

Coombesgate Beach  
Woolacombe  
Devon



Looking across towards Baggy Point

Beach profile for Coastwise North Devon  
Marjorie Heath

## Introduction

Grid Reference SS455445

Woolacombe is a seaside resort on the coast of North Devon, which lies at the mouth of the valley (or 'combe'). It is a popular location for surfing attracting thousands of people each year. The rolling surf brings unbroken Atlantic breakers from across thousands of miles of ocean to pound on this three mile long stretch of golden sand. There are many establishments offering tuition and equipment hire in addition to many hotels/holiday apartments bed & breakfast amenities..

Coombesgate Beach is situated between Woolacombe as mentioned above) and Mortehoe (a stone built village dating back to the Domesday Book)

It is a semi-sheltered west facing cove with numerous rock pools and gullies with views across the Bristol Channel. It is exposed to the strong Atlantic winds and waves and brings an abundance of marine life within its shores.

The beach lies within the North Devon's Voluntary Marine Conservation which was established in 1994 to help protect the rich and varied marine life. Coombesgate also falls within the North Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

### Man's Impact/Access



In an elevated and unrivalled position at the waters edge above Coombesgate is the 3 \*\*\* Watersmeet Hotel situated in Morteohoe offering excellent cuisine and uncompromising sea views - it is extremely popular all year round. Also within this area

are many apartments/houses (some privately owned) and others that are sub-let during the year for holidaymakers.

Access to the beach is by way of a concrete staircase (approx. 102 steps) leading down onto a concrete ramp before stepping onto the upper beach.





No facilities on beach - nearest located at WatersMeet Hotel - Morthoe  
No parking facilities - restricted parking on Morthoe Road and The Esplanade at Woolacombe  
Dog restricted on beach in summer months

### PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Most of the rocks are from the Devonian Period. The cliffs are Morte Slate and Pickwell Down sandstone. The veins of white rock that occur throughout the rocks are quartz - these can be observed on many of the



rocks between the upper and mid-shore. The quartz is more resistant to erosion than the slates and stand out in prominent places.

Water - its sight and sound permeates everywhere in Devon so it is not surprising to find a waterfall hidden away in a secluded corner - this can be a stunning sight following heavy rainfall - though cliff erosion is evident by the amount of slates and boulders found at the upper beach level



## FLORA

On the inhospitable cliffs it is difficult for the plants to take a hold within the rock structure though several species do succeed - wild angelica /sea mayweed and samphire struggle to survive



## COMPOSITION OF BEACH

The upper beach is coarse shingle and shale with numerous boulders and pebbles. Walking down to mid-shore level of the beach the shingle changes its dimension to fine shingle. With the receding tide many large rocks and rock pools are exposed - before opening out into a huge sandy beach - this expanse of sand changes the whole concept of the beach.





Surfing can only take place between mid to low tide due to the many rocks in the lower shore area and on a clear day Lundy Island (with its own special marine protection) is visible from the shore.



## THE SHORE

Upper shore - very little sign of marine life due to the poor surroundings

Mid-shore - Rock pools are accessible at mid/low tide



Marine life is found mainly on the sheltered side of the rocks





Looking across to Morte Point

Coombesgate Beach is an ideal beach for holidaymakers staying in the Morte area

However one notable event which took place in August 2008 was the unfortunate incident where an 8 year old boy got stung by a Portuguese Man O'War whilst swimming in the bay. These species are not actually jellyfish but floating colonies of closely related animals called Hydrozoans which float from the bottom of an 18" wide air-filled bladder. The Hydrozoans form a mass of 3 ft. long tentacles which give multiple agonising stings.



## Animals & Plant life between May-August 2008

### Birds

Blackheaded Gull/Herring Gulls

## MID-LOWER SHORE & ROCKPOOLS

### Animals

Common limpets	F	Dog whelks	O
Mussels	F	Prawns	O
Beadlet anemone	F	Gem anemone	O
Hermit Crab	O	Common cowrie	O
Toothed topshell	O	Spider crab	O
Purple Topshell	F	Barnacles	C
Common Periwinkle	O		
Cushion star fish	R		

### Plants

Gutweed	F
Bladderwrack	O
Thongweed	O
Spiral Wrack	A

### SACFOR CODE

S	- Super Abundant
A	- Abundant
C	- Common
F	- Frequent
O	- Occasional
R	- Rare

