

The field of battle. ¹

Considering the definition of a battlefield as the area where a battle is fought and where the contending armies are placed before they started it, the battlefield of Waterloo was roughly bounded in the north by the forest of Soignes, the forests of Ohain and Paris in the east, the Lasne stream and the forest of Callois in the south and the Hain stream in the west.

The huge forest of Soignes stretched out between Brussels and Waterloo on both sides of the great road which connects Charleroi and Brussels. To the west of this road it stretched up to Waterloo and the hamlet of Le Chenois, while to the east of the road it ran up to the hamlets of Joli Bois, Le Roussart, Verd Coucou and Ransbeeck; from there it fell back as far as the hamlet of Gallemart. The forest was very open having high trees without any significant under-grow. Further, it had a lot of lanes and sand-tracks. These were mostly in use for hunting, recreation and the exploitation of the forest. ²

The battlefield was intersected by two high roads, one coming from Charleroi and the other from Nivelles, both converging in the hamlet Mont Saint Jean, whence their continuance, in one main road, was directed upon Brussels.

Both roads were about 5 to 6 metres wide and were rimmed by wide verges of loam, but - at least on the battlefield - without any trees. Depending on the adjoining fields, the roads were sometimes at the same level with these fields or cut deep in them. ³⁻⁴

In June 1815, by far the largest part of the battlefield was covered with crops of wheat, oats and rye. Although these were not quite ready for harvesting, they were ripening and had grown tall. Though the density was lower, the variety of these crops grew higher as the modern versions, so much of the battlefield was covered with grain that had grown as high as 1.5 metres or more. ⁵

Other than that, there were also fields with potatoes, clover, beans, peas, and grass, as well as fallow lands. Fields were here and there interspersed with thickets. ⁶

In front of the hamlet of Mont Saint Jean, and offering, as it were, a natural military position for the defence of this approach to Brussels, was a gently elevated ridge of ground. It was intersected at right angles by the Charleroi road and followed a westerly direction until about midway between the two high roads, whence it took a south-westerly course and terminated abruptly at its point of intersection with the Nivelles road. On the east side, the ridge extended itself perpendicularly from the Charleroi road until it reached a point, distant about 650 metres, where, elevating itself into a mound or knoll and thence, taking a north-easterly course, expanded into an open plateau. This ridge of Mont Saint Jean constituted the position of the first line of Wellington's army.

To the south, where the French came from, the slope of the ridge varied locally. Near Gomont, it was about one centimetre per metre (⁷), while the one between this building and the farm of La Haye Sainte was more gentle. From La Haye Sainte, the slope increased again, to become abrupt near the Ohain-road; here the ascent was three centimetres per metre. ⁸

The ascents have been described as: "the ground on each side of the valley was of easy access, and of such a moderate ascent as to allow of charges of cavalry up it, at all points, at full gallop, and that the ascent to reach the left of the line of battle of the allies was longer, and in parts somewhat steeper, than the ground opposite of their centre and left, although not so high." ⁹

Due to the height of the ridge and the fact that the farm of La Haye Sainte was in a hollow, this farm could barely be seen from the heart of Wellington's position.

To the east of the Brussels-road, the slope was sharp (about eight centimetres per metre), but descended slowly further east and to climb up again towards the the farms of Papelotte and La Haye.

The first line of Wellington's army was more distinctly defined by a road which -while running along the summit of the ridge- entered on the east side from Wavre, and led through Ohain towards Braine l'Alleud.¹⁰

The crossing of the Charleroi-road and the Ohain-road was cut deep through the ridge.¹¹ From the middle, these hollow parts ran some 260 [¹²], 200, 60 and 100 metres to the west, south, east and north respectively. From a depth of about 3 to 4.5 metres, they gradually ran up to ground level.¹³ At some point, small corridors allowed from the fields access into the sunken road.¹⁴

Immediately east of the Charleroi road, the Ohain-road was lined on both sides with hedges and bushes for a distance of about 600 metres.¹⁵

Between the hamlet of Mont Saint Jean and the crossroads of the Ohain-road and the Charleroi road stood, to the east of the chaussée the large farm of Mont Saint Jean. Further south, near to the same crossroads, in its north-west-corner, stood a small cottage, the Maison Valette.¹⁶

Along the west-side of the Charleroi road, some 250 metres south of the Ohain-road, and in the low ground in front of the ridge, stood the large farm of La Haye Sainte. Like the one of Mont Saint Jean, the complex – consisting of a dwelling, barns, stables and other outbuildings - was constructed around a large courtyard. On its north and south side the farm was bounded by a small garden and an orchard respectively.

Immediately north-east of the farm and on the opposite side of the *chaussée* lay a large sandpit.¹⁷ On top of its northern side (some 100 metres in front of the Ohain-road) was a small earth bank which was crowned with a 150 metres long hedge and a few high willows.¹⁸

On the extreme left flank of Wellington's first line, some 900 metres in front of the Ohain-road, was the hamlet of Smohain.¹⁹ It derived its name from the small stream which ran in a low ground through it, in a west-east direction. The low ground of Smohain had three extensions in a western direction. The first one formed the low ground in front of the ridge of Mont Saint Jean and continued to some distance beyond the farm of La Haye Sainte.

The second turned round the plateau of La Belle Alliance (see below) to seek connection to the low ground of the village of Plancenoit. The third one extended towards the inn of La Belle Alliance, where it forked out in two. The presence of this third extension resulted in the presence of a high ground between the plateau of La Belle Alliance and the ridge of Mont Saint Jean. It came from Gomont and ran for about 900 metres in an eastern direction and was about 300 metres wide. Here, the *chaussée* which ran from Brussels to Charleroi was cut through it.²⁰

On the left bank of the Smohain stream, on the higher grounds, some 500 metres west of Smohain, stood the farms of La Haye and Papelotte. It was a broken area, interspersed with groups of trees, scattered houses and sand-tracks, converging from Ohain, Braine l'Alleud and the Bois de Paris. On the road which led from Smohain to the Bois de Paris stood, at about 300 metres from Smohain, and surrounded by large gardens and a wood, the chateau of Ficherfont.



The farm of La Haye at the beginning of the 20th century.

On the right flank of Wellington's front-line, some 400 metres in front of both the Ohain-road and the Nivelles-road stood the vast complex of the chateau-farm of Gomont. It comprised the buildings of the chateau and farm, adjoined by a formal garden to the east, an orchard and a small wood to the south.

The village Braine l'Alleud, at the Hain, was in the right rear of Wellington's front line, some 2200 metres from Gomont. Around it, at some hundred metres distance, stood the hamlets and farms of Pospoil, Bestrave and du Vieux Foriez.

Halfway between Braine l'Alleud and Mont Saint Jean was the hamlet of Merbraine, in which the farm of Cambrai formed the main construction.²¹ Merbraine was located in a low ground which was an extension of the one of the Hain. From Merbraine, it continued along the west side of the ridge of Mont Saint Jean and along Gomont, made a sharp angle to the east south of it and extended from there towards the extreme west side of the plateau of La Belle Alliance. From there it reached towards the farm of Rossomme, from where it branched out towards the village of Plancenoit and the Bois de Callois. The area between this low ground and the Bois de Callois and the Bois de Neuve Cour was, in its turn, cut through by the extensions of the low ground of Braine l'Alleud, which resulted here in an undulating landscape.

The ridge of Mont Saint Jean gradually sloped down to the north and west into extensions towards the farm of Mont Saint Jean, to the area between between Merbraine and the Nivelles-road and between Merbraine and the hamlet of Mont Saint Jean. To the east of the Brussels road, the ridge descended towards the low ground which came from Haut Ransbeek and which was bounded at its northern side by the higher ground between Verd Coucou and Mont Saint Jean. This low ground ended in a hollow between the Ohain road and the orchard of the farm of Mont Saint Jean.

The French position was dominated by a plateau which was bounded by the low grounds of Smohain to the east, the low grounds coming from Merbraine to the west and those of Plancenoit to the south.



The farm of Decoster.

The plateau, referred to as the one of La Belle Alliance, derived its name from the inn, which stood along the Brussels-road in the very heart of the French position. Also here, and further south along the same road, stood the farms of Trimotia [²²], Decoster and Rossomme. ²³ Still further south, at the junction of the Brussels-road and the road to Plancenoit, and in rear of the French position, was a group of buildings located on both sides of the Brussels road, called Maison du Roi. ²⁴

In more romantic descriptions, the field between the plateau of La Belle Alliance and the ridge of Mont Saint Jean is depicted on the one hand as a plain and on the other as a very low ground, and sometimes as a deep valley. First of all, however, the plateau of La Belle Alliance did not have the same extension as the ridge of Mont Saint Jean, while this field in reality was an area with undulations and smaller or larger hollows and high grounds.

The area between the Bois de Paris and Plancenoit was formed by a series of heights, which were bordered on their north- and south-side by the low grounds of Smohain and of the Lasne respectively.

These heights, as coming from the Bois de Paris, sloped gradually down towards Plancenoit (though with a slight rise between the chateau of Fichermont and the Bois de Ranson), while in the same direction they became more and more narrow (from about 1000 to 250 metres).

The southern extension of these heights formed the northern slope against which the village of Plancenoit was built. The opposite side of the low ground in which Plancenoit was built, was the slope of the height between Plancenoit, the farm of Rossomme, the hamlet of Maison du Roi and the Lasne.

To the east of the Brussels road, between the abbey of Aywiers and the farm of Caillou, both banks of the Lasne were wooded by the Bois de Virère, de Hubermont and Chantelet. On the opposite side of the Brussels-road, between both high roads, were the large Bois de Callois and Bois de Neuve Cour, the last with the farm of the same name near the Nivelles-road.

In the north part of the Bois de Callois there was a strong rise in the ground (160 metres) which was used as a vantage point through the construction of a wooden, 20 metre high observatory. It

was built there by Dutch engineers in 1814 geodesic purposes.²⁵

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1. For the description of the battlefield the following maps have been used:

Carte de cabinet des Pays Bas Autrichiens (1777)

Capitaine (1796)

Craan, W.B. Plan du champ de bataille de Waterloo dit de la Belle Alliance etc. Bruxelles (1816)

Siborne, W. History of the war etc. (1844) atlas

Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 Vol. (1906) plan nr.IX

Charras, La campagne de 1815 (1857) plan nr.4

Cotton, E. Une voix de Waterloo (1845)

Etablissements géographiques, Ph.van der Maelen (1846-1854)

2. Carmichael Smyth - Histoire abrégée des guerres dont les Pays Bas et principalement La Belgique ont été le theatre depuis le traité des Pyrénées en 1659 jusqu'à celui de Paris en 1815 p.324

Carte de cabinet des Pays Bas Autrichiens (1777)

Capitaine (1796)

Hills, however, describes the forest on the 22nd of July 1815 as composed of thousands of “tall, but flimsy upright beeches and other trees, so closely planted that their branches had hardly the spreading of the common fir, but oaks abounded in other parts.” In: Sketches etc. p.76

3. Mudford, W. - An historical account of the campaign in the Netherlands, prints B, M, N and O

Craan, W.B. - Plan du champ de bataille de Waterloo dit de la Belle Alliance etc. Bruxelles

Lieutenant colonel Nicolay of the staff corps says about the roads: “all the principal roads are paved in the middle for use in bad weather, with another road at each side for dry weather, which answers therefore very well – and almost universally there are rows of trees on both sides of the roads.” In a letter dated 17th of May 1815 to general Brown. In: NAM, nr.8903-48

Stanley describes the Brussels road as a narrow pavement in the middle with black mud on each side; this black colour was caused by the transport of coal over this road. Cf. E.Stanley. In: - Before and after Waterloo p.261

Also see: Béraud (member of the imperial guard). Histoire de Napoleon p.273

Simpson mentions a width of the roads of 12 or 15 metres. In: A visit to Flanders 3^e ed. p.54

Hills describes the Brussels road in the forest of Soignes as wide enough for three carriages, but paved only in the middle for the accommodation of one. In: Sketches etc. p.75

4. The fact that there were no trees along the high roads on the battlefield is confirmed by:

Craan, W.B. - Plan du champ de bataille de Waterloo dit de la Belle Alliance etc. Bruxelles

Siborne, W. History of the war etc. Atlas

Map of captain Schuler, lieutenant Brade and lieutenant Backer Seest from 1815. In: Navez, L. Le champ de bataille etc. p.88

Jacobus Scheltema indicates there were only trees north of the hamlet of Mont Saint Jean. In: Verhaal van etc. In: Vad.Letteroefeningen 1815.II p.584

The map of Capitaine (1796) does show trees all along the way though, as does the Carte de cabinet des Pays Bas Autrichiens, but this last one only for a distance of about 1100 metres south of Mont Saint Jean along the Nivelles road.

This situation matches the sketch as made by lady Gordon in May 1829. In: Waterloo 1815. L'Europe face à Napoleon p.68

In 1815, landmarks were most probably at Waterloo, Mont Saint Jean and Maison du Roi. These have probably been removed in the early 20th century. Cf. Navez, L. Le champ de bataille et le pays etc. p.139

Cf. Map of Capitaine (landmarks indicated as "barrière").

5. Cf. Mercer, captain (battery Mercer). Journal of the Waterloo campaign Vol.I p.145 He mentions a height of not less than 7 or 8 feet.

Lieutenant Wilson (battery Sinclair). In: BL, Add.mss.34.703 p.281-282

Captain Wallace (1st dragoon guards). In: BL, Add.mss.34.703 p.256-257

Lieutenant Gawler (52nd regiment). In: BL, Add.mss.34.704 p.88-97

Major Whinyates (battery Whinyates). In: BL, Add.mss.34.707 p.251-254

Major Rudyard (battery Lloyd). In: BL, Add.mss.34.704 p.167-170

Lieutenant Holmes (23rd regiment). In: BL, Add.mss.34.705 p.209-212

Ensign Standen (3rd Foot Guards). In: BL, Add.mss.34.705 p.19-22

Surgeon James (1st Life Guards). In: Journal p.24

Major Llewellyn (28th regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.264-265

Captain Ross-Lewin (32nd regiment). In: With the thirty-second in the Peninsula and other campaigns p.256

Clayton speaks of rye and wheat growing up to a height of 7 and 5 feet respectively. In: Waterloo p.180-181

6. Captain Tomkinson (16th regiment of light dragoons). In: The diary of a cavalry officer in the Peninsular and Waterloo campaigns p.298

Captain Mercer (battery Mercer) In: Journal of the Waterloo campaign Vol.I p.299

For his Waterloo-model, in the 1830's while being on the battlefield, captain Siborne made a detailed research on the crops as they would have been on the battlefield in 1815.

After that, he asked in his subsequent questionnaire to participants of the battle the following: "Upon examining the plan you will find that I have marked with a pencil, on the different fields in and near which the [the unit of the respective participant] was general posted throughout the 18th of June, the nature of the crops which, it is presumed, from the information afforded me by the farmers residing on the spot, they respectively contained on that day. Have you any doubts as to the correctness of such information, and if so, in what particular ? Considering the extremely devastated and trodden-down appearance of all kinds of vegetation at the period of

the crisis of the battle, it is more with reference to the existence of ploughed land that I ask this question.” In: BL, Add.ms.34.703 p.209

7. Navez, L. Le champ de bataille et le pays etc. p.44

8. Navez, L. Le champ de bataille et le pays etc. p.44

⁹ Shaw Kennedy, J. – Notes on the battle of Waterloo p.59

Lieutenant colonel Gardiner characterizes the ridge as “open and gradual ascent from all sides, without any particular feature which could be considered as securing our flanks, and perfectly open to our front.” In: former www.1815.ltd.uk Original in: NLS MS 3615, letter dated July 1815 to lieutenant general sir Th.Graham.

¹⁰ Siborne, W. – History of the war etc. Vol.I p.327-328

From here on, this road will be referred to as the Ohain-road.

Except for the immediate of the great road Charleroi – Brussels, it ran immediately north of the summit of the ridge.

11. Craan, W.B. - Plan du champ de bataille de Waterloo dit de la Belle Alliance etc. Bruxelles Sketch of captain Ross (battery Ross). In: BL, Add.mss. 34.707 p.255-259

Mudford, W. An historical account of the campaign in the Netherlands - print I Waterloo.1815. Estampes etc. plate XIII

Captain Ross (battery Ross). In: BL, Add.ms.34.707 p.255-259

Siborne gives a detailed description, both in writing and in a small sketch, of the banks of the Brussels road between the Maison Valette and the farm of La Haye Sainte. In: BL, Add.mss.34.707 p.540-543

12. Craan, W.B. - Plan du champ de bataille de Waterloo dit de la Belle Alliance etc. Bruxelles Navez mentions a distance of 200 metres. In: La campagne de 1815 Vol.II p.129

Lieutenant colonel Cathcart mentions almost 100 metres. In: BL, Add.mss.34.705 p.146-150

13. Cf. lieutenant colonel Cathcart. In: BL, Add.mss.34.705 p.146-150

Aerts mentions a depth of 4 to 5 metres. In: Etudes etc. Livre V (manuscript) p.38

Houssaye mentions 1.5 to 2 metres. In: 1815.Waterloo p.

14. Lieutenant colonel Cathcart, however, mentions one entrance to the road in rear of La Haye Sainte, near the Wellington-tree, and being accessible for one or two horses at the time, in an angle of about 45 degrees. In: BL, Add.mss.705 p.146-150 and 34.707 p.399-401

¹⁵ Craan, W.B. - Plan du champ de bataille de Waterloo dit de la Belle Alliance etc. Bruxelles Colonel Van Zuylen van Nijeveld (2nd Netherlands division). In: Bas, F.de & T'Serclaes de Wommersom. La campagne de 1815 Vol.III p.328

Ensign C.Mudie (1st Royal Scots). In: Operations of the 5th or Picton's division in the campaign of Waterloo. In: USJ, II, 1841 p.190
Lieutenant Forbes (79th regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.105-109
Lieutenant Riach (79th regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.707 p.107-110
Aerts, W. Etudes etc. Livre V (manuscript) p.38
Houssaye, H. 1815. Waterloo p.308
Mudford, W. - An historical account of the campaign in the Netherlands, prints I and L
The fact that the road did not lay any deeper is confirmed by W.M.Gomm. In: Gomm, W.M. Letters and journals etc. footnote p.352

Between both high roads, the Ohain-road had no hedges, except at a place about halfway, on its south-side only and for a length of approximately 200 metres.

W.Aerts mentions the presence of a tree and some bushes about 500 metres east of the crossroads, and directly on the south side of the road. This tree was called the "chêne St.Matthieu". They were the remains of a much older small group of trees. In the period 1815-1840 the bushes gradually disappeared, and finally the oak was cut down in 1865. In: Etudes etc. Livre V (manuscript) p.100

The tree can be found on the map of van der Maelen (1846-1854).

16. Craan, W.B. - Plan du champ de bataille de Waterloo dit de la Belle Alliance etc. Bruxelles Siborne, W. - History of the war etc. Atlas
Mudford, W. - An historical account of the campaign in the Netherlands, print I
Maaskamp, E. - Explicatie van den veldslag etc.
Waterloo.1815. Estampes etc. Plate 24
Lieutenant Waymouth (1st Life Guards). In: BL, Add.mss.34.703 p.244-247
Lieutenant Elliott (2nd Life Guards). In: BL, Add.mss.34.704 p.199-200
Lieutenant colonel Hartmann (Battalion Hameln, brigade Vincke). In: BL, Add.mss.34.704 p.227-228

¹⁷ Cf. Craan's map.

Measured at its base along the road and its upper edge it measured about 50 x 50 metres. Cf. Craan's map.

Caldwell and Copper give a much smaller size 30 x 15 metres, with a depth varying between 3.60 and 4.50 metres). In: Rifle green at Waterloo p.46

18. Houssaye, H. 1815. Waterloo p.309
Mudford, W. - An historical account of the campaign in the Netherlands, prints K and L
Maaskamp, E. - Explicatie van den veldslag etc.
Captain Ross (battery Ross), sketch. In: BL, Add.mss.34.707 p.255-259
Waterloo 1815. Estampes etc. plate XIII
Anonymous sketch of La Haye Sainte. In: Gloucestershire Record office nr.D1833/Z5

19. Cf. maps of Ferraris and Capitaine. Both mention "Smouhen". Nowadays it is called "La Marache". This name comes from the Dutch word of "moeras", which means swamp, which in its turn is connected to the marshy ground of the site. Before 1815, the same name existed but not for the village itself, but for a part of it. Cf. Aerts, W. Etudes etc. Livre V (manuscript) p.99

²⁰ From here on, this ridge will be referred to as the "intermediate ridge."

²¹ Craan, W.B. - Plan du champ de bataille de Waterloo dit de la Belle Alliance etc. Bruxelles
According to Aerts, the farm referred to in Craan's plan was the one of la Mousseline; a farm called de Cambrai would have stood about 200 metres further south-west. In: Promenades etymologiques etc. p.6

Cf. for the same conclusion Vandermaelen's map (1850).

According to Navez, the farm of Cambrai had burned down in the battle. In: Le champ de bataille etc. p.168

22. Other names of the farm are Badart, La Salière or la Saline. This name is probably derived from a local saltpan near La Belle Alliance or by the fact that its owner was a merchant of salted supplies. Cf. Aerts, W. - Promenades etymologiques etc. p.12

Cf. Mudford, W. - An historical account of the campaign in the Netherlands, print M

²³ The farm of Rossomme (the cense de Rossomme at the Ferraris-map), at about 1500 metres north of Le Caillou, took its name of Alexander van Rossum, the owner of the farm in the 18th century. The tablet of his gravestone can still be seen on the wall of the church at Plancenot.

The farm is sometimes also called maison Derbais and maison Delpierre. Cf. Tarliers, J. & G. Wauters. La Belgique ancienne et moderne. Arrondissement de Nivelles Vol.1.p.78

The farm as it existed in 1815 dated from the 18th century, but the place where it stood was much older; in 1544 it was called Tulvent. In 1815, the farm itself was formed by a house with a few annexes.

In April 1895 the farm was destroyed by a fire; only the adjoining orchard, on the other side of the road, survived. Since long, this orchard has been cut down.

Cf. Morgan Crofton, W. A visit to Waterloo p.285

Cf. map of 1896. In: Navez, L. La campagne de 1815 Vol.II p.25 and: Le champ de bataille p.168

Barral, G. Itinéraire etc. p.132

He shows a drawing of the Decoster house, but erroneously describes it as the farm of Rossomme.

24. Craan, W.B. - Plan du champ de bataille de Waterloo dit de la Belle Alliance etc. Bruxelles
In 1685 the site had the name of Monchar and when the Spanish king had decided to extend the road which came from Brussels up to Waterloo, as far as Genappe, it was there that a building

was constructed for the intake of toll. The name of "Maison du Roi" was given to the houses of the farmers who lived here, as they were built on the expenses of the king. In 1709 the toll-building was sold to Antoine Ransquin, whose descendants still own it. Cf. Logie, J. Waterloo, l'évitable défaite p.

According to Barral there were in 1815 only three houses. Cf. Barral, G. Itinéraire etc. p.116
There is a sketch (of 1894) which shows at least several buildings. Cf. Sketch-book of A.H.Kennedy-Herbert. In: NAM, nr.7303-73

The Carte de cabinet des Pays Bas Autrichiens shows a large farm west of the road and one (with some houses) east of it, while Craan shows houses on both sides of the road with two farms east of the road.

The major building to the east of the road still holds a tiny chapel dated 1741, while a stone in the former barn of the farm about 250 metres north of Maison du Roi bears the date 1757.

²⁵ Craan, W.B. - Plan du champ de bataille de Waterloo dit de la Belle Alliance etc. Bruxelles, Harvaert en Pauwels, 1816

Scheltema, J. In: Verhaal van etc. In: Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen 1815.II p.585

The fact that it was about 20 metres high is confirmed by sergeant Clarke of the Scots Greys. Journal of sergeant Clarke (Scots Greys), NLS, MS 15379 p.21

Sometimes the height is estimated much higher, but this is due to the distortion in some of its engravings, like the one published by Th. Kelly. In: The Waterloo Journal, Vol.23 nr.3 p.26

Sometimes it is asserted that Napoleon used the scaffold as an observation point but this is incorrect as it was too remote from the battlefield.

Simpson - A visit to Flanders etc. 3e ed. p.102

Sir Ch.Bell. In: Letters of Sir Ch.Bell p.235

Sketches and notes relating to the battle of Waterloo. In: Gloucestershire Record Office. D1833/25

Craan, W.B. , Plan du champ de bataille de Waterloo dit de la Belle Alliance etc. Bruxelles, Harvaert en Pauwels, 1816

T'Sas, F. - L'observatoire de Napoleon à Waterloo. In: Bulletin of SBEN, no.47 June 1964 p.19
Lieutenant Kuckuck (3rd battalion of the line KGL). He writes: "we saw at some distance to the right or behind us a pile of wood, said to have been erected for the surveyance of the country, and used by Napoleon in the morning to reconnoitre our positions." In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.35-41

Captain Taylor (10th regiment of hussars) in an account dated 21st June 1815. He writes: "Bonaparte had a great stage [here he adds a tiny sketch of the construction] (comme ça) erected to climb up & command the whole position, this was left standing." In: BL, Add.ms.34.703 p.31

According to Bell it contained three platforms, of which the first was located at about 8 metres in height. Also see: Sketches and notes relating to the battle of Waterloo. In: Gloucestershire Record Office nr.D1833/25

This sketch also depicts three platforms. Also see the one published by Th.Kelly.

During the winter of 1815 / 1816 it would have collapsed in a storm. Cf. Navez, L. – Le champ de bataille etc. p.129

Aerts specifies this was in March 1816. In: La nuit de Napoleon et la matinée du 18 Juin 1815. Réfutation de quelques légendes. In: Bulletin of the SBEN. 1952 nr.5 p.12-18

On July 1st 1815, a Dutchman, Willem van den Hull, visited the observatory; then it would have counted 30 to 40 steps. In: Autobiografie, p.486

Barrett states that during the visit of William Siborne (1838) the lowest part was still there. He also encloses a small sketch of it. In: The observatory at Waterloo. In: The cavalry journal. Vol.7 1912 nr.27 p.385

For further pictures of the construction:

Anonymous sketch. In: Gloucestershire Record office nr. D1833/Z5

Mudford, W. An historical account of the campaign in the Netherlands, in 1815 under his grace the Duke of Wellington and marshal Prince Blücher, comprising the battles of Ligny, Quatre Bras and Waterloo. Plate S

Waterloo, 1815. Estampes / dessins / documents. Plate IX

Two anonymous drawings. In: BL, Blore drawings. Vol.XLVIII Add.mss.42.045.p.69 and 71. From these sketches it becomes clear that the scaffold would have stood just out of the wood.

According to Delloye it was *not* a construction built for geodesical purposes. He bases his conclusion upon the fact that it was placed in a forest, its fragile construction and the fact that at that time, constructions like these were not built for purposes like that. For Delloye it was probably a part of the telegraphic system of the French army. In: L'énigme de la tour du bois Callois, un soi-disant observatoire de Napoléon à Waterloo. In: Bulletin de la SBEN, 1994 nr.22 pp.38-51