

Swabian-Franconian Forest -- Schwäbisch-Fränkischer Wald

It's dark outside — the sun won't be up for maybe another hour; I haven't even had a cup of coffee yet, and I'm about to embark on a trip around the Swabian-Franconian Forest in Baden-Württemberg.

Why do I bring up the fact that it's dark (and I haven't had coffee)? Two reasons. One, so you can see how "hard" I'm working. Two, there probably isn't a whole bunch of other places where I'd like to see the sun come up.

There are certainly enough places to do it. The Swabian-Franconian Forest is 1,187 square kilometers, likely more. Why? Because in German we actually have two distinct areas: the *Schwäbisch-Fränkischer Wald* and the *Schwäbisch-Fränkische Waldberge*. Doesn't sound like much of a difference, I know, but while both share most of the same area, the former goes a bit more to the south while the latter stretches a bit further to the east.

Anyway, with an average elevation of around 500 meters above sea level (and all thanks to the Jurassic period), and the highest elevation at 586 meters in the town of Großerlach in the Mainhardt Forest, the Swabian-Franconian Forest is great for sport activities.

Yea, you can have a forest within a forest. And too bad I'm not this high up to watch the sun come up. This time. ;-)

There aren't any official borders of the Swabian-Franconian Forest, but generally the accepted outline (of both German areas) is Waldenburg to the north; [Schorndorf](#) to the south, [Ellwangen](#) and Stimpfach to the east, and [Neckarsulm](#) and [Heilbronn](#) to the west.

But, first we're starting out in [Öhringen](#), a town on the former Roman Limes (that means its boundary). I don't know if the Romans appreciated a good cuppa java, so I'll take my coffee (alone) to see Öhringen's medieval Marktplatz, the old castle that's now the Town Hall, and the 14th century church of Sts. Anna & Elisabeth.

By the light of day it's easy to fall in love with all the trees in the Swabian-Franconian Forest, and just as easy to fall in love with all its towns, rivers (like the [Neckar](#), Sulm, Murr, Kocher, Jagst,...), lakes, and recreational activities.

But, I'm getting ahead of myself.

Our next town would've been unrecognizable on April 17, 1945. Because the day before, Waldenburg was just about 100% destroyed by [World War II](#) bombing.

Residents painstakingly restored everything, and now you can visit the Castle Waldenburg (it's

part medieval/part Renaissance) with its Local History Museum, or the ruins of the Monastery Goldbach — whose destruction had nothing to do with the war. And I wouldn't dare dream to leave out telling you about the nature reserve area.

The Swabian-Franconian Forest has a treat for us, the town of [Schwäbisch Hall](#) along the Kocher River. Sure it has an old church. Sure it was vital to the salt trade hundreds of years ago. Sure it has half-timbered houses that frame the riverbank. But, hello, this place has a gorgeous Christmas Market and a fun Baker's Festival.

Um, that means strudel or apple cake to go with my coffee. ;-)

We meet up with one of [Germany's scenic routes](#) in [Murrhardt](#), or Vicus Murrensis as I like to call it. OK, not just me — that's what the Romans called it.

Anyway, Murrhardt lies along the [Idyllic Route](#) and the [German Limes Road](#). The best way to see this amazing place is by bicycle — because more than half of it is forested, and how far you think you're going to drive into the trees? ;-)

Next to Murrhardt is Großerlach, the place within the Swabian-Franconian Forest with the highest elevation. Yeah, OK, they got a *Limesturm* (a Roman watchtower), and they got some gorgeous countryside — but they also got a haunted house. So, I'm outta here.

Wait, that's not right. I'm all for a haunted castle, so why not a house? Perhaps the castles (like Castle Hohenstadt, Castle Laubach, Castle Untergröningen, and the other two castles) might be haunted. I guess I'll have to ask the residents of all 75 hamlets of Abtsgmünd.

We're coming to the end of our trip, but I always have time for another cup of coffee — so here we are in [Backnang](#) on the [German Framework Road](#).

For those of you who don't know, the German Half-Timbered Route is all about those fairytale framework houses. Lovely. Simply lovely. The rest of Backnang is just as wonderful, right down to its Ducal Palace and its medieval church.

Backnang also likes to party, so stick around for its Youth Festival, its Christmas Market, and its Wine Days in August.

Hmm, now that's something to make me put my coffee down for. ;-)

[Heilbronn](#) is last up, picked specifically for its gypsum and sandstone rock formations, and its network of caves.

In addition to all that out in the forest, Heilbronn has four medieval towers, the St. Kilian Church,

villas, fountains, a Christmas Market, and a German Order St. Peter & Paul Cathedral.

Don't even bother bringing your coffee in here, I already tried — they yelled at me in a [Swabian](#) dialect. ;-)

Oh well, I'll go drink it along the banks of the Neckar River, I guess, thinking of where to next...