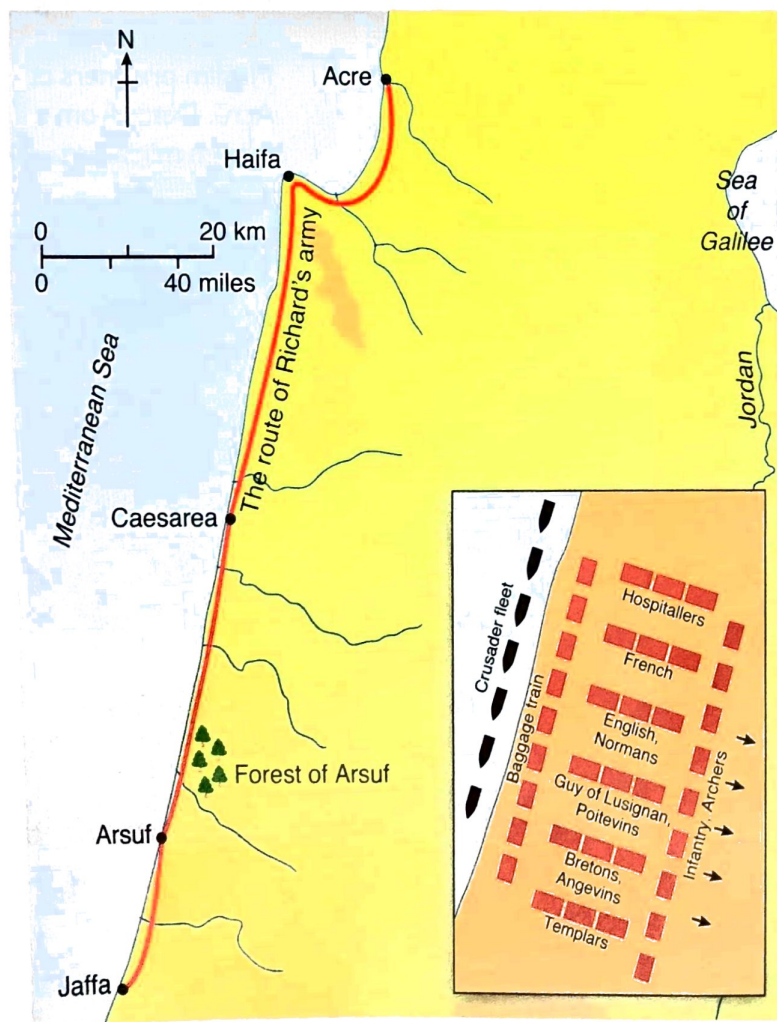


The March to Jaffa, August 1191

What next? This was the question in the front of Richard's mind following his victory at Acre. The Third Crusade had been launched to recover Jerusalem, but, in August of 1191, it was not certain that a direct assault on the Holy City was the English King's immediate goal. Richard decided to lead his men south on an 80-mile march to the port of Jaffa, Jerusalem's port. It may have been his intention to use Jaffa as a springboard for an attack on the Holy City. Alternatively, Richard may have been planning to launch an attack from Jaffa on the southern coastal city of Ascalon. This would have cut off Saladin's crucial military and trade link to and from Egypt. It is also possible that Richard had not yet decided on a firm plan and that he intended to make up his mind when he reached Jaffa.

The Lionheart's immediate concern was to prize his men out of Acre. Many of the crusaders were enjoying the city's wine and women and were reluctant to set out on another military campaign. By 22 August, Richard had gathered around 15,000 of his troops, ordering that only elderly washerwomen were to accompany his men on their march south. At first there were some problems with organisation and discipline, but, after the first few days, Richard organised his army in a strict formation. As you can see on the diagram, the elite knights of the Templars and Hospitallers

▽ **The March to Jaffa.**
The inset shows the formation of Richard's army on the march.



were positioned at the front and rear. The King and his mounted knights were in the middle. There could be no possibility of an attack from the right because Richard's men stuck close to the shoreline. On their left the King and his knights were protected by ranks of well-armed infantry. Richard further demonstrated his military leadership by ordering the crusaders' ships to sail down the coast with the army. Richard's navy would keep the crusaders supplied with food and weapons during their march along the coast.

The crusaders endured terrible conditions on their way to Jaffa. The summer heat was stifling and Saladin's forces placed them under near-constant attack. Six years after the events, the chronicler Ambroise wrote a vivid eyewitness account of the march. He described how Saladin's skilled horsemen made lightning strikes on the crusaders, showering the men and their horses with arrows and cross-bow bolts: 'never did the rain or

snow, or hail falling in the heart of winter fall so densely as did the bolts which flew and killed our horses'. The need to wear full armour meant that many men developed sunstroke and had to be evacuated to the ships. Richard's military leadership was crucial to the survival of the crusaders. He allowed the soldiers rest days and prevented fights over the meat of dead horses. He was particularly insistent that that no crusader should break rank and give chase to a Muslim horseman as he knew that the crusading army would be more vulnerable to attack if it broke formation.

The Battle of Arsuf, 7 September 1191

By 7 September, the crusaders were just 25 miles from Jaffa. Saladin was determined to stop them. If Richard's forces captured Jaffa so soon after the fall of Acre the consequences would be horrendous. The Muslims' hold over southern Palestine would be threatened and Saladin's reputation as the defender of Islam would be seriously damaged. Saladin therefore planned a massive assault on Richard's forces.

Saladin ordered his whole force of 30,000 men to attack the crusaders when they emerged from the wooded hills onto the plain north of Jaffa. Around nine o'clock, when the first of the crusaders marched onto the plain they were shocked to see Saladin's army waiting for them. Wave after wave of Muslim mounted warriors attacked the marching crusading army. Through this terrible onslaught, King Richard's priority was to keep his army moving forward in formation. He knew that a break in the line could prove fatal. Imagine the King's horror when he looked back and saw that two knights had suddenly broken ranks and were chasing Saladin's horsemen. Hundreds of crusaders were now following the two knights. Without hesitation, Richard turned his whole army on the Muslims. In the chaotic battle that followed Richard's men fought off two fierce Muslim counter attacks and made renewed charges, eventually forcing Saladin's army to retreat.

Richard the Lionheart's overall leadership at the Battle of Arsuf has recently come under closer scrutiny from the historian Thomas Asbridge. Asbridge argues that modern historians have too readily followed Ambroise's account of the event. This presents Richard as the great hero who actively sought the confrontation with Saladin at Arsuf. Using a wider range of sources, including a letter written by Richard shortly after the battle, Asbridge argues that Richard I reacted to events and that the King himself saw the Battle of Arsuf as simply a response to one of the many attacks that the crusaders had faced on their march to Jaffa. If the significance of Richard's role at Arsuf has been exaggerated, there is no doubt that the success of the crusaders in reaching Jaffa marked a significant turning point in the Third Crusade. Saladin had not been totally defeated, but after Arsuf the morale of the Muslims was seriously sapped.

■ Add points to your timeline and make further notes on the key issues. If you haven't done so already, start your notes on the leadership of Saladin.

How important was Richard's leadership during this phase of the Third Crusade?