

The field and the position of Quatre Bras.

The field of Quatre Bras stretches between the crossroads of the high-roads of Brussels [¹] and Nivelles in the north, the Bois de Bossu in the west, Sart à Mavelines in the east and the Bois Delhütte [²] and Frasnés to the south.

The west-side of the battle-field was formed by the Bois de Bossu. Though being some kind of timber-forest, its underwood was thick.³ The wood had a southwest-northeast orientation, between the farm of Grand Pierrepont and the road to Namur. Its total length was 2500 meters, its width varied between 500 to 1000 meters.⁴ In its east-side, very close to its edge, was a hollow way.⁵

For about 400 meters the Bois de Bossu stretched along the south-side of the road to Namur, and at about 200 meters west of the crossroads of Quatre Bras. From there, the wood ran parallel to the Brussels road for about 1600 meters, and about 400 meters away from it. From there, the edge of the wood bent further west, as to extend near the farm of Grand Pierrepont, about 2000 meters west of the Brussels road.

The Bois de Bossu no longer exists: it has been completely cut since the 30's of the 19th century so that the fields could be used for agricultural purposes.

South-east of the extreme southern-part of the Bois de Bossu, at about 1300 and 1600 meters west of the high-road of Brussels respectively, were the farms of Grand and Petit Pierrepont. Both these farms are in the low ground of the stream of Odomont, which comes up near the farm of Grand Pierrepont and which flows towards Rêves. Both farms were surrounded by gardens, orchards and hedges.⁶

At 2900 meters south of Quatre Bras was in 1815 the inn of Le Balcan; it has been taken down around 1930.⁷

At about 500 meters north of Le Balcan, on the point where the road of the farm of Grand Pierrepont crosses the Brussels road, was a small chapel.⁸

1100 meters south of Quatre Bras and 100 meters east of the Brussels-road, in the low ground of the stream of Gémioncourt, was (and still is) the farm of Gémioncourt. The oldest parts of this farm date back to 1146, when the first monks of the abbey of Villers la Ville lived there.⁹

At about 300 meters north of this farm, south of Quatre Bras, was on the same side of the Brussels road a small building which is usually referred to as the La Bergerie.

The building itself had two floors and to its rear was a by a hedge enclosed area; on the opposite side of the road was a garden which was also enclosed by a hedge. From the road, a small gate led into this garden onto a small gravel-road which led to the far end of it, ending in a similar access.¹⁰

From La Bergerie a small field road led into the fields to the east.¹¹

In 1815 Quatre Bras itself was composed of several buildings.¹² One of them was an inn, built in the northwest-corner of the roads, which was called Les Trois Bras.¹³

In the angle of both roads there was another (small) building, having its facade to the east.¹⁴
In the period until 1796 a few more buildings were constructed; one of them was the large farm in the north-east corner of the roads and which is still there, albeit in a very dilapidated state.¹⁵⁻¹⁶

In the southwestern corner of the roads there were another three buildings, located along the Brussels road.¹⁷ One of them probably was an inn.¹⁸

Along the Nivelles-road there must have been some kind of construction as well, having to its left rear a second one.¹⁹ In the south-east corner of the crossroads there were no buildings in 1815.²⁰⁻²¹

Halfway the road leading from Frasnes to Sart à Mavelines was (and still is) in a low ground the farm of Lairalle.²² 750 meter towards Frasnes, at the same road, on a crossing, was the Chapelle de Frasnes.²³ 600 meters northeast of the farm of Lairalle was the hamlet of Piraumont.²⁴

About half a kilometer north of Piraumont was (and still is) a small lake, the Étang Materne. In 1953 the lake fell dry, but after the construction of a small dam it returned in 1957; in 1815 it was smaller as it is now.²⁵

Both high-roads were not lined with trees in 1815.²⁶ The high-road leading from Nivelles to Namur was, from Quatre Bras stretching south-east, hollow for a length of about 800 meters.²⁷

On the whole, the field of action was an undulating area which was dominated by the heights of the Quatre Bras and Le Balcan in the north and south.²⁸ Between the farm of Grand Pierrepont and the Brussels road was a height (162,5), which extends towards Frasnes and Piraumont. Along the northern-side of this extension was the low ground of the stream of "Pré des Queues". This stream, which comes up near the Brussels road, joins (near Piraumont) the stream "Pré des Saules". It is this stream which arises at about 400 meters distance from the Chapelle de Frasnes and passes along the farm of Lairalle towards Piraumont. One of them, the one of "Pré des Saules", passes under the Nivelles-road via the mill of Buchet (still in existence) to the village of Sart-à-Mavelines. Before doing so, however, it is being fed by a third stream which is further north, coming from the farm of Gémioncourt.

North of the Étang Materne was the low ground of the "Ruisseau de Gémioncourt". This stream started very near the eastern edge of the Bois de Bossu, from there to the east, passing under the Brussels-road, along the farm of Gémioncourt, to the Étang Materne. Small streams, marshy areas and the presence of hedges made access in this area difficult.

The ground here stretches out towards the higher ground of Quatre Bras, after passing two low grounds. The area north-east of Quatre Bras was cut by numerous hedges.²⁹

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¹ The high-road from Brussels was constructed between 1713 and 1719. In: Delaet, J. Libre sur Sambre p.22

2.This forest was cut down for the most part in 1839. Cf. Navez, L. La campagne de 1815 Vol.II p.55

3.Lord Saltoun (Foot Guards) mentions an "in some parts thick wood" . In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.431-434

Captain Powell (1st Foot Guards) writes: "the thickness of the underwood [which] soon upset all order." In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.143-148

4.On 29th of september 1815 the duke of Wellington were given, through an Order in council, domains like the Bois de Bossu (122 hectares).

By that time, the most southern part of the wood (south of the road Hautain le Mont - Grand Pierrepont) no longer carried the name of Bois de Bossu, but was divided in two: the Bois de Petit Bossu (20 hectares) and the Bois de Pierpont (39 hectares).Cf. Siborne, W. History of the war etc. Atlas.

⁵ Captain Powell (1st Foot Guards). In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.143-148

6.In 1815, the farm of Grand Pierrepont was inhabited by a family called Duviensart (information of the inhabitants).

7.Cf. maps of Ferraris and Capitaine. In 1815, it would have been owned b a woman called Marianne Bilon. An annex of the inn would still have existed around 1970 (local information). Nowadays, a gas-station is built on the fomer site of Le Balcan.

8.Cf. Ferraris-map. It is not being mentioned on the one of Capitaine.

9.On the 4th of June 1988 a tablet was erected on one of its walls by the Association pour la conservation des monuments Napoleoniens, stating:

"A la mémoire des soldats de la Grande Armée tombés devant ces murs,le 16 juin 1815."

10.Lieutenant Hope (92nd regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.703 p.143-148

Private Kay depicts the building in his sketch on the other side of the road. In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.216-223

The building itself has been completely transformed into a house. The old contruction is not to be found on the maps of Ferraris and Capitaine.

For illustrations, cf. sketches of the British historian A.H.Kennedy-Herbert. In: NAM.

Nr.7303-73 Store 185.Views of the battlefield of Waterloo. FA 7303-73-2 to 21.Store 185

¹¹ Corporal Külbel (Brunswick leibbattalion). In: Die letzten Augenblicke etc. p.5 and plan

12. For illustrations, cf.

Van Neck, L. Waterloo, met afbeeldingen p.46

De Bas, W.G. Quatre Bras en Waterloo, p.56

Couvreux, L. Le drame Belge de Waterloo p.16

Chalfont, lord Waterloo, battle of three armies p.44-45

Waterloo 1815 (catalogue) Pl. XXII

Lachouque, H. Waterloo p.95 and 100

Mudford, W. An historical account Plate V.

De Vos, Het einde van Napoleon (lithograph of Jobard).

Sketch of the farm dated april 1816 in the list of objects of the former Cotton Museum at Mont Saint Jean. In: NAM. Nr.7905-4

¹³ Ferraris-map (1777).

14. Nowadays, all these buildings no longer exist. Yet, in 1899 they still must have existed. Cf. drawing of Hoyneck van Papendrecht. In: Bas, W.G. de Quatre Bras en Waterloo p.56

According to J. Scheltema, who visited the battlefield in september 1815, the inn also had a forge. Cf. Scheltema, J. In: Verhaal van een reisje langs de slagvelden van Belle Alliance etc. In: Vad. Letteroefeningen, 1815 II p.591

15. This farm has undergone some major changes through time. The main gate in the front of the large barn has been converted into a large window; other than that, several annexes have been erected in rear of the farm.

For illustrations of the farm before that, cf.

Bowyer. In: Waterloo 1815, l'Europe face à Napoleon p.48

Documentation of the former Cotton collection. In: NAM, nr.7905-4

16. On the southern wall of the farm a tablet can be found bearing the text:

"Aan de Nederlanders en hun medestrijders, verdedigers van Quatre Bras 15-16-VI-1815. A la mémoire des Néerlandais et leurs alliés, défenseurs de Quatre Bras."

17. Cf. Bowyer. In: Waterloo 1815 p

Nowadays, all these buildings have gone.

The print of Hoyneck van Papendrecht (1899) only shows a single wall. In: Bas, W.G. de Quatre Bras en Waterloo p.

18. Cf. Bowyer. In: Waterloo 1815, l'Europe face à Napoleon p.48

Neck, L. van Waterloo, met afbeeldingen p.46

19. Siborne, W. History of the war etc. Atlas.

20. Ferraris seems to indicate a tiny chapel here, but this is not very clear.

21. Not far from Quatre Bras, to the west, on the south side of the Namur-road is a Belgian monument, stating:

"1815 - 16 juin. A la mémoire des Belges tués à la bataille de Quatre Bras pour la défense du drapeau et l'honneur des armes."

And: "Ter nagedachtenis der Belgen te Quatre Bras voor de verdediging van het vaandel en de eer der wapens gesneuveld. "Zij streden als leeuwen tegen troepen sterker in getal."

It was inaugurated on June the 22nd 1926 by lieutenant general Selliers de Moranville. The area was in former possession of the duke of Wellington.

²² Cf. Capitaine (1796). It was "Cense de le Rat" according to the Ferraris-map.

²³ Nowadays, called the Chapelle Notre Dame de Basse Wavre.

24. Ferraris calls it Piermont and Capitaine, Pireaumont. In 1777 it counted ten houses, in 1857 twenty-two.

The hamlet is centred around a farm, which has been transformed through time. For illustration, cf.

Chalfont, Lord. Waterloo, battle of three armies p.40

²⁵ According to Tarliers and Wauters the lake was absent in the middle of 19th century as well. In: Tarliers, J. and A. Wauters. Géographie et histoire des communes Belges. Province de Brabant. Canton de Genappe p.34

²⁶ Capitaine indicates them, as well photographs of the early 20th century, but no witness mentions their presence.

27. Lieutenant J. Hope (92nd regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.703 p.18-21 He confirms the presence of a slope of almost three meters in height.

²⁸ 1st lieutenant Backersloot. In: Ophelderungen etc. (dated 1815). In: 2.13.13.09 nr.185

29. Captain Cleaves (battery Cleaves). In: VPH-LBA, nr.15