

# Hiking network in east flanders

**How to  
use the  
hiking  
network?**

## **A quick guide to using the hiking network!**

We selected the most beautiful hiking paths and then marked them on a map to create a comprehensive network for hikers.

Enjoy your trip!

 **Five  
family-friendly  
walking routes**

A pdf or gpx of each route can be downloaded via the links included in this document.

# 01. Kluisbos walking route

This route guides you through the Kluisbos, the largest forest in the Flemish Ardennes. You'll visit Belgium's language border, and take in the breathtaking views on the rolling hills of the Pays de Collines.

► [www.routen.be/kluisbos-wandelroute](http://www.routen.be/kluisbos-wandelroute) (dutch version)

## ► Starting point

### MAISON DES RANDONNEURS

The Kluisbos hiking trail starts at Torendreef (free parking is available here). The walking route is 6.4 km, short enough to walk with children, but less suitable for prams. Dogs are welcome on a leash.

You will find a hamlet called Enclus du Haut a few metres from the junction 7 starting point. A little further on lies the Maison des Randonneurs (Hikers' House), a construction of wood and glass where hikers can obtain tourist information as well as view temporary exhibitions by local artists.

### JUNCTION 7-33 > KLUIBOS

While Flanders is known for its relatively flat landscape, there is the unique concept of a 'getuigenheuvel'. A Flemish word - roughly translated to 'witness hill' - that denotes an isolated mountain watching over an otherwise flat landscape. One of these is the Kluisberg, a showpiece of the Flemish Ardennes standing at a height of 141 meters. On top of the Kluisberg lies the 300-hectare Kluisbos, which is a freely accessible walking forest taking up more than two thirds of the hill. Its open spaces offer phenomenal views

**The 300-hectare Kluisbos is located on top of the diestien hill Kluisberg, which is one of the showpieces of the Flemish Ardennes at a height of 141 metres. More than two thirds of it is freely accessible as a walking forest. Open spaces offer phenomenal views of Henegouwen.**

In spring, the blossoming bluebells turn areas of the forest into something out of a fairytale. This colourful spectacle attracts many visitors, much to the delight of the numerous catering establishments that serve thirsty and hungry visitors.

### JUNCTION 2 > LIEFDESBRON

The so-called Liefdesbron (Spring of Love) is an idyllic place to spend some time. According to myth, a person will find love within the year if they stand barefoot in the water. The spring is one of the many zones in the forest where the groundwater collides with the underlying clay layers and finds its way above ground. Clear streams emerge from the springs, surrounded by beautiful and bright flora.

### JUNCTION 53 > BOSBAAR

De Bosbaar is a wonderful place to stop for a local beer or a savoury snack. What started as a summer pop-up has become a popular place to stop, even on winter Sundays, in front of the fire pits on the outdoor dining area. Owners Stijn and Sylvie rebuilt the former farmstead into a beautiful B&B.

### LANGUAGE BORDER

Cross not only the Torendreef but also the language- and provincial border at junction 53. A little further is Rue la Cavée, an ecologically valuable sunken lane that descends from the hamlet of Hortilin to Amougies. From here, you can look out over the rolling hills of the Pays des Collines.

### JUNCTION 7 > AUX ACASIAS

Back in Enclus du Haut, it's time to rest your tired feet and take a seat in one of the many taverns. A popular place is Aux Acacias, where you can go for a crêpe, as well as a full lunch or a ham and cheese sandwich grilled in butter. The children can play to their hearts' content in the Bosuil play area, where the play equipment is made from sustainable wood and stimulates the imagination.

## ► End point

### MAISON DES RANDONNEURS

# 02. Donkmeer walking route

Spring, summer, autumn, or winter: the Donkmeer in Berlare is fabulous in every season. This pleasant loop takes you all the way around this popular hotspot, where outdoor dining areas and boats beckon on sunny days.

► [www.routen.be/donkmeer-wandelroute](http://www.routen.be/donkmeer-wandelroute) (dutch version)

## Accessibility assets

There is ample parking here, including for people with extra needs. There is a sanitary building at the duck decoy that was designed entirely for people with physical disabilities and children. The benches along the way support every hiker with ergonomic backrests and armrests.

## Possible points for attention

There are no insurmountable obstacles here, but there are a few spots where you have to be extra careful. You will come across slightly steeper slopes along the way – and possibly a few potholes – particularly at the duck decoy itself.

## ► Starting point

### DONKMEER RECEPTION CENTRE

This new reception centre on the banks of the lake is your ideal base for exploring the surrounding area. With a playful introduction to Berlaar's nature and history you'll learn all about the origins of the Donkmeer and the rare birds and fish in and around the old Scheldt meander.

### JUNCTION 8 > BARELDONK CHAPEL

On top of a sandy hill at junction 8 is the listed Bareldonk Chapel, one of the most beautiful chapels in the area. The hill served as a look-out post for the Flemish rebels or Brigands during the Peasants' War of the 18th century. Next to the chapel is a pilgrimage corridor that dates back to 1953 with seven chapels and a calvary hill with life-sized statues. In 2009, one of the chapels was searched for the lost panel of the Mystic Lamb, The Just Judges, but the search was fruitless once again.

### JUNCTION 1-2 > DUCK DECOY

The Eendenkooi (Duck Decoy), a historic relic first mentioned back in 1678, can be found on an island in Donk Lake. Until shortly after 1930, masses of ducks were hunted here in winter to grace the plates of rich citizens.

The remarkably well preserved structure belonged to a noble family until 1950.

In 2019, the Duck Decoy was renovated and expanded to include a picnic area, a willow tunnel, and a bird watching area. It's the perfect place to take a break!

### JUNCTION 2-9 > DE TURFSTEKER

De Turfsteker Visit East Flanders

The Turfsteker (The Peat Cutter) is hard to miss. The statue by Restaurant Elvira commemorates the local peat cutters, without whom the lake wouldn't be here. It was them that reclaimed the peat layer from the old meander in the 17th and 18th centuries. They dried the cut peat until it became blocks of peat, a popular kindling in times of wood shortage.

### Junction 2-9 > BOAT RENTAL

Exploring Flanders' largest inland lake is not only lovely on foot or by bike, but also by boat. Rent hydrocycles, canoes, and motorboats from the boat rental on Donklaan, or let yourself be ferried to the Duck Decoy. (Early April to mid-October)

### Junction 2-9 > 'T WEIKEN

This place where tourists came half a century ago to lie down on bushels of farmers' straw on the shores of the Donkeer is an absolute must. Gradually, 't Weiken grew into a quintessential summer bar, with beach chairs and accompanying parasols. Have a drink with a view of the lake or feast on your own picnic!

## ► End point

### DONKMEER RECEPTION CENTRE

# 03. Kravaalbos walking route

Kravaalbos is somewhat hidden on the border of two provinces, so the forest stayed under the radar for a long time. Today, this is also the greatest asset of this ecologically valuable area, where spring flowers and hop stems grow in droves.

► [www.routen.be/kravaalbos-wandelroute](http://www.routen.be/kravaalbos-wandelroute) (dutch version)

## ► Starting point

### JUNCTION 47 > BIJ STINNE

This route's starting point is near junction 47 and café Bij Stinne. This café has been an established name in Meldert for over fifty years. Neighbours took over the torch from Stinne Aelbrecht and gave it a second life. The interior was left alone – just like the coal stove and the local football team – and local beers started appearing on the menu.

Bij Stinne has since garnered national fame, as the café was used as a backdrop in the third *Kampioen* movie.

### JUNCTION 47-99 > MOLENBEEK

The Molenbeek is fed by the many springs that bubble up in and around the Kravaalbos. It has a fairly natural, winding course in a valley lined with trees and forest. Ten years ago, the stream was little more than an open sewer. Apart from a few sticklebacks, all the fish had disappeared. Thanks to a number of interventions the quality of the water has improved considerably, and you can once again find a dozen or so species of fish swimming upstream from the Dender.

### JUNCTION 47-99 > HOPVELD

You'll pass a hop field spanning several hectares on the left-hand side of the trail. It doesn't have the characteristic hop stakes of yesteryear. Instead, the hops grow in hedge form and are used for harvesting hop shoots or 'keesten', a culinary delicacy.

Hop cultivation was introduced by the Affligem Abbey. In the 17th century, the region around Aalst was responsible for more than one third of the world's production. In the 20th century, production moved to the Eastern Bloc and centuries of tradition came to an end. Thankfully, the tradition lives on in the annual *Pikkeling* harvest festival.

### JUNCTION 40 > MELDERT

#### MELDERT JOHAN MARTENS

The village of Meldert is one of the four boroughs of Aalst that form the *Faluintjes*. The village owes its origin to the sandstone quarries in the area. In all likelihood, the Affligem monks built a church or chapel here to serve the ever-increasing population. The tower of the Gothic St Walburga Church is said to be a remnant of the original Romanesque church building.

There are two monuments on the Frankish commons in front of the church to keep the memory of sandstone mining and hop-growing alive.

### HOF DEN TUITELAAR

The former Goossens brewery stopped producing beer and vinegar in 1928, after all copper – including the brewing kettles – was confiscated by the Germans during World War I. The building stood empty for many years, until 2017, when it was converted into a cosy neighbourhood inn. The inn features local produce on the menu and an adventurous garden where young and old can enjoy themselves in the sunshine. Nature-related activities are also regularly organised, with the café serving as the base of operations.

### BRASSERIE 'T VERTIER

Brasserie 't Vertier and the adjoining *Victorie* room date back to the beginning of the 19th century at least. Over the years, it has been an important home for local club life. Today, it is a stylish brasserie with a varied mix of classics on the menu. Those who just want a drink are also welcome.

### Junction 50-24 > KRAVAALBOS

We end up in the actual Kravaalbos via the *Kiekenvilla*, a former chicken farm. The whole of Meldert was originally situated in the middle of the woods, but large parts were cut down during both World Wars. The trees were used to reinforce German trenches and make charcoal for gunpowder, or were processed into fuel for vehicles. Later, the forest was replanted with American oak and sweet chestnut, which have been gradually giving way to native species. The forest has a special protected status. Today, it is an ecologically valuable forest where the many bluebells provide a colourful spectacle in the spring.

## ► End point

### JUNCTION 47

# 04. Drongengoed landscape park walking route

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The Drongengoed Landscape Park is the largest contiguous forest in the province, where you can hike for hours upon hours. In addition to hikers and cyclists, you will also come across grazing cows and sheep – and if you're lucky, a roe deer.

► [www.routen.be/drongengoedbos-wandelroute](http://www.routen.be/drongengoedbos-wandelroute) (dutch version)

## Accessibility assets

Please note! The park is not accessible due to the breeding season in April, May, and June every year. The path has been redirected here.

## ► Starting point

### DRONGENGOEDWEG – KRAKEEL CAR PARK

The free Krakeel car park on Drongengoedweg is the starting point of the route. The best place to park your car is from POL car park onwards. Walk counter-clockwise from junction 16 towards 17 and then 22 and so on until you have completed the loop and ended up right back where you started.

### JUNCTION 17 > DRONGENGOEBOS

The Drongengoed Landscape Park is the largest contiguous forest in East Flanders. The forest's many shades of green are accented by dashes of purple, thanks to the original heather growth that is gradually being restored throughout the forest. In addition to hikers and cyclists, you will also come across grazing cows and sheep – and if you're lucky, a roe deer.

### JUNCTION 17-21 > MALDEGEMVELD

The first part of the route takes us through the Maldegemveld, a nature reserve where the local Natuurpunt department is reconstructing the original biotope of woods and heathland. This doesn't mean that nature is given free rein, though. The area is regularly mowed and grazed by cattle. This lets the seeds of the heather plant germinate again. The result is a special piece of nature, which is reminiscent of the High Fens at times. Heath, sundew, inundated club moss, and peat moss grow in the wet places. In the drier areas, you will find heather, petty whin, and Scotch broom. Free roaming Galloway cattle also graze in the Maldegemveld. While they are used to hikers, don't get too close and don't touch them.

### JUNCTION 12-13 > DRONGENGOEDHOEVE

One of the main attractions of the Drongengoedbos is the cosy outdoor café; the historical Drongengoedhoeve, which dates back to 1746. Enjoy a coffee or an Augustijntje (the best local beer) in the shadow of the walnut and chestnut trees. There is plenty to do on and around the farm. There is a well-maintained herb garden, an orchard with local fruit varieties, and a landscape information centre that tells the story of the region. Just past the Drongengoedhoeve, you can still see the ramparts of the original farm from 1242 on the right. [www.drongengoedhoeve.be](http://www.drongengoedhoeve.be)

### JUNCTION 13 > KABOUTERPAD

The great diversity of plants and trees also makes the Drongengoedbos attractive as an educational forest for young children. The two-kilometre-long Kabouterpad starts near the Drongengoedhoeve. Toddlers playfully learn about the forest with the help of ten signs with tips, facts and fun tasks. The Kabouterpad also runs through the newly constructed play areas near the farmstead, where children can horse around on the natural play elements.

## ► End point

### DRONGENGOEDWEG – KRAKEEL CAR PARK

# 05. Puyenbroeck provincial domain walking route

The Zuidlede leads us through the deep green natural beauty of the Moervaart Valley into the Puyenbroeck Provincial Domain, where there are enough activities to fill an entire day. So get up early for this child-friendly day trip full of variety. The starting point of the route is inside the domain. It is best to park at car park 2 on Stenenbrug. From there, walk towards junction 6 where you start the route.

► [www.routen.be/puyenbroeck-wandelroute](http://www.routen.be/puyenbroeck-wandelroute) (dutch version)

## ► Starting point

### PUYENBROECK PROVINCIAL DOMAIN

Since its opening in 1969, Puyenbroeck Provincial Domain has been a popular destination for summer family outings. It offers something for everyone. Children can have fun on a playground, in a play forest, a traffic park with go-carts, and on a pond with rowboats and hydrocycles. You can walk in the 150-hectare forest area and in the Levend Erfgoed (Living Heritage) Park. Sports enthusiasts will enjoy the Olympic swimming pool or the numerous sporting fields. You can learn everything about mills and wind energy at the Mola Mill Centre Provincial Heritage Site.

Those who prefer not to walk from one attraction to the next can get around on a rental bike or on the tourist train crossing the park. You can quench your thirst or sate your hunger at The New Four Seasons, a cafeteria with a buffet and a large outdoor dining area by the water, or at brasserie De Laatste Afslag, the golf course's clubhouse.

### JUNCTION 47 > ETBOSHOEVE

From the starting point, walk over 2 kilometres along the small Zuidlede river to junction 47. The straight Etbosdreef runs through here and connects the Wulfsdonksite at the Moervaart to the Etbosbrug over the Zuidlede. Once, the Etboshoeve stood this bridge, built on a former bulwark of the Bedmarlinie line of defence. As early as the 18th century, an inn was located here, which was initially mainly used by smugglers and poachers. It later became a popular resting spot for hikers, hunters, and fishermen, but above all, for ordinary villagers with a sense of nostalgia. Rice pudding with brown sugar was a big favourite here. Café Etboshoeve closed its doors in 1999. Since then, the house has been a private residence. If you're combining this route with the Kruiskapel route, keep following the Zuidlede to junction 47.

### JUNCTION 46-7 > HOLLANDSTELLUNG

The two World War I bunkers you pass were once part of the German Hollandstelling line of defence. It followed the border with the Netherlands from Knokke to Beveren, in order to repel

Allied attacks from the neutral north. In practice, the line was only used to a limited extent in combat situations. Both bunkers are typical outpost bunkers made of reinforced concrete, with one room, two entrances at the side and rear, and a machine gun on the roof. The walls on the front side are 180 cm thick.

### JUNCTION 7 > 'T OU HUYS

If you walk towards the Zuidlede again just before junction 7, you will arrive at the cosy tavern 't Ou Huys, where you can relax and enjoy a regional beer or a cup of coffee.

For the youngest visitors, there is a petting zoo with small farmyard animals and bees making honey.

### JUNCTION 12 > LEVEND ERFGOEDPARK

In this special part of Puyenbroeck, which is like Bokrijk but with animals, you'll learn about local, small farm animals whose existence is threatened because they are no longer economically viable. There are no bears or tigers here, but there are steenkonijnen (a native Belgian rabbit), Ardennes voskop sheep, and many other small farm animals in the most colourful varieties. At the Knuffelhoeve, children learn about farm life in all its facets.

### JUNCTION 8 > OBSERVATION TOWER

Since the summer of 2020, a new observation tower has been rising above the Levend Erfgoedpark (Living Heritage Park). Climb 15 metres up to a platform above the meandering pond via a steel fire escape and find a panoramic view of the popular recreational domain. A true landscape park is being created in this part of Puyenbroeck, with an experience park, a suspension bridge, a barefoot path, and grazing animals.

## ► End point

### PUYENBROECK PROVINCIAL DOMAIN

This guide was developed as part of the project 'Soft Landing Flanders: a smooth landing for international tech start-ups & scale-ups'.



AGENTSCHAP  
INNOVEREN &  
ONDERNEMEN



EFRO  
EUROPEES FONDS  
VOOR REGIONALE  
ONTWIKKELING