

**Swimming condition notes**

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**Introduction**

Here I've tried to give some general advice on swimming conditions, how they might change, the risks associated with them and how you can combat them.



**Wind**

For coastal swims, like Torbay, we're most concerned with the wind speed and direction. The wind speed on a forecast, like the inshore shipping forecast, can sometimes show up as quite high but if the wind is blowing from the NE or NW, then the wind speeds in the actual bay are generally much lower. If the wind blows straight into the bay, then the bay can become very exposed to the elements. As a rule of thumb, the limit of our swims is around force 4 on the Beaufort Scale (roughly 13-18 mph).



Although experienced swimmers are usually okay up to a force 5 to 6 – these wind speeds can really take their toll on your shoulders, energy levels and breathing. The sea can become particularly unsettled when the wind is blowing in the opposite

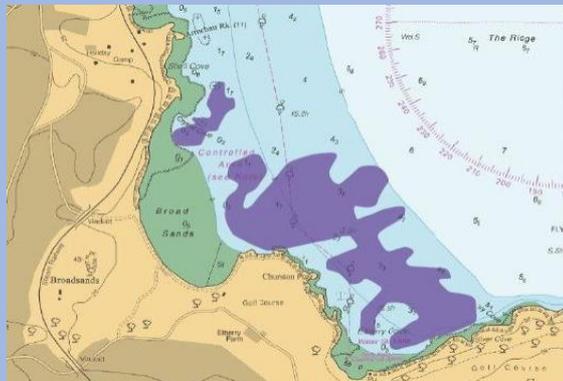


direction to the current. So being able to breath both sides, is almost essential when dealing with rough conditions. A strong breeze can also have a wind chill effect, which means you are more susceptible to getting cold and the risks associated with that. Finally, wind can make it difficult for your kayaker. They are the most important person as far as your safety is concerned owing to them being your marker in the water (flag alpha).

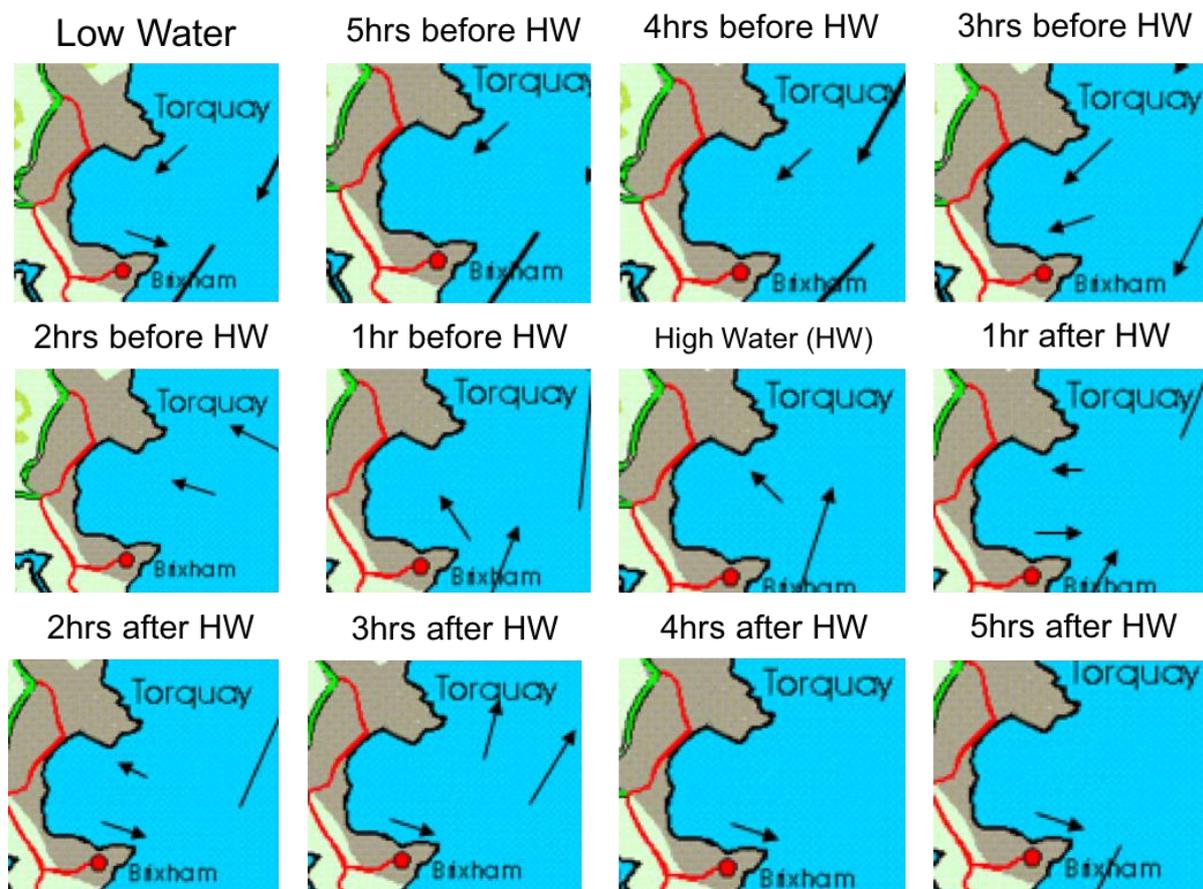
## Tides and Currents

If you are a strong swimmer, then the tidal currents in Torbay are not something you need to be particularly worried about, but are useful to be aware of. For example, when swimming into the turnaround point at Fishcombe, you are better off staying further into the bay and away from Brixham Harbour to avoid being taken out to Berry Head. The tidal currents below, give you an idea of what you can expect while swimming in Torbay.

## DID YOU KNOW?



This **seagrass** bed spans Elberry Cove and Broadsands beach. It covers a total area of 470,000 m<sup>2</sup> and can vary in density from just a few plants here and there, to a thick forest of grass. In the summer a huge percentage of the plants here produce flowers and shed seeds which get carried with the current to nearby areas. Observed to be one of the best seagrass beds for spotting many different types of marine life. There are more sea squirts here than any other seagrass bed in Torbay. Cuttlefish lay thousands of eggs here and spiny spider crabs can often be seen on the march.



*Figure 1: Tidal currents within Tor bay showing the changes from Low Water (LW) to High Water (HW). This figure has been adapted from Admiralty charts and the work of Mike Fennessy in 1978. These tidal currents are based off low wind speeds and spring tides.*

## Temperature

Torbay at the end of June or start of July usually hovers around the 14 °C mark, but can feel colder or warmer depending on cloud cover. For experienced swimmers, this really shouldn't be an issue particularly if they've fulfilled our recommended swim experience criteria (see [here](#)). Please be aware, if these are not fulfilled, then associated risks of hypothermia and cold-water shock are much higher.

One thing all swimmers should be particularly aware of is the 'after-drop' once you've finished your swim. On average, most people are in the water for 4 hours or more at Torbay and although it may be sunny and warm out, it's important to get into some



warm clothes quickly after getting out (a warm drink is usually a good idea too!). There are no showers at Torbay, but this can draw blood away from your main organs and cause other problems – the best practise is to warm up gradually with plenty of warm clothes.

## Wildlife

The bay can get quite a few jelly fish in, avoid if you can. However, normally they only cause a stinging nettle like sting which will go away after short period. Some sun creams include an anti-jellyfish ingredient but we've not tested it so can't vouch for its effectiveness. If you think you're getting an allergic reaction or know you are allergic, alert our safety crew ASAP via your kayaker. Our safety boats patrol the field of swimmers at frequent intervals, so alerting them won't take long. The only other wildlife you that might affect you are dolphins or fish, but neither of these are anything to worry about. And don't worry, Torbay has no sharks!

## DID YOU KNOW?



OVERTURNED SHALE ROCKS AT TORBAY, DEVON. TORBAY  
The overturned 66 is away from the camera. There is some major shipwreck here. The major tectonics are the result of the Variscan Orogeny.  
Photograph: 12th April 2012, Ian Wood © 2012



Tor Bay is a recognized area of **geological** importance and is a designated geopark. Dating back some 410 million years, the geology in Tor Bay represents important periods in geological history such as the Permian era and Quarternary era. And during the last glacial period, when sea levels were much lower, Tor Bay was dry land, shown by the existence of a submerged forest in the bay. This was overwhelmed during the Flandrian transgression which started circa 10,000 years ago.

## 58<sup>th</sup> Torbay Championship



### Find out more

Sea grass - <http://www.csi-seagrass.co.uk/>

Tor Bay Geology -

Durrance, E. M., & Laming, D. J. (1982). *The geology of Devon*.  
University of Exeter.

Torbay geological status –

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/devon/content/articles/2007/09/17/torbay\\_geopark\\_status\\_feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/devon/content/articles/2007/09/17/torbay_geopark_status_feature.shtml)

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Please note this is advice only and the final decision on conditions being safe always lies with the organisers and the examples quoted above are not hard and fast rules.

If you have any questions, please get in touch.