



THE FRIENDLY INVASION

It's hard to imagine this peaceful corner of Devon saw such explosive activity and so many secrets vital to the success of D-Day, 6th June 1944.

It was arguably the American forces rather than the British that have left their mark on this coastal landscape. 10,000 American soldiers were stationed along the coastline, from Westward Ho! to Woolacombe. It was an area granted to them by the British to establish the **Assault Training Center**.

As World War II moved towards its final months, the soldiers trained on the beaches, estuaries and sand dunes. D-Day was to become the largest amphibious invasion in military history.

Soldiers stormed ashore at Woolacombe and Saunton with smoke, live explosives and ammunition recreating the confusion, sounds and smells of combat they would face on the beaches of Normandy. But today listen to the happy squeals of children splashing in the sea where once US army soldiers had pounded ashore to perfect their deadly art of war.

Although here for little more than a year, the American presence changed this coastal landscape profoundly and had a big impact on those who lived in it. The legacy of their time here can be seen today among the scattered remains on this coastal walk, and from the splendid vantage point of Baggy.

Richard Bass



Courtesy of Morteboe Museum

GETTING TO BAGGY POINT, CROYDE

The nearest train station is Barnstaple. Once there you can travel to Baggy Point by bus. Croyde, Ruda Holiday Park, is the nearest stop via bus route 21A. The bus stop is about 5 minutes walk to Baggy Point car park.

If travelling by car, follow A361 to Braunton, take the Saunton Road B3231 to Croyde, then follow brown signs to Baggy Point. Pay and display parking is available at the tea rooms and toilets (free to National Trust members).

For further information visit:
nationaltrust.org.uk/baggy-points

Baggy Point can also be accessed from Putsborough Sands, where pay and display parking, cafe and toilets are available.

For further information, see:
putsborough.com

For a free download of the North Devon D-Day Heritage Trail, visit:
northdevon-aonb.org.uk/coastalheritage/world-war-ii-trail



(c) Historic England

The walk follows a route on land owned and managed by the National Trust. Some of the features described in the leaflet are on private land. Walkers are requested to keep within the open access area, as shown on the map. Please respect neighbouring landowners and do not trespass.

A number of seating and resting points are provided along the length of the walk and these afford splendid views of the coastline.

From the Sandleigh direction, the path is surfaced as far as Baggy Point, a distance of around a mile. After 600m there is a wheelchair accessible gate, after which the path begins to narrow and steepen. There is one exposed section of path near the end of Baggy Point, but this can be avoided by following the alternative route shown on the map.

- The linear path around Baggy Point follows the South West Coast Path. The distance between the two parking areas is approximately 3 miles, so a walk back will take around two hours.
- Other route variations are possible as there are a network of paths across the headland.

ROUTE DESCRIPTION

There are two possible start and finish points for the walk - from the National Trust car park at Baggy Point, and from Puttsborough Sands. Both are well-serviced with available parking, cafes and toilets.

Devon D-Day

Baggy Point



(c) 'The Longest Day' (1962) 20th Century Fox

REMAINS



AERIAL BOMBING RANGE

The small concrete building overlooking Putsborough Sands is easy to spot and marks one of the two starting points for the walk.

Much less obvious is another concrete structure, an arrow-shaped slab, laid in the ground nearby.

These are what remains of the Morte Bay Practice Bombing Range, a facility that was used by the Royal Air Force.

The arrow was designed to be seen from the air to help guide pilots towards a floating target out in the Bay. The concrete building next to it was an observation post. It was one of three located around Morte Bay from where the accuracy of the bombing runs was recorded.

A variety of aircraft practised dive bombing the targets, the most famous of which were the RAF Coastal Command, Vickers Wellington bombers. They were known to practise bombing using a special searchlight called a Leigh Light, which was used to locate and attack surfaced German submarines at night.

PRACTISE PILLBOXES

Other remains of military activity on Baggy Point are visible. Look closely and you'll find a number of isolated concrete structures. These are the remains of practise fortifications that the Americans used for D-Day training.



Examples of dummy pillboxes can be found along Baggy Point.

Baggy's makeshift battlefield was created by the 398th Engineer General Service Regiment. Hedges were bulldozed, trenches were dug and barbed wire strewn over the fields. This helped to prepare troops for the sort of enemy resistance they would encounter when moving inland from the invasion beaches of Normandy.

On closer inspection you'll notice that many of the pillboxes were only ever partially built and usually only consisted of a front facade. The pillboxes needed to be easily replaced if damaged during practice. The Americans hit them with live ammunition including flamethrowers, pipe bombs and grenades.

Pillbox remains are also found in Morte Bay, Croyde and Braunton Burrows, although Baggy has the greatest surviving concentration.

VIEWS



Image courtesy of Richard Bass

CROYDE BAY

The first landward view you will encounter if setting out from Sandleigh (or the last from Putsborough direction) is of Croyde Bay.

During World War II, Croyde was mainly used by the Americans to practise small beach landings.

Look closely at the small cliff at the far end of the beach and you may just about see a pillbox. The Americans constructed a small number of dummy pillboxes into the cliffs at Croyde, but erosion of the soft cliffs has meant that only this one remains.

American personnel were stationed in Croyde at a large tented encampment. This was located in the land around the present day UNISON Bay Holiday Park, which can be seen in the distance behind the dunes.



POINTS OF INTEREST

CLIFF ASSAULT TRAINING

Rock climbers can sometimes be seen at Baggy Point and in preparation for D-Day, American soldiers scaled these cliffs too.

In April 1944, the 29th Infantry Division "Rangers" moved from Bude in North Cornwall specifically for this purpose. Their training here was put into practice for a special mission; to capture the 'Pointe du Hoc' in Normandy. This was a fortified promontory cliff, the highest point between the Utah and Omaha invasion beaches in Normandy.

Pointe du Hoc had in fact been bombed just before the D-Day landing, after which the Germans removed the heavy artillery, but this remained unknown to the Allies. The U.S. Ranger Battalions were given the task of assaulting the stronghold early on D-Day. Their training at Baggy undoubtedly helped make the operation a success.



Views of Whiting Hole from Baggy Point.
Amphibious Sherman tanks on Woolacombe beach, early 1944. The adapted, raised exhaust systems were detachable. They allowed tanks to disembark from ships and landing craft.

Image courtesy of Tony Koorlander.

BRAUNTON BURROWS

To the south of Croyde, views of the vast sand dune system of Braunton Burrows opens up. During the war this whole area was made over for military training and was the epicentre of American activity.

The southern end, nearest the estuary, was where troops and vehicles rehearsed launching from ships and amphibious vessels. Other areas were designated for specialist training and for practising and trialling weaponry.

The remains of the replica concrete landing craft that were used for military training can still be found among the dunes.

MORTE BAY

On the northern side of Baggy Point are uninterrupted views across the bay to Morte Point.

Morte Point was used by the Americans for gunnery practice. Ships cruising off Woolacombe Beach fired field guns at makeshift shoreline defences. During D-Day this provided additional firepower as troops stormed the Normandy beaches.

Woolacombe, seen in the distance, became another temporary American settlement with camps and officers' quarters. The Headquarters of the Assault Training Center was based here, located at the present day Woolacombe Bay Hotel.

AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT

Putsborough and Woolacombe beaches were the main areas where the Americans honed their skills in seaborne invasion. Designated as the "Green" and "Yellow" Beaches, all full-scale practise landing operations took place here.



Photo of Landing craft accident at Woolacombe in which fourteen men lost their lives. Image courtesy of Morthoe Museum.

This landscape closely resembled the Omaha and Utah invasion beaches in Normandy. From here, you can appreciate the long, flat sandy beach, the sand dunes, steep bluffs and rounded hills behind.

This area was a hive of military activity, but the far end of the beach was especially hazardous. Several accidents occurred here when landing craft were swept off course and on one occasion they capsized and lives were lost. A memorial to the US soldiers who died has been placed on the Esplanade in Woolacombe.

