

Trail 4

Cape Helles

Discover the south of Gallipoli, where the British – staging their primary attack – tried to push northwards, joined by Anzac troops



Taking the trail

From the ferry wharf in Eceabat, turn left and follow the road along the Dardanelles coast 200 metres before it turns right, then take the turn to the left 50 metres on to continue south down the coast. After 4.5 kms you will come to the village of Kilitbahir.

Continue along the coast road, passing the Ottoman era Kilitbahir Castle on the right of the road and then the Turkish artillery position the Namazgah Tabyasi (Namazgah Battery) on the left just after the castle. A further 250 metres along the road, at the edge of the village, a stabilized track opens in front of you on the right. Take this track as it climbs for 75 metres, ending in a car park in the rear of the Mecidiye

Tabyasi (Mecidiye Battery). Walk into the battery area and to the large artillery gun.

Plan your time

Allow 4 – 5 hours to explore the entire Cape Helles trail.

If you're short of time, you can simply visit the must-do stop on the trail – Alçitepe. The audio guide to Alçitepe gives you the big-picture Cape Helles story.

Trail stops

1. Kilitbahir
2. **Alçitepe (Achi Baba)**
– *Must-do stop*
3. V Beach
4. W Beach
5. Twelve Tree Copse Cemetery

Visit ngatapuware.govt.nz for more information on the trails.

Stop 1

Kilitbahir

From this fort the Ottoman army first watched British and French ships arrive –and readied themselves to defend

**Getting there from Eceabat**

See directions on previous page.

Your stop

Stand on the seaward side of the cannon looking out over the Dardanelles Strait.

Story

You're standing at one of the Turkish forts that defended the Dardanelles when the British and French battleships attacked on 18 March 1915. Ships came from your right, which is the mouth of the Dardanelles nearly 15 kilometres from here. The Turkish defence was based on batteries of guns like this one here, which covered a series of minefields stretching out across the water in front of you. There was also rows of mines, one behind the other, all the way up the strait, covered by these guns.

Out towards the mouth on the far shore, there was a single row of mines running parallel to the shore, it was laid by the Nusrat, a tiny Ottoman minelayer. This single row of mines was placed there because the Ottoman officers saw that when the battleships came in to bombard the forts, they turned in a wide circle, which covered the area where the mines were laid.

The British plan was for their minesweepers – which were converted fishing trawlers – to clear the way. However, the current was so strong that the trawlers could not keep up with the battleships. Meanwhile both minesweepers and battleships were under intense Turkish artillery fire. Because the minesweepers couldn't clear the way, the battleships had no choice but to swing round in an arc and, of course, ran onto that row of mines.

Three ships were sunk and three badly damaged. This caused the British and French Admirals to call off the attack.

This gun position is very important because it is here, with many of the gun crew killed, and with the hoist mechanism damaged, that Corporal Seyit single-handedly lifted up one of the shells that you see here, he staggered with it up the steps and loaded it into the gun. His incredible strength and courage led to him being recognised as one of the heroes of this battle.

The defeat of the naval attempt to break through on 18 March 1915 led the Allies to decide that they had no choice but to mount an invasion to take the peninsula, in order to let the navies get through. This victory over the British and French navy made the Ottoman government in Constantinople determined to resist the invasion they knew would come, and they strongly reinforced the peninsula.

Stop 2

Alçitepe (Achi Baba)

The British planned to seize this hill, then advance along the peninsula and link up with the Anzacs

Must-do stop

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

**Getting there from Kilitbahir**

Continue along the coastal road for approximately five kms, passing the hamlet of Havuzlar before turning inland. After a further seven kms you will approach the outskirts of the village of Alçitepe. Just before entering the village there is a road to the left skirting the back of the village. Take this road and follow it for 200 metres, where it forks. Take the left hand road, signposted for the Alçitepe Baki Terasi (Alçitepe Viewing Terrace). Follow this one-way road as it climbs to the east for 2.4 kms, till you come to the viewing terrace on your left.

Your stop

Walk up the steps to the top of the platform. Look out to sea so you can see the four pillars of the Çanakkale Martyrs Memorial on the headland, with a Turkish flag to its left.

Story

You're standing on the seaward slopes of Alçitepe, which the British called Achi Baba. This was the goal of General Ian Hamilton's Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, which landed on 25 April 1915. Hamilton wanted to seize this hill because he believed that it would give him a toe-hold for an advance up the peninsula, so that he could link up with the Anzacs.

"On the left, a mile out in the Aegean, a few warships lie motionless, like giants asleep, their gaunt outlines mirrored in a satin sea. As far as the eye can reach there is no sign of movement; the world seems bathed in sleep."

—General Ian Hamilton

If you look out to the coast you'll see the Turkish National Monument on the headland, with a Turkish flag to its left. Beyond that, you'll see a strait that's usually full of ships. That's Cape Helles. If you look around, you will see the lighthouse at the end of the cape. On the left of the lighthouse is V Beach. To the right of the lighthouse is W Beach, these were two of the British landing beaches. In fact, all around this headland were the landing beaches of General Hamilton's force.

The intention of the landing was to seize the tiny little village of Krithia. You can see the mosque in the middle of the town in the bowl to your right. At the same time they were going to grab where you're standing now.

"Only high on the shoulder of Achi Baba – the goal of the British troops – a field of scarlet poppies intrudes a restless note."

—General Ian Hamilton

The attack on 25 April was in response to the failure by the British and French navies to sail through the Dardanelles Strait on 18 March. The purpose was to allow the navy to reach Constantinople and force the Ottoman Empire out of the war. Hamilton landed at Gallipoli in order to seize the high ground of the peninsula and capture the Ottoman forts that blocked the navy's way through the Dardanelles.

On 25 April the British forces got ashore, but were held up on the beach by the Turks. Over the next few days they advanced just short of the village of Krithia and this hill. In a combined operation, the British pushed towards the village, while French soldiers advanced towards this hill where you are standing. In early May, Hamilton believed he lacked sufficient troops, and brought the New Zealand Infantry Brigade and an Australian Brigade in to reinforce his attack.

"We are now enjoying a splendid rest, and watching our fellows slowly driving the enemy back. It is grand to see the advance after our uphill fight among the hills and cliffs. There are imperial and French troops here and they know the game thoroughly."

—Trooper Clutha Mackenzie



The scene after an attack by the 2nd Infantry Brigade. Several bodies are lying on the ground and a rifle is in the left foreground. Australian War Memorial C01079

Both these brigades took part in the Second Battle of Krithia. On 6 and 7 May, the British and French forces attacked at 10.30 on both mornings in broad daylight. They failed miserably. Each attack was the same – 15 minutes of artillery bombardment followed by a daylight attack, and the Allied troops failed. It was no different on 8 May.

"I had an entrenching tool and we dug down – at first we had to lie on our bellies and scratch, every time we threw up earth we got a shower of bullets, because Jacko, we found out afterwards, was lined up along the ridge well above us looking down on us."

–Sergeant Joseph Gasparich

On 8 May, the New Zealanders thought that they were attacking as part of a much larger force, but found they were doing it by themselves. Four battalions of New Zealand Infantry attacked 12 Battalions of Turkish Infantry, who were well dug in. The outcome was inevitable.

"Bullets and casualties thick. I wondered why I was not hit as they whistled everywhere. We reached some brush and scattered bushes. As we got near we crept on our stomachs inches at a time. We crawled for about an hour and men were hit everywhere."

–Private Frank McKenzie

Most New Zealanders never got beyond the front line. If you look south of the village, you can see the open areas among the trees. That is where the New Zealanders attacked.

"For two hundred yards we sprinted, thinking oddly how beautiful the poppies and daisies were, then from sheer exhaustion we rushed to the ground in a slight depression and lay there panting."

–Private H. Palmer

The Wellington Infantry Battalion got about 300 metres and that was the most ground that was gained. That same afternoon, Hamilton ordered the attack to go in again despite the protests of the New Zealand brigade commander. At 5.30 pm, the Australian and New Zealand brigades again attacked Krithia, and were decimated. There were over 800 casualties in each brigade – all in one day.

After this unsuccessful attack, both of the Anzac brigades were exhausted, and the British commander had no option but to await reinforcements before he could attack again.

"Our work last night was of a most unsatisfactory nature, and blame is attachable in some quarter. We were pushed forward in a disorganised stage. It is a pity that the advance

was made under such conditions because it does not increase the fighting power of our men. They go forward whenever they are ordered although they know that in many cases they are walking to their death.

–Private Peter Thompson

The battle at Cape Helles became one of attrition. If you go to the top of Alçı Tepe and look north you will see the Kilit Bahir plateau behind you. It was an even more formidable natural fortress – but it is here where you stand that General Hamilton's prospect of success at Cape Helles came to a halt.

Turkish Story

The main Allied landing of the Gallipoli campaign was at Cape Helles. It took place on five beaches. If you think of Cape Helles as the palm of your hand: S Beach on the left is the thumb – then V Beach, W Beach, X Beach – and your little finger is Y Beach.

The commander of the Allied Forces at Gallipoli, General Ian Hamilton, also decided to put a force ashore at Gaba Tepe. For this he selected the Anzacs. Hamilton split the Allied forces into two groups. Half of the force landed 20 km further north at Gaba Tepe and half of the force landed at Cape Helles.

The difference between the two landings was that the Anzacs landed at Anzac Cove, slightly north of their intended landing site, in darkness at 4.30 a.m., but the British landed here at about 5.30 a.m. By this time it was getting light.

It was not a good idea to land in daylight because back then they did not have proper landing craft but used little boats that each carried between 40 and 50 men, all packed in like sardines. The British soldiers were very exposed, despite beaching the River Clyde, an old cargo ship, in an attempt to get men ashore.

At 5.30 a.m., after a bombardment, the landings began on the five Cape Helles beaches. The British got ashore without difficulty at two beaches, but didn't take advantage of this. The Turkish units on shore resisted, and fighting went on for nearly two days. When the British eventually secured the five beaches, but at a great cost.

The Turks retreated about 2 km inland and dug in. The first Battle of Krithia was fought on 28 April but nobody gained much territory. Then the Turkish counterattacked, carrying out two night attacks. The Turks were brought here after a long march and they couldn't see their front line in the dark, only rifles flashing in the distance.

They attacked enemy lines during the night, in the morning they found that they were in the open, very close to the beaches. The British navy lying offshore pounded the exposed Turks. The 15th division lost almost half its men, with 8,000 casualties in one attack.

In early May the New Zealand Infantry Brigade and an Australian brigade were redeployed here from the Anzac sector. They spent 6 and 7 May waiting behind the lines, then joined the fighting. On the morning of 8 May they attacked and were halted, and the Turks thought it was over, but then in the afternoon the New Zealanders and their allies attacked again.

The area around Anzac Cove is rugged country and the terrain gives cover. But here in Cape Helles the New Zealanders were in the open so casualties were high. When the infantry attacked, men went into line in echelons. The fire came from the flanks, which gave no chance to the soldiers, so it was very bloody fighting.

That's why Turks say that the battles here in Cape Helles were bloodier than the battles at Anzac. In a single day here, the New Zealanders suffered about 1,000 casualties out of roughly 7,000 suffered in the entire campaign.

A Turkish account describes how on the night of the 8 May some Turks heard a wounded Allied soldier moaning in no-man's-land. A soldier was sent to pull him into the Turkish line, and they dressed his wounds. They offered him some drink, but he suspected it might be poisoned so he refused.

He used sign language to say 'you drink first and then I'll drink', so they sipped a bit and then gave the water to him. He finished it very quickly. He was so thirsty, but not trusting.

Another Turkish account talks of being in the trenches and looking one way out to the Dardanelles; another way out to the Aegean Sea. They had water on their left; water on their right, but they were like dirty, smelly beasts, wearing clothes for days on end. It was a very hard life in the trenches.

Many New Zealand men were lost at Krithia, some even before they reached Turkish lines. The 8 May attack failed and the survivors were moved back to the Anzac area, the day after the Turks attacked the Anzacs on 19 May.

Turkish sources estimate that they suffered nearly 150,000 casualties at Cape Helles, and that the Allies lost almost the same number. So this was a bloodbath.



Corporal Seyit carrying a shell.
Wikimedia Commons

Around here, May is a time when everything is green and poppies and other flowers appear. It's hard to believe what happened here 100 years ago. However, farmers and other people living here say that when they came here they couldn't use the land because it was all shells, bones and barbed wire. It took them 10 years to make this land arable.

According to farmers in the village, in 1943, nearly 30 years after the battle, they collected almost 100 cartons of bones. These were put in an ossuary, which is shaped like a well, and a memorial was placed on top.

Stop 3

V Beach

This is where the first wave of British soldiers landed on the first day of the Gallipoli campaign. The waters ran red with blood



Getting there from Alçitepe

Continue along the road that has brought you to the viewing platform for 3.7km till you join the road to the Çanakkale Martyrs Memorial. Turn left here onto the two-way road and continue on past the Çanakkale Martyrs Memorial (Çanakkale Şehitleri Anıtı). Continue on the central road running south to the village of Seddülbahir, coming to the village square after 400 metres. Take the village road directly in front of you, travelling 250 metres further before coming to a small mosque on the left and the walls of Seddülbahir Castle facing you. Follow the road as it curves right and then turn left again, with the western wall of the castle on your left. The road will lead down to V Beach.

Your stop

Stand at the water's edge on V Beach. Face the castle of Seddülbahir, on its left is the village of Seddülbahir.

Story

You are standing at the water's edge on V Beach, and this became the amphitheatre of death for the British soldiers who landed here in broad daylight on 25 April 1915.

In front of us is the castle of Seddülbahir, and you can see the damage done to it by the allied naval bombardment. On the day of the landing, these ruins were held by Turkish Infantry. Next to the castle, on the left, is the village of Seddülbahir. On 25 April there were open fields in front of it, and further to the left, on the high ground where the monument now stands, was a Turkish artillery battery – which is marked by the flag. Turkish riflemen occupied all these positions covering the beach.

If you turn to your left you can see, on the headland, the very prominent Memorial, which incorporates the British Memorial to the Missing. Along the ridge overlooking you, were Ottoman defences with riflemen ready to fire down. This is a natural amphitheatre that stretches around, through the forward part of the village, to the castle itself. Anything coming down on to this beach would be shot down.

On the morning of 25 April 1915, the British 29th Division landed here in daylight. The centrepiece of the landing was the old transport ship River Clyde, which was converted into a landing

ship. Holes had been cut in its sides and ramps erected, so that the British soldiers could run down and stream ashore. This line of rocks where you stand marks the spot where the River Clyde ran aground. It was going to be a simultaneous landing with two infantry battalions carried in boats – but the very strong current meant that the River Clyde arrived first.

If you can imagine the River Clyde, with barges being towed behind, grounding about 80 metres out from where you stand. The barges were used like a pontoon bridge to form a walkway from ship to shore allowing the infantry to run across and charge inland. In fact, the ship's captain, Commander Unwin, won a Victoria Cross for jumping into the water under fire and trying to keep the row of barges together.

There were machine guns mounted on the River Clyde firing at the village and the fort. As the ship grounded, the two side doors opened and men, came racing down the ramps, packed one behind the other while Turkish infantry opened fire and shot them down.

The Ottoman riflemen fired 15 rounds a minute and soldiers on the River Clyde thought it was machine gun fire. In minutes, each barge between the ship and the shore was crammed with dead and dying men, and anyone who moved was shot by Turkish snipers. Some



The ship 'River Clyde' at V Beach, Capes Helles. Alexander Turnbull Library 1/2-C-010055-F

survivors who got to the beach ran and took cover in that small clay bank by the tree just in front of you – and stayed there for the rest of the day. Any attempt to move was to die.

A British airman flying a seaplane overhead said that the waters ran red with blood. The British attackers were stuck on this beach for two days before an advance from the next bay across, W Beach, allowed them to clear the village. This beach would become one of the major logistic bases for the British and French armies at Cape Helles, and it was here that the New Zealanders from Anzac Cove landed on 6 May to support the British advance.

Stop 4

W Beach

If you look out to sea here, you can see the wrecks of the Allies' ships –deliberately sunk to make piers

**Getting there from V Beach**

Return to the village square and turn left along the paved road heading west out of Seddülbahir. After one km you will see the stone column of the Empire Memorial on the left. Continue past the turn for the road to the memorial and a further 500 metres you come to a gravel track on the left. Take this turn and drive roughly one km, till the track turns sharply to the left just after a small Ottoman era cemetery on the left hand side of the track. Follow the track downwards 300 metres to W Beach.

Your stop

Stand at W Beach and look out to sea.

Story

You are standing at W Beach. This is the site of the second of the major landings by the 29th British Division on 25 April 1915. If you look out to sea, you can see the wrecks of the ships that were deliberately sunk to provide the piers to make this a logistic base. The landing here occurred in broad daylight, and the ship's boats carrying the British infantry came in after naval artillery had pounded the high ground that you can see all around you.

Once again, Turkish infantry were in trenches on the high ground. They held their fire until the infantry got out of the boats and came up the beach to a barbed wire barrier, about where you are standing. As the soldiers tried to push through the barbed wire, they were shot down by Turkish fire.

Six Victoria Crosses were won here by the 1st Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers before breakfast on 25 April. Finally the brigade commander landed behind the cliff that you can see on your right and he and his soldiers attacked up the cliff and opened the way for his infantry to move inland.

There was an opportunity from about lunchtime that day to push inland and provide support to V Beach – the next beach across. But that did not happen because so many of the officers and NCOs (non-commissioned officers) had been killed or wounded that they were leaderless, and no one took the initiative.

Stop 5

Twelve Tree Copse Cemetery

Anzac troops were deployed here to fight alongside their allies at Krithia. Bones of the dead are still scattered through these fields



Getting there from W Beach

Return to the paved road and turn left, continuing to travel west away from the village behind you. After the road passes Lancashire Landing Cemetery it curves to the north, running parallel with the Aegean coast, passing Pink Farm Cemetery on the right after some 3 kms. Another 2.5 km drive brings you to Twelve Tree Copse Cemetery on the left of the road.

Your stop

Stand just inside the gate of the cemetery.

Story

You're at Twelve Tree Copse Cemetery. At the back of the cemetery is the New Zealand Memorial to the Missing, which commemorates those whose bodies were never found or identified in the battle at Krithia on 8 May 1915. You are standing just north of where the New Zealand Infantry Brigade attacked.

If you look towards the village you can see the minaret of the mosque that was the New Zealand goal. The Turkish frontline was perhaps 300 to 400 metres from where you're standing, and stretched across the front of this village.

An Australian and a New Zealand Infantry Brigade were brought down from Anzac. The New Zealand attack took place on 8 May at 10.30 in the morning. After a 15-minute artillery bombardment, three New Zealand Battalions, with one in reserve, attacked either side of where you're standing. They went through these open fields – which the soldiers referred to as the Daisy Patch because of the wild daisies and poppies that grew in profusion.

The New Zealanders started their attack well behind the British frontline and many men were killed before they even got to the front trenches. As they approached the area where you stand, they came under intense fire. The Wellington Infantry Battalion, which was to the left of you, advanced the furthest. They got about 300 metres beyond

the frontline. Because of the intense fire, everyone took cover. The living lay among the dead. They dared not move because Ottoman snipers shot at any sign of life. Many men spent all day in the hot sun, absolutely still, listening to the moans of their mates nearby, yet they were unable to do anything to help.

Men went to ground and if they had their entrenching tool, they put the shovel part over their head to give them some protection.

General Hamilton ordered another attack at 5.30 pm, and so the Otago Battalion, which had been in reserve, came up and linked with the Canterbury, Auckland and Wellington Infantry Battalions. After 15 minutes of artillery bombardment, the New Zealanders attacked again. This time the Australians on your right also attacked, and both brigades were cut to pieces.

On 8 May 1915, New Zealand had over 800 casualties. This attack marked the end of any further offensive action on the part of the New Zealanders at Krithia. They dug in and remained here manning the trenches.

They then went into reserve and worked as a labour force at the beaches. Finally they were taken back to Anzac Cove in late May, where they reinforced the defences and played their part in the August offensive.



An Australian infantryman gives a drink to a wounded Turkish soldier, below Achi Baba.

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Some of the New Zealand dead are buried in Twelve Tree Copse Cemetery, but most are missing with no known graves. They are commemorated on the wall of this memorial. In fact, of the 2,779 New Zealand dead from the Gallipoli campaign, there are only 341 graves. Some are buried at sea but most are missing.

There are still bones scattered through the fields where this New Zealand attack took place. Though they could be Turkish or British, they could also be the bones of New Zealand soldiers.