geography southwest

Places To Visit

The Baggy Point Erratic, North Devon

Location & Access:

The Baggy Point glacial erratic can be found at Freshwater Gut on Baggy Point, a headland between Croyde and Woolacombe beaches in north Devon.

Baggy Point is located 6 km to the west of the village of Braunton.

Baggy Point can also be accessed via the South West Coast Path.

There is a large National Trust car park right next to Baggy Point, and there are other car parks at the head of Croyde beach.

The Baggy Point Erratic

Key Geography: Marine erosion, glacial erratic, raised beach, cliffs & caves, wave cut platform, and head deposits.

Description:

The Baggy Point erratic is a large granulite gneiss boulder that has been carried by ice from Western Scotland. It weighs some 50 tons, but sea erosion and encrusted lichens make it a little tricky to spot.

The Baggy boulder is one of a suite of over twenty glacial erratics that can be found along this stretch of north Devon coastline. Two of them are quite accessible (this one at Baggy Point, and another at Saunton are relatively easy to identify, but most of the others are much smaller and quite difficult to find.

As at Saunton, the Baggy erratic sits on a wave cut platform created from the local rocks. At this location, the foreshore consists of Baggy sandstones that overlie the Upcott slates that form Baggy Point itself. These sedimentary beds of mudstones, siltstones and sandstones were formed in the Devonian Period between 359 to 372 million years ago. They were deposited as horizontal layers on the sea bed, but have since been uplifted and contorted, and hardened into vertically aligned layers. The sea has since carved this rock into sharp ridges and ancient fault lines are marked by long, straight and deep gullies, created where less-resistant beds have been eroded at a faster rate.

Vertical beds of foreshore, Baggy Point

Behind the erratic boulder is a clear exposure of an old cliff line formed from Pleistocene raised beach material, or sand rock, that was created in the Ipswichian interglacial. This provides clear evidence of how sea levels at this location have been at different heights in the past.

(continued overleaf)

Curiosity Questions:

How many visitors go to Baggy Point each year?

Baggy Point is part of the North Devon AONB. What do the letters AONB represent?

What are: Slab Cove, Cheesegrater Cliff, Scrattling Zawn and Long Rock?

Further information:

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/baggy-point

https://www.northdevon-aonb.org.uk/

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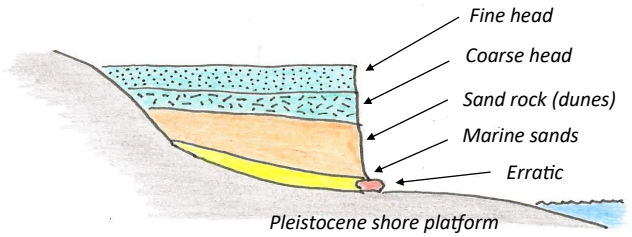
The upper section of the cliffs contains a loose matrix of angular rock fragments of varying size. Such deposits are known locally as 'head'. This part of the cliff profile was created by the down-slope flow of saturated sub-soil – a process known as solifluction. Mass movement like this is associated with colder spells, particularly in the coldest parts of the last Ice Age that took place some 180,000 years ago. North Devon was then a periglacial tundra-like wilderness with mean average temperatures about 10 degrees Celsius colder than today. The ground would have been permanently frozen (permafrost), and only the top metre or so briefly melted to create an unstable slurry that flowed easily on the permanently frozen ground below. Frost shattering in the cold spells detached fresh rock fragments to feed the flow.



There remains considerable debate about how the Baggy Point erratic arrived in north Devon. it was certainly transported by ice, but there is disagreement about what form the ice took. One theory suggests that the boulder was carried here by the ice sheets from the Anglian Glaciation, the last to affect this area. Alternatively, the boulder was a dropstone carried to its present location by a grand iceberg.

Ice ages have been one of the main reasons why sea levels have changed in our geological history. During the last 2 million years or so (the Quaternary Period), ice ages have come and gone roughly every 100,000 years. As the ice caps trapped water from the oceans, world sea levels fell between 100 and 200 metres. At the peak of the last ice age (about 18,000 years ago) a Paleolithic hunter stood on the cliffs at Croyde would not have been able to see the ocean, as it would have retreated beyond the horizon. During the warmer inter-glacial periods, sea levels rose again – perhaps even reaching higher than their position today. Of course, today we also have to consider the additional cause of rising sea levels due to anthropogenic causes.

Baggy Point erratic

The old cliff-line was created in interglacial periods when the world was warmer and sea levels higher. Combined with a general eustatic uplift, it has been raised some 40 feet or so above the present sea level. During the ice age, sea levels fell. Since the end of the last glacial period, sea levels have started to rise again, and the cliffs are currently retreating quickly.

HOW TO LOCATE THE BAGGY POINT ERRATIC

The Baggy Point erratic is not easily accessible, as it sits on the foreshore, well below the level of the coastal path at the top of the cliff. To reach it requires a steep descent onto the foreshore and then a bit of clambering over loose rocks, gullies, and steep ridges. Bear in mind that the erratic is not accessible at high tides, so make sure you check local tide tables and visit the site at low tide so you have plenty of time to explore.

To find the erratic, follow the coast path signed to Baggy Point, accessed by turning right out of the National Trust car park at the head of Croyde beach. When you reach the white house built in a modern architectural style, look for a single wooden bench at the edge of the cliffs. A route leads to it from the main path, and to the left of the bench is a steep washed-out path that will give you access to the wave cut platform below. At the bottom, turn right, and edge your way along the base of the cliffs, over the ridges and gullies cut in the Baggy sandstone platform, until you reach the erratic.

If you decide to extend your visit with a stroll along the cliff path to Baggy Point itself, you will be well-rewarded. You will also have an opportunity to examine another erratic that can be located close to the path on the way to Putsborough.

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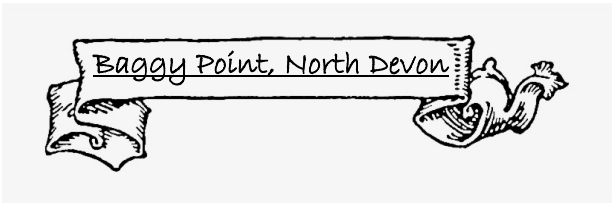

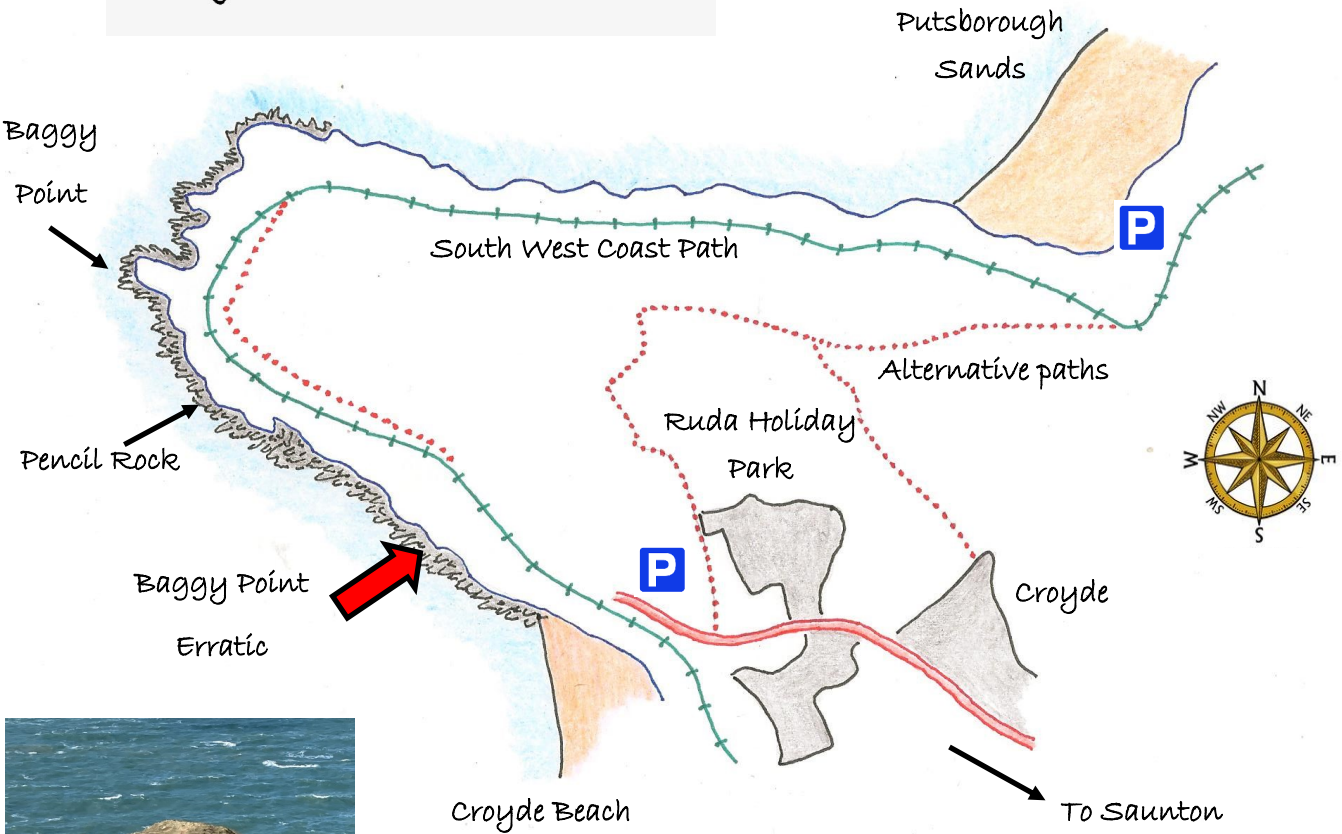

Answers to Curiosity Questions:

How many visitors go to Baggy Point each year? *(70,000)*

Baggy Point is part of the North Devon AONB. What do the letters AONB represent? *(Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty)*

What are: Slab Cove, Cheesegrater Cliff, Scrattling Zawn and Long Rock? *(Climbing routes on Baggy Point cliffs)*