

**THE MAGINOT LINE :**  
**" WHAT YOU HAVE TO KNOW "**  
(translation: Hotel l'Horizon Thionville)

To comprehend the magnitude of the **Maginot Line**, a visit to **Alsace and Lorraine** to see the fortifications and the terrain is important.

(If you have the time, a visit to **the Riviera** in the **Maritime Alps north of Nice** is well worth it).

Fortunately, 99% of the **Maginot Line** still exists in **northern Alsace and Lorraine**. Several fortified works (known in French as "**Ouvrages**" - **fortresses, forts, casemates, and bunkers**) are open to the public as **museums**, while the rest of the **Line** lies abandoned in the countryside. In the **Thionville** sector, many of the large works have been sealed up and buried by the Army with mounds of dirt - **Metrich, Soetrich, Mont des Welches, Billig**, etc. This is an understandable preventive measure by the army to prevent injury and death.

### **HOW TO VISIT**

Those sites open to the public are maintained by local volunteer groups. Because none of the groups have full-time staffs - visiting hours can be irregular. Only the **largest Maginot Line** museums have regular visitation schedules. Other sites are typically open only one or two days a month, often on weekends. It is wise to verify opening times before departing for a visit (Internet websites are a good source of information).

To see the less traveled parts of the **Maginot Line**, several sources are available to help you, since finding the forts and fortresses can be a daunting task. The entire line is now visible through an individual's efforts on Google Earth. If you're familiar with it, visit the Google Earth community where you can download a .kmz file of the **entire Maginot Line**. Our associate, **Caspar Vermuelen**, has created a CD (<http://www.maginot.info/atlas/en/index.html>) that shows the location of every **bunker, ouvrage, etc., along the Maginot Line**. Never forget that most of these forts are on private or military property !

### **LOCATION**

One of the best places to see **the Maginot Line is in the Thionville** area which is in the heart of the **Line**. Within a short distance of the city there are no less than **18 Maginot fortresses and forts**; many of which are open to the public.

Some of the more well known sites are:

**Gros Ouvrage Hackenberg** ( <http://www.maginot-hackenberg.com> ) - arguably the largest **Maginot Line** fortress with 17 combat blocks (although **Ouvrage Hochwald** also claims that honor).

**Petite Ouvrage Immerhof** ( <http://www.maginot-immerhof.info/en> ) - a four block fort with two machine guns and one 81mm mortar turrets.

**Abri Zeiterholtz** - a surface shelter for interval infantry troops.

**The Cattenom Forest Fortifications** ( <http://forticat.com> ) provide an ideal opportunity to see every element contained in the Maginot Line, including:

**Gros Ouvrage Galgenberg** (an artillery ouvrage with six combat blocks),

**Petit Ouvrage Bois Karre** (a mono-block fort with a machine gun turret),

**Petit Ouvrage Sentsich** (a monoblock fort with a machine gun turret),

**Abri du Bois-de-Cattenom** (a surface infantry shelter).

**Observatoire du Bois de Cattenom** (an artillery observation casemate to the rear of the main line)

**Casemate Sonnenberg** (a small infantry casemate adjacent to the Ouvrage Galgenberg)

Numerous small infantry shelters, observation blockhouses, and trenches in the NE corner of the forest.

**Gros Ouvrage Michelsberg** ( <http://perso.orange.fr/michelsberg> ) an artillery fortress with five combat blocks.

Within an hour's drive, it is also possible see **the Petit Ouvrage La Ferte**, the only **Maginot Line** work to fall to the Germans in 1940. It is now a memorial to the soldiers killed inside during the attack.

**Gros Ouvrage Fermont** with an excellent museum that now includes the complete 75 turret recently removed from **Molvange** ( <http://www.ligne-maginot-fort-de-fermont.asso.fr> ;

**Petit Ouvrage Bambesch** ( <http://www.kerfent.com/guidesdubambesch.htm> )

**Ouvrage Bois de Bousse and the Abri de Bockange next to the Gros Ouvrage Anzeling** (not open to the public).

Within an hour's drive, it is also possible see:

**Petit Ouvrage La Ferte** now a memorial to the 105 soldiers of the fort's crew who were killed in May 1940.

◦ Marc Romanych has a huge collection of original photos of the Maginot Line taken by the Germans in 1940

<http://mysite.verizon.net/vzev1mpx/maginotlineatwar>

◦ Clayton DONNELL was the first american " Maginot Line's buff on the net

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/1491/finding.html>

◦ Dan McKenzie and his group propose wonderful photos of the Maginot Line today

[http://www.bunkertours.co.uk/maginot\\_-\\_finding\\_the\\_line.htm](http://www.bunkertours.co.uk/maginot_-_finding_the_line.htm)

Here is a great link from the **AALMA site**

- <http://www.lignemaginot.com/menu10/indexen.htm> that has hundreds of photos from the entire line.

To see the less traveled parts of **the Maginot Line**, a guide is a wise idea, if not a necessity, since finding the forts and fortresses can be a daunting task. For those with broader military interests, the area around **Thionville** contains:

Several Middle Age castles such as **Château de Malbrouck**

( <http://www.chateau-malbrouck.com/dispatch.do> ).

Sites related to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870

( <http://www.omaha-beach.org/Travel/1870/1870-71.html> ).

Sites associated with US Army combat operations in 1944 in **Lorraine**

( [http://www.moselleriver1944.org/site/en\\_index.php](http://www.moselleriver1944.org/site/en_index.php) ). Beyond the immediate surroundings (1-2 hours away) are:

The WWI battlefields of **Verdun** ( <http://www.verdun14-18.de>

and <http://www.xs4all.nl/~verdun> )

and **Argonne** ( <http://www.meuse-argonne.com>

and [http://www.sqtyorkdiscovery.com/Home\\_Page.php](http://www.sqtyorkdiscovery.com/Home_Page.php) ).

Several German Westwall museums

( <http://www.amba.lu/pageshtml/westwall.php> ).

Sites associated with the Battle of the **Bulge** ( <http://www.amba.lu> ), including **Patton's** grave in **Hamm, Luxembourg**( <http://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries/cemeteries/lx.php> and

<http://www.pattonhq.com/funeral.html> ). For even broader interests, there are cultural sites nearby such as: **Saint-Etienne Cathedral in Metz**

( <http://www.viamichelin.co.uk/viamichelin/gbr/tpl/mag5/art20070615/htm/tour-visit-diaporama-cathedrale-metz.htm> ).

**Luxembourg City** (a UNESCO heritage site) ( <http://www.lcto.lu> ) **The Moselle wine** region

( [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorraine\\_\(region\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorraine_(region)) ). The three frontier region allows visitors to enjoy French, German, and Luxembourg cultures within a relatively compact area.

A search of the Internet will yield ample information about things to see and do in **the Moselle Valley region**.

One of the best developed **Maginot Line** museums

“ **Gros Ouvrage Schoenenbourg**

( <http://www.lignemaginot.com/index12.htm> ) is located near **Wissembourg**.

Near **Schoenenbourg**, is another museum :

“ **Gros Ouvrage Four-a-Chaux** near the village of **Lembach**. ( <http://membres.lycos.fr/fourachaux> ).

Unfortunately, both are outside those areas typically visited by English-speaking tourists. However, if visiting **Strasbourg, Gros Ouvrage Schoenenbourg** is about one to two hours away.

Note: To translate French or German language webpages, consider using Altavista Babel Fish translation webpage ( <http://world.altavista.com> ). The Germans built a vast system of pre-WWI fortresses surrounding **Metz and Thionville - The Feste Gruppen**.

Two of these fortified groups are open for visits:

**The Fort de Guentrange**, one kilometer beyond the **Hotel Horizon north of Thionville**: <http://perso.orange.fr/fort-de-guentrange/index.htm>

**Feste Wagner**, a huge complex to the south of **Metz** near the village of **Verny**: <http://www.fort-de-verny.org/>

There is one site is associated with the extensive US Army combat operations in 1944: [http://www.moselleriver1944.org/site/en\\_index.php](http://www.moselleriver1944.org/site/en_index.php)

Beyond the immediate surroundings (1-2 hours away) are the **WWI battlefields of Verdun and the Argonne forest, several German Westwall museums, sites particular to the Battle of the Bulge, including Bastogne and Patton's grave in Hamm, American Cemetery close to the airport in Luxembourg city**. For even broader interests, there are cultural sites nearby such as the **Cathedral of Metz, Luxembourg City (a UNESCO heritage site), and the Moselle wine region**.

The three frontiers region allows visitors to enjoy French, German, and **Luxembourg** cultures within a relatively compact area. A search of the Internet will yield ample information about things to see and do in the **Moselle Valley region**.

### ***Some tips for visiting the Maginot Line:***

Plan well.

The opening times of **most Maginot Line** museums are irregular.

The websites of the various **Maginot Line** associations have contact information for those wanting a visit.

It is a good idea to verify opening times.

Many **Maginot Line** associations are happy to offer special visits if coordinated in advance.

Time of year.

High season for most associations is from May to September. **The Maginot Line** associations cut back on visitation hours in the fall and winter to make repairs to the works.

Otherwise, visits must be arranged in advance.

Bring appropriate clothing.

Keep in mind that the **Maginot Line** is still very much a military machine designed for war, not comfort.

Even the most developed **Maginot Line** tourist sites are somewhat rustic.

Warm clothing is needed for visiting the larger fortresses as the interiors are up to 100 feet underground and maintain a constant cave-like temperature in the 50s.

Comfortable shoes help the visitor to negotiate what could possibly be hundreds of meters of underground galleries and stairs. (If you have a heart condition of any kind, you may want to reconsider a visit to the underground).

Rental car.

A car is needed to visit the various sites. **No Maginot forts** are served by public transportation.

Taxis are not suitable either, since many taxi drivers do not know where the forts are located.

Nor are taxis likely to wait while you visit the site.

For visits to multiple sites, consider taking either a specialized tour .....

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The abandoned forts are very very dangerous. The forts near **Thionville** have been sealed up with cinder blocks and the interior doors have been welded shut. The entrances and the ditches have been covered over with dirt. That doesn't keep people from attempting to access the interior, which is full of sharp objects, rotting staircases and railings, rusted metal, holes in the floor, and flooded passageways. There is no ventilation thus the air inside is not good for prolonged breathing. If your flashlight goes out there's no light and it's next to impossible to find your way out. Finally, many of the forts, casemates, bunkers, etc., are on private property and you will be arrested, handcuffed, and fined if you are seen on the property. The locals know where the forts are and if they see you there they will call the police. It's not worth it. Visit instead the museums.

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----- For questions concerning tours of some of the local forts, or to possibly arrange an escort, consider contacting **Jean-Pascal Speck, owner of the Hotel Horizon in Thionville** for assistance: <http://www.lhorizon.fr>