The Battle of Mons, the first major engagement between British and German forces of the Great War, was fought on Sunday 23 August 1914. Heavy fighting took place in and around the city throughout the day and by nightfall, the heavily outnumbered British Expeditionary Force (BEF) had begun a tactical retreat. In the two weeks that followed, the officers and men of the BEF, under General Sir John French, fought and marched from the battlefield at Mons to the outskirts of Paris. For some 200 miles, the BEF was followed by the German 1st Army and fought a series of rearguard actions in order to protect the retreat.

The Retreat From Mons Remembrance Trail follows this journey and tells the stories of men like Lieutenant Colonel George Morris.

Lieutenant Colonel Morris, originally from the west of Ireland, was killed on 1 September 1914, when the 4th (Guards) Brigade fought a rearguard action in the Forêt de Retz near Villers-Cotterêts. He was later buried at Guards' Grave Cemetery.

At each of the sites on this trail, you can use your mobile phone to access the personal stories of some of the men who fought and died during the retreat.

The trail is yours to explore, but we recommend starting at St. Symphorien Military Cemetery (at Mons) and finishing at the La Ferté-sous-Jouarre Memorial on the Marne. The trail presents the locations in a chronological context, but you may find it easier to use a different order. The map inside this leaflet is there to help you.

Total distance: Approximately 250 miles

Estimated completion time: We suggest that you complete the trail over two or three days. The travel time, by car, is five to six hours.

Discover more: Why not download a free QR code reader to your phone before tackling the trail? This will allow you to scan the QR code on the information panels at each cemetery, giving you access to further information about the cemetery and about those commemorated.

*Please be aware that although scanning the QR code costs nothing, you may incur data roaming charges from your mobile phone operator, depending on your contract.*

The Retreat From Mons Remembrance Trail

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission is responsible for the commemoration of 1,700,000 members of the Commonwealth forces who gave their lives in the two world wars. The graves and memorials of these men and women, who came from all parts of the Commonwealth and who were of many faiths and of none, are found around the globe in 153 countries. Enquiries on the location of individual burials or commemorations can be directed to the offices below or to the Commission’s web site at www.cwgc.org

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Tel: +32 (0) 57 22 36 36
Email: neaoffice@cwgc.org

CWGC France Area
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CWGC Head Office
Tel: +44 (0) 1628 507200
Email: casualty.enq@cwgc.org
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As British soldiers began to retire from the Mons area, German forces established the cemetery at Hautrage for soldiers killed or mortally wounded in subsequent actions south of the city.

Étouges Communal Cemetery
The BEF fought a rearguard action against German forces at Étouges in August 1914. After the battle, German troops buried some of the British dead in this place.

Landrecies Communal Cemetery
On 25 August 1914, 4th(Guards) Brigade acted as a rearguard for the British III Corps and fought a night action at this place.

Le Cateau Military Cemetery
Le Cateau was a German railhead throughout the war and the site of a large hospital centre. The cemetery was laid out by the Germans in February 1916 with adjacent sites for the German and British dead.

Étreux British Cemetery
Many of the soldiers killed at Étreux were from the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Munster Fusiliers. By holding out against a much larger German force, the Munsters protected the retreat of the British III Corps.

St. Symphorien Military Cemetery
The cemetery at St. Symphorien was established by the German Army as a final resting place for both British and German soldiers killed at the Battle of Mons. It contains the graves of the first and last Commonwealth war dead of the Great War.

Hautrage Military Cemetery

Le Cateau was a German railhead throughout the war and the site of a large hospital centre. The cemetery was laid out by the Germans in February 1916 with adjacent sites for the German and British dead.

Étreux British Cemetery
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Néry Communal Cemetery
The remote village of Néry was the scene of a rearguard action fought by the 4th(Guards) Brigade on 1 September 1914. In the aftermath, many of the dead were buried by the people of Villers-Cotterêts. The cemetery was created by the Irish Guards when British forces regained the territory two months later.

Guards’ Grave Cemetery, Villers-Cotterêts
The Forêt de Retz was the scene of a rearguard action fought by the 4th(Guards) Brigade on 1 September 1914. In the aftermath, many of the dead were buried by the people of Villers-Cotterêts. The cemetery was created by the Irish Guards when British forces regained the territory two months later.

La Ferté-sous-Jouarre
The La Ferté-sous-Jouarre Memorial commemorates almost 4,000 officers and men of the BEF who fell at the Battles of Mons, Le Cateau, the Marne and the Aisne between August and September 1914.

Vailly British Cemetery
The village of Vailly-sur-Aisne was the location at which the British 3rd Division crossed the River Aisne on 13 and 14 September 1914, during the Allied advance from the Marne. Most of those buried here were killed at the Battle of the Aisne in September 1914.