

## Hunsrück Vacations -- Outdoors, Outlaws, Out Of This World

At the turn of the 19th century, when the Hunsrück hills belonged to France, a young man in his teens gathered a group of ne'er-do-wells for an outlaw spree which has become the stuff of legend. Johannes Bückler's ghost (he was beheaded at the age of 20) is said to this day to haunt the same ruined castles of the Hunsrück forest which once sheltered him.

The only way you can find out for certain, however, is to come to this magical place! ;-)

Bückler's ghost may well be waiting at the Hahnenbach Valley's Schmidtburg Castle, one of his hideouts near the municipality of Bundenbach. Since 926 A.D, the castle has secured this narrow and exceptionally deep valley.

Its inaccessibility made it an ideal hideout for Bückler and his band. Even if he's not in residence when you arrive, however, the Hunsrück slate quarry in the nearby town of Altburg will more than make up for his absence.

This quarry is the resting place of the Bundenbach Slate fossils, a collection of starfish, sea lilies, jelly fish, and more than twenty dozen other forms of fossilized animal life dating to the Devonian era, between 350 and 400 million years ago! Fossilized with them are some five dozen kinds of plants, possibly the same ones which on which the animals dined during their lives.

Eons later, those plants and animals were followed first by the Celts (300 B.C.), then the Romans (58 B.C.), and eventually the Franconians. A small section of the Celtic settlement has been reconstructed as an open-air museum from ruins found by a 1970s archaeological dig.

Altburg was just one of a group of Celtic settlements in Hunsrück, so why not hike along the Sirona Trail (named for the Celtic goddess of healing waters) to the other three? For a good look at the goddess Sirona herself, however, you'll have to head to the Idarwald Mountain Range, where an ancient statue of her was enshrined at the base of 2450-foot/746m Idarkopf Mountain.

All across the Hunsrück region, in fact, you'll encounter plunging valleys, steep mountainsides, and elevated plateaus where strange rock formations are scattered among endless forest expanses and streams tumble with untamed abandon. There is simply no better place in Germany for a hiking or cycling adventure.

Follow the path of the 21 mile/35km *Schinderhannes Radweg* from Enmmelshausen to [Simmern \(Hunsrück\)](#) and the Schinderhannes Tower, in which Johannes Bückler was briefly imprisoned before escaping to continue his outlaw ways. Simmern's 15th-century *Neues Schloss*, destroyed in 1689 and rebuilt about twenty years later, now contains the *Hunsrückmuseum* and a display of works by sculptor and painter Friedrich Karl Stroeher.

Just 4 miles/6.5 km southwest of Simmern is the village of Ravengiersburg, notable for the 42-meter tower which originally belonged to an 11th-century monastery. Northwest of Simmern is one of Hunsrück's two nature parks, the Soonwald-Nahe Nature Reserve.

Within the Nature Reserve is the 653 m/2150-foot Simmernkopf, well worth the climb for its view of the park's heights. From the top you'll see all the way to Ravengiersburg.

Continuing through the Park, you'll find the nearly hidden ruins of the Wildburg Fortress. It was constructed in 1253 A.D. to protect what were then royal forests, and to control traffic on the Hunsrück roads between the Rivers Mosel and Nahe.

You'll have few experiences in your life as poetic as standing by the crumbling walls of the Fortress at sunset, while darkness envelops the valley at your feet and the light spreads its dying colors against the western sky.

After your day of hiking, treat yourself to an evening of Hunsrück food and wine. Wild game has always been a staple of regional cuisine, and the cooks of Hunsrück can prepare potatoes in amazing ways.

The annual potato harvest is important enough to be honored with its own Festival, the *Hochwälder Kartoffeltage*. Try some Hunsrück cabbage and potatoes with spit-roasted pork, and while you're at it, raise a glass to the ghost of Johannes Bückler! ;-)