



The Chemin des Dames

The Ladies Road

Between Laffaux and Craonne, over thirty kilometres, a narrow and fertile plateau rises between the Aisne and Ailette valleys. Overlooking the plain between Laon and Reims, one hundred metres high, it forms a fantastic natural lookout point. The old path, which had been used by the lookouts over the years, became a road at the end of the eighteenth century when the Countess of Narbonne, a lady-in-waiting to Adelaïde, one of the daughters of Louis XV, decided to make it suitable for coaches so as to gain easier access to her country mansion, the Château de la Bove, near Bouconville.

16 April 1917

At six in the morning, General Nivelle launched the great offensive which was supposed to put an end to the endless trench warfare. More than one million men had gathered between Soissons and Reims. Despite an intensive initial assault by the artillery, the German positions were not destroyed. The bloody defeat, illustrated by The Song of Craonne, 'Goodbye life, goodbye love' ignited outbreaks of mutiny among the soldiers.

Other battles

At the end of October, the French troops took the Malmaison Fort. The German troops left the plateau and beat a retreat to the north of the River Ailette.

After 1918

After 1920, the battlefields became places of pilgrimage for veterans and families. A new kind of tourism appeared. It has been booming for the past fifteen years thanks to the renewed interest shown by the grandchildren and great grandchildren of the soldiers who fought in the Great War.



La Caverne du Dragon Musée du Chemin des Dames

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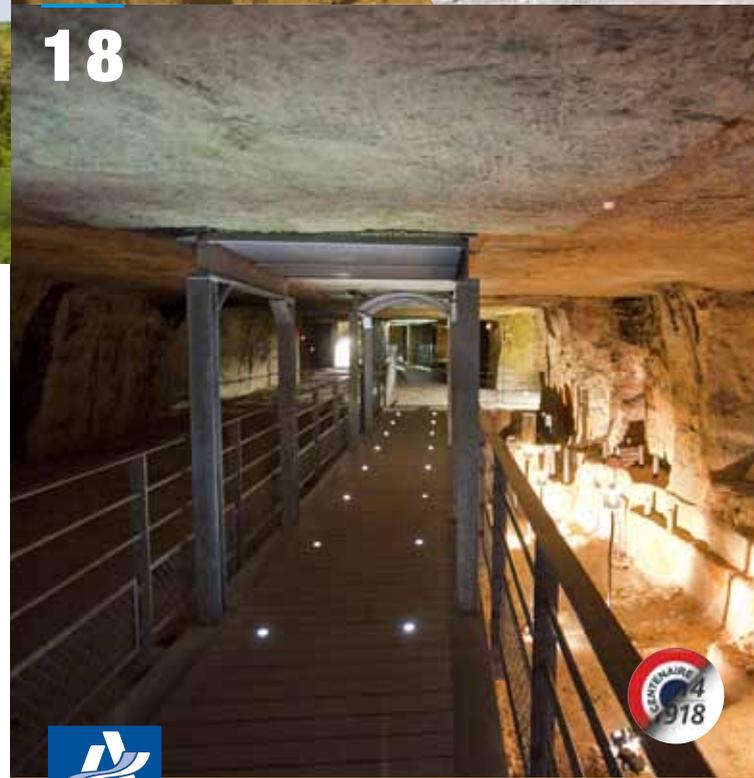
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 Chemin des Dames

Des lieux d'histoire dans l'Aisne



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The Caverne du Dragon

A former quarry

Originally the site was a 'creute'. In the past, the word referred to the quarries where stones were dug out of the chalky plateau. More than just a makeshift shelter, it became a strategic stake. The Germans seized it on January 25th 1915. They dug out a tunnel to link the Creute to a quarry located on the southern part of the Ailette Valley. They converted this large space into an underground barracks, complete with an electricity network, first-aid posts and firing positions. Just as the German soldiers often did for other quarries, the Bavarian soldiers who occupied it gave it a name inspired by Germanic mythology. It was known as the 'Drachenhöhle', the 'Dragon's Cave', and the French kept the name after they recaptured the place on June 25th 1917. Some traces of the successive troops occupying the cave remain, like German inscriptions and, in areas sometimes out of reach, names, dates which remind us that men have lived in those places of war, now empty.

The Museum of the Chemin des Dames

As early as the 1920s, the Caverne du Dragon became a tourist spot. A first museum was opened in 1969, under the aegis of the Souvenir Français. Managed since 1995 by the departmental Council of the Aisne, the Caverne du Dragon has become the highlight of tourism development in the Chemin des Dames area. Nearby a memorial in the shape of nine sculptures created by Christian Lapie and called Constellation of Pain was erected to pay homage to the Senegalese soldiers who were very heavily engaged in the fighting.

To prepare the centenary of World War 1, the present building of the Dragon's Cave will be refitted to offer the visitors a better understanding of this exceptional battlefield, the Ladies Road. A new life for this site which has a special place in history and must be protected.



CAVERNE DU DRAGON
MUSÉE DU CHEMIN DES DAMES

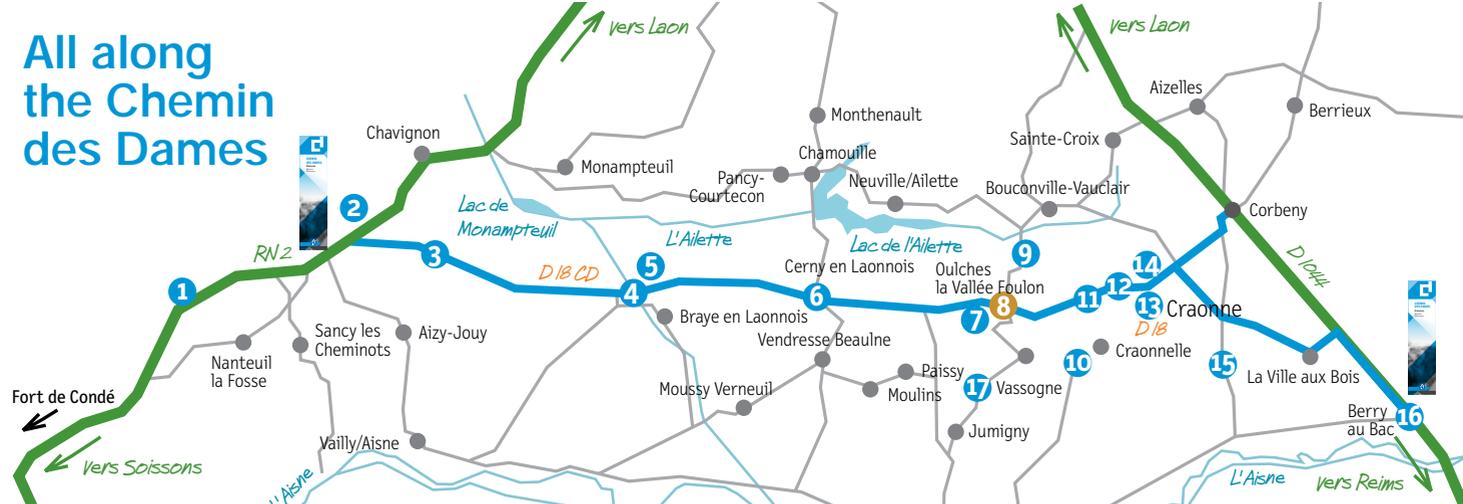
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www.aisne.com



All along the Chemin des Dames



1 - Moulin de Laffaux
the scene of bloody fighting during the two World Wars.

2 - Galvaire de l'ange gardien

3 - Fort de La Malmaison
the ruins of a 'Séré de Rivières' fort (1883).

4 - La Royère
an evocation of the offensive of La Malmaison in October 1917.

5 - Chapelle Sainte-Berthe

6 - Cerny en Laonnois
the memorial next to two German and French cemeteries.

7 - Hommage aux Tirailleurs sénégalais
Constellation of Pain, by Christian Lapie, 2007.

8 - Caverne du Dragon
musée du Chemin des Dames.

9 - Abbaye de Vauclair
the ruins of the Cistercian abbey founded in 1134.

10 - Monument des Basques
in memory of the 36th infantry division.

11 - Statue de Napoléon
in memory of the battle of Craonne on 7 March 1814.

12 - Plateau de Californie
Trenches's remains.

13 - Arboretum du vieux Craonne
site of the old village which was destroyed in 14-18.

14 - Tour-observatoire du Chemin des Dames

15 - Stèle en hommage à Apollinaire

16 - Monument national des chars d'assaut
in memory of the engagement of the first French tanks at the Chemin des Dames.

17 - Musée de Vassogne
Historic Center of the World of Work.



At the Caverne du Dragon



PRICES	Caverne du Dragon	English Tours	Investigation at the museum	Guided tours of the Malmaison fort	Caverne and the Malmaison fort	Discovery tour of Chemin des Dames	Theme Tour
Adults	7€	7€	6€	4€	8€	8€	8€
Children 6 -18's	3.50€	3.50€	4-12 years : 3€	4€	4€	4€	4€
Under 6's	free	free	- 4 years : 0€	free	free	4€	4€
Family ticket	16€	/	/	/	/	/	/
Student /Teacher /Soldier/ Job seeker	3.50€	3.50€	6€	4€	8€	8€	8€
War veterans	free	free	6€	4€	8€	8€	8€
Disabled	free	free	6€	4€	8€	8€	8€
Adults' group > 30	5€	5€	/	/	/	On quotation	/
School group	2.50€	2.50€	/	/	/	On quotation	/



Opening times
10 am - 6 pm September to June
10 am - 7 pm in July and August
 Guided Tours only
 Closed on Tuesday mornings
 Open on public holidays

Guided Tours

10 am - 4.30 pm
 (5.30 pm in July/August)
 Tours every 30/45mn
 English tours every day at noon except on Tuesday
 Duration : 1.15 - 12°C
 Limited to 49 persons

« **Investigation at the museum** »
 Tour for kids and families
 Wednesdays - Saturdays **2 pm**

Guided tours of the Malmaison Fort

4th Sunday of the month
 Departure **10.30 am and 2.30 pm** from the Museum

The historic tour of the Chemin des Dames

Every Thursday in July and August
 Departure **2 pm** from the Museum

And many other events to follow on www.caverne-du-dragon.fr