

2019 Flanders Challenge – The Route has been Checked.....and it has passed the test

Recce Report from Preston Ayres & Rob Oakley

Summary

Is this a remake of one of our most successful challenges – the 2007 Four Nations Challenge? Maybe, we have certainly pinched some of the best bits (like the Moselle valley)!

The fascination of experiencing the different feel and features of France, Luxembourg, Germany and Belgium lives up to expectations. Friday and Saturday will provide enough climbs for most participants together with typical beautiful scenery to match. Sunday has only a few bumps but the second half is an amazing tour of the World War 1 Ypres Salient. We have resisted Paris – Roubaix type rough farm tracks but have included some cobbles!



For the two nights in Metz and the final night in Ypres we all stay in the one hotel and the entry fee includes dinner (with wine and water) for all together on every night including, of course, our fabulous Sunday Gala dinner.

Thursday

Our drive to our destination is about 4 ½ hours from the Channel Tunnel. We all stay and eat in Novotel Metz Hauconcourt for two nights, with dinner Thursday and a buffet on Friday evening.

Friday



Initially we head for one of the prettiest villages in France, Rodemark and enter through a historic stone arch. We travel alongside the river Moselle for about 10 miles in total. The valley has some remarkably steep vineyards rising from the riverside – as in Piesport in the picture above. Many (but not all!) of the roads in Luxembourg are billiard table smooth in a country barely double the size of Bedfordshire. The hills of Luxembourg and Germany certainly provide a fair challenge for our first days cycling.

Saturday

We start with a 35 minute drive to escape the industrial areas to allow cycling to commence in the countryside. Today about half our roads are marked green on the Michelin map indicating “picturesque”. Much of today is spent in forests/woods and following river valleys. We cross the French/Belgian border about eight times (sometimes you don’t even notice). There are great views of Rohan as we descend into the town which nestles on the river Meuse.



Sunday

And now for something completely different. Our whole route is below an altitude of 500ft and total elevations set a new record low. Boring! Far from it – this will be a truly memorable day's cycling. You will cycle your own tour of the Ypres Salient incorporating just about all the key sites in this area. Our route directions will highlight the memorials and cemeteries you pass including Passendale New British, Canada Gate, Tyne Cot, New Zealand, Brandhoek, Ploegsteert Strand & Berks Extension and those by the cratered Hill 60 battle field area left untouched after WW1 in memory of the many who lost their lives there.

We finish at the magnificent city of Ypres and all stay in the city centre Novotel hotel. For Sunday evening we strongly recommend that you attend the Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate (about a 4 minute walk from hotel) – get there by 19.45. After the ceremony, we walk back to the historic Cloth Hall for our grand Gala Dinner.

Monday

Ypres is just 1 ¼ hours drive to the Tunnel sous la Manche, allowing time for a little sight-seeing and perhaps a tour of the Flanders Fields Museum (again in the Cloth Hall).

Statistics for teams of four (For those who thrive on them!)

| | Miles | Total Elevation | Highest Altitude | Ridewithgps Route |
|--------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Day 1 | 172.4 | 12,812 ft | 1,911 ft | https://ridewithgps.com/routes/29789120 |
| Day 2 | 176.4 | 10,368 ft | 1,420 ft | https://ridewithgps.com/routes/29799236 |
| Day 3 | <u>163.5</u> | <u>4,741</u> ft | 486 ft | https://ridewithgps.com/routes/29799461 |
| Total | <u>512.3</u> | <u>27,921</u> ft | | |

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Two images Of Tyne Cot Cemetery





Berks Extension Cemetery



Hill 60



Menin Gate



Ypres Market Square and Cloth Hall