

This trail was realized with the support of:



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Welcome to Steenbergen

This theme walk was developed by the Steenbergen municipality on the initiative of Steenbergen's water sports club 'Die Spoye'. Both trail and text were realized with the support of the municipal Heritage Committee. More information on this trail and other trails is available at VVV Tourist Agency Steenbergen, Kaaistraat 53 (number 49 as from 01-09-2011) in Steenbergen or you may check www.gemeente-steenbergen.nl or www.vvvbrabantsewal.nl. We hope you will enjoy your walk.

RAF pilots

At the end of WWII, the famous British Royal Air Force pilot, captain Guy Gibson, and his well-known navigator, James Warwick, crashed in their fighter-bomber in the vicinity of Steenbergen. Guy Gibson was regarded to be one of the RAF's most experienced pilots. He had been in charge of 'Operation Chastise', the demolition of a number of reservoir dams in the German Ruhr area. This operation was carried out by a special squadron, N° 617, equipped with AVRO Lancasters which had been modified for this special task. The air raid on the reservoir dams under the command of Guy Gibson will forever fire the imagination.

History

As WWII dragged on and the British air force recovered from the German attacks, it was contrived that Germany should be hit by saturation bombing. The aim was twofold. Firstly, to break the morale of the Germans by systematic bombing of large cities, hoping the citizens would rise against the Nazis. Secondly, to bring the German war industry to a standstill. Bombing had mainly been aimed at key sites, such as coal-mines, oil depots and armaments factories. Though the allied forces had been successful on several occasions, the Germans had managed to rebuild these sites on the double every single time.

Gibson was briefed not to destroy the factories, but the dams of the reservoirs used to generate hydro-electric power. This mission was deemed to be impossible, as the attack would require great precision and because these reservoir dams were too vast to be destroyed by the existing type of bombs. Therefore, a special type of bomb was developed for this aim, a so-called bouncing bomb weighing 4,200 kilos each.

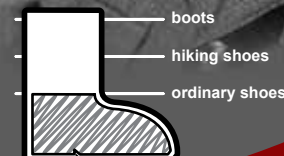
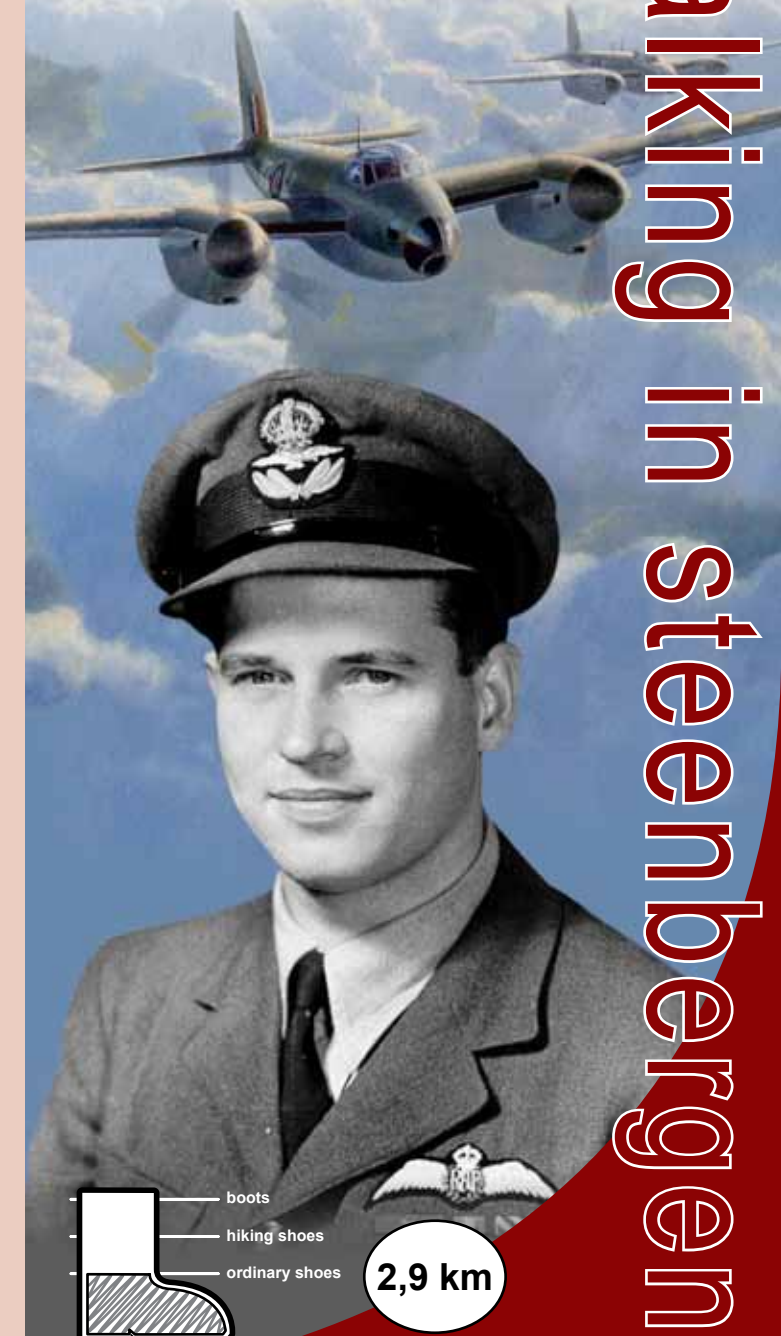
After months of preparation, the squadron left on the evening of 16 May 1943. Gibson commanded the first formation, which was to destroy the Möhne, Eder and Sorpé dams, close to Germany's western border. Only eight of the nineteen Lancasters that left England returned home safely. Thanks to the successful bombardment, the water supply was cut off in the entire Ruhr area for a month, which seriously slowed down the German war industry. Five weeks after the bombing, the highest British military decoration, the Victory Cross, was awarded to Guy Gibson by King George VI.

On 19 September 1944, Guy Gibson was flying a twin-engined bomber of the 627 squadron as master bomber together with squadron leader James Warwick as navigator. At the time, this De Havilland Mosquito fighter-bomber was a very sophisticated aircraft that was able to maintain high air speed levels (nearly 700 km per hour) at low altitudes. The pilot and navigator were seated side by side in this twin-engined aircraft. They were flying back to England following a bombardment on Rheydt and Mönchengladbach on that particular day in September. At around 22:45 h, the fighter-bomber was spotted over Steenbergen with a misfiring engine. This was caused by a mechanical defect and the aircraft ran out of fuel. Consequently, it crashed near a farm in the former West Graaf Hendrikpolder and burst into flames. Both crew members were found near the wreckage and buried in Steenbergen's local Roman Catholic cemetery.



Guy Gibson and his crew

Theme walk: Dambusters Trail
location: Steenbergen



2,9 km

Walking in Steenbergen

Dambusters Trail

1. The starting point and finish of this trail is located at hotel Aarden (Kaaistraat 1) in Steenbergens friendly city centre. Hotel Aarden has a cosy outdoor café and ample complimentary parking space nearby. The city centre offers a few nice shopping streets with decent restaurants and coffee shops. The starting panel with the trail directions is located just across hotel Aarden. In hotel Aarden, you will find a mini exhibition in remembrance of the two war pilots. The walk starts off into Kaaistraat and then continues into the first street on your right, Geert Vinckestraat. After the school, please enter the City Park on your left and continue straight on. After 200 metres, you will find the war memorial dedicated to the memory of the two fallen British war victims on your left.

2. War memorial

The memorial was unveiled on 7 May 1990. Every year, both the war memorial and Steenbergens cemetery are visited by many groups of British visitors. A propeller of a British fighter aircraft is mounted on the memorial's pedestal, together with a memorial plaque. Next, please continue on the same road, leave the city park on your left and turn right onto the Zuidwal. Please cross Wouwsestraat and continue on Oranjebolwerk. Then, please turn

left onto the footpath and walk along the water towards Middenwal. After the bridge, please continue straight on to Oranjewal. From here, you can see the Roman Catholic cemetery on your right. This is where you will find the graves of both British heroes.

3. War pilot's graves

Please turn right around the corner to the entry of the cemetery. Several official plaques were put up by British authorities on this cemetery and you will also notice a genuine British post office box. Two war heroes from WWII are buried on this Roman Catholic cemetery, pilot Guy Gibson and navigator James Warwick. Gibson was born in India on 12 August 1918 and was killed in Steenbergens on 19 September 1944. At the urgent request of his father, his mortal remains stayed in Steenbergens. He wanted his sun to be buried at the location where he was killed.

4. Mini exhibition

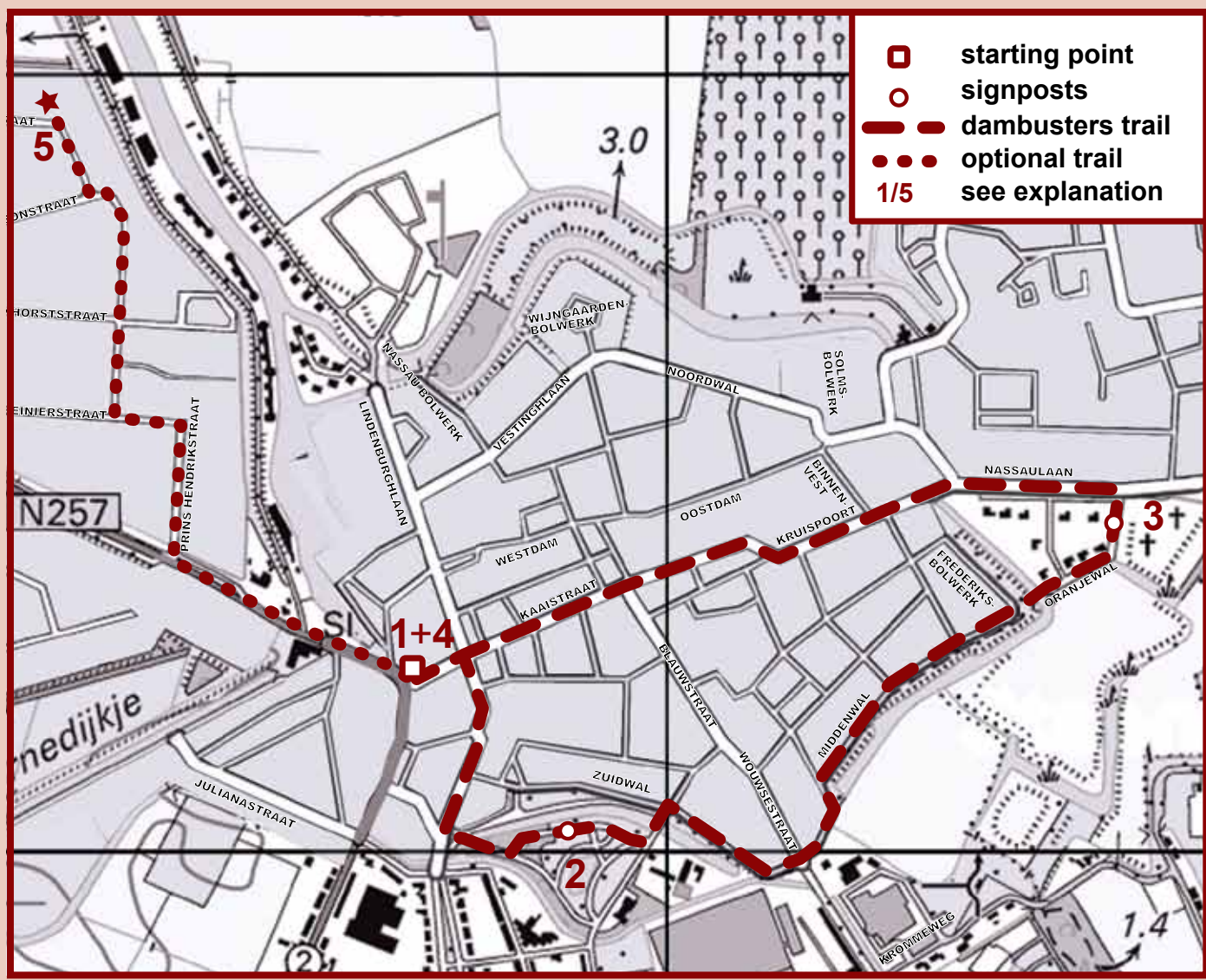
As you leave the cemetery, please turn right into Nassaulaan and continue on Kruispoort back to hotel Aarden, the official finish of the trail. You will find several nice restaurants and pubs in Steenbergens to conclude the trail. Please feel free to ask for the mini exhibition at hotel Aarden.

5. Crash site fighter aircraft

You may also visit the site on which Guy Gibson and James Warwick crashed in their De Havilland Mosquito. You will find this location just outside the city centre within 15 minutes walking distance from the starting point. The street



AVRO Lancaster which was used to carry out the attacks on the Möhne, Eder and Sorpé dams.



in which the two heroes crashed is now called Mosquitostraat and was named after the aircraft type. At this location, you will find a pattern of the Union Jack in the pavement and a bronze plaque. Various streets on this industrial site are named after the event.

Code of conduct

- walking is at your own risk
- please do not leave any litter behind
- please leave crops and animals in peace

Other interesting trails

- Walking trail 4.5 km: Stronghold Trail, published by the municipality of Steenbergens
- Cycling trail 45 km: Liberation Trail, published by VVV Brabantse Wal and the municipality of Bergen op Zoom

References

- Guy Gibson: Enemy coast ahead 1944
- Articles by Hans Molier and Willy Horemans