= Half @-@ Life 2 : Lost Coast =

Half @-@ Life 2 : Lost Coast is an additional level for the 2004 first @-@ person shooter video game Half @-@ Life 2 . Developed by Valve Corporation , it was released on October 27 , 2005 , through the Steam content delivery service as a free download to owners of the Microsoft Windows version of Half @-@ Life 2 . Lost Coast serves as a technology demonstration , specifically showcasing the high @-@ dynamic @-@ range rendering implemented in the Source engine . The level was designed with a variety of appropriate environments to emphasize these effects . In addition , Lost Coast was the first video game developed by Valve to allow developers to explain various elements of design as the player progresses through the level .

Lost Coast follows Half @-@ Life protagonist Gordon Freeman as he travels up a coastal cliff to destroy a Combine artillery launcher in a monastery , which is firing on a nearby town . The Lost Coast level was originally created for Half @-@ Life 2 , but was ultimately removed from the game . As a result , it has several minor story details that were not included in Half @-@ Life 2 . The level received a generally positive reception , and there was consensus among reviewers that the new features included in Lost Coast should be integrated into future games released by Valve .

= = Gameplay = =

Lost Coast uses the same first @-@ person shooter gameplay mechanics as Half @-@ Life 2 . The game is viewed from the perspective of the player character , and plot information is imparted through scripted sequences rather than cutscenes . A heads @-@ up display at the bottom of the screen shows the player 's health , energy gauge , and ammunition status , while available weapons are shown at the top . Health and armor energy can be replenished by picking up medical supplies and energy cells respectively , or by using wall @-@ mounted charging devices . The player character is equipped with a small armory of weapons from Half @-@ Life 2 at the beginning of the level , including a pistol , shotgun , crossbow , and gravity gun . The gravity gun allows the player to manipulate physical objects in the world ; it can be used to pick up nearby objects and throw them at enemies or create cover from enemy fire . The gravity gun can also be used to perform several non @-@ combat functions , such as grabbing out @-@ of @-@ reach supply crates .

= = Story = =

Half @-@ Life 2 : Lost Coast opens with the protagonist , Gordon Freeman , finding himself near a group of decaying piers , underneath a monastery set up on rocks and overlooking the small town of St. Olga . A fisherman recognizes Gordon and directs him to the monastery , which the enemy Combine are using as a platform to launch artillery shells filled with headcrabs into the town . The fisherman opens a gate , allowing the player to proceed , and awaits Gordon 's return .

As Gordon proceeds up the cliffside to the Byzantine Christian monastery , he encounters heavy resistance from Combine soldiers who rappel down the cliff to try to stop him . Gordon fights his way up , enters the church 's nave , and disables the artillery launcher . This alerts nearby soldiers , who assault the sanctuary in force , while a Combine attack helicopter arrives to support the soldiers . After defeating the soldiers in the courtyard , Gordon moves to scaffolding over the side of the cliff and destroys the helicopter with RPGs . The helicopter crashes into the scaffolding , freeing up a path to a crude elevator which lowers Gordon back down to the pier . The fisherman congratulates Freeman on his success , invites him to a feast in St. Olga , and the screen fades out . As the level ends , the fisherman exclaims that Gordon is " getting all fuzzy ' round the edges " .

= = Development = =

= = = Level design = = =

Lost Coast was originally conceived as a part of the Highway 17 chapter in Half @-@ Life 2 (Highway 17 's development name was " Coast " , hence the name " Lost Coast ") , but was later discarded during development . As a result , Lost Coast features minor storyline details that were removed from Half @-@ Life 2 , such as the headcrab artillery launchers . Each area of the level was designed with a specific purpose . An Eastern Orthodox architectural style was deliberately chosen for the monastery , as buildings of this type " are very colorful and have a large variety of materials " and are " often lit naturally , with extremes of darkness and brightness , " providing an ideal showcase for the HDR lighting effects . Valve also thought that the use of a monastery would help provide a starker contrast between old human architecture and futuristic Combine technology found within it . The cliffside that leads to the monastery had a gameplay @-@ oriented purpose , and was meant to emulate a similar cliffside combat scene in Half @-@ Life . The cliffside also forces the player to be observant of threats from above and below , breaking from normal horizontal combat . The monastery 's courtyard was designed as an area where the player recovers from the cliffside combat , while also presenting a contained combat arena later in the level in which the player must hold their ground while they are attacked from multiple directions .

= = = High @-@ dynamic @-@ range rendering = = =

The goal of Lost Coast was to demonstrate the new high @-@ dynamic @-@ range rendering implemented into the Source game engine . Valve first attempted to implement high @-@ dynamic @-@ range rendering in Source in late 2003 . The first method stored textures in RGBA color space , allowing for multisample anti @-@ aliasing and pixel shaders to be used , but this prevented alpha mapping and fog effects from working properly , as well as making textures appear sharp and jagged . The second method involved saving two versions of a texture : one with regular data , and the other with overbrightening data . However , this technique did not allow for multisample anti @-@ aliasing and consumed twice as much video card memory , making it infeasible . The third method , shown at the E3 convention in 2005 , used floating point data to define the RGB color space , allowing for reasonably efficient storage of the high @-@ dynamic @-@ range data . However , this method also did not allow for multisample anti @-@ aliasing , and was only compatible with Nvidia video cards , leaving ATI cards unable to run high dynamic range . The fourth and final method compromised between the second and third methods , using overbrightening textures sparingly and allowing ATI cards to render HDR in a different way to the Nvidia ones while nearly producing the same end result .

The final version of Valve 's high @-@ dynamic @-@ range technology adds a significant number of lighting effects to the engine , aimed at making the game appear more realistic . Bloom shading was introduced , blurring bright edges in the game world and emulating a camera 's overexposure to light . This is combined with exposure control to tailor the effect to represent the human eye . For example , as the player exits a dark area into a light area , the new area is initially glaringly bright , but quickly darkens , representing the adjustment of the player character 's eyes to the light . New cube mapping techniques allow the reflection cast by an object to correspond with the brightness of the light source , and lightmaps enable light bouncing and global illumination to be taken into account in the rendering . Refraction effects were added to make light account for the physical attributes of an object and to emulate the way light is reflected by water . The Lost Coast level is specifically designed to showcase these effects . It uses the sea and beach as opportunities to demonstrate water @-@ based effects , the monastery to demonstrate bloom from its whitewash walls , and the sanctuary to provide the means to show refraction through stained glass windows and cube maps on golden urns and candlesticks .

As a technology showcase , Valve considered Lost Coast to have very demanding system requirements . The game runs on computers with specifications lower than what is recommended , albeit without some key features such as high dynamic range . If a non @-@ high @-@ dynamic @-@ range @-@ capable card is used , the developer commentary is changed slightly to reflect this . For example , Gabe Newell would describe the effects that are seen in a different manner .

= = = Commentary system = = =

In addition to a showcase for visual improvements , Lost Coast acted as a testbed for Valve 's commentary system . When the feature is enabled , additional items appear in the game that can be interacted with to play an audio commentary . Each audio piece ranges from ten seconds to a minute of commentary . Players hear the developers talk about what the player is seeing , what is happening , why they made certain decisions , and what kinds of challenges they faced . Commentary tracks are represented by floating speech bubbles called commentary nodes . Valve intended for players to first play the level with commentary disabled , and after completing the level , play it again with commentary enabled , learning about each new stage as they progress . The company has since made the commentary system standard in all of its later video games .

= = Release and reception = =

Lost Coast was released on October 27 , 2005 , as a free download from Valve 's Steam content delivery service to anyone who purchased Half @-@ Life 2 . People who received Half @-@ Life 2 as a gift from Valve 's online store were not eligible to download the level . Valve announced on May 30 , 2007 that Lost Coast , along with Half @-@ Life 2 : Deathmatch , would be made available for free to owners of ATI Radeon cards . It was later released without charge to Nvidia graphics card owners along with Half @-@ Life 2 : Deathmatch , Peggle Extreme , and the first eleven levels of Portal .

Lost Coast was generally well received by video game critics . 1UP.com enjoyed the amount of detail , including the graphics , puzzles , and intelligent enemies , saying , " Valve just packed more atmosphere into a tiny snippet than most shooters muster , period . " The review also praised the level 's commentary system , calling it an informative addition , and enjoyed the interesting and insightful comments made by some of its creators . The level satisfied UGO because " it would be harder not to enjoy this level in all its beautifully rendered glory ? even after you 've broken all the windows and spattered the walls with Combine blood , " and GameSpot commented that " the textures in Lost Coast are noticeably more detailed and numerous than in the retail game . " The review concluded hoping that the features introduced in Lost Coast would be included in Valve 's future releases .

Negative reaction to the game focused on its length and gameplay . 1UP.com and UGO both considered it short ; Shawn Elliott of 1UP.com described it as " a lickety @-@ split run through postcard @-@ pretty tide pools , up cliffs , and into a church turned Combine outpost " . UGO 's Nigel Grammer stated that Lost Coast 's gameplay seemed to be secondary to the level 's graphics . Lost Coast 's gameplay disappointed Brad Shoemaker of GameSpot , who compared it to that of Half @-@ Life 2 and considered them to be very similar , saying that it " isn 't going to set the world on fire " .