

Exploring Down-Hill & Single Tracks in Belgium



By Ingrid Hernes and Cathrine Keyser

Who could have expected that Belgium, well known for road biking and famous rides in the spring, also would be an El Dorado for all-mountain biking?

When the corona-virus invaded Europe, border-crossings were banned and city walks at the weekend were not fun anymore because of the closed shops and cafes – therefore we had to turn to outdoor activities. Riding along nice graveled roads in the Belgian countryside and small tracks covered by leaves is a nice way of exploring the more hidden parts of Belgium.

The Ardennes, with its vast network of cycling routes and trails, Houffalize and La Roche-en-Ardenne are the ideal destination for cyclists and mountain bikers. In this area there are several marked routes all starting in the centre of the village and then you can follow the signposted routes until you are back where you started, leaving behind several meters of elevation which challenges both your strength and courage. Nevertheless, it might be a good idea to have additional means like a map, either as a hardcopy or as an app on your mobile device. The tourist offices in the popular cycling areas provide maps.

In Belgium you have the cycling node network you can find on **vhello.be**. This is nice for exploring on hybrid or gravel bikes, but for mountain biking you might look for more challenges like single tracks. And these you can find following hiking routes. In the Flemish part of Belgium, there is a similar hiking node network as the one you can find on **vhello.be** and this is perfect for a ride in the countryside. But be

aware, even if it is easy to ride along the wide trails in the area of Groenendael between Waterloo and Brussels, there are a lot of people walking.

It might be better to move into the more rural areas. Did you know it is possible to walk from Amsterdam to Paris following one route? Or that Europe has a pattern of long-distance hiking routes? The Grande Randonnée (French), Grote Routepaden or Lange-afstand-wandelpaden (Dutch), Grande Rota (Portuguese) or Gran Recorrido (Spanish) is a network of long-distance footpaths in Europe, mostly in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain. You can download the routes from the internet or buy a guide book covering part of the route. We have spent several Sundays on the GR12, in the area of Abbaye D'Aulne, Phillippeville, Walcourt and Pry.

Another helpful guide is an app named Komoot. (There might be other apps too providing similar functionality). For a small fee, you will have access to many maps in Europe that you can download to your phone or using a Garmin computer. Here you can find routes people have explored and uploaded and you can search for region, city, distance and challenge. In Komoot you can find a route for all levels and for us, the weekend starts on Friday afternoon looking for a new route to follow on Saturday or Sunday.

What kind of bike do I need to do the adventure? A full-suspension makes most fun, but a hard tail mountain bike is good enough, but then you should pay a little attention to the route description.

**So, what are you waiting for?
Get out there and explore!!**

