Man and the Bar

Loe Bar is set between Mount’s Bay and Loe Pool, 4.8 km south-east of Porthleven and 3.2 km south-west of Helston, in the valley of the River Cober, on the western side of the Lizard Peninsula (Map 1.1). The word “Loe” in Cornish was likely to have the meaning of creek or tidal pool (Padel 1985). It is spectacular and unique, a sand and shingle Bar set between lake and sea, 430 m long (widening to about 900 m at low water) and 250 m wide, partly vegetated with low plants adapted to growing in the high winds and salt spray that characterise this exposed habitat. Perhaps the best place to view it is from the terrace of Bar Lodge on the north-west cliffs which was built by Captain John Peverell Rogers of Penrose more than a century ago. Until fairly recently it was possible to drive from Porthleven along the coast road to the Lodge and then down onto the edge of the Bar itself. With four-wheel drive, you could drive over the Bar and up the rough track on the south-eastern side to Chyvarloe; locals used to drive onto the Bar to picnic on the sand and watch the waves. Now the coast

Photo 2  Aerial photo of Loe Bar 2006  © STEVE HARTGROVES @ HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT, CORNWALL COUNCIL  F74-059
road from Porthleven has collapsed in places into the sea, the strength of the rocks weakened due to the maze of interconnecting mine shafts. The land is riddled with tunnels and there is a story that a local farmer lost a cow in a mine shaft and gave it up for lost; a few days later the same cow was heard calling on the beach below, after several days of wandering through the old dark mining passages amongst the ghosts of miners.¹

The Bar forms part of the South West Coast Path; without it, you would need to make a 6 km detour around Loe Pool. Vehicles can no longer cross; the occasional cyclist uncomfortably wheels his mountain bike across the yielding pebbles. Going south-east, you leave the height of Bar Lodge and head down the stony path, part eroded away by rainfall, edged on the landward side by steep sandy cliffs of glacial head, full of the tiny holes of solitary mining bees and wasps, down to the Bar itself, by steep metamorphic slate cliffs, and look across to the more gentle farmed slopes on the south-eastern side. The track on the south side is now closed to vehicles, with a locked National Trust gate near the top. It used to be possible to drive down the rough track, over potholes and through scraping blackthorn bushes squealing against the sides of the car onto the Bar itself; many a vehicle has driven down here to get stuck in the sand and been pushed out by holidaymakers or rescued by the local farmer and his tractor.

¹ Story told by Hugh Rowe.