



The site is protected by Historic Environment Scotland and visitors are asked to respect the information signage onsite. The area is fenced off for safety reasons and access to the exposed cliff edges is discouraged.

The memorial here was unveiled by the Russian Convoy Club in September 1999. Over a hundred and twenty thousand men served on these dangerous journeys and more than three thousand men died. You can also visit the Arctic Convoy Memorial at this site. The structural elements that remain here are some of the most complete coastal defences in the United Kingdom. gun emplacements.

Up to two hundred soldiers of the Royal Artillery were based here to watch for possible enemy attack on the Arctic convoy ships moored in Loch Ewe. A 40mm calibre anti-aircraft gun sat on top of the platform its position at the mouth of the loch provided a perfect point for the anti-submarine nets that guarded the western tip of Loch Ewe. It was established as the area's main wartime coast defence battery during World War Two. The remains of wartime activity are visible along the road from the remains of the Royal Artillery were based here to watch for possible enemy attack on the Arctic convoy ships moored in Loch Ewe.

RUBHA NAN SASAN

BLAZING A WARTIME TRAIL AROUND LOCH EWE

A' SEÒLADH SLIGHE GHASGEIL CHOGAIDH MU LOCH IÙ

This heritage trail explores the pivotal role that Loch Ewe and its people played in the events of World War Two as the base for Atlantic and Arctic convoys. These ships provided essential supplies to war torn Russia along a route described by Winston Churchill as 'the worst journey in the world'. The crumbling concrete buildings, rusting metal posts and old gun emplacements around the loch are evidence of this remarkable wartime story.

Visit the Russian Arctic Convoy Museum in Aultbea to explore more about the history and stories of Loch Ewe and the Arctic Convoys. To learn more about the project, get in touch at:

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Please respect the local communities that live around Loch Ewe. Many of our roads are single track, please drive carefully and use passing places with consideration.



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This area of coastline bustled with action during the war and was requisitioned during the war as Command Headquarters for the Russian Arctic Convoys. A short walk along the shoreline path towards Inverewe Gardens will take you past Pool House. The house was requisitioned during the war as Command Headquarters for the Russian Arctic Convoys. Spot the mosaic beside the main entrance of Poolewe Village Hall. This beautiful piece of artwork was created by local primary school children to commemorate the journey taken by the Arctic Convoys. Servicemen and women from around the world were based around Loch Ewe during the war. The silhouette feature and entrance to the loch monitored changes in the electrical field. Controlled mines could be detonated if ships or submarines were detected. Barrage balloons helped protect the skies from German bomber attacks. The remains of the building used for inflating the balloons and also the brick water tower are visible beside the road at Tourraig, between here and Poolewe. The NATO refuelling depot visible below the viewpoint is a modern-day clue to Loch Ewe's continuing links with the Royal Navy.

POOLEWE POLL IÙ DRUM A CHOIRCH DRUM A CHOIRCH AN T-ALL BEITHE AULTBEA

WARTIME LIFE AND LOCAL PEOPLE MUIinntir an Àite agus Beatha aig Am a' Chogaidh



Laide Checkpoint. Outside the old Post Office with the MacLennan family, 1940 ©Roddy MacLennan

Britain declared war against Germany on 3rd September 1939 after Hitler invaded Poland.

Loch Ewe was drawn into the war almost immediately when the British Naval Fleet moved here briefly in October 1939 after the sinking of HMS Royal Oak in Scapa Flow, Orkney.

Loch Ewe became the assembly point for Atlantic and Arctic Convoys in January 1941. The area quickly became a strategic military base hosting over a thousand service personnel and transforming quiet crofting communities across the area. Loch Ewe and Gairloch were given 'restricted area' status and barrier checkpoints were erected at Gairloch and Laide. The Gairloch Hotel was taken over by the military as a hospital and local businesses and shops adapted to serve the growing population.



There are a number of wartime sites to explore in Poolewe. Start in the centre of the village at the panels outside the Post Office and village shop to discover more about the Arctic Convoys. A short walk along the shoreline path towards Inverewe Gardens will take you past Pool House. The house was requisitioned during the war as Command Headquarters for the Russian Arctic Convoys. Spot the mosaic beside the main entrance of Poolewe Village Hall. This beautiful piece of artwork was created by local primary school children to commemorate the journey taken by the Arctic Convoys. Servicemen and women from around the world were based around Loch Ewe during the war. The silhouette feature and entrance to the loch monitored changes in the electrical field. Controlled mines could be detonated if ships or submarines were detected. Barrage balloons helped protect the skies from German bomber attacks. The remains of the building used for inflating the balloons and also the brick water tower are visible beside the road at Tourraig, between here and Poolewe. The NATO refuelling depot visible below the viewpoint is a modern-day clue to Loch Ewe's continuing links with the Royal Navy.

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Joan Slessford, née Smith (on left) 3rd officer at the Boom Defence depot in Mellon Charles. ©RACM

There were times during the war when military personnel outnumbered the local population by three to one.

Women played an important role in Loch Ewe during the war. The WRNS or 'Wrens' were the women's branch of the Royal Navy. They worked as clerks, telephonists, radar operators, electricians, mechanics and drivers.

Many local people took on important roles connected to the Loch Ewe naval base. They worked in the NAAFIs along the coast or crewing naval support vessels. Several local men were utility or 'Tillie' lorry drivers and mechanics while others worked at the Boom Depot in Mellon Charles.



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The William H Welch disaster

In the early hours of 26th February 1944, American flag liberty ship 'SS William H. Welch' went aground in Black Bay near the entrance of Loch Ewe. In gale force winds and heavy snow, the ship struck a reef off Eilean Fuaradh Mòr and instantly began to break in half. As the storm swept down out of the darkness one man after another was washed off the wreck and into the freezing sea.

In the winter dawn, three survivors who had managed to swim ashore stumbled inland. They came across the small community at Cove and local residents were horrified to hear of the terrible events. They immediately set out in the storm to search for survivors.

Wreckage, bodies and oil littered the rocky shoreline. The rescuers spent hours climbing amongst the cliffs for survivors in the treacherous hail, sleet and wind. They waded out into the freezing surf and lit driftwood fires to revive the exhausted men. Flasks of hot tea and blankets were brought to wrap around the frozen survivors. Some rescuers carried badly injured men on their backs across the miles of rugged moorland back to Cove. Many of these local people were older men and women as most young of their men were away serving in the war.



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The William H Welch disaster



Six of the twelve crew who survived the shipwreck

News of the shipwreck spread through the villages around the coast of Loch Ewe. Medical help arrived from the naval base at Aultbea and Highland Field Craft Training Centre recruits at Poolewe joined the rescue with the local Coastguard. Everyone worked with desperate haste well into the following night until all hope was lost of finding more survivors.

From a crew of seventy-four, twelve men were rescued alive. A memorial cairn and plaque stand on the shore above the beach at Camas an Aiseig to commemorate and honour those lost in the disaster and the bravery of local rescuers.

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THE ARCTIC CONVOYS CONBHOIDHEAN NA H-ARTAIG

In June 1941 Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Britain and its allies realised that if Russia was abandoned then the war could be lost. They agreed to provide aid to help the country defend against Hitler's forces. Over the next four years the Arctic Convoys delivered over four million tons of vital supplies to the Soviet Union including tanks, fighter planes, food, fuel and medicines.

Each convoy was made up of Merchant ships protected by an escort of Royal Navy warships. The crews of the Merchant ships came from countries from as far away as North and South America, the USSR, Scandinavia, China and India.

Conditions were amongst the worst faced by any Allied sailors. They braved constant attacks by sea and air from German U-boats and aircraft flying from bases in Nazi occupied Norway. The route to the Soviet ports of Murmansk and Archangel was a hazardous two week sea voyage. It took the ships into the Arctic Circle and east across the freezing Barents Sea.

Convoys moved in a strict column formation made up of Merchant ships protected by an escort of Royal Navy warships, moving only as fast as the slowest ship. Merchant ships were not designed for speed and the convoys were an easy target. They were exposed to relentless attacks from bomber aircraft during the polar summer. Fierce storms, blizzards, towering waves, gales and extreme cold were a constant threat during the long polar winters. The water was so cold that waves could turn to ice as they smashed against the ships. Men were known to freeze to death on watch. Crew had to constantly hack the ice that built up on the ships to stop it becoming so heavy that it would sink the ship.

Convoys that successfully reached Russia faced a return journey at the mercy of the arctic weather and enemy attack and more than three thousand sailors lost their lives. The Arctic Star British military campaign medal is awarded to all British Commonwealth forces who served on the Arctic Convoys of World War Two. The medal acknowledges their bravery in delivering vital supplies to Russia.

