

Oxen Trail (Ochsenweg) -- Cattle Meets The Vikings

The Oxen Trail, or *Ochsenweg* in German (*Hærvejen* in Danish), isn't just about the German version of a cattle drive. No, this area was once teeming with Vikings and pious pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

Funny, they couldn't have been at the furthest ends of the human spectrum. No one ever talks about Vikings on some sort of spiritual quest — they were always out invading some place or another.

It was also where peasants and merchants in the 19th century tried to meek out a modest living in [northern Germany](#). And Denmark for that matter, since some areas once belonged to the Danish.

You might hear the Oxen Trail also being called the *Heerweg* or Army Way, since many soldiers used the cleared trails on their way to plunder and pillage somewhere.

Oh, just like the Vikings.

This isn't about them though. This is about the cattle and people who came to [Wedel](#), an important city on the banks of the [Elbe](#); just west of [Hamburg](#).

Many centuries ago people flocked to Wedel for a huge cattle market. Wedel was taken over for a few weeks as people from all around came to town to buy or sell tens of thousands of cattle.

Today the city of Wedel is looked after by Roland (the town's landmark from 1450), and you'll find some great marshland to hike. Every Spring (until the Fall) ferry service to/from the island of Helgoland is available.

From Wedel the cattle and their owners traveled north towards [Uetersen](#). The Oxen Trail meets up with the North Sea Cycle Route, but no matter what scenic route you're traveling on — you'll get to enjoy Uetersen's Wine Festival, Rose Festival, Christmas Market, Rock Festival, and Wedding Fair.

That's a whole lot of festivals going on. Break up all the festivities with a visit to the Local History Museum, the Shoemaker Museum, and the old Convent Church.

[Itzehoe](#) is the next town on the *Ochsenweg*, and where you can see graves from the Bronze Age. The prehistoric isn't all that Itzehoe offers, this is a charming medieval town with a 1km long Pedestrian Zone with shops and cafes.

The *Prinzeßhof* (from the 16th century) is now a District Museum, and I wouldn't travel any further before seeing the Church of St. Laurentii and the Klosterhof (part of a Cistercian Monastery) from

the mid-13th century.

The other Roland town along the way is [Bad Bramstedt](#), where the route meets up with the Altona-Kiel Road. Sure there are 69km of biking trails (as well as canoeing), but a mud bath at the spa would be just as good.

OK, maybe better. ;-)

[Neumünster](#) started out as a simple 9th century settlement. What it grew into was a city of almost a hundred-thousand people that has a Cloth & Textile Museum, a sculpture park, a Game Park, and a place with a City Festival on the 1st Thursday in June.

We're about half-way through the Oxen Trail when you arrive in [Rendsburg](#). You're also meeting up with the [Kiel Canal](#) that links Schleswig with Holstein and the [German Ferries Route](#).

Follow the Blue Line (a real blue line) that'll take you through the city's best sites, including the Old Town Hall at the Old Marktplatz, the town's oldest building from 1541, the Jewish Museum, and the Evangelical Christ Church.

Our next town of Lohe-Föhrden might be German now, but it once belonged to the Danish. Even though it's mostly agricultural it was the site of a real bloody battle during the Great Northern War in the early 18th century.

Dannewerk wasn't always German either, although this place was known for the Vikings who lived here instead of the Danish. The marauders are long gone now, but their defense wall is still around (it measures over 3.5km long, by 7 meters high, and 2 meters thick).

Hmm, guess the Vikings did more than just invade Europe and North America. ;-)

What the Vikings did plunder they had to trade somewhere for it, right? That was in the next town of [Schleswig](#). Found along the Brautsee, the city was once a Viking trade center.

There's so much to see and do here in Schleswig, I'll see if I can sum it up. In regard to its Viking beginnings, the *Wikinkgertage* are known as the Viking Summer Days. Then there is the Annettenhoh Castle, the Old City, all the fishing cottages, Gottrup Castle, the State Museum of Art & Culture, the Archaeology Museum, and the State Theater & Symphony.

I almost left out the St. Peter Cathedral and the Castle Festival. Goodness gracious, that would've been bad not to tell you about those. ;-)

It's pretty quiet in Munkwolstrup (part of Oeversee). Really quiet. Especially at the *Arnkielpark*, an archaeological park of prehistoric graves. You can even see the centuries old plow markings

that've been preserved. See, that's what the oxen were used for.

The last town along the Oxen Trail in Germany is good ol' [Flensburg](#), the home of a former naval base. They still speak Low German around here (there's even a Low German Theater), and it's where you'll find a Danish Library, a Harbor Museum, and Art & Culture Museum, a Shipyard Museum, a 12th century Church (St. John), and a Gothic church (St. Nicholas) too.

I like the *Rum-Regatta* in late May/early June, and the Christmas Market that's held in the city, which is along the Danish border.

The *Ochsenweg* ends its German journey here, but does continue on to Viborg in Denmark — giving it a total of 540km from start to finish.

One thing though, this isn't a driving route. You're going to have to hoof it like the oxen did, or you'll have to bike it since a number of the roads are impassable by car.

Oh, it's not so bad. It's really quiet, the land is pretty flat, there are plenty of bicycle rental places along the way, and the countryside is great for a picnic just about anywhere.

Just be careful where you do that, though. You don't wanna sit where the oxen might've left their... uh, calling card. ;-)

Oxen Trail Web Site

Here is the official Web site of the [Oxen Trail](#).