



# WATERLOO, BELGIUM HISTORIC TRAIL



## FIELD GUIDE



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®  
TRANSATLANTIC COUNCIL

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This Field Guide contains information on the Waterloo Historical Trail designed by Mr. Robert H. Boling of Troop 149 in Waterloo, Belgium as part of his Wood Badge ticket in 2001. The guide is intended to be a starting point in your endeavor to learn about the history of the sites on the trail. Remember, this may be the only time your Scouts visit the Waterloo area in their life so make it a great time!

While TAC tries to update these Field Guides when possible, it may be several years before the next revision. If you have comments or suggestions, please send them to [Admin@tac-bsa.org](mailto:Admin@tac-bsa.org) or post them on the TAC Nation Facebook Group Page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/27951084309/>.

This guide can be printed as a 5½ x 4¼ inch pamphlet or read on a tablet or smart phone.



Front Cover: Wellington at Waterloo by Robert Hillingford  
Front Cover Inset: Napoléon reenactor in front of the Lion's Mound.



WATERLOO, BELGIUM  
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# GETTING PREPARED

Just like with any hike (or any activity in Scouting), the Historic Trail program starts with **Being Prepared**.

1. Review this Field Guide in detail.
2. Check local conditions and weather.
3. Study and Practice with the map and compass.
4. Pack rain gear and other weather-appropriate gear.
5. Take plenty of water.
6. Make sure socks and hiking shoes or boots fit correctly and are broken in.
7. Pack a first aid kit, "just in case."
8. Discuss the day's activities, so there are no surprises; discuss safe hiking.
9. Ensure Two-Deep Leadership at all times.
10. Check the Quick Quiz and keep it with you on the trail.



# WHAT IS THE HISTORIC TRAIL?

The Battle of Waterloo is of great importance to Americans living in the European theater. There were no American soldiers fighting in this battle, but our country today is still influenced by the events that occurred here. The results of this battle were to directly mold European thought, balances of power, and political boundaries for the next two hundred years, extending across oceans and leading right up to the world that we share with the Europeans of today. The battle set the stage for two world wars, establishing alliances and history of military thought.

It is important and proper that American Scouts have a full sense of the historical events that happened here and thus gain a greater appreciation of their overseas surroundings - Scouting is an international movement and we live in a global world. The heritage that we Americans share is derived from ancestors whose blood was spilled in the name of Freedom here as well as countless other points on the globe. This Historic Trail is dedicated with great respect to their sacrifice and courage.

Goeije Reise! – Have a nice trip!



Coat of Arms of Waterloo



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# HISTORIC TRAIL ROUTE

## Hike

### Where and How to Start

The trail starts at the Q.G. de Napoléon, (General headquarters of Napoléon), at the farm of Le Caillou.

### Distance and Time

The Waterloo Historic Trail is about a 10km hike through the battlefield, visiting most of the prominent features. Experienced adult hikers completed the route in about 5 hours, stopping at each location to view the site. Younger and less-experienced hikers, and those who wish to take more time, will take longer, perhaps a 7 hours or more. The British were in static positions, so the route initially follows the approach of the French Imperial forces. The fields have changed very little since Sunday, June 18, 1815, thanks to their protection under Belgian law. Please remember that the fields are still actively farmed, and stay on the roads and lanes and do not walk through the crops in the fields. The buildings on the battlefield are also still private homes, so please be respectful of the owners' privacy. Additionally, there are a number of interesting museums on the battlefield. A visit to them is recommended. Take the time to learn and enjoy the hike.



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# WATERLOO HIKING ROUTE

## START – Caillou Museum

Start at the Q.G. de Napoléon, (General headquarters of Napoléon), at the farm of Le Caillou. This is a **museum** with collections housed in five of the rooms where Napoléon spent the night before the battle. It was here that he drew up the plans for the Waterloo battle on the morning of June 18, 1815. Displays include a collection of weapons, medals, and firearms, a camp bed belonging to the Emperor, and the skeleton of a French Hussar still lodged with musket balls.

Entrance fees for the museum as of January 2018 are:

Adult: 5€

Children: 3€

Seniors: 4€

Groups: 4€

Museum Hours:

1 April-30 September: 09.30-18.00

1 October-31 March: 10.00-17.00

You are encouraged to check for updates at the museum website:

<http://www.dernier-qg-Napoléon.be/>

**50°38'45.8"N 4°25'14.4"E – Chaussée de Bruxelles 66, 1472 Genappe, Belgium**

*Proceed north for 1. miles on the N5 road, which traces the route toward the battlefield followed by the French that morning, to your next stop, the Wounded Eagle Monument.*

## Checkpoint #2 – L'Aigle Blessé (Wounded Eagle)

The **L'Aigle Blessé, or the Wounded Eagle Monument** symbolizes the fall of the Imperial Guard, whose last defensive squares were on this spot. Just past the monument is another large monument to the French writer Victor Hugo whose writings in "les Misérables" and "Les Châtiments" chronicled the tragedy of Waterloo.

**50°39'57.7"N 4°24'48.2"E – Chaussée de Charleroi 18, 1380 Lasne, Belgium**

*Continue about 100 yards, past, the La Belle Alliance and turn right for about 200 yards to our next stop, Napoléon's Observation Post.*



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# WATERLOO HIKING ROUTE

## Checkpoint #3 – Napoléon's Observation Post

On your right is an embankment with a set of stairs and metal rail. Climbing to the top, you will find yourself at the **observation point** occupied by Napoléon when he returned to the battle at about 4:00 p.m. From here, looking northward, you can get the French view of the British lines across the valley 1500 meters away. These fields on the eastern side of the N5 are the site of the first French infantry attack, and the wild counter-attack of the British cavalry.

### 50°40'02.7"N 4°24'58.2"E – Chemin de la Belle Alliance, 1380 Lasne, Belgium

*Head back toward the La Belle Alliance and cross the N5 road onto to a small dirt road. Follow the road for about ¼ of a mile and stop to look around the battlefield along the way.*

## Checkpoint #4 – The Battlefield

This road was there during the battle and crosses the body of the battlefield where the French cavalry and Imperial Garde charges took place. From here, looking north, it is possible to see the Butte du Lion (Lion mound) in the distance, the most prominent feature on the battlefield today. As you continue westward along the dirt road, you will walk directly across the battlefield. It takes some imagination to envision this peaceful farmland of today as the field of horror and slaughter that it became that afternoon. As you walk, notice the gentle ridge on the horizon to the northwest that was occupied by the British. Today from the valley, unchanged from the way it appeared to the French, the ridge conceals the ground behind it. This was enough to fool the Imperial forces, in three separate attacks, into thinking the British had abandoned their positions. It is unquestionably the most significant feature of the battle site, and the reason it was selected by Wellington. As the dirt road rises to the crest of the ridge, you will meet a paved road. This position was occupied by the British line of defense.

### 50°40'24.1"N 4°24'05.8"E – Chemin de Plancenoit, 1380 Lasne, Belgium

*Turn left (south), and proceed for 0.3 miles to Hougomont farm, our next stop.*



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# WATERLOO HIKING ROUTE

## Checkpoint #5 – Hougoumont Farm

This fortified farm formed the anchor point of the extreme southern end of the British defenses. The purpose of its defense by the British was to prevent the French from circling around through the low ground to the south to attack the British on that side from their flank. Although this was the scene of intense combat all day, Hougoumont never fell, and fulfilled its role for the British. The purpose of its defense by the British was to prevent the French from circling around through the low ground to the south to attack the British on that side from their flank. Although this was the scene of intense combat all day, Hougoumont never fell, and fulfilled its role for the British.

As you approach the farm, you come first to the main entrance leading into the courtyard. The walls used to be higher, and it used to have a solid wooden gate. The buildings and garden were defended by detachments of the Scots Guards and Coldstream Guards. Although they were surrounded for most of the day, their musket fire held the attackers at bay. Within these walls some of the most tremendous violence of the battle took place. At one point, about 100 Frenchmen broke through the main gate into the courtyard, but the defenders managed to close it behind them. There was a fierce fight in the courtyard and the only French unhurt survivor of the 100 was a small drummer boy who had lost his drum.

As you enter the courtyard of Hougoumont through the spot where this gate stood, the great barn is on your right and the remains of the great house or chateau was on the left. Nothing remains of the chateau now except part of a ruined wall attached to the chapel, which is ahead of you. The chateau caught fire during the shelling and burned down during the battle, killing many of the wounded sheltered inside as it collapsed. Inside the chapel hangs a wooden figure of Christ on the Cross. Its feet still show charring marks from the flames that burned many of the wounded defenders to death.

The present residents graciously permit visits to the private outer grounds of Hougoumont. All visitors are requested to behave with respect to their generosity and to act discreetly. (continued on next page)



# WATERLOO HIKING ROUTE

## Checkpoint #5 – Hougoumont Farm (cont.)

**50°40'15.7"N 4°23'38.9"E – Chemin du Goumont 1, 1420 Braine-l'Alleud, Belgium**  
*From Hougoumont, backtrack northward on the lane you came down for about 0.5 mile, going by the end of the dirt road that led across the valley on your right. The paved lane proceeds toward the Butte du Lion and other buildings, which are ahead of you. As you look to your right, you get a wide view of the valley as the British viewed it. This is one of the most important spots on the battlefield.*

## Checkpoint #6 – Chemin des Vertes Bornes

This lane, the “Chemin des Vertes Bornes,” remains exactly the way it was when the infantry and artillery manned it, except it is now tarred. From here, one can appreciate Wellington’s strategy of using the slope to screen his forces from view of the French coming up from the valley. The cavalry and reserves were again behind the ridgeline, on the down-sloping ground to your left. This was where Wellington had his mixed regiments of British, Belgian, Dutch, and German troops, ordering them back 100 yards from the skyline and to lie down, when the French artillery bombardment started. It was from the lane along this ridgeline at about 4:00 p.m. that they saw the immense waves of Imperial cavalry approaching from beyond La Belle Alliance, across the valley on your right. This is where they formed into squares in gallant defense against the equally heroic onslaught of the cavalry charges.

About 7:30 p.m., the Imperial Garde also attacked up this slope, unable to see their enemy or realize that they had not retreated after all until they were nearly at the top of the ridge.

Continuing northward, about 300 yards from the Butte du Lion along the lane you will pass by a small stone monument, marking the crucial position of a Royal Horse Artillery Company battery under the command of Captain A.C. Mercer. This battery played an important role in breaking up the French cavalry charges.



# WATERLOO HIKING ROUTE

## Checkpoint #6 – Chemin des Vertes Bornes (cont.)

Another memorial commemorates Lieutenant Augustin Demulder, a Cavalry Lieutenant attached to the 5th Regiment of the French Cuirassiers who was killed here in one of the furious charges led by Marshal Ney against the allied lines.

**50°40'39.6"N 4°24'06.2"E – Chemin des Vertes Bornes, 1420 Braine-l'Alleud, Belgium**  
*Continue along the Chemin des Vertes Bornes lane to the Butte du Lion, and the surrounding buildings. The Lion Mound is the most prominent feature on the battlefield today. None of the buildings around it or the hill itself were there during the battle; it was all just open farm fields.*

## Checkpoint #7 – Butte du Lion and Waterloo 1815

The Lion Mound is an ideal observation point from which to see the entire battlefield at once. There are 226 steps leading up to the viewing area at the top. Its construction was a tremendous feat at the time it was built in 1826. This involved the movement of over 10.6 million cubic feet of dirt. In another of the Waterloo battlefield ironies, the earth used to construct the Butte du Lion was taken by removing the ridge between La Haie Sainte and the Butte's location. In other words, they took down the most important natural feature of the battlefield – the ridge that caused Wellington to win – in order to build a monument to his victory! In doing so, they removed all traces of the sunken road of Ohain, which was slightly behind the area of the Lion Mound, that proved an unseen disaster to the violently charging French Cavalry.

The Lion statue was cast in the John Cockerill works at Liege. The legend that it was made from melted-down barrels of captured French cannons makes an interesting story but is not true. It was the "Bottresses," female laborers from the Cockerill works, who moved the tremendous amount of earth on their backs in wicker baskets to create the Mound. The Mound took two years to build, and stands over 140 feet high with a circumference of 1700 feet.



# WATERLOO HIKING ROUTE

## Checkpoint #7 – Butte du Lion and Waterloo 1815 (cont.)

There are a number of gift shops and restaurants near the base of the Lion Mound, as well as three museums dedicated to the battle. An excellent audio-visual presentation in the Visitor's Center at the foot of the hill provides a good explanation to the battlefield. The dramatic Panorama of the battle in the adjacent round building is also well worth a visit. Across the road is the Musée de Personages de Cierre, a wax museum depicting the major commanders in the battle. All add to an understanding of how much was encompassed here and are recommended to visit.

Entrance fees for the Waterloo 1815 museum as of January 2018 are:

Adult: 16€                      Seniors: 13€                      Children 7-17: 13€                      Under 7: free

Family: 3 paid tickets plus 2 free children 7-17

Museum Hours:

1 April-30 September: 09.30-18.30

1 October-31 March: 09.30-17.30

You are encouraged to check for updates at the museum website:

<http://www.waterloo1815.be>

**50°40'46.5"N 4°24'18.3"E – Route du Lion 1815, B-1420 Braine-l'Alleud**

*Leaving the Lion Mound and Visitor's Center, proceed 0.3 miles east to the crossroads intersection of the Visitor's Center road and the N5.*

## Checkpoint #8 – Wellington's Observation Post

On the southwest corner stands a tree, planted several years ago by the Touristic Federation of Brabant. This marks Wellington's observation post during much of the battle, which was under an Elm tree. It was near this spot at about 8:00 p.m. that Wellington raised his hat as a signal to all his troops for a general attack on the Imperial forces, starting their total collapse.



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## Checkpoint #8 – Wellington's Observation Post (cont.)

The tree was famous, and was bought by a shrewd Englishman, J.C. Children, in 1818. He cut the tree up into small souvenir pieces, which were bought up by people eager to have a token of the victory of Waterloo. Mr. Children also presented chairs made from this Elm tree to the Duke of Wellington and to Queen Victoria.

Looking south down the road, you will see the Gordon Monument, a lone column sitting on a hill. This is a memorial to Wellington's competent and devoted Aide-de-Camp, fatally wounded here. The monument was erected before the ridgeline was removed to build the Lion Mount. The "hill" is actually all that is left of the ridge; it stands at the original height of the land. Across the street from it, also standing on a similar remaining portion of ridgeline, is the monument to the Hanoverians. This was one of Wellington's German Legions who fought to keep the middle fortified farm of La Haie Sainte out of French hands. This monument also marks one of the huge mass graves on the battlefield, an enormous pit where 4,000 men were buried.

Just past these monuments to the south, the farm of La Haie Sainte can just be seen on the right hand side of the N5 road. The N5 runs due south across the battlefield, just as it did during the battle. Little has changed in the view over the past 200 years except for the width and paving of the road.

**50°40'48.7"N 4°24'42.1"E – Route du Lion 379, 1410 Waterloo, Belgium**

*Cross the N5 to the eastside and stop at the northeast corner of the intersection.*

## Checkpoint #9 – Belgian Monument

On your left is the monument to the five or six thousand Belgians who found themselves fighting on one side or the other of the opposing forces. Because of Belgium's geographic location at the crossroads for European power, Belgium has been the site of their conflicts and encounters throughout its history.



# WATERLOO HIKING ROUTE

## Checkpoint #9 – Belgian Monument (cont.)

This legacy continues even today, as we Americans participate in the Brussels Tri-Missions of NATO, the European Union, and the American Embassy. It is not by accident that these organizations are headquartered in Belgium. Back in 1815, Belgium belonged to Holland and its King was William the 1st. At Waterloo, once again, Belgians paid a high price for European struggles.

### **50°40'49.9"N 4°24'43.6"E – Chaussée de Charleroi 611, 1410 Lasne, Belgium**

*After a small covered picnic area, turn right and continue south down the sidewalk for about 0.2 miles. The buildings across the street here are La Haie Sainte, the middle of Wellington's three fortified farms*

## Checkpoint #10 – La Haie Sainte

A strong word of caution here - the farm stands inconveniently near the edge of the road and there is no sidewalk on that side, and heavy traffic roars by uncomfortably close. It is better viewed from across the street on the other side of the N5, where you now are. The buildings were repaired soon after the battle, and it remains a working farm. The owners are understandably reluctant to have visitors wandering through their property and it is not open to the public.

The house is on the right of the courtyard and the barn is on the left. They are joined on the far side by a row of stables with an arched gateway to the fields beyond. On the street side, there is a high wall separating the courtyard from the road, extending between the house and barn. Today all this appears almost exactly as it did during the battle.

Wellington's ridge ran right behind La Haie Sainte. It was awkward for Wellington to have to defend this fortress, but it was so close to his lines that it could pose a serious problem to him if the French were able to take it. He posted a reliable detachment of 360 Hanoverians from the King's German Legion to defend it.



# WATERLOO HIKING ROUTE

## Checkpoint #10 – La Haie Sainte (cont.)

The Hanoverians has sheltered there the night before, but had not been told they were going to have to defend the place. So they had broken up all the farm carts and taken off the main gate to the fields for firewood. Now they had no timber to build firing platforms or block the entrances. But they knocked firing loopholes in the walls and from there and the upper windows had a grandstand view of the French infantry charge and retreat, and the British cavalry charge in the fields across the road.

Napoléon saw the importance of the farm, so close to Wellington's lines, and he sent French infantry to attack it at about 3:00 p.m. The farm was surrounded, and French broke through the main gate. They were slaughtered and the attack was repulsed but many of the defenders were also killed. The Hanoverians had used up most of their ammunition in the fight and in shooting at Imperial troops who passed the farm to attack the main British line itself. They kept sending messengers up to the crossroads for more ammunition, but none arrived. Even by collecting all they could find on the dead and wounded, each man had only about 4 or 5 rounds left.

At about 6:00 p.m., the French made a second attack. They seized the barrels of the defenders' rifles and fired into the loopholes, and tried to chop down the main gate with axes. The Hanoverians stood on the roofs of the sheds and leaned over the walls, firing their last few rounds. But other French got onto the roofs of the stables opposite and fired down into the courtyard. Their ammunition gone, the Hanoverians had to abandon the position and run for the crossroads. But the only way out was to fight their way through the house and out by the back gate. There was a brief, horrific fight in the courtyard with musket butts and bayonets. Only 41 of the 360 Hanoverians made it back to the crossroads alive.

**50°40'40.9"N 4°24'45.1"E – Chaussée de Charleroi 2, 1380 Lasne, Belgium**

*Head back north to the previous intersection and then make a right. Follow the cobblestone lane for about 150 meters to our next stop.*



# WATERLOO HIKING ROUTE

## Checkpoint #11 – Picton Monument

On the corner, you will pass a small stone monument to Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Picton, who was shot dead on his horse here commanding the Scottish infantry against the first French attack. The British lines along this cobblestone lane on this side of the main road were mostly a Scottish stronghold. Except for a brigade of Dutch and Belgians, there were the Cameron Highlanders, the Black Watch, the Gordons, and the First Royal Scots, all regiments of Sir Thomas Picton's infantry division. Each of these regiments had already lost over a third of their men in the previous day's fighting at Quatre-Bras. The Gordons had fared the worst, losing more than half their men and 25 of their 36 officers. Nearby is also a small stone monument commemorating the 27th Inniskilling Regiment of Foot. Out of 747 officers and men, they lost 493 killed or wounded. As you look to the south, you can see the entire open plain over which the first French infantry attack came, which was also the scene of the disastrous British cavalry counter attack. Napoléon's vantage point was about 1500 meters away, on the rise behind La Belle Alliance.

**50°55'11.5"N 2°55'01.6"E – Klerkenstraat 64, 8920 Poelkapelle, Belgium**

*After surveying the battlefield, return back to the same intersect on the N5 and this time head north. After about ½ a mile, you will see the large farm buildings of Mont St, Jean on your right.*

## Checkpoint #12 – Mont St Jean

The British established this as a hospital, under the command of Deputy Inspector Gunning, Principle Medical Officer of the 1st Royal Medical Corp, and surgeons were busy with wounded here all day. It was a very popular job for a soldier in the middle of a terrible battle to help a wounded comrade back to safety, and a very tempting excuse to linger a while before going back to the fight. There were no stretchers, and it took six men to carry a wounded man in a blanket. So the loss of manpower at a crucial time during a battle could have been enormous. Consequently, many commanding officers gave orders that no wounded were to be carried off or even helped. Several who had given that order were left to die where they fell.



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# WATERLOO HIKING ROUTE

## Checkpoint #12 – Mont St Jean (cont.)

Today, there is a small museum at the farm. Entrance is included if you get the 1815 Pass at the Lion's Mound museum or you can buy a separate ticket for just this museum.

Entrance fees for the Mont St Jean museum as of January 2018 are:

Adult: 7.50€                      Seniors, Students, Groups of 10: 5€

1815 Pass: 20€ (includes entrance to several museums around the battlefield)

Museum Hours:

Monday: 14.30-18.00

Tuesday to Sunday: 10.00-18.00

You are encouraged to check for updates at the museum website:

<http://fermedemontsaintjean.be/en/le-musee/>

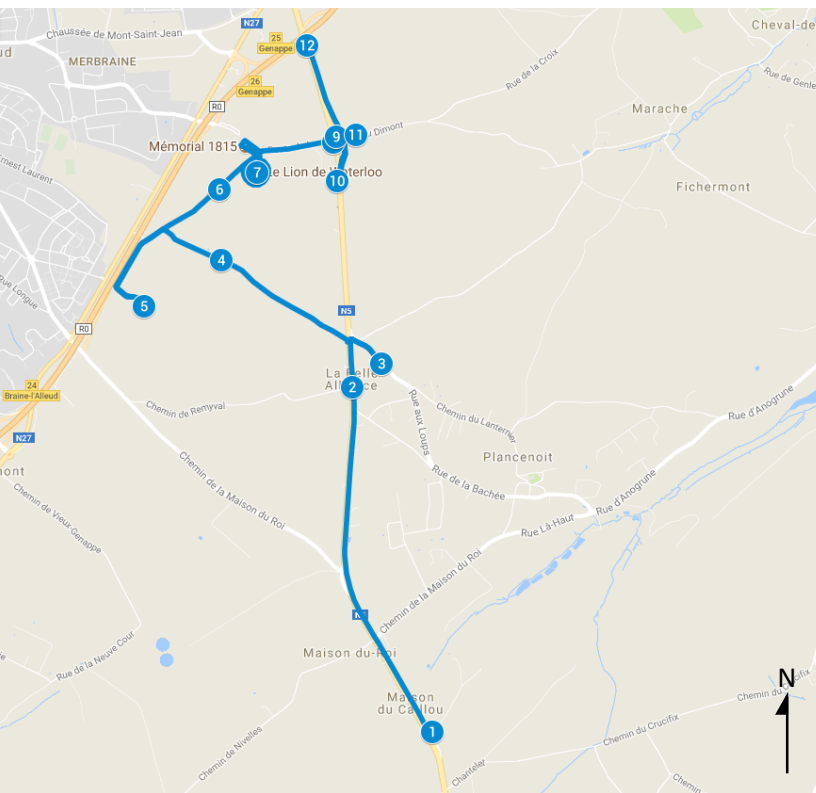
**50°41'08.9"N 4°24'34.3"E – Chaussée de Charleroi 591, 1410 Waterloo, Belgium**

*Congratulations, you have now completed the Waterloo Historic Trail and hopefully learned a little about the men who fought in the battle and some of the tactics they used. Before you head back to your car, feel free to stop at any of the nearby cafes or restaurants for a short break! And thanks for hiking!*



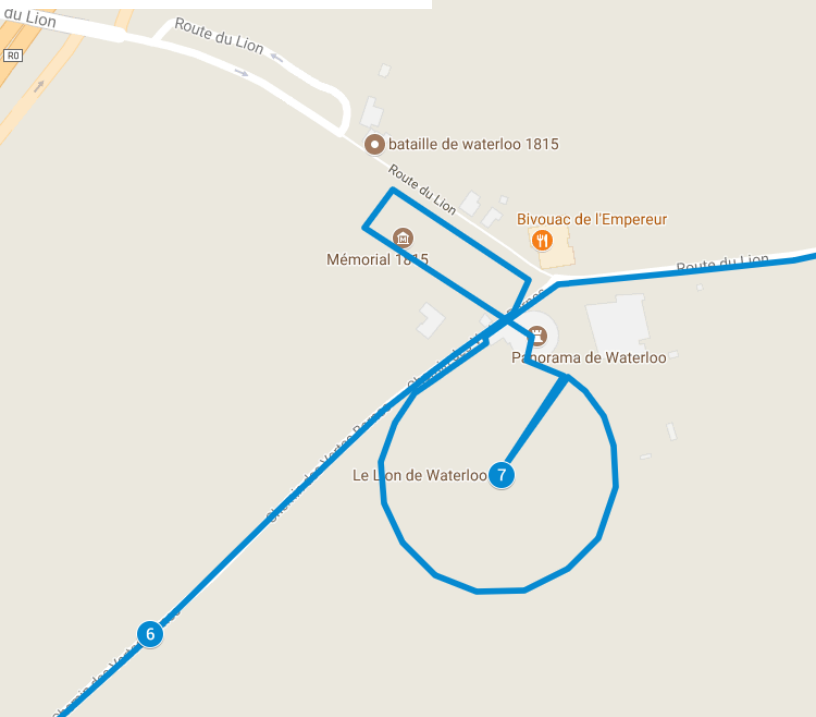
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# WATERLOO HIKE ROUTE MAP

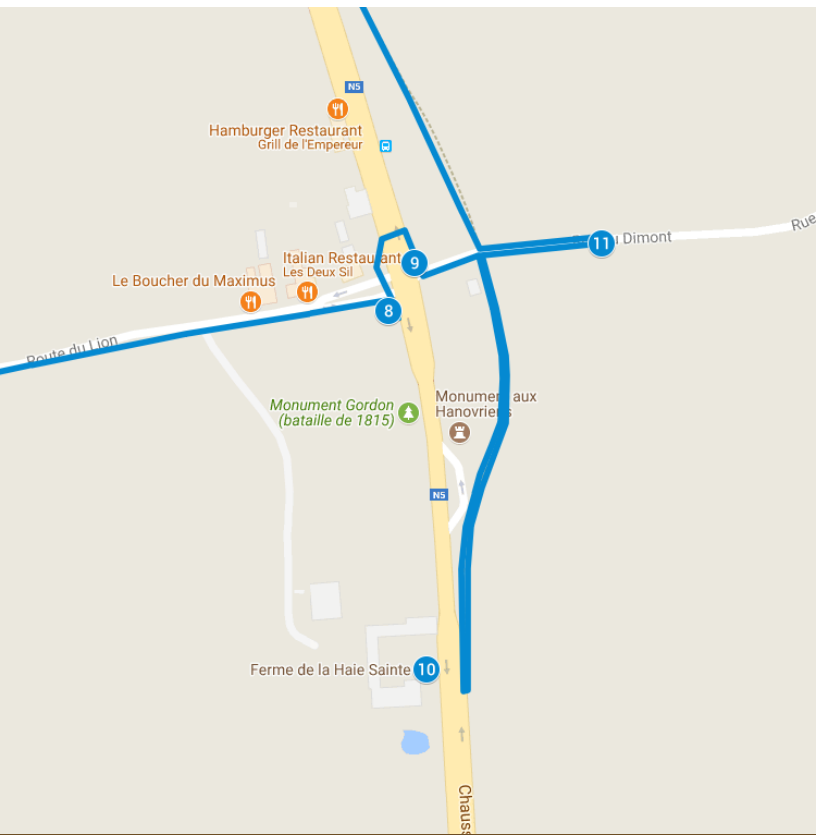


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# HIKE ROUTE AROUND THE LIONS MOUND



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# CAMPING

There are several campsites in the area for scout units interested in camping.

## De Kluis

The closest camping for scouts is at De Kluis, a facility owned by the Flemish Association of Catholic Scouts and Guides. There are 20 campsites spread over 35 acres of forest, capable of accommodating 3000 people, with sanitary installations provided near to the campsites. It is located approximately 25km from the battle site.

**50°47'57.3"N 4°39'55.6"E – De Kluis 1, 3051 Sint-Joris-Weert, Belgium**

**Telephone: (32) 16 47 71 72**

**Fax: (32) 16 47 04 56**

For more information, email [kluis@hopper.be](mailto:kluis@hopper.be) or visit their website at <https://www.hopper.be/en/jeugdverblijf/de-kluis>.

## La Fresnaye

Camp de la Fresnaye is not often used by the Boy Scouts of America. It is part of the Federation of Catholic Scouts in Belgium. It is closer to Waterloo than De Kluis although the facilities are not as modern as De Kluis. It is about 15km away from the Lion's Mound.

**50°43'43.4"N 4°16'42.5"E – Prins Boudewijnlaan, 1653 Dworp, Belgium**

**Telephone: (32) 492 27 79 23**

For more information, email [lafresnaye@lesscouts.be](mailto:lafresnaye@lesscouts.be) or visit their website at <https://lesscouts.be/contacts/nos-centres-federaux/la-fresnaye.html>.



# BACKGROUND READINGS

## PRELUDE TO THE BATTLE

Napoléon Bonaparte, inspiring his own people with his military genius and his revolutionary fervor, became within a few short years Emperor of France and master of Europe. In 1812, after 15 years of victory, he met with disaster in the Russian Campaign. By 1813, defeated by the combined forces of Russia, Austria, Prussia, and England at Leipzig, Napoléon was driven to the gates of Paris to await his fate. In May 1814, he was sent into exile on the small Mediterranean island of Elba.

After ten months, Napoléon escaped from Elba. In a desperate gamble, with less than 1000 men, he returned to the mainland of Europe. He reformed his army in France with amazing speed, and set out to conquer Belgium and the Netherlands as his first step in rebuilding his empire. Only two armies could be mobilized in time to meet this threat in Belgium: the Prussian army of Marshal Blücher and a mixed army of British, Dutch, Belgian, and German troops commanded by the Duke of Wellington. Most of Wellington's British army, which had been victorious over the French in Spain, had been sent home. He had a low opinion of his new forces, which were divided by loyalties, experience, and their languages.

Napoléon's army marched north headed for Brussels. He decided to divide the two forces of Blücher and Wellington, keeping them apart by attacking each of them in separate battles. He first sent General Grouchy with about 70,000 men to engage Blücher's army on Friday June 16 and Saturday June 17 at Ligny, badly mauling the Prussians in heavy fighting. The Prussians retreated toward Wavre, but moved back faster than the French could pursue them, salvaging much of the army.

As General Grouchy's force chased the Prussians without catching them, they would be drawn away from the main body of Napoléon's Imperial Army. Napoléon was yet to discover that he would not have their support during the battle.





# BACKGROUND READINGS

Meanwhile, Wellington's forces also engaged Napoléon's main army at Quatre Bras, the crossroads of the Brussels-Charleroi and Nivelles-Namur roads, 13 km south of Waterloo. Wellington had to fall back to the north in step with the Prussians, and he conducted a fighting retreat to the valley south of Waterloo. He had chosen this ground some time before as the best position for the defense of Brussels.

The night of June 17, before the battle, Wellington established his headquarters in a tavern in Waterloo center. At 2 a.m. on the morning of June 18, 1815, Wellington received word from Blücher that the Prussians would march across from Wavre and join Wellington as soon as they could. Based on this information, Wellington decided to stand and fight that day. However, even marching with astonishing speed, Blücher's forces could not arrive to help until that evening. Wellington's mixed army would face the French onslaught on their own all day, praying for the Prussian reinforcements to come.

At about 6:30 p.m., on the evening of June 17, Napoléon arrived with the advance guard of his Imperial army at the farm of Le Caillou, about two kilometers south of the battlefield, where he spent the night. He took over this farm as his headquarters. While his Service Corps settled in, he and his General Staff rode to the south edge of the battlefield, by an inn called La Belle Alliance. From there, across the valley, they could see the campfires of the British army deploying and bivouacked along a ridge on the northern side about 1500 meters away. Napoléon believed this was very favorable to his plan of attack. He thought Wellington had made a serious misjudgment in having the Forest of Soignes to his back, blocking his retreat like a wall as the battle progressed. What he could not realize was that Wellington knew this land perfectly and had explored it on a previous visit to Brussels nearly a year before. Napoléon returned to le Caillou and had dinner with his Chief of Staff and second in command, Marshal Ney. His communications officer had died at the beginning of June, and Napoléon appointed a replacement, Marshal Soult. Although Soult was a good operations officer, he was inexperienced and lacked foresight in organizing the dissemination of battle orders. Delays in effective communications and orders were to cost the French heavily.



# BACKGROUND READINGS

Napoléon was not feeling well. Unknown to his troops, he was suffering from an attack of piles and a chronic condition later diagnosed by some historians as colitis, an extremely painful bladder infection. His ill health also set the stage for disastrous effect on the upcoming battle.

## THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO

It rained violently all night, and in the morning when it ended, the ground was sodden. The soil on the battlefield is rich in sticky clay, and it was impossible to move cavalry or artillery pieces until the ground had a chance to dry out. Napoléon and his staff rode toward La Belle Alliance. From here, on June 18, Napoléon directed the battle. He lined up all the Imperial forces even with La Belle Alliance inn on both sides of the Brussels-Charleroi Road: seven infantry divisions, supported behind by three separate corps of cavalry. Behind, in reserve, were 20,000 men of the Imperial Garde. The Imperial Forces at Waterloo totaled about 72,000 men and 246 cannons.

Facing him was Wellington's army of about 67,000 combined forces with 184 cannons. Wellington had deployed his troops along a gently rising ridge of high ground on the north side of the valley. This low ridge was to play a vital role in helping Wellington win the battle. Anchoring the west end of his lines was Hougoumont, a farm with fortress-like walls, defended by the British Coldstream Guards. In the center was another fortified farm, La Haie Sainte. A third fortress farm, La Papelotte, anchored the east end.

Napoléon's men were exhausted getting into position through the mud. Napoléon had no choice but to postpone the battle until the ground dried. The battle started at 11:30 a.m. on June 18, 1815. He sent the battalions of his brother, Prince Jerome, to attack Hougoumont. This was supposed to be only a diversionary attack, to make Wellington pull his forces from the center of his lines to rush to reinforce Hougoumont. But the trick did not work- Wellington left his forces right where they were.



# BACKGROUND READINGS

Prince Jerome exceeded his orders, launching attack after attack on Hougoumont, with horrible casualties. The fighting went on here all day to no avail; the fort never fell. The French had to divert more men to fill the ranks of casualties in the fighting. They pounded Hougoumont with artillery, setting the buildings on fire, killing many of the defenders, who still fought on relentlessly. The diversion attack became a futile, pointless slaughter for the Imperial troops, but the garrison held. The French continued to attack all day, even when it was apparent they would not take the fort. Six thousand men were killed and wounded, strewn over the farm and its surroundings.

Napoléon was obviously very ill and in pain. Leaving the battle in the hands of Marshal Ney, he rode part way back towards le Caillou, to a farm called Rosomme. He stayed there most of the day, not returning to La Belle Alliance until after 4:30 p.m. But from Rosomme, the Emperor could not see into the valley where the fighting was to take place. Marshal Ney was in the thick of the fighting all day long, and was therefore not in a good vantage point to oversee and direct the action. One of the odd things about Waterloo is that the French commanders never had any comprehensive view of the battle until it was in its last stages.

At 1:30 p.m., about two hours after the starting attack on Hougoumont, 78 French cannons opened fire on the positions at the center of Wellington's lines, along the road at the top of the ridge. As the shots came, bounding up the ridge or sailing over, there was a spot of relative safety just behind the crest. Wellington ordered the Scottish infantry holding this position to step back one hundred yards. This placed them out of view of the French gunners. After about half an hour, the shelling stopped.

The French infantry began to advance over the fields, parallel to the main road on the east side of La Haie Sainte, to a steady rum-dum-dum of drums. They came in three solid columns of infantry, about 150 men wide and 25 men deep. The French met with fire from the Rifle brigade near La Haie Sainte, but continued their steady approach toward what looked like an empty ridgeline. About forty yards from the crest, they halted and began to form into a line.



# BACKGROUND READINGS

Suddenly, 3000 muskets of the Scottish infantry fired into the deploying French. In the middle of their maneuver, they could not fire back. The Scots burst over the lane charging in with their bayonets- about six or seven thousand men began fierce hand-to-hand fighting. Into this mêlée charged 1,200 men of the British Heavy Cavalry. The double attack totally overwhelmed the French infantry. Their ranks broke and the survivors retreated in disorganization across the valley, pursued by the British cavalry in a killing frenzy.

The British cavalry went all the way across the valley in their excitement, right up among the French cannons, temporarily driving the gunners away. But no one had any way to disable the cannons, or rope to try to drag them off across the still-muddy ground. The cavalry were armed with pistols and sabers, and could not really do any damage to the cannons at all. As the British cavalry tried to fight their way back across the valley, about half of them were killed. Thousands of dead and wounded men and horses lay in the mud all across the valley, and there was a lull in the fighting for the moment as both sides gasped for breath.

At 3:30 p.m., Imperial French artillery again began to bombard the mixture of British, Belgian, Dutch, and German troops on the ridge between Hougomont and La Haie Sainte. Wellington had the men move back 100 yards from the skyline, and lie down to make them smaller targets for the cannon fire. His own artillery stayed on the ridge all day, as did Wellington himself, paying no heed to the danger.

The artillerymen watched in awe at about 4:00 p.m., as masses of French Cavalry aligned themselves for an immense attack approaching from beyond La Belle Alliance. The massive waves of cavalry advanced at a slow trot, in lines of riders 500 abreast and 12 deep. They stretched all the way across the valley, from Hougomont to La Haie Sainte. The end ranks took musket fire from the fortified farms, and bunched up toward the center. Later, some cavalrymen said their horses were actually lifted off the ground by the pressure.



# BACKGROUND READINGS

Marshal Ney was fighting right alongside his men in this attack, but made a mistake: he sent no infantry support with the cavalry. This had seemed unnecessary; from his vantage point, it looked like the artillery had driven the British from the ridge in retreat.

To defend against cavalry, a line of infantry stepped back and formed into a “square,” each side three ranks deep. The front rank knelt with the butts of their muskets on the ground and the bayonets pointing up and outward. The back two ranks stood and fired alternating volleys. Cavalry could not ride through such a bristling hedge of bayonets, or get close enough to chop at the defenders with their swords. They were reduced to riding around the squares, being shot at from all sides, like Indians circling a wagon train.

The cavalry broke into a charge up the ridge. They could not see the British squares until they were nearly on top of them. As they reached the top, they ran into devastating canister fire from the British cannons and musket fire from the squares from a range of less than 50 yards. The front ranks were pushed forward by those behind, charging between the squares and losing their formations. Many horsemen met with disaster as they fell into a sunken road that cut through at the top of the ridge, invisible until they were upon it. The French retreated down the hill, reformed their ranks, and attacked repeatedly. After each attack, the French artillery opened fire on the squares and inflicted hideous casualties. The cavalry attacked over and over, at least ten charges, until the ground was so littered with dead men and horses that they could not ride over it any more.

Toward the end, the cavalry and squares were deadlocked, which had never been experienced in a battle before. The cavalry rode around the squares slowly trying to find a way in, to break them up. The infantry ranks discovered that if they fired, the cavalry tried to attack before they could reload – so they stopped shooting. Neither side could do much of anything, and they sometimes just stood several yards apart shouting insults at each other in frustrated fury.



# BACKGROUND READINGS

The cavalry attacks lasted for about an hour and a half, until 5:30 p.m. By this time, Wellington's ranks were very thin and very low on ammunition. The men were dazed and exhausted, but there were no more reinforcements to bring up. Wellington reformed the regiments into a line again and made them lie down. He knew his men were at the end of their resources. They had almost nothing left.

Meanwhile, though ill, Napoléon had returned to La Belle Alliance during the cavalry attacks. Standing on an observation point behind the inn, he was furious in the way his cavalry were used without infantry support. Marshal Ney, in the thick of the fighting, could not observe the British troops remaining on the ridge. Earlier, he had sent a single messenger to tell General Grouchy to stop chasing Marshal Blücher's Prussians and return to join the Imperial forces facing Wellington. But due to the communications problems, General Grouchy never received this order until 7:00 p.m., after the battle's outcome had already been established. Grouchy and his 70,000 French troops would never arrive. Later, when the battle was lost, Grouchy would retreat without casualties to Paris, and would be commended by the French people for salvaging this portion of Napoléon's troops from the bloodbath.

Napoléon realized he was in serious trouble but still determined that he could grasp victory. After another lull, at about 7:00 p.m., Napoléon threw his Imperial Garde into the fray. This was an elite corps, which only took part in a battle if the outcome became desperate. The drums of the infantry again sounded and the Imperial soldiers marched up this same slope, which had been churned into liquid mud by the cavalry attacks.

They advanced in three great columns, but again, because of the ridge, were unable to see the formations of British until they were almost on top of them. The column formations were impressive, meant to punch through the ranks of the British who the Emperor thought had broken and fled. But this meant that the men in the inner ranks could not use their muskets.



# BACKGROUND READINGS

As the bearskin hats of the Imperial Garde became visible marching up over the top of the slope, the British line stood up. They began volley fire into the leading ranks of the Imperial Garde, who had not known they were still there. They were engaged at the front by the British 1st Foot Guard, and by Belgian troops. The British 52nd Foot Guard marched forward down into the valley, pivoted left, shot into the French masses from the flank and charged with bayonets. The Garde fired back and tried to meet the assault. In brutal hand-to-hand fighting, the Garde's invincibility and energy was transformed into agony and bloody wreckage. With enormous casualties on both sides, the Imperial Garde broke into disorder and retreated across the valley, back toward La Belle Alliance, where they regrouped.

At the same time, about 7:30 p.m., Marshal Blücher's Prussians arrived, with 60,000 men. Prussian soldiers began an assault on the French from the farm at Papelotte to the east. Napoléon was in shocked disbelief - he had thought up to the last moments that his forces had won. At 8:15 p.m., his troops were under general assault by the allied forces from both sides.

By 8:30 p.m., Napoléon's Imperial French army was in panic and wild retreat back south toward France, the way they had come. The remnants of his Imperial Garde, faithful and disciplined to the last, formed into three squares to cover the retreat until their numbers were overwhelmed. This crushing, resounding and final defeat was the end of Napoléon's empire. This was a very different scenario than he had imagined, having planned to spend that night victorious in Brussels.

As the Prussian army took over the pursuit of the retreating French, the two allies, Marshal Blücher and the Duke of Wellington, met and shook hands in front of La Belle Alliance. They had won - although by only a very close margin.



# BACKGROUND READINGS

## AFTERMATH OF THE BATTLE

At the end of the day, 40,000 men and 10,000 horses lay dead or horribly wounded on the field. But the horror did not stop there. In those days, it was a soldier's right to loot the dead for money or other items of worth. Officers in particular had purses, watches, pistols, swords, medals, locketts, and other decorations that could be sold. Their gold braids and epaulettes and uniforms were worth money and even teeth were pried out of mouths by the cold-blooded looters, to sell to dentists for making sets of dentures.

But the looting at Waterloo was out of hand. After the soldiers had moved on, local peasants came and robbed the bodies of what was left, living and dead alike. Wounded who resisted the looters were quietly knifed in the dark. Looters turned on each other and were murdered themselves for their plunder.

Survivors that night simply slept in their units on the battlefield, not moving from the circle of their bivouacs, while men lay bleeding to death and robbery went on around them. The next morning, the whole army had moved south after the retreating French, and there was not a healthy soldier left on the battle site.

Armies in those days had no systematic means of caring for their casualties, who were in inconceivable numbers. Wounded from both sides were taken in carts by the local peasants to makeshift surgeries in the crowded, filthy hospitals that occupied every cottage and barn in the area. It was Thursday, four days after the battle, before the last men still alive were found and brought in from the places they had fallen. They were deranged by thirst, pain and solitude.

Surveying the carnage on the evening after the battle, some of the Duke of Wellington's officers saw tears running down his face. He later said, "A victory is the greatest tragedy in the world, except a defeat."





# BACKGROUND READINGS

## THE FORCES AND WEAPONS USED AT WATERLOO

In the armies of both sides, there were three main bodies of force: **Infantry**, **Cavalry**, and **Artillery**.

The **infantry** was the most numerous. Most of the soldiers on both sides carried a smoothbore musket, which fired an iron ball  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch in diameter. There were paper cartridges for its powder. To load it, you bit off the end of the cartridge and poured a little of the powder into the firing pan, then the rest down the barrel. You put the ball and the paper wadding down the muzzle and rammed it all tight with the ramrod. In a hurry, it could be rammed by pounding the rifle butt on the ground, but only if the ground was hard enough. A well-trained man could load and fire about two rounds per minute. But after about fifty shots, the flint that ignited the powder wore out. Also, as powder fouled the barrel, ramming became progressively harder until you were forced to stop to clean the musket. Loading had to be done standing up so you usually fired it from a standing position. A musket could kill a man several hundred yards away, but it took more luck than skill to hit someone, or even a whole rank of soldiers, at much over seventy or eighty yards. For this reason, armies relied on firing muskets together in volleys, which was deadly. Each man carried about 120 rounds of ball cartridge. The Baker Rifle had been introduced to the British Army in 1800, but was not widely in use yet by Waterloo. Only a few regiments had Rifle brigades. The rifling made them a little slower to load, though they were much more accurate than the smoothbore muskets.

The **cavalry** was armed with sabers and pistols. After expending your one pistol shot, you were left only with your sword. In the French cavalry, there were also lancers. The lance was respected because it had greater reach than a saber. With sword or lance, it was easy for disciplined cavalry to ride through a line of infantry, whose only defense was to form square. The only armor, other than helmets, were heavy chest-plates worn by the French Cuirassiers. These deflected saber-slashes, and sometimes even musket balls.



# BACKGROUND READINGS

But the disadvantage was that armor was heavy and cumbersome, especially when the rider was unhorsed. It was better strategy to kill a mounted man's horse because then he became just a man on foot with a sword, weighed down with bulky armor.

There were two kinds of **artillery**: horse artillery, which was mobile, used to great effect at Waterloo by the British, and foot artillery. This took a fixed position at the start of a battle and remained in one place. They fired three kinds of missiles, which ranged from four to twelve pounds in weight. The first, round shot, was a cast iron ball. Its momentum was its destructive power. One shot was seen to knock down twenty-five men, one after another, killing or wounding all of them. Even at the end of its range, a rolling cannon ball could still take off a foot. If you could see a round-shot in flight, that meant it was coming straight at you, but it was considered cowardly to duck. You could see them easily when they began to bounce, plowing up the ground each time they hit.

Artillery shells, the second type of missile, were also round. They were hollow and lighter, so they did not bounce so much. Sometimes they lay on the ground with their fuses sputtering and sparking, giving a soldier time to pick them up and throw them away like a baseball before they exploded.

The third type was canister, also called grapeshot. These were large numbers of musket balls or scrap iron packed into a canvas bag, which burst open when they were fired. At Waterloo, the French used canister filled with horseshoe nails. This was the artillery's close range weapon. A well-timed shot could mow down an entire rank of men or cavalry.

Cannon had to be aimed again after each shot. They were just turned in the right direction and the range and elevation estimated through experience. The barrels had to be cooled down and kept clean with sponges on the end of long poles, but the principles of loading and firing were similar to the musket. The gunners usually kept a slow match burning throughout the battle to set off the powder charge. Cannons could fire at about the same rate as muskets, about two rounds per minute.



# BACKGROUND READINGS

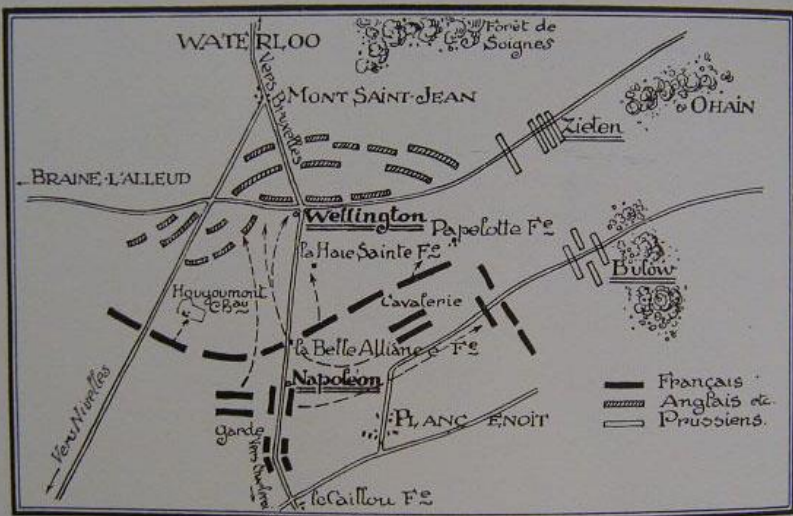
## MEDICAL TREATMENT OF THE WOUNDED AT WATERLOO

On both sides, surgeons were operating on the frontiers of the knowledge of their day. A surgeon carried his own outfit of knives, scalpels, saws, forceps, tourniquets, lint for stopping wounds, linen for bandages, silk and wax for sutures, whalebone splints, pins, tape, thread, needles, adhesive plaster, opium, submuriate of mercury, sulphate of magnesia, volatile alkali, oil of turpentine, wax candles, phosphoric matches, and wine or other liquor, to help treat shock.

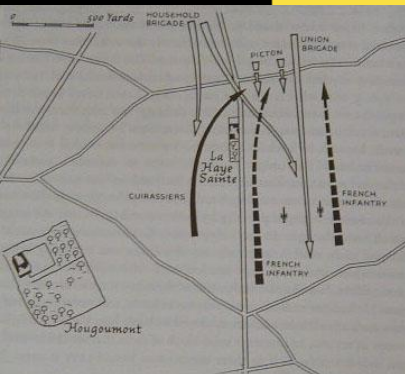
What seems remarkable is that there was no anesthetic. The wine or diluted spirits were given to fortify the men, not to render them unconscious, and the opium was to rest them after the operation, not before. Some historians have suggested that the soldiers back then were no less immune to pain than we are today, but that they expected and anticipated it as a simple fact of everyday life. So perhaps they were simply more experienced with pain, in themselves and in others. This may have lead them to be less afraid of it than some people of today who, accustomed to anesthetics, have never had a serious pain and know how to avoid it.

The treatment was not very complicated. For chest and abdominal wounds, nothing could be done except to stitch them or plaster them up, then wait to see what happened. For leg or arm wounds, the ready remedy was to cut them off. The round musket balls and other missiles were so destructive in smashing arms or legs that this was often best for anything other than a simple fracture or flesh wound that missed the main arteries. Aside from the amputations, the surgeon's main work was in probing for foreign bodies and setting simple fractures and bandaging. Probing was done with bare fingers, and special forceps that were made to fit musket balls.

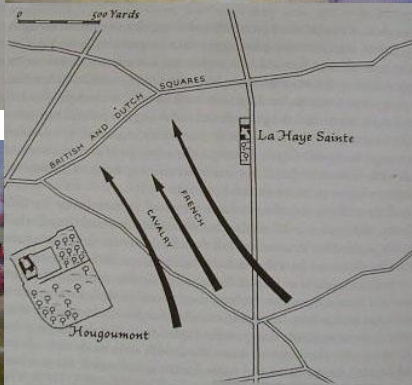




WATERLOO, BELGIUM  
HISTORIC TRAIL

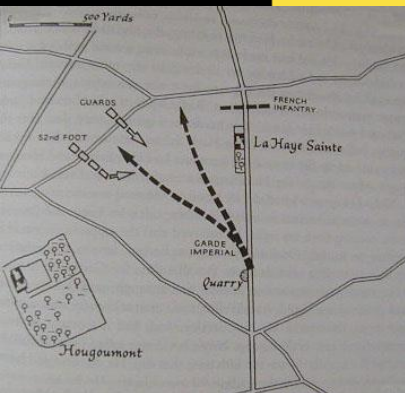


First Main Attack



Second Main Attack





Third Main Attack



Weapons of the Battle



WATERLOO, BELGIUM  
HISTORIC TRAIL

# HISTORIC TRAIL QUIZ

1. What day was the Battle of Waterloo? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What farm did Napoléon use as his headquarters? \_\_\_\_\_
3. The L'Aigle Blessé, or the Wounded Eagle Monument symbolizes which unit? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many attacks did the French conduct during the battle? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Where in the British line was the Hougomont Farm and was it successfully used by the British? \_\_\_\_\_
6. When was the Lion's Mound built and how long did it take? \_\_\_\_\_
7. About how many Belgians fought at Waterloo? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Who defended the La Haie Sainte farm for Wellington? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Name two regiments from Sir Thomas Picton's infantry division? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What was established at Mont St Jean by the British? \_\_\_\_\_
11. How many men & horses were killed or wounded in the battle? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Who were the leaders of the winning side? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Who led the French side in their defeat? \_\_\_\_\_
14. How many men did the French have? What about the allies? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Where was Napoléon defeated in 1812? \_\_\_\_\_

Answers on page 43



# BSA REQUIREMENTS

**Completion of the Waterloo Historic Trail may complete the following Requirements:**

## **Cub Scouts:**

### **Tiger:**

My Tiger Jungle  
Tigers in the Wild  
Tiger Tales

Req 1  
Req 1, 2, 4  
Req 7

### **Wolf:**

Paws on the Path  
Finding Your Way

Req 1-5  
Req 4

### **Bear:**

Fur, Feathers, and Ferns  
Paws for Action

Req 1  
Req 2B

### **Webelos:**

Webelos Walkabout

Req 1-6



## **Scouts BSA:**

### **Tenderfoot:**

Req 4d, 5a, 5b, 5c

### **Second Class:**

Req 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 6c

### **First Class:**

Req 4a, 4b



\*Note: Requirements for the Citizenship in the Community, Citizenship in the Nation, Hiking, Orienteering, and American Heritage Merit Badges and the Cub Scout Outdoor Activity Award can be earned by completing this hike and learning about sites found on this hike.



**WATERLOO, BELGIUM  
HISTORIC TRAIL**



## This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.



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# NOTES

Quiz Answers: 1) June 18, 1815; 2) the farm of Le Caillou; 3) Imperial Garde; 4) three; 5) Extreme Southern end of the defenses, yes, it never fell; 6) 1826 and two years; 7) 5000-6000; 8) 360 Hanoverians from the King's German Legion; 9) the Cameron Highlanders, the Black Watch, the Gordons, and the First Royal Scots; 10) a hospital; 11) 40,000 men & 10,000 horses; 12) Marshal Blücher and the Duke of Wellington; 13) Napoléon; 14) 72,000 French & 67,000 allies; 15) Leipzig



This Historic Trail was put together by Mr. Robert H. Boling of Troop 149 in Waterloo, Belgium as part of his Wood Badge ticket in 2001.

Additional Historic Trails in the Transatlantic Council area can be found at <http://tac-bsa.org> or by scanning the QR Code below.



UPDATED 29 OCTOBER 2019