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4014664 GB, 12.2020

“The European Community and the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark have participated in the financing of this project.”

# The Als Sound trail

## The hiker's route from Alsion to Ballebro



### Along the coast – or the country road?

When travelling between Snogbæk Nederby and Ballegaard, you must choose between taking the coastal path or turning inland and taking a busier road.

The coastal route includes a beach which is 2.8 km long. The route is challenging and difficult in places, due to branches and tree trunks. On the other hand, there is plenty of opportunity for games and exercise along this demanding stretch.

If you follow the country road, it takes you close to Ballegaard Manor, with its protected farmhouse dating from 1771. From the road you can see a new stone wall some 220 metres long, which is home to many reptiles and small animals. The area around Ballegaard has a large population of bats; the large manor hall at Ballegaard regularly has bats flying inside. At least four species of bat have been observed: the serotine bat, the common pipistrelle, the soprano pipistrelle, and Daubenton's bat.



### Facts about Alssund

It's just 160 metres between Als and Jutland across Alssund's narrowest stretch at Sønderborg Castle. Alssund is up to 14 metres deep. The Christian X bridge is opened each year for approx. 22,000 ships – not including vessels less than five metres tall that can sail under the old bridge.

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### Alssundstien

Alssundstien runs alongside the beautiful strait of Alssund from Alsion to Ballebro. Alssundstien is 17 km long and follows Nydamstien (the Nydam trail) for part of the route. The route offers a varied journey along the coast and also goes through woodlands and small, rural villages.

Along Alssundstien there is a rich selection of animal and bird life – not least in the many hedgerows. A walk along Alssundstien is also a walk in the footsteps of history: from the early Iron Age inhabitants, via nobility and lords of the manor, to the war in 1864.

### Alsion

At Alsion, education, research and culture have been assembled under one roof. This unique building of 29,422m<sup>2</sup> was established in the period 2004-2007. Alsion is home to the University of Southern Denmark, a research park, private businesses, a café and Sønderjyllands Symphony Orchestra in one of the best acoustic concert halls for classical music in Europe. In 2019 a new wing of 3,340m<sup>2</sup> was built to house the Centre for Industrial Electronics. The total area today is 32,762m<sup>2</sup>.

In front of Alsion towards Alssund you can see the sculpture Alssund Pavilion, which was created by the famous Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson. From here there are views of Sønderborg's eastern harbour front, where the old industrial harbour is also being transformed into a lively urban area with exciting architecture and many activities. It is the world-renowned architect Frank Gehry (whose works include the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao) who has developed the plan for Sønderborg's new harbour front.



### Sandbjerg Manor

Sandbjerg Manor was founded by Duke Hans the Younger just after he took over Sønderborg Castle in 1571. Duke Hans was notorious for his harsh treatment of peasants at the manor. He is reported to have shot a man for collecting firewood on the manor grounds, and rumours say that he caused seven peasants to be hanged for having stolen rotten, discarded meat from the manor.

In 1673, Sandbjerg Manor was taken over by the Reventlow family, who in 1788 commissioned a palace to be built on the headland facing Alssund. Sandbjerg remained in family ownership until the end of the 1920s after which it was used for many purposes, including as a high school, a housekeeping school and horse stud farm. In 1929 Sandbjerg Manor was bought by barrister Knud Dahl and his wife Ellen. Ellen Dahl was the sister of Karen Blixen, and both Ellen and her husband were known for their deep commitment to the problems of the border country.

Following her husband's death, Ellen Dahl opened Sandbjerg Manor to cultural personalities and scientists. In 1954 she gifted the manor to Aarhus University, which today uses the buildings as a venue for training courses.

### Sottrup Forest

Sottrup Forest is a coastal forest of mixed growth. It consists of both mature beech trees with a dense carpet of anemone blossom in the spring, boggy areas with ash and pools of water, dense undergrowth and open arable land with hedgerows.

One can often see signs of badgers on the path, and in the ditch alongside the path you can see a huge badger sett.



In the forest there are nesting boxes for goosander, which naturally prefer to nest in hollow trees. These boxes have also proved to be popular with tawny owls. It's worth keeping your eyes peeled, because the forest also boasts the white butterbur. This plant grows in several locations in the local area, but is rare elsewhere in Denmark.

### Reconstruction of The Nydam Boat and Iron Age boathouse

During the excavation of Nydam marsh three large boats and a good many ancient relics dating from 200-550 CE were found in 1863. Due to the outbreak of war in 1864, the excavations were halted; two of the boats and many artefacts were lost during the war. The remaining boat was brought in secret to Korsør, but as part of the peace settlement it had to be relinquished to Kiel in 1868, together with a number of artefacts from the marsh. Today, therefore, both the boat and the archaeological finds are on display at Gottorp Castle in Schleswig.

In close collaboration with the Viking Museum in Roskilde, the Nydam Boat Lodge at Sottrup Forest has built a reconstruction of the 23.7 metre-long boat. Like the original Nydam Boat, the reconstructed Nydam Tveir has neither mast nor sails, and therefore must be rowed by a crew of 30. In the winter season, the boat is laid up in a beautifully reconstructed Iron Age naust (boathouse) at the water's edge by Sottrup Forest. The building is 25 metres in length and built according to the Norwegian pattern. At the same time, a 100 metre-long mooring bridge was built; this is where Nydam Tveir is berthed in the summer months when it is not on its voyages elsewhere.



### The war in 1864 and Snogbæk Hage

Alssundstien takes you past many traces of the 1864 war, including the protected mass graves of soldiers, boat slipways and cannon positions along the coast, plus the remains of column marks in the oldest trees. The Prussian army lay in bivouacs in Sottrup Forest, while the palace at Sandbjerg Manor was used as headquarters. On the other side of Alssund strait was the Danish army. At 2 a.m. on the night of 29 June 1864, Sandbjerg's large clock signalled the invasion. The first assault wave consisted of 2500 Prussian soldiers in 163 boats, which sailed under cover of darkness across the narrow strait of Alssund.

The northernmost of the Prussian batteries lay at Snogbæk Hage. But, unlike the other batteries, the battery at Snogbæk Hage was not hidden in the forest. Therefore, the boats had to be launched further to the east at Ballebro and pass by Snogbæk Hage in order to join the attacking forces. The element of surprise was crucial to the success of the operation, so not even the Prussian coastguard officer at Snogbæk Hage was given notice of the coming invasion.

When 42 boats came floating by, the coastguard officer raised the alarm and opened fire. He thought it was the Danish army in the process of landing troops. In this way, the Prussian invasion could have been discovered, but quite by chance, it wasn't. The Danes thought it was a Danish pilot boat that was being fired upon by the coastguard officer.

- In the battery at Snogbæk Hage, there were 16 cannons
- It is roughly one kilometre across Alssund from the battery at Snogbæk Hage to the northern coast of Arnkil
- In the battle for Als a total of 3,148 Danish soldiers were killed, maimed or taken prisoner, while the equivalent Prussian losses amounted to 372 men