

# 'Wellington's Way'

Guild of Battlefield Guides Peninsular War Reconnaissance



2<sup>nd</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> March 2023

*"I am going to take a little sleep. Watch with your glass. You see that large stone? Call me when the head of the French column reaches that point."*



Wellington to Lord Fitzroy Somerset prior to his great victory at Salamanca, 22 July 1812

*The Greater Arapiles at Salamanca. That large stone referred by Wellington is at the western end (right). The Lesser Arapiles, from where the above photograph was taken was the scene of the most formidable decision making by Wellington and most likely the location of the famous 'chicken bone story'. We walk the escarpment you see in the photograph and that of the Pico de Miranda to learn its history.*

## "By god that will do"

*Wellington on seeing that the French had split prior to his momentous victory at Salamanca.*

*"This battle is the most cleverly fought, the largest in scale, the most important in results, of any that the English have won in recent times. It brings up Lord Wellington's reputation almost to the level of that of Marlborough. Up to this day we knew his prudence, his eye for choosing good positions and the skill with which he used them. But at Salamanca he showed himself a great and able master of manoeuvring. He kept his dispositions hidden nearly the whole day: he allowed us to develop our movement before he pronounced his own: he played a close game: he utilised the oblique order in the style of Frederick the Great."*



General Foy - Commander of the French 1<sup>st</sup> Division at Salamanca written in his diary six days after the battle



## Recce Overview

The intent of this 8 Day reconnaissance is to familiarise 'Guild mates' with the ground, battle sequences, briefing stands and walking route options on Wellington's battlefields. We will also consider the administrative support available in terms of accommodation, restaurants, emergency services, cash points etc. Some of us are experienced 'Badged' Members while others are just starting their association with the craft. We are here to educate ourselves by learning from each other and to share in the camaraderie that is the Guild!

We take in Peninsular War battle sites that tested Wellington's army and himself personally during the middle years of the Napoleonic Wars. We look at various aspects of his leadership and his logistical challenge and most importantly of all the ground where the actual combat happened. The Peninsular War proved that a large army could not survive, and a small army could not win.

Having rendezvoused at Madrid Airport we travel to **Talavera** and see where a commander stayed with his men overnight prior to a victory. We then view Hill's 1812 lightning raid on the French bridge of boats at **Almaraz** before taking the costly engagements at **Albuera** and the **Badajoz** siege where Wellington's Army lost control and its name.

We view the scene of action at **Alcantara** en route to **Ciudad Rodrigo** to contemplate the January 1812 Siege. Here we stroll the Tescos to understand the history, stand where Craufurd died in the lesser breach and where the 88<sup>th</sup> stormed the Citadel.

The following day we battlefield walk Craufurd's 1810 'Action on the Coa', stroll the ramparts of **Almeida**, scene of the explosion that angered 'Nosey'. We examine Wellington's decision making that saved his reputation at the battlefield of **Fuentes de Onoro** where he defeated Masséna to end the Marshal's career and the third and last French invasion of Portugal. Taking in the context of the war against Napoleon we visit Wellington's Headquarters at **Freineda** and learn of the Duke's daily disciplined lifestyle and habits.

We end the tour with two nights in **Salamanca** the European city of culture with its famous **Plaza Mayor** and **Irish College** where Father Curtis spied for Wellington. A short drive south of the city we view the field of Wellington's



principal victory where it is said 'fourteen thousand French went down in forty minutes.'

Above: The northern part of the Salamanca battlefield where Wellington's 6<sup>th</sup> Division plugged the gap. Across this ground towards the camera Wellington galloped with chicken bone in hand. The European City of the year 2003 is horizoned and viewed from atop the Lesser (English) Arapiles where 'Nosey's' brilliant decision making decided the battle.

We walk the **Arapiles**, **Leith's Ridge** and the escarpment at **Aldea Tejada** and see exactly how Wellington's plan unfolded. Atop the **Pico de Miranda** we envisage the advance of the "The Fighting Irish" of the 88<sup>th</sup> Foot. Mesmeric and adorned with incredible scenery you will not fail to be fascinated by the events here in July 1812.

On the last day we depart for **Segovia** and an option lunch beneath the famous **Roman Aqueduct** before arriving at Madrid Airport mid-afternoon for departure.



## Day 1: Battle of Talavera 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> July 1809

- **Casa Salinas (right)** where the anger of Nosey is exemplified as Cuesta sleeps and where locals view Wellesley in a different light.



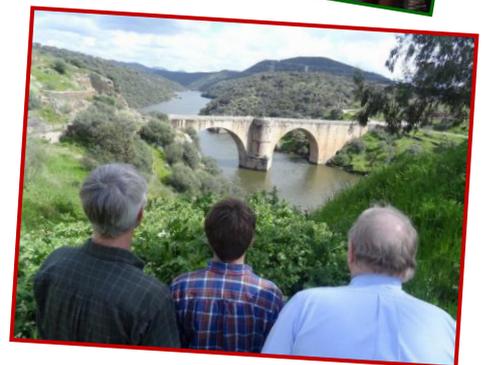
- **The Talavera Ring** – We drive it to understand Nosey’s choice of ground.  
*Looking south the Medillin is the high point beyond the reservoir which was created in the 60’s*
- **Cascajal** where 80 French guns cannonaded Sherbrooke’s Division into platoon crescent formation before the French main attack by Sebastiani & Lapisse
- **The Pajar** where Laval attacked the Spaniards and Nosey’s southern flank
- **The Medillin** and the old Memorial and where the night attack by 9 French battalions circumnavigated Donkin’s boys who were fast asleep. We stand where Nosey spent the night wrapped in his cloak and view the ground where the 29<sup>th</sup> Foot volleys ‘lit up the night sky’ as they drove the French 24<sup>th</sup> Foot into retreat.
- **Wellesley’s Crisis.** The new memorial and where Victor’s memoirs saved an aspect of the environment.



## Day 2 Almaraz Raid 20<sup>th</sup> May 1812

- **Fort Ragusa** the French fort on the north bank of the Tagus
- **The Roman Bridge** (right) which the Spaniards destroyed forcing the French to build a bridge across the Tagus to save time.

**Fort Napoleon** and the steep climb up to it. The Mirabete Pass can be seen from here and where 300 French with 9 guns guarded the pass. Hill’s lightning raid can be envisaged from here.



*In the footsteps of Howard’s Brigade which via a night march through Romangorda attacked Fort Napoleon (right) with 900 men*

## Day 3 Battle of Albuera 16<sup>th</sup> May 1811 & Siege of Badajoz 6<sup>th</sup> April 1812

- **Albuera 16<sup>th</sup> May 1811 - Napier's Hill** (below) on the Albuera battlefield where “*the most massive single attack of the war*” took place. We stand there and contemplate this toe-to-toe engagement. A 9-phase battle that saw disobedience and fate play a part in the outcome.



We walk the ground (above) where Ensign Edward Thomas at 15 years of age held the Buffs Regimental Colour and refused to surrender it to a French officer. Thomas fell instantly to the ground pierced by a lance. The Buff's Colours were captured and retaken 3 times



**The Albuera Memorial (Right) and Museum (Left).**



Marshal Beresford had not drawn his sword when he saw a Polish Lancer heading directly for him. But the Anglo Irishman was powerful and alert; he thrust aside the lance, seized the Pole by the neck and dashed him senseless to the ground.

The location of the bloodiest battle on the Peninsular War – Napier's Hill at Albuera – We go there!



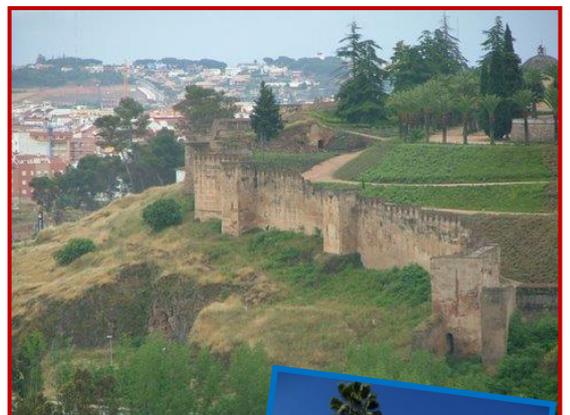
### ➤ **Siege of Badajoz 6<sup>th</sup> April 1812**

We stand where 4th Division assaulted the Trinidad bastion and where the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division escalated the castle walls.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> March 1,800 men started digging the first parallel from Fort Picarina (left) ... 2'300 covered them.



(right) The eastern walls & the memorial outside the Trinidad breach.

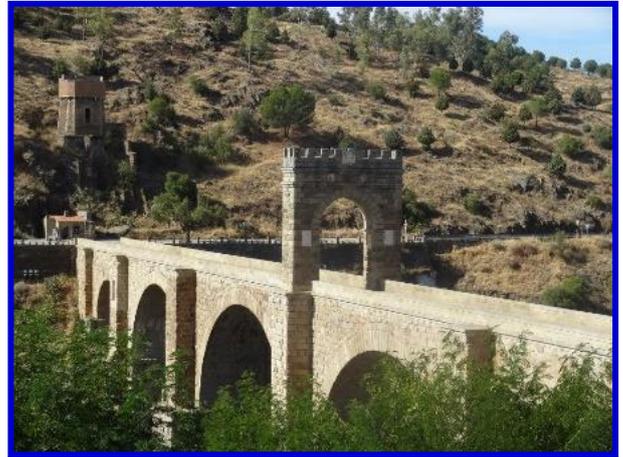


We follow the story where for days the Wellington's Army pillaged, looted and raped the city and in so doing lost its name and reputation. We visit the site where Wellington had gallows erected to stop the murder of the city.



#### **Day 4: Battle of Alcantara 14<sup>th</sup> May 1809**

Heading north across the Alcantara plain towards Ciudad Rodrigo we cross the impressive Roman bridge at Alcantara where the battle saw a French division led by Marshal Victor attack a Portuguese detachment under Colonel Mayne. After a three hours skirmish, the French stormed across the Alcántara Roman Bridge and forced the Portuguese to retreat. Alcántara is situated on the Tagus river near the Portuguese border, 285 kilometres west-southwest of Madrid.



While Marshal Soult invaded northern Portugal in early 1809, two other French forces stood ready to cooperate in the subjugation of Portugal. Lapisse's Division lurked near Ciudad Rodrigo while Victor's I Corps operated in the Tagus valley. A weak force under Wilson watched Lapisse while Colonel Mackenzie's Anglo-Portuguese corps kept an eye on Victor. After being outgeneraled by Wilson, Lapisse marched south to join Victor. When Sir Arthur Wellesley's Anglo-Portuguese army advanced to attack Soult's corps, the detachment under Mayne occupied Alcántara.

Believing Mayne's troops to be a serious threat, Victor marched against him. The Loyal Lusitanian Legion battalion defended the Alcántara Bridge for three hours. Then, the French artillery silenced their guns and a supporting battalion of militia took to its heels.



The bridge was mined, but when Mayne ordered the charges to be detonated, its heavy construction withstood the explosion. Victor's infantry then rushed the incompletely demolished span. The French hung around the area for a few days but finally withdrew. The next action was the Battle of Talavera.

#### **The Siege & Storming of Ciudad Rodrigo 19<sup>th</sup> January 1812**

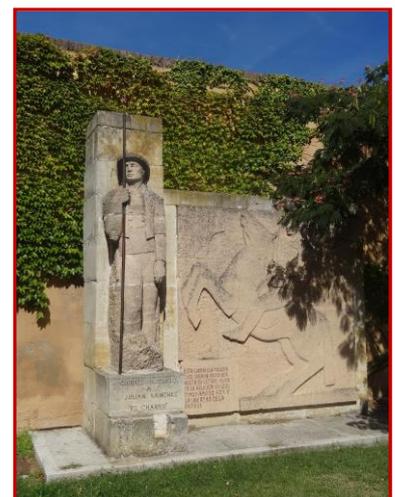


Above: *The Ciudad Rodrigo citadel viewed from the Greater Teson*

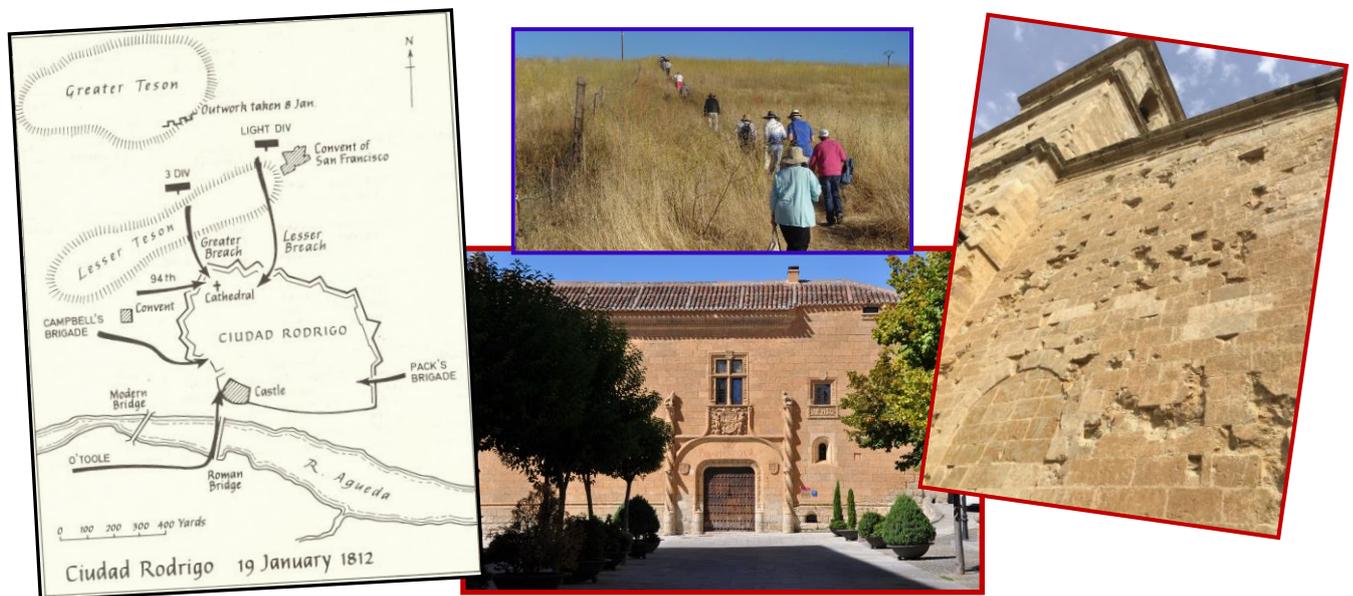
*We then marched here (the Guards' camp at Espeja) and got in at four o'clock, having been thirty-four hours in the open air, with no shelter, in the most biting frost, so hard that the water had frozen in the men's canteens."*

**John Mills**, Coldstream Guards, Ciudad Rodrigo - 9 January 1812

Right: The Memorial to Sanchez inside the citadel walls the Spanish Guerrilla leader



- **Greater Teson** - We locate the Reynaud Redoubt, review Wellington's strategy, his plan and the sports day. We imagine the Light Division's night attack and the prize.
- **Lesser Breach** - We discuss the assault on that cold night and the death of Craufurd. We locate Craufurd's Memorial and contemplate the man, his standards and dealings with Wellington.



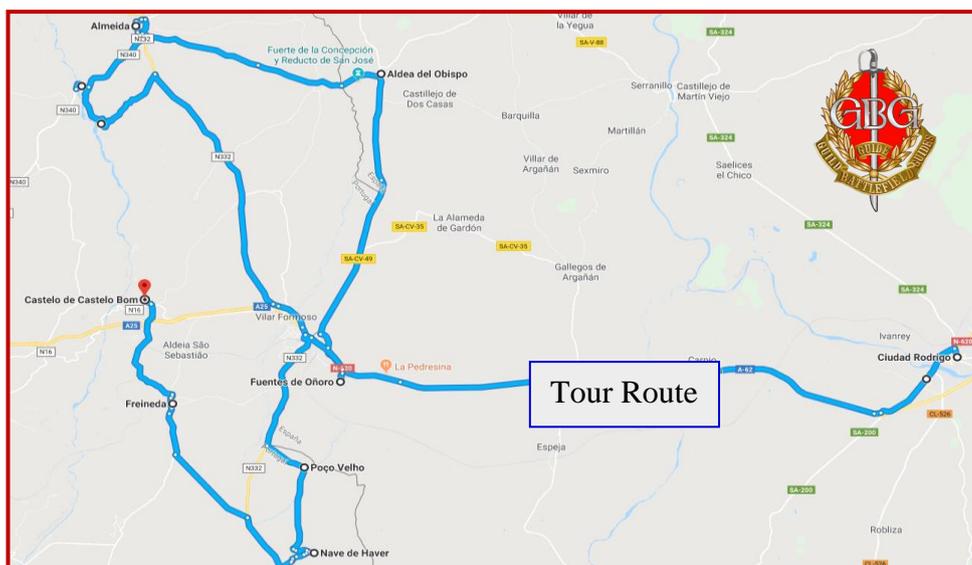
Above: The walk up to the Greater Teson, where Wellington spent the night and the Cathedral battle damage

- **Greater Breach** - We look down on the path that the Connaughts took to the Greater Breach – and where Picton addressed the 88<sup>th</sup> Foot Connaughts prior to the assault. We walk the castle walls of the citadel, understand its garrison and overlook the bridge over the Agueda to view the assault route that Wellington's Portuguese Cacadores took to gain the castle walls. We understand Nosey's fears.
- **Dinner in the Moorish Castle** followed by a short night walk through the citadel to where Wellington spent the night of the 19<sup>th</sup> Jan 1812.

### Day 5: 'Action on the Coa', Almeida, Fuentes de Onoro and Wellington's HQ

- **The Action on the Coa.** We follow the retreat route of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Regt in their rush to the bridge over the Coa, the scene of Craufurd's near run thing on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1810.

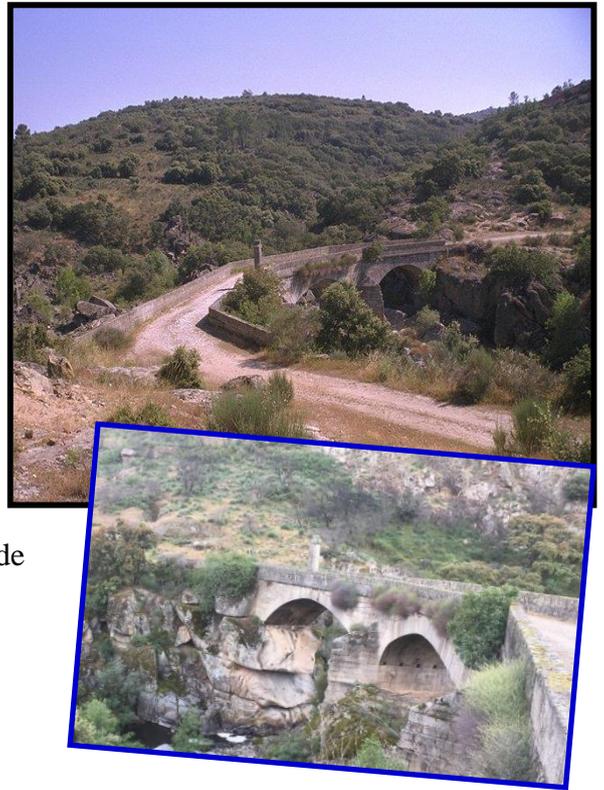
*"...I am not desirous of engaging in an affair beyond the Coa. Under these circumstances, if you are not covered from the sun where you are, would it not be better that you should come to this side with your infantry at least?"* - Wellington's letter to Craufurd on 22<sup>nd</sup> July.



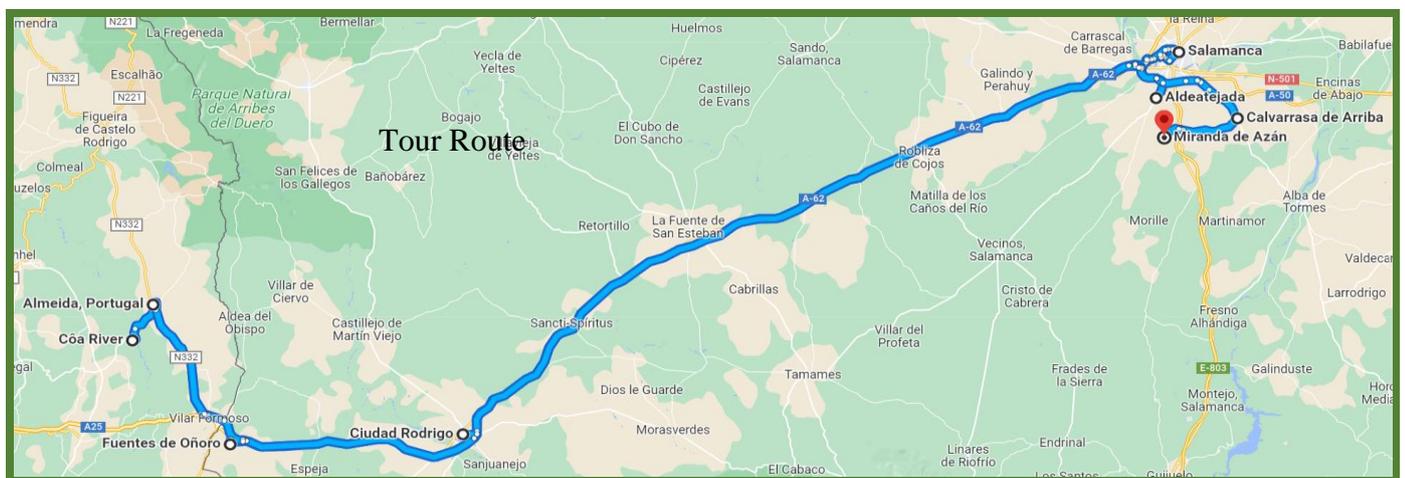
In the summer of 1810, the French were about to begin their third invasion of Portugal in two years. They had just completed their capture of the fortress city of Ciudad Rodrigo and were preparing to cross the frontier into Portugal. Wellington, the commander of the British Portuguese Army, knew his forces could not stand up to the numerically superior French forces, so he ordered a retreat.

*Right: The Roman Bridge over the Coa*

The British Light Division, under the command of General Robert Craufurd had the mission of screening the slowly withdrawing British forces. General Craufurd decided to defend as far forward as possible and keep the Light Division on the east side of the River Coa. The division's left flank was within sight of the fortified city of Almeida (which was the next French objective), while their right flank was on the ridge overlooking the river. Should the French attack them, the division would be in grave danger of being surrounded and cut-off.

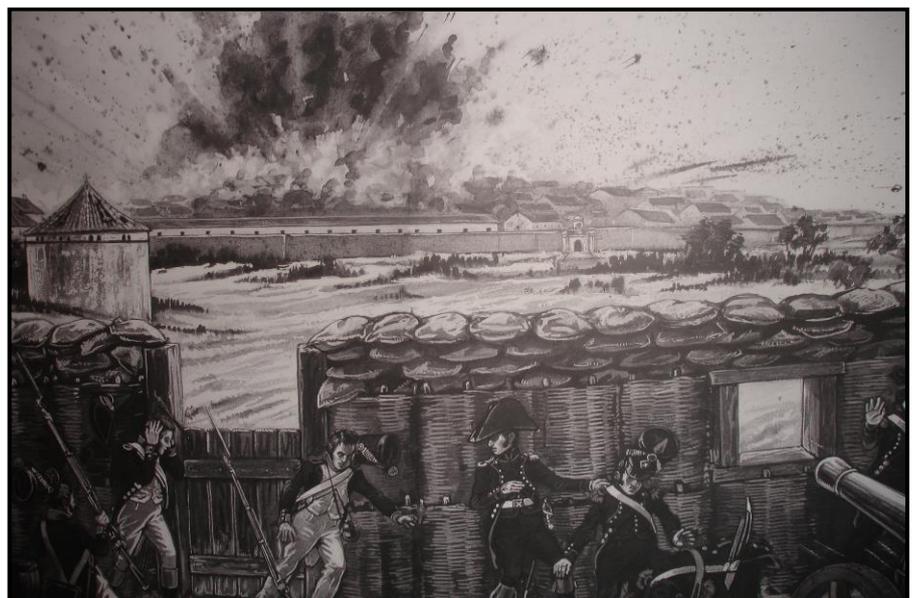


Craufurd's deployment of the Light Division was in direct violation of Wellington's stated wishes. Defended by more than 100 guns, 40 of which were of 18-pounder or heavier calibre, there was every reason for Wellington to hope that it could hold out until October when the autumn rains would hinder Masséna's further advance into Portugal.



- **Almeida:** A stroll around the citadel. The site of that incredible explosion that devastated the town in 1810. We visit its quaint museum, riding school and study the concept of Star Forts. The garrison of 4,000 Infantry, a squadron of cavalry and 400 gunners, all under the command of William Cox, an English Colonel and Portuguese Brigadier, had ample supplies of food and ammunition.

*Right: When Almeida exploded*





The Citadel and the rugged Coa valley that is protected. This well guarded the bridge over the Coa, Nosey's northern escape route into Portugal



- **Battle of Fuentes de Onoro 3-5 May 1811.** The village that took the brunt of the French infantry assault in May 1811. We walk the Don Casas stream, its legendary bridges and the alleyways of death where the onslaught of the Irish of the 88<sup>th</sup> Foot against all odds destroyed French ardour and column.



*Fuentes de Onoro: The hinge village at the centre of Wellington's line where the Guards protected his get out clause. (Left) Down this road the Connaughts charged to rescue Wellington's intent in May 1811. Above: The battlefield and the stone bridges*

- **Pocho Velo** – The Village where the 7<sup>th</sup> Division were surprised by massed French cavalry but saved by Wellington's leadership and the skill of 'Grasshoppers' on the move.



*Spot the Badged Member with Ladies of the 19<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot when they met Maria (centre) in the most remote bar in the peninsula!*



- **Freineda** – Wellington's Headquarters in 1811. We look at Wellington's lifestyle, his likes, dislikes and things that made him the leader.

*Left: Wellington's balcony at his Freineda Headquarters – Today a private residence*



*Nosey's stables – Notice the drainage channel.  
He endeavoured to go hunting every afternoon*



*Wellington's balcony at his Freneida  
Headquarters - Today a private residence*



*Where Nosey slept*



*The Chapel*



*Wellington's backyard*



*Wellington's Wine Store*



*Wellington's Conference Room*



*Wellington's Headquarters. In 1811 it was guarded by two sentries in civilian clothes.  
A most superb leadership stand for corporate and military groups!*

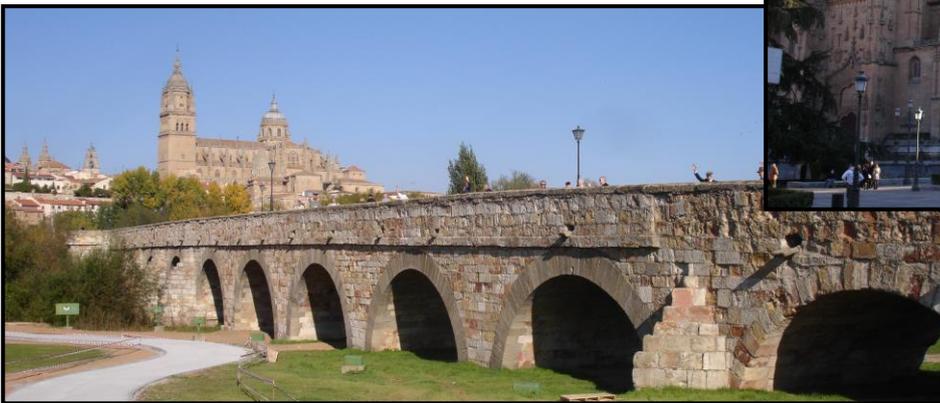
## Day 6: The Salamanca Forts

In the June of 1812 Wellington had to drive the French from the city of Salamanca. The French under Marmont withdrew leaving a defensive force in the city forts. We enjoy an afternoon's walk around this magnificent city, cross its Roman bridge, view the forts held by the French in 1812, take in its two cathedrals and the Irish College where Father Curtis betrayed Marmont.



*Right: The Irish College and Salamanca's second Cathedral*

*Below: The Roman bridge over which Pakenham's 3<sup>rd</sup> Division made haste to the south and Aldea Tejada*



## Day 7: The Battle of Salamanca 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1812

Wellington's master plan that brought freedom to the citizens of Salamanca following 6 years of French rule.

*'The weather was fine, the country rich, the troops received full rations and wine was so plentiful it was hard to keep the soldiers sober: the caves of Rueda, either natural or cut in the rock below the surface of the earth, were so immense and so well stocked, that the drunkards of two armies failed to make any sensible diminution in the quantity. Many men of both sides perished in that labyrinth.'*

William Napier - Rueda 1812

- **Calvarrasa de Arriba** to overlook the ground that dominated the prelude to the campaign and discuss the end of the parallel waiting game.
- **Nuestra Señora de la Peria** where the French advanced. We view the ground where 'The Sweeps' witnessed an early skirmish.
- **Lesser Arapile** We appreciate the vista, the battle plan, a chicken bone and a memorial service.



Above: Salamanca battlefield... where it is said that 'Fourteen thousand French went down in forty minutes.' The two Arapiles (hills) stand 900 meters apart. The main battle was fought between and beyond these two features.

- **French Arapile** - We walk it via the easy route and view the battle sequence through French eyes. Fantastic views.
- **Monte de Azan** - We learn of the Essex lads, the eagle and the retreat.
- **Pico de Miranda** - Following lunch in a motorway café we stand where the Connaughts lead the front line. Fighting in the Napoleonic wars meant many miles were marched, many casualties were suffered, and many stories were told, not least that of the *'Jingling Johnny'*.
- **Aldea Tejada**. We see the terrain over which the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division advanced to start what was to become Wellington's famous masterpiece battle. 21 Officers and 642 Rangers from Connaught were concentrated in Wallace's Brigade in the village of Aldea Tejada. They were to be the *'Irish trigger'* to Wellington's masterstroke. Their casualties by the end of the day were 135. Behind them in Campbell's Brigade were 319 men of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Regt. Their forward pickets on top of the escarpment hiding the village would have observed *'that great stone'* referred to by their supreme commander.

Right: *The Pico de Miranda. The 88<sup>th</sup> advance south across this view from left to right up onto the Pico de Miranda (the two peaks you see on the right and the one from where the photo was taken). The 83<sup>rd</sup> were in Campbell's Brigade in the second line. Both Arapiles are horizoned. We stand here on 16<sup>th</sup> March.*



*Salamanca Plaza Mayor where the 6<sup>th</sup> Division assembled for the Victory parade and where the ladies were waiting for the party to happen!*

The Battle of Salamanca was a damaging defeat to the French. A misunderstanding between Spanish and British commanders rendered the victory incomplete as Spanish troops failed to guard a crucial escape route over the bridge at **Alba de Tormes**. The pursuit failed to destroy or to capture the fleeing French.

## **Day 8: Segovia**

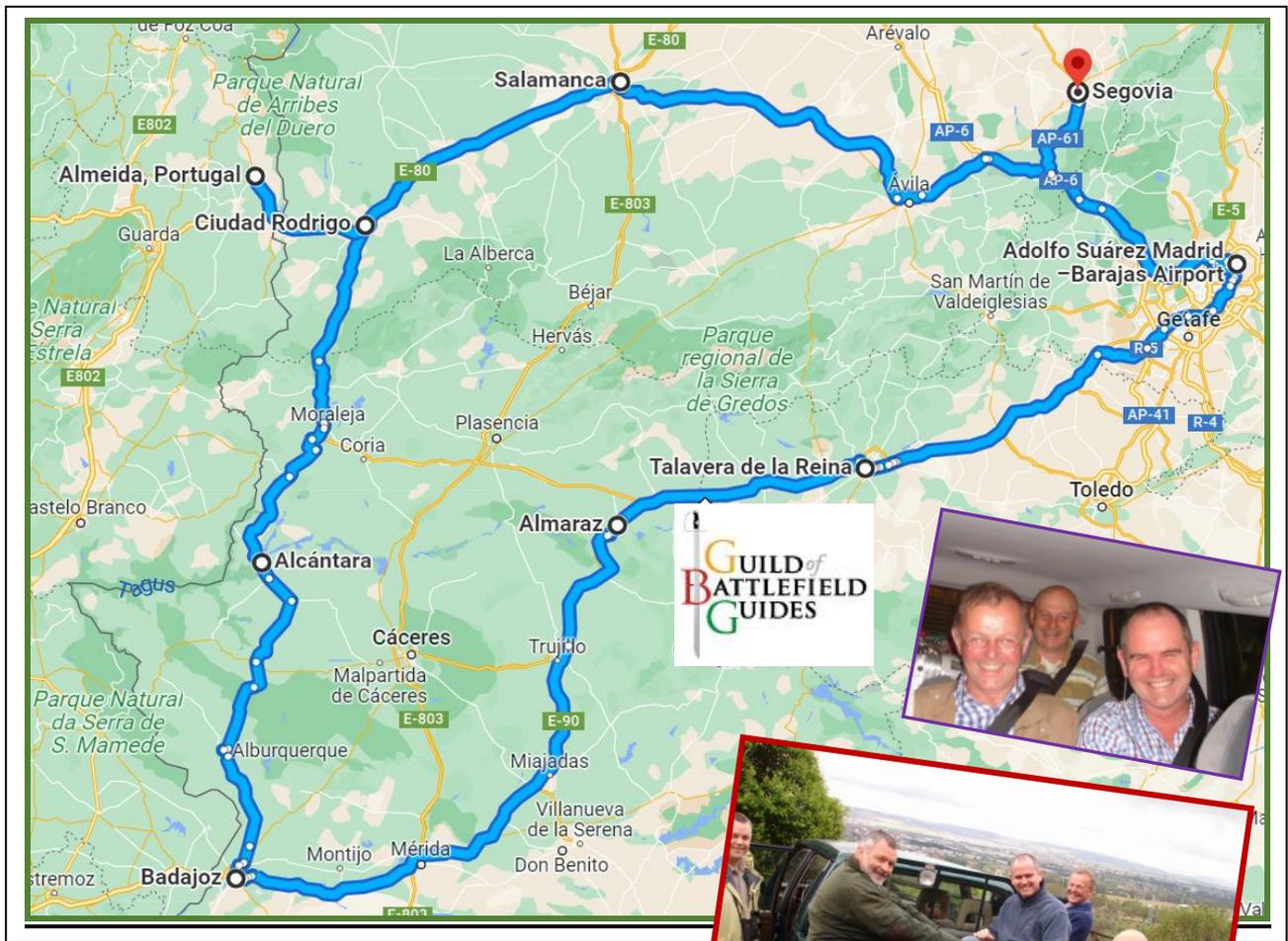
We take an early lunch in Segovia and visit the unique roman aqueduct, cathedral and city of historic interest. Thereafter we arrive at Madrid airport for return flights mid-afternoon.



*Segovia's Cathedral*



*The famous Aqueduct in Segovia*



**Peninsular Recce Guild Memories 2008!**



*David Winn, Tom Dormer, Mike Peters, Frank Toogood, Mike Sheil – 'The Ring' at Talavera*



*With Spanish Fire Bde - Badajoz*

