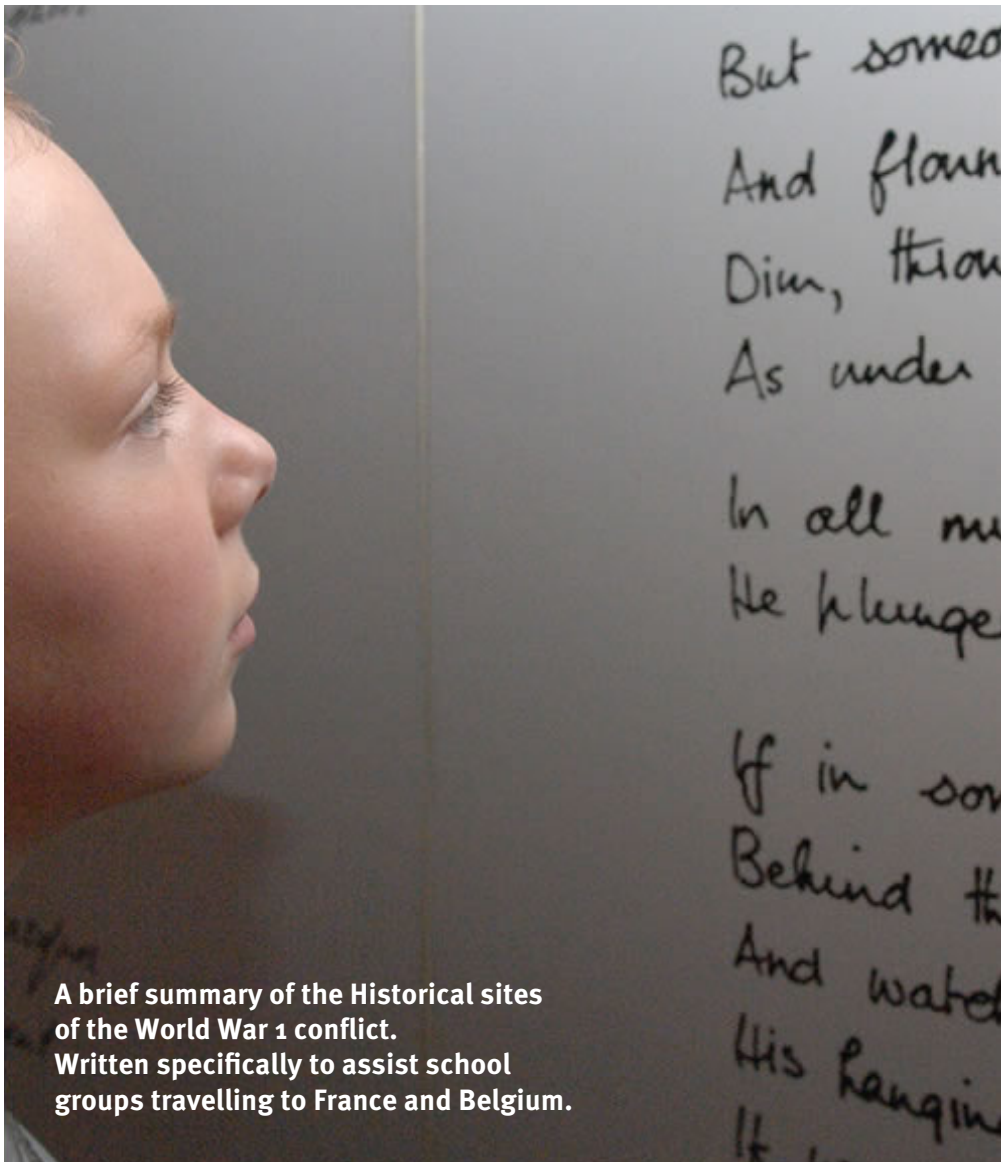


World War I

Where to go and what happened



A brief summary of the Historical sites of the World War 1 conflict. Written specifically to assist school groups travelling to France and Belgium.

World War 1

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This guide is designed primarily as a planning resource for staff, whilst NST holds the copyright feel free to photocopy and issue the maps and information sheets as you think appropriate. The guide is intended to be a brief guide to some of the events of the WW1 Western front conflict where you are likely to visit.

It is by no means a complete gazetteer of all the sites available and many well known and hundreds of lesser known sites are omitted. You may well wish to make visits other than those listed particularly if visiting a cemetery or battlefield site that has specific local connections to your school.

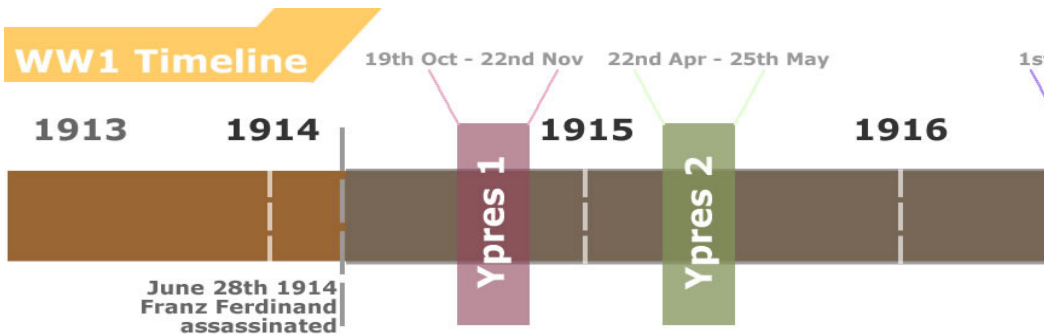
Finding a guide book which will help you plan such a visit is becoming easier by the year as the range of specialist battlefield publications continues to expand rapidly. The problems that you may face are twofold. One is making a selection from the huge choice of literature available and it is hoped that the bibliography at the end of this booklet will be of some use in this.

The guide covers four areas of the Western Front;

- the Ypres Salient,
- the Somme,
- the Arras/Vimy sector and
- the Belgian Army Sector

Each area would constitute a full or part day visit. Most British school groups tend to concentrate on the old British battlefields, particularly Ypres and the Somme, and this is reflected in the emphasis given to these areas in the guide.

The Guide includes Historical Notes providing a brief outline of events in each area, maps, and information sheets on specific sites. The outline of events is intended to be the basis of any pre-visit briefing and to help make the link between the events being studied and the sites themselves. The outline maps of the principal areas are intended to show the location of the sites visited relative to the battlefield as a whole.



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Chapter 2 - Ypres and the Salient

Ypres

Before World War One, Ypres was one of the most picturesque towns in Flanders. Its major buildings, the Cathedral and the Cloth Hall, dated from the period of the towns greatest prosperity as a cloth centre in the late Middle Ages. At its height, the town and surrounding countryside had a population of 200,000. By 1914 it was a sleepy market town of less than 20,000 inhabitants which drew its main income from hops.

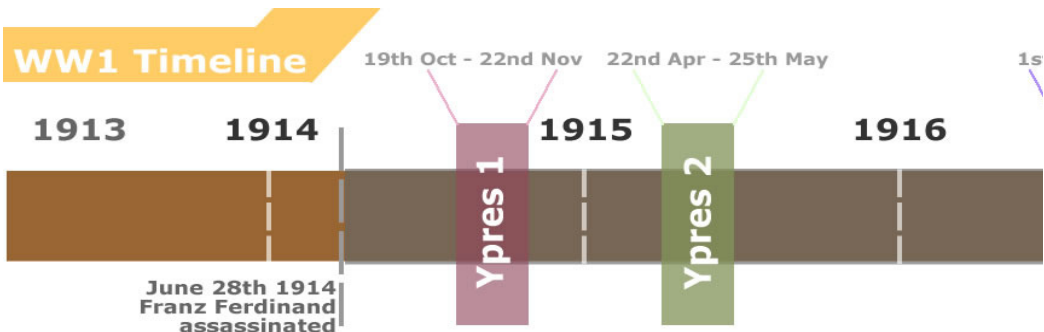
The Salient

A salient is a piece of land pushing into hostile territory so that the enemy is ranged around it on three sides and it thus by its nature a dangerous place to be. British troops in the Ypres Salient were subject to fire not only from 3 sides but, until the capture of the Messines Ridge in 1917, also from the rear. A combination of geography, the military technology of the period, and the differing tactics of the two sides made it a terrible place – the most hated and feared sector of the whole Western Front.

Geography

The name Flanders derives from the old Flemish for flooded land. This area of heavy clay soils is, by nature, a bog requiring constant and careful drainage. Nowadays the landscape looks solid enough but to this day a farmer failing to keep his drains in good order is heavily penalised. Under constant shelling the drainage quickly broke down and this very fragile landscape reverted to a bog. It was bad enough for the Germans on the high ground and they were able to drain much of their water away into the lower British trenches.

The town of Ypres is situated on the edge of a flat plain which stretches off to west and north. To the east a series of low ridges run round the town, roughly in a semi-circle, before joining the Messines Ridge which goes off south towards the French border, like the tail on a slightly skewed question mark. The

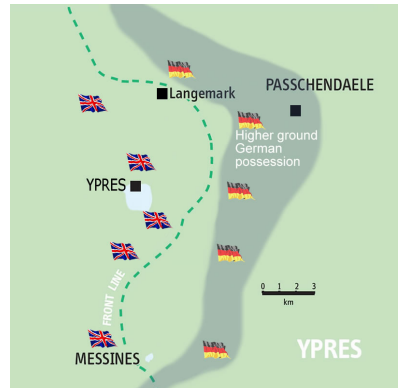


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Chapter 2 - Ypres and the Salient

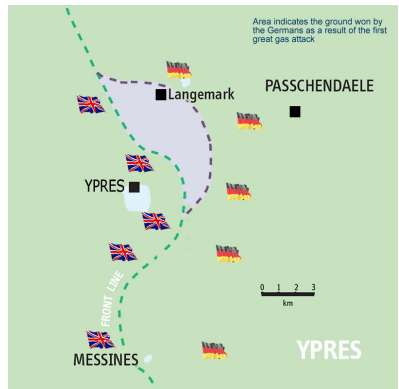
1st Ypres – 19th October-22nd November 1914

In the closing phases of the 'race to the sea' a German attempt to break through to the French channel ports was stopped on the ridges above Ypres. There were terrible casualties on both sides. The B.E.F, the old regular army, was more or less destroyed in the fighting. The German drive to the sea was halted but they were left in possession of the ridges. The Ypres Salient had come into being.

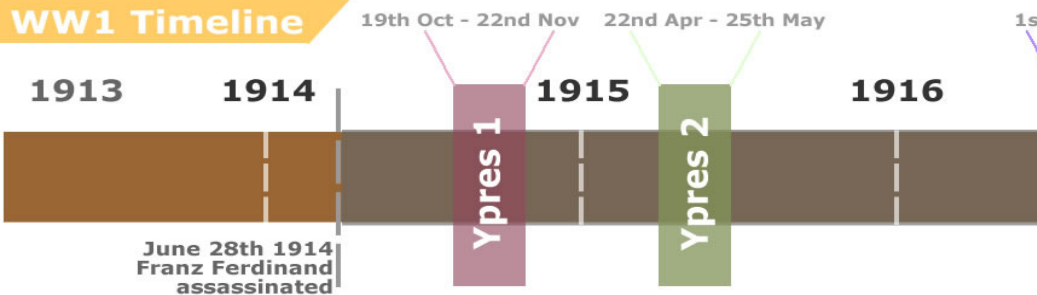


2nd Ypres – 22nd April-25th May 1915

On the 22nd April the Germans experimented with the first use of poison gas in the north of the Salient. The extent of their success was so unexpected that they failed to take full advantage. A desperate situation for the Allies was relieved by an effective but costly series of counter attacks, largely by Canadian troops. By the end of May a German breakthrough had been prevented but a large dent had been made in the north of the Salient and Plumer, the British commander, pulled the line back to form a semicircle running in an arc not much more than two miles from the town. Throughout 1916 things were fairly static in the Salient as attention was turned to the Somme, 70 miles to the south.



WW1 Timeline



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Chapter 3 - the Somme Offensive

The Somme area saw two periods of heavy fighting in World War One; the first from July–November 1916 and the second in the summer of 1918, where a successful Allied counter attack after the retreats of spring 1918 led to the first great armoured breakthrough of modern warfare.

It is the first of these periods, the Allied offensive of 1916, saw the most terrible losses in the history of the British Army – 60,000 casualties of whom about 20,000 were dead.



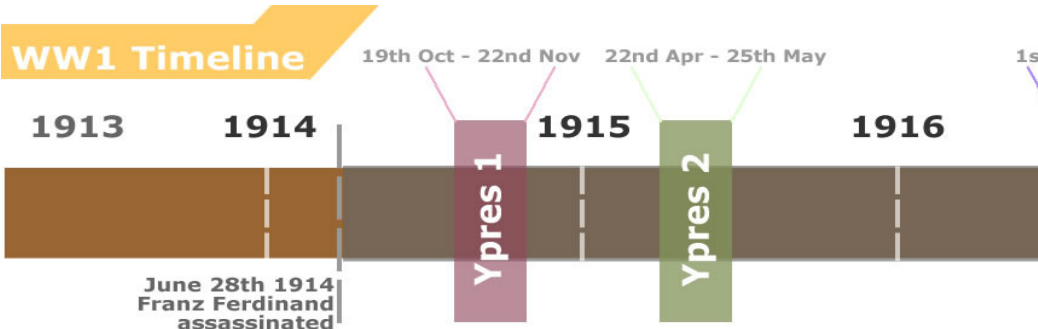
The Area

The Somme is a largely agricultural area in the old principality of Picardy.

The regional centre is the city of Amiens. In 1914, as today, the main crops were wheat and sugar beet, farmed on a low chalk ridge intersected by small sleepy rivers such as the Somme and the Ancre. The main town behind the British lines was Albert, a quiet provincial town of about 7,000 pop. Dominated by its huge Basilica with its statue of the Golden Virgin. From Albert, an old Roman Road ran westward to Bapaume. The front line ran across this road about 3km from the town. This was to be the centre of the 1916 offensive.

The German Defences

The Germans had had 18 months to construct an elaborate series of defences along the tops of the chalk ridges. Where the ridges were cut by valleys, the German front line pulled back along the contour line. The dry chalk soil enabled tunnels and dug outs to cut deep. There were 3-4 systems of defences, giving a total of anything up to 12 trench lines.



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Chapter 3 - the Somme Offensive

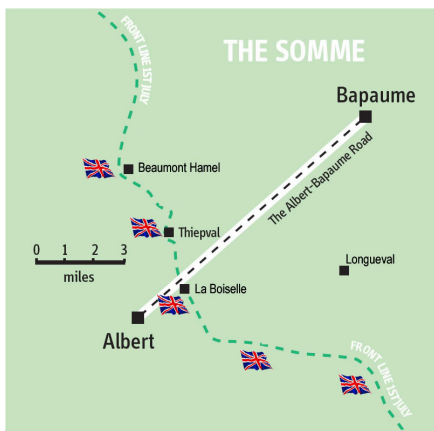
known as Pals Battalions, e.g. Accrington Pals, Grimsby Chums. Some were drawn from specific occupations, e.g. Glasgow City Tramways Battalion. In some, e.g. Liverpool

Commercials, companies could also have a common link, one being made up of clerks from the White Star Shipping office, another from Cunards.

The Plan

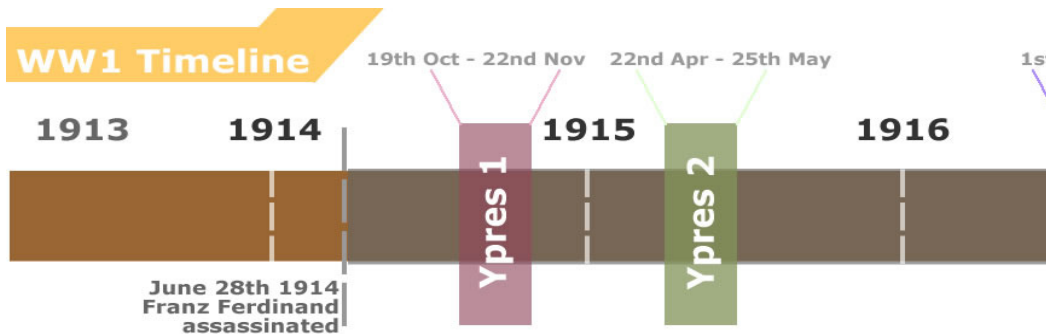
The original plan was for a joint offensive by the British and French along a 43 mile front.

After the German attack on the French at Verdun in February 1916, this was reduced to a 26 mile front, of which the British were to have 18 miles. The French were desperate for a British offensive to take the pressure off Verdun.



The main attack was to be carried out by Rawlinson's 4th Army. He mistrusted the ability of his infantry, because of its lack of experience, and drew up a starkly simple plan of attack for them which relied on heavy preparatory bombardment.

A week-long bombardment would destroy the German defences, break down the barbed wire and kill all the defenders. The infantry would simply walk over and occupy the German front line. Reserves would move through them to the German second line. Once they were secure, the artillery would move up and repeat the



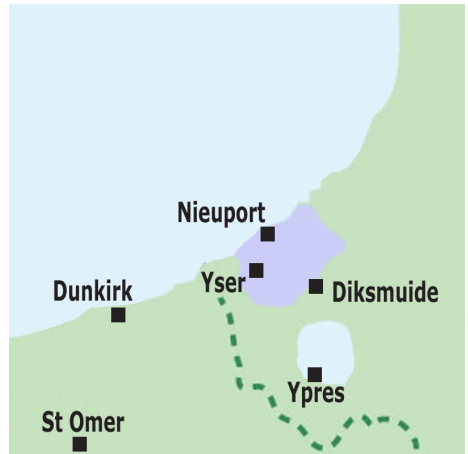
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Chapter 4 - the Belgian Army Sector

A note about place names

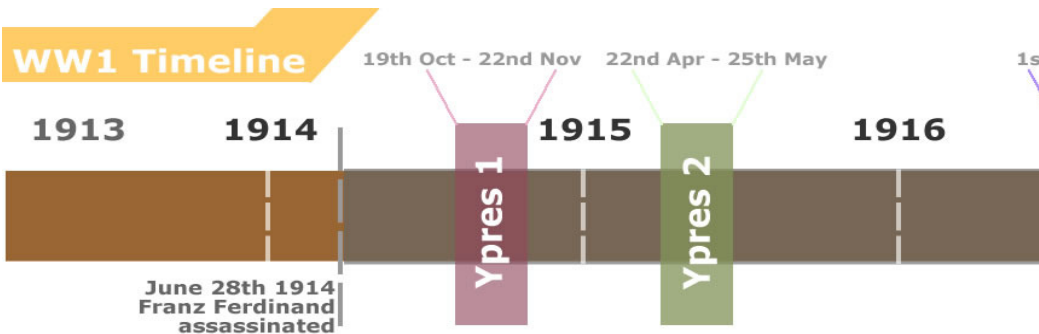
Most place names in Belgian Flanders have both a Flemish and a French form. Nowadays the Flemish is universally used in Flanders, but in 1914 French was the official language. This is what the British Army used, and what has gone down in history books. The French is used throughout the text with the Flemish in brackets in the sub-headings e.g. Ypres (Ieper), Missines (Mesen) etc.

Just north of the Ypres area, roughly from the village of Boezinge to the coast at Nieuwpoort, is the area of the Allied line held by Belgian troops during the period of static warfare. You may well choose not to visit sites in this area, but if you have accommodation situated towards the Belgian Coast, the following sites might be of interest.



Diksmuide(Dixmude)

Like Ypres, the town had been an important cloth centre in the middle ages. It declined when the Yser estuary silted up and had turned from cloth to dairy produce in order to earn its living. In October 1914 it lay in the path of the German advance and, in a vicious fight lasting many days, the Belgian and French troops were able to hold them there. As part of the effort to prevent a German breakthrough the Belgians had opened the sluice gates at Nieuwpoort as the



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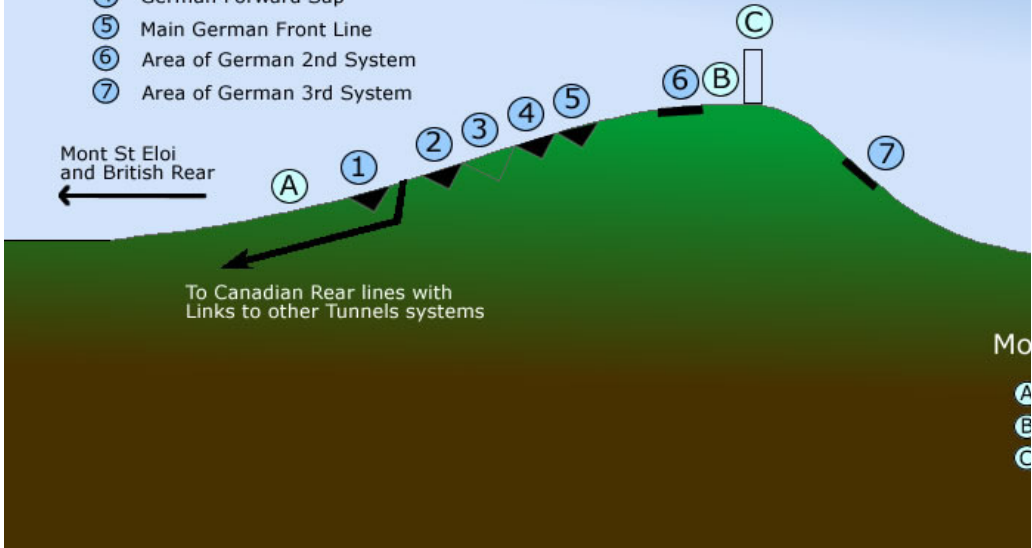
Chapter 5 - the Arras/Vimy Sector



Vimy Ridge

World War 1 Features

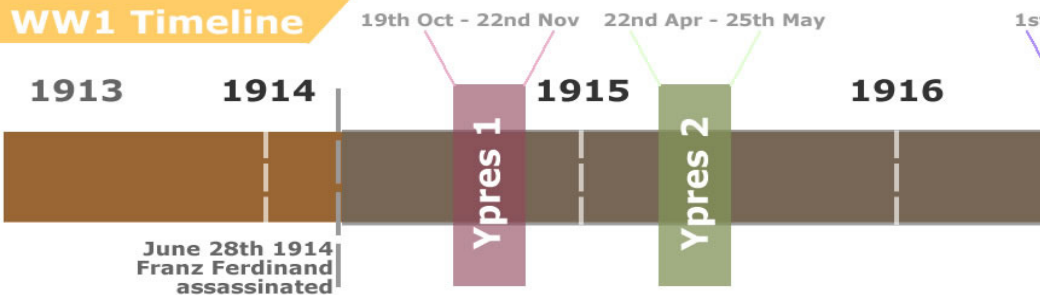
- ① Main Canadian Front Line
- ② Canadian Forward Sap
- ③ Pre-existing Mine Crater (No Man's Land)
- ④ German Forward Sap
- ⑤ Main German Front Line
- ⑥ Area of German 2nd System
- ⑦ Area of German 3rd System



The Ridge Today

The capture of the formidable German defences on Vimy Ridge by frontal assault was an impressive achievement. It was also the only occasion on which all Canadian troops on the Western Front fought together as one united force.

WW1 Timeline





Thus it is of particular importance in Canada's remembrance of the war.

The Canadian Memorial – This is Canada's major memorial to its troops in W.W.1. It stands at the top of Hill 145 surrounded by land given to the Canadian government and preserved in its battle scarred condition. The twin pillars of Adriatic marble symbolise the two nations that go to make up the Canadian nation – the British and the French. The wall behind the memorial carries the names of 11,285 Canadian dead whose bodies were never found. Some 620,000 Canadians served in W.W.1. and 66,655 died. Of those, about 20,000 have no known grave.

The Trenches – These mark the front lines prior to the attack and although artificially preserved in concrete, they do follow the correct lines. They provide a vivid example of how narrow no man's Land could be in certain parts of the Western Front. Just behind the Canadian front line is the entrance to the Grange Subway, one of the tunnel systems to be built to get the attacking Canadian troops into the front line area safe from enemy shellfire.

Notre Dame De Lorette

