



NP Schwäbisch-Fränkischer Wald e.V.

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A warm welcome

Do you enjoy long walks through natural forests with picturesque lakes, or small villages and towns which still capture the magic of their past today? Allow your children or grandchildren to discover the legendary worlds of rocks, grottoes, tree giants and mermaids. Have a look for yourself at how beautiful, refreshing and stimulating this variety of nature can be.

The Nature Park Association for the Swabian Franconian Forest sees it as its responsibility to maintain, develop and care for the attractive landscape in its beauty as a home not only for the indigenous population but also as a natural habitat for the diverse numbers of native animals and plants.

At the same time we support projects that improve the recreational experiences for our guests. An extensive network of walking and cycle routes is being completed in addition to a lot of children's playgrounds, barbecue areas and shelters, observation towers and man made lakes. In the Nature Park you will find the remains of the Limes with its fortifications, old mills and lots of their cultural possessions and artistic treasures.

You can request a copy of our brochure from our office in which we have extensive information about the Nature Park region and its natural and cultural sights. You will find all the information you need here.

We hope that all our visitors both young and old have a refreshing time rich in experience in the Nature Park.

Your Nature Park Association

The Nature Park

In the north east of Baden Württemberg, near the regional capital of Stuttgart lies the Swabian Franconian forest Nature Park (Naturpark Schwäbisch-Fränkischer Wald) With an area of around 900 km² (559 miles²), it covers the area between the towns of Backnang, Heilbronn, Öhringen, Schwäbisch Hall, Gaildorf, Lorch and Schorndorf. Around 110,000 people live in the area. The altitude varies from 200m above sea level in Sulmtal to 586m in Gschwend and Großlarch. The climate varies from a mild climate in the wine growing province with a

yearly average temperature of 9° C and a mean annual precipitation of 800mm, to a cold and damp bracing climate 7.5° C, (1100mm) in the higher region.

In 1979 this excellent naturally and culturally rich landscape was designated as a Nature Park. The five nature regions form the green, dense forest heart of the Nature Park: Welzheim forest in the south, Murrhardt and Mainhardt forests in the centre and the Löwenstein and Waldenburg mountains in the north.

On the west and northwest edge of the Nature Park steep vineyards based on the 'Keuperstufenrand' create an impression of the landscape. Extensive plateaus, long valleys and steep, wooded escarpments characterise the centre of the Schwäbisch-Fränkischer Wald. Fields, meadows, pastures and forest as well as hamlets and farms are part of a huge mosaic. Elements especially typical of the landscape include livestock and sheep pastures, the orchid rich marsh area in the valley and the Streuobstwiesen (mulch-fruit meadow) on the hillsides. In the side valleys lie the hiding places of forest gorges, ravines, blades and smaller waterfalls like for example the ones in Hörschbach, Fischbach, Götzenbach and Wieslauftal.

Mysterious and ancient names like Hägelesklinge and Gallengrotte near Kaisersbach, Hohlenstein in Löwenstein and Spiegelberg, Schillergrotte in Alfdorf, Teufelskanzel and Teufelsküche in Gschwend, Felsenmeer and Große Platte in Murrhardt represent bizarre and legendary rock pictures and grottoes. They invite visitors to come and discover them.

Numerous artificial lakes enrich the many and diverse natural habitats for animals and plants. Today they are also attractive holiday areas.

For visitors who are interested in history and culture, the Nature Park offers an historical tour. The remains of a human settlement left for over 300,000 years trace back to the 'Steinheimer Mensch' who lived alongside the Murr.

The first significant colony in the Nature Park developed during the migration of the Roman occupation in protection of the Limes from 150 to 260 AD.

In the area that is the Nature Park today, the Upper Germanic boundary wall (Limes) ran for 50km and was protected by forts in Öhringen, Mainhardt, Murrhardt, Welzheim and Lorch as well as 115 watchtowers. The rest of the Upper Germanic Limes, its woodsteaks, ramparts, ditches and the foundations of the stone watchtowers can be seen today along the Limeswanderweg (Limes walking route) in the Nature Park.

The border between the Swabian (Alemannen) and the Franconian territory, which originates from 500AD lies on the southern plateau parallel to the Murr valley. The dialects of Swabian (Schwäbisch) in the south and Franconian (Fränkisch) in the north, which are still present today, demonstrate this border.

The crucial clearing period and building of today's villages begin in the Carolingian Era with the foundation of the monastery in Murrhardt (816) and later Lorch (1100), Gnadental (1243), Lichtenstern (1243) and Goldbach (1382).

For those wanting to visit the Swabian Franconian forest, lots of historical jewels like castles, churches and beautiful half-timbered houses await. A large number of preserved, that is historical and mill museums recount the hard work of daily bread making in the past.

An intensive insight into history, local customs, culture and art is offered by the museums who have put a lot of care and attention into detail.

The Nature Park Authority

The Swabian Franconian Forest Nature Park Association was established in 1979. Its members are 37 local authorities and towns and include, the Rems-Murr-Kreis district (this makes up 47 % of the Nature Park area), Schwäbisch Hall (22 %), Heilbronn (11 %) Hohenlohekreis (10 %) Ostalbkreis (9 %) and Ludwigsburg (1 %), five associations of farmers, the Land Forestry Administration and the Forest Association of Baden Württemberg, the Schwäbische Albverein as well as the Association for the Protection of German Forests (Schutzgemeinschaft Deutscher Wald).

Since the discovery that ‘the natural environment can only be protected and conserved with the co-operation of humans, who require an unspoilt natural environment to recreate’, it is of paramount importance for the Nature Park Association that:

The Schwäbisch-Fränkischer Wald is a protective habitat that allows for the development of numerous native species of animal and plants. It should also be a home for the inhabitants and offer an experience rich recreational area for guests.

A solution to the conflicts between tourism and conservation is one of our main aims. Since the founding of the Nature Park around 11 Million Euros has been invested in Nature Park Projects. Our member communities as well as the federal state of Baden Württemberg have equally financed this considerable sum. We improve recreation facilities; conservation projects like for example the care of marsh areas, brook groves, or dry grass as well as the conservation of buildings and cultural monuments. Reserves for protected animal and plants are protected from disturbance.

The tourist infrastructure of the Nature Park provides over 3,000 kilometres of walking and cycle routes, 25 nature trails, 5 campsites for young people, numerous play and barbecue areas, several observation towers and many idyllic lakes, which are suitable for swimming in. In the winter there are also various cross-country ski tracks and ski lifts available.

Environmental education and working with the public to promote conservation are of special interest to the Nature Park Association.

Geology and Water

The Nature Park is situated on the Keuper which is part of the (Swabian Franconian) Schwäbisch-Fränkischer Schichtstufenland. Clearly visible rising in the west and north on the border of the Nature Park, the Keuper layer that is made from shell/lacustrine limestone

formed the landscape. Here and in the river valleys the geological structure continues and we find Gipskeuper at the bottom; on top of it constructive pebble sandstone followed by lower coloured marl, pebble sandstone and upper coloured marl.

The plateaus of the Nature Park are made up from different types of sandstone. The Löwensteiner Bergen (Berge meaning mountains) in the Murrhardt and Mainhardt forests are made from the first kind (Stubensandstein) and the lower Waldenburger Bergen that lie against them are mostly the next type Kieselsandstein.

The upper formation of the Keuper consists of Knollenmergel a kind of marl which is notorious for its danger of landslides. It can also be found in the "Löwensteiner Berge" as well as near Welzheim and Gschwend. The black Jurassic alpha (Lias) forms the plateaus in Welzheim, Alfdorf and Frickenhofen and produces fertile soil. The geological trails in Aspach, Öhringen-Michelbach and Welzheim give you an insight into our geological history. The highest elevations of the Nature Park landscape are Hohe Brach (586m), Hagberg (585m) Hohentannen (565m), Stocksberg (539m), Flinsberg (535m) and Juxkopf (533m), while the lowest point is in Obersulm, which is 200m above sea level.

The drainage system of the landscape takes place in the Neckar and its tributaries - "Rems", "Murr", "Schozach", "Sulm" and "Kocher" in the Rhine. As the valley of the Rhine is lower than its tributaries, the speed of the water increases as they slope down to meet it and this results in steep gorges and V-shaped valleys. Schweizerbach, Walkersbach and Wieslauf flow into the Rems. The stretches of water known as Lauter and Bottwar run into the Murr, and the rivers Brettach, Ohrn, Kupfer, Bibers, Fichtenberg Rot and Lein flow into the Kocher.

Forestry and Agriculture – The Care of a Cultivated Landscape

The appearance of our countryside is not only a result of geological and climatic conditions. It is also the result of hundreds of years of human intervention through settlements, road construction, agriculture and forestry.

In a large part of the Nature Park you'll find typically multifarious forest with spruces, firs, beeches and oaks. Compared with the land average for Baden Württemberg of 38 % forest coverage, the Schwäbisch-Fränkischer forest has a large quantity of forest with coverage of 53 %. From this forest area of 480km² on average around 300m³ of solid timber is produced with a positive eco balance.

However, the forest doesn't just produce timber. The land forest law means that all private landowners are obliged to carry out a lasting and caring use of the forests. Both conservation and recreation are of equal importance.

The Forestry Administration has made a detailed map of functions and site classifications to meet both public and ecological demands.

In the Nature Park over half of the forest area is soil protected forest of importance. The intensive root penetration of the trees prevents landslides in hillside locations and protects

roads and settlements. To ensure that the local water supply is guaranteed around 20 % of the forest is a Wasserschutzwald (water protected area).

Close to the vineyards and fruit growing fields the forest serves the purpose of a climate protection area. Well-attended forests with special recreational areas make up 15 % of the recreational forest area. The accounted for avalanche forests, biotope protection forests as well as lots of area measured forest habitats have scientific and ecological importance in the forest community. Of the forest area as a whole in the Nature Park, 49 % is privately owned, 36 % belongs to the state and 15 % to the Forest Corporation. The main species of tree in the state maintained forest are the spruce which makes up 45 %, followed by the beech (18 %), oak and other broad leaved trees (15 %), fur trees (12 %), pine Douglas fir, and larch together making up the last 10 %.

In the face of global problems such as the extensive destruction of forests, the changing climate and growing piles of rubbish, the importance of an environmentally sustainable raw material such as timber is increasing and is a central theme of modern forestry. For example, at present only half of the timber consumed in Germany is produced from its forests, however at the same time only 2/3 of the timber that is produced in the forests is used.

The modern concept of sustainable and multifunctional forestry guarantees the supply of raw materials and a habitat for humans, and flora for future generations. A large part of the agricultural areas in the Nature Park belong to the economically underdeveloped regions of Baden Württemberg. On the sandy, barren soils it is only possible to have “grassland farming” with extensive meadows and pastures for livestock. For these farmers, private forest property is important as it means that they have an additional income from timber as a reserve for bad times.

The more fertile Jurassic plateaus around Welzheim, Alfdorf and the adjoining Frickenhofer offer favourable cultivation opportunities for farming. The same is true of the areas in the north and west, which border fertile clay soil – the ‘Hohenloher Ebene’ and the ‘Neckar Valley’. The Keuper terrace is predominant for wine and fruit growing and returns a good yield. The rural family business was for many centuries a guarantee of efficient agriculture in the area that is now the Nature Park. Many characteristics of our landscape are a result of the farming and cultivation. The structural changes in agriculture that have been recorded for years will leave serious long term alterations to the familiar picture of the landscape as it is today. In places where the continuation of the traditional cultivation has ceased to be profitable the free landscape conservation is lost with the farmers. The consequence is the afforestation of meadows and fields.

You can support our farmers and contribute indirectly to the maintenance and care of our landscape by taking the opportunity to buy products directly from farms when you are next in the Nature Park. They offer fresh vegetables, fruit, sausages, meat, eggs, baked goods, juice and cider or wine.

Recreation and sights

What do you think of a holiday rich in experience, or simply one relaxing day in the Swabian Franconian Forest? Extensive multifarious forests, clear streams in picturesque meadow valleys and secluded lakes invite you to come hiking, cycling, riding, covered wagon driving or swimming. In snowy winters the mountain tops are a popular destination for sledging, skiing and ice skating. There are golf courses, a summer toboggan run in Kaisersbach, grass ski facilities in Großelach, the Schwabenpark (Swabian Park) in Gmeinweiler or Bullyworld in Spraitbrach. There is also a 'Lapidarium' sculpture trail in Aspach.

From the observation towers of Steinknickle (525m) in Neuhütten, Juxkopf (533m) in Spiegelberg and Hagbergturm (585) in Gschwend you can see the Odenwald, the Limburger Land or the Schwäbische Alb in good weather. The observatory in Welzheim offers a glimpse of the universe.

Hiking and cycling in the Nature Park are in! Hikers and walkers will find variety in the many main footpaths in the Schwäbische Albverein, the 'Georg-Fahrbach-Weg', Main-Neckar-Rhein-Weg, Franken Weg, Stromberg-Schwäbischer Wald-Weg and the Limeswanderweg (walk along the Limes) along with the Mühlenwanderweg (Mill walk way) are among the most popular walking routes in the Nature Park.

The extensive routes created by the Schwäbische Albverein extend into various routes, which are maintained by our member communities.

Twenty nature trails offer information of varied themes. Geology, plants, birds, forest, wine and local history trails await the interested visitor. Cyclists will find 600km of recommended tours in the Nature Park brochure 'Mit dem Fahrrad unterwegs' (En route with your bike).

The local restaurants (many offering traditional local specialities), hostels and Naturfreundehäuser invite you for a comfortable rest. Moreover, the Nature Park offers various lakes, which are suitable for swimming in.

As tourist attractions you can count - Aichstrutsee, Breitenauer See, Buchhorner See, Diebachsee, Ebnisee, Eisenbachsee, Hagerwaldsee, Leinecksee, Neumühlsee, Starkholzbacher See and Waldsee. (These are all popular during summer months) .The "Idyllic Route" (Idyllische Straße) tourist route also runs through the middle of the Nature Park. In the north and west run the "Burgenstraße", the German holiday route "Alpen-Ostsee" and the "Württembergischer Weinstraße". The "Schwäbische Dichterstraße" and the "Staufenerstraße" meet in the south of the Nature Park area. Youth hostels and campsites as well as normal campsites, farm stays, a holiday village, private Bed and Breakfasts and good hotels offer accommodation according to your needs.

The Upper Germanic Rhaetian boundary wall "Limes" of the Roman Empire belongs to the outstanding archaeological monuments of Europe. The UNESCO intends to include it in the World Heritage List soon. It reached from the Rhein (Rhine) near Koblenz approximately

500km up to that Donau (Danube) near Eining. It was a masterly performance of technical measurement that the 80km long section from Walldürn to Alfdorf-Haghof is completely straight. The Limes crosses the Nature Park for 50km from Öhringen to Lorch. Reconstructed watchtowers in Mainhardt, Grab and Lorch, as well as the archaeological park "Ostkastell" in Welzheim remind us of our Roman past.

In addition, castles and forts like for example Ebersberg, Hohenbeilstein (which also has falconry), Lichtenberg, Maienfels, Reichenberg, Waldenstein, Wildeck, the ruins of Löwenstein or the convent in Lorch are all popular destinations. Charming half-timbered houses and narrow and winding lanes characterise the historical towns of Öhringen, Waldenburg, Schwäbisch Hall, Backnang, Beilstein, Murrhardt and Lorch.

All over the region there are a large number of well known preserved buildings, to be precise restored historic oil mills, saw mills, pounding and grinding mills and flour mills. A tip for interested visitors: every year on Whit Monday most of the mills open their doors for visitors, as it's the German mill day.

People who are interested in culture and history will find numerous museums covering a wide range of topics. The collections range from prehistoric finds from Roman times, town and local history to art and literature. A special attraction is the open-air museum in Wackershofen near Schwäbisch Hall, which has over 40 historical buildings and a diverse programme of events.