

# Your Guide To The WW1 Battlefields



Halsbury  
travel

# Somme



## Somme 1916 Museum

This museum, 10m below the British garrison town of Albert, will help your students better understand what life was like for soldiers in the trenches during the Somme offensive of July 1916.

**Help your students better understand what life was like for soldiers in the trenches.**

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Your students will have the chance to see weapons, uniforms, and other artefacts of the era. And in the museum's new exhibition hall, the personal stories of nine soldiers will help your students to understand the human experience of war.



## Thiepval Memorial to the Missing

If you want your students to better comprehend the scale of devastation caused by the First World War, then you need to include a visit to Thiepval Memorial to the Missing on your WW1 battlefield tour.

**Understand the scale of devastation caused by the First World War.**

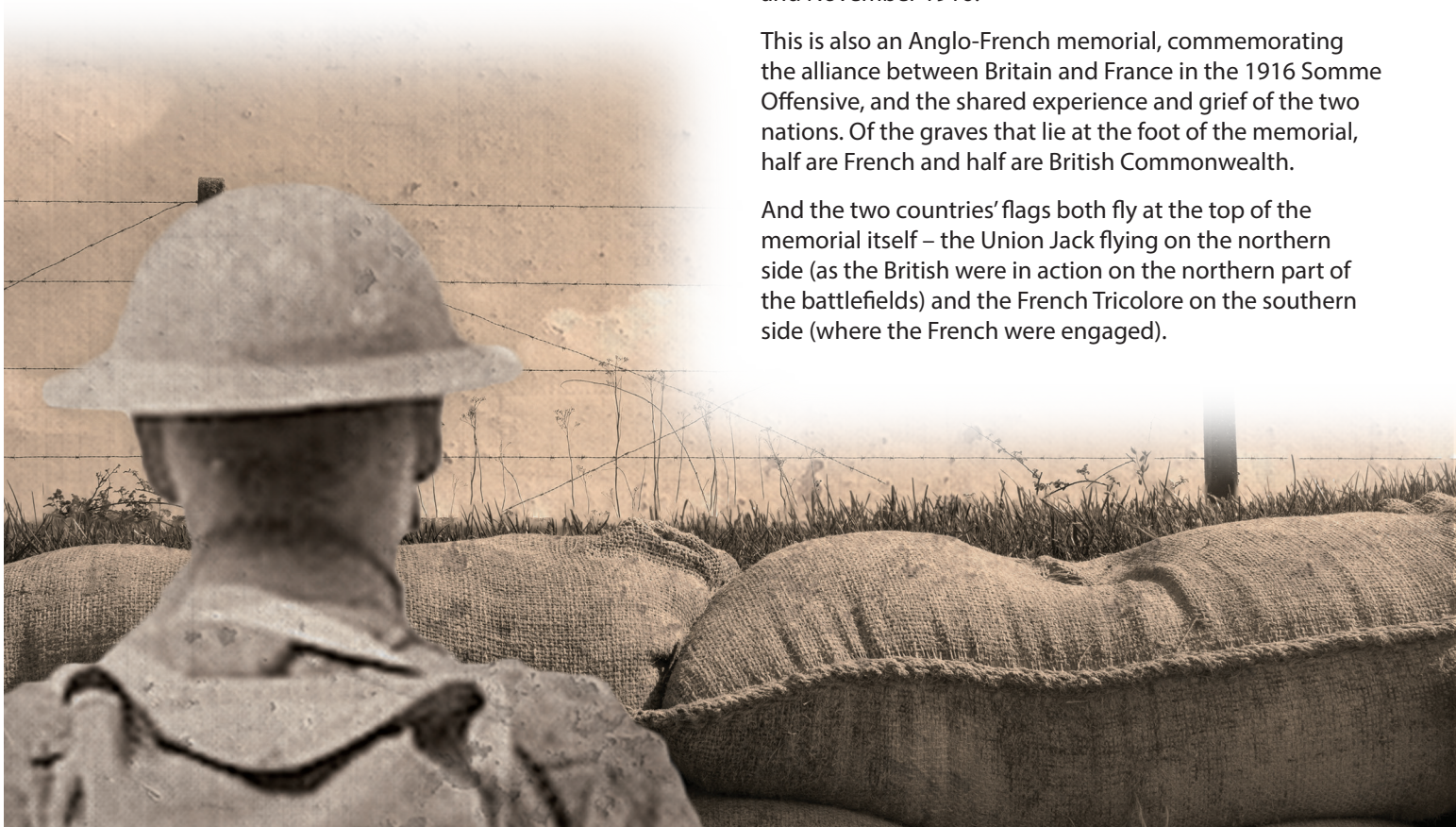
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The memorial bears the names of 72,194 men who lost their lives on the battlefields of the Somme before 20th March 1918 (the day before the German 'Operation Michael' was launched, where a further 177,739 casualties were suffered by the British) and have no known grave.

90% of those commemorated here lost their lives in the 1916 Battle of the Somme, which took place between July and November 1916.

This is also an Anglo-French memorial, commemorating the alliance between Britain and France in the 1916 Somme Offensive, and the shared experience and grief of the two nations. Of the graves that lie at the foot of the memorial, half are French and half are British Commonwealth.

And the two countries' flags both fly at the top of the memorial itself – the Union Jack flying on the northern side (as the British were in action on the northern part of the battlefields) and the French Tricolore on the southern side (where the French were engaged).



# Somme



## Vimy Ridge

The Canadian National Vimy Memorial is a memorial to all the Canadians who lost their lives in the First World War. A visit here will help your students to understand the global reach of the conflict.

### Help your students to understand the global reach of the conflict.

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Canada was still a British dominion in 1914 and so when the United Kingdom declared war on Germany it also dragged Canada into the war.

Of the 625,000 soldiers that enrolled, 60,000 died. And on the Western Front, one in seven Canadian soldiers was killed.

The memorial itself is hugely symbolic and definitely worth a visit. It is the powerful realisation of a competition-winning design that will really help your students to consider the devastating effects of the First World War.

The memorial consists of two 30m high pylons, representing France and Canada – two nations united in sorrow and the sacrifice of war.

Challenge your students to work out who or what the human figures on the memorial represent – there are 20 of them in total!



At the top of the memorial, a group of eight figures, known as the Chorus, represent Justice, Peace (the highest figure holding a torch), Hope, Charity, Honour, Faith, Truth and Knowledge.

Between the two pylons is the figure of a dying soldier, known as the Spirit of Sacrifice, and his comrade, to whom he has passed a torch.

Two groups of seven figures in total are found either end of the front wall, and collectively they are known as the Defenders.

On the southern side of the memorial, flanking the steps, are two figures representing the parents of the soldiers who were killed.



And finally, a lone female figure looks down on a stone sarcophagus. She represents 'Mother Canada', or 'Canada Bereft', with the tomb representing Canada's war dead.

While the memorial is impressive and loaded with symbolism, it is not the only site of interest within the park. There is also a section of original trenches, both Allied and German, which can be visited. In fact, this is one of the few places on the Western Front where you are able to walk through a section of the 'original' trenches.

There are also sections of tunnel you can visit, and some of the park has been left in its cratered state to allow visitors to see the effects of war on the landscape.



# Somme



## Newfoundland Memorial Park

On 1st July 1916, the Battle of the Somme began. 800 men from the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, a Canadian regiment, took part in the advance on the German front line. Half an hour later, just 68 remained alive and uninjured.

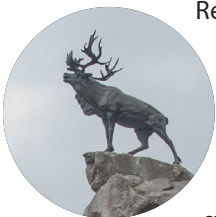
**Walk across a battlefield, study a preserved trench system and learn more about the role of Commonwealth forces in the First World War**

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Newfoundland Memorial Park is one of just two Canadian National Historic Sites outside of Canada - the other is Vimy Ridge. The park is a memorial to those men lost on that fateful day. It's also a memorial to the other Newfoundlanders lost during WW1, as well as the soldiers of other nationalities who died on this spot.

Here your students will have the opportunity to walk across a battlefield. They'll be able to study a preserved trench system. And they'll learn more about the role of Commonwealth forces in the First World War.

Make sure you leave enough time to visit the famous caribou monument on the western side of the park. The caribou is the symbol of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, and this one looks out across the very spot where the regiment advanced towards the enemy line, many of them not making it.



The monument is surrounded by plants native to Newfoundland. And it also stands over three

plaques which bear the names of 814

Newfoundlanders lost at land and sea during WW1.



## Lochnagar Crater

Lochnagar Crater is the largest man-made crater on the Western Front, and the ideal place to learn about the use of mines in WW1.

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The mine itself was laid by the British Army's 179th Tunnelling Company Royal Engineers underneath a German stronghold known as Schwabenhöhe. It was detonated at 7.28am on 1st July 1916, two minutes before 'Zero Hour', at the start of the Battle of the Somme.

Although it detonated successfully, it did not have the desired effect and the defending Germans were still able to find positions from which to fire at the advancing British infantry, many hundreds of whom were killed.

The mine was named after Lochnagar Street, the British communication trench from which the shaft was sunk.

The crater is 30m deep and 100m wide and it's thought that the remains of many British, French and German soldiers are still left undiscovered there – which is why a memorial service is held at the crater every year on 1st July.

There is also a wooden cross that stands above the crater. Made from timbers reclaimed from a deconsecrated church in Durham, it serves as a reminder that a large number of the men lost here were from Tyneside, and many of them were miners, drafted for their expertise in tunnelling.



# Somme



## Ulster Tower

The Ulster Tower lies close to Thiepval Wood and is a memorial to the men of the 36th Ulster Division, thousands of whom were killed or injured on 1st July 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

As the Battle of the Somme began, the 36th Ulster Division advanced towards enemy lines - managing to capture the German stronghold of Schwaben Redoubt and getting close to German field gun positions.

But as the day progressed, they were forced to fall back, as it was too difficult to get supplies of ammunition, food and water to the front to sustain the attack. By end of the day, the division had suffered nearly 5,000 casualties.

The memorial is a replica of Helen's Tower on the Clondeboye Estate in County Down, where many of the soldiers from the 36th Ulster Division trained before being sent to the front line.

The 21m high tower houses a memorial room, as well as a caretaker flat. The memorial room features memorial plaques around the walls, and a remembrance book for visitors to sign.



## Delville Wood

Still a British dominion in 1914, South Africa was dragged into WW1 when Britain declared war on Germany.

Delville Wood, known as 'Devil's Wood' by soldiers, is the only memorial dedicated to South African losses on the Western Front. South Africa sent 229,000 men to fight in the First World War - 10,000 of those were never to return home.

Delville Wood was chosen for the memorial to South African forces as it was the site of the South Africans' first major action on the Western Front in July 1916. They showed outstanding courage here, when they came under fire from the Germans, as they attempted to capture the wood.

It was decided that the wood, which was almost completely destroyed, would be replanted, with two rows of oak trees lining the avenue leading up to the monument. The oak trees there now come from acorns grown on a tree in South Africa that had in turn been brought to that country by a Frenchman in the 17th century.



# Ypres [Flanders]



## Passchendaele Museum

Housed in an historic château, the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 tells the story of the Battle of Passchendaele (a.k.a. the Third Battle of Ypres) – a battle that has come to symbolise the futility of war. More than half a million casualties were suffered here for a territorial gain of just 8km.

**Your students will better understand the personal experiences of WWI soldiers.**

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This is an interactive museum, which means that your students can really immerse themselves in the history. They'll discover historical artefacts, authentic letters, uniforms and video clips.

The big draw of this museum is the fact that it offers your students the chance to experience life in the trenches. There is a reconstructed dugout, complete with bunks, communication posts and even an operating theatre. And in the grounds are reconstructed trenches. Both offer students the opportunity to really get a feel for the claustrophobic conditions soldiers were living in.



Plus, if your students are aged 14 years and above, you can choose for them to take part in the Platoon Experience. This will see them transformed into an Australian platoon from 1917, and follows their story along the Ypres-Roeselare railway to Tyne Cot Cemetery.

They'll wear period costume and will each become a particular soldier. Throughout their experience, they'll discover more about that soldier's experiences, before finding out what his eventual fate was.

## In Flanders Fields Museum

If you want your students to better understand the human impact of war, then we recommend a visit to the In Flanders Fields Museum. Housed in Ypres' iconic Cloth Hall, the museum aims to bring the war to life for visitors, to help prevent history repeating itself.

You'll be provided with a poppy bracelet on arrival at the museum. As you explore the exhibition, you'll be able to use that bracelet to scan and read personal stories supplied by those who lived through the war. You can even use the bracelet to send those stories to your email address, so that you can refer back to them.



**Your students will be encouraged to think about why it's important to learn about and remember the First World War.**

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As you make your way around the museum, your students will be encouraged to think about why it's important to learn about and remember the First World War. And you can even volunteer to take part in the museum's Names List project, which is seeking to compile a list of all those who died in the region during the First World War.

# Ypres [Flanders]



## Tyne Cot British Cemetery

The largest Commonwealth military cemetery in the world, Tyne Cot is the final resting place of nearly 12,000 soldiers who died between October 1914 and September 1918.

It's an ideal visit for helping your students understand the scale of devastation caused by WW1. It's also the perfect place to think about the aftermath of war, and how to remember this violent period in history.

Around 70% of the graves in the cemetery are of unidentified British or Commonwealth soldiers. These are just a few of the 90,000 who died in the Ypres Salient but could not be identified.



These 90,000 names are listed on four memorials across the Ypres Salient, one of which can be found at Tyne Cot. This really demonstrates the scale of loss and sacrifice during the First World War.

You'll notice that while most of the graves are laid out in a very regimented fashion, there are some near the Cross of Sacrifice that seem to be laid out a bit more haphazardly.

These date from between October 1917 and March 1918, after the British had captured the area from the Germans and turned it into an Advanced Dressing Station. These are the graves of the men who were treated here but died of their wounds.

When King George V visited the cemetery in 1922, he made a speech including these poignant words:

**“We can truly say that the whole circuit of the Earth is girdled with the graves of our dead. In the course of my pilgrimage, I have many times asked myself whether there can be more potent advocates of peace upon Earth through the years to come, than this massed multitude of silent witnesses to the desolation of war.”**

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## Menin Gate

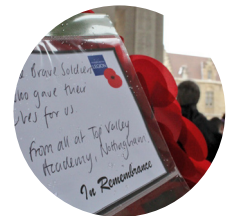
The Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing is a memorial to 54,389 British and Commonwealth soldiers who lost their lives in the Ypres Salient prior to 16th August 1917 and have no known grave.

This is the road along which the soldiers walked out of Ypres and into battle, which makes it a poignant place for a memorial.

**Every day, the famous Last Post ceremony is performed at the Menin Gate.**

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The Menin Gate is a living memorial. In the countryside surrounding Ypres, the remains of soldiers are still being discovered. If they are identified as those of a soldier named on the Menin Gate, that name is removed from the memorial and the soldier receives a proper burial within one of the nearby military cemeteries.



Every day, the famous Last Post ceremony is performed at the Menin Gate and, if you can, we really would recommend trying to fit this into your tour, as it's a poignant and memorable event for students to participate in.

# Ypres [Flanders]



## Langemark Cemetery

Langemark is a German cemetery and a visit here will help your students understand that there were devastating losses on both sides. Over 44,000 soldiers are buried here.

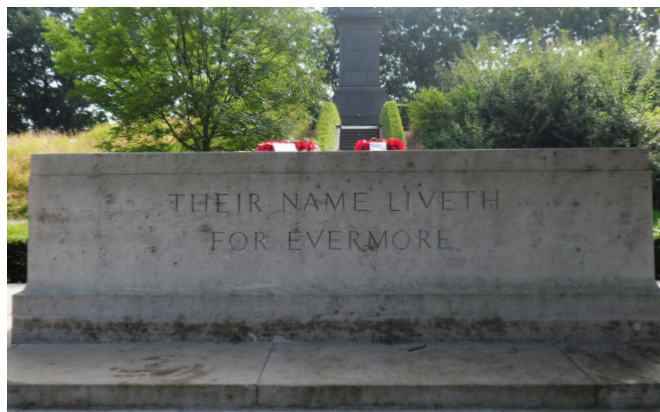
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Close to the entrance is a mass grave known as the Comrades Grave (*Kamaraden Grab*). This is the final resting place of nearly 25,000 soldiers, of whom nearly 8,000 are unidentified. The names of those who have been identified, including German Ace Werner Voss, are inscribed on bronze tablets around the edge.

There is also an area of the cemetery known as the 'Studentenfriedhof' (student cemetery), where the graves of 3,000 young student volunteers are located. The legend surrounding their deaths is sometimes referred to in German as 'Kinder mord' (massacre of the innocents) and became an important tool of Nazi propaganda. In fact, Hitler, who had served in the area during the war, made a visit to this cemetery in 1940.

So a visit to Langemark Cemetery is also a good lesson in how history can be manipulated and used to further political goals.



## Essex Farm

Essex Farm is a must if your group have looked at the poem *In Flanders Fields*, as it was inspired by events that took place in this area. It's also a great place to talk about teenagers during the First World War.

**A must if your group have looked at the poem *In Flanders Fields*.**

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A former dressing station established by the Canadian artillery, Essex Farm is located within the John McCrae Memorial Site. 1200 servicemen are buried or commemorated here.

John McCrae wrote the famous poem *In Flanders Fields*, after the death of his close friend, Alexis Helmer, in May 1915. There is a memorial to the composition of the poem in the cemetery.

This is also the final resting place of one of the youngest British casualties – rifleman Valentine Joe Strudwick. Rifleman Strudwick was just 15 years old when he died – he told army recruiters he was 17 so that they would allow him to enlist.





# Ypres [Flanders]



## Yorkshire Trench

For those interested in the construction of trenches, and what life was like for soldiers, Yorkshire Trench is a brilliant visit.

**Learn about the construction of trenches and what life was like for soldiers.**

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Yorkshire Trench is a preserved trench in the middle of what is now an industrial estate – which in many ways is a stark reminder of how life moves on even after something as catastrophic as war.

It was discovered in 1992 by a group of amateur archaeologists known as the 'Diggers'. There are actually two sections of trench here – the 1915 section is marked out by a wooden walkway.

The 1917 section has been reconstructed. Much of this area is below sea level, and so the water table often flooded the trenches. This could cause serious health issues for the soldiers, including the dreaded 'trench foot'.

To help to combat this, a system of inverted A-frames and suspended duckboards was used – allowing the water to drain away underneath the walkway. And you can see this system for yourselves in the 1917 section of the trench.



## Talbot House

On your battlefields tour, you will, of course, visit trenches to experience what life was like for soldiers on the Front. But that's just one (albeit, incredibly important) aspect of what life was like for soldiers in the First World War.

**Rank was left at the door, and the men were allowed a little piece of normality.**

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So a visit to Talbot House, an 'every-man's club' in Poperinge, is a wonderful insight into other aspects of life at the Front.

Talbot House was open for three years from the end of 1915. It hosted thousands of servicemen, for whom it was a home-from-home. It had a lovely garden, where men could enjoy some much needed peace and quiet, and firstly a chapel, and then a concert hall, in the hop loft.

It was also a place where men could socialise and even catch up with friends and family who were also serving on the Western Front. Rank was left at the door, and the men were allowed a little piece of normality.

Essentially, Talbot House was an incredibly important place for those serving on the Front, as it was focused on keeping up morale. A visit to the museum here will teach your students how this was achieved and why it was so important.



# Ypres [Flanders]



## Hill 62 Museum/Sanctuary Wood

Sanctuary Wood is a very special place, as it is one of the only places on the Ypres Salient where you can see an original trench layout. This is a fantastic opportunity for your students to see what the trenches would really have looked like.

**One of the only places on the Ypres Salient where you can see an original trench layout.**

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It's also a great place for a discussion on how historic sites should be preserved – should you be able to wander freely through history, or is the very real threat of damage enough to mean that access to such sites should be restricted? The debate rages, but here you can walk through the trenches for yourselves.



Nearby is the Hill 62 Memorial commemorating the Battle of Mount Sorrell which took place in June 1916. You'll reach this memorial along the Canadalaan ('Canada Avenue' in English), which is lined with Canadian Maple trees – another example of how symbolism is so important to remembrance of the Great War.

# Make the most out of your WW1 battlefields trip!



## Discover personal stories

- Encourage students to find out about relatives who fought in WW1 – perhaps they could find their grave or listing on one of the memorials you visit.
- Find out about former pupils of the school who fought in WW1 and set your pupils the task of finding their grave or listing on one of the monuments.
- The best place to start your research is the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website - [www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org).

## Things to remember when visiting the WW1 battlefields

- If you are told to stick to paths, please make sure that everyone takes this instruction very seriously. You may visit some areas where unexploded munitions could still lay undetected, so it's imperative to stick to paths where provided.
- If you spot a shell **do not pick it up**, it could potentially still explode. Better safe than sorry – do not pick up anything you find lying around on the battlefields.
- It can get quite muddy out there, particularly in autumn and winter – so pack suitable clothing! And sensible shoes are a must, particularly if you are intending to explore trenches and dugouts.

