry come in as it's awesome to be so close to them - and you can wave at the folk on the 'Dock-yards and Warships' pleasure boats.

There are also lots of pools and lakes and rivers on Dartmoor that are swimmable and Spitchwick Common has a lovely swim spot where you can take a picnic.

How would someone get started, who's never done it before?

Firstly make sure you're safe. The water can be dangerous especially if you don't know how to read the currents and tides so I would always recommend swimming with a group of experienced swimmers until you learn what you need to look out for. Come and join **Devon Wild Swimmers** on one of our social swims or swim at a lifeguarded beach and make sure you stay within your depth until you're confident.

What is special about Devon and Cornwall Wild Swimming, and what are your aspirations for it?

The people make this group special. We have swimmers of all ages and abilities. Some like to come along for a social swim and bob and chat - others have swum The English Channel and other great swims. We are inclusive of everybody and we don't charge a fee to join the group or swim with us. You don't need to spend money on a lot of kit or a wetsuit you just need a cossie to start with and then add in a hat and goggles and you have the basics.

The group has evolved greatly over the last 5 years and we now have active teams in East Devon, North Devon and Torquay swimming regularly. We also have a lot of visitors join us who are in Devon on holiday.

“The camaraderie of swimming with a group of Wild Swimmers is incredible. You don't have to be a great swimmer or a fast swimmer to enjoy being in the water - it's all about the sensation of being”