

# Battlefield Exploration



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## The Chemin des Dames

*The battlefields of the Champagne area have been left unnoticed just until recent years. The story is mainly a French one, obviously, but still there are lots of lessons to be learned from it. At the Chemin des Dames lies the origin of the serious mutinies in the French armies in 1917. And the Nivelles Offensive also proved vital for lessons concerning the use of tanks and the creeping barrage.*

### The Tour

Your professional battlefield guide will come pick you up at your accommodation\*.

From Ypres we'll drive towards the Chemin des Dames, scene of horrific carnage during the 1917 battle. Our first stop will be the **Moulin de Laffaux**, where a commemorative garden has been laid out.

We'll then continue along the Chemin des Dames passing the **Fort de Malmaison** (with a large German military cemetery) and the **Panorama de la Royère**.

Next onwards to the military cemeteries in **Soupir**. More than 6,000 French, 11,000 German and even nearly 600 Italian casualties have been buried near the village. In **Cerny-en-Laonnais** we'll visit the Remembrance Chapel and the memorial to the Lancashire Lads.

For lunch we'll drive to the Domaine de l'Ailette.

After lunch we'll visit the **Caverne du Dragon**, a museum on the First World War that tells the story of the battle of the Chemin des Dames. The site was an old stone quarry, in operation from the 16th to the 19th century, which became an underground barracks in the Great War. From 1915 it was taken over by German troops who installed electricity, gun positions and dressing stations. The French recaptured it in June 1917 but did not long remain its sole occupants. Both sides occupied it, separated by internal walls. Visitors to the Caverne du Dragon can explore the many tunnels which bear witness to the presence of soldiers. The names and dates carved on the walls remind us that this now empty place was once 'home' to many men. The *Caverne du Dragon* was so named by German soldiers who saw in it something of the seven-headed dragon of the *Nibelungen* myth.

Indeed the seven openings carved into the old quarry for machine gun fire were often compared to the mouths of the fabulous beast.

Next onwards to the **Monument des Basques**, a remarkable memorial to the troops of Southern France.

Via the **Plateau du Californie**, where a monument to Napoleon can be found, we drive to **Craonelle** to look out on the Aisne Valley. We will also get to know the story of the tanks attacking during the Battle of the Chemin des Dames. Our last stop – after driving through the village of **Craonne**, known for the famous song on the mutinies of the French army – will be the **Monument National des Chars d'Assaut**, the national tank memorial at Berry-au-Bac.

Back to Ypres. End of the tour at about 7 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 8.30 am; back in Ypres by 7 pm.  
Other departure points (Bruges, Ghent, Lille, ...) are possible, but may result in an extra charge.
- » **Tariff:** € 375 (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 fees to be paid during this tour: € 7,50 p.p. (Caverne du Dragon).
- » **Walking:** only short distances from the car to the actual sites. Never more than 500 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!**