

Slacken your pace  
and indulge in  
nostalgia!

This route takes you to the west of Mechelen, where the River Zenne meanders through the verdant countryside. However, you will stay away from the water and explore Hombeek's many agrarian areas and the border with Leest. Apart from the occasional glimpse of St Rumbold's Tower, it is not hard to imagine you have left the inhabited world behind! Prepare for a zen moment on the Hombeek Plateau!

## HIGHLIGHTS

### 1 THE BANKS OF THE ZENNE

Walk through the centre of the village of Hombeek and then after a few hundred metres, instead of an asphalt surface, the ground will feel soft underfoot. You are now walking parallel with the River Zenne. A sunny day has cyclists and hikers flocking to the dykes. At certain times of the year, you will see cattle grazing on the banks of the Zenne on your right. The fertile layer of silt left by the winter floods is now used as a natural protection for the summer meadows and in the autumn as pasture. For years now enthusiastic volunteers have been connecting with the nature on their doorstep by helping protect the Hombeek Plateau.

### 2 JOHAN'S WOOD

You are approaching Intersection 60, where you will find grand-dad's bench. Note the woodland that is now within view. It was planted by Johan, dyke warden and resident of the nearby village of Leest. Between 2004 and 2009, in consultation with the Flemish government Agency for Nature and Forests (ANB), he planted 10,000 native oak and ash trees. The new, two kilometre-long hedge of hazel, elder, Guelder rose, bird cherry (*Prunus padus*) and hawthorn provides food and cover for numerous songbirds such as the goldfinch, siskin and crossbill. Johan has left an old, rotting poplar, for dead trees are an important habitat for fungi, bats and cavity-nesting species such as woodpeckers and nuthatches. Two bee-keepers have given their 'workers' employment here.

### 3 MARE-MILK DAIRY

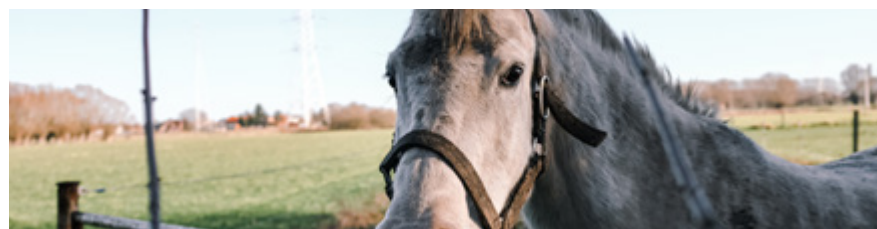
When the weather is dry, you will see that horse-riding is popular around Intersection 56. Did you know that horses can be milked too? While in our part of the world cow's milk is more traditional, peoples of the Russian Steppes have been drinking mare milk since time immemorial. There is something fascinating about mare milk.



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Agricultural landscape, Hombeek



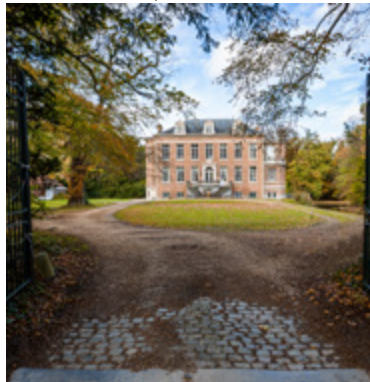
Hombeek



Through the fields, Hombeek



Expoel Castle, Hombeek



What is more, mare milk is rich in vitamins and minerals and believed to have healing properties. Willy and Gerdt De Beck have been milking their mares and providing us with this wholesome product since 1997.

#### ④ ROMAN VILLA

Near Intersection 291 you'll come to the Steynen Molen (Stone Mill) farmstead. The building you see today dates from 1781. Previous owners were the princely brothers of Savoie-Aoste, Italians from Turin and count Felix van Merode. However, the original estate, described as the "pachthof en speelhuys met vijver en wallen" – farmstead and gambling house with pond and ramparts - stood on the other side of the dirt track. Several excavators found the remains of an old Roman villa here (possibly the oldest settlement in Leest). A possible explanation is that Kapellebaan is part of the earlier Roman road which ran through Mechelen linking Utrecht with Bavay in Northern France.

#### ⑤ EXPOEL CASTLE

At Intersection 134, you'll see the splendid Expoel Castle dating from the 13th century. It owes its name to Jan de Axpole, the husband of the first known owner, Catharina Raduwaerts. In 1700 the castle became the summer residence of the heir of the Plantyn printing works in Antwerp and lord almoner of Antwerp, Balthazar IV Moretus. After his death, the castle was sold to the de Meester de Ravestein family.

#### ⑥ MILITARY AIRFIELD

To the right of Intersections 35 and 280, there used to be a military airfield, constructed on the orders of the German authorities several weeks before the First World War armistice. It was the base of the German Junkers D.1, the first all-metal fighters to enter service. Once the Germans had left, the airfield soon fell prey to plundering and so was decommissioned by the Belgian army. There is no longer any trace of it, but a few Hombeek residents have kept souvenirs, including propellers and a tent-cloth. You are now nearing the end of the walk. Around Bankstraat and Frans Reyniersstraat you are sure to find a café!

# Practical information

## STARTING PLACE

Stationsplein, 2811 Hombeek – junction 36

**Public transport:** De Lijn, bus 288 « Mechelen Station - Londerzeel » -> stop « Station Hombeek »

## FOLLOWING THE ROUTE ON FOOT

The route makes use of the pedestrian node network. The walking intersections are managed by Wandelnetwerk Rivierenland, [www.rlr.be](http://www.rlr.be).

## WALKING INTERSECTIONS

36 – 48 – 60 – 59 – 46 – 42 – 43 – 55 – 54 – 56 – 291 – 277 – 22 – 338 – 164 – 25 – 133 – 134 – 40 – 41 – 39 – 38 – 34 – 290 – 35 – 280 – 37 – 36

## TERRAIN & ACCESSIBILITY

Wear appropriate footwear. Depending on the season, paths may be muddy. Terrain unsuitable for wheelchairs and prams.

## LENGTH

Standard route: 11,7 km

Go to [visitmechelen.be/en](http://visitmechelen.be/en) for more brilliant walking and cycling ideas!

## CONTACT

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## COLOPHON

**In collaboration with:** the inhabitants of Hombeek, **layout:** Visit Mechelen, **printer:** Antilope De Bie Printing, **map:** Open Street Map, Elke Feussels, **photos:** Visit Mechelen, **publisher:** Björn Siffer, VVV Mechelen vzw, Vleeshouwersstraat 6, 2800 Mechelen - D/2022/10717/33



## CIRCUIT HOMBEEK

WALKING ROUTE - 11,7 KM