BRIEF NOTES FOR GUIDES AND VISITORS
A HISTORY OF THE CRATERS ON HAWTHORN RIDGE

There are two craters on Hawthorn Ridge. The larger one, closer to the road is that of 1st July 1916 while the small one to the South West is that of 13th November of the same year.

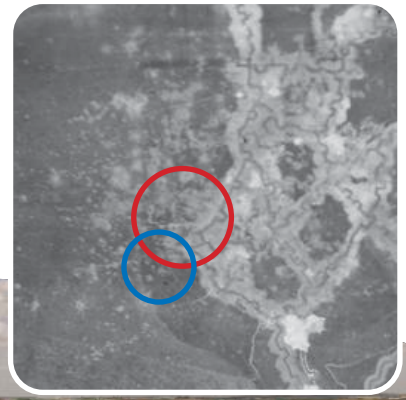
The Great War came to the area of Beaumont Hamel with the arrival of the German XIV Reserve Corps in October 1914. Units of the French 10th Army managed to halt the advancing German troops by 4th October, but by that point Beaumont and its related village, Hamel had been lost to the enemy. Both sides dug in and the line stabilised in this area and was to be the same when the Battle of the Somme began on 1st July 1916.

At 7.20 Lieutenant Geoffrey Malins, one of two official cinematographers covering the attack, managed to record on film the only mine exploded in combat and this footage has been used in countless documentaries. The main attack on the crater was made by 2/Royal Fusiliers, 86 Brigade, 29 Division. It would prove a complete failure.

Within days the old H3 gallery was re-opened and a new tunnel driven from the point where it was too crushed to use. By the end of October the new chamber, 61 metres south of the original mine was charged. The attack staged by the 51st Highland Division took place on the 13th November. This time the mine was blown at 5.45 am, before dawn and in thick fog. No photography or filming was possible, but the mine explosion was a complete success. The new mine crater collapsed the southern side of the existing crater and many of its defenders must have been killed by this blast. As the second mine was smaller but slightly deeper the crater has steeper sides than the original one and its force swept a large segment of the eastern side of the position away creating a roughly triangular shaped feature that we see today. Within days the Battle of the Somme was over and the ridge remained in British hands until it was recaptured by the Germans in April 1918.

The 1st detonation
July 1916

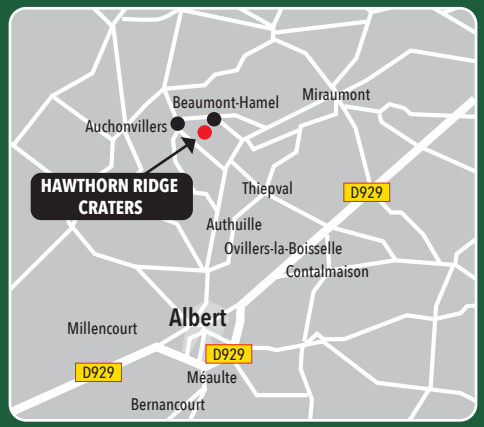
The 2nd detonation
13th November 1916

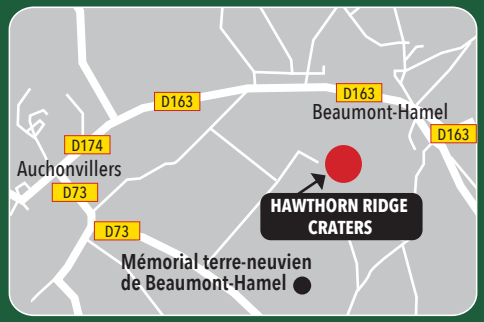




HOW TO GET TO THE HAWTHORN RIDGE CRATERS

Beaumont Hamel, Somme, France





Scan to donate

email: rick@hawthornridgeca.com
www.hawthornridgeca.com

WALK THROUGH HISTORY

HAWTHORN RIDGE CRATERS



A GUIDE AROUND THE HAWTHORN RIDGE CRATERS



9

Looking to your right, you will be able to the spire of Beaumont Hamel church. Both the church and the village were totally destroyed during the fighting of 1916. The farms on the slope up to the left of the village were used by the Germans as command HQ's and were linked into the forward lines by underground tunnels.

8

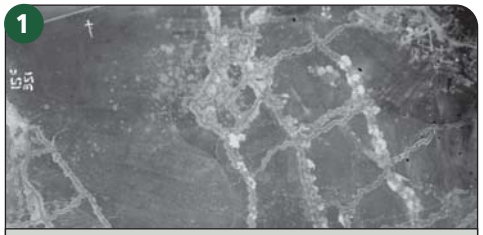
Follow the path to your left, this will take you down to the viewing area at the bottom. To your right and left you will see the approx. positions of the centre of each detonation. Turning half left you will make out a number of shell holes covering the slope, these are the results of British artillery shelling from the period April – August 1918, after the German Army returned here in late March 1918.

Return back to the main path.



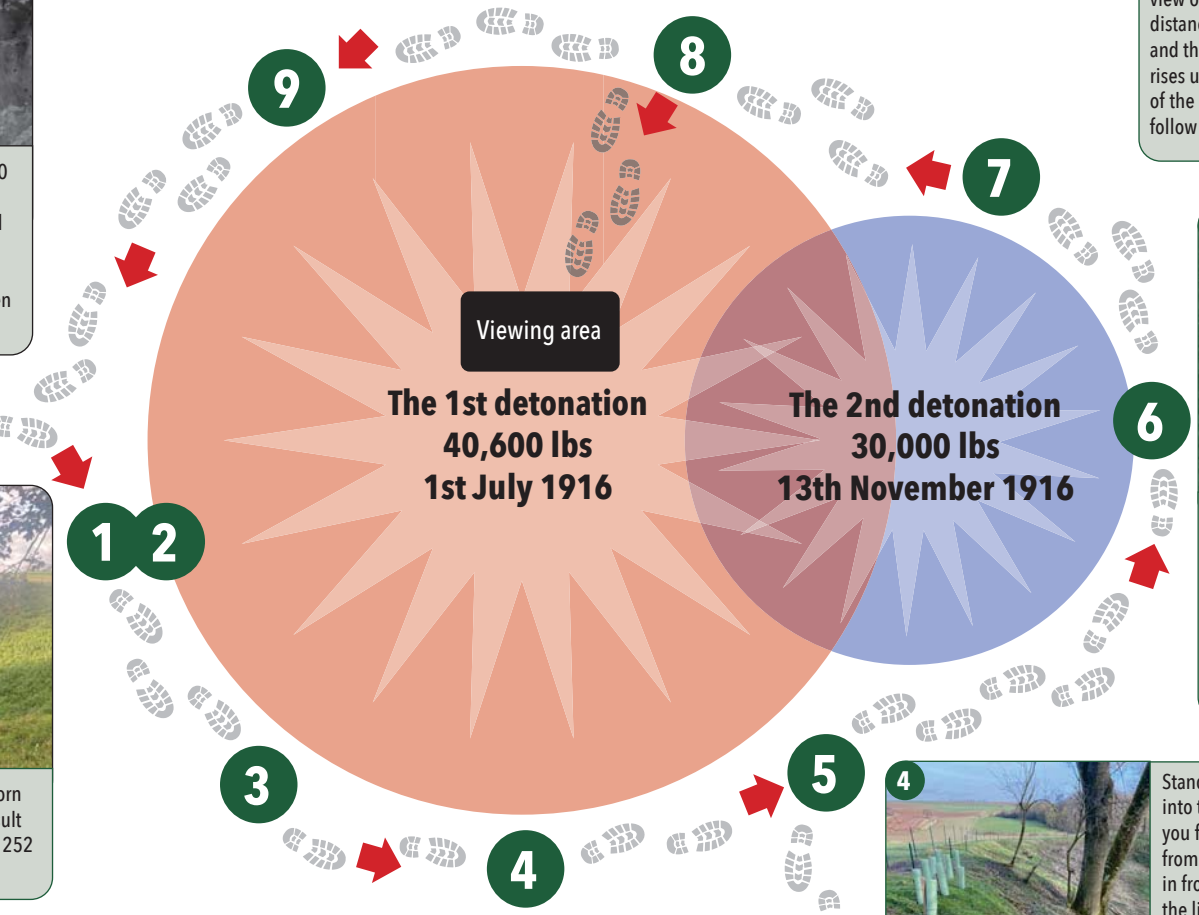
7

At this point, with the craters behind you, you get a good panoramic view of the battlefield stretching away from you. In the near distance, slightly right, you have the trees of Newfoundland Park and the infamous 'Y' Ravine. In the distance, where the ground rises up from the Ancre valley, you can make out the two memorials of the Ulster Tower and the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing. All follow the German Front line.



1

Turn to face back down the path. To your right approx. 50 metres into the field was the German Front Line. It ran north down the slope, across the road and into the wood (the "Bergwerk"). To your left was No Man's Land and approx. 300 metres away was the British Front Line, in front of the trees of the Old Beaumont Road. The "Sunken Lane" was part of No Man's Land.





6

Again, looking into the craters, you are now looking into the result of the second detonation, blown at 0545hrs on 13 November 1916, and you are close to the position of where cameraman, Ernest Brooks took this photograph. The original lip of this crater actually runs in the field behind you (if the grass is low you can just make it out), but 100+ years of farming has infilled an amount of the original crater so it is smaller than it would have been.



2

At the top of the path you will now be facing the Hawthorn Craters. The largest one and the nearest to you is the result of the 1 July 1916 detonation and blown at 0720hrs by 252 Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers.



3

With the crater behind you, the view you see is looking towards the British front lines. This is the ground covered by the men of the 2/ Royal Fusiliers on the 1st July and the 5/Gordon Highlanders on the 13th November. In the distance to the right of the main road you can see a small building (pumping station), this is the approx. position where Geoffrey Malins filmed the Mine detonation and the subsequent attack, seen in the official film, " The Battle of the Somme".

To Hawthorn No.1 Cemetery



4

Standing looking into the crater, if you follow your view from immediately in front and around the lip to your left, you will see the indentations or "crenelations" of Observation/Fire bays, constructed by the occupying Germans from after the 1 July.

5

The path that turns off to your right and through the gate, will take you to the CWGC cemetery, "Hawthorn No.1". Follow the track for 100 metres until a path cuts through the field to your left (it is legal to cross). This cemetery was a 'Battlefield' cemetery, men buried in the area where they fell, and contains graves of casualties from both 1 July and 13 November 1916.

Retrace your steps back to the crater.