

Calais Blitzkrieg

Thinking of bombing abroad in your Land Rover but not really sure how to? Why not try the Battlefields by 4x4 Calais Taster Day trip? You will quickly find out if greenlaning in France is for you...

IF YOU drive a Land Rover and live in the UK then you are in a massively privileged position. You and your loved ones can easily experience the wonderful landscapes on offer in the Welsh valleys, Lake District, Peak District, Scotland... I could just go on and on and on. The opportunities are endless. Just turn your Land Rover's key, pray it starts and off you go. But what options are there after you have been there and done just that in the UK, time and time again?

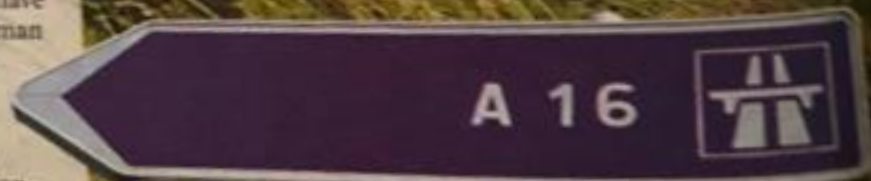
Remember the Land Rover slogan is 'Go Anywhere' and I don't know about you but I see my Land Rover as a tool of exploration. So the next obvious place to play (nicely, of course) has to be Europe, or more specifically, our closest ally France, and you can get there pretty quickly if using the ferry services or speedy Eurotunnel. Providing the French customs officials are not striking that is.

In the past LRM has done three weekend tours of France with our friends from Battlefields by 4x4. They were: the 1917 Arras tour, Normandy D-Day, and finally, the moving tour of the Somme. As someone who loves Land Rovers and military history, I know for a fact that there is no better way to spend your time in France than driving off-road on a Battlefields by 4x4 tour.

This time though I find myself on their shorter Calais Taster Day trip. The reason for this change in tactic is that I have some mates with me who have never been off-roading abroad before. So we have instead opted for the 4x4 blitzkrieg on France option. The German word blitzkrieg literally means lightning war, a tactic they applied superbly in the Second World War with short, sharp and unexpected attacks by a highly-mobile armoured and mechanised infantry force. Unlike the First World War which mostly had a static frontline, the blitzkrieg tactical meant you had a constantly moving frontline.

We have decided to make a weekend out of our trip and after collecting my five-year-old son Isaac from school at 3.00 pm we leave Bedford in a new Discovery Sd6 HSE. Some of the HSE extras include the fixed front and rear panoramic roof, powered third row of seats (our gear will be covering them), adaptive cruise control (great for avoiding speeding fines), high-speed emergency braking and the interactive driver display (perfect for knowing which way your wheels are pointing when sliding about in the muddy French fields).

Our blitzkrieg hits a snag as the M25 dishes up its usual smorgas-





Story: Patrick Cruywagen Pictures: Patrick Cruywagen, AdobeStock

board of delays due to accidents and roadworks and we get to our Folkestone Premier Inn an hour later than we intended to. All part of the fun of travel.

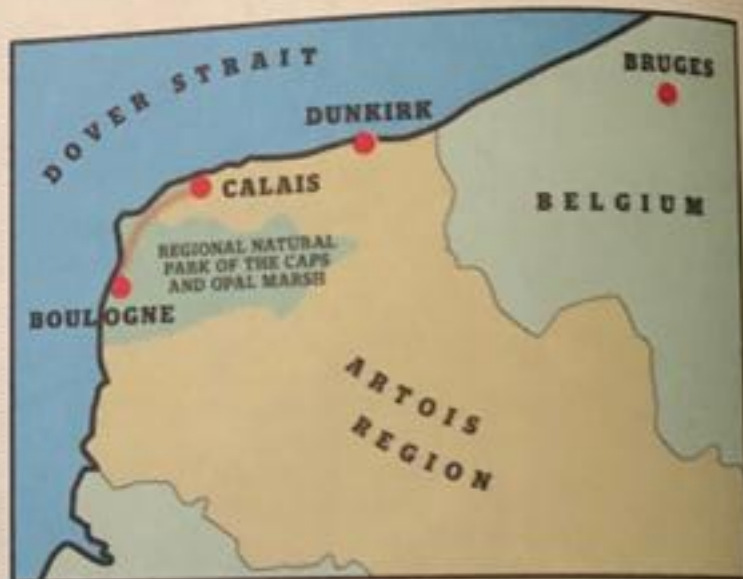
Our blitzkrieg hits a second snag the following morning even though we arrive well in time for our Eurotunnel crossing, the French customs officials are on a go-slow. So we arrive 15 minutes late for the 10.00 am group meet-up at the supermarket in Coquelles, Calais. Carl Liversage from Battlefields by 4x4 quickly installs a CB radio into our Discovery while guide Jim Smithson gives us a brief overview of what to expect as we head south along the coast from our meeting point towards our late afternoon finish at Boulogne. There are only six cars in our convoy as they don't like to run bigger groups, this is for command and control purposes. Plus a long old convoy through the countryside does not look good and could upset the locals. I am pleased to see that there are two more Land Rovers in the convoy. Quentin Thorp is in a gold-coloured late L322 while LRM subscriber Matt Sewell is in his Defender 90 200Tdi.

As we leave the shopping centre car park we see Fort Nieulay, which was constructed hundreds of years ago to defend Calais, a city which has seen more than its fair share of conflict since then. During the 1940 German invasion of France a few French soldiers occupied the fort but they did not last very long. The Germans then destroyed Calais and the poor residents had to wait until the autumn of 1944 for liberation by General Daniel Spry's 3rd Canadian Army.

It does not take us long to get into some off-road action and onto our first lanes of the day. It's a proper stormy day and the tracks are pretty muddy. We select the Mud and Ruts option on the Terrain Response 2 knob. Despite our road bias tyres Storm Gareth has other ideas and blows the Discovery sideways. Or maybe the driver was not using the interactive driver display and did not know which way his tyres were pointing. As I am outside photographing I show him how to use it and for the rest of the day the Discovery proceeds in a more or less straight line. This French mud is very slippery and soon clogs up everyone's tyres. Now we may as well all be on racing slicks but the battlefield is anything but equal as the electronic off-road aids on our Discovery place it at an advantage.



Above: Mark Mackenzie in the command position
Right: The route for our Calais Taster Day



There were a few Land Rovers in the convoy including a late L322 and Defender 90

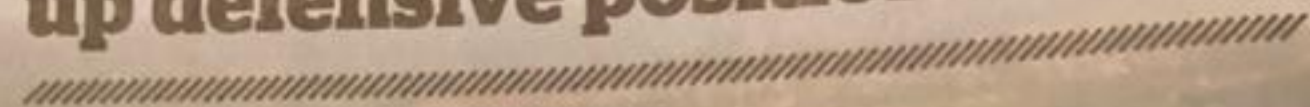


The Mud and Ruts
option on our new
Discovery 506
came in handy



**“It did not take us
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“I’m surprised by the hilly nature of the terrain so close to the coastline, a dream come true for those setting up defensive positions”



Guide Jim Smithson in full flow at Wimereux



BATTLEFIELDS BY 4X4 TOUR

THERE IS no better way to do a Land Rover tour of a European battlefield. They will take you places other tourists don't go. The next Calais Taster Day Tours will be on July 27 and October 12.

The cost of the tour is £59 per person, while kids go free. This does not include your ferry crossing.

They also do a new weekend tour called The Western Front, which takes one all along the First World War frontline from Somme to Ypres (August 24-26).

For more details go to: battlefieldsby4x4.com

Jim announces over the radio that we are currently driving directly above the very same 31.4 mile-long Channel Tunnel which we used this morning to get into France. While there are longer tunnels elsewhere in the world, none of them have a longer undersea portion (23.5 miles) than this one.

We now find ourselves in the heart of the Atlantic Wall, that incredible defensive system that Nazi Germany built all the way along the Scandinavian and European coastline to repel any invasion. As Calais is the closest point to mainland Britain you can just imagine that extra special care was taken in this area. We pass massive blocks of concrete which would've housed artillery pieces and German soldiers. They are now grass-covered and mostly destroyed, but they serve as a stark reminder of the dark days when this was all still under Nazi occupation.

I'm surprised by the hilly nature of the terrain so close to the coastline, a dream come true for those setting up defensive positions. Carl warns us over the radio to keep moving

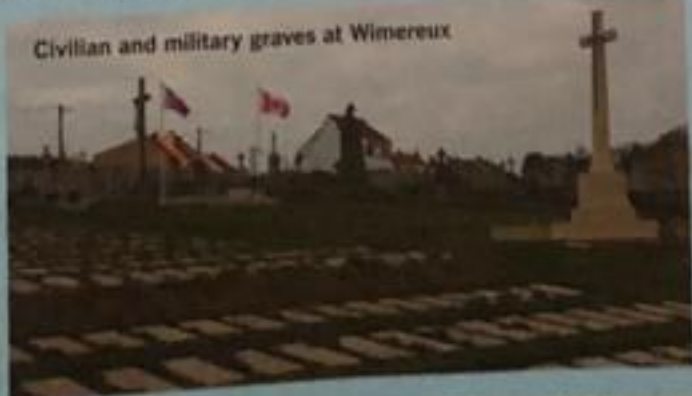
when straddling the ruts or else you could slide into the ploughed fields. There are no such dramas for our little convoy as we slip and slide our way up and down the hills along the coast. From here we can see the village of Escalles and the nearby Cap Blanc-Nez summit, home of the Dover Patrol Monument. The monument is dedicated to all the French and English sailors who paid the ultimate price while patrolling these coastal waters in the First World War. The memorial was designed by Sir Aston Webb, who also designed the two other Dover Patrol Memorials which are in Dover and New York.

Just after passing Wissant we stop for a beer-tasting at Brasserie des 2 Caps, which is situated on a lovely old farm. The family craft beer brewery was started in 2003 by Christophe and Alexia Noyon and I would definitely recommend the white beer though judging by the sales the rest of the convoy preferred the real blond ale. This is also our lunch stop and I whip out the portable Weber

The Discovery stops to enjoy the coastal views



Isaac's cross at Wimereux



Civilian and military graves at Wimereux



Go-Anywhere BBQ to cook some of the African sausage we smuggled into France. We leave the brewery and the village of Tardinghen happy and with full bellies.

The village was of extreme tactical importance to the Germans due to the nearby radar station on Mount Plovin. Because of this there are some serious defensive positions in place in the area. We make our way further south with the coastline never more than a few hundred metres away from us. On December 2, 1917, a British minesweeper ran aground near here. At low tide the wreck reveals itself, but we don't have time to look for it now.

Our next stop is not too far away and Isaac welcomes the chance to run around the impressive Museum of the Atlantic Wall, which was once also home to one of the bunkers in Germany's Battery Todt. It's a brilliant museum and it gives one a good idea of what life was like in one of the four seemingly impenetrable bunkers that made up the battery. Each one of the bunkers weighed 160,000 tonnes with 3.5 metre thick walls and roof. Unfortunately the 38 cm Krupp gun with its 55.7 km range had been removed from the bunker but there was enough on display to keep us busy for a good 45 minutes.

Our journey south along the coastal greenlanes continues towards Wimereux. The radio crackles to life and Jim tells us a bit more about what happened in the area. "In the First

Museum of the Atlantic Wall is impressive

Not all the lanes were wet and muddy



Colonel John McCrae's grave



German Centre Steer

World War Boulogne and Wimereux formed an important hospital centre for the wounded from the frontlines. They used the Wimereux communal cemetery for burials." The cemetery is our next stop and we pass a monument on a roundabout at the entrance of the village. It's dedicated to the Canadian army who helped liberate the village in 1944. Unlike any other of the many Commonwealth War Graves Commission sites that I have visited the gravestones here lie flat on the ground due to the nature of the soil which cannot keep them upright. The most-visited grave in the cemetery belongs to Colonel John McCrae, the Canadian doctor who wrote the now-famous 'in Flanders Fields' poem. As this is a community cemetery we have to walk past some civilians' graves on our way out. Franck Hanquiez was only 23 when he was buried here. He must have been a Discovery 1 fan as there is a lovely stone cut-out of one on his grave. Do look out for it if visiting.

Our second-to-last stop of the tour is at the Terlincthun British Cemetery, home to 4378 Commonwealth burials from the First World War, 200 German graves and 149 graves from the Second World War.

The tour ends about five minutes away from here at the Column of the Grand Armée. Basically it's Napoleon standing atop a 53-metres-high column looking out towards Britain while dreaming of victory against us. The column also





marks the spot where an army of 80,000 Frenchman once camped while waiting for the order to invade England. It never came of course.

Some of the members in our convoy have to race back so we say our quick goodbyes at the column while Carl makes the rest of us a nice hot cuppa. We have packed a lot into the day but everyone is smiling.

"Today was just a taster of how we operate. Hopefully some of you will come back and do one of our many longer tours," says Carl.

He also tells me that they now do a new tour called the Western Front, which goes from Ypres to Vimy Ridge. I might just have to sign up for that one. Our blitzkrieg on Calais has been a success.

LRM TRAVEL GUIDE

How we got there

■ **Eurotunnel:** They run various specials and we paid £60 for a return crossing. See eurotunnel.com.

Where we stayed

■ **Le Portel, France:** As there were four of us we booked a tidy beachfront apartment on Airbnb for the one night only and paid £90 in total. It was situated at Le Portel, which is only a few minutes from where the tour finished.

■ **Folkestone Premier Inn, England:** Has a pub and restaurant. Can be busy on a Friday night. Cheap and cheerful. See premierinn.com.

Other things to do

■ **Nausicaá Aquarium:** The biggest aquarium in Europe is located only a few minutes away from where the tour finishes. We spent the day after the tour here and while it is pretty pricey it is worth every penny. Expect to spend several hours here. €25.90 per adult and €19.50 per kid. Children under three go free. See nausicaa.co.uk.



Beer tasting at Brasserie des 2 Caps



The biggest aquarium in Europe just a few minutes from where the tour finishes