



Talence, March 20th, 2017.

Press Release

The “*Lumberjack Trail*” honors the lumbermen who operated during World War I within North American forces in the Landes de Gascogne

From June 22th to 25th, and from October 24th to 26th, 2017, the inauguration of The Lumberjack Trail will take place in several municipalities of the Gironde and the Landes. It pays tribute to the soldiers who came from overseas to cut timber in our forests and so contributed greatly to restore peace and freedom in Europe.

During WWI, timber of all types (boards, stakes, logs, etc.) was a strategic material for the armies - be they fighting units at the front or logistics units in the rear. It was used supporting trenches, building barracks, hospitals, warehouses, railroad tracks and bridges, etc. but also for heating, making beds and coffins. France on her own could not satisfy the needs of all the Allied troops on its territory. This is why Allied armies created, within their ranks, military lumberjacks who cut down trees and processed the timber.

At the request of the British government, Canada established the *Canadian Forestry Corps* in November 1916. More than 12,000 of these men and officers served in France, of which roughly 4,000 operated from 1917 to 1919 in the communes of Andernos-les-Bains, Arès, Audenge, Belin-Beliet, Biganos, Hourtin, Lanton, Lège-Cap-Ferret, Le Porge, Lugos, Marcheprime, Mios (Gironde) and on those of Biscarrosse, Dax, Laluque, Léon, Lesperon and Parentis (Landes). The Canadians also operated in Talence (Gironde) where there was a military hospital.

The USA also formed a similar unit as soon as they entered the war on April 6th, 1917. The *Tenth Engineers (Forestry)* was formed which later merged to become the *Twentieth Engineers (Forestry)* with a total of 18,000 men and officers at war's end. It is estimated that 5,000 officers and men served in the forests of the Landes at Arengosse, Aureilhan, Bias, Castets-des-Landes (where at first the *Royal Engineers* of the British Army operated), Dax, Herm, Labrit, Mimizan, Mées, Pontenx-les-Forges, Sabres, Saint-Avit, Sainte-Eulalie-en-Born, Saint-Paul-les-Dax and Sore (Landes), at Captieux (Gironde) and at Houeillès (Lot-et-Garonne). There were also many other American troops in Gironde, notably in Bordeaux (HQ), Bassens (port facilities) and at Talence (hospital). After the war, a monument was erected at Le Verdon-sur-Mer (Gironde) to honor the American forces.

These forestry troops operated with their own equipment, material and tools which they brought with them from overseas. This modern equipment was a considerable technological leap compared to that used at the time in Europe, at least here in Aquitaine. They made use of numerous horses and mules for logging purposes, hoists and jammers to handle and load logs (while French lumbermen handled logs manually!), tractors, powerful trucks, railroads and locomotives to haul logs to sawing areas or lumber depots as well as high performance sawmills.

Though less dangerous than for troops in fighting units, many Canadian and American engineers died on French soil, in particular in the Landes and Gironde, from accidents at the workplace or during traffic or from the Spanish influenza pandemic that struck in 1918-1919. In Aquitaine, US casualties were repatriated while Canadians still rest in French cemeteries.

A historical research group named “Allied Forestry Corps in Aquitaine”, composed of David Devigne (Talence, Gironde), Kévin Laussu (Dax, Landes), Jean-Michel Mormone (Andernos-les-Bains, Gironde) and Christian Tauziède (Captieux, Gironde) supported by Alain Gaudet (a Canadian citizen and unpaid volunteer serving with the *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, Bordes-de Rivière, Haute-Garonne), wished to bring back to light the history of these North American soldiers whose memory was rapidly fading in our collective minds.

In close contact with the above mentioned municipalities, they set up the “Chemin de mémoire des bûcherons” (*Lumberjack Trail* in English) that was awarded the “Label Centenaire” by the French “Mission du centenaire de la Première guerre mondiale” (Centennial mission of the First World War). Ceremonies will take place in June and October 2017 as well as in 2018 where commemorative plaques will be unveiled close to where these North American foresters worked and lived. Consular representatives and some military from these three nations will be present to honor these Lumberjack soldiers.

Calendar of events, June 2017 (Gironde)

- June 22th, 2017 - Morning: Talence (GB, Canada, USA); afternoon: Captieux (USA)
- June 23th, 2017 - Morning: Lège-Cap-Ferret (Canada); afternoon: Andernos-les-Bains (Canada)
- June 24th, 2017 - Morning: Biganos (Canada); afternoon: Parentis-en-Born (Canada)
- June 25th, 2017 - Morning: Le Verdon-sur-Mer (USA)

Calendar of events, October 2017 (Landes)

- October 24th, 2017 - Morning: Pontenx-les-Forges (USA)
- October 25th, 2017 - Morning and afternoon: Dax (GB, Canada, USA)
- October 26th, 2017 - Morning: Mées (USA) (afternoon: visit of the remains of the old sawmill)

Calendar of events in 2018

To be announced later.

Contacts

David Devigne: telephone +33 6 75 20 43 38; e-mail daviddevigne@orange.fr

Kévin Laussu: telephone +33 6 52 38 02 89; e-mail baignots40@gmail.com

Jean-Michel Mormone: telephone + 33 6 74 37 12 14; e-mail jean-michel.mormone01@orange.fr

Christian Tauziède: telephone +33 6 20 02 48 08; e-mail christian.tauziède@wanadoo.fr

Alain Gaudet: telephone +33 5 61 89 24 94; e-mail agaudet@wanadoo.fr
