



# THE WELLINGTON QUARRY

## *BATTLE OF ARRAS MEMORIAL*



PRESS FILE

## HISTORICAL ACCOUNT

**Many traces left in the underground chalk quarries by the French and the British soldiers between 1914 and 1918** were discovered during a research programme on these underground quarries.

The interest of those testimonies for the understanding of the soldiers' everyday life led to the systematic listing of all these traces left in the Wellington Quarry, as well as all the archaeological signs of previous periods.

In the meantime, the study of archives revealed that **these underground quarries had been fitted out in the perspective of the 1917 spring offensive, to meet the elementary needs of the soldiers: kitchens, showers, latrines were created.** Without totally complying with the sanitary rules, the quarries of Arras offered however high security to the soldiers despite the proximity with the front, as well as acceptable comfort before going over the top.

This information collected during the research programme help us to measure the **human and material effort made by the British forces to convert these underground passages into real quarters aimed at billeting up to 24,000 soldiers, i.e. the equivalent of the population of Arras before the war.**

**These underground works are the most important ever realised by the British troops.**

### *A diversion offensive*

At the end of the year 1916, the allied general staff are planning the next spring offensive: the sector of Arras will be the basis for the launch of a diversion offensive. This action is meant to lure the German reserve troops and help the French major offensive on the Chemin des Dames, which is aiming at breaking through the enemy lines between Soissons and Reims.

From this moment, the British prepare the attack, which is scheduled for April 1917. The commandment's main concern is to concentrate the troops without drawing the Germans' attention. They are preparing an ambitious plan to save lives and prevent mass losses such as the ones happened in 1916 in Verdun and the Somme sectors. **A huge underground network (about 20 km) is being fitted out. From it the British troops will literally come out from nowhere, a few metres from the enemy lines, without being shot when crossing the no man's land.**

### *The offensive*

On Monday 9<sup>th</sup> April 1917 at 5.30 in the morning, after a 4 day long intense shelling aimed at paralysing any enemy action along the 22 km long frontline, the First British Army composed of the four Canadian divisions attacks onto the Vimy Ridge, while the Third Army rushes towards the towns of Cambrai and Douai, two important road junctions, to liberate the mining sector.

This quick advance compels the Germans to strategically retreat onto their second defence line. With the arrival of important reinforcements, vigorous counter-attacks starting 11<sup>th</sup> April jam the British offensive. The British cannot take advantage of their break. From that moment the battle confines to local actions.

In the meantime, the main offensive on the Chemin des Dames is a bitter defeat. Despite this, Field Marshall Haig continues his action along the Gavrelle – Fontaines-les-Croisilles line. These attacks are aimed at holding in the sector of Arras as many German soldiers as possible to help the French on the Chemin des Dames.

The result of the Battle of Arras, even if it does not compel with all the initial objectives, is positive: 20,000 prisoners, the capture of an important stock of weapons, a gain of ground about 10 km wide which allowed to open up Arras, which had suffered bombings and shelling since October 1914.

### ***Where do the names of the quarries come from?***

The New Zealand tunnellers, to find their way in the 20 km long underground network, imagined they were in their country. They named the quarries in the Ronville sector after the main New Zealand towns: Wellington, Nelson, Blenheim... So did the English did in the Saint-Sauveur sector, naming the quarries after British cities.



# THE WELLINGTON QUARRY: OBJECTIVES, FITTING OUT, VISITS

## ❖ Objectives

On the site has been created a memorial of the Battle of Arras of 1917, emphasizing the soldiers' strategy, the role of the Allies and the place of Arras in the history of the First World War. The site will be the starting point for memory discoveries and tours. The discovery of the Wellington Quarry will focus more on the soldiers' lives than on the war itself. It is an authentic place where the visitors will walk in the footsteps of the soldiers.

About 60,000 visitors are waited every year.

## ❖ Impacts

- Emphasizing a unique and authentic historic war site
- Giving the city a new image, regarding a quite unknown episode of its history
- Working on a heritage and memory axis
- Giving a new life to a sector of Arras

## ❖ Visits

Visits are aimed at any type of public. Sounds and lights are omnipresent. The visit lasts 75 minutes.

Here are the main stages of the visit:

- 1- A gentle slope gives access down to the welcoming building. There, an exhibition retraces the main stages of the First World War.
- 2- A glass lift takes the visitors down to the quarry – they enter into a quiet and protecting underground space.
- 3- Audioguided and accompanied tour in the quarry. 17 static or dynamic sequences (projections of pictures or films, lights...) evoke different themes:
  - the discovery of the underground world
  - the quarry before 1916 (extraction of chalk during the Middle Ages...)
  - 1916: the objectives of this unique military strategy
  - 1916 – 1917: the works of the New Zealand Tunnelling Company
  - April 1917: strategy and everyday life
  - The layouts in the fitted out underground network
  - April 1917: the Battle of Arras
- 4- Back to the surface: discovery of the shock of the battle through the projection of a film, combining archives and reconstituted images.

As an emblematic memory place, the site of the Wellington Quarry, on the surface, offers a memorial garden as well as a memorial wall, to render homage to the regiments of the First, Third and Fifth British Armies involved in the Battle of Arras.

### ❖ Opening times

Every day all year round: 10 am – 12.30 pm  
1.30 pm – 6 pm

Closed: 25 December, 1 January, the 3 weeks after Christmas holidays.

### ❖ Admission 2008

6, 50 €

Special price: 2, 70 euros.

### ❖ Details

The Wellington Quarry  
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Tél : +33.(0)3 21 51 26 95  
Fax : +33.(0)3 21 71 07 34  
Email : arras.tourisme@wanadoo.fr  
Site internet : <http://www.carriere-wellington.com>

### ❖ Testimony

*« The town of Arras has a special connection to New Zealand.*

*The story of the members of the New Zealand Tunnelling Company who toiled beneath this lovely city in the dark days of the First World War is legendary. Not only it is the story of determination to help turn the tide of the long and bitter Battle of Arras, but it is also a human story of men far from home who kept their spirits up by creating reminders of the country they hoped to return to one day. As they dug and developed the tunnel network, they left behind personal memories of hope, of humour, of faith and creativity that mark the tunnels today and lend them their unique character.*

*The decision by the Arras city authorities to create a museum to keep these memories alive and to give the public ready access to this historic site is greatly appreciated by the New Zealand government. The museum will strengthen close friendship between New Zealand and Arras and it will become a centre for visitors, especially young people, interested in this city's war-time history”*

Sarah Dennis, New Zealand Ambassador

## ❖ Architecture

Contracting authority: Ville d'Arras  
Archaeology: service archéologie de la ville d'Arras  
Architect: Pattou tandem (Lille)  
Geotechnics: Sols Etudes Fondations (Carvin)  
Scenography : Itinérance (Paris)  
Acoustician: Damiel Cacheteux  
Signposting: S.E.V (Oullins)  
Planning office: Etnap B.E.T

Lot 1 : G.O : Ramery  
Lot 2 : VRD : Duffroy TP  
Lot 3 : Etanchéité : SMAC  
Lot 4 : Menuiseries extérieures : EPM  
Lot 5 : Aménagements intérieurs : Delporte  
Lot 6 : Sols coulés : Sept résine sol  
Lot 7 : Plomberie : Maille  
Lot 8 : Electricité, VMC, chauffage : Santerne  
Lot 9 : Ascenseur : Thyssen  
Lot 10 : Equipements scénographiques : JLT Silic 107  
Lot 11 : Confortement des carrières : Botte Fondations  
Lot 12 : Agencement décor : Innov'Inter

## ❖ Fundings

The cost for this project is € 4 millions  
Here are the financiers:

Conseil Régional	27%
VILLE D'ARRAS	20%
Ministère de l'Aménagement du Territoire	18%
Communauté Urbaine	13%
Conseil Général	12%
Ministère de la défense	10%

## ❖ Some figures

Gross floor area of the welcoming building: 600 m<sup>2</sup>

Surface of the total ground: 11,300 m<sup>2</sup>

Altitude of the visit floor: - 15m underground

Inside height: 2 m – 13.50m

General excavation diggings: 6,600 m<sup>3</sup> (among which 400 m<sup>3</sup> for the lift shaft)

Diverse underground diggings: 1,200 m<sup>3</sup>

Partial filling of the galleries with concrete: 500 m<sup>3</sup>

Underground course through the quarry: 350 running metres

Signalling on each side of the wooden path: 25,000 LED

### Contacts :

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