

## Rothaargebirge -- A Thousand Hills And A Thousand Memories

Perhaps the best way to understand the geology and history of [Sauerland](#)'s Rothaargebirge (Red Hair Mountains) is to visit the *Bruchhauser Steine*.

Each of these four massive boulders adds about 100 meters to the crown of 2100 foot/630 m Istenberg in the village of Bruchhausen. Archaeological evidence now suggests that these volcanic stones, as long ago as 500 B.C, served as the cornerstones of walls built around a Bronze Age meeting place.

In the late 1600s, however, the stones were used as part of an astronomical observations site which included shrines devoted to Christian saints.

Today, they are used by rock climbers wishing to hone their skills. For all its untamed beauty, one thing the Rothaargebirge lacks is the rock climbing challenge common in so many of Germany's other mountain ranges!

What this region does have, and in abundance, is the sort of landscapes about which hikers and mountain bikers dream! The 95 miles/154km of the hiking trail *Rothaarsteig* are not called The Way of the Senses without good reason. Walk for a day or a week along the ridges of the Rothaargebirge, as an infinity of hills stretches around you in every direction!

The Way of the Senses begins in the south at Dillenburg, the birthplace of William I of the royal house of Orange-Nassau. Although the home in which he was born was destroyed in 1760, you can still walk along the Wilhelmstraße which was constructed from its remains.

Continue northwest along the *Rothaarsteig* for about 20 miles/31km, leaving [Hesse](#) and entering [North Rhine-Westphalia](#).

You'll come to the city of [Siegen](#), which is worth a look if only for its Beatles Museum, the smallest museum of any kind on the planet! Summer in Siegen means festivals, including the *Johannismarkt* which dates back to the 1600s. If you're there at festival time, why not sample some of the local specialties like roasted rabbit with potato pancakes?

When you refresh yourself at Siegen, follow the *Rothaarsteig* as it winds north and east through North Rhine-Westphalia until you come to Hilchenbach. South of the town center, on the Ginsberg Heath, you'll find the ruins of Ginsburg Castle. Once a border fortification, the castle was where William I of Orange Nassau first devised the plans which would eventually lead to freedom for the Netherlands.

Keep heading east/northeast through the Rothaargebirge Nature Park, until you reach Bad Berleburg, about 20mile/31km from Hilchenbach. You'll know you're close when you start passing through picture postcard village after village of half-timbered, slate-roofed cottages. Notice the air becoming noticeably more pure, because Bad Berleburg and its health spas are blessed with some of the cleanest air in all of Germany!

Arrive in July, and be treated to the entertainment from the world's greatest classical musicians at the International Music Festival held in Bad Berleburg's castle. Arrive at any other time, and enjoy the castle's sweeping parklands with their abundant wildflowers and stands of centuries-old trees shading the shores of sparkling lakes.

Leave Bad Berleburg and head for the end of the *Rothaarsteig* in [Brilon](#), at northern edge of the Rothaargebirge. You'll pass through Winterberg, one of the world's top bobsledding and tobogganing venues (why not try a summer toboggan run?).

The Rothaargebirge is a great winter sports country, with World Cup Ski Jumping being held at Willingen, just a bit beyond Winterberg!

Hiking the last stretch of the *Rothaarsteig* from Willingen to Brilon will take you back where we began, to the *Bruchhauser Steine*! When you finally enter Brilon, you'll probably be more than happy to trade in your hiking gear for a seat at the Hotel-Restaurant Eulenhof's beer garden and what has been called "probably the best beer in the Sauerland!" ;-)