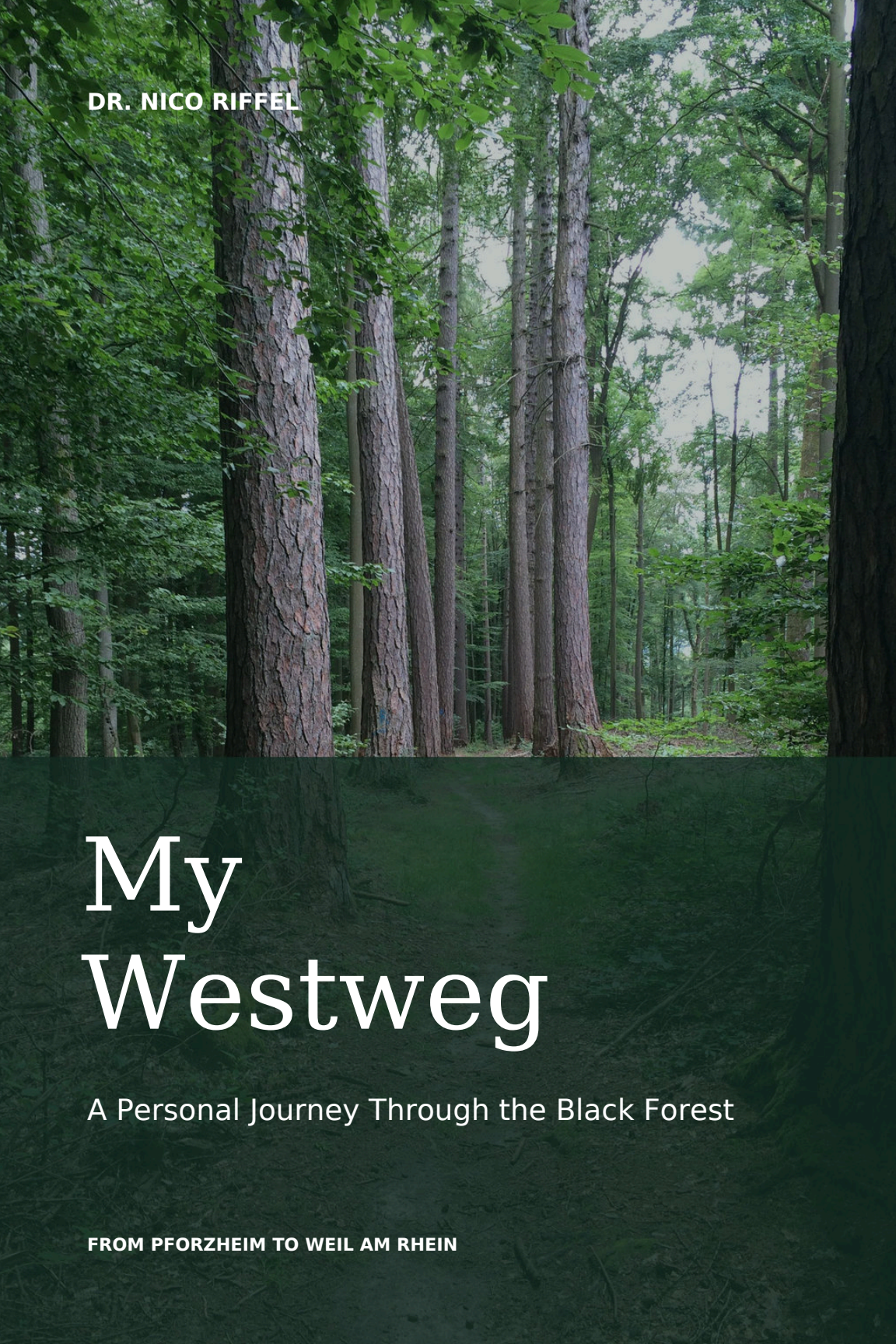




DR. NICO RIFFEL

My Westweg

A Personal Journey Through the Black Forest

FROM PFORZHEIM TO WEIL AM RHEIN

Contents

Preparations and the First Stages

About This Book	5
From an Idea to My First Long Walk	7
Equipment with a Purpose	11
The Packing List After the Walk	25
Food, Water and Weather	29
Maps and Daily Stages	31
Arriving in Pforzheim	34
01 Pforzheim to Dobel	38
02 Dobel to Forbach	49
03 Forbach to Unterstmatt	58
04 Unterstmatt to Alexanderschanze	68
05 Alexanderschanze to Hark	78
06 Hark to Hausach	85
07 Hausach to Wilhelmshöhe	92

Contents

Continuing South

08	Wilhelmshöhe to Waldau	100
09	Waldau to Hinterzarten	110
10	Hinterzarten to Notschrei	118
11	Notschrei to Haldenhof	129
12	Haldenhof to Kandern	135
13	Kandern to Weil am Rhein	143

	Rest and the Journey Home	150
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	What I Learned Along the Way	155
--	------------------------------	-----

	Well Prepared for the Trail	163
--	-----------------------------	-----

	Sources, Maps and Credits	173
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STAGE 01

Pforzheim to Dobel

The first stage greets me with a few impressive figures: almost 30 kilometres, an estimated seven hours of walking, as much as 800 metres of ascent and temperatures well above 34°C.

The Westweg begins where the Nagold and Würm rivers meet, at a place called Kupferhammer. In fact, all three of the Schwarzwaldverein's major trails start here: the Westweg, Mittelweg and Ostweg. I met walkers who followed the Westweg south and then returned north on the Ostweg, making a four-week circuit through the Black Forest. A wonderful trip, if you can get that much leave or are retired and fit enough to tackle it.



At the Westweg gateway in Pforzheim

These gateways need a little explanation. There are twelve along the route, with information about the Westweg and a mechanism for stamping the walking passport available from the Black Forest tourist organisation. Collect at least nine different stamps and you can claim a surprise gift from a tourist information office, or have it sent to you later.

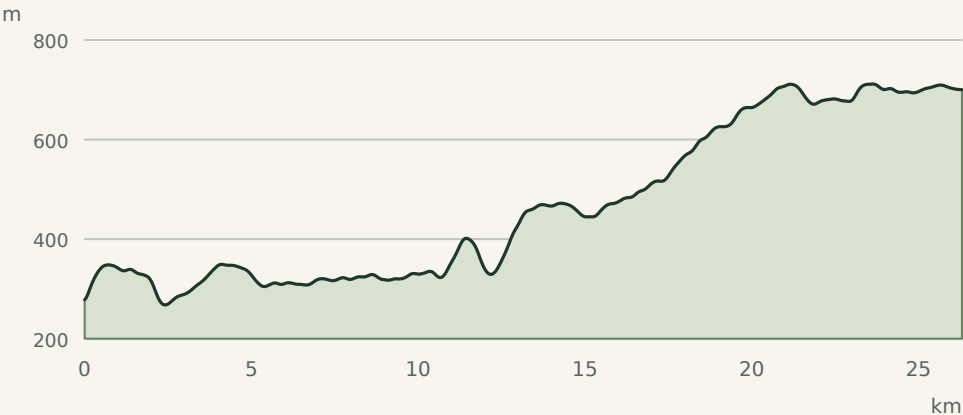
At the first gateway, I meet another walker and we search for the stamp together. It takes us a while to work out the mechanism. There are digital walking badges these days too, but it is not quite the same, is it?

I head off briskly into the forest beside the Nagold, barely noticing at first how relentlessly the temperature is climbing. Even in the morning, the sun is fierce enough to make the woods hot and airless. There is not a breath of wind. As soon as I leave the trees for the first climb, the sun beats down on my head. I am glad I remembered a hat.

Refusing to take the bus, on grounds of walking honour and all that, I have already left my hotel at seven full of confidence. I walk through the centre, across the Enz and through the town forest to the Goldene Pforte, the gateway marking the start of the Westweg. The slowly awakening town is well worth a stroll and shows me some of Pforzheim's prettier corners. My enthusiasm does, however, add about three kilometres to the day. Kilometre zero is still at the gateway.

Distance and Elevation

26.3 km · ↑ 770 m · ↓ 350 m



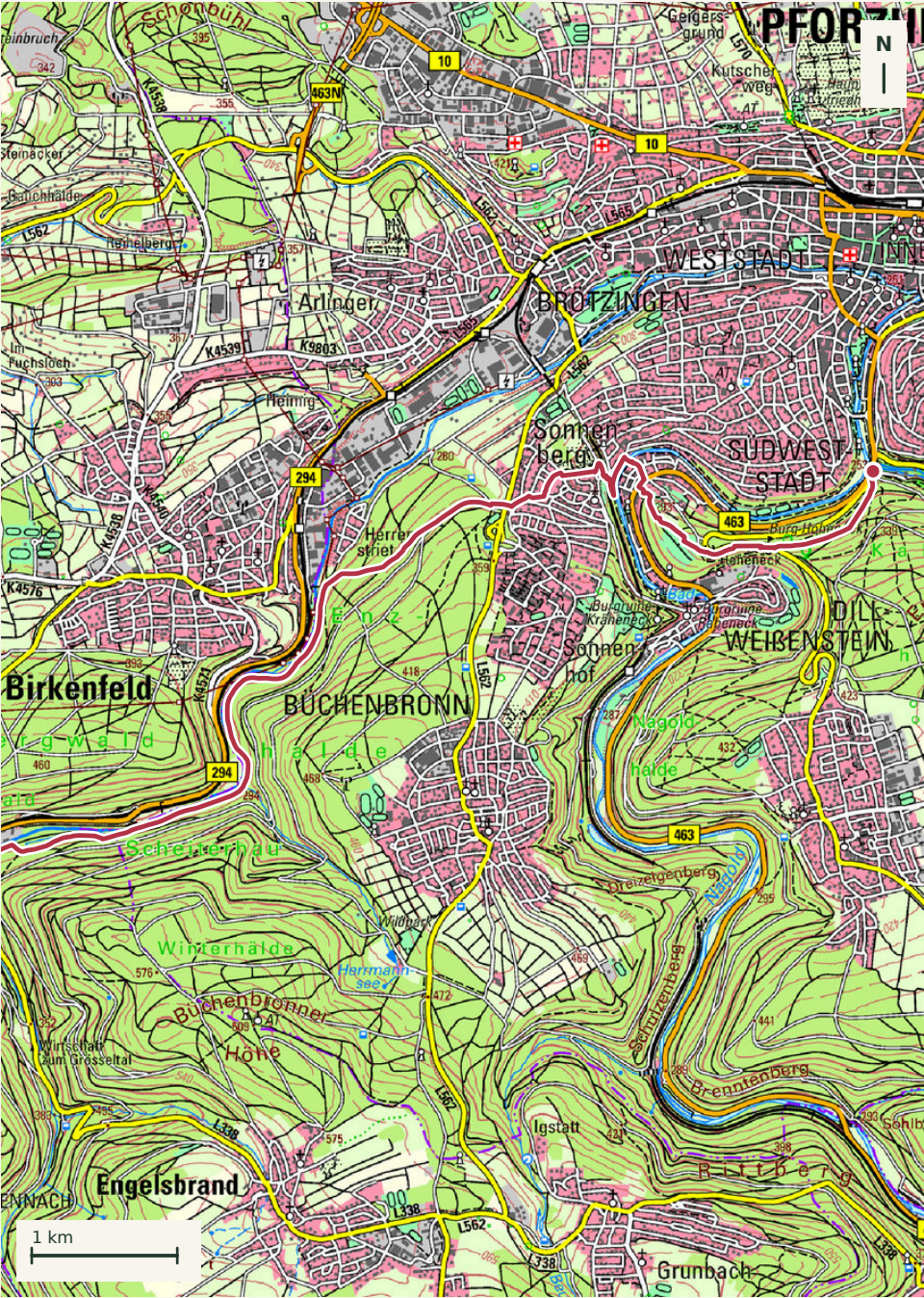
Elevations: Copernicus DEM GLO-30 · smoothed planning estimates

This long first day needs careful pacing in hot weather. The mapped section begins at Kupferhammer; the walk there from your hotel is extra. There is still a long final stretch to Dobel, even if the views at Schwanner Warte tempt you into an extended break.

Where I stayed in 2016: Pension Heidi in Dobel.

Mapped section: Pforzheim Kupferhammer – Dobel. Route figures accompany the elevation profile.

Map 1 · km 0.0–8.6

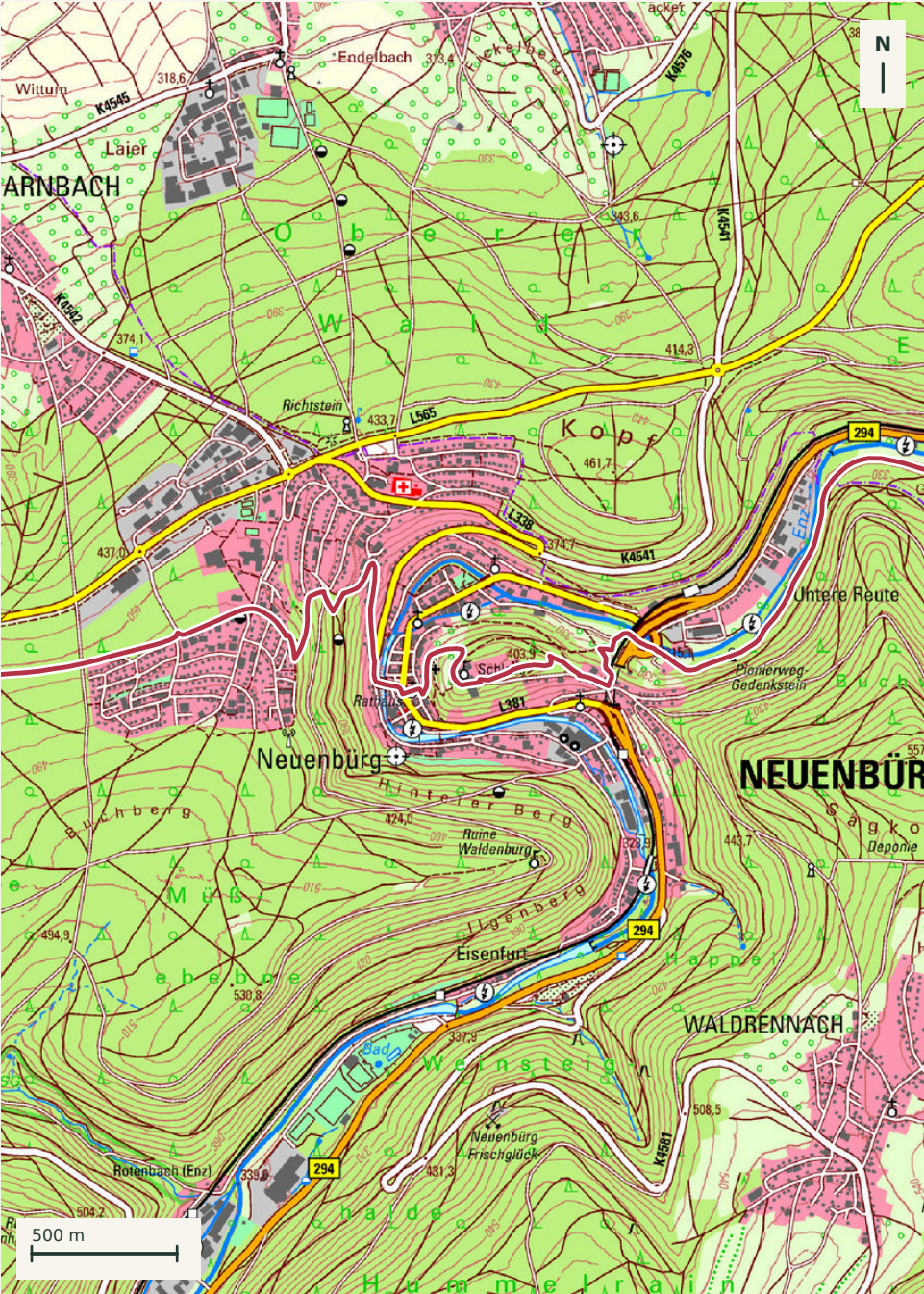


01-K1 · 1:50,000 — Westweg route (OSM)

Data source: LGL, www.lgl-bw.de, dl-de/by-2-0 · Accessed 10/2026

Route added: © OpenStreetMap contributors · ODbL

Neuenbürg



01-D1 · 1:25,000 — Westweg route (OSM)

Data source: LGL, www.lgl-bw.de, dl-de/by-2-0 · Accessed 10/2026

Route added: © OpenStreetMap contributors · ODbL

Well Prepared for the Trail

Planning a walk at your desk is a lovely occupation. You only discover on the trail whether the rucksack is comfortable and the water will last. I could test some things on my training walks; others I learned on the Westweg itself. Here is what I would bear in mind before my next long walk.

Packing Your Rucksack Properly

A rucksack that wobbles, gets in your way or rubs your shoulders raw? Nobody needs that. A few adjustments make the load much easier to bear. Pack heavy items as close to your back as possible. Keep your waterproof jacket, water and first-aid kit accessible without having to empty the whole pack, near the top or in an easy-to-reach compartment. Fill the remaining spaces with lighter clothing. Nothing should dangle loosely outside, getting in the way as you walk or catching on branches.

The hip belt and back length need to suit your body. Many walking rucksacks have an adjustable back length; try this before buying. When putting mine on, I left the shoulder straps loose, fastened the hip belt and tightened it first. Only then did I snug up the shoulder straps. That put most of the load on my hips and made the pack much more comfortable. I also tested it several times on training walks with the load I actually intended to carry. Only then do you really find out whether a strap digs in, a pocket is out of reach or your water bottle swings with every step.

Small belt pouches also helped me keep frequently used things handy: camera, sunglasses, Buff and a snack bar. Chest pouches are another option for carrying some equipment at the front. A day walk is a good opportunity to discover what works with your rucksack. For me, the main advantage was being able to reach these small things without taking the pack off every time.



Drinking Water on the Trail

If, like me, you stay in hotels, you can conveniently fill your water containers at your accommodation each morning. The evening before, check whether and where you can refill the next day. That determines whether you might set off with three litres or whether one litre will cover a short section to the next reliable drinking-water point. I was very thirsty in hot weather, so I started with plenty of water already in my pack.

If you want to refill at springs, take a suitable water filter. There are compact options that are straightforward to use. I would not drink even clear stream water without treating it: you cannot see the organisms that might make you ill. I would not rely on colour, smell, particular animals in the water or a small test sip. Especially on a trip where I would rather not lose three days to diarrhoea.

Check which organisms and substances a filter actually removes. Many walking filters with sufficiently fine pores remove bacteria and parasites, but not viruses. After filtering, additional disinfection with suitable drinking-water treatment tablets or drops may therefore be useful. Follow the dosage and contact-time instructions. Cleaning and frost protection matter too, if the filter is to keep working reliably on the trail.

Boiling water takes time and fuel, so I did not use that method on my walk. It does not reliably remove chemical contamination either. If I suspected that, I would find a different source. Nor would I base my supply on improvised rainwater collection or homemade sand and charcoal filters. For me, those experiments belong on a survival course or in bushcraft training. On the Westweg, I want to walk and be able to trust my drinking water.

Sources, Maps and Credits

Text and photographs from the manuscript: Dr. Nico Riffel. Journey: 2016. Revision and map data: October 2026. First English edition, translated from the revised German edition.

The topographic maps are supplied by the Landesamt für Geoinformation und Landentwicklung Baden-Württemberg (LGL), the state's mapping authority. The Westweg routes were added from open geodata. No maps or elevation profiles were taken from the Hikeline walking guide. Its division into stages, together with my travel accounts, helped assign the mapped sections.

Maps and Elevation Profiles

DTK50 and DTK25 topographic maps. Data source: LGL, [www.lgl-bw.de, dl-de/by-2-0](http://www.lgl-bw.de/dl-de/by-2-0). Accessed: October 2026. Licence: <https://www.govdata.de/dl-de/by-2-0>. Adaptations: map extracts prepared; Westweg routes, scale bars and labels added.

The three equipment illustrations showing clothing layers, walking boots and a daypack were generated with OpenAI ImageGen for this edition. All travel photographs come from my manuscript.

Map data: © OpenStreetMap contributors. The data is available under the Open Database Licence (ODbL) 1.0: <https://www.openstreetmap.org/copyright> and <https://opendatacommons.org/licenses/odbl/1-0/>.

OSM relations used: 48073, 905947, 905949, 905948, 905950, 905955, 542317, 907520, 907521 and 62897; Brandenkopf alternative: 2336164. Queried on 12 October 2026. The derived routes are included under ODbL in the accompanying map data package.

Elevation profiles: Copernicus DEM GLO-30, the 2021 release of the data hosted by AWS. Accessed on 12 October 2026.

<https://registry.opendata.aws/copernicus-dem/>

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About the Westweg

- Schwarzwaldverein: <https://www.schwarzwaldverein.de/> and <https://westweg.de/>
- Black Forest Tourism, western route: <https://www.schwarzwald-tourismus.info/touren/westweg-westvariante-f79b8f7884>
- Esterbauer, Hikeline Fernwanderweg Westweg Schwarzwald: <https://www.esterbauer.com/hikeline/fernwanderweg-westweg-schwarzwald/>
- Hohenlochenhütte and volunteer duty schedule: <https://www.schwarzwaldverein-wolfach.de/>
- Kreuzsattelhütte: <https://www.schwarzwaldverein-oberwolfach.de/>

Practical Advice

- CDC, Water Treatment Options When Hiking, Camping, or Traveling, 30 January 2025:
<https://www.cdc.gov/drinking-water/prevention/water-treatment-hiking-camping-traveling.html>
- Robert Koch Institute (RKI), questions about ticks and tick bites, and guidance on TBE, Lyme disease, rabies and echinococcosis:
<https://www.rki.de/zecken> and <https://www.rki.de/ratgeber>
- ForstBW, conduct in the forest:
<https://www.forstbw.de/erleben-lernen/erlebnis/verhalten-im-wald>
- Black Forest National Park, rules and tips:
<https://www.nationalpark-schwarzwald.de/nationalpark/regeln-tipps>
- German Alpine Club, severe weather in the mountains, 2 June 2026:
https://www.alpenverein.de/artikel/unwetter-im-gebirge_abf33f74-f927-48ab-975d-d297b38332cd
- Schwarzwälder Bote, closure of the Haldenhof, 31 March 2026:
<https://www.schwarzwaelder-bote.de/lokales/schopfheim-wiesental/haldenhof-in-heubronn-keine-chance-mehr-fuer-den-haldenhof-78822875.html>
- Regierungspräsidium Freiburg, summit protection and overnight stays on the Belchen: <https://rpf.baden-wuerttemberg.de/>

The practical advice in the German source edition was checked on 12 October 2026. Personal impressions and the accommodation used at the time relate to the journey in 2016. Source websites are mostly in German.