

# **HIKING AND CYCLING IN THE BLACK FOREST**



### **About the Author**

Born and raised in Berlin, Germany, Kat Morgenstern discovered her passion for travel early on. At the tender age of 18, she left Germany to begin a journey that has taken her halfway around the world and is still in progress today. Professionally, Kat is a grassroots herbalist, ethnobotanist, writer and ecotravel professional. She is the founder and director of Sacred Earth, a network and educational resource for ‘plant people’ of all species, and of Sacred Earth Travel, a dedicated online ecotravel consultancy.

Having spent most of her adult life in the UK, the US and France, she currently makes her home in Germany’s southern Black Forest, where she has been surprised to find not only rewarding vistas and a great variety of ecosystems, but an innovative model of sustainable tourism development.

### **Other Cicerone guides by the author**

*The Westweg*

# HIKING AND CYCLING IN THE BLACK FOREST

by Kat Morgenstern

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Seensteig symbol © Baiersbronn Touristik



Base mapping by Lovell Johns

*Front cover:* Beautiful Münstertal with St. Trudperts Abbey

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Firstly, I wish to express my gratitude to the Schwarzwaldverein. Without its early efforts to preserve the culture and nature of the Black Forest and to make it accessible to visitors via a huge network of trails, the Black Forest would not be the wonderful walking destination that it is today. I am grateful for their tireless efforts to implement and maintain the thousands of kilometres of trails throughout the region and I am especially grateful to the chief trail warden Mr Schenk for his very helpful assistance and prompt responses to my questions.

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## Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/1021/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/1021/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal LA9 7RL.

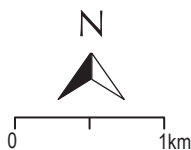
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## Map key

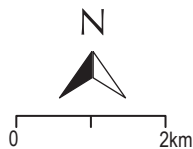
	walk route		finish
	cycle route		start
	alternative route		start/finish
	picnic spot		A5 Autobahn (motorway)
	restaurant		B500 Bundesstraßen (=UK A roads)
	chapel/church		L123 Landstraßen (=UK B roads)
	peak		minor country roads
	car park		geological/water feature
	lake		route direction
	river		track
	town/village		serviced hut
	urban area		unserviced hut
	landmark		
	ski lift		
	signpost		
	wind turbines		

## Map scales

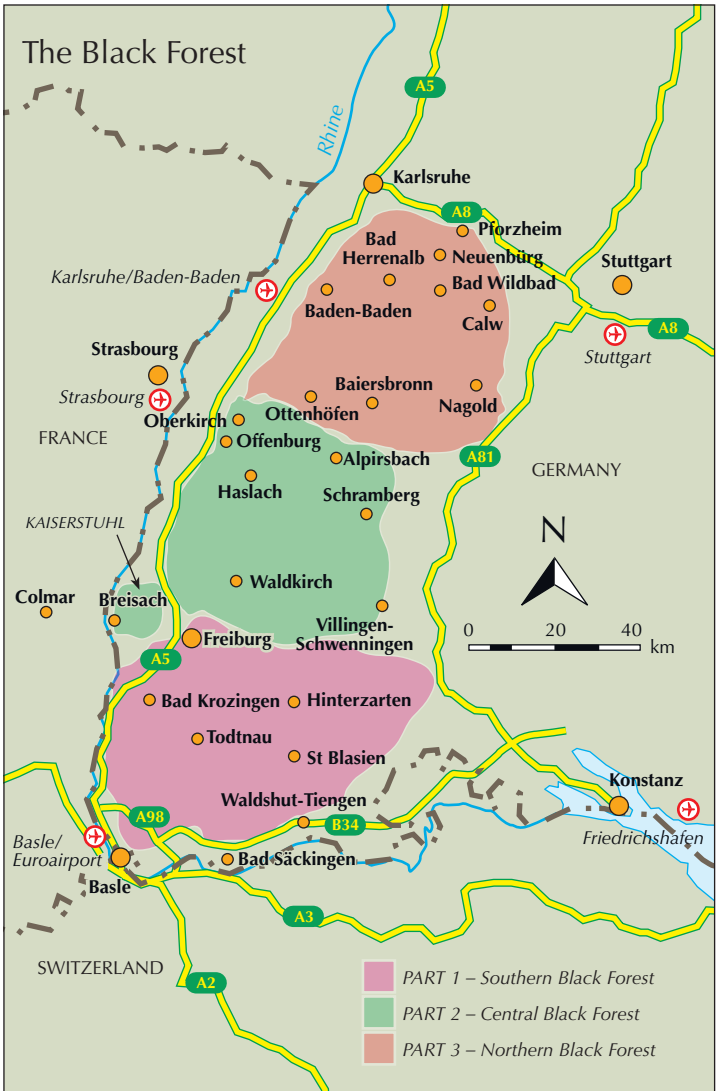
The maps for the walks are at 1:50,000 (2cm to 1km), as indicated on the first map in each route description.



The maps for the rides are at 1:100,000 (1cm to 1km), as indicated on the first map in each route description.









*A long view of Münstertal (Walk 3)*

## INTRODUCTION

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The Black Forest could well be described as the epitome of picture-book Germany: ancient castles perched high above small towns with quaint old timber-frame buildings, ancient wooden farmhouses sat on the side of forest-clad hills, flower-strewn mountain meadows that make cows happy and fat, tiny wayfarers' chapels inviting the weary traveller to linger for a while and take in the views, hidden gorges and impressive waterfalls, serene forests with raspberries and blueberries galore, and bald, sub-alpine mountain tops with panoramic views stretching as far as the Alps and the Vosges. An extensive trail network covers 24,000km of well-marked routes providing endless possibilities for exploring this beautiful region.

As a medium-sized mountain range, or *Mittelgebirge* as Germans call it, the Black Forest is not a destination for peak-baggers, but the perfect place for romantics. Instead of trying to impress with superlative landscapes it seduces the visitor with its unpretentious charm and authenticity rooted in age-old traditions and colourful heritage.

There are few places that manage to blend so well an old-world charm, which lets you forget the troubles of the modern world, with a superb and well-maintained infrastructure providing all the conveniences to which we have grown accustomed.

And yet, the Black Forest has a lot more to offer than just pastoral peace and quiet. Blessed with an abundance



*A flower-strewn Black Forest meadow in spring*



*Karlsruher Grat – volcanic fissure (Walk 8)*

of curative hot springs it has been an oasis for ‘wellness’ seekers since pre-Roman times. Spa tourism culminated during the 18th and 19th century. Back then only the rich could afford such luxuries, but today they are affordable for anyone. What could be more restorative than to relax in a pool of hot soothing waters after a long day’s walk?

If you like walking for pleasure, enjoy the harmonious interplay between nature and culture, appreciate fresh produce and regional specialities, and value a good night’s sleep in a comfortable bed, you will love the Black Forest.

Last, but not least, the Black Forest is a budget-friendly destination. Contrary to popular belief, Germany

is one of the least expensive countries in Western Europe, yet offers some of the highest standards of infrastructure, quality and service.

### **GEOLOGY**

The Black Forest lies deep in the southwestern corner of Germany. It stretches from Pforzheim in the north down to the Swiss border, between Lake Constance and Basle. As mountain ranges go, it is quite old, with its bedrock of granite and gneiss originating more than 200 million years ago from volcanic activity. When the region was submerged under a shallow and warm inland sea it became covered with sedimentary deposits. Countless generations of corals and

crustaceans lived and died in these waters, forming thick layers of calciferous deposits. The best place to see these layers is Wutach Gorge, in the southeastern corner of the region, where the River Wutach has carved a geological timeline into the rock (Walk 6).

Up until the Eocene era (56–34 million years ago), the Black Forest and the Vosges were still part of the same tectonic plate. Eventually, volcanic activity caused the plate to crack, resulting in rifting and the creation of the Rhine Valley. The small mountain range of Kaiserstuhl, situated between the Vosges and the Black Forest, was formed during the Miocene period (23–5 million years ago) at the climax of volcanic

activity in that region. After the tectonic break, the plates on either side lifted along their Rhine-bound edges, which accounts for the steep hills that border the Rhine Valley.

Glaciers that covered the entire Black Forest during the last ice age have left their unmistakable mark on the topography. Today's Black Forest is characterised by softly contoured hills and valleys, dotted with near circular tarns that lie at the base of the hills. As the glaciers retreated, the land, freed of their weight, started to rise. It is still rising today, but at a rate that is offset by the forces of erosion.

Geographically, the Black Forest is generally divided into a southern and a northern/central part, although the dividing lines are a little arbitrary.



*The source of the Danube (Walk 10)*

SPAS: THE HEALING POWER OF WATER

The Black Forest's position on the edge of a fault line that runs through the rift valley of the Rhine has endowed the region with an abundance of hot springs. The Celts revered the springs as sacred, but the Romans turned them into 'bath temples' at Baden-Baden, Badenweiler, and Augusta Raurica, where the remains of these complexes can still be seen.



*Remains of a Roman bath temple (Ride 1)*

Mineral-rich hot springs have always been deemed to possess curative powers and have long been used therapeutically for conditions ranging from arthritis and rheumatism to heart disease and respiratory problems, depending on their mineral composition.

Balneology (water therapy) experienced its heyday in the 18th and 19th centuries, when spa towns such as Baden-Baden, Badenweiler or Bad Wildbad became Meccas for well-heeled health tourists from all over Europe and Russia. The rich and famous flocked to the Black Forest with their families and entourages of attendants, often spending many weeks or months 'taking the waters' and bathing in the soothing pools. Today, 'wellness tourism' is less exclusive. Although there are clinics and recuperation homes for patients who have been prescribed a therapeutic stay (*Kur*) by their physicians, the spas are affordable and open to anyone who simply wants to relax and enjoy the rejuvenating waters.

A typical thermal spa usually has several pools with water temperatures ranging from 28 to 36°C and most have outside pools with powerful jets for water massage, as well as saunas and steam baths. Massages and other wellness treatments are available at an extra charge.

A listing of spa towns in Baden-Württemberg can be found at [www.heilbaeder-bw.de](http://www.heilbaeder-bw.de). Not all of these are in the Black Forest, but you can check their location on the map.

In the north the mountains rarely reach much more than 1000m, with Hornisgrinde at 1164m being the highest peak. The mountains here are deeply incised by fast-flowing rivers that have cut steep and narrow valleys into the hills. The southern part is known as Hochschwarzwald (High Black Forest), and it is here that the highest peaks are found, several of which reach almost 1500m. Here, near the headwaters of the Danube, runs another important geological dividing line – the European watershed that determines the flow of water either into the Atlantic via the Rhine or into the Black Sea via the Danube.

The Black Forest can further be bisected into an eastern and western side divided by its main crest. While the mountains along the western edge erupt quite abruptly from the Rhine Valley, the eastern part rises gradually, forming an extensive high plateau characterised by gently rolling hills.

Thanks to this varied topography, the Black Forest offers a surprising range of different landscapes and habitats, which are best explored by foot.

## HISTORY

### Celts, Romans, Alemanni and Benedictine monks

The history of human activity in Baden-Württemberg dates back to the dawn of humankind. In 1907, a jawbone was found near Heidelberg, which has been dated to between

600,000 and 500,000 years old and belonged to a pre-Neanderthal hominid known as *Homo heidelbergensis*. Most archaeological discoveries have been made on the eastern side of the Black Forest and in the Danube Valley in the Swabian Jura. In the Rhine Valley there is evidence of hunter-gatherers dating back to 40,000–35,000BC. In Neolithic times, the fertile soils along the river were used by the earliest farming communities who established themselves on prominent hilltops, especially on the edges of Kaiserstuhl at Breisach and Burkheim.

From about 750BC, Central Europe north of the Alps was predominantly Celtic, and this was the first significant civilisation to inhabit the area of the Black Forest. Remains of Celtic settlements in the region have been dated to about 650BC. Among the most significant archaeological sites from that period are the huge Magdalenenberg burial mounds near Villingen-Schwenningen and a hill-fort settlement on Münsterberg in Breisach. Other traces of Celtic civilisation are dotted throughout the area, but are often poorly preserved or documented.

When Caesar conquered Gaul between 58 and 50BC, the Celtic territories were absorbed into the Roman Empire. At first, the Rhine formed the natural limit of the empire, but with their eyes set on expansion, the Romans gradually pushed their borders further east and north. Soon the Danube became the border

## WALK 1

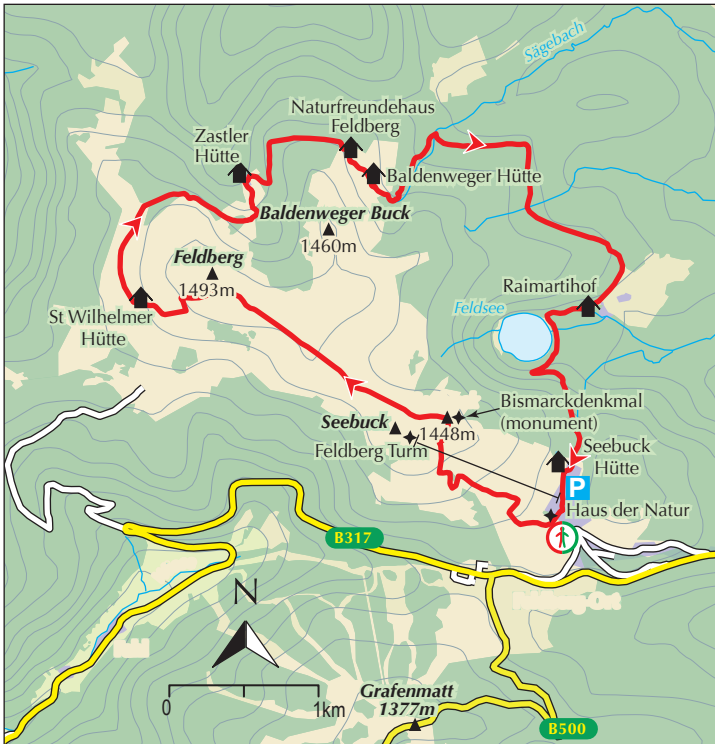
### *Feldbergsteig – Black Forest's highest peak*



<b>Start/finish</b>	Haus der Natur, Feldberger Hof
<b>Distance</b>	12km
<b>Difficulty</b>	Medium
<b>Time</b>	4–5hr
<b>Height gain/loss</b>	570m
<b>Maps</b>	Schwarzwaldverein Wanderkarte Hochschwarzwald 1:35,000; Kompass Feldberg–Todtnau 1:25,000
<b>Refreshments</b>	St Wilhelmer Hütte, Zastler Hütte, Baldenweger Hütte, Raimartihof, Seebuck Hütte (see <a href="http://www.hochschwarzwald.de/Feldberg">www.hochschwarzwald.de/Feldberg</a> ); numerous snack places at Feldberger Hof <a href="http://www.liftverbund-feldberg.de">www.liftverbund-feldberg.de</a>
<b>Public transport</b>	Bus to Feldberg (Schwarzw)/Feldberger Hof
<b>Access</b>	By car, B317 via Todtnau or Titisee, turn off at Feldberger Hof. Haus der Natur is the big building right in front of the car park, opposite Feldberger Hof Hotel.
<b>Parking</b>	Haus der Natur car park, or the huge new parking garage.
<b>Website/webcam</b>	<a href="http://www.feldbergsteig.de">www.feldbergsteig.de</a> , <a href="http://www.liftverbund-feldberg.de">www.liftverbund-feldberg.de</a>
<b>Trail markings</b>	Feldbergsteig symbol (pictured)
<b>Note</b>	Firm footwear is essential and walkers must be surefooted and vertigo-free. In parts the trail is very narrow and may be rather slippery. It is not a good choice in bad weather or snow/icy conditions. Beware of capercaillie on the northern slopes, especially during mating season, as males can be a bit forward and intimidating. Avoid visiting during St. Laurentius feast day, an annual event on or around 10 August.

At 1493m Feldberg is the highest peak of the Black Forest. On a clear, crisp day the views from the top are simply wonderful: the southern hills of the Black Forest roll into the distance towards the Rhine, the jagged snow-capped peaks of the Alps paint a craggy line into the southern sky and the blue ridge of the Vosges defines the western horizon. Beyond the touristy bustle at the top a delightful trail awaits those that venture further.





The Feldbergsteig trail is well marked and easy to follow. It starts at Feldberger Hof, by the Stonehenge-like gateway to the left of **Haus der Natur** (Nature Interpretation Centre) on the paved path marked towards Feldberg-Gipfel and Bismarckdenkmal. You can also access the trail through the back exit of Haus der Natur: cross the alpine garden and re-join the paved trail via a small path at the top right corner. After about 900m, at *Hans-Klarmeyerweg*, the trail abruptly heads off through the bushes to the right on a small, steep footpath and about 10min later emerges just below the hill station of the cable car.

Passing underneath the cable car trusses head for the stone pyramid, the **Bismarckdenkmal**. Feldberg peak is further over to the left, near the weather station. Cross this open expanse on any trail you like. Feldbergsteig continues left of the Bismarck monument, just below the ridge, while the upper trail passes by **Feldberg Turm**, the observation tower that marks the top of Seebuck, Feldberg's twin peak.

By the first buildings, you reach *Feldberg Gipfel*. For the actual summit continue straight on, to the viewing platform opposite the weather station. Return

to signpost *Feldberg Gipfel* to continue on Feldbergsteig and follow the broad path towards St Wilhelmer Hütte. At a sharp bend ignore a steep, serpentine path that leads down to Todtnauer Hütte and continue on the broad main trail to **St Wilhelmer Hütte**. ▶ The trail continues just below the terrace to the right, towards Zastler Hütte.

After about 400m (*Weide*) cross the field and follow the narrow path through the trees and blueberry bushes. At a trail junction continue straight on, down along the edge of the hill, crossing a highland watershed meadow.

Pass **Zastler Hütte** and continue on the gravel road to the right towards Naturfreundehaus Feldberg and Baldenweger Hütte. The dirt road gradually turns into a forest trail, which soon reaches the playground of **Naturfreundehaus Feldberg**. Continue on the paved road to the right. Just a few metres past **Baldenweger Hütte** (*Abzw.Sägebachschlag-Steig*), the trail heads off into the woods to the right. The next section ambles through the forest on a 'sticks and stones' trail, passing several streams and ravines. This is a lovely passage, but can be slippery as this area forms part of the Feldberg watershed.

The path eventually joins a forest road to the right, towards Raimartihof. Ignore the first fork (which is a mountain-bike trail), but at the second fork take the right-hand track. A little further on ignore the West Way (red



*Stone pyramid of the Bismarck monument*

On a clear day the views from the terrace of the hut are gorgeous.

## HIKING AND CYCLING IN THE BLACK FOREST

This trail is badly marked, but if you miss it the forest road will also lead to Raimartihof.

marker), but a few metres further on follow the right fork of a trail that starts off quite broad, but soon narrows to a skinny path leading down the hill through the woods. ◀

At *Raimartihof/Koppel* follow the dirt road to the right and at the bend continue straight on the forest path towards **Feldsee**, a tarn formed by the glaciers that once covered Feldberg during the last ice age. Swimming is prohibited to protect a rare water fern, which is only found here and at Titisee, the largest natural lake in the Black Forest, just a little bit to the east.

You can circle around the lake, but Feldbergsteig continues to the left across a little bridge and quickly starts to climb back up the hill via a steep and narrow path towards Seebuck and Feldberger Hof. After about 1km turn left on the gravel path and continue uphill. Soon **Seebuck Hütte** and the ski-lift base station come into view. Pass the restaurants and shops and you are back at Feldberger Hof bus stop and car park.

*Feldsee was formed by glaciers during the last ice age*

