

Scan these QR codes to watch archive cine film and newsreels - watch the events unfold.



Newsreel of the whole event.



Churchill arriving and troops gathering for the event.



Church & Eisenhower inspecting the troops and watching the drop.



Paratroopers preparing for the drop.



Colour film of the event - spot the dog near the end!

The walk is within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. The character and beauty of this landscape are recognised as so outstanding that it is protected by law for the nation. The NL straddles the boundaries of Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire and is the third largest NL in the country covering an area of 668 square miles (1,730 square km).

The North Wessex Downs NL is a visibly ancient landscape of great beauty, diversity and size. It embraces the high, open arable sweeps of the chalk downs and dramatic scarp slopes with their prehistoric monuments and beech knolls, the moulded dip slopes, sheltered chalk river valleys, intimate and secluded wooded areas and low-lying heaths with a rich mosaic of woodland, pasture, heath and commons. The North Wessex Downs NL forms a surprisingly remote, expansive and tranquil landscape in the heart of Southern England.

This leaflet was funded by the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme.

For further information on the NL please refer to the website: <https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/>



North Wessex Downs National Landscape

FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

THE BIG DROP

A circular walk

On the 23 March 1944, the area east of RAF Welford, north of the village of Boxford, was the site for 'The Big Drop'; a top-secret practice for the D Day landings at the end of the Second World War. Prime Minister Winston Churchill and General Dwight Eisenhower (Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, and later President of the USA) inspected the American troops of the elite 101st Airborne Division. This was followed by a mass parachute drop of troops and equipment by the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment and the 377th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion. 2,000 to 3,000 men parachuted onto the drop zone and close to 2,000 troops took part in the parade and inspection.



RAF Welford Historical Society

On 6 June 1944, these same troops were dropped behind enemy lines in Normandy in France; the start of the ground offensive during which many lost their lives, but ultimately led to the end of the Second World War.

This circular walk takes you round the site on public rights of way and a new permitted path. There are 4 information boards around the walk with archive photographs of the day.

The walking route is about 2.6 miles. It can be accessed from the villages of Boxford or Leckhampstead, where there is parking. The walk will take 1–1½ hours and is on footpaths and bridleways and sometimes on rough ground.

These photos of Churchill and Eisenhower were taken during the Big Drop.



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Critical Past

