

The Electoral “Thiergarten” of Arnsberg



The cultural-historical route in the electoral “Thiergarten” of Arnsberg is an experience for all the senses. Here the strollers and hikers can not only relish the fascination of the nature, They can at the same time embark on a journey through more than 800 years of Arnsberg and Sauerland history.

Many seemingly insignificant relics tell stories of the manifold uses of the forest through the centuries: be it the bustle of the old “Thiergarten” of the Cologne Electors, or traces of mining activities, or charcoal burning, and long forgotten forest uses: e.g. the fattening of pigs. Immerse yourself in the open history book of a very special forest landscape.

Feel invited to enter the archive of the landscape of the forest. At more than 40 “experimentation stations” past becomes visible again and something seemingly insignificant appears in a new light.

Walking along the cultural-historical route you should not expect to come across something like a zoo or a particular park or gardens. The name “Electoral Thiergarten” (deer park) is only reminiscent of what once used to exist here. The “Thiergarten” of Arnsberg used to be a fenced in area for the preservation, observation, and especially for the easy killing of deer. Such “Thiergärten” were created and laid out in our region especially in Baroque times, usually near royal or princely residences.

Between 1653 and 1656 Elector Maximilian Heinrich of Bavaria – at the time the ruler of the Duchy of Westphalia and its Capital Arnsberg – had the “Thiergarten” built: a design not only meant for the “amusement and recreation” of the elector after having worn the “heavy burden of government”, but also “for the benefit of our feudal lands”.

But the Elector’s pleasure also meant problems and suffering for the common man: the exaggerated caring of the deer and luxuriant hunting pomp caused great damage in fields and meadows and in addition to that statute labour was an extra burden.

The “Thiergarten” of Arnsberg covered the considerable area of 250 hectares. In addition to the Elector’s own woodland further land was acquired from the town of Arnsberg, especially parts of the “Rüdenberg” (old castle). In this way a grand deer park came into existence: surrounded by a ditch, walls, and fences, a great wildlife park with large populations of oaks and beeches, wild fruit trees, rich grassy fields, lively brooks and ponds had come into being: A unique and valuable example of a landscape of nature and culture.

A lot of evidence from electoral times can clearly be found and seen in the woods round “Obereimer” still today. On either side of the route we can find relics of bygone times. Open your eyes and your mind and seemingly insignificant things will tell exiting stories.

(Translation: Klaus Diener)