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WESTWARD HO! BEACH

LOCATION:
OS GRID REFERENCE:
SS 4321 2946

POSTCODE:
EX39 1LL APPROX

Westward Ho! beach is adjacent to Westward Ho!, the only place name in the UK to have an exclamation mark after its name. The town of Bideford is 2.5 miles away. Westward Ho! is a popular destination for visitors, dog walkers, wildlife enthusiasts and those taking part in water sports, specifically surfing. The Northam Burrows Country Park runs alongside Westward Ho! and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which is inside the North Devon Coast AONB.

AMENITIES:

Several cafes and shops exist within short walking distance of the beach. Public toilets are available in Northam Burrows County Park at the visitor centre and also near the beach. Lifeguards operate on the beach between May and October.

PARKING AND ACCESS:

There is ample parking in the village near the beach and also in Northam Burrows County Park. A good bus service exists between local towns such as Barnstaple and Bideford. There are three main access points on the beach; the slipway which is suitable for pushchairs and wheelchairs, a concrete bar step-way from Sandymere bridge and steps from the promenade.



TOP THREE SPECIES:



RAZOR CLAM SHELL (*Ensis ensis*)

Five species of razor clam can be found washed up along the sandy beach at Westward Ho!. They are all elongated rectangular hinged shells called bivalves which would have housed marine molluscs that burrow vertically into the sand on the beach. The most common species you'll find is the common razor shell. It is up to 13cm long, with slender curved parallel sides, one end truncate, other end curved.



VOLCANO BARNACLE (*Perforatus perforatus*)

This is a large barnacle found on rocks at low tide, volcano shaped, usually creamy-brown tinged with purple with a small oval opening at the top. Underwater it extends feather-like feelers to collect food. Barnacles are not molluscs (snails) like most other shells but are actually from the same family as crabs (crustaceans), the plankton larvae cement their heads to the rock and grow protective plates around themselves, then stick out their legs to filter food from the water.



BEADLET ANEMONE (*Actinia equina*)

Up to 5cm, these monochrome red, brown, or green anemones look like blobs of jelly stuck to rocks when they are out of the water. Once underwater they open up to reveal a ring of short tentacles the same colour as the body and if you are lucky you'll be able to see a string of blue 'beads' (nematocysts) surrounding the base of the tentacles which they use to attack other anemones that get too close. Anemones are animals not plants and will eat anything they can catch with their tentacles, which are covered with stinging cells.

TOP THREE HABITATS:



ROCKY SHORE

The rocky shore is made of sandstone and mudstone, which have been eroded over the years to produce a wide rocky platform with rock pools and gullies, home to lots of animal life.



SANDY BEACH

This is a constantly-shifting 1.5km sandy beach, with sand moving seawards in the winter to reveal shipwrecks and a sunken forest and landwards in the summer. There is a lifeguard service by both slipways over the summer and it is popular for surfing, body-boarding and kite-surfing.



SUNKEN FOREST/ FOSSIL FOREST

This is only visible at low tide during the winter months when the sands have shifted to reveal two small patches of fossil forest. The first is about 50 metres directly in front of the slipway and at a distance looks like a small muddy outcrop, closer inspection reveals layered blue mud with embedded pebbles, wood and, on the surface, lots of perfectly circular holes - about the size of a one pence piece - made by boring piddocks, a type of marine mollusc that bores into soft peat and wood.

INTERESTING FEATURES:



SHIPWRECKS

There are at least two of these, which are sometimes revealed at very low tides when you can see the ribs of the ships rising out of the sea.



NORTHAM BURROWS COUNTRY PARK

This is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), has sand dunes, grazing rights and a golf course. Next to this is an area called the Skern which has salt marshes and mud flats.



PEBBLE RIDGE

This is a natural feature, the 'pebbles' having been rolled by the waves from eroding cliffs further round the headland by a process known as longshore drift, it is mobile spit made of sandstone pebbles and moves about 5,000 cubic metres per year. Potwallopers used to fling the cobbles back onto the ridge after winter storms.

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, Neville Stanikk and Nicola Mello.

