

# Croyde & Saunton

**Start/Finish:** Croyde Village Car Park

- **Distance:** 3.5 miles
- **Circular walk:** Yes
- **Grade:** Moderate
- **Terrain:** Coast path, public footpath, surfaced road. Fairly even underfoot, with a few slippery stretches.
- **Obstacles and steep gradients:** 8 flights of steps; 7 stiles
- **Accessibility:** This route is not suitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs
- **Public transport:** Bus service 308 from Barnstaple and Braunton to Croyde. For further details contact Devon Traveline 0871 200 22 33 or [traveline.info](http://traveline.info)
- **Toilets:** Public toilets at entrance to car park.
- **Parking:** Croyde Village Car Park. Pay and Display
- **Other Facilities:** Village stores, pubs and Post Office opposite car park entrance.
- **Accommodation:** Please contact Braunton Tourist Information Centre 01271 816400 or [brauntontic.co.uk](http://brauntontic.co.uk)
- **OS map:** Explorer 139
- **Grid ref:** SS 444392
- **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.



## Man and the Landscape – Croyde & Saunton

The countryside of the AONB has been shaped and affected by man for thousands of years, and the land has a fascinating tale to tell. From scratching at the earth with sticks and bones, to flicking switches in today's sophisticated farm machinery, we have left our mark as we have sought to meet our needs from the land. The result is an epic story of quiet heroism and struggle, ambition and desperation, triumph and defeat, etched indelibly into the Devon landscape.

Thousands of years ago ancient Celtic tribespeople were creating enclosures and huge earthworks. Saxon settlers imported their unique systems of agriculture, and medieval farmers set out to claw the land back from nature. Clearing heaths and woods acre by hard won acre for cultivation, they made strides which have been built upon by generations of farmers and workers right up to the present day. The characteristic hedge-banks which enclose Devon's fields are jewels in the county's crown. Many of them date back over 800 years and some, incredibly, are up to 4000 years old. These sturdy and beautiful boundaries, spangled with wildflowers in spring and summer, are a haven for wildlife of all kinds. Thousands of years of toil and muscle have produced the patchwork landscape of field and farm you see today. The earth has been cut, dug, ploughed and moved for as long as man has been here, and it is no exaggeration to say that, as you look out over the countryside, Devon's history really is laid out before you.



## Directions

1. Turn right out of car park **(1,2)**, then right again up Hobb's Hill (main road). Where the pavement ends, cross road with care, then turn left onto Cloutman's Lane.
2. Follow lane, which heads up hill and round sharp right hand bend, then turn right through five-barred gate onto public footpath **(3)**.
3. Go straight on at next junction, signed 'Public Footpath to Saunton'. Path follows old green lane up hill **(4)**.
4. Cross first field diagonally to right up hill **(5)**. Head for fingerpost and stile on the skyline, and cross further two fields straight over the saddle of the ridge.
5. At gate overlooking Saunton Sands **(6,7,8)**, bear left, following public footpath down across field. At next fingerpost before abandoned farm, bear right downhill, signed for Saunton Sands.
6. At the bottom of the hill just before the road, turn right signed 'Coast Path' **(9, 10)**. Note that refreshments may be obtained from Saunton Sands Hotel or the Sands car park opposite but take care when crossing the road.
7. Where Coast Path drops down steps to main road, cross with extreme care and turn left. Just on the sharp left hand bend, turn right through narrow gap and down steps, following 'coast path' sign.
8. Follow coast path down and round to the right, along low cliff edge.
9. At path junction beyond two benches, follow 'Coast Path' sign left down steps and along beach to right **(11)**.
10. After 500m, follow edge of stream inland **(12)** to a concrete pipe bridge, and bear right up track. Around the corner; bear left to continue following track.
11. At field, follow line of evergreen trees up left hand edge, to the end of the row. Turn left here, take the gate straight ahead, and follow footpath.
12. At the road turn left, then left again along Jones's Hill. Car park is immediately on left.



## Points of Interest

1. Legend has it that the village of Croyde takes its name from a Viking raider called Crydda, who settled in the area. In the late Saxon period (10th Century), Croyde was a manor belonging to one Ordulf II. The Lord of 19 manors in Devon, Ordulf was said to be a man of exceptional height and might, capable of great feats of strength. Evidence of human occupation here goes back still further; Stone Age flint scatters have been found both on Saunton Down and Baggy Point.
2. Although part of the parish of nearby Georgeham, the centre of Croyde village is quite old with many thatched cottages. At one time there were supposed to be 14 farms located in the core of the village with associated farmhouses, today sadly, none of the farms remain but many of the old buildings do. Since the mid-20th Century the settlement has grown rapidly becoming a popular seaside resort.
3. Much of the area surrounding Croyde used to be orchards producing a variety of local apples for eating and for cider-making. In the 19th Century, cider was often used as an "agricultural wage". Today little remains of this once thriving industry other than the names of some of the more modern streets. Work has been undertaken on land bordering this stretch of the route to increase and enhance natural habitat. Trees have been planted to provide 'wildlife corridors' with a wild flower meadow created and an orchard restored.
4. The route here follows a classic Devon green lane. These ancient routes formed the rural communications network before the coming of surfaced roads. Farmers, traders, smugglers and drovers relied on these byways in days gone by. This lane is known as Alf's Path, and



*Croyde from Saunton Down*

was in regular use by locals before the building of the coast road round from Saunton in 1906. If you look closely you will notice the presence of elm in the hedgerows here. Whilst mature elm trees were lost in the 1960's as a result of Dutch Elm disease, smaller hedgerow specimens can survive for up to 20 years before they succumb to the disease.

5. Farming techniques from well over a millenium ago are imprinted on land on the edge of Croyde. Back then, peasants worked strips the width of one 'chain' (22 yards) and one 'furlong' in length (one acre), within a very large enclosure. As time went on, those who managed to accumulate a few strips together would often enclose them with a hedge. This practice has produced the slender oblong fields which survive here to this day.

6. At over 2,500 hectares, Braunton Burrows is the largest sand dune system in England. The Burrows has been 'fed' by windblown sand from the broad strand of Saunton Sands. A botanist's paradise, it is home to almost 500 species of flowering plant including many rare and specialised species. It is also one of only two sites



in the country where the Amber Sandbowl Snail is found. During World War II, it was used as a site of invasion practice by American troops before the D-Day landings. American soldiers of the Engineer Combat Battalions trained here and they were some of the first ashore during the Normandy landings. The dunes are still used today by the armed forces for military training exercises.

7. The dunes and beach are a Site of Special Scientific Interest and form the core area of a UNESCO International Biosphere Reserve. This prestigious designation aspires to more than simple conservation. The aim is to bring people and the land together in a harmonious and sustainable living relationship. (See: [www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk](http://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk) )

8. Look inland towards Braunton and you can just make out the landscapes of Braunton Great Field and Braunton Marshes. The Great Field is a large open arable field and is one of only two surviving examples of a Mediaeval Open Strip field system in the country. Unlike the narrow enclosed strips we saw earlier; this field has remained unenclosed and some narrow open strips survive to this day. Braunton Marshes is the flat, low lying area beyond the rumpled landscape of the Burrows. Once a wilderness of marsh and mudflat, the area was drained and reclaimed in the early 19th Century by Dutch engineers. The passing of a dedicated Enclosures Act through parliament made this venture possible, and now freshwater drains separate the pasture fields, providing a valuable grazing area for Braunton which complements the large arable Great Field. Both are now iconic landscapes associated with Braunton and defined as a Heritage Coast which affords it some protection from development.

9. Ancient medieval cultivation terraces are still just visible on the slopes here amongst the gorse and have now been designated as a Scheduled Monument. It is not known when exactly the hard work of digging these flat plots into the hillside was carried out. However, it may be that they are a continuation of the Saxon agriculture practised at nearby Braunton. You can still just make out where peasants would have ploughed their skinny single strips of land, sandwiched between those of their neighbours in a series of terraces.

10. Among the rocks at the bottom of the cliff are boulders from Western Scotland. They were carried here by the huge ice sheets which moved down over the country during the Ice Ages. These curiosities, which include a 12 tonne boulder of pink granite, are known as 'erratics'. Today they lie at the base of much later cliffs, created by the accumulation of sand and the freeze thaw erosion action of the old cliffs line on Saunton Down which is known as solifluction. These virgin cliffs are very susceptible to erosion as we shall see.



11. The low cliffs here are the result of erosion from the original cliff line behind. In interglacial periods, when the world was much warmer; sea levels were much higher, creating a cliff line that Saunton Down was a part of. During colder periods and especially during the Ice Age sea levels would have fallen.



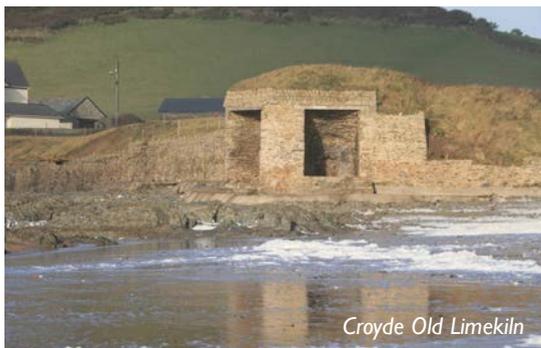
During this period 'freeze thaw' action on the cliffs would have created much eroded material, in times of thaw this would slump down to the base of the old cliffs. The cliff that you are standing on is the remains of that erosion process, which has left the rounded hills and a cliff line made up of soft material (known as head deposit) which is very susceptible to erosion. As sea levels rise, these newer cliffs are easily eroded and the line of the cliffs is beginning to retreat here quite quickly.

12. The fast retreating cliffs here have sometimes revealed an interesting past. In 1997 human bones were discovered in the eroded cliff edge. This led to excavations by North Devon Museums Service of the bodies of 4 shipwrecked mariners. At first it was believed they were the bodies from the infamous wreck of HMS Weazle which foundered off Baggy Point in 1799 with the loss of all on board. However, further investigation of the pewter and silver buttons at the site indicated that they were probably buried in the mid 1600's and that the fast eroding cliffs had revealed their final resting place. One of the bodies is on display in the North Devon Museum in Barnstaple.



13. The dunes here are part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which covers the coastline from Saunton Sands to the far side of Baggy Point. Protected because of its geological interest, it is also important for plants, amphibians and reptiles, including lizards. The beach here was also used for D Day invasion practice as evidenced by a number of "dummy pillboxes" that can be found on the cliffs and on Baggy Point. Baggy Point was used also to practice cliff assaults, which would be required when attacking German fortifications on the Pont D'Hoc in Normandy.

14. At the far end of the beach you will notice a strange stone structure on the edge of the cliffs, this is a lime kiln. Lime kilns are commonly found on many parts of the North Devon coast where ships could get in. Limestone and coal from South Wales was slowly burnt in large kilns, the reduced material being used as an agricultural fertiliser. This "quick lime" was also used for building in the form of mortar, cement and whitewash for buildings. This has had a big influence on the number of white walled traditional buildings within Croyde village.



Croyde is rated by many as the best surfing beach in the country. The shape of the coast funnels waves towards the shore, producing fast, fulfilling rides for experienced surfers. It is not the place for beginners. There are strong rip currents, and the incline of the beach builds powerful waves which 'dump' with considerable force. However it is a beautiful beach with impressive rock pools at low tide.