



Trail 2

Passchendaele

Take the trail where New Zealand suffered
its darkest day.



Taking the trail

Drive out of the Lille Gate (Rijselpoort) at the roundabout, take the third exit onto the N37. At the next roundabout, continue straight on the N37. At the roundabout (Hellfire Corner), take the third exit and stay on the N37.

Continue to follow the N37 for about 6km to Zonnebeke. At the roundabout, take the second exit onto Langemarkstraat. Continue onto Zonnebekestraat and park at Dochy Farm cemetery on your left.

Enter the cemetery, turn right and walk to the corner. Face away from the cemetery, looking across the road.

GPS 50.881875, 2.971710

Plan your time

Allow 2 to 4 hours to explore the complete Passchendaele trail.

If you're short of time, simply visit stop 3: Passchendaele Start Line for an overview of the entire trail.

The Passchendaele trail

1. Dochy Farm Cemetery
2. New Zealand Memorial
3. **Passchendaele Start Line** – *Trail overview*
4. Wolf Farm
5. Tyne Cot Cemetery

Visit ngatapuwaenewzealand.nz/westernfront for more information on the trails.

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Stop 1

Dochy Farm Cemetery

This is where the New Zealanders launched their attack on Gravenstafel ridge on 4 October 1917, in the lead-up to Passchendaele.



The reverse slope of the German position at Gravenstafel Ridge, Passchendaele, with German dead lying on the ground. National Army Museum, NZ. Accession No. 1992.756

GPS 50.881875, 2.97171

Getting there from Ieper

See directions on page 1.

Your stop

Enter the cemetery, turn right and walk to the corner. Face away from the cemetery, looking across the road.

Story

The area where you are now standing is known as Dochy Farm Cemetery. This is where on 4 October 1917, the New Zealand Division became involved in the 3rd Battle of Ypres. This would force the Germans to withdraw some ten to 15 kilometers. About 50 metres across the road in front of you was the general area of the British front line.

If you look down this farm track up onto the high ground, to the immediate left, you can make out a white memorial. That's the New Zealand memorial, named Gravenstafel after the first battle that took place here on 4 October. Gravenstafel ridge was the first New Zealand objective, and it was part of a strong German defensive position. A position that had to be taken.

Imagine the landscape in front of you. It was a sea of craters, all of the trees were shattered, and just their stumps left, farm houses were destroyed into piles of rubble, all you could see was bunkers and barbed wire dotting the landscape.

One of the key differences to this battle is that the Germans had changed their defensive tactics. It wasn't just trench-to-trench fighting anymore. Because of the innovative infantry and artillery tactics of the Allies, the Germans had been forced to develop new techniques to defend their positions. This involved the building of reinforced concrete

bunkers known as pillboxes, positioned to create killing zones - hemmed in by barbed wire. Some of the bunkers were originally cellars from farm houses that had been further fortified. These pillboxes housed machine-gun teams and snipers, and were ringed with thick barbed wire entanglements, creating interlocking fields of fire that were devastating to the approaching enemy. All of this was backed up by machine gun teams in nearby bomb craters and Eingreif or 'counter-attack' infantry further behind them, waiting for the right moment to tip the balance.

This impressive defence system was further bolstered by German artillery which would provide extra killing power during an attack by shelling the British infantry. To take these positions - infantry would attack each pillbox and bunker with small teams of men equipped with Lewis guns, Mills bombs, rifle grenades, rifle and bayonet. Once taken, they could use these defenses as shelter from German counter-fire or attacks. The New Zealanders had trained for weeks and weeks on their tactics for this battle.

On the evening of the 3rd, the New Zealanders assembled - where you stand. Around 6.00a.m., on a dark and misty morning on 4 October - the Allied artillery barrage began - and crept up the slope - in front of you. The New Zealanders advanced, slowly making

their way through the craters, in every crater were dead Germans caught in the open by the barrage. They attacked the pillboxes and bunkers in-turn, successfully taking each one and forcing the surrender of the Germans defending them. Those who didn't immediately give up were shot, grenaded, or - if lucky - taken prisoner. The 3rd Otagos captured Gravenstafel, taking around 100 prisoners.

Meanwhile, on the ridge, further to your left, the two front battalions, the 1st Aucklands and the 1st Wellingtons, had become separated. The Aucklands were drawn away to the far left because of

the terrain and the German pillboxes - while the Wellingtons were grappling with the Germans at a bunker complex called Korek which is just to the left of the memorial - this caused a gap in their line - despite this, they fought their way forward. The attack was an outstanding success and warning signal for the Germans - that their new defensive tactics were vulnerable.

Around 5,000 prisoners were taken, with the New Zealand Division alone taking over 1,100 - and Gravenstafel Ridge was now in Allied hands - leaving one more ridge to go before Passchendaele.

Stop 2

New Zealand Memorial

Stand on Gravenstafel ridge where the New Zealanders fought fiercely with the Germans.



A YMCA stall supplies hot drinks to New Zealand walking wounded at St Jean. 5 October 1917.

© Imperial War Museums (Q 2973)

GPS 50.890698, 2.97919

Getting there from Dochy Farm Cemetery

Continue down Zonnebekerstraat. Turn right onto Roeselarestraat and continue until you reach the New Zealand Memorial at the crossroads.

Your stop

Walk up to the New Zealand Memorial and turn around to face the crossroads.

Story

You are now standing at the New Zealand Memorial at Gravenstafel which records the New Zealand victory on the morning of 4 October 1917. This road junction was the Red Line - the first objective and you're up on the Gravenstafel ridge that was also known as the Heights of Abraham, named by the Canadians who held it in 1915. In October 1917 it was the key to the German defensive line protecting the Passchendaele ridge which is down the road to your left and it was very strongly defended.

At the time, this was a lunar landscape, all the buildings had been knocked down or destroyed in the previous years' fighting and the cellars converted into strongly defended bunkers with walls a metre or so thick. These bunkers could withstand almost anything. They were often level with the ground and became homes for the German machine gun teams who would shelter there during barrages.

Once British artillery fire lifted, the Germans would run out, hurriedly mount their machine guns in nearby craters around the bunker or on top of the bunker itself and pour fire upon the attacking British infantry.

If you look over at the crossroads, you can see the chimney stacks of that factory in the distance, ahead of that there's a farm house complex in the area

of Dochy Farm and on the right you can pick out the cross of remembrance of Dochy Farm Cemetery. In front of the cemetery was the road which was the startline for the New Zealand attack, and on that flank there - were the new boys of the 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade. They'd formed in 1917 and this was their first and only big attack.

On this side were the originals - the brigade that had fought on Gallipoli - the 1st New Zealand Brigade. Their job was to seize this ridge, where you stand, attacking bunker by bunker. Looking down, into the valley towards Dochy Farm, picture the New Zealanders advancing through this ground, among the German dead.

After reaching this position on the ridge the New Zealanders attacked Korek Farm - a formidable bunker complex in the ruins of the farms just to your right - using machine guns, mortars and, rifle grenades the 1st Wellingtons and the 3rd Otagos rushed these bunkers and threw grenades into the openings.

One Sergeant Paterson, of the Wellingtons, fought his way into Korek and found 30 or so dead and wounded inside. He also came across a German officer frantically trying to destroy important documents so they didn't fall into British hands. The entire bunker caught fire and Paterson had to get out in a hurry. Korek burned like a furnace

for the rest of the day, incinerating everyone inside it.

The next wave of New Zealanders pushed forward, over the ridge - where you stand and continued onto Waterloo Farm, near Berlin Wood which is further down the road behind you. Field Marshal Haig was elated with the success. General Russell, of the New Zealand Division, described the effort as: 'not too bad' - with over 1,000 wounded

and some 400 New Zealand dead. The attack had not been as expensive as the 3,000 casualties from Messines. But the rain was about to fall, and the New Zealanders faced a difficult road ahead - the road - over that final ridge - to Passchendaele.

Stop 3

Passchendaele Start Line

The New Zealanders made it to here in a successful attack, and it became their startline for the attack on Passchendaele.

Must-do stop

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

GPS 50.893072, 2.987224

Getting there from New Zealand Memorial at Gravenstafel

Follow the road ('s Graventafelstraat) towards Passendale and park at the Cheese Factory (De Oude Kaasmakerij) car park on your right.

Your stop

Walk to the left corner of the car park, stand in the vicinity of the Ngā Tapuwae sign facing away from the Cheese Factory/De Oude Kaasmakerij towards Passendale.



A gun crew, moving through mud at Passchendaele, 1917.

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Ref: PAColl-2667-014. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22835925>

Story

If there is one battle site in Belgium that resonates with New Zealanders it is where you're standing now. Passchendaele.

The road to your left climbs up over Bellevue Spur, which is the high ground in front of you. You can see the church spire of Passendale town on the skyline to your right. This was the New Zealand Division's objective in the 3rd Battle of Ypres – in Field Marshal Haig's big offensive. The aim was to break out from the Ypres Salient, and advance through this critical high ground which you can see in front of you.

On 4 October 1917, the New Zealanders, alongside Australian Divisions, of both Anzac Corps, advanced in a successful attack up to where you are now standing. Haig was eager to build on these gains and ordered further attacks. But heavy rains arrived, and Haig's insistence on speed, meant that there was not enough time to bring up sufficient guns and ammunition. By the time British Divisions attacked on the 9th - they were held up by the German barbed wire and couldn't gain any more ground.

However, Godley, our ambitious corps commander, was insistent that his New Zealanders and the Australians could take Passchendaele. When the New Zealanders assembled on the night of the 10th, the wounded and the dying were still lying out there from the attack

on the 9th. They were freezing in the wet mud and unable to pull themselves out of the water-filled craters.

"Road terrible rough & muddy, full of shell holes all covered with slimy mud, couldn't see holes until we walked into them. Road had been recently shelled, blocked with carts and wagons of all descriptions, dead horses and mules and men."

– Lance-Corporal McCorkindale

In front of you - is Bellevue Spur, and the road to your immediate left is the centre line of the New Zealand attack.

On the left of the road is the New Zealand Rifle Brigade, and on this side is the 2nd New Zealand Brigade, spreading through and into Berlin Wood which is on your right. Beyond Berlin Wood are the Australians.

"The whole countryside looked forbidding. It was a sea of mud, caked dry only on the surface, with shattered trees marring the landscape. Beyond towards the slopes, I could see the scarred ridges of the frontline. These belonged to the Germans who had an uninterrupted view of the greater part of us. It looked exactly like what it was, a shell-torn, muddy and dreary waste. It was probably the most uninviting and unhealthy place in the world."

– Private Len Coley

Picture this whole landscape on that morning in 1917. It was a cratered wasteland full of mud, dead bodies and wounded men who had been out in the cold for 36 hours among the dead from the previous attacks. These trees and farmhouses were totally flattened - it was a lunar landscape laced with barbed wire entanglements. The cellars of these farmhouses that we see today had been converted into German strong-points, low concrete bunkers - with walls metres thick - that housed their machine gun teams.

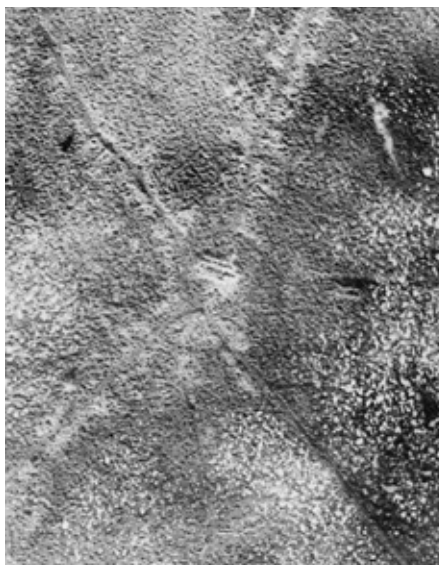
On this misty raining morning, picture the men of the New Zealand Division in craters where we stand, mud up to their knees, soaking, they've been here all night. As the artillery bombardment started they were to move forward and secure Bellevue Spur so that the Australians on the right could sweep in and take the village of Passendale.

The plan was that at zero hour - the arranged time for the attack to commence - the infantry would advance behind a creeping barrage that would move forward in hundred-metre steps with the infantry moving in a series of single files through the wire, which hopefully the artillery had already cut. They'd move up the hill and of course they would be advancing as close as possible behind the rolling artillery barrage so that the German machine gunners - safe in their pillboxes - couldn't get out in time before the New Zealand infantry were upon them. That didn't happen here.

Getting the guns forward through the never-ending mud was dependent on that one road to our left, and only one-third of the necessary guns made it on time. To support an attack like this - each gun needed something like 300 or 400 rounds of clean ammunition, a real task in the mud and rain.

Each gun also needed logs and wooden planks under their wheels to stop them sinking into the mud and from moving off target. To supply all of the ammunition and wood, and for the horses and men to drag these enormous weapons through the mud, was an incredibly difficult task.

"I know how impossible it was to move the guns in time for this second attack. Horses were useless in such mud and the guns were inched forward by manpower - out of the muddy water in one shell hole to slide



A before-and-after scene of Passchendaele from the air. Note the destruction caused by heavy artillery, obliterating the small town. © Imperial War Museums (Q 42918A)

into another. All that could be done in the time allowed was to set them up on the firmest ground and fire them at extreme range."

– **Alfred Thomas Stratton**

There weren't nearly enough guns or ammunition, and when the artillery opened up it was weak and inaccurate. Indeed, the opening barrage landed right on the New Zealand positions killing our soldiers, knocking out the headquarters and blowing up mortar ammunition. It was a disastrous start.

Picture the infantryman - wearing everything he has because it's very cold. He's got 200 rounds of ammunition, his rifle, bayonet, grenades, gas mask, satchel, water bottle, rations and steel helmet. He's rugged up in a greatcoat, with his jerkin on, and his balaclava, and if he's lucky he's got over-boots on, to protect his legs from the sea of mud he is attempting to walk through.

His Corporal or Sergeant is leading his file and he's trying to find a way through the landscape, carefully skirting around the edge of each crater with his rifle and bayonet at the ready, trying not to fall down into the huge water-filled holes. The initial artillery barrage moved too fast for the infantry struggling to keep up, through the mud.

The artillery fire was too weak to cut the barbed wire defences and to keep the German heads down. The Germans realised this, came out of their bunkers and began to set up their machine guns.

They purposely left the road leading up

Bellevue Spur clear of wire, creating a kill-zone, and as the New Zealanders advanced up it - the German gunners opened fire, and mowed them down.

"The boys were dropping on all sides; all of our officers in tenth Company were killed yet the lads never flinched... I only saw one of our Company up at the wire with me & the poor fellow got his head split open with an explosive bullet... Poor George Scott got a bullet across his face which blew out both eyes & broke his nose. I had one hit the shovel on my back & another through my gas mask bag hanging at my side."

– **Private David Grant**

The Germans had redeveloped their defensive strategy and now relied on a series of reinforced concrete pillboxes that were dispersed in-depth along a wide front with interlocking fields of fire. In the surrounding craters and trench systems there were machine gun nests protected by thick entanglements of barbed wire. This was an 'elastic front', with groups of men ready in the craters and bunkers behind waiting to counterattack.

On your left, the New Zealand Rifle Brigade fought their way forward taking the high ground which you can see on the skyline. It was a critical piece of ground, however the wire between it and Bellevue Spur had not been cut. On the road in front of you - a young second-lieutenant in the Otagos, Cockerell, edged forward through the wire and took out a bunker but he only had a handful of men with him. Each attempt

to get reinforcements was thwarted - with his runners killed by German fire.

By mid-morning the New Zealand attack ground to a halt. The battalion commanders gathered at the bunkers at Waterloo Farm, which are the farm buildings on the other side of the road. They knew that this attack had failed. Only the stretcher bearers were not fired on as they dragged wounded men to the road which was the only firm ground.

It took at least six men to carry each stretcher. Thousands of infantry men were called up to join the teams of stretcher bearers, and the line of wounded ran all the way back up the road to the New Zealand Memorial. Among the wounded were many British soldiers who had been out here for three days.

For each stretcher party it was an exhausting carry, and it would sometimes take a wounded soldier

about 24 hours to be carried back to St Jean where there was an Advanced Dressing Station. It was only then that the ambulances took over and drove them further back for treatment.

"The Somme was pretty bad I'll admit but this is worse. I have never seen such destruction. It is hard to imagine that four years ago, peaceful people tilled this same soil, that it was one of the most prosperous districts in Europe. Now, as I saw it today, well it's simply an awful nightmare, a hideous reeking swamp seething with living and dead beings."

- **Sergeant William Wilson**

It was a failure in command, where an overly ambitious plan, backed by a poor logistic effort, took no account of dreadful weather conditions. 12 October 1917 became the darkest day in New Zealand's history of warfare, with over 2,400 casualties in the first four hours and around 845 men dead.

Stop 4

Wolf Farm

This is as far as the New Zealanders got on 12 October 1917.



New Zealand reinforcements moving up to the front, near Kansas Farm in the Ypres Salient. 13 October, 1917. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Ref: 1/2-012933-G. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22317419>

GPS 50.903085, 2.98641

Getting there from Passchendaele Start Line

Follow the road ('s Graventafelstraat) for about 500 metres and turn left at the brick tower on to Ravestraat. After about 600 metres the road forks, take the right hand fork onto Wallemolenstraat.

Your stop

Find a park just before the right-hand turnoff to Passendale near the cluster of houses. Walk back the way you came along the road until you reach the first farmhouse.

Stand on the left-hand side of the road facing across the road. Make sure you don't go past the house, so it doesn't obscure the view.

Story

This was the furthestest point reached by the New Zealand Rifle Brigade in the attack on 12 October 1917. In front of you to your right is Wolf Farm, and Bellevue Spur is the sloping high ground in the distance.

Bellevue Spur was the initial New Zealand objective on 12 October and if you follow this spur along the skyline, you can see the spire of the village of Passendale which was the final objective for Godley's 2nd Anzac Corps.

On the slope itself, in fact in this area around you, none of these houses or trees still stood but all of the farm house cellars had been converted into German strongpoints, manned by machine guns and snipers. The only evidence left of a farm house was usually the red of the mud where the brick dust had mixed in with the earth.

Looking back behind you, the start line on this flank for the attack was the farmhouse complex on the skyline - that was the New Zealand startline - and all of this land around you was covered in craters and mud.

If you can imagine German defenders in their bunkers during the artillery bombardment once they knew the attack was actually happening - they would quickly set up their machine guns on top or next to their bunkers. The Germans would see long single files of

infantry, wading their way, forward in the mud, and as their machine guns opened up they would force entire battalions to the ground.

On the morning of 12 October the New Zealand Rifle Brigade started pushing forward to this point - they suffered many casualties. Finally a mix of all three battalions of the Rifle Brigade reached the general line of the road, seizing this piece of high ground.

They then tried to push forward, in the direction towards Wolf Farm and onto Bellevue Spur, but this failed. Some fought their way down into Wolf Farm, taking out bunkers - but barbed wire stopped them getting any further. Today, if you walked up there, it would only take you 15 minutes. In 1917 - the reality was hours of crawling and wading through mud and water, against artillery, machine gun and rifle fire. But here is where they were stopped.

They were defeated by the flooded stream, the mud, and the uncut wire, and they could go no further.

Stop 5

Tyne Cot Cemetery

There are over 1200 names here, representing every town and district in New Zealand.



Graves of New Zealanders beside Gravenstafel Road. February 1918.

© Imperial War Museums (Q 10500)

GPS 50.887444, 3.000601

Getting there from Wolf Farm

Go back the way you came until you come to 's Gravenstafelstraat (the road that the Cheese Factory is on). Turn left and continue for about 400 metres.

Turn right on to Tynecotstraat and continue for about 12-1400 metres until you come to Tyne Cot Cemetery on your left.

Your stop

Enter the cemetery, walk to the memorial wall at the far end and stand at the New Zealand Memorial to the Missing.

Story

You are now at the New Zealand Memorial to the Missing at Tyne Cot. As you can see it's a distinctive enclosure, in the memorial wall. There are almost 1,200 names here, representing where men enlisted in every town and district in New Zealand.

Over the past 30 years, 13 of these New Zealanders have been found, identified and buried, and this continues to happen.

The names on Tyne Cot include three brothers from Takaka - Leonard, Edwin and Leslie Newlove - all privates, who were all killed within eight days of each other in the two October attacks at Passchendaele. They were aged 40, 32, and 22 respectively.

There are also at least five pairs of brothers on the memorial; Carmody, Hight, Leslie, McIlroy, and O'Gorman - and all but one of these men were killed on 12 October. Brothers, sons, cousins, farmers, teachers, university graduates - they all fell in Belgium during October 1917.

These attacks once held the promise, certainly to Haig and his Generals, of an actual breakthrough - ending years of stalemate. This optimism disappeared with the failed assaults on 9 and 12 October. The cost of that failure can be read on these walls.

Walk among these headstones. At Tyne Cot, there are almost 12,000 of them. 70 percent are unidentified, and you can see many silver ferns among them. New Zealand paid dearly for Haig's determination to push on.

For the men who survived, it was to be a bleak winter here in the salient, occupying the ground - where we stand. Our Divisional Commander, General Russell, now faced the difficult task of rebuilding both the physical strength and the morale of his New Zealanders in order to face the struggle that would come in 1918.