

# Bluesky aerial laser maps reveal WWI Battle of the Somme secrets for TV show

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Leicestershire, 04 August 2016 – An aerial survey using aircraft mounted lasers has revealed previously undiscovered evidence that might potentially help to dispute accusations of a lack of determination by Welsh soldiers during the first Battle of the Somme in the Great War of 1914-1918. Aerial mapping company Bluesky flew an area of northern France called Mametz Wood, capturing accurate 3D measurements of the terrain and ground cover. Specially commissioned by Bearhug TV, the Bluesky LiDAR survey revealed two distinct and previously unrecorded topographies for further investigation and analysis.

“The Bluesky data allowed the experts to read the landscape from the air, seeing through the trees and vegetation,” commented the programme’s producer, Louise Bray of Bearhug TV. “This revealed a number of clues in a never before seen landscape. It was hoped that these discoveries might give a better understanding of the difficulties faced by the soldiers on the ground.”

In the years since 1916, there has been uncertainty as to why Mametz Wood proved so hard for the Welsh Soldiers to clear; there were even accusations of a ‘distinct lack of push’. As part of a BBC TV documentary which explored the history of Welsh soldiers on the Somme through the eyes of rugby player Gareth Thomas, the evidence revealed by Bluesky LiDAR data was used to evaluate the topography of landscape and help the archaeological team focus their efforts on the ground.

Using specialist software, the Bluesky LiDAR data was stripped of tree cover and other features to reveal the bare earth surface. The resulting ‘moonlike’ image clearly showed two crater-like features with rectangular sides, so, not shell holes, which were not on any other map. To the east of these anomalies was another, more subtle feature, also not depicted on war time maps or in reconnaissance information.

“The first feature identified from the Bluesky LiDAR survey turned out to be a pre-war quarry. Not depicted on maps at the time, this could very well have stopped the troops in their tracks,” continued Bray. “However, the second anomaly turned out to be far more significant.

“A series of deep interconnected German trenches was discovered, which the experts say was incomparable on the entire Somme battlefield. This was a major new discovery that would never have been made without the Bluesky LiDAR data, and might finally allow accusations of lack of determination on the part of the Welsh troops to be put to bed!”

The programme ‘Wales at the Somme: Gareth Thomas and the Battle of Mametz Wood’ is available to view for a limited time only at

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b07jj41w/wales-at-the-somme-gareth-thomas-and-the-battle-of-mametz-wood>

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