

Battlefield Exploration



Battlefield Exploration

Kruisekestraat 197 bus 0001
8940 Wervik
Belgium

T +32 486 968 307

info@battlefieldexploration.be

www.battlefieldexploration.be

Canadians in Flanders Fields

The battlefields of Ypres are linked to Canadian history like no other foreign battlefield. After having been trained at the Salisbury Plains in the Winter 1914-1915 the Canadian troops were shipped to the Ypres Salient, where they thought to find a quiet sector on the Western Front. Less than a month later they were involved in the very first gas attacks on the Western Front. A horrible experience in Spring of 1915, but in 1916 the Battle of Mount Sorrel proved even more horrendous. And in 1917 the worst battle in Canadian history was fought on the muddy fields of Passchendaele.

The Tour

Your professional battlefield guide will come pick you up at your accommodation* at about 9 am.

From Ypres we drive to **Essex Farm Cemetery** to get the story of the Canadians in the 2nd Battle of Ypres, infamous for the first use of poison gas on the Western front. You can visit the remains of the former *Advanced Dressing Station* and see the *John McCrae Memorial*. The Canadian doctor wrote his famous poem '*In Flanders Fields*' right there. On the cemetery you'll also see the graves of VC winner Thomas Barratt and the 15-year-old Valentine Joe Strudwick.

Next we drive along the frontline that was established after the 1st gas attacks. Via *Mauser Ridge* we drive to St Julian to see the **Kitcheners Wood Memorial**. After the 1st gas attack the Canadian 1st Division was told to recapture the terrain. 10th and 16th battalions were sent forward in a counterattack on Kitcheners Wood, but were destroyed. The village of St Julian was kept in Canadian hands though. In the centre of the village we'll hear the story of Frederick Fisher, VC.

In Langemark we visit the **German military cemetery**. It was from here that the Germans launched their gas attack on 22nd April 1915. But it was also just north of Langemark – where the German military cemetery is – that the Germans launched the 1st Battle of Ypres with the so-called '*Massacre of the Innocent*'.

Our next visit is to the **Canadian Memorial Park** at **St Julien** where the impressive *Brooding Soldier* towers above the 1915 battlefield. The memorial commemorates the nearly 18,000 Canadians who fought along this frontline during the first German gas attacks in April 1915. All

plants in the memorial park have been brought over from Canada. The *Brooding Soldier* memorial itself was designed by Frederick Chapman Clemesha, who fought in the trenches of the Ypres Salient during the war.

Along 's **Graventafel Ridge** – where the Canadians stood their ground during the first gas attacks and invented the gas mask on the spot – onwards to **Frezenberg** where the **Scottish Memorial** tells the full story of the 3rd Battle of Ypres. The 9th (Scottish) Division had the South African Brigade attached to the division. The site also has a splendid view on the whole of the Ypres Salient battlefields. Just a little further is the only French military cemetery in the Ypres Salient.

Back to Ypres for lunch.

After lunch we'll drive to **St. Eloi** to see the remains of the craters of the *Mine Battle of St. Eloi*. The *Battle of the St. Eloi Craters* was the first major engagement for the 2nd Canadian Division, recently arrived from England. It ended in disaster. British forces had previously blown a series of underground mines to destroy the sector's German defences, but the effort had left massive, mud-filled craters for the attackers to occupy. When the Canadians relieved British troops on the night of 3 April, they found few actual trenches in which to take cover, and most of those were waist-deep in water. A series of German counterattacks on 6 April drove the Canadians out of the muddy craters and sowed confusion throughout the division and at higher headquarters. Through two weeks of hard fighting, Canadian commanders were often unclear as to the location of their troops. Most soldiers dug in under heavy fire and divided by the shell-pocked terrain, could supply their commanders with little accurate information on the progress of the battle. After aerial photography helped reveal the true German and Canadian positions, the battle ground to a halt on 16 April, with enemy forces holding most of the key points. The Canadians suffered 1,373 casualties during the confused fighting at St. Eloi. The Corps commander, Lieutenant-General E.A.H. Alderson, was replaced by Sir Julian Byng, an experienced and respected British general.

From St. Eloi onwards to **Hill 60**, a site that has been left untouched since the end of the Great War and as such provides the visitors with a better understanding of the ruined terrain on which the many battles were fought.

Next along the infamous *Menin Road* and *Hellfire Corner* to the **Canadian Hill 62 Memorial Park** to hear the impressive story of the *Battle of Mount Sorrel*. Just prior to the 1916 Somme offensive the Germans launched an attack on the high ground east of Ypres. The Canadians were pushed back, but cunningly retook the high ground 10 days later.

In Zonnebeke we will then visit the **Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917**. The museum has splendid displays of uniforms, weapons and shells, but also provides excellent insight in the men who fought the war, focussing on different nationalities. The dugout experience and the trenches experience make this visit certainly worthwhile.

Our next visit will be **Tyne Cot Cemetery**, the largest CWGC cemetery of the Great War. It was in the attack on Tyne Cot (4th October 1917) that Sgt Lewis McGee won the VC. He and his comrades of the 40th Battalion Australian Imperial Force captured Tyne Cot under extremely difficult circumstances. Sgt McGee was killed a week later in the attempt to take Passchendaele. He now lies at Tyne Cot Cemetery. Not only the cemetery itself is impressive, so is the *Wall of the Missing*, listing 35,000 names.

From Tyne Cot we drive to **Passchendaele** and the Canadian **Crest Farm Memorial**. The ruins of Passchendaele were the scene of bitter fighting in October and November 1917. The final stage of the 3rd Battle of Ypres resulted in high casualty numbers.

Back to Ypres. End of the tour at about 5.30 pm.

** When accommodated in the Ypres area, there will be no extra charge for the pick-up and drop-off at your accommodation. If you want to be picked up from other places (like Bruges, Ghent, Lille, Arras, ... et cetera), there will be an extra charge for the extra mileage.*

Practical Information

- » **Departure** from your accommodation in Ypres at about 9 am; back in Ypres by 6 pm.
Other departure points (Bruges, Ghent, Lille, ...) are possible, but may result in an extra charge.
- » **Tariff:** € 245 (with a maximum of 7 participants).
 - > If more than 7 participants, tariff will be depending on the coach tariff.
 - > In the price is included: transportation with minibus and professional guide/driver.
 - > Extra entrance fee to be paid during this tour: € 9 p.p. for the MMP1917.
- » **Walking:** only short distances from the car to the actual sites. Never more than 750 yards.

**Want to add a specific site to the itinerary? Or want to combine several itineraries?
Please let us know, and we'll provide a quote!**