

BATTLEFIELD ROUTE

BACKGROUND

The province contains many historic sites related to the Anglo-Boer War, including 13 battlefield sites, 8 military monuments, 2 war museums and 3 war and concentration camp cemeteries.

The Anglo Boer War broke out on 11 October 1899. This war, which was the last full scale war to be fought on south African soil, was a turning point in the history of the modern wars of our time, but also the last of the gentlemen's wars.

The **War Museum in Bloemfontein** portrays this war in an unforgettable manner, providing full detail of battlefield sites and other relevant historical sites and how best to visit these places.

MAIN BATTLEFIELDS

Some of the main battles of the war can be described as follows; .

Paardeberg (18-27 Feb. 1900)

After the battle of Magersfontein, the new Commander in Chief on the western front, Lord Roberts, decided to relieve Kimberley with the help of Gen. JDP French and his cavalry. At Paardeberg near Kimberley he encountered the forces of Gen. Piet Cronjé – with 40 000 British troops and 100 guns against the 4 000 Boers with only five guns. The heavy bombardment left Cronjé with no other option but to surrender on 27 February 1900. Casualties: The Boers lost 100 dead, 250 wounded and 4 069 men captured during the battle. British losses were 258 men killed, 1 211 wounded and 68 taken prisoner.

Poplar Grove (7 March 1900)

In contrast to the gallant defence the Boers made at Paardeberg, Poplar Grove was an anti-climax. The 5 050 strong forces of Gen CR De Wet, left their defences and fell back with only a few casualties. Casualties: Boer 2; British 57.

Driefontein (10 March 1900)

While the Battle of Poplar Grove was nothing for the Boers to be proud of, the contrary is true of the battle that followed three days later. Driefontein was the last stand they made before Bloemfontein, the Free State capital, fell on 13 March 1900. Gen CR de Wet and Gen JH de la Rey had 1500 men at their disposal. Under heavy artillery bombardment the British forces advanced in overwhelming numbers on the Boers who fought with greater determination than at Poplar Grove and only left the battlefield after a full day's fighting. Casualties: Boer 87; British 438.

Sannaspos (31 March 1900)

On 13 March 1900 Bloemfontein was occupied by Lord Roberts. At the end of March 1900, Gen de Wet decided to attack the British garrison protecting the Sannaspos waterworks, the main water supply for Bloemfontein. They captured 421 men, seven guns and 83 wagons during the day long battle actually the first of the guerilla phase. Casualties 16 Boer; 571 British.

Mostertshoek (3-4 April 1900)

The clinching victory at Sannaspos was instrumental in the boosting of Boer morale and Gen. de Wet used it to good effect. De Wet and nearly 2 000 men decided to attack a British column near Reddersburg on 3 April 1900. The overwhelming Boer force succeeded in defeating the British force - a definite sign to Lord Roberts that the Boers were far from beaten. Casualties: Boer 6; British 591.

Jammerbergdrift (9 April 1900)

After the success of de Wet at Sannaspos and Mostertshoek, Genl. De Wet and his commando decided to besiege British positions at Jammerbergdrift but as was the case in most of these attempts, the siege could not be sustained after help arrived on the scene. The Boer force had to retreat on 25 April when a British relief force arrived on the scene. Casualties; Boer 35; British 180.

Sand River (10 May 1900)

Bloemfontein the capital of the Free State was occupied by Gen Roberts on 13 March 1900. On 3 May 1900 he proceeded to Pretoria with about 25 000 soldiers, 80 guns and 49 machine guns. At Brandfort and the Vet River the Boers had in the region of 2000 men at their disposal to halt the British forces. However, under the leadership of Gens. L Botha and C R De Wet they had to close too many gaps in their defence and fear of encirclement and the overwhelming British forces ensured the retreat of the Boers by nightfall. Casualties: Boers 79; British 250.

Biddulphsberg (29 May 1900)

Biddulphsberg is situated near the town of Senekal. While this battle was taking place, the Boers were attacking the Imperial Yeomanry at Lindley. These two battles were closely connected and the reason is that when the Yeomanry were besieged, Lt Gen Rundle with his 4 000 men at Senekal tried to divert the Boers attention from Lindley to himself with a march from Senekal to Bethlehem. The artillery bombardment set the veld on fire and was at first used as a smoke screen by the attacking British soldiers. After a while, the wind changed direction and posed serious problems for the attackers. This and the continuous Mauser fire proved too much for the British force and they had to retire, leaving the Boers victorious. Casualties: Boer 40; British 180.

Yeomanry Hill (31 May 1900)

On the Lindley-Kroonstad road a fierce Boer onslaught proved too much for the British soldiers and the white flag was raised. This incident proved to Lord FS Roberts that he could not yet rule the occupied territory. Casualties: Boer 70; British 443 men.

Roodewal (7 June 1900)

After the occupation of Bloemfontein and Pretoria, the British army became dependent on the railway for transporting their required war provisions. Gen de Wet saw his chance of acquiring provincial at Roodewal station near Bloemfontein and decided to attack the station on 7 June 1900. He succeeded in overpowering the garrison and made off with goods worth £100 000. Casualties: Boer 8; British 28.

Surrender Hill (30 July 1900)

After the battle at Roodewal, Lord Roberts realized that he had to counteract the operations of De Wet. With this in mind he ordered a drive on the Boer forces, which were operating in the Eastern Free State. The Brandwater basin is a geographical region in the Eastern Free State, which offered the Boers the chance to regroup. Lt Gen A Hunter hopped 4 000 Boer fighters in the basin and forced them or surrender. The loss was a severe blow to the Boers in general, but it also had a positive outcome as the most hardy Boers were decided to fight to the bitter end. Casualties and prisoners : Boer 4 300; British 275.

Doornkraal (6 November 1900)

At Doornkraal, near Bothaville, Gen. De Wet and his commando were surprised by Lt Col le Gallais, who himself however, was fatally wounded by a Mauser bullet. The escape of De Wet led to a determined effort to capture him and this became known as the second drive on De Wet. Casualties: Boer 131; British 46.