



Discovery Map  
around and about the

# Pömmelte

# Ring Sanctuary

# Pömmelte ✨ & Schönebeck

This Discovery Map takes you to the south-eastern part of the Magdeburg Börde where a more than 4,000-year-old sacred landscape with the ring sanctuaries of Pömmelte and Schönebeck was discovered. Characteristic for the region are the extensive lands used for farming on the fertile black earth soils, which make the area one of the most sought-after agrarian locations in the world. The route leads you on mostly rural lanes past many lakes created by old and recent gravel and sand extraction whose shorelines today are used as breeding grounds by numerous species of birds. Humans on the other hand are invited to go fishing and swimming. Furthermore, the UNESCO Middle Elbe Biosphere Reserve offers an outstanding natural experience which you can comfortably enjoy from the Elbe Cycle Route.

The Elbe plain south-east of Magdeburg must have had a special meaning for people in the period between 2400 and 1900 BC. Here they built two circular ditched enclosures on a sandy valley island, known today as Pömmelte Ring Sanctuary and Schönebeck Ring Sanctuary – both were within sight of one another. Circular ditched enclosures consist of ditches, posts, or palisades arranged in concentric rings. The Pömmelte and Schönebeck enclosures were discovered from the air in 1991. To this day, the region around the two monuments is being investigated jointly by the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg, the University of Southampton, and the State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology Saxony-Anhalt. The research is funded by the Salzland district.

Gommern

Randau-  
Calenberge

UNESCO  
Biosphere Reserve  
Elbe River Landscape

Bad Salzelmen

Schönebeck

Pömmelte

Pömmelte  
Ring Sanctuary

Magdeburg  
23 km

Elbenauten Straße

Elbe river

Barby  
5.1 km

6

5

4

3

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A



# ... Pömmelte Cycle tour

32 km, altitude difference 50 Hm, duration ca. 2 hours

The trip begins and ends at the car park at the Pömmelte Ring Sanctuary.

- 1 Pömmelte Ring Sanctuary    
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- 3 Salzland Museum Schönebeck  
- 4 Graduation Works Solepark Bad Salzelmen 
- 5 Elbe Cycle Route and UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Elbe River Landscape 
- A Scenic viewpoint 
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## Directions

The Ring Sanctuary in Pömmelte-Zackmünde can be reached by car from the A14 Schönebeck junction via the B246a in the direction of Schönebeck/Gommern. At the second roundabout (after about 11 km on the B246a) take the first exit towards Barby. After 1.9 km, in Zackmünde turn right (airfield), follow the road, after 1.5 km turn left into the car park at the ring sanctuary. Free parking is available directly at the ring sanctuary.



# Pömmelte



## 1 Pömmelte Ring Sanctuary

In the late 3rd millennium BC, at the transition from the Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age, this ring sanctuary was the sacred centre of the region. The monumental complex was used for more than 250 years. It is comparable in size, structure, and function to Stonehenge in England, the only difference being that it is made of wood. That is why it is also dubbed the “German Stonehenge”. The complex was built on the banks of the Elbe river by the so-called Bell Beaker people and the subsequent Únětice culture. When choosing a site, they orientated themselves by the places that were sacred to their ancestors. Proof of this is a small rectangular ditched structure, which is interpreted as a sanctuary of the Corded Ware culture and is four to five centuries older.

The Pömmelte Ring Sanctuary has already been completely excavated and then reconstructed at the original site in the Salzland district, where you can experience it today. From the 9 metre high platform you have a wonderful view over the complex structure with a diameter of 115 metres. The ring sanctuary was built from thousands of tree trunks that form five concentric circles of posts. They are encircled by earthen walls and ditches. All structures could be verified during the excavations. Since all organic elements – especially the wood – have decayed, the above ground design is based on colours and patterns from some 4,000 years ago and thus offers clues as to its original appearance.

## Sacrificial and Ritual Acts

The finds in the ring sanctuary provide insights into the complex rituals and sacrificial acts at the time. This is evidenced by 29 shaft pits with offerings, some of which are now marked by grey concrete slabs. The pits were not filled simultaneously. Decades passed between individual depositions and they always followed a similar pattern, which suggests recurring rituals. Smashed ceramic vessels, grinding stones, flint arrowheads, stone axes, and animal bones were found in the shaft pits. From this it can be concluded that when the deposition events took place, grain was ground to bake bread and cattle were slaughtered and then consumed. The vast amount of broken drinking and storage vessels indicate the great importance of drinking rites and sacrifices.

Furthermore, bones of children, adolescents, and women were recovered from the shafts. It remains unclear whether they were sacrificed or whether the injuries sustained are derived from other incidents. In contrast to these are 13 regular burials of men in the eastern half of the complex. It is believed that these were people of special social status who were privileged to be buried near the holy ground. The ring sanctuary was abandoned around 2050 BC.

However, the people of the Early Bronze Age did not simply let the cult site fall into disrepair, but deliberately dismantled it: They pulled out the wooden posts and refilled the pits and ditches. Then they burnt the old wood and filled the ashes into the ditch. To finish, they sealed individual post holes with final offerings.

## Astronomy

As with the Nebra Sky Disc, there is evidence for an astronomical reference of the Pömmelte Ring Sanctuary. The two main entrances to the complex are orientated towards the points of sunrise and sunset at the mid-quarter festivals celebrated at the transitions between seasons, the sowing and harvesting, as well as the commemoration of the dead. The mid-quarter festivals were much later also celebrated by the Celts: Imbolc is now synonymous with Candlemas on 2nd February. Beltane, the feast to mark the beginning of summer, corresponds to May Day. Lughnasadh marked the beginning of harvest in August. Samhain is today most likely to be equated with All Saints' Day, Remembrance Sunday, or Halloween.

## Settlement and House Features

In the immediate vicinity of the ring sanctuary a settlement existed with up to now at least 70 houses. Most of them date from between 2200 and 1900 BC and are assigned to the Únětice culture. This Early Bronze Age culture (ca. 2200–1500 BC) was a highly structured society with an impressive hierarchy, which was established here for the first time in Middle Germany. It was they who created the Nebra Sky Disc (deposited around 1600 BC).

The settlement at the Pömmelte Ring Sanctuary is one of the largest of its time in all of Central and Northern Europe. The first houses were built approximately one century after the construction of the ring sanctuary.

The typical house at Pömmelte was a rectangular post construction at least 20 metres in length with wattle walls and a floor area of 80 to 360 m<sup>2</sup>. After the ring sanctuary was abandoned, the settlement continued to exist for at least another 100 years as far as we know today – the excavations are ongoing.

# Schönebeck



## 2 Schönebeck Ring Sanctuary

The neighbouring ring sanctuary of Schönebeck (2150 to 1800 BC) ca. 1.4 km away, is of similar shape and importance. This circular ditched enclosure, like the Pömmelte complex, consisted of several concentric rings of posts, palisades, and ditches, and with a diameter of 80 metres was slightly smaller. The ring sanctuary in Schönebeck was built at a time when the

Pömmelte complex was still in use. The Schönebeck Ring Sanctuary, however, still existed for about two centuries after the complex in Pömmelte had already lost its function as the ritual centre of the region. The remarkable thing about Schönebeck is precisely what was missing: there were apparently no shaft pits, arrowheads, pottery depositions, or graves and, above all, no sacrifices – neither of animals nor of humans. The few depositions include a stone tool and a so-called pillow stone. The latter is a flat stone that was used to forge copper and bronze objects. The lack of sacrifices and the deposited stone tools indicate a fundamental change in ritual practice at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age, which is associated with the emergence of a ruling elite at the time of the Únětice culture. This elite not only forged the bronze Nebra Sky Disc, but also introduced a new order into the communal life in this world and the hereafter. In this regime they no longer had to legitimise their power through rituals and sacrifices, because as charismatic rulers they were in direct contact with the realm of the gods.

### **3 Salzland Museum**

The Salzland Museum in Schönebeck dedicates its own small exhibition area to the Pömmelte Ring Sanctuary. Here selected original finds from the complex and its surrounding area are presented and explained with the aid of media stations and models. Take your time to explore the museum's fascinating permanent exhibitions "Salzspu(e)ren" (Trac(k)ing Salt) and "LebensStröme" (Currents of Life), which deal with historical salt production and inland navigation.

## **Bad Salzelmen**

### **4 Graduation Works Solepark Bad Salzelmen**

In Bad Salzelmen, a district of the town of Schönebeck, you can discover stories about salt and the healing power of natural brine, and treat yourself to a breather. This is the oldest saline health resort in Germany, with a spa tradition spanning more than 200 years. In the years 1865/66 a landscape park was created by the well-known landscape architect Peter Joseph Lenné. This park area includes the "Solequell" health and recreation bath, the "Kunsthof Bad Salzelmen" exhibition complex, the Dr. Tolberg Hall, the spa centre Lindenbad and the graduation works. The graduation works, restored according to the historical model, can be visited and used as an open-air inhalatorium. In the environment of graduation towers a mix of water and salt is in the air similar to natural seaside inhalation. Salt was important in this region already in prehistoric times. From the Early Bronze Age onwards, large quantities of brine boiling vessels from the Únětice culture document extensive salt production.

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## **Elbe Cycle Route and UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Elbe River Landscape**

The environs directly along the Elbe are ideal for a leisurely bicycle trip. The Elbe Cycle Route is Germany's most popular long-distance cycle route. The middle section between Lutherstadt Wittenberg, the state capital Magdeburg, and the old Hanseatic towns of Tangermünde and Havelberg is about 260 km long. Here you find the Middle Elbe Biosphere Reserve, a part of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Elbe River Landscape, with the largest contiguous alluvial forest complex in Europe. Among others, it is home to the largest rodent on our continent, the Elbe beaver.

## **Randau-Calenberge**

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### **Randau Stone Age Village**

In the Stone Age village of Randau you can find reconstructed houses from different times and learn about how people lived since the Stone Age. Regular guided tours and workshops illustrate the challenges of everyday life in an exciting way and make this place a worthwhile destination for an outing, especially for families and children.

## **Gommern**



### **Princely Grave of Gommern (Wahlitz)**

At Gommern the rich grave of a Germanic prince was discovered. Even though a detour to the pretty place is worthwhile, nothing can be seen of the princely grave today. Since 2019 the spectacular finds are part of the permanent exhibition of the State Museum of Prehistory in Halle (Saale). The princely burial (ca. AD 280) is the richest Germanic grave of Late Antiquity in Germany to date. The body was laid out in an underground wooden chamber with splendid clothing and status symbols. The burial chamber was used for an impressive staging: Personal items and magnificent drinking utensils testify to the wealth and high social standing of the deceased. In addition, the objects document an extensive trading network at that time. There are valuable Roman imports, but also finds proving relationships with other Germanic tribes. A wooden shield is of particular importance. On it paint residues are preserved which demonstrate the richness of colours in Antiquity and today are considered to be the oldest surviving "panel painting" in Middle Germany.



Pömmelte

Halle (Saale)

Langeneichstädt

Nebra

Goseck

**Salzlandmuseum**

Pfännerstraße 41

39218 Schönebeck (Elbe)

03471 684 624410

[www.museum.salzlandkreis.de](http://www.museum.salzlandkreis.de)

**Pömmelte Ring Sanctuary**

51°59'49.8"N 11°48'01.0"E

The Sky Paths in Saxony-Anhalt combine five extraordinary archaeological locations around the Nebra Sky Disc. They invite you on a journey into millennia long past and open up new vistas into the sky.

[www.emuseum-himmelswege.com](http://www.emuseum-himmelswege.com)



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