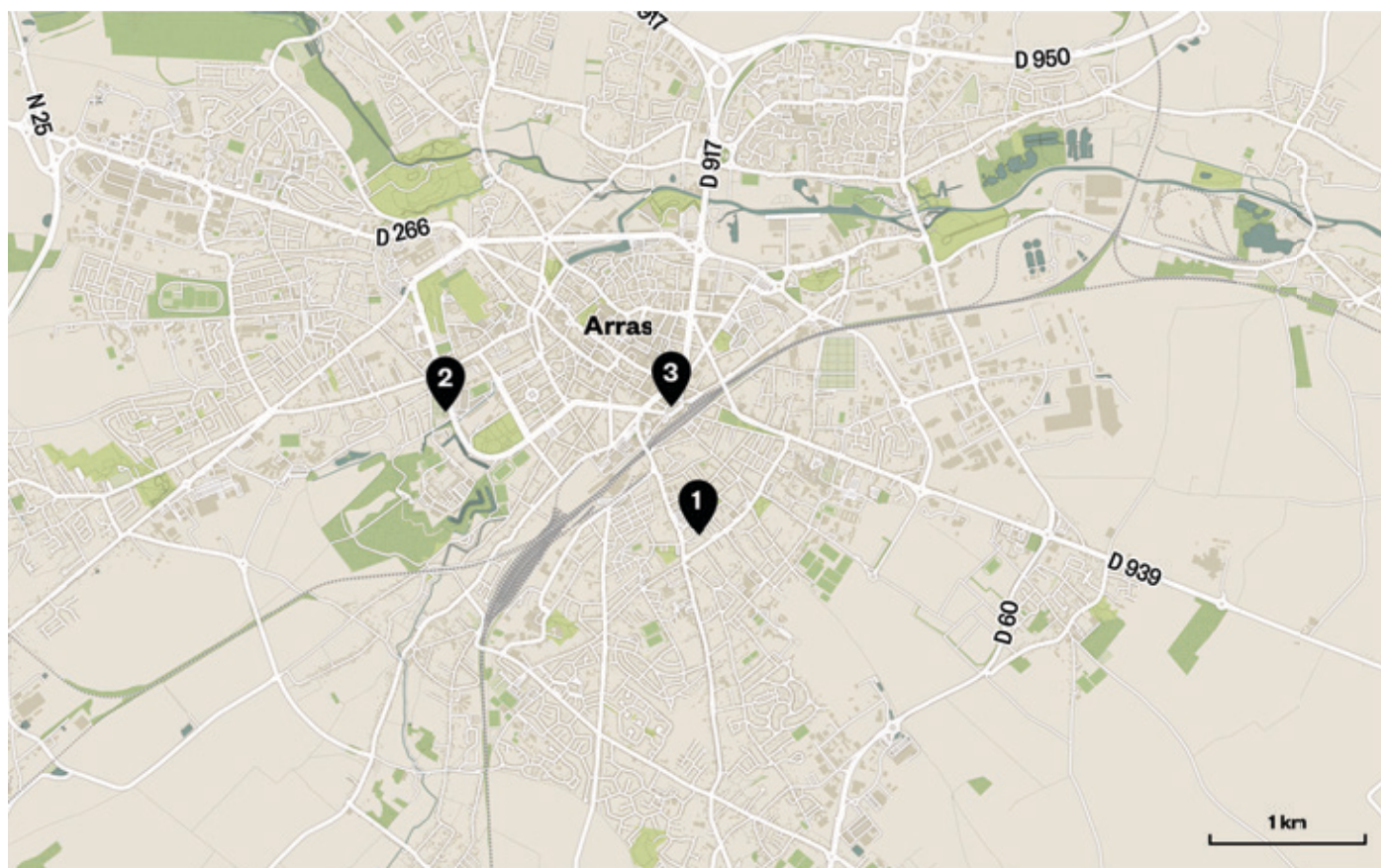




## Trail 6

# Arras

Experience life underground with the  
New Zealand Tunnellers.



## Taking the trail

From Place des Heros take Rue de la Taillerie (at the far left corner of the cobbled parking area with your back to the clock tower). Note the one-way system around Place des Heros. Shortly afterwards, you will come to Grand' Place. Take the first right into Grand' Place and continue straight ahead onto the side street Rue Paul Perrin. Take a left and then right onto Rue Saint-Michel following the sign to Carrière Wellington.

You'll cross a bridge over the railway tracks. At the roundabout, take the

2nd exit onto Rue de Cambrai/D939. Turn right onto Rue du Temple following the sign to Carrière Wellington. After you turn right onto Avenue Fernand Lobbedez, Carrière Wellington is first on the right.

Stand at the entrance to La Carrière Wellington.

**GPS** 50.110010, 3.067800

## Plan your time

Allow 2 to 4 hours to explore the entire Arras trail.

## The Arras trail

- 1. La Carrière Wellington**  
– *Trail overview*
- 2. Faubourg d'Amiens Cemetery**
- 3. Gare d'Arras**

Visit [ngatapuwaenewzealand.nz/westernfront](https://ngatapuwaenewzealand.nz/westernfront) for more information on the trails.

Map based on OpenStreetMap data (licensed under ODbL) which is © OpenStreetMap contributors.

**Stop 1**

## La Carrière Wellington

This is where the New Zealanders dug and expanded their famous tunnels.

**Must-do stop**

This stop introduces the Arras trail. If you're unable to do the whole trail, this stop gives you the big-picture story in one go.

**GPS** 50.280038, 2.783024

**Getting there from Arras**

See directions on previous page.

**Your stop**

Stand at the entrance to La Carrière Wellington.



*Men of the New Zealand Tunnelling Company below ground at La Fosse Farm, 5 December 1917.*

*Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Ref: 1/2-012990-G. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22347381>*

**Story**

You're standing at the entrance to La Carrière Wellington, which is one of the most fascinating museums on the Western Front.

This is the town of Arras, and La Carrière means 'quarry'. The Wellington quarry was named by the New Zealand Tunnelling Company that operated in Arras from 1916 to August 1918.

La Carrière Wellington is next to the main Arras-Bapaume highway, and you're here because, in late 1914, the war of movement - that everyone wanted - shuddered to a halt and turned into trench warfare.

The Germans went onto the defensive and consolidated their positions along the Western Front, and the Allies, the British and the French, endeavoured to break the trench deadlock - but struggled to penetrate the German lines.

So, with trenches stretching from the English channel to the Swiss border, it became siege warfare. Part of that, particularly in this sector, which was a mining area, involved tunnelling underground. The Germans first started it in this area, and the Allies quickly responded, and so began 'underground warfare' - mining and countermining.

It became so important that the British government put out a call to its dominions for tunnelling companies, and

in 1915 New Zealand raised a tunnelling company formed of miners from all over New Zealand. A lot of them were over-age, and they were pretty 'rough and ready' soldiers, a bit averse to authority - but they were very good tunnellers.

They arrived in England by ship, trained at the Engineering School in the South of England, and then came over here in early 1916, under the command of Major J. E. Duigan. In fact, the New Zealand Tunnelling Company was the first New Zealand unit to serve on the Western Front.

They were sent up to the Vimy sector, just North of Arras, where they took over from a French mining company and began operating there. Later on, they were sent down to where you are now - and they took over the Arras sector.

By the time the New Zealand Tunnelling Company arrived, the city had been evacuated, and they started investigating the tunnels and the cellars under the city.

They discovered that when the cities' fortifications were rebuilt in the 16th and 17th centuries, Arras had mined its building material from a series of underground limestone quarries.

La Carrière Wellington is one of the seven quarries that are down the line of the Arras-Bapaume road, and the New Zealanders realised that these quarries

were enormous, and had the potential to be underground cities.

*"The idea was to connect all the caves, some very large ones & some smaller ones. They had been formed by the French taking out the chalk in big blocks for building purposes. Some dates I saw on the chalk walls dated back to thirteen hundred or fourteen hundred AD."*

– Sapper J Williamson

They looked at a plan to connect the quarries to each other with tunnels. One could start in the centre of Arras, go down into the cellars, of any building, then into the underground sewer system. From here, a New Zealand-made tunnel led - from cavern to cavern, all the way, to right under the German frontline.

The British soon realised that there were two quarry systems - this one, which the New Zealand Tunnelling Company worked on, and one down the other main road out of the city, the Arras-Cambrai road, which a British tunnelling company worked on. But here, this is where New Zealand tunnellers created their very own 'New Zealand' underground. The nearest cavern to the centre of the city they called 'Russell', and the one closest to the German frontline, they called 'Bluff'.

Between December and April 1917, when the Battle of Arras was launched, they created an underground city which could accommodate well over 12,000 soldiers in total.

These amazing interconnecting caverns had light railway, running water, an electrical system with lighting, toilets,

kitchens, mess halls, hospitals, barracks, headquarters, and communications centres.

*"To make these caverns habitable was no easy matter, for as soon as they were opened to the cold wet winter air the chalk commenced to swell and crack, and slabs weighing many tons would come crashing down without an instant's warning...it is a great tribute to the mining ability of the company that beyond one or two small knocks not a single man of these thousands was hurt by falling chalk."*

– J C Neill

The New Zealanders ran the entire system so that British divisions, in this case the 3rd Division, in the New Zealand area, could come down and occupy the tunnels, to prepare for the attack.

*"These cellars and underground quarries formed the basis of the scheme on which the company now embarked. They were to be connected, opened up, and made habitable for troops, so that when the day for attack came the men could issue from them safe, warm and dry, and utterly unsuspected by the enemy."*

– J C Neill

On the morning of 9 April 1917 at zero hour, exit points were blown, just before the German trenches, and the British soldiers poured out and attacked. Men were ferried forward by light rail, safely underground, all the way to the frontline.

The Germans must have wondered where all these British soldiers came from - or where they had been hiding, but all the while they'd been underneath

them. The first day of the Battle of Arras was one of outstanding success. Indeed, it surprised the British as much as the Germans. But, the days that followed bogged down into attritional warfare, grinding down the soldiers of both sides. From mining, deep underground, to aircraft flying overhead - warfare had reached terrible new heights.

The air war over Arras is an important story, and involves New Zealand pilots. The Battle of Arras was a disaster for the Royal Flying Corps. Known as 'Bloody April' - the Allies were outclassed by the 'Flying Circus' led by Manfred von Richthofen - otherwise known as the Red Baron. Superior German machines, pilots and tactics led to horrific casualties for the British. In almost every dogfight during that month, the outcome was the destruction of Allied planes and pilots. Among these casualties were three New Zealanders.

The New Zealand tunnellers stayed in Arras, working on projects like this one, up until the final offensive in August 1918. They then joined up with the New Zealand Engineers, who had similar skills, many of them having worked on the main trunk line in New Zealand. They built and repaired bridges, and their outstanding achievement was at Havrincourt - the longest single span bridge built on the Western Front by the British Army in the First World War.



**Stop 2**

## Faubourg d'Amiens Cemetery

Visit the graves of the 26 New Zealand tunnellers and the Arras Flying Services Memorial.



*New Zealand, Canadian, American, English and South African pilots of No. 32 Squadron. 15 May 1918.  
© Imperial War Museums (Q 12042)*

**GPS** 50.28702, 2.760246

### Getting there from La Carrière Wellington

From La Carrière Wellington turn right onto Avenue Fernand Lobbedez/D917. You'll cross a bridge over the railroad. Continue along the D917 as it curves to the right and then take a left on to Boulevard Carnot following the sign to Amiens. Continue to follow the signpost to Amiens as the road forks taking the left fork. Continue down Boulevard Vauban. Continue onto Boulevard du Général de Gaulle. After Boulevard du Général de Gaulle curves to the right, the Faubourg d'Amiens Cemetery will be on your left. You will see the grand brick and stone exterior of the cemetery from the road.

### Your stop

Enter the cemetery and stand next to the memorial stone and face out over the rows of graves.

### Story

You are now in the Faubourg d'Amiens Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery. During the First World War this was a working cemetery, right next to the citadel of Arras - the original defensive system designed in the 17th century by Vauban.

What is fascinating about this cemetery is that if you go to the far end, to your right, and work your way forward, you can trace the chronological loss of the 26 New Zealand tunnellers and those who were assisting the tunnellers throughout the war. You can start at the earliest death recorded here and work your way through, assessing what was happening when each man was killed.

Even though the New Zealand Tunnelling Company was one of the smallest units, and not working as part of the New Zealand Division, these 400 men played a major role - with the tunnels they developed, which is recorded both in La Carrière Wellington and here in this cemetery. In a sense, what we're seeing here is technology evolving through warfare. In the case of the tunnellers it's old technology.

But over Arras you also had the Royal Flying Corps, going head-to-head with the Imperial German Air Force - which was completely new technology. Aircraft were increasingly used in combat, and progressed from being used for reconnaissance into deadly fighting

machines - as the battle for dominance in the skies escalated.

Air attacks began with the pilots dropping medieval-type steel darts, known as flechettes, from above, and then more modern, hand-held bombs. Pilots were first armed with pistols - for shooting at enemy aircraft. But as all-out aerial warfare developed, machine guns were fitted and interrupter gear - allowing for firing between the propeller - was introduced. Newly fitted with automatic weaponry, fighter aircraft would swoop down through the air and directly attack artillery horses, supply columns and infantry on the move.

Dominance of the sky became increasingly important. This became the age of the flying ace, with those who shot down five aircraft earning the prestigious title of 'Ace'. New planes with experimental designs were constantly being created, and the weapons and tactics changed with them. 'Fighter' planes evolved for speed and manoeuvrability, while 'bombers' were produced for flying long distances and delivering larger bomb payloads.

Germany began bombing over Britain and the Western Front with zeppelin airships and Gotha Bombers, and the Allies soon retaliated.

Here, in Arras, is where this new technology came to a head in the month

of April 1917 and it became known as 'Bloody April'. The Royal Flying Corps met the Imperial German Air Force for the first time in large numbers. They concentrated 25 of their squadrons, totalling around 365 aircraft. But the Germans were too good. Their superior aircraft, tactics and leadership including that of the ace, Manfred von Richthofen - the 'Red Baron' - led to many British casualties. They lost 245 aircraft and 211 aircrew killed or missing during that fatal month.

To a New Zealander in the trenches, flying an aeroplane through the skies represented a chance to escape the misery and boredom of life below. Many New Zealanders who served as infantry applied to join the Royal Flying Corps and were accepted.

They created a name for themselves, and pilots like Keith Park became both an air ace and a squadron leader on the Western Front. During 1917 he was based in La Basseville, near Arras, with the 48th Squadron. Park went on to be a major figure in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War and played a key role in the Battle of Britain.

There is also George Masters, who served at Gallipoli, before joining the Pioneer Battalion on the Western Front. In 1916 he was attached to the Royal Flying Corps as an observer. He flew in the front seat of an R.F.C. Farman Experimental Two, manning a Lewis Gun and spotting troop movements and artillery positions. He was shot down in March 1917 and survived, but the following month he was shot down again and his body was never recovered. His is one of two New Zealand names on the Arras Flying Services Memorial.

This memorial commemorates those who served with the Royal Naval Air Service, the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Air Force during the First World War. And - this area of Arras, these skies above you, and the caverns and tunnels underneath, saw much fighting. They also saw the methods and instruments of war develop in ways that had not been imagined in 1914.

**Stop 3**

## Gare d'Arras

This is where the New Zealand Tunnelling Company based its headquarters.



*The Town Hall of Arras in ruins, May 1917. © Imperial War Museums (Q 2049)*

**GPS** 50.287299, 2.780698

### Getting there from Faubourg d'Amiens Cemetery

Go back the way you came on Boulevard du Général de Gaulle and continue along Boulevard Vauban. Boulevard Vauban turns slightly right and becomes Boulevard Carnot. Keep going until you see the Gare d'Arras straight ahead of you.

### Your stop

Walk up to the war memorial in the Arras station square and face the same way as the French soldier.

### Story

You're standing in the station square of the Gare d'Arras by the war memorial. Arras was first fortified in the 13th century, and later, the city defences, were constructed by Vauban - the foremost engineer of his time - in the 17th century.

This area was the traditional route of invading armies, either attacking out of or attacking into France - and so there was a whole network of fortified towns to protect the frontiers. Ypres played a similar role in Flanders.

In the late 19th century the city knocked down the walls and covered over the moat, which then became part of an underground sewer-system. Here where you stand stood the walls and this became the route of the Arras railway line because it offered up a superb site, right through the centre of the city.

The underground sewer runs under the railway line in front of where you are standing. Like Ypres, Arras became an important salient during the First World War. The outer suburbs became the frontline area and right here was where the New Zealand tunnellers, connected the sewer system to specially built tunnels, underneath the two main roads.

The basement of the post office, behind you just a block away down the street, was the site of the New Zealand Tunnelling Company Headquarters.

As the buildings around you were destroyed by shelling, the New Zealand Tunnellers recce'd the cellars to find accommodation for soldiers. Exploring underground, they found that the former moat linked up with the Crinchon sewer that led from this square back, into the centre of town. Surrounding the Hôtel de Ville are the Grand' and Petite Place.

Today, many of the restaurants are situated in the basements of those two squares. You can pop down and look at the back walls - maybe ask the owner first - and you'll see a change in stone work or an obvious place that's been bricked up. That's where the New Zealand Tunnellers knocked their way through the back of the basement to find the link into the sewer - so that the soldiers living in that basement could then be transported down through the sewer system.

They then linked up with the tunnels that the New Zealanders had dug under the line of the two main roads. On your right is the overbridge leading to Bapaume, the tunnel dug under this linked up with the seven big caverns that the New Zealanders turned into an underground city for over 12,000 men.

So here, in Arras, an entire underground city was created by many skilled and brave miners, and this enabled thousands of Allied troops to live



*The railway station at Arras after a series of German bombardments. 1914.  
Australian War Memorial Museum H11782 (CC BY-NC 3.0 AU)*

fairly comfortably underground, with protection from the war, above. This network of tunnels also provided a safe way to transport troops directly to the

front line, a secretive route that was a complete surprise to the Germans, in the Arras offensive of April 1917.