

# Lee Valley & Bull Point

**Start/Finish:** Lee Cove car park

- **Distance:** 5 miles (8 km)
- **Circular walk:** Yes
- **Grade:** Moderate to Strenuous
- **Terrain:** Coast path and public footpath. Some rocky, uneven, slippery and muddy patches
- **Obstacles and steep gradients:** 6 flights of steps; 14 stiles (4 can be avoided); 3 steep ascents; 2 steep descents
- **Accessibility:** This route is unsuitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs
- **Public transport:** Bus service Filers Travel 35 from Ilfracombe.  
For further details contact Devon Traveline 0871 200 22 33 or [traveline.info](http://traveline.info)
- **Toilets:** Public toilets 75m up footpath along route from car park  
(closed in Winter)
- **Parking:** Lee Cove Car Park
- **Other Facilities:** Public payphone on right, 700m back up through Lee village from Cove car park
- **Accommodation:** Please contact Ilfracombe Tourist Information Centre  
01271 863001 [visitilfracombe.co.uk](http://visitilfracombe.co.uk)
- **OS map:** Explorer 139 Grid ref: SS 480464
- **Countryside Code:** When walking in the AONB always follow the Countryside Code, which is dedicated to helping members of the public respect, protect and enjoy the countryside.



## A Colourful Landscape – Lee Valley and Bull Point

Devon offers a glorious tapestry of colour throughout the seasons. From the dazzle of its coast and the inspiring open cliffs and heaths, to its richly wooded valleys and the patchwork of rolling field and pasture, this beautiful county offers a feast for the eyes. It is a land of lush greens in more shades than you would think possible. The exquisite lightness of spring's uncurling leaves, the deep greens of late summer's shaggy hedgerows, and the quiet beauty of winter meadows are just some of the delicate and delicious tones on view. Amidst all of this, a ploughed field here and there reveals the rich red or deep brown of the fertile soil, and as summer fades, the autumn colours light up the land.

Down by the sea, the bright blue and fresh white of the waves invigorate the senses, while up on the cliffs, purple heather mixes deliciously with the yellow gorse. Drop down into the valleys and the peaceful woods are thronged with wildlife, while Devon's hedgebanks are a glorious riot of wildflowers in spring and summer. Artists, whether poets, painters, sculptors or musicians have always been drawn here, seeking to capture the rich essence of the county. Yet colour is not confined to the landscape here. Charming villages, seasonal traditions, quirky place names, and even quirrier individuals all contribute to Devon's vibrant character.



*Flagstaff Hill and Lee Bay © Neville Stanikk*




## Directions

1. From entrance to car park **(1)**, turn sharp left to follow footpath up valley along Tarmac lane, then between fences alongside pasture.
2. At the end of the field **(2)**, turn right over stile following 'Public Footpath' fingerpost. Cross the footbridge, then take left hand footpath following stream **(3)**. Walk for about 1 km through the woods
3. Just beyond the kissing gate, turn right signed 'Public Footpath to Damage Barton'.
4. At top of the hill **(4)**, follow footpath across field, over the road, and on through three hilltop fields, following 'Public Footpath' signs.
5. After 600m **(5)**, ignore footpath signed to right, and follow yellow waymarker down slope to the left. Turn right through a small gate, then left back onto track, following 'Public Footpath' sign.
6. Skirt around the side of the stone buildings of Damage Barton, then turn right, **(6)** signposted public footpath to Lee Bay and Bull Point.
7. Bear left, signposted footpath to Bull Point. **(7)** (Alternatively you can shorten the walk at this point by turning right. After a short while turn left when you join the tarmacked lane which will take you quickly down into Lee and back to the car park.)
8. After 100m or so and in the dip in the track turn left, **(8)** sign posted public footpath. Follow the field edge and drop down through a small gate into an ash woodland following the path.
9. Immediately after the footbridge **(9)** turn left, sign posted Mortehoe and climb up to the road to Bull Point Lighthouse for the tremendous Atlantic panoramas to be seen there. (Or you can stroll down the valley at this point, turning right and signed to Bennett's Mouth.)
10. At the top of the steps **(10)** turn right on to the Lighthouse Road.
11. At the lighthouse turn right signed 'Lee 1½m'. Follow the coast path along the cliffs for 1¼ miles **(11)** until you drop down to road.
12. Turn left down the hill to Lee. At the bottom turn right to return to car park.



*Bull Point*

## Points of Interest

1. Tucked away and awkward to get to for the law enforcers, Lee was a perfect spot for smuggling activity. The illicit cargoes would be landed here on moonless nights. Then, the smugglers would transport the contraband inland using trains of donkeys, their hooves wrapped in rags to prevent any noise. Although the smugglers often got clean away, there are records of government seizures of brandy, wine, silks, and salt at Lee, found buried beneath the sands and hidden in villagers' homes. Lee was also famous for its wrecking activities and many an unfortunate ship ran aground on the treacherous beach, mistaking the small harbour for that of nearby Ilfracombe.A photograph of Lee Church, a stone building with a steep gabled roof and a small square tower. It is situated behind a stone wall with a small gate. A person is walking on the path in front of the church. The background shows a steep, wooded hill.

Lee Church
2. The valley at Lee is known as 'Fuchsia Valley'. The vivid red, pink and purple bells of the fuchsia can be seen in bloom here and there during the summer months. Although there were a few isolated buildings in Lee, the majority of the village was built in the mid 1800's by local developer Robert Smith. The original hamlet was called Warmcombe changing its name to Lee, which is why Lee is not a parish in its own right, but is shared between the neighbouring parishes of Ilfracombe and Morteohoe.
3. Borough Woods is a tremendously rich and varied woodland habitat. The pointed oval leaves of the smooth limbed beech trees growing here have an almost translucent pale green when young. They darken through the summer and turn a burnished bronze come the autumn. Other trees in these woods include alder and ash, evergreen holly and the silvery barked hazel. You may also spot sweet chestnut, with its long serrated leaves and



spiky seed cases. This woodland lost many of its oaks to the demand for timber during the two world wars, but some stately specimens remain. During the spring months the woodland floor is a riot of colour with yellow celandines, primroses and bluebells. Look out for the early purple orchid which thrives adjacent to the path in the middle of the woods.

Not content with adorning gardens, the glossy leaved Rhododendron has, like the fuchsia, jumped the garden gate into the wild. It thrives here in Borough Valley, producing massed heads of glamorous purple flowers which light up the scene. Unfortunately, this woody shrub also shades out native plants. It is poisonous to many creatures, sours the land and spreads like wildfire. Like many of our 'problem' plants, it was introduced to this country by adventurous Victorian gardeners.

4. A glance back across the valley from here offers fine views of the conifer plantations on the opposite slope. Early Ordnance Survey maps show the hillside opposite as being clear of trees until the 1950's when it was planted up with conifers. The dark green areas are Sitka Spruce, a fast growing timber tree from North America. In the midst of the spruce grows a large stand of larch. The larch is a lighter green than the spruce, especially in the spring when its delicate new growth emerges. It is also one of the few conifer trees to lose its leaves in the winter, and in the autumn its needles turn a beautiful light golden colour.



*Coniferous woodland in Borough Valley*

5. Damage Barton. The ancient farmhouse, surrounding buildings and courtyard wall are all Grade I I\* Listed Buildings as a historically interesting complex dating from at least the 16th Century. A "Barton" is the old name given to one of the most important farms in the parish, in Old English it derives from "beretun" meaning a "barley yard" or enclosure. For many years the farm was home to the Cutcliffe Family, who were Lords of the Manor in Lincombe and nearby Warcombe.



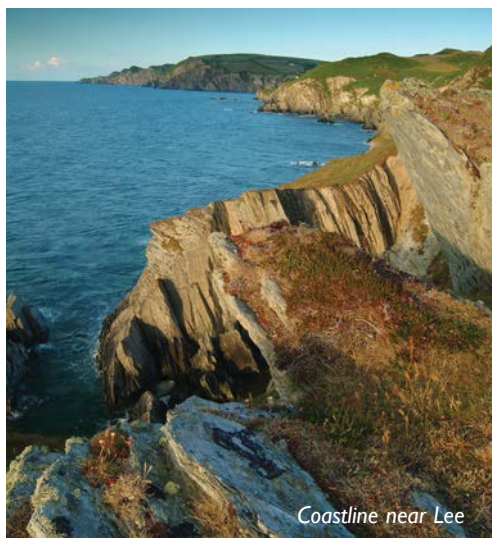
*Standing Stone near Damage Barton*

6. In the field you are crossing sits the southernmost of a line of three prehistoric standing stones. They were thought to be ritual or ceremonial monuments ranging from the Late Neolithic period to the Bronze Age and are protected as Scheduled Ancient Monuments.
7. Gorse grows thickly on this hilltop, filling the air with the coconut smell of its flowers on warm days. You can usually find some gorse in bloom at almost any time of year, which accounts for the convenient old folk saying, 'when the gorse is in flower, it's kissing season'!
8. Bull Point Lighthouse was built by Trinity House in 1879, partly in response to the "barbarous conduct of lawless wreckers". After luring a ship onto the rocks with deliberately misplaced lights, the wreckers would then plunder its cargo. The coming of the lighthouse meant that at last, ships had reliable information to help them steer clear of danger. In 1972 part of the lighthouse was extensively damaged by a cliff collapse and had to be re-built. It was automated in 1995 and the lighthouse keeper's accommodation has become an exclusive holiday home.





9. Clinging to the cliff edge are the remnants of coastal heath, now a very rare habitat. The harsh conditions of thin acid soils and Atlantic salt laden winds make it a habitat for only the hardiest of plants. It is here that heather and gorse have traditionally thrived forming a mosaic of purple and yellow. Originally managed by sheep grazing, cutting and burning (gorse had many uses for firing bread ovens and lime kilns) most of the heathland has been lost to intensive grazing or agricultural abandonment, the latter leading to the formation of coastal scrub and bracken.



10. The sheltered nook of Sandy Cove was a look out for local smuggler Hannibal Richards. Once a member of the notorious Cruel Coppinger's gang in Cornwall, he moved to Lee for the quiet life. He could not resist the lure of his old profession, however, and soon returned to crime. His vantage point was a cave in the cliff behind the beach, now covered by a rockfall.

