



Photo: Jesper Secher Olesen

**Watershed and ridge** In Mid-Jutland, on the Jutlandic ridge, the sources of Denmark's two largest rivers, The River Guden and the River Skjern, are only a few hundred meters apart and run in their separate directions to the sea. In this same area Hærvejen, the ancient road that for millennia was the main route across Jutland, crosses the river valley. The landscape is dotted with oak copses, and the area is rich in cultural history – all set off by beautiful and changing natural surroundings.

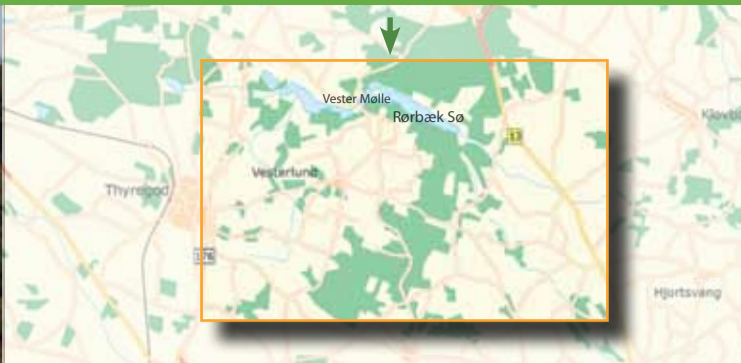
**Lakes in a glacial valley** The three long lakes Rørbæk Lake, Neder

Lake and Kul Lake are arranged like a string of pearls along the glacial valley created by the retreating ice sheets during the last ice age. Large isolated masses of ice left at the base of the river valley prevented meltwater from depositing materials in the holes which, today, form the long lakes. Two large hills: Kælder hill and Fåre hill stretch away from the lake's western end. They were formed by meltwater deposits from water that flowed through cracks in the ice that filled the entire lake basin. After the ice melted away the material from the cracks remained to form islands in the lake.

**Hærvejen is steeped in history** Between Hundshoved and Øster Nykirke is one of the oldest stretches of Hærvejen. The gravel track winds its way in and out of hills and valleys passed Viking burial mounds. In places, the passage of so many feet and wheels has, over time, created a sunken road that lies adjacent to the gravel track of today. They bear witness to the sheer volume of traffic that once followed the watershed along the Jutlandic ridge. The passage of centuries of ox carts and horse-drawn carriages have worn down the sandy soil. In peace time drovers drove their cattle this way towards Southern Jutland and in wartime armies used it. During the Middle Ages the road was also an important pilgrim route. Cattle drovers used to seek

lodgings at the ancient Hærvej inn Koutrupgård, which today is no longer an inn but houses Koutrupgård Nature Centre.

**Denmark's largest oak copse** Oak copses are a feature of the landscape in the area around the springs. Tinnet copse is one of the most well-known and, when combined with the other copses of varying sizes it's Denmark's largest area of oak copses. Some of them are fairy story material, with trees with twisted and bent trunks. This is particularly true of the Tinnet and Kollemorten copses. The oak copses are the remains of the original mid-Jutland forest. Tree felling across the centuries removed all other species of trees. Trees were coppiced – felled at the trunk and



allowed to regrow and that, combined with tree felling, livestock grazing, the west wind and poor soils have given the trees their characteristic growth patterns. The oak copses are living history, plus there are particular species of plant which thrive in the light and airy forest floor. Amongst other plants, there are lots of blueberry bushes in amongst the oaks.

**Forest management and protection** Almost the entire area around Rørbæk Lake, the springs and Hærvejsstrøget is protected by law, and large areas have been purchased by the Danish state. Today, the area is thus crisscrossed by rambler paths totalling 49 km of marked paths. Special efforts are made to preserve the attractive oak

copses and the open landscape. Self-seeding pine trees have spread in amongst the oaks as selective felling, forestry and livestock grazing have ceased. The unique copse environment thus needs management for it to remain. Legal protection places a duty on local authorities and the state to maintain the oak copses and keep the landscape open. In practice, this involves felling pines, birch and broom and reintroducing former management methods including selective felling and grazing. Sections of Koutrup and Kollemorten Copses are designated natural woodland areas and are unmanaged – and thus completely free of human interference.

**Rørbækgård**

The 13th Century Rørbækgård farm was on Kælderbanken (Cellar Hill). The farm burnt down during the Swedish wars and has since moved to its current position south of the lake. The mammoth stone cellar remains, however, and has given it's name to the hill.

**Water power**

Several mills have exploited the current in the upper reaches of the River Skjern and the River Guden. Most of these have not survived to the present day and all traces of them have all but disappeared, but a memory of them is retained in place names such as Stampemølle, Vester Mølle, Egholm Mølle etc. (mølle being

the Danish for mill).

**One of the country's first baths**

On the meadow in which the River Guden has its source the remains of old concrete foundations stick up in amongst the grass. They're what's left of the baths built in the 1930s which made use of the fresh spring water. A siphon pumped the spring water up and created a water park including swimming pools, and the area also featured a café on the hill. The baths were a great attraction, but closed following a bathing accident shortly after the Second World War.

Cover photo: Jesper Secher Olesen. Published by Naturstyrelsen, Midtjylland and Vejle, Hedensted and Ikast-Brande Municipalities, June 2011.



Contour map – the line marks the area protected by law



The watershed, just a few hundred meters from the sources of the River Skjern and the River Guden (ramblers route no. 7)



Oak copse and blueberries. The photo's central section: Gert Hougaard Rasmussen



The remains of Rørbækgård's stone cellar



Magrethediget



Rørbækgård. Foto: Hansen



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**Margrethe Dike -**

still recalls the words of farmhand Per Limkaster, who hissed at the king: "Don't you bloody well go stamping on my oats. No." The dike is no hindrance to travellers, but it was originally excavated to a depth of 2 meters with a bank of the same height. Giving a height difference from the bottom of the dike to the top of the bank of up to 4 meters. Frederik the 7th issued a preservation order protecting the dike in 1861, and attended the preservation ceremony personally – local legend

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**Pilgrimage to St. Peter's Spring** Slightly East of church Øster Nykirke there is a spring which, like the church, is dedicated to St. Peter. Their proximity to Hærvejen has influenced the history of both the spring and the church. Pilgrims travelled to the holy spring to sample its life-giving waters, and wayfarers and locals alike have taken strength from the spring water and the word of God as preached in the church. Finds of Iron Age paving and pottery show that the spring site has been visited for many, many years. Today the spring that was once so active is just a small still-water well.

**Flowers and red deer**

Oak copses and oak woodland, dry and wet heathland, meadows, grassland and marshland with

lakes and vigorous streams make the area an eldorado for both flora and fauna. In the oak copses there is a spring which, like the church, is dedicated to St. Peter. Their proximity to Hærvejen has influenced the history of both the spring and the church. Pilgrims travelled to the holy spring to sample its life-giving waters, and wayfarers and locals alike have taken strength from the spring water and the word of God as preached in the church. Finds of Iron Age paving and pottery show that the spring site has been visited for many, many years. Today the spring that was once so active is just a small still-water well.

**Birds**

The grassland is home to the red-backed shrike. It lives amongst the

thorny bushes where it catches flying insects, saving those it doesn't immediately consume for later on the bushes' thorns. The winchat is also a common site on grasslands and meadows. The mistle thrush, black woodpecker and raven breed in the area, and the water attracts many varieties of birds such as water sturling, kingfisher, osprey and common snipe. During the autumn and winter months, a number of swimming and diving ducks are attracted to Rørbæk Lake.

**Smooth newts and common spadefoot toads** are both amphibians whose populations are under threat, but they're still to be found in some of the water holes, and special efforts have been made to improve their habitats. Following the cleaning of existing water ho-

les and excavation of new ones coupled with the release of common spadefoot toad tadpoles, local numbers have risen rapidly.

**The aquatic environment of Rørbæk Lake** Rørbæk Lake is at the top of the water system. It's water quality is thus crucial to the water quality of downstream lakes: Neder Lake and Kul Lake. As it's surrounded by uncultivated areas, the waters of Rørbæk Lake have had a good chance of remaining clear and clean, and that's the way they were till as long ago as the 1960s. Since then, fertilizers from farming have polluted the lake and today the water is cloudy and algae flourish in the summer months.

**A helping hand**

More than 76 tonnes of fish – roach and bream – have been fished in Rørbæk Lake between 1994 and 2010 in an attempt to recreate the clear and pure water quality of former times. Surrounding farmland has also been purchased and taken out of use. At the start of the 2000's the lake started to show signs of improvement. The water became clearer and plants could, once more, grow on the lake floor. Unfortunately these positive developments seem to have gone into reverse. Vejle and Ikast-Brande Municipalities still fish roach and bream during March and April in order to reduce the quantity of plankton-eating fish, with aquatic plants still struggle to grow, and the water is still unclear. During the summer months the water often has a red hue. This is caused by

a poisonous red variety of algae which flourishes here and causes serious damage to the aquatic environment downstream of Rørbæk Lake.

**Roach and bream** eat the small animals that live off the algae. The more fish there are the less algae gets eaten. By fishing large quantities of roach and bream the hope is that the lake's natural balance can be restored.



**Out in the great outdoors**

A large network of 49 km of paths and a number of public areas with seating provide plenty of excellent opportunities to get closer to nature. There are 12 rambler's routes that start from the car parks in the spring area around Rørbæk Lake.

**Nature centre and visiting centre**

Koutrupgård Nature Centre is centrally located. The nature centre provides pupils from local schools in Vejle, Hedensted and Ikast-Brande with a chance to learn about the countryside and the centre also provides guided nature tours and other services. Close to Koutrup Wood there's a primitive camping area where Hærvejen's rambler, cyclists and horsemen/women can camp free of charge. In the former gravel pit there's also a shelter which

is available for booking by schools, boy scouts and other groups. Ballesbækgård Visitors Centre is located on the south side of Rørbæk Lake – there's a picnic area and barbecue and bonfire site, plus wheelchair accessible toilets and rambler paths. Right next door there's also a shelter which is available for booking by schools, boy scouts and other groups.

Public lavatories are available at the source of the River Guden, Koutrupgård, Ballesbækgård and Vester Mølle.

**Koutrupgård and Ballesbækgård** are owned and run by Naturstyrelsen Midtjylland. For further information see www.naturstyrelsen.dk/Lokal/Midtjylland/, tel. + 45 75 80 00 07.



Arnica. Photo all flowers: Biopix



Viper's grass



Goldenrod



St. John's Wort



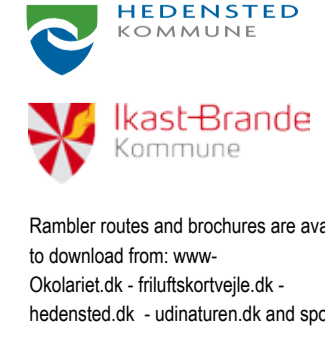
Sundew



Heath spotted orchid



Red-backed shrike. Photo: Eigil Odgaard



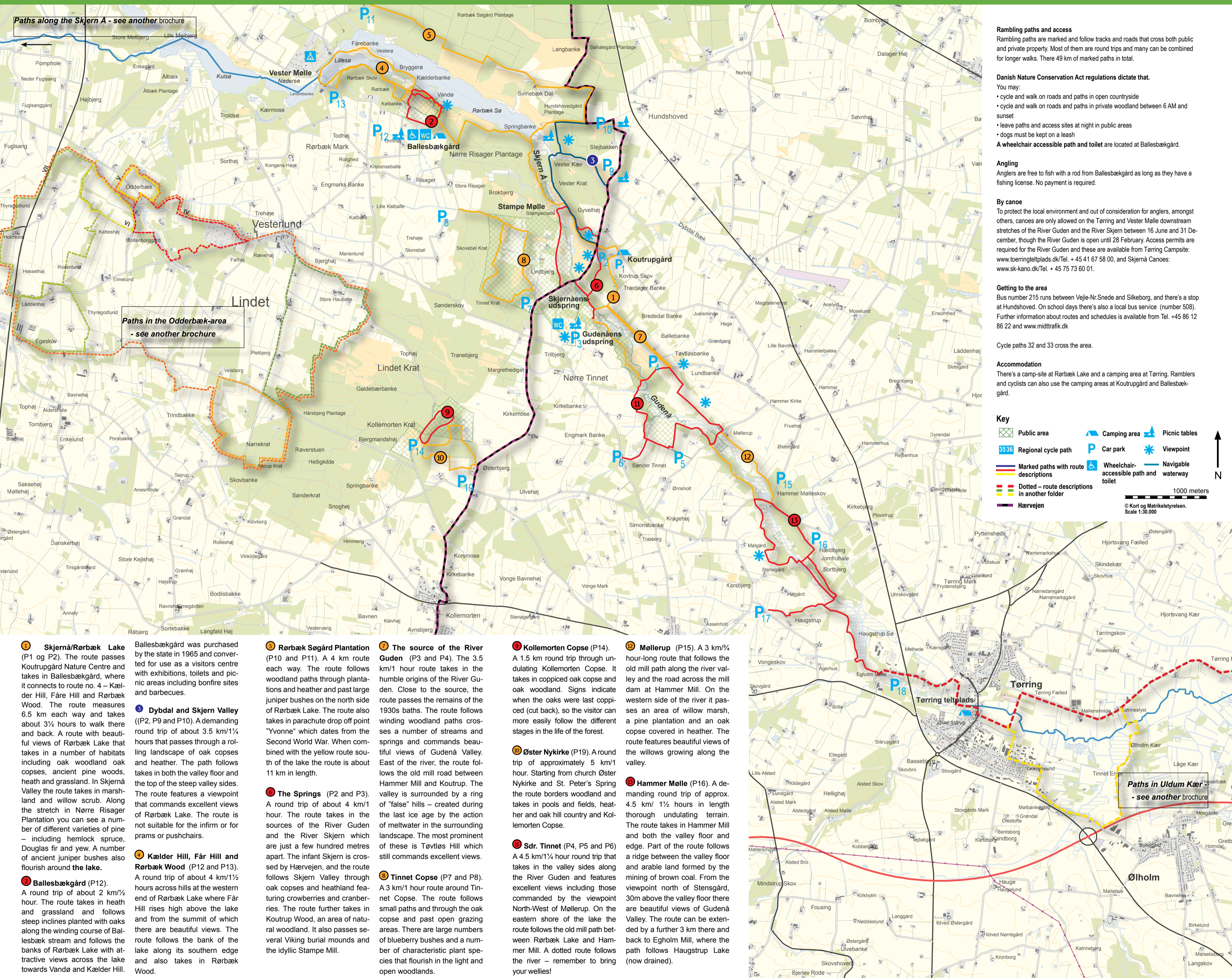
Sagebrush bird. Photo: Aage Matthisen



Further municipal information:  
Vejle: Tel. +45 76810000  
Hedensted: Tel. +45 79755000  
Ikast-Brande: Tel. +45 99604000



Rambler routes and brochures are available to download from: www-Okolariat.dk - friluftskortvejle.dk - hedensted.dk - udinaturen.dk and spor.dk



Paths along the Skjern A - see another brochure

Paths in the Odderbæk-area - see another brochure

Paths in Uldum Kær - see another brochure

**Rambling paths and access**  
 Rambling paths are marked and follow tracks and roads that cross both public and private property. Most of them are round trips and many can be combined for longer walks. There 49 km of marked paths in total.

**Danish Nature Conservation Act regulations dictate that.**  
 You may:

- cycle and walk on roads and paths in open countryside
- cycle and walk on roads and paths in private woodland between 6 AM and sunset
- leave paths and access sites at night in public areas
- dogs must be kept on a leash

A wheelchair accessible path and toilet are located at Ballesbækgård.

**Angling**  
 Anglers are free to fish with a rod from Ballesbækgård as long as they have a fishing license. No payment is required.

**By canoe**  
 To protect the local environment and out of consideration for anglers, amongst others, canoes are only allowed on the Tørring and Vester Mølle downstream stretches of the River Guden and the River Skjern between 16 June and 31 December, though the River Guden is open until 28 February. Access permits are required for the River Guden and these are available from Tørring Campsite: [www.toerringteltplads.dk](http://www.toerringteltplads.dk)/Tel. + 45 41 67 58 00, and Skjernå Canoes: [www.sk-kano.dk](http://www.sk-kano.dk)/Tel. + 45 75 73 60 01.

**Getting to the area**  
 Bus number 215 runs between Vejle-Nr.Sned and Silkeborg, and there's a stop at Hundshoved. On school days there's also a local bus service (number 508). Further information about routes and schedules is available from Tel. +45 86 12 86 22 and [www.midtrafik.dk](http://www.midtrafik.dk)

Cycle paths 32 and 33 cross the area.

**Accommodation**  
 There's a camp-site at Rørbæk Lake and a camping area at Tørring. Ramblers and cyclists can also use the camping areas at Koutrupgård and Ballesbækgård.

**Key**

	Public area		Camping area		Picnic tables
	Regional cycle path		Car park		Viewpoint
	Marked paths with route descriptions		Wheelchair-accessible path and toilet		Navigable waterway
	Dotted - route descriptions in another folder				
	Hærvejen				

1000 meters  
 © Kort og Matrikelstyrelsen. Scale 1:30.000

**1 Skjernå/Rørbæk Lake** (P1 and P2). The route passes Koutrupgård Nature Centre and takes in Ballesbækgård, where it connects to route no. 4 – Kælder Hill, Fåre Hill and Rørbæk Wood. The route measures 6.5 km each way and takes about 3½ hours to walk there and back. A route with beautiful views of Rørbæk Lake that takes in a number of habitats including oak woodland oak copses, ancient pine woods, heath and grassland. In Skjernå Valley the route takes in marshland and willow scrub. Along the winding course of Ballesbæk stream and follows the banks of Rørbæk Lake with attractive views across the lake towards Vandø and Kælder Hill.

Ballesbækgård was purchased by the state in 1965 and converted for use as a visitors centre with exhibitions, toilets and picnic areas including bonfire sites and barbecues.

**3 Dybdal and Skjern Valley** (P2, P9 and P10). A demanding round trip of about 3.5 km/1¼ hours that passes through a rolling landscape of oak copses and heather. The path follows takes in both the valley floor and the top of the steep valley sides. The route features a viewpoint that commands excellent views of Rørbæk Lake. The route is not suitable for the infirm or for prams or pushchairs.

**4 Kælder Hill, Får Hill and Rørbæk Wood** (P12 and P13). A round trip of about 4 km/1½ hours across hills at the western end of Rørbæk Lake where Får Hill rises high above the lake and from the summit of which there are beautiful views. The route follows the bank of the lake along its southern edge and also takes in Rørbæk Wood.

**5 Rørbæk Søgård Plantation** (P10 and P11). A 4 km route each way. The route follows the woodland paths through plantations and heather and past large juniper bushes on the north side of Rørbæk Lake. The route also takes in parachute drop off point "Yvonne" which dates from the Second World War. When combined with the yellow route south of the lake the route is about 11 km in length.

**6 The Springs** (P2 and P3). A round trip of about 4 km/1 hour. The route takes in the sources of the River Guden and the River Skjern which are just a few hundred metres apart. The infant Skjern is crossed by Hærvejen, and the route follows Skjern Valley through oak copses and heathland featuring crowberries and cranberries. The route further takes in Koutrup Wood, an area of natural woodland. It also passes several Viking burial mounds and the idyllic Stampe Mill.

**7 The source of the River Guden** (P3 and P4). The 3.5 km/1 hour route takes in the humble origins of the River Guden. Close to the source, the route passes the remains of the 1930s baths. The route follows winding woodland paths crosses a number of streams and springs and commands beautiful views of Gudenå Valley. East of the river, the route follows the old mill road between Hammer Mill and Koutrup. The valley is surrounded by a ring of "false" hills – created during the last ice age by the action of meltwater in the surrounding landscape. The most prominent of these is Tøvtløs Hill which still commands excellent views.

**8 Tinnet Copse** (P7 and P8). A 3 km/1 hour route around Tinnet Copse. The route follows small paths and through the oak copse and past open grazing areas. There are large numbers of blueberry bushes and a number of characteristic plant species that flourish in the light and open woodlands.

**9 Kollemorten Copse** (P14). A 1.5 km round trip through undulating Kollemorten Copse. It takes in coppiced oak copse and oak woodland. Signs indicate when the oaks were last coppiced (cut back), so the visitor can more easily follow the different stages in the life of the forest.

**10 Øster Nykirke** (P19). A round trip of approximately 5 km/1 hour. Starting from church Øster Nykirke and St. Peter's Spring the route borders woodland and takes in pools and fields, heather and oak hill country and Kollemorten Copse.

**11 Sdr. Tinnet** (P4, P5 and P6) A 4.5 km/1¼ hour round trip that takes in the valley sides along the River Guden and features excellent views including those commanded by the viewpoint North-West of Møllerup. On the eastern shore of the lake the route follows the old mill path between Rørbæk Lake and Hammer Mill. A dotted route follows the river – remember to bring your wellies!

**12 Møllerup** (P15). A 3 km/¾ hour-long route that follows the old mill path along the river valley and the road across the mill dam at Hammer Mill. On the western side of the river it passes an area of willow marsh, a pine plantation and an oak copse covered in heather. The route features beautiful views of the willows growing along the valley.

**13 Hammer Mølle** (P16). A demanding round trip of approx. 4.5 km/ 1½ hours in length through undulating terrain. The route takes in Hammer Mill and both the valley floor and edge. Part of the route follows a ridge between the valley floor and arable land formed by the mining of brown coal. From the viewpoint north of Stensgård, 30m above the valley floor there are beautiful views of Gudenå Valley. The route can be extended by a further 3 km there and back to Egholm Mill, where the path follows Haugstrup Lake (now drained).

**14 Tørring teltplads** (P17). A 1.5 km round trip through the town of Tørring. The route follows the old mill path between Rørbæk Lake and Hammer Mill. A dotted route follows the river – remember to bring your wellies!

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