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# LEE BAY, ILFRACOMBE

**LOCATION:**  
**OS GRID REFERENCE:**  
**SS 4822 4672**

**POSTCODE:**  
**EX34 8LR APPROX**

Lee Bay lies on the North Devon coast between Ilfracombe and Woolacombe. It is reached, past the village of Lincombe, via a narrow wooded valley. The small village in inside the North Devon Coast AONB and the South West Coast Path runs through it and a Marine Conservation Zone protects coastal waters. In Lee Bay you will find a sheltered beach surrounded by cliffs and a small tight-knit community.

### AMENITIES:

There are public toilets available about 100m in the opposite direction of the beach, up a path. A seasonal café is situated at the beach and in the village there is a pub and craft/gift shop. There is variable mobile service at the beach.

### PARKING AND ACCESS:

Next to the beach there is an unofficial free car park and in the village there is further parking (donations). Beach access is via a short slipway on the coastal road. On the shore up to 350m of beach is accessible at low tide on sand or uneven path. The path is not suitable for wheelchairs. Close to the beach there's a woodland network of public footpaths.



## TOP THREE SPECIES:



**BLUE-RAYED LIMPET**  
(*Patella pellucida*)

Whilst other limpets stick to rocks and graze on algae, blue-rayed limpets stick to and feed on kelp and so are found at the low shore. It's always worth examining the fronds and stipes of any kelp you find for these small, up to 1.5cm long, translucent amber limpets with radiating bright blue stripes.



**VELVET SWIMMING CRAB**  
(*Necora puber*)

Up to 6.5cm long, is found on the lower shore under rocks, it has bright red eyes and is also known as 'devil's crab' and has bright blue stripes along its legs and is surprisingly good at hiding. Its hind legs have flattened paddles for swimming, if you find one do NOT attempt to pick it up as they are extremely aggressive.



**GEM ANEMONE**  
(*Aulactinia verrucosa*)

Can be found in rock pools up and down the shore. They give birth to live young so often are found in groups. They look very different when open and closed: closed, they resemble a small round pincushion with tiny warts in neat lines from top to bottom, with five lines that are white; open, they have 48 longish tentacles dappled with white/pearly grey spots radiating from a mouth with two bright pink spots on either side of it and bright crimson lines leading from the mouth to the base of the tentacles. They are usually greeny-white but at Lee Bay are often reddish.

## TOP THREE HABITATS:



### BEACH

The beach is a quiet unspoiled beach popular with families for picnicking, safe swimming, rock-pooling and canoeing, particularly at low tide, when plenty of grey sand is exposed. Then the adjacent Sandy Cove is also accessible via a scramble through "Smugglers' Path". Dogs allowed.



### ROCKY SHORE

A sheltered shore Lee Bay faces north east onto the Bristol Channel with its high tidal range. Sea can be silty but rarely very rough. Steep valleys feed the stream which enters shore at top of beach and spills out on gently sloping grey sands divided by ridges of rock which form an expanse of gullies and rockpools. The rocks emerge as the tide falls revealing a broader band of sand at low tide.



### CLIFFS

The rocks in Lee Bay valley are Morte Slates. They form the high Damage cliffs to the West of Lee and are part of a band of rock running roughly E.W. through Devon to Somerset. To the North run the Ilfracombe Beds that emerge on the coast to the east of Lee Bay to form the magnificent cliff scenery of Lee Downs.

## INTERESTING FEATURES:



### HISTORIC TOURISM

In Lee's heyday visitors came by boat from Ilfracombe, by train via Morte Hoe station, and on a regular bus service, now long gone. Such was the demand for the summer bus service that an Inspector was employed just to keep the queue in order. Tourism supported a large hotel on the front, which now awaits redevelopment.



### SMUGGLERS ROUTE

There's a smugglers route cut into the rocks on the left hand side of the beach, you can still walk along the steps and the cut through. One of the most notorious smugglers from Lee was Hannibal Richards. He used a lookout at Sandy Cove to avoid capture. There is no record of his having been convicted. He died in 1849 aged 85 and is buried in an Ilfracombe churchyard.



### COASTAL VALLEY

Abundant birds ensure that bird song can be heard throughout Lee, particularly in spring. Once the trees are in leaf sightings will be fewer. An enthusiastic birder may find 40 or so species and may get an occasional sighting of deer too. Freshwater streams run down the valleys, making the going wet at times. From spring there are abundant woodland flowers, by autumn butterflies and dragon flies are more in evidence.

This guide was written for the North Devon Coast AONB Coastal Creatures project by members of Coastwise North Devon in 2018.

Photos by AONB team and Neville Stanikk.

