

ROCKHAM BEACH NORTH DEVON



A Beach Profile for Coastwise North Devon

Dawn Murphy

Looking North towards Bull Point, Rockham Bay in the centre.
Photographs by Rob Jutsum, maps from website of North Morte Farm campsite

Beach Grid ref SS 457462

Rockham beach lies between Morte-hoe and Ilfracombe on the North Devon coast, with Morte Point (left in picture) and Bull Point on either side.



Rockham It is natural, rugged and wild....free from madding crowds with nought but the call of the gulls and the song of the sea.

Visits require a quite difficult walk of approx 2 kms along the coast path down to the sea, the beach is accessed via a steep flight of about 100 steps. A mixture of sand / pebbles and rocks it is a great location for family picnics and rock-pooling.



The Sea

Rockham, running from north to south, is west facing,. Though protected from southerly winds by Morte Point it is exposed to north and westerly winds.

The water is clear of silt or sediment. A freshwater stream trickles down from the cliff top and runs into the sea, but salinity is not significantly affected.

Currents are strong but despite the big tidal range it is safe for paddling and dipping, but not a beach for serious swimming.

Photos: the beach and a rock-pool



Physical features

The rock type is Morte Slate seamed with pink quartz. Rocks are worn smooth on the south side but are jagged to the north. There is no sand at high tide but sandy stretches are exposed between jagged rocky outcrops as the tide recedes.



Ownership

The beach is owned by the National Trust who organize several litter-picks during the course of the year.

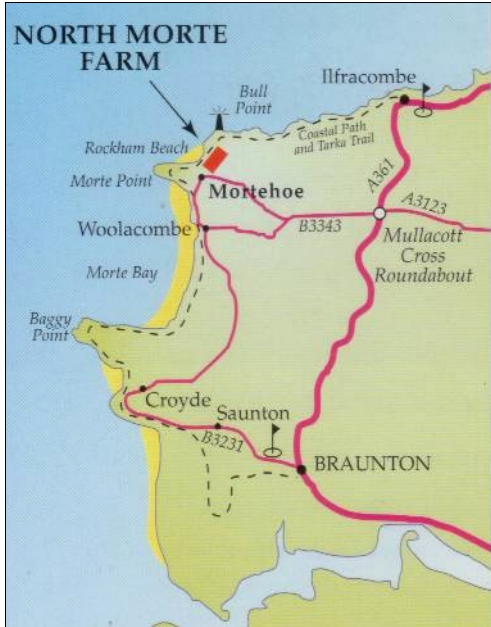
Rockham falls within the Voluntary Marine Conservation Area and the Biosphere and is a designated AONB.

Man's impact

There is less sand on the beach these days. This will in part be due to natural movement of the sand, but it is feared sand dredging off the shore is also a contributory factor.



The unforgiving coast-line, extreme weather conditions and the latter day practice of “wreckers” have resulted in many shipwrecks in the area. The remains of the wreck of the SS Collier are visible towards the north of the beach at low tide.



Immediately above Rockham is North Morte Farm Campsite, one of the most attractively situated sites in North Devon, and from which there is a footpath to join the coast path just above Rockham Beach. From this point there is a short walk to Bull Point.

The lighthouse at Bull Point is no longer manned and now provides holiday accommodation through Trinity House. It was built in 1879, but fell into the sea when 100 ft of cliff face subsided in 1972 and was rebuilt in 1974.





Wildlife of the Shore

Porpoise are present around the coastline particularly off headlands – Morte Point and Bull Point. Look out for the tell-tale signs of gannets diving to feed. Atlantic Grey Seals frequent the Morte Point area and occasionally swim into Rockham Bay.

Many years ago while Dawn Murphy, a local Seawatch Foundation volunteer, was at Rockham Bay, 3 Bottlenose dolphins erupted from the sea –“a magical and unforgettable experience”.

Birds of the coast include Fulmars which nest in the bay, and Shags and gulls which roost on offshore rocks. Ravens patrol the cliffs, as do several species of birds of prey including Peregrine Falcon, Kestrel and Buzzards.



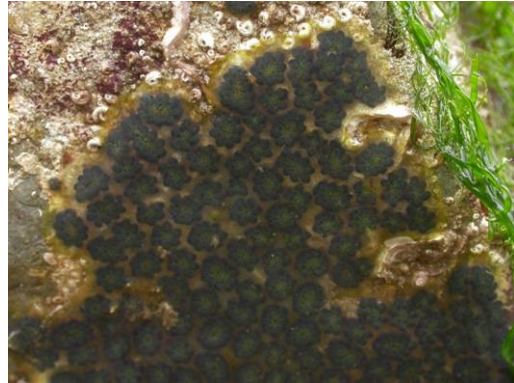
Other resident birds include Rock and Meadow Pipits, Robin and Stonechat among others. Migrants drop in to the coastal scrub and include Wheatear (seen here) , Whinchat and various warblers. The reed-bed above Rockham is attractive to Sedge and Reed Warblers.



From the fields above Rockham down to the cliffs there are plenty of flowers in spring and summer, including Violets, Primroses, Bluebells, Foxgloves, Devilsbit Scabious (seen here), Knapweed and then the cliff plants – Sea Campion, Thrift, Rock Samphire. Above the cliffs there is a good expanse of gorse, often strewn with the red stems of the parasitic Dodder plant.

Some of the animals of the shore.

Clockwise from top left: Velvet Swimming Crab, Star Ascidian, Cushion Star, Montagu's Crab, Brittlestar, Blue-rayed Limpet in Kelp holdfast



Coastwise North Devon - Rockham Beach, snapshot of shorelife taken 16th-September 2008, 0.8m tide

Based on species checklist in Marlin Shore Thing Protocol
SACFOR – super abundant, abundant, common, frequent, occasional, rare

Upper shore

Black tar lichen	A
Barnacles sp.	F
Small periwinkle	F
Rough periwinkle	F
Limpet	A
Audoinella floridula	O
Carollina	A
Sea Lettuce	C
Gutweed	O
Encrusting red algae	A
Wireweed	O
Blenny	R

Lower shore

Sea lettuce	F
Gut weed	C
Toothed wrack	SA
Bladder wrack	C
Dulse	A
Oarweed	O
Sea Belt	
Encrusting red algae	A
False Irish moss	C
Laver	C
Pepper dulse	SA
Lomentaria	C
Cladophora	O
BI Tar Lichen	O

Mid Shore

Black Lichen	F
Sea lettuce	F
Gut weed	C
Spiral wrack	C
Bladder wrack	C
Carragheen	F
Encrusting red algae	C
Laver	C
Pepper dulse	SA

Barnacles sp.	SA
Breadcrumb Sponge	O
Beadlet anemone	O
Cushion Star	O
Painted topshell	F
Grey top shell	F
Limpets	A
Flat top shell	C
Brittlestars	C
Porcelain crabs	A
Velvet Swim. Crab	F
Edible Crab	O
Montagu's Crab	O
Prawn	C
Sand eels	F
Blenny	O
5 Bearded Rockling	R
Star ascidian	C
Scale worms	C
Spirorbis/keel worms	A
Blue-rayed Limpet	O

Barnacles sp.	A
Beadlet anemone	O
Snakelocks anemone	O
Gem Anemone	R
Edible periwinkle	C
Limpets	C
Flat top shell	A
Thick Top shell	A
Common Winkle	C
Shore Crab	O