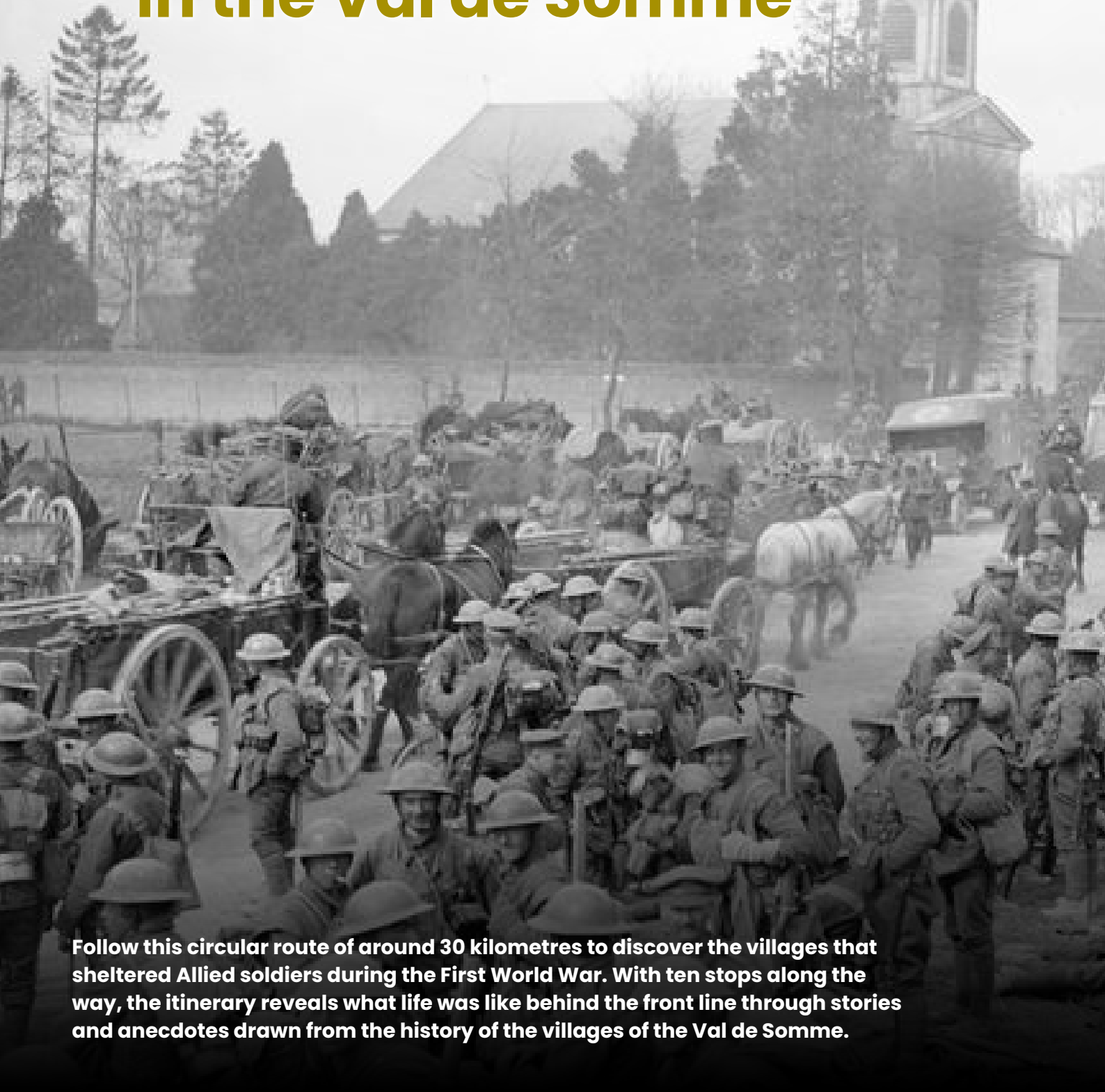


Behind the front lines in the Val de Somme

© IWM (Q 8622)



Follow this circular route of around 30 kilometres to discover the villages that sheltered Allied soldiers during the First World War. With ten stops along the way, the itinerary reveals what life was like behind the front line through stories and anecdotes drawn from the history of the villages of the Val de Somme.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

By bike



3h



36.2 km

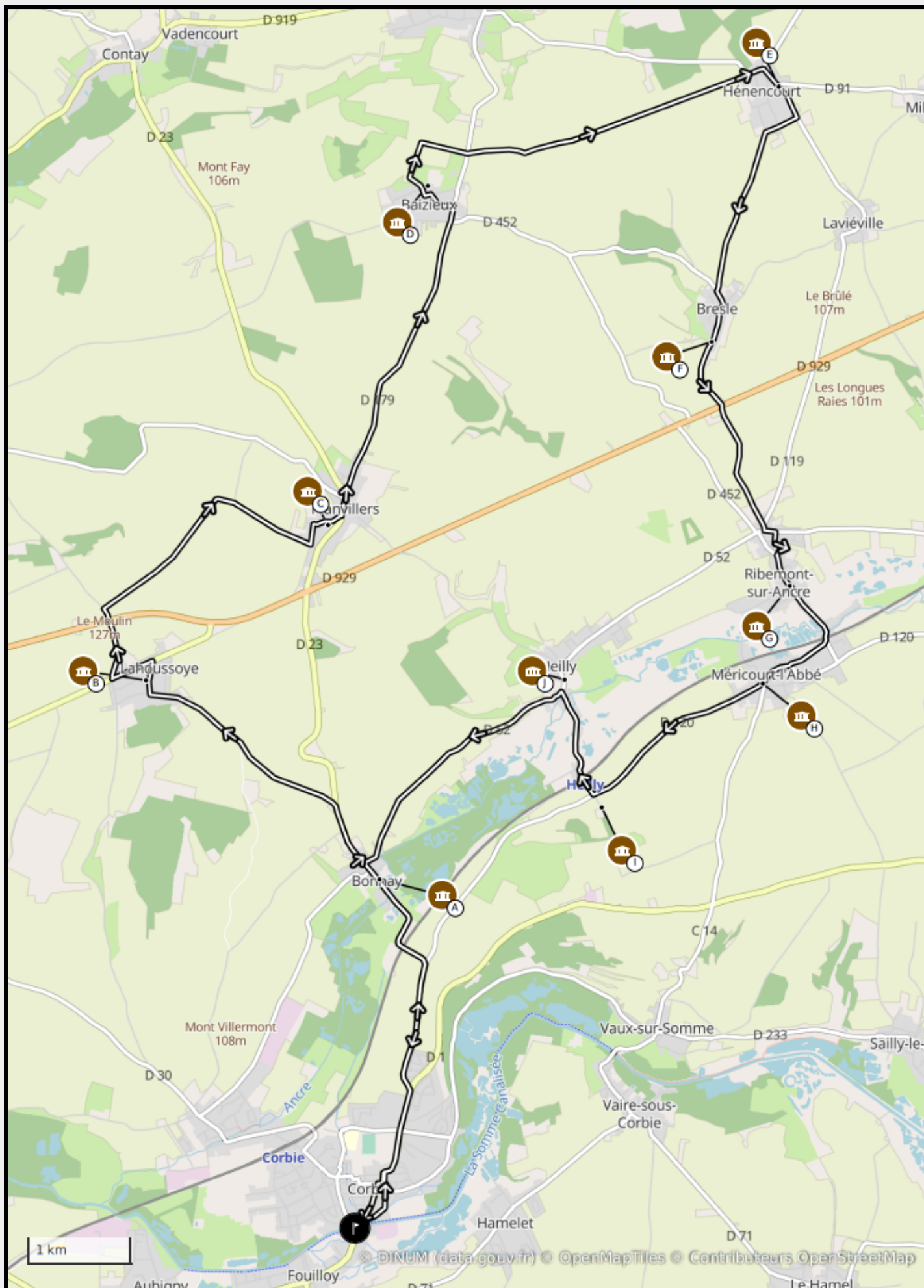


EASY



To follow the
route on Cirkwi





Behind the front lines in the Val de Somme.

Mis à jour le 18/07/2026 par Office de tourisme du Val de Somme et généré par www.cirkwi.com

Route information and points of interest

Step 1

Starting from the Tourist Office, head towards the town centre, then cycle up Rue Gambetta. When you reach the statue of Sainte-Colette, turn right towards Bonnay.

© AWM, E02245



Bonnay Under German Air Attack

The village of Bonnay was briefly occupied by the Germans in 1914 following the French army's retreat. After the German retreat in September, the fighting shifted towards Albert. Bonnay remained behind the lines for the remainder of the war.

After 1915, the area came under British control and the village was used as a rest area. To make it more difficult for German aircraft to spot it, camouflage netting was strung across the village.

In April 1918, under pressure from the Germans, the village was once again under threat and came under German bombardment. The house on the left of the photograph served as the headquarters of the '13th Australian Field Artillery Brigade'. It was men from this unit who shot down the famous Red Baron on 21 April 1918.



Grande Rue, 80800, Bonnay.

Lat : 49.9518274 Lng : 2.5370371

Step 2

Next, leave the village and head towards Lahoussoye. Once you're in the village, cycle up "La Ruelle".

Guynemer in Lahoussoye

Georges Guynemer was one of the 'Aces of Aces' of the Great War, with a record of 53 official victories. He was thus the second-highest-scoring French pilot, just behind René Fonck and his 75 victories.

At the head of his squadron, he was stationed at Cachy from April 1916 to January 1917. It was there, in fact, that his squadron took on its famous name, 'L'escadrille des Cigognes' (The Storks' Squadron).

Paul Lengellé, who would go on to become the official painter of the Air Force, was then a student at the Lahoussoye School, in front of which you are standing. He later recounted that, in early 1917, his class was evacuated upon the arrival of British officers. He then realised that they were accompanying Georges Guynemer. He recounted: 'I walked past him, filled with admiration, whilst one of my classmates, Paul Ballue, who was older than me, took the liberty of speaking to him...'. The pilot had made an emergency landing near the village. He went to the school to contact his unit by telephone in order to be evacuated.



La Ruelle, 808000, Lahoussoye.

Lat : 49.9517804 Lng : 2.4813942



© SPA 42 S 2199 - ECPAD

Step 3

At the top of the street, turn left onto the main road, then turn right towards Béhencourt. After crossing the bridge, take the path on your right towards Franvillers. At the junction, carry straight on.

© IWM (Q 4331)



Franvillers : farm life for the soldiers

Franvillers is a farming village, surrounded by fields. In 1916, although the village was some distance from the fighting, it was used to house British troops. The numerous farms provided accommodation (photo 1). This photo was taken in the courtyard of the farm on your right. The fields were harvested by British troops during September 1916 whilst fighting continued further to the east. A welcome diversion for the soldiers, the army's work in the fields also provided relief for a local population deprived of their men who had gone off to fight, and even stepped in to replace them when the villagers had been evacuated due to the fighting.



5 Rue de l'Eglise, 80800, Franvillers.

Lat : 49.9650577 Lng : 2.5056207

Step 4

At the end of Rue de l'Église, turn left and carry on straight ahead until you leave the village. Continue on your way to Baizieux; once in the village, take the first left. The château is at the top of Rue de Fresne.

The Australian Army in Baizieux

The village of Baizieux played an important role for the Australian army during the spring of 1918. The château, in fact, served as headquarters for the 4th Division. A prisoner-of-war camp was even set up on the outskirts of the village.

During the German advance in March 1918, the village came under threat. It was subjected to intense shelling.

In this photograph, taken in front of the castle walls, we can see Australian soldiers carrying a deceased man. He was not one of their own, but a local resident who had stayed behind with his wife despite the evacuation of the population, and who was killed by a German shell. He was buried by the Allied forces in the cemetery at Baizieux.



© AWM (E01842)



17 Rue du château, 80800, Baizieux.

Lat : 49.9940547 Lng : 2.518859

Step 5

Turn left, then take the first street on the right. Follow Rue de l'Église up to the cemetery, then turn right onto the path. Carry on straight ahead until you reach Hénencourt.



© IWM (Q8622)

Hénencourt under German threat

Hénencourt served as a command centre throughout the war. The château provided sufficient space and comfort to accommodate successive military headquarters. King George V of England even attended a sporting competition organised by the army within the town's boundaries.

However, in March 1918, the town was threatened by the German advance, and Albert fell on 27 March. The Allied troops were forced to retreat.

The town's main street was then filled with British soldiers making their way to their new positions.

In the photograph, the château is still intact; the right wing was destroyed a few weeks later in a fire.



15 Rue Neuve, 80300, Hénencourt.

Lat : 50.002519 Lng : 2.5655115

Step 6

Once you're in front of the castle, cycle down Rue Neuve and turn right at the blockhouse. Then follow the signs for Bresle. Cycle through the village until you reach the war memorial.



© ECPAD – DD105-75

Bresle : From the Rear Area to the Front Line

Situated at the bottom of the valley, the village of Bresle offered some protection from artillery fire. Being close enough to the front, it served as an entry point to the trenches. Trench systems led the soldiers directly to the front line further to the east. Nevertheless, as the Germans advanced in 1918, the village also suffered damages.

Known as St Mark's Tree, an ancient lime tree – which had been a sacred site for the Gauls – once stood here. Sadly destroyed in 1918, the war memorial was erected on the site of this tree.



25 D22, 80300, Bresle.

Lat : 49.9807227 Lng : 2.556569

Step 7

Continue on your way until you reach the D929. Cross the road and take the path to Ribemont-sur-Ancre. Head towards the archaeological centre, and stop at the town hall.



© AWM (E04696)

Ribemont-sur-Ancre's Barricades

The village of Ribemont-sur-Ancre was under particular threat during the German advance of March 1918. As a result, it was reinforced by Australian troops, who were seeking to stem the enemy offensive. Barricades were therefore erected in the village in anticipation of street fighting. Ultimately, the Germans were halted to the east of the village, and by the end of March they continued their advance south of the Somme, heading towards Villers-Bretonneux.



1 Place du Général de Gaulle, 80800, Ribemont-sur-Ancre
Lat : 49.959857 Lng : 2.5669572

Step 8

Cycle down Rue de la Gare, then turn right after the level crossing. Continue along this road until you reach the war memorial in Méricourt-l'Abbé.

MMéricourt-l'Abbé: Along the Prisoners of War Route

When the Allies resumed their offensive in the summer of 1918, many Germans were taken prisoner. In the first photograph, we can see a column of prisoners marching up Rue de Vaux, to the left of the war memorial, and heading towards the village square.

These men were then transported to prisoner-of-war camps such as those at Baizieux or Villers-Bretonneux, for example. They were used as labourers, even after the war, to clear the former battlefields.

In the background, we can also see the extensive damage suffered by the village.



© Inconnu



11 Place du 8 Mai, 80800, Méricourt-l'Abbé.
Lat : 49.9514995 Lng : 2.5633737

Step 9

Leave Méricourt-l'Abbé and continue on your way to the Heilly Station military cemetery, which is on your left.



© IWM (Q 1255)

Heilly Station Cemetery

We know that the 36th Casualty Clearing Station was set up in Heilly on 1st March 1916. At that time, it consisted of tents pitched near the station, to the south of the railway line. The captain who kept the unit's diary notes that the camp measured 165 metres by 70 metres, or 11,500 square metres – the same size as the Licorne football pitch in Amiens. The location was ideal in the run-up to the Battle of the Somme, as Heilly station lay on the Albert–Corbie railway line, which was heavily used to evacuate the wounded to hospitals.

The cemetery, meanwhile, opened in May 1916. The first burial was that of John Westcott Solomon of the 25th Field Ambulance (Royal Army Medical Corps), who died on 26 May 1916.

The 'Heilly Station Cemetery' is the largest military cemetery in the Val de Somme. Nearly 3,000 men are buried here.



La Couturelle, 80800, Méricourt-l'Abbé.

Lat : 49.9409052 Lng : 2.5419724

Step 10

As you leave the cemetery, carry on straight ahead towards Heilly. Cycle up Rue du Moulin until you reach the château.

The British Army in Heilly.

The Allied occupation of the village changed over the course of the war, in line with troop movements as soldiers were redeployed to other sections of the front. Thus, from the spring of 1918 onwards, the village was occupied by Australian troops. Heilly continued to serve as a rest and recuperation area for the soldiers. In this photograph, we can see Australian soldiers returning from the baths, which were set up in the village's old mill a short distance away.



8 rue Notre Dame, 80113, Heilly.

Lat : 49.9518274 Lng : 2.5370371



© AWM (E00072)

Step 11

To return to your starting point, head back along Rue Baudelocque towards Corbie. Then follow the Véloroute de la Mémoire (V32) to the Tourist Office.



VAL DE SOMME
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