

CIRCUIT LEEST – HOMBEEK

Pedal your way past expanses of fields and ponds

On this route you can expect to cycle through stunningly beautiful countryside. The River Zenne meanders through the Hombeek Plateau, which makes the perfect base from which to explore Mechelen's green and blue spaces.

HIGHLIGHTS

1 LEUVEN-DYLE CANAL AND BLEUKENSWEIDE

Your ride starts at the Leuven-Dyle Canal, which was built in 1752, making it one of the oldest waterways in Belgium. If you cycle the route the other way round, you end up in Leuven, but we are going to head towards Battel, where you turn off to cycle to the Zenne. In Leest take the left side of the towpath and you will spot the Bleukensweide, a meadow used as a natural ice-rink in winter, and as a foraging area for numerous waterbirds in the summer.

2 HEFFEN VILLAGE

Interchange 79 takes you to the village of Heffen, whose history is tied up with the Zenne. From the 14th century the city of Mechelen could charge ships a toll in exchange for exemption from staple rights on fish, grain and salt. In 1413 a chain was hung across the Zenne to prevent ships evading the toll. At the time, the church tower probably also served as a lighthouse.

3 BLAASVELDBROEK AND WHISKY DISTILLERY

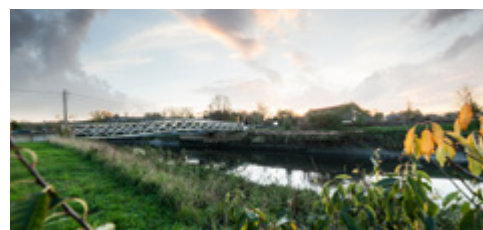
At Intersection 78, you are just a stone's throw from the Blaasveldbroek, a verdant, 160-hectar magnet for nature lovers, hikers, joggers and anglers. Het Broek, as the locals know it, also boasts an otter and beaver island. You can cycle on through Blaasveld, where the 17th-century farmstead De Molenberg may attract your attention. The Mechelen brewery Het Anker now distils whisky here using the mash from its Gouden Carolus Tripel beer.

4 MARE-MILK DAIRY

Between Intersection 53 and 25, you cycle past the De Beck mare-milk dairy. Did you know that horses can be milked too? While in our part of the world cow's milk is more traditional, peoples of the Russian Steppes have been drinking mare milk since time immemorial. Willy and Gerdt De Beck have been milking their mares and providing us with this wholesome product since 1997.



Bleukensweide



The bridge over the Senne in Leest



Leest

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Eglegem Lake



The banks of the Zenne, Hombeek



5 OPEN-FIELD VEGETABLES

You will now cycle through Hombeek, where the agricultural sector plays a very important role in maintaining open spaces and preserving rare animals species. Meadow and farmland birds are part and parcel of this agrarian landscape. A number of arable farmers are combining food production with nature, environment and landscape management.

6 EGLEGEM LAKE

Cycling towards Intersection 10 and the lovely centre of Hombeek village, you pass a large expanse of water. Eglegem Lake (Eglegemvijver, or "Hombeek pit" as it is called here) was created when the E19 motorway was constructed. It is now a 43-hectar wildlife area and an important stopover site for birds, as well as home to a family of beavers. In the summer, fishermen line its banks and sailors and windsurfers take to the water.

7 THE ZENNE

You are about to embark on the last five kilometres of the route. You come to the Zenedijk for the second time. Like the Nete, Rupel and Dyle, the Zenne is a freshwater river, subject to the twice-daily ebb and flow of the tide. This process has created an extremely rare biotope: freshwater mud flats and salt marshes, sheltered and so silt-rich habitats because they are not permanently under water. At low tide, ducks and waders forage for food on the mudflats. There is no vegetation here, but they are ecologically important zones favoured by algae. Bluethroats, reed buntings and reed warblers inhabit the reed beds in the salt marsh; warblers and song thrushes the tidal willow woodland.

8 VRIJBROEK PARK

The last hundred metres take you through Vrijbroekpark. For many Mechelen residents this is the place to escape the busy city. What better way to round off your tour than with a drink and a snack in one of the two cafés! A Mechelen beer perhaps? Schol!

Practical information

STARTING POINT

Tourist information office Visit Mechelen, Schepenhuis: Vleeshouwersstraat 6, 2800 Mechelen.

FOLLOWING THE ROUTE

The route makes use of the national cycle network. Just follow the intersection numbers on the rectangular green and white signs, as shown on the map in this flyer.

WALKING INTERSECTIONS

93 - 95 - 90 - 79 - 78 - 87 - 53 - 25 - 45 - 10 - 59 - 92 - 93.

Website and contact for the national cycle network:
routedokter.be (only in Dutch)

LENGTH

Standard route: 37,8 km

TERRAIN & ACCESSIBILITY

The route is flat and most of it is towpaths and country roads.

Go to visitmechelen.be/en for more brilliant walking and cycling ideas!

CONTACT

Visit Mechelen, Vleeshouwersstraat 6, 2800 Mechelen
visit@mechelen.be, +32 15 29 76 54
exploremechelen.be - visitmechelen.be

COLOPHON

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BICYCLE LOOP - 37,8 KM

VISIT
MECHELEN