

Ballons des Vosges: Terry Dean

Our August visit to the Dordogne this year was via a family wedding at Hullhorst in the Lubbecke - Minden district of northern Germany. It gave Emmie and I the opportunity to view the terrain over which the Lancashire Fusiliers (then the 20th Regiment of Foot) fought with other British and German regiments to defeat the French at the Battle of Minden on 1st August 1759.

After the wedding we were lured southwards by Andrew's account in last November's Despatch of his brief visit to WW1 sites in the central Vosges.



After an overnight stop in Colmar we headed up to le Linge to start our whistle stop tour of the Ballons des Vosges. At an altitude of 1000 metres it would not be on my bucket list for a future battlefield tour by cycle but several days foot trekking would be another matter.

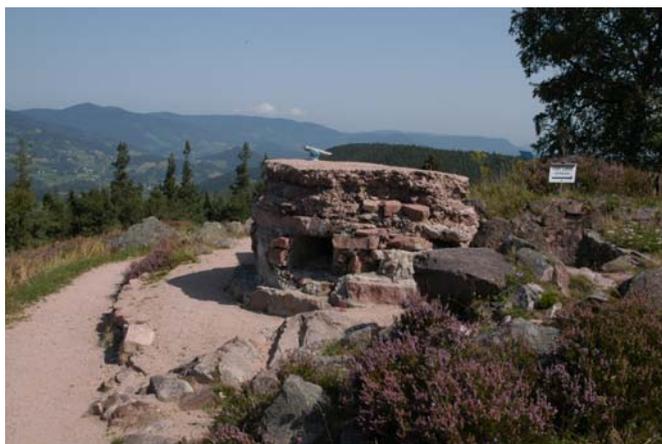


Entrance to le Linge Museum and trenches



Plan of Fortifications

Access to the battlefield at le Linge, where intense French attacks took place in summer 1915, is only possible via a museum, a quadrilateral built on three levels, which contains a large collection of battlefield artefacts.



Beyond the museum there is a maze of German trenches and strong points hewn from rock with wonderful views towards the French positions. Crosses mark the locations where human remains were found in the 1960s when the battlefield was cleared.

From le Linge we travelled via Munster and Metzeral to le Grand Ballon where, at an altitude of over 1400 metres, is the highest monument on the Western Front (to French Alpine troops). Beyond here was our last point of call at the Vieil Armand. Here we were unable to visit the Vieil Armand (Hartmannswillerkopf) Memorial and Crypt which is dedicated to the fallen of both sides since it is being renovated for 2014.



Grand Ballon Memorial & Radar Station



Silberloch Military Cemetery

We wandered through and beyond the adjacent Silberloch Military Cemetery noting the many headstones in need of renovation and the six mass graves each containing 64 French soldiers. Beyond the cemetery is the tree-covered slopes of the mountain peak crowned by a large Cross of Remembrance. Unfortunately our travel plans did not allow time to climb the mountain and visit the battlefield remains and memorials, which are apparently more significant than those at le Linge. This is one for the bucket list!