

5. Brussels, Waterloo, Europe in a nutshell, and a beautiful ruin



To be honest, I don't really like Brussels all that much. According to some, it has a certain charm, and on a warm and sunny day when the terraces around the stock exchange are packed and there's music and partying in the streets I can understand that. However, I think most of Brussels is quite ugly and the greater part of the monuments aren't really that notable, and not even very well-kept when you compare them to the state of the monuments in Paris or London. Random walks through Brussels usually leave me unsatisfied. I think it lacks that feeling of greatness you get in more legendary cities. Nevertheless, the following walks include the most beautiful and interesting sites and sights in Brussels.

If you want to save yourself the city walks, there's also a hop-on hop-off sightseeing bus, see www.city-sightseeing.com for a map, prices and schedules.

You can combine the visit to Brussels with a journey to the greener area south, where you'll find the battlefield where Napoleon was defeated and probably our most romantic abbey ruin.

If you want to do all three, it's best to do the Waterloo and Villers-la-Ville visits first and then head back to Brussels. That way, the Waterloo museums and abbey are sure to be open, and you can choose how many of the proposed city walks you'll be doing depending on the time you have left. If you insist on doing all three visits thoroughly and at ease, or in winter when the days are short, you might want to spread this over two days.

Just as a side note: street names in Brussels and the villages in and around it often have a name in Dutch and in French. I've used one or another, whichever seemed most logical. I don't mean anything by it.

Parking in the streets can be difficult on weekdays and traffic is almost always very busy. You might want to leave your car in a car park but they can be quite expensive. You can try to park on or near the Vrijheidsplein (Place de la Liberté). Parking here is free on Sundays. It's mentioned in walk number 1 so you can take it from there.

If you don't want to do the first walk, try to park on or near the Sint-Katelijneplein. As long as there isn't any special event (like the Christmas market in December) you might find a place there. It's near the stock exchange and it's mentioned in walk 2. If you really only want to see the touristic part, park in the Grote Markt parking – see <http://www.interparking.com> for the prices and adress.

If you arrive by train, I suggest the central station as a start for your walk. Remember that the Thalys trains to Paris depart from the south station (Brussel-Zuid or Bruxelles-Midi), not the central station, if you plan on going to Paris later on.

The city walks

Part 1 of the walk takes you from the central station to the market place via the royal palace, the parliament and the museums of fine arts. Part 2 is an extra half an hour's walk that shows you the stock exchange and the very pretty Sint-Katelijneplein. Part 3 is the most touristic part. If you have limited time, only do part 3. Each walk takes about an hour and a half (including a short stop).

A city walk in Brussels, part 1 – if you want to see it all

The walk starts at the central station – skip the next paragraph if you've parked at the Vrijheidsplein.

At the station, take the exit "Keizerinlaan". With your back to the exit of the station, take a right (between the Méridien hotel and an office block called Impératrice). Walk along the busy Keizerinlaan and at the intersection with traffic lights, go through the little park on your right. This brings you to the Cathedral of St.-Michael and St-Gudule. Also note the modern building on the right, in which the architect has tried to mirror the cathedral. The cathedral can be visited. Leave the cathedral on your right. On your left is the National Bank. There's a museum about money here. Entry is free on weekends, on weekdays you

have to pay. See <http://www.nbbmuseum.be> for details. Follow the rather uninteresting Wildewoudstraat and De Lignestraat to the end. This street brings you to the Congresplein where there's a column commemorating the congress that ruled Belgium the first year after its independence. There's also an eternal flame for the unknown soldier.

Opposite the column, take the Congresstraat to the Vrijheidsplein. (If you've come by car, this is a good parking spot on weekends. Start the walk here then.) Most streets in this neighbourhood are named after people or events or other things related to the Belgian independence. There's the Voorlopig Bewindstraat ("preliminary government"), the Omwentelingsstraat ("revolution"), the Barricades square... and some of the liberties that are laid out by the Belgian constitution also have streets named after them: religion, press, schooling and association. Even a lot of Belgians don't know this.

Go into the Onderwijsstraat (on some plans known as Onderrichtstraat). In this street you'll find the royal circus, a very good concert hall where pop and rock concerts are given. A little further is the "Bier Circus", a bar with about 100 kinds of beer. Follow this street



The congress column amidst the abandoned offices

until you come to the wide Koningsstraat/Rue Royale again at a square with a street sign "Leuvense Weg". Take a left into the Koningsstraat and a left again at the next corner and walk to the next intersection. On your left hand side are the ministry of the Walloon community and the national Parliament. This is the Wetstraat ("Law Street") where the prime minister has his official residence, at number 16 – that's at the intersection with the Hertogstraat (the next street on the left). In the Hertogstraat is the back entrance to the Parliament and, in another building, the Flemish Parliament. Brussels is not only the capital of Belgium but also of the Flemish community – although Brussels is not actually part of the Flemish region but a region on its own, with its own parliament as well (that's in the Lombardstraat). And the Walloon parliament is in the Walloon capital, Namur. Can you still follow?

If you were to continue along the Wetstraat you'd end up at the Cinquantenaire park. The park was laid out to celebrate fifty years of Belgian independence, and in 1905 a triumphal arch was erected. All of this was masterminded by king Leopold II, who never got enough of grandeur and expensive projects. You can see the top of the triumphal arch from this intersection. Unless you have a lot of time, don't bother going there. It's a long boring way on foot - apart from the buildings of the European Commission there's not much to see - and although the park has a car and history museum, there are more interesting things ahead.

So go back to the national parliament, turn your back to the building and walk through the Warandepark. At the other end of the park you see the Royal palace. Right next to it is the BelVue museum, about the history of Belgium. There are temporary exhibitions and you get access to the foundations of a castle that used to be here. Their website, <http://www.belvue.be>, is very informative as well. If you have more than one day to spend in Brussels, I'd add this museum to the "to do" list. If you want to see the palace up close you may cross the street but do return to the side of the park. Facing the palace, take a right. At the big intersection, cross the street (there is a

zebra crossing I'd recommend you use, especially on week days) and go left. You pass the entrance of the "old art" branch of the Museum for Fine Arts. A bit further is the Koningsplein, with the Constitutional Court (one of the highest courts in the country, it decides whether laws are in accordance with the constitution) and the statue of Godefrid of Bouillon. Halfway the square, go down the street on the right hand side, Hofberg (or Berg Van 't Hof). Here, you have a pretty nice view of the Kunstberg ("Art hill") and the old downtown of Brussels.

Note the Musical Instruments Museum on your right hand side, in an Art Nouveau



The royal palace

building (1899, architect: Paul Saintenoy) with a beautiful visible steel structure. It was built as a warehouse for the company Old England – that name is still visible on the building.

All the way down, on the left, you see the Royal Library or Albertina. Many a fine manuscript is kept here, as well as the books that are published by Belgian authors. In front of the library is a statue of king Albert I and opposite it is a statue of his wife, queen Elisabeth. You may want to go down a couple of hundreds of meters for a better view.

If you're interested in architecture, follow the main street into the Ravesteinstraat - it's only a couple of steps - to see the "Bozar" (previously Palais des Beaux Arts), a concert hall and arts centre built in 1928 from a design by Victor Horta. There's a store with art books in the building – if you want to, you can pick

up a book about Art Nouveau in Brussels. Just around the corner is the Cinema museum.

You have to turn back and return to the Koningsplein. Take the big street on the right. You pass the Margritte Museum, and you see the Court of Audit (that controls the financial stuff of the government) on the other side of the street. In this house, Albert I was born. Of course, it didn't house the Court of Audit back then. You also pass the Museum for Modern Art. Just past the Museum of Modern Art is a statue garden (free entrance, open from 10-17h) with some modern statues - but don't expect too much. If it's open, you walk all the way down and continue straight ahead past a gate, through the Sint-Annastraat (no street sign). In this street, at number 32, you pass the Museum for Erotic art and Mythology, a private collection of erotic art. See <http://m-e-m.be>. You arrive at the Grote Zavel square. Walk up to the church - you may visit it.

If the statue garden is not open, just continue along the main street until you come to the Zavel church.

If you cross the main street you get to the Kleine Zavel park, where you'll find a statue of the counts of Egmont and Hoorne, both executed on the same day in 1568 by the Spaniards during their occupation of the Netherlands. Around them are ten statues of other men who were important in the Dutch independence. If you want to know more about this, look for "Eighty-year war" in your encyclopaedia. For now, return to the Grote Zavel square.

This interesting square has several exclusive shops - from expensive chocolates to antiques - and an antiques market in the weekend. Have a look in the Sablon Antiques Center where several antiques dealers have very diverse objects on display.

You have to leave the square at the corner the furthest from the church, into the Rollebeekstraat. The street sign isn't very legible but it's the street between the Café Leffe and Aux Bons Enfants. This is a cosy street with some restaurants. Continue straight through, cross the Keizerslaan (the head offices of the PS, the Walloon socialist

party, are on the right). Continue straight through for a while. By the "Dinant" bus stop is the legendary bar Goudblommeke in Papier. It was the mainstay of surrealist and dadaist painters like Alechinsky and Magritte, and writers like Louis Paul Boon and Hugo Claus (who held the party for his first wedding there) and Hergé, the man who drew Tintin. A sign on the outside reads "this is not a museum, 1 consumption minimum" - I suggest a Lambic or Gueuze if you want to try something special. Lambic is a rather sour beer that has no yeast added for fermentation - the fermentation happens spontaneously because of the wild yeasts and bacteria that are only to be found in the region around Brussels. Gueuze is made by blending aged and young lambic beers.

Continue down the street and take the first on the right, the Stoofstraat. In this street you'll find the famous Manneke Pis, and the hordes of tourists start there. Most people are very surprised at how small it is. Wikipedia has some explanation on its history and meaning. It's a funny statue but it beats me why it's such a popular attraction.

If you want to do part 2, take the second on the left past Manneke Pis, the Vrutstraat.

If you want to skip part 2, continue along the Stoofstraat to the Grote Markt, the market square.



Manneke Pis

A city walk in Brussels, part 2 – around the stock exchange

Follow the Vrutstraat and then the Steenstraat until you reach the wide Anspachlaan. A bit to the left is the Ancienne Belgique, one of the best music clubs in Belgium. You cross the street here into the Borgval street. This street brings you to the Place St-Géry, a square with a relaxed ambiance around an old market hall. Go straight into the Karperbrugstraat. From 6pm, you can have a drink in Le Bison. The interior is lovely, with lots of old concert tickets on the wooden beams. Continue until you reach the crossroads, go right and immediately left at a pharmacy into the Dansaertstraat.

You arrive at a square (the old grains market) and you walk to the right, in the direction of the somewhat dilapidated St.-Catherine church - renovation is at hand. There's a urinal next to it if you need to go. Pass the church on the left hand side and you'll have the Sint-Katelijneplein or Place St.-Cathérine on your left. This square is well-known for its fish restaurants and generally there's a nice ambiance here. This is the site of the docks of the former harbour of Brussels. A lot of the street names here remind of this history, with names like Steenkaai (stone quay), Steenkoolkaai (carbon quay) and so on.

Enjoy a look around the square but get back to the St.-Catherine church and walk around it. At the back, you have a view of the so-called black tower (it's rather pale now) at the other side of the street. This is a tower of the first city wall, dating back to around 1200. It looks very out of place between the modern buildings surrounding it. Walk past it and cross the next street into the Rue de l'Eveque. You reach the Anspachlaan again. You see the guarded car park Parking 58. You can take the elevator all the way up for a splendid view of the city (it's free!) - see if you can spot the palace, the market square, the Koekelberg basilica... Take the same way down.

Follow the Bisschoplaan further and go right at the intersection with the traffic lights.

Follow the wide Anspachlaan until you reach the stock exchange ("Beurs" in Dutch, "Bourse" in French). Some of the statues on this classical style building were made by Auguste Rodin. Apparently, after the fusion with the Amsterdam, Lisbon and Paris stock exchanges (to Euronext), the actual stock exchange will cease to take place in this building. Future plans for the building aren't clear yet. Walk to the back of the stock exchange. If you want to see yet another remarkable café, take a left (Taborastraat) and look for A La Becasse - it's on your left and it's indicated in the pavement with copper nails. It's only a couple of houses away from the back of the stock exchange but it's in the back of a narrow hallway. Specialties here are Gueuze and Lambiek in stone jars, and the waiters serve it in white gueuze makers' aprons. The 19th century interior has remained pretty much original. You can have a snack there as well. After you've had your drink, go back to the rear of the stock exchange.

With your back to the stock exchange cross the street and follow the Boterstraat until you reach the Grote Markt.



The Grote Markt in miniature, in Mini-Europa

A city walk in Brussels, part 3 – the part where all the tourists are

If you only want to do this part, follow the directions for the Grote Markt from the Central Station. They are quite clear.

You are at the famous Grote Markt (“Groote” is the old spelling). It’s one of the finest and architecturally richest market squares in Belgium or maybe in the world. This is the heart of Brussels. It might be a bit confusing because the city hall on one side, and the Broodhuis on the opposite site, look pretty alike. The easiest way to tell them apart is that the city hall has the tallest tower. In the Broodhuis, the costumes of Manneke Pis are kept. There’s a brewery museum in the house of the brewer’s guild, to the left of the city hall. The other impressive building with the gilded details on the columns (but without a tower) is called “the house of the dukes of Brabant” because there are bustes of the dukes on the facade of the building. There are actually 7 houses with one common facade.

Go left next to the city hall. Here is the statue of Everaard t’Serclaes, a 14th century nobleman who liberated Brussels from the Flemish in a dispute between Brabant and Flanders. He served in the city council but was murdered later because of a conflict with the lord of Gaasbeek. Rubbing the statue apparently means good luck in love. The statue is worn where all the tourists rub it.

If you haven’t done part 1 of the walk, continue along this street to see Manneke Pis.

At Manneke Pis, turn back to the Grote Markt. Walk across the square to the Broodhuis. On its right is the Haringstraat. In this street you’ll find one of the strangest pubs in Brussels, Le Cerceuil (“the coffin”). It has a funeral theme going on. Drinks are expensive here, it’s best just to order a regular beer or just have a look and turn back. The half litres come in stone skulls.

Continue along this street. On the corner is the tourist office for Flanders, and opposite the street is the entrance of Toone VII, a famous puppet theatre with plays like the 3 musketeers in Brussels dialect. There’s a bar with a cosy terrace. *Coming out of the Haringstraat, take a left and then quickly a right into the Korte Beenhouwersstraat. At the end, take a left into the Beenhouwersstraat*

and soon a right into the narrow Getrouwheidsgang.

At the end is the female counterpart to Manneke Pis. She’s called Jeanneke Pis. The statue was made by Denis-Adrien Debouvrie, who also owned several restaurants in the Beenhouwersstraat but who was murdered in 2008 at age 74. It was placed here in 1987 to attract more tourists to the little street.

Turn back and take a left into the Beenhouwersstraat. Continue along this street, more famously known under its French name Rue Des Bouchers. It’s full of affordable restaurants, but I’ve heard the quality isn’t always that great. Further on are the glass-covered shopping Sint-Hubertus galleries to the left and right. They consist of three galleries, the King’s, Queen’s and Prince’s gallery. You’ll find luxury shops here. Feel free to stroll through them but return to the Beenhouwersstraat.



the t'Serclaes statue

At the end of the Beenhouwersstraat, take a right (Bergstraat) until you reach a square (Grasmarkt). To the left of the Ibis Hotel is a passage to the Spanjeplein. If you really want to, you can have a look – it’s a rather uninteresting square with statues of Don Quichote and Béla Bartók. At the Grasmarkt, take the street to the right of the Novotel hotel (Infante Isabellastraat) and continue along the cobbled street. You arrive at a square with an entrance for the central station. Here ends our city walk.

The Atomium and Mini-Europe



Mini-Europe and the (real) Atomium

The **Atomium** for Belgium is like the Eiffel Tower for France. It was built for the 1958 world exposition and it symbolises an iron atom. The design was by Belgian architect André Waterkeyn. A word of warning for photographers: the Atomium itself is copyrighted, so if you post pictures of it on your website, you might get an e-mail asking to remove it – however, you’ll only get in real trouble if you try to use the image commercially. On a side note: it’s the same with the evening lighting of the Eiffel Tower - although, in that case, the building itself isn’t copyrighted.

Inside the Atomium is a (rather expensive) restaurant and an exposition about the world exhibition of ’58. The top sphere has a splendid view over Brussels. The entrance fee is quite high – if you’re on a budget holiday you might want to skip it.

Mini-Europa, with its 1/25 scale representations of Europe’s most important monuments, is also worth your time if you do decide to visit the Atomium – it’s just across the road, there are directions for BruParck.

The booklet you get upon entering Mini-Europa is very

interesting and the scale models are of a stunning quality. It’s very well-kept, too. Definitely a fun visit on a sunny day. There are combination tickets with the Atomium.

There’s a Planetarium, a cinema, a “fake old” city with restaurants, and a swimming pool (Océade) within walking distance as well, but you can hardly do it all in one day if you want to do the city walks as well.

See <http://www.bruparck.com> for more information.

If you do include the Atomium and Mini-Europa in your visit, it will be very late in the afternoon when the visit to Brussels is over and you might have to skip either Villers-La-Ville or Waterloo.

If you’ve come by car, the atomium is well-indicated from the Brussels Ring (the ring road) – follow the “EXPO” directions. There’s free parking in the streets around the Atomium.

If you have to get there by public transportation you have to take a bus or metro to the Heizel. Heizel is the name of the plain where the world exposition palaces were built. It’s still the site of one of Belgium’s biggest exposition grounds. Bus lines 7, 51, 84 and 88, metro lines 6 and 7, and of course the hop-on-hop-off busses stop there.

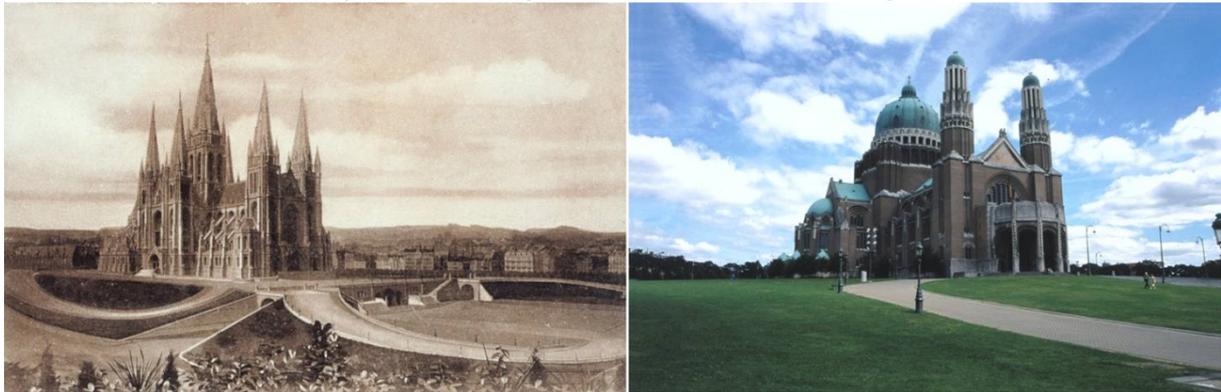
It’s best to look at the Atomium website (www.atomium.be) for directions.

If you plan on visiting the Atomium and you’re going by train it’s well worth checking out the nmbs day trip (b-dagrip) which includes admission to the Atomium and Mini-Europe and the train ticket from any Belgian station at a discount. There is no English translation on the nmbs website available yet so it’s best to ask in the train station.

The Koekelberg Basilica and a splendid night view

Unless you really want to wear out your shoes and you have lots of time to spend, you'd better take a bus if you want to visit the fifth largest church and largest art deco building in the world. The Koekelberg basilica. As you can read on their highly informative website <http://www.basilicakoekelberg.be/documents/home.xml?lang=en>, you can visit a panoramic platform at the base of the dome. The interior of the church is quite different from what you have become used to in churches. Really worth a visit if you have the time.

Below left is a magnificent comparison between the original drawings of the basilica as Leopold II would have wanted it. Because of his death and the immense cost of those plans, a new architect was brought in. The foundations were already cast, however, and that's why there's such a resemblance between the lay-out of the original idea and the final building.



The original plans and the final Koekelberg basilica. © Ngo The friends of Koekelberg's Basilica

Some of the best night pictures can be taken from the "small" ring road. The best spot is probably the crossing of the Koningsstraat and the Kruidtuinlaan. You can see the illuminated basilica and the busy lanes. The office blocks' windows light up at night. If you're spending the evening or the night in Brussels, don't miss out on this free light show and bring a tripod!

Waterloo



The lion of Waterloo is not in Waterloo

The future of Europe in the 18th century was decided in Belgium - although Belgium didn't exist as such in 1815. Probably everybody knows Napoleon was defeated in **Waterloo**. Coming from Brussels, you'll find this is a totally different scenery: large pastures, farms, and of course the 1815 battlefield. Funnily, the hill with the lion (and the actual battlefield) is not in the Waterloo commune but in Braine-l'Alleud (Eigenbrakel in Dutch). The Duke of Wellington wrote his claim of victory in Waterloo where he had his quarters, and so the battle where Napoleon was defeated became known as the battle of Waterloo. Apparently, "the battle of Belle-Alliance"

was also proposed as the name for this battle, Belle-Alliance being the name of the farm where Wellington and Blücher met after the battle. "Belle-Alliance" would have made a worse title for an ABBA song...

There are two possible courses of action: either you can do what most tourists do and just climb the Lion's mound and maybe visit a museum, in which case this chapter is completely useless. If you want to have an idea of what happened here, read on.

Waterloo can be reached by public transportation. See the website <http://www.waterloo-tourisme.com/> for directions. Probably the easiest way to reach it is by busline 365a from Brussels south station, stop Braine-l'Alleud, Monument Gordon. The bus ride will take about an hour.

It's probably easier by car. Directions for 'Butte du Lion' can be followed from various Waterloo exits of the southern part of the Brussels ring. Sat nav setting is Route du Lion in Braine-l'Alleud. There is enough parking space around the Lion's mound, although on weekends and in high season they might be quite full by noon.

What happened here in 1815?

Maybe a little history lesson is in order. Because the battle has been described so many times by people taking poetic liberties, some of the heroic stories may or may not be true. That's why you'll often read "it is believed" or "supposedly" in this text. Sorry about that.

Napoleon, who had led France to victories in battle and took power after the French revolution, had returned from his exile in Elba, an island off the Italian coast. He was sent there by the allied forces who had defeated him in 1814, but less than a year later he felt the public opinion in France was ready for his return. The reign of the French king Louis XVIII didn't seem like a success to the French. Meanwhile the allies (Austria, Prussia, Great

Britain and Russia) were arguing amongst themselves (and with the representatives of France) whilst discussing the division of the territories that France had lost. The Vienna convention wanted to re-divide Europe without going back to the unclear hosh posh of little nations and scraps of land. Napoleon had annexed most of them and simplified law and administration.

In 1815 Napoleon set foot on French soil again, with his personal guard of 600 men. The troops that were sent to capture him all turned to support Napoleon and soon he returned triumphantly to Paris. King Louis XVIII fled to Ghent and lived in the hotel D'Haene-Steenhuysse in the Veldstraat. After

Napoleon's second exile he would be reinstated.

Although Napoleon wanted to make peace with his former enemies, they almost immediately declared war on him. Armies from Russia, Piemonte, Holland, Britain, Spain and Portugal set course for France. Napoleon believed that, if he could separate the British from the Prussians he could beat both armies and he hoped that would break the allied coalition.

On the 15th of June, Napoleon and his 128000 men entered what then was the Southern Netherlands near Charleroi, hoping to confront the Prussian and British/Dutch army separately, with 117000 and 93000 men respectively. Napoleon fought the Prussians of Marshall Blücher near Ligny and gave them quite a beating. Marshall Ney confronted the troops of the Duke of Wellington at Quatre-Bras. The reserve troops of Drouot d'Erlon were almost at Napoleon's side when Ney called upon them. By the time they reached Ney the battle was over and they hadn't participated.

Napoleon sent Grouchy after Blücher's army that was headed for Wavre and went on to confront Wellington who had fallen back on Waterloo. Wellington had been at Waterloo the year before and understood the advantages of this site as a battlefield. However, victory would depend on the timely arrival of the remains of the Prussian army because the French were stronger in artillery, with 250 cannons against 160.

Heavy rain during the night led to a standoff until noon. Napoleon was unable to estimate the size of the allied army because lots of troops were hidden behind the slope in the terrain. Wellington's lines stretched along the strategically placed farms of Hougoumont, Haie Sainte and Papelotte. Nevertheless, it was clear that Wellington's left flank was the weakest - the Prussians were expected to arrive soon on that side.

Napoleon launched a diversion attack on the Hougoumont farm by noon. Hougoumont was on Wellington's stronger right flank, but

Napoleon wanted to weaken the left flank even more, hoping that reinforcements would have been sent from the left to the right flank. The fighting around the Hougoumont farm would last all day.

The 12500 French soldiers under Napoleons brother Jerome Bonaparte couldn't take it from the 2600 British elite troops, although he put in all his strength the entire day. This diversion manoeuvre turned out to be a strain on the reserve troops.

Around half past one, the main attack was started by Drouot d'Erlon. The sheer number of allied soldiers surprised the French. The artillery attack hadn't been very effective as most cannon balls went over the heads of the soldiers behind the ridge, and because of the wet soil the balls didn't bounce back to do more harm.

The allied soldiers weren't allowed to shoot before the French troops were at less than 50 meters. With the inaccurate and slow loading rifles of the time, this wasn't very abnormal. To give you an idea: a skilled soldier could shoot two or three times a minute.

The British cavalry of Lord Uxbridge launched a counter attack but they rode too far in their enthusiasm and were decimated by the French cuirassiers (armoured cavalry with firearms).

Lieutenant-General Picton also led a counter-attack. The suitcase with his uniform hadn't arrived so according to the story he charged in his civilian's suit and top hat, "armed only



The Lion's mound and the panorama

with his umbrella". He was shot and died on the battlefield.

By three o'clock pm the losses on both sides were already massive. Drouot d'Erlon had lost 5000 men. Meanwhile, 15km further near Wavre, Grouchy couldn't contain the Prussians and while his troops were caught up in a battle for some strategic bridges a large part of the Prussian army and Blücher managed to set direction for Waterloo. The gunfire of Waterloo was audible in Wavre but Grouchy decided to follow Napoleon's orders and kept fighting in Wavre instead of leading his troops to Waterloo. As a side note, Grouchy would eventually conquer the bridges and win the Battle of Wavre, but by that time Napoleon had been defeated.



A view of the battlefield from the mound. In the foreground are crop circles that "appeared" in 2006.

When new Prussian troops arrived in Plancenoit, near the Waterloo battlefield, Napoleon first thought it was Grouchy. Napoleon sent much of his reserves there once his error became clear. The street fights in Plancenoit were heavy but Napoleon's troops reconquered the village by half past six. Meanwhile on the Waterloo battlefield Ney attacked the Haie Sainte farm, and when he believed the British were fleeing he followed them with 10000 horsemen but no infantry. The British formed squares - an almost impenetrable form for a cavalry - and a two hour fight again led to heavy losses on both sides. Haie Sainte was eventually conquered

by the French and Ney managed to set up a couple of cannons by 6pm.

Around half past eight Napoleon sent in the old guard as a last chance attack while Wellington mobilised all of his reserve troops. Around eight o'clock the Prussians entered the field and Wellington waved his hat, the sign for the charge. The old guard refused to surrender and they were decimated. According to the legend, general Cambronne, when cautioned to surrender, first said "The guard dies but does not surrender", and when pressed, he replied "Merde!" ("Shit!"). Although he himself has always denied this has happened, "le mot Cambronne" ("the Cambronne word") is sometimes used in the French language instead of merde, or so I've read.

One of the last cannon shots hit Lord Uxbridge in the leg. The limb was amputated and buried near the battlefield. It got its own gravestone (unlike many a soldier who was shoved into a mass grave or cremated) and when Lord Uxbridge died of old age, it was exhumed and reunited with the body - or so the story goes. The prothesis for Lord Uxbridge's leg is on display in the Wellington Museum.

The French fled in disarray, chased by the Prussian cavalry. 11000 Men and 10000 horses stayed dead, 35000 were wounded. Some of the wounded were helped only three days later. Wellington and Blücher shook hands at the Belle Alliance farm around nine o'clock. Napoleon returned to France where he was no longer recognised as emperor. An escape to America failed, and Napoleon surrendered to the British. They banished him to St-Helena, where he would die in 1821 at the age of 51.

The battlefield was soon protected as a landscape. Monuments for the Prussians, the French and some noblemen who were killed or injured were erected. The most famous is the Lion's Mound, the hill that was erected by King William I of The Netherlands, on the place where his son, William II, was injured at the shoulder by a musket ball. The hill is 43m high and about 500m in diameter and was erected between 1822 and 1826.

What to do, buy and see here now.

The climb up the hill (226 steps) is definitely worth the money. There are some museums about the battle as well. There are discount tickets if you want to visit multiple museums (the "pass 1815"). Each year, re-enactments take place. Consult the tourist office for more details.

For a more elaborate explanation of the battlefield, the booklet 'Waterloo, a guide to the battlefield' by David Howarth is a worthwhile read. It's not too elaborate or technical but it provides a great insight in what happened where. It's available in the gift shop or you can buy it online at <http://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/products/Waterloo-English.aspx>. Bear in mind that reading this book and visiting the five sites proposed in it will take two to three hours.

While you're in the gift shop you might want to pick up the 1970s movie 'Waterloo' (not to be confused with the 18 minute documentary in which a French presenter in a dreadful coat explains what I've just written above). The movie is a bit outdated but quite evocative and mostly accurate. You'll probably be able to get the dvd cheaper online than in the gift shop though.

There are more than one hundred monuments and commemorative plaques around the battlefield and in Waterloo. Some are monumental, some are small, some were erected almost immediately after the battle, some were added later. Some are in a dreadful state. The man behind the splendid website http://napoleon-monuments.eu/Napoleon1er/1815_EN.htm has left no stone unturned (or better,

unphotographed and undescribed) and some of the French text is translated in English. Mr. Timmermans is really passionate about this battlefield. There are links to interesting texts by an other expert, mr. Claude Van Hoorebeeck, who has his own website in French, <http://www.freepub.be/waterloo.php> If your knowledge of the French language allows it, the attention to detail and the investigations both men have undertaken are down right fanatic.

As the battlefield was protected in 1914, probably the only changes since then - apart from minor enlargments to existing buildings - are the removal of the tram tracks that had been there since 1898, the enlargement of the road to Charleroi and the placement of electric lamp posts and the building of the Fichermont convent.

Finally, if you want to have a good meal, the fondue in Le Cambronne – opposite the visitor's centre – is good and not too expensive. It's "à volonté" which means you can have all you want, although it might be possible you have to ask for more meat, the waiters don't always ask you if you want some more. There are more restaurants from the same owner, each with their own style. See <http://www.restaurantdulion.be/fr/cambronne/accueil.html>

In the village of Plancenoit, Le Vert d'Eau is mentioned in the Michelin guide as a Bib Gourmand, i.e. a good culinary restaurant that's not too expensive. On weekdays at noon the lunch is very affordable lunch.

Interesting sites and most important monuments

There aren't that many addresses or street names to go by, so I've drawn a map of the most interesting points around the battlefield. These points of interest can be reached by car, although parking near them might sometimes prove difficult. Of course, you can also walk to the ones you definitely want to see from one of the parking lots near the Lion's Mound, but allow sufficient time. I haven't mentioned each and every monument and plaque, for that I refer to mr. Timmermans' site. Some monuments or commemorative plaques were added as late as the 1990s. The most recent of them were placed by the A.F.E.W., the Association Franco-Européenne de Waterloo.

Once again I have to stress that some of these monuments are in a sorry state. Sometimes this is caused by neglect, sometimes by vandalism, sometimes by greed. One can only hope that some of these historic treasures will be rescued by the bicentennial celebration in 2015.

1. Lion's Mound, visitor's centre, parking lots, snack bar, restaurants. The centre of the battlefield. As said, this monument was erected in the 1820s by the king of the Netherlands near the spot where his son was injured.

Climb the 226 steps to the top and see the orientation table for a rough idea of the battlefield. From the mound, the fields look deceptively flat, so it's best to do a little walk around as well to get an idea why this battlefield worked to Wellington's advantage.

Most of the restaurants and houses around the mound were erected between 1815 and 1914, the year the battlefield was protected. Touristic infrastructure, such as the visitor's centre, may be treated as an exception by the government. During renovation works in 2012 an intact skeleton was found with a bullet between the ribs. It was buried at only 40cm deep.

Farms

2. Mont St-Jean. This farm has finally seen some renovation works after it has been in a sorry state for more than thirty years. This was a field hospital. It can't be visited.

3. Hougoumont (or Goumont). Without a doubt the most interesting farm of the battlefield, then and now. There are fences to prevent people entering as it's uninhabited at the time of writing. It is claimed by the Waterloo committee that a further restoration is at hand, but costs are estimated around 5 million euros.

A diversion attack early in the day by the French on this farm proved more difficult than expected, lasted all day and used more

of Napoleon's resources than foreseen. The attack was led by Napoleon's brother Jerome. The farm was kept in Allied hands by elite troops: troops from Hannover and from Nassau (The Netherlands) companies mainly, and some Coldstream and Scots guards outside of the walls.

The North gate (H1) was on the defender's side. Bear in mind that the walls were around 2m high at the time of the battle, so you can imagine the difficult task of the attacking forces.

The French division of around 6500 men approached from the south. Near the south gate (H2) was an orchard or park that was defended by some 400 Foot Guards while the castle was held by a German battalion of around 800 men. After some fights in the orchard during which the French General Bauduin was killed, the Germans and the Foot Guards had to retreat to the farm because of the numeric advantage of the French. They had been reinforced and barricaded during the night and shooting positions were created. Wellington ordered his artillery to shoot the park and the French had to retreat.

When the English artillery weakened, a second attempt was made by the troops of baron Soye. They managed to get around the farm on the east, and got a cannon into the orchard. The cannon proved to be of little effect and the French, who were more exposed, suffered heavy losses.

Finally the French reached the north gate - which was still open - and surprised the defenders. The English managed to shut the gates. The French Lieutenant Legros chopped through the gate and entered the farm with some thirty soldiers. The English closed the gates again, trapping them inside. All of the soldiers, except a little drummer boy, were killed in vicious hand-to-hand fights.



Hougoumont farm in the evening, with the silhouettes of the chestnut trees that witnessed the battle.

Around half past one, after an attack from other English troops, the French left the surroundings. It is claimed that Wellington later said that the outcome of the battle depended on the closing of the gate of Hougoumont.

After the fierce battles, thousands of dead bodies were cremated near the south gate. Note the chestnut trees that witnessed the battle (H3).

Victor Hugo wrote that the water well (H4) served as a grave for 300 soldiers, but this was a romantic liberty and proven to be untrue. Until the end of the 19th century, the well was still surrounded by a wall.

The castle of the farm was uninhabitable and served as a quarry. Only the foundations remain. The house that's still standing was the gardener's house. Until the end of the 19th century, some castle walls still remained.

There was a wooden Christ in the chapel (H5), whose feet were burned during the battle. This heavy statue was stolen in 2011 and hasn't been recovered as of yet. A statue of St. Anne was stolen from the chapel in the 1970s.

Less prone to theft are the heavy grave stones of Capt. John Blackman and Soldier Edward Cotton (H6). Cotton, an educated man, survived the battle and became a well-known battlefield guide. He also started the first museum about the battle. He was buried here in 1849 but his body was moved to the British monument in Evere, along with many others, in 1890.

Blackman on the other hand died on the battlefield. He had a lot of battle experience but he died in the defence of Hougoumont. The gravestone was placed here in December 1815 by Guillaume Rahlenbeck, with whom Blackman had stayed before the battle.

4. Ferme de la Haie (Haye) Sainte. This central farm was conquered by the French by half past seven. Ney placed some artillery here and for a couple of hours it was believed that this would be the turning point of the battle in the favor of the French.

5. Ferme Belle-Alliance. This inn, a former postal relay, has changed little since 1815. Here, Napoleon inspected his troops at the beginning of the battle as they marched along the route to take their positions. 70000 men in splendid uniforms cheered the emperor. Napoleon went back to his headquarters at Rosomme, only to return to the battlefield - probably near this spot - by half past four.

Why Napoleon left the battlefield for so long is a matter of debate. He probably felt ill, or maybe he was afraid to return because of the threat of the Prussians. On the other hand, Napoleon was more in the habit of leaving the battlefield decisions to his Marshalls.

During the battle the building played no role of importance. After the battle, Wellington and Blücher met here briefly and shook hands from their saddles.

6. Le Caillou or Napoleon's last headquarters. Now a museum. Napoleon spent the night before the battle here and met his officers in the morning. There are some gravestones of which the bodies have been moved, there's a little ossuary for bones that were found during excavation works.

7. Ferme Papelotte. A support stronghold for the British troops. It was partly destroyed during the battle but it was rebuilt later. It's rather far from the battlefield and not really worth the detour, unless you want to join the pony club that's housed there.

8. Ferme du Quatre-Bras. 14km from Lion's Mound. This is where the Quatre Bras battle between Ney and Wellington took place two days before the battle at Waterloo. The farm is in a dreadful state and on the brink of demolition. At the crossroads you see directions for the Villers-la-Ville abbey.

Villages

9. Waterloo. In this village you'll find Wellington's last headquarters and the church from 1690 with commemorative plaques. You won't find many battle graves here as most of the British officer's bodies were later moved to the cemetery of Evere, near Brussels.

There are a lot of new and ugly buildings in the town, and only the town square with the Wellington Museum, tourist office and St. Joseph's Church - with lots of commemorative plaques - are worth the detour if you're a fanatic.

10. Plancenoit. There are lots of commemorative plaques in this village where street fights between the French and the Prussians took place.

British monuments

11. Wellington's tree. The duke of Wellington was often on the look-out near this spot. The tree that was here in 1815 was chopped up for relics, and apparently even two pieces of furniture were made from it, one donated to the monarch of Great-Britain, one to the Duke of Wellington. The tree you see here now was planted in the 1980s.

12. Picton monument. Dedicated to general Picton, who fell near this spot, in his civil clothing. On the other side of the road is a monument for the 27th regiment.

13. Gordon monument. One of the oldest monuments on the battlefield, for the camp help of the duke of Wellington. Lt. Col. Picton was injured at the leg by a cannon ball. He was moved to the Mont St. Jean hospital and then to the headquarter of Wellington in Waterloo. He passed away at half past three the morning of the 19th.

This monument seems to be at a strange altitude. This is the actual ground level of the field during the battle. An estimated 300000 m³ were removed from this roadside to build the lion's mound.

French

14. The Wounded Eagle. A touching monument dating from 1904 for the French divisions that fought here. Cambronne was among them. Again, it's in urgent need of restoration.

German

15. The Prussian Monument. The Prussians have little to offer in terms of monuments. Apart from a monument for a fallen colonel further afield, this is the only Prussian monument.

16. The Hannover Monument. The King's German Legion was part of the British army, not of the Prussians. They heroically defended a sand quarry near this spot and it is said that around 4000 corpses are buried on this spot.

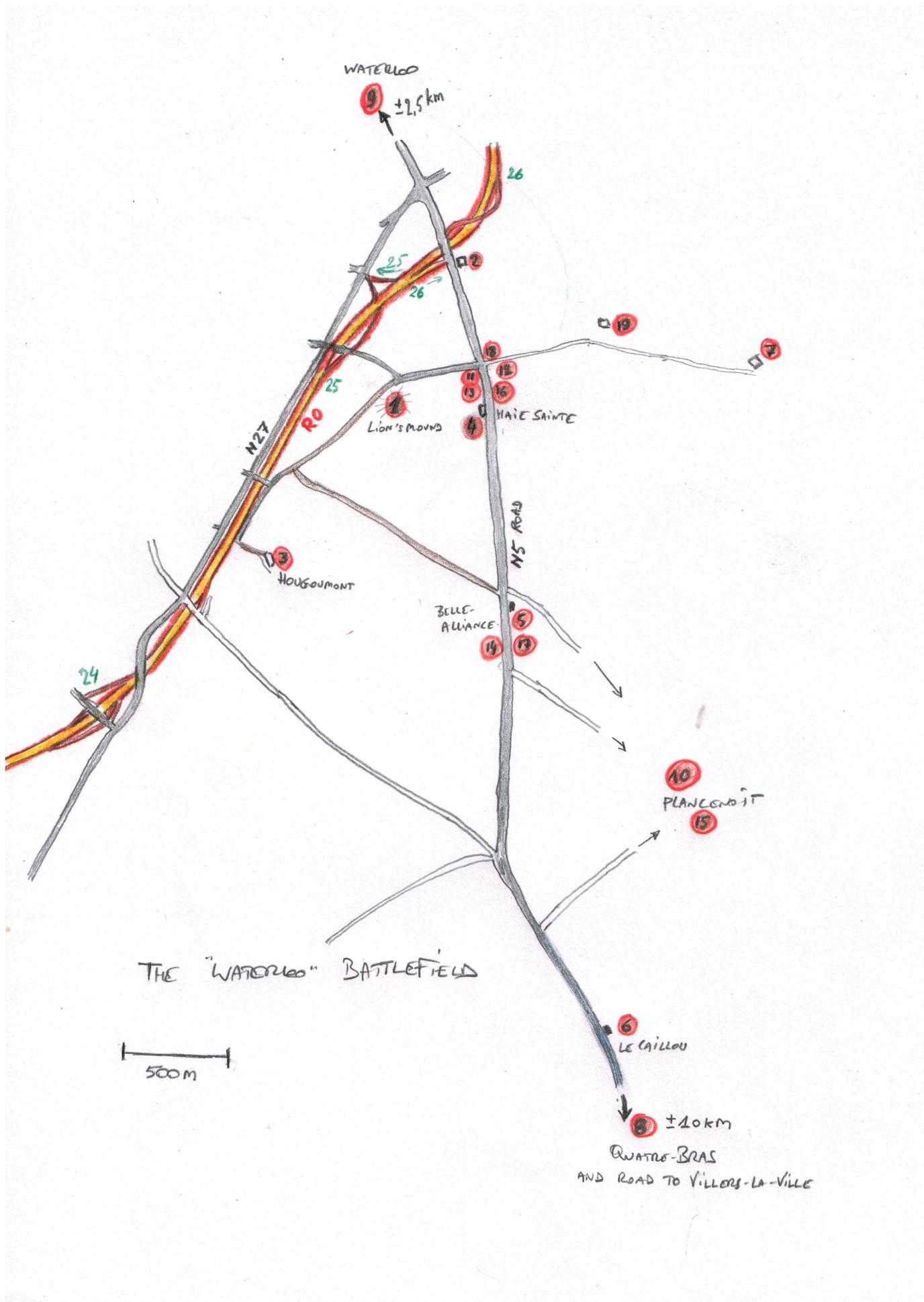
Other

17. The Victor Hugo monument. Erected for Victor Hugo (who described the Waterloo battle in a very romantic - i.e. dramatised - version) and all the other French artists "of the plume and of the paint brush" who were inspired by the Waterloo battle. *Les Misérables* appeared in 1862 and provoked a renewed interest in the Waterloo battlefield.

Works on the monument started in 1911 to commemorate the 50th birthday of Victor Hugo's stay in Waterloo, but it took until 1956 to finish the monument.

18. The Belgian Monument. Although Belgium didn't exist as a country in 1815, there were "Belgian" soldiers - on both sides, actually. It was never officially inaugurated - the first date was postponed because of a strike in the quarries of Sprimont, and by the time of the second date the first world war had started so the inauguration never took place.

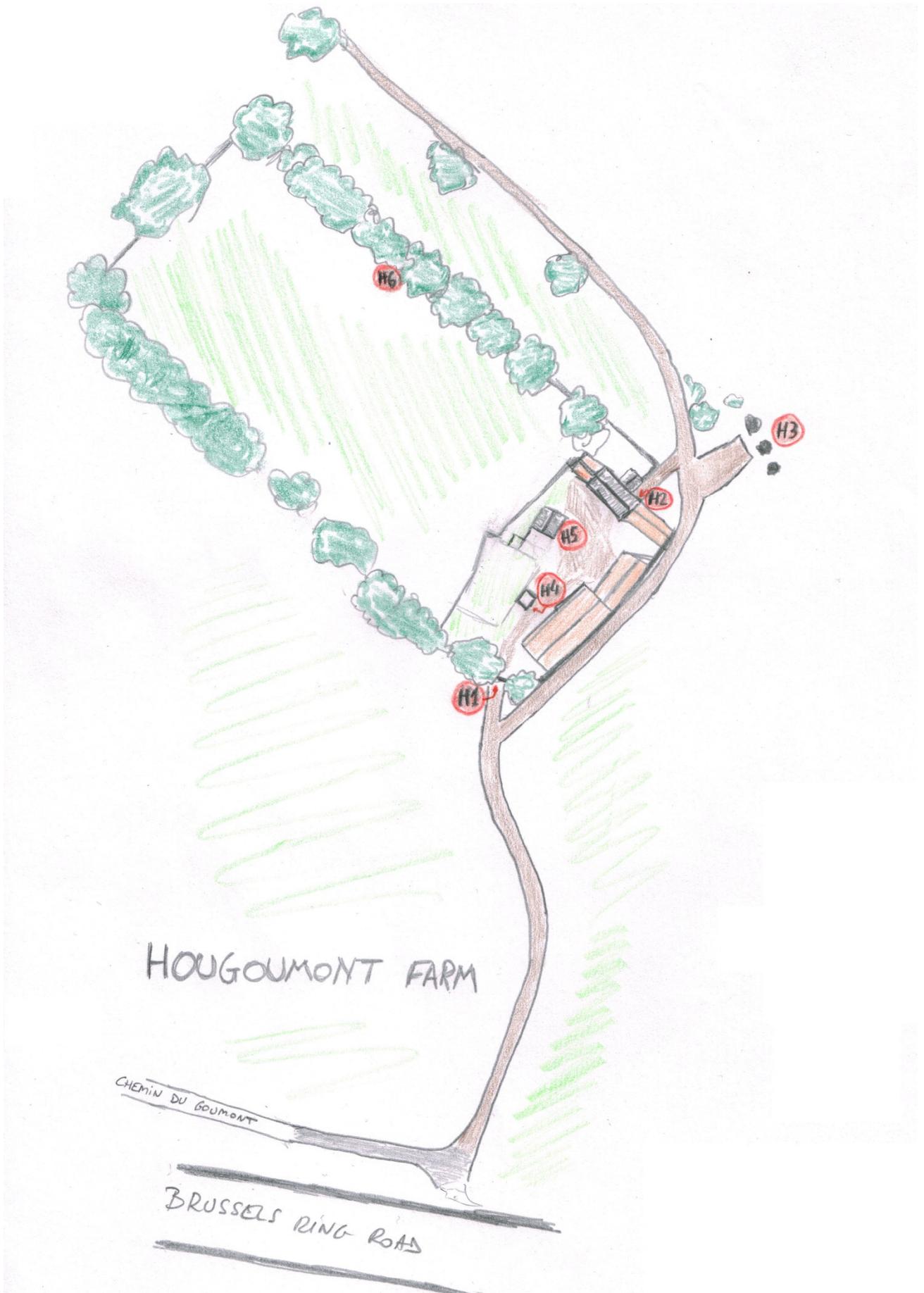
19. The Fichermont convent. This convent was erected in 1928 to house the missionaries who had been in the Fichermont castle since 1920. There weren't any buildings here in 1815 and this was probably the biggest exception to the 1914 battlefield protection. I wouldn't mention it, had it not been that "the Singing Nun", Jeannine Deckers, had written the world hit *Dominique* in this convent. Later, she would leave the convent to which she had given all her royalties. The government, however, claimed that she had to pay taxes on the income from the album. After a failed attempt at a second musical career with a disco version of *Dominique*, Soeur Sourire and her female lover killed themselves with an overdose of barbiturates in 1985. A touching French-Belgian biographical movie about her life as Soeur Sourire appeared under that name in 2009. The convent now belongs to the Verbe de Vie catholic community.



THE "WATERLOO" BATTLEFIELD

500 M

6 LE CAILLON
 8 ±10 km
 QUATRE-BRAS
 AND ROAD TO VILLORS-LA-VILLE

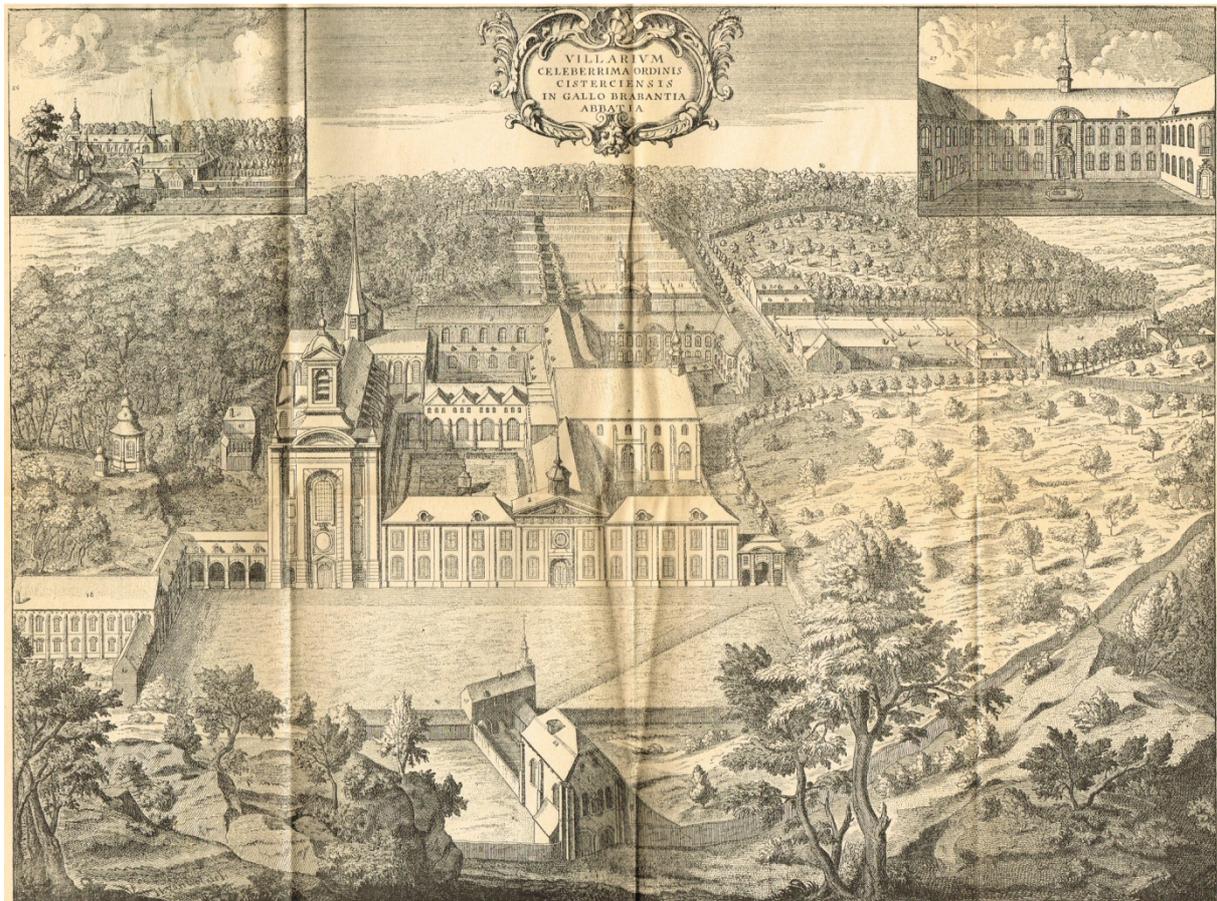


Villers-la-Ville

There are several ruins in Belgium. One of the most beautiful and best-known abbey ruins is Villers-La-Ville. It's quite large and romantic. Like most abbey ruins, this abbey was demolished partly during the French revolution and used as a quarry afterwards. Despite it being a well-known ruin, it's not really a tourist trap, with acceptable numbers of visitors. In other words, you won't experience waiting lines or pictures full of people. There are exhibitions and concerts from time to time.

You can find most of the practical information about the Villers abbey on <http://en.villers.be/> - however, reaching it by public transportation isn't addressed on that site. You have to take a train from Brussels to Ottignies and change to line 140 there. This train stops in Villers-La-Ville at about 2km of the ruins. Taking a train or a bus from Waterloo to Villers takes even longer. A car is your best, if not your only choice if you want to visit Brussels, Waterloo and Villers in one day - although in that case, you'd better visit Villers and Waterloo first, otherwise everything will be closed by the time you get to your last stop.

There are a couple of walks that start at the abbey, all of them worthwhile. Maps can be bought at the tourist office (Syndicat d'Initiative) near the abbey.



The Villers abbey in better times ("Grande Planche Sanderus")

The ruins of Belgium

For the sake of the really interested, here's a non-exhaustive list of other ruins in Belgium in no particular order. This list does not include urbex sites (abandoned factories and such). There are a lot of those about as well, but it's customary in urbex circles to do your own research.

- **Abbaye d'Aulne:** not very known but nice abbey ruin. There's a retirement home on the premises as well, and a brewery nearby. The abbey gate is the starting point for three walks that are definitely worthwhile. The surrounding lands are mostly in use for agriculture so the walks are more relaxing than they are interesting in the way of touristic points of interest.

- **Abbaye de Cambron-Casteau:** this abbey ruin nowadays houses the Pairi Daiza animal park that used to be known as Paradisio. It's relatively expensive and the main focus is not on the ruin but on the animals, with all kinds of exotic birds and animals and bats in the old abbey tower.

- **Abbaye d'Orval.** The abbey of Orval, famous for its Trappist ale (they only have one kind and its taste is pretty special), consists of the ruins of the old abbey, and the new abbey in 1920s style. Of the new part, only the church can be visited. The ruins are worth a visit when you are in the neighbourhood (or if you're doing a trappist tour) but the ruins of Villers-La-Ville are much more romantic. Unfortunately, the once so nice and old tavern l'Ange Gardien (The Guardian Angel) just down the road from the abbey was replaced with a modern building that's as cosy as a soccer canteen and as beautiful as a polyvalent hall.

- **Castle César,** Rue des Abiaux, 7536 Vaulx. Very little is left of this castle. It's really not worth a detour.

- **Castle of Fagnolle,** Fagnolle. Although Fagnolle is elected one of the most beautiful villages of Wallonia, it does lack a bit in charm and seems in need of some care. The castle itself – a “plane” castle, in the middle of the meadows – has been in family hands for generations. It's not that mind-blowing in size, but the current owner has a bar in the basement where the donkeys used to be. If you are doing the Viroinval and Chimay Region you may take a little detour to visit it, but it's not worth a drive on its own.

- **Chateau de la Haute Roche,** also in Viroinval, near Dourbes. As the name indicates, it's on a high rock. Not that easy to find, but a wonderful stop on a hike in the neighbourhood.

- **La Roche castle ruin,** La Roche. Pretty informative although not really overwhelmingly impressive.

- **Bouillon Castle,** Bouillon. One of the biggest feudal castles in Europe, dating from medieval times with changes from the times of Vauban. A visitor's guide is handed to you at the entrance. There's a pretty falconry show as well. If you are to visit one castle ruin, it should be this one.

- **Château Le Duc,** Ucimont. Near Bouillon. Only some knee-high walls are left. Not really worth the search.

- **Ruïnes de Crêvecoeur,** Crêvecoeur. See the chapter about Dinant.

- **Ruïnes de Montaigle,** Rue du Marteau 10, 5522 Falaën. Near Dinant. The main structure and floor plan is recognisable and the ruin of a tower is still standing, but this isn't all that interesting unless you're a real lover of medieval castles.

- **Ruïnes de Poilvache,** Evrehailles. Near Dinant. Same description as Montaigle.

- **Ruïne de Herbeumont,** Herbeumont. Entrance is free so if you're in the neighbourhood it's worth a small detour. Apart from the thick walls, there isn't much left, but the views are splendid and the price is right.



Abbaye d'Aulne

- **Ruïne du Château-fort de Logne**, Rue de la Bouverie 1, 4190 Vieuxville. The interest factor lies somewhere between Montaigne or Poilvache, and Bouillon. There's a falconry show, an audioguide, and – for a small extra fee – a museum with the archaeological finds from the excavation of a water well. There's a pretty funny documentary that shows archaeologists in extacy about finding piece of oak or a coin after months of digging. Make sure you get the right directions towards this museum. It's not far from the ruin but you have to walk in the right direction.

- **Ruïne de Franchimont**, Franchimont. Near Spa. This is a place of historical importance. At the start of World War 1, when the people and troops were mobilised, King Albert I reminded the Flemish people of 1302 (the Guldensporenslag near Kortrijk, where the French army was defeated by Flemish peasants and civilians – see the Brugge chapter), and the Walloon people of the battle of Franchimont. It looks out over the surrounding area – as a ruin, it's quite well consolidated but it didn't do much for me.

- **Ruin of Mariemont/Morlanwez**. Mariemont. Most of this domain is taken by the park and quite modern museum of archaeology (regional, Roman, Greek, Egyptian, Far East), art and porcelain. The ruin itself is mostly inaccessible because of instability. Not interesting as a ruin, but if you're interested in the museum or the gardens (with recreations of famous statues such as the Burghers of Calais by Rodin), go ahead.

- **Ruin of Havré**, Havré (near Mons). A pretty ruin with a small flower garden nearby. The ruin itself is being consolidated so from certain angles it looks like a building site. The flower garden is open on weekdays, the ruin itself can apparently be visited on certain occasions but I don't think there's much of the interior left. Entrance to the park is free but my guess is you'll spend no more than 15 minutes here. Only worth a small detour, e.g. when you are visiting Mons.

- **Prinsenkasteel (Prince's Castle)**, Guldendal (or parking at Schuttershof), Grimbergen. Destroyed by the Germans during the second world war. Apparently the basement is interesting but consolidation works are still ongoing so visits are not possible yet. It's not too far away from the A12 motorway exit, but only worth the detour if you want to have a picture of every ruin in Belgium.



The Havré ruin