



The logo 'Leading Quality Trails - Best of Europe' is used on national as well as international trails. Certification is only available for complete trails. Presently, it is a distance of at least 50 km with three daily stages. Exceptions to the rule are the European Long Distance routes. They can be certified in part as long as the minimum length is given.



How is it possible to ensure this?
Through the creation of a system of assessment that takes into account the needs of walkers!

Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe

The rating system 'Leading Quality Trails - Best of Europe' considers the attractiveness of routes measurable and guarantees a high quality walking experience. Such a system has to capture the complexity of different landscapes, infrastructures and route character in comparable dimensions. To allow for the variety and uniqueness of the landscapes and walking routes in the different regions of Europe, the criteria system has been constructed with maximum flexibility. It uses the years of practical experience in countries that already use quality criteria to plan and upgrade walking trails.

With the "Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe", the ERA sets a European standard bringing multiple uses for walking tourism:

- giving the walking tourist an overview and decision aid
- giving regard to ecology and nature preservation
- involvement of all affected parties in the quality process
- trained and competent trail experts in the area e.g. from walking groups, wildlife reserves and tourism
- competitive edge for the walking region in marketing

Step by step to Leading Quality Trails Best of Europe



- 1. Assessment** Every interested body (Municipality, walking group etc.) submits the ERA to start the quality process.
- 2. The ERA offers a 2 day (or more) workshop** to assess the route in the region.
- 3. The invited experts** (after the discussion) for the quality assessment are the trail and assess them on the basis of their strengths and weakness). This also (depending on the quality of the route) can be identified quickly and possibilities for upgrades can be found.
- 4. When the route fulfills the 'Quality trail' criteria, an application for certification can be applied for with the ERA.**
- 5. The data gathered on the route are independently assessed and analysed by the ERA. Qualified ERA personnel carry out spot checks on the route body.**
- 6. When the results of the checks are positive, the route gets the certification 'Leading Quality Trails' for the period of 3 years. After this time, the quality of the route has to be tested again. The quality mark can be used to promote nature and on the internet to market the walking route.**



The ERA appointed the Dutchman Wim van der Meulen as the implementation of the Leading Quality Trails - Best of Europe.

Sustainability

- Nature conservation** The proposer confirms that the route of the walking trail complies with all environmental protection regulations (particularly in sensitive areas like natural reserves, biotopes, etc.).
- Maintenance** The proposer guarantees for the complete period of use of the certification that maintenance of the trail - surface and furniture - is ensured. The ongoing regular inspections and care has to be documented and sent to the ERA. The fundamental principles of ERA way marking apply (Bechtyné/Czech Republic, 2004).
- Validity period** The certification period starts with the handing over of the certificate and runs for 3 years.
- Co-operation** All affected interest groups that are part of the quality process in the trail region have to be involved by the proposers from the very start. Interested parties can include forest services, NPWS, tourism groups, mountaineering organisations, walking clubs, land owners, local authorities and communities.

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Leading Quality Trails Best of Europe

SPECIAL QUALITY CERTIFICATION FOR WALKING TRAILS. WALKING IS VERY POPULAR. ALL OVER EUROPE MORE AND MORE PEOPLE USE THEIR BOOT LACES DURING THEIR HOLIDAYS AND LEISURE TIME. AND DISCOVER A VARIETY OF NATURAL BEAUTIES ON FOOT. THE SPECIAL QUALITY CERTIFICATE OF LEADING QUALITY TRAILS – BEST OF EUROPE OFFERS A TRANSPARENT SYSTEM OF CRITERIA FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF TRAIL QUALITY THROUGHOUT EUROPE.



www.leading-quality-trails.eu



Leading Quality Trails Best of Europe



Choice and core criteria – an overview...

A walking route is examined on three levels: 4km sections (c. ca. 1 hour walking time), daily stages, overall length of route. The multi-dimensional assessment assures that the route is attractive throughout, offering the walking tourist the most variety possible. Every 4km section will be assessed and judged by using the following 23 criteria. To achieve full accreditation each 4km section must achieve 11 points for the choice criteria. Throughout the overall length and all daily stages all core criteria must be met.

choice criteria – based on 4km sections

| | trail surface format | limit |
|-----|---|--|
| 1. | natural trails natural, stone-engineered paths without artificial fortification, easy walking | at least 1,000 m counts double over 2,000 m |
| 2. | fortified trails paths with artificial non-sealed surfaces | without limit |
| 3. | uneven but passable trails e.g. rough, loose stone/boulder cover, heavily eroded paths | maximum 300 m |
| 4. | sealed surfaces tarmac, concrete, pavement as tread way | maximum 500 m |
| 5. | paths trail width less than 1m | altogether at least 500 m counts double over 1,500 m |
| 5.1 | natural paths: non-engineered paths | |
| 5.2 | safety secured paths: paths that have to be fortified for safety reasons | |
| 6. | on busy roads including unsecured crossings | maximum 50 m |
| 7. | alongside busy roads up to a distance of one lane to the side of the road | maximum 300 m |
| | trail routing system/visitor guiding | limit |
| 8. | marking recognition of the national marking system, as long as they comply with the fundamental principles of ECA way marking (Běchyně/ Czech Republic, 2004) | complete, without gaps, correctly aligned and without errors |
| 9. | signposting with details of destination, direction, distance or time as well as number of trail identification mark | at least 2 |
| 10. | network integration with other walking trails | at least 2 |
| | nature/landscape | limit |
| 11. | variety distinctly different landscape formations | at least 3 |
| 12. | natural quietness no machine or traffic noises | at least 1,000 m continuous |
| 13. | attractive natural landscapes special biotopes or geotopes, impressive forests, coastal landscapes, rock formations, horticultural areas, etc. | at least 1 (more counts double) |
| 14. | natural waters e.g. natural wells, streams, rivers, lakes, bogs, etc. | at least 1 (more counts double) |
| 15. | points of natural beauty e.g. summits, gorges, ravines, rocks, caves, waterfalls, natural heritage sites | at least 1 (more counts double) |
| 16. | impressive panoramas continuous free view (at least 3 years guaranteed) min. 45 degree opening and 2,000 m visibility | at least 1 (more counts double) |

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core criteria – based on daily stages

| | core criteria | characteristic |
|---|---|--|
| safety | | on all daily stages the safety regulations/requirements have to be in accordance with national law/legal framework |
| grading of the daily stage | | easy, moderate, strenuous, very difficult |
| walker friendly entry, walking portal, walkers' car park | | availability of information about the trail |
| mobility | walker friendly entry, walking portal, walkers' car park | at least 2 connections, daily, or access via public transport (daily stage access points) along the route are connected to the trail by public transport (bus, train, taxi, cab) |
| accommodation | hotel, guesthouse, B&B, hostel, campsite, pick-up transfer | at the start and end of each daily stage the possibility of accommodation or transfer possibility available |
| luggage transport | hotel, guesthouse, B&B, hostel, campsite, pick-up transfer | can be booked through local provider (accommodation provider, taxi company, tourist information, etc.) |
| private property/access | | access to private property (restricted by gates, fences, walls, hedges, etc.) has to be guaranteed from 7am to 5pm |

core criteria – based on the total route

| | core criteria | characteristic |
|---|---------------|--|
| natural trails | | at least 35 % of the overall route and half of the safety secured paths can be counted as natural trail |
| uneven but passable trails | | max. 5 % of the overall route |
| sealed surfaces | | max. 1,500 m continuously |
| on busy roads | | max. 20 % of the overall route |
| alongside busy roads | | max. 3,000 m continuously |
| marking | | max. 3 % of the overall route |
| variety | | max. 300 m continuously |
| experience/adventure potential | | max. 10 % of the overall route |
| intensively used environment | | max. 10 % of the overall route |
| walker friendly entry at start and end point of trail | | at least 4 points per 8 km for the choice criteria 13-19 |
| mobility at start and end point of trail | | max. 10 % of the overall route |
| start and end point of trail are serviced by public transport (bus/train, alternative walkers' taxi) | | at least 1 head board with information in the national, English, French or German language + 1 other language (local language - 1 other English, French or German) |

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