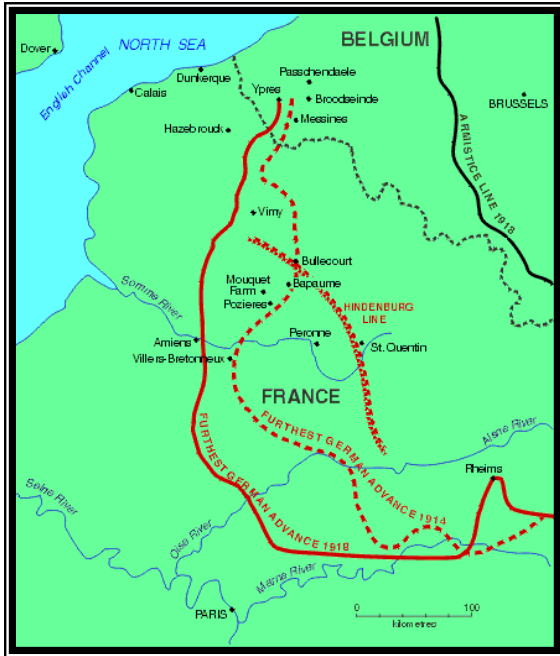


Battlefields of the Somme & Belgium

Tour Itinerary



Visiting the WW1 battlefields is a moving experience, an experience that is best conducted in a personalised small group. The tour size makes us flexible enough to visit fascinating places off the beaten track, yet see more in a day at a more leisurely pace and in greater depth.

As we walk over the ploughed fields which were once No Man's Land, we still find to this day, pieces of shrapnel, barbed wire, cartridge cases and other battle debris. Unexploded shells are still unearthed on a regular basis even to this day, in what is known locally as the 'Harvest of Iron'. It is a common sight to see unexploded shells lying by the roadside after the spring and autumn ploughing, awaiting collection by the authorities.

Our tour leader is Kate Stedman, a qualified historian who as Head of History at a leading Melbourne school, taught this region for many years to senior VCE students. Afterwards, in conjunction with her English cousin, renowned war historian and writer Michael Stedman, Kate devised this tour with a particular emphasis on the ANZAC battlefields.

We provide you with a wide variety of different sites and activities to maximize your understanding and interest in the time you will spend with us on our tour.

Kate will conduct walks to actual battle sites, provide maps and histories of the major battles and give pictorial information on the history of WW1. We encourage you to research your own family history – an easy and quick task – so that you can find your relative's grave or name at one of the memorials we visit. This has always been a very moving experience for our clients and makes the journey a very powerful historical pilgrimage.



Day One Monday 04 June

Depart Paris after breakfast and arrive mid morning at Amiens to check into our hotel.

After lunch we visit the town of Villers Bretonneux. This town remains a living tribute to the Australian soldiers who liberated it from the German army on ANZAC day in 1918. The town's logo is a Kangaroo and there are streets named after towns in Australia. VB is now twin town to Robinvale in Victoria and the townsfolk maintain a warm and welcoming atmosphere for Aussie visitors.

- Victoria School and pictorial museum in town centre
- Australian National War Memorial and Adelaide Cemetery
- Visit Le Hamel memorial site of General Monash's astounding 93 minute victorious battle over the Germans

Amiens is the central town of the Somme and underwent extensive re-building after the city was leveled in WW1. See the exquisite 12th century Amiens Cathedral – the largest and arguably most beautiful in France - containing the head of John the Baptist brought back from the Crusades, the famous "Weeping Angel" and some of the most extraordinary stone reliefs in the world.



We stay in a centrally located three star hotel and recommend that you dine this evening in the medieval quarter of St Leu, overlooking a pretty canal. The sound and light show at the Cathedral at 10pm is an unmissable experience.

Day Two Tuesday 05 June

Thiepval Memorial to the Missing.

This huge and simply stunning memorial is the world's largest and has excellent views across towards **Mouquet Farm**. From Thiepval it is possible to understand the reasons why the ANZAC troops were so heavily engaged at the Somme against the Germans. The new visitor's centre is an absolute highlight.

The group will have maps and other printed materials to aid in the understanding of the battle areas.



Newfoundland Park Memorial



This commemorates the men of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment who fought here on 1st July 1916. The entire regiment was wiped out in 40 minutes. After the war the ground was purchased by the mothers and widows of the men who had died here that day, and has remained unchanged until the present. You can walk through the trenches in their very steps.

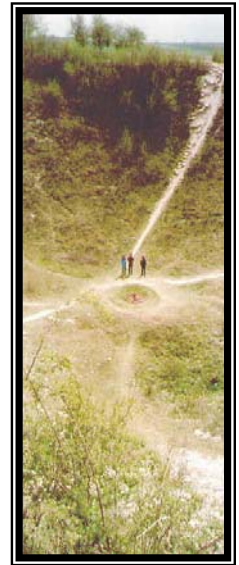
This morning we visit this 80 acre park to show the design of a battle, complete with trenches, craters and ravines and witness almost first hand the actual choreography of two battles fought here.

From here round to the **Hawthorn Ridge Crater and Sunken Lane** is a fascinating study of the famous and disastrous battle of July 1st 1916: during this one day, allied forces suffered 60,000 casualties

We then visit the massive **Lochnager Crater** (shown here) where 74,000 lbs of ammonal was detonated prior to an attack undertaken on 1st July 1916. This is the largest crater on the Western Front and one of the best.

We then move to the ridge of **Pozieres**. 23,000 Australian men died in 2 months here. We visit the Windmill Monument to Australian soldiers with the inscription:
"... captured on 4th August by Australian troops, who fell more thickly on this ridge than any other."

We will take lunch at the quirky and renowned **Tommy Café**, owned by a local who has been hunting and collecting trench artifacts for decades.



After lunch we visit **Les Abris Museum** at Albert and see the underground tunnels used for air raid shelters in both wars. See vivid depictions of life in the trenches in WW1.

This museum is located under the unusual and beautiful Albert Basilica, which was repeatedly damaged by both sides' artillery during the Great War, and had to be almost completely reconstructed.

We will overnight at a charming three star hotel in Albert this evening.

Day Three Wednesday 06 June



Leaving the Somme and travelling North after breakfast, we visit the town of **Bullecourt** – see the "Digger" statue (below) commemorating the 10,000 Australian casualties during these two battles.

We visit **Vimy Ridge**, the stunningly beautiful Canadian memorial. It looks over the rolling fields of the lowland coalfields of the North. The central statue of a woman represents Canada - a young nation mourning her dead. It is breathtaking.

Close by is **Notre Dame de Villette**, an evocative and vast French cemetery and the Byzantine-style Basilica, which is a must see. This vast cemetery holds 23,000 crosses on graves, designed in burial so that from wherever you look you cannot see the corners or end of the graves. The ossuary contains the same amount again of French soldiers "known only unto God"

We travel over the border into the Belgian town of **Ieper** (or its French name: Ypres) The Aussies called this town "Wipers" and it was the scene of three fierce battles.

Ypres was the only town in Belgium never to fall to the Germans during World War One.

We stay two nights in the heart of the medieval town in a lovely 4 star hotel only 5 minutes walk from the Menin Gate.

You are free to attend the moving Menin Gate ceremony at 8 pm each night - in which 8 buglers play **The Last Post** - and wander round this delightful town admiring the totally restored architecture that was decimated during WW1.



Day Four Thursday 07 June

This morning after walking through the Menin Gate memorial we then go to nearby **Hooge Crater cemetery** - scene of the tunnellers - which has a fascinating museum and is on the Menin road towards Passchendaele.

From here we go to see the intact concrete **Essex Farm "dressing station"**, scene of the famous poem "In Flanders Fields Where Poppies Grow" by John McCrae written whilst tending to battlefield victims. See the grave of 15 year old Valentine Strudwick - too young to enlist but one of thousands who went for the "adventure".



From here it is on to the **Passchendaele museum at Zonnebeke** in the grounds of the Chateau - 2 miles from Tyne Cot. This new museum is a passionate labour of love by local historians – and is one of the best on WW1. Everyone loves it.

It is a short drive from this to the extraordinary **Tyne Cot cemetery** at Passchendaele. Largest British War cemetery in the world, its dimensions are stunning. It is of especial significance to Australians as they took the German Bunker on which this cemetery was built, and their graves are the most prominent and the most moving – you will see why when you get there.

On our way back to Ypres we shall stop at the **Langemark Cemetery** - one of the few German cemeteries allowed to exist in the Ypres Salient. See the Students and the Comrades cemeteries, German bunkers, Pilkem Ridge and the mourning sculptures.

Day Five Friday 08 June

We begin the day with a moving visit to the medieval Cloth Hall "**In Flanders Fields**" museum in Ypres - a pictorial comment on the futility of the Great War.

Free time this morning to pack, wander around leper, study the Menin Gate and maybe buy some Belgian chocolates!

Before heading back over the French border again we make a brief stop at one of the scenes of the famous 1914 Christmas Truce in which Allies and Germans exchanged gifts with their enemy and sang songs together on Christmas Day.

We'll see the enormous **Spanbroekmoelen** Crater one of 19 craters exploded in the Battle of Messines

- Hellfire Corner – one of the most dangerous sites on the battlefield
- Hyde Park corner, the Berkshire round cemetery with lions guarding
- Ploegstreet Wood cemetery –scene of heavy Australian fighting

In **Fromelles** just over the border we go to the **VC Corner cemetery** at Australian memorial park and see the famous **Cobbers** statue (see right) and battlefield at Fromelles.

The VC Corner cemetery is unique because it has no gravestones and contains only Australians. On the wall at the rear are the names of 1,299 Australians who died in the battle and have no known grave.

Rose bushes mark the numbers of the men whose bodies were recovered. The cemetery was situated in no-man's land between the Australian and German lines in 1916.

This was the first scene of Australian involvement on the Western Front and you will learn just why it was such a disastrous one.



