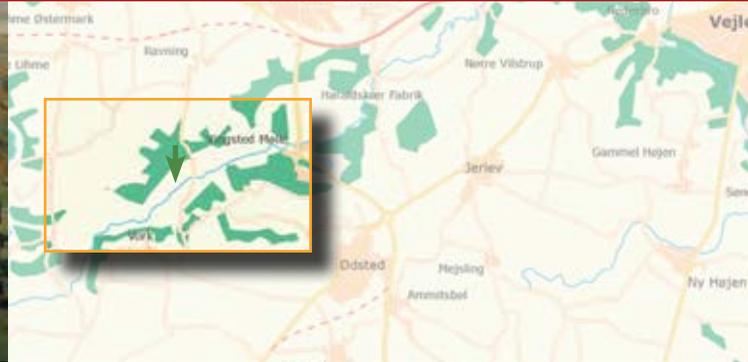


# Ravingbroen

## A bridge from the Viking era



The bridge in the river valley. A small embankment marks the bridge's location. Photo: Jan Kofoed Winter



quickly move south from the king's seat in Jelling to southern Jutland, where the Danes were battling the Germans. It was Harald Bluetooth who first broke the peace by invading the territory south of Ejderen in 973. In 974 the Germans responded with a counterattack, driving back the Danes and conquering southern Jutland for the German emperor. This was probably the reason why the king initiated the construction of Ravingbroen bridge around 980. The bridge is contemporary with the ring fortresses Trelleborg, Fyrkat, Aggersborg and Nonnebakken, all building works thought to date from the reign of Harald Bluetooth. They seem soon to have lost all military significance, and gradually fell into decay.

### The bridge in our time

There are remains of the bridge in the silt under the meadowland of Raving Engje, and to preserve them the Forest and Nature Agency carried out a nature-restoration project in 1996-97 costing 2.6 million kroner. Plots of land were bought, a fish farm was closed down, and the bridge's trajectory was covered by a grassy embankment. The embankment keeps the environment around the bridge damp, preventing the posts from rotting. This has made the line of the bridge visible again. A small bridge was built above the river, and reconstructions of the bridge were made on the north and south sides. This allows visitors to see the original bridge's dimensions and materials.

Frontpage Photo: Ceas van Roeden

### Exhibition about Ravingbroen

disused Raving Station (on the Vandelbanen track 1897-1957) houses an exhibition about Ravingbroen bridge and the history of the Vandelbane track. Another exhibition about the history of the Vandelbane track can be seen at Bindeballe Station.

### On foot and on bike

The former Vandelbane track, now Bindeballestien path, runs along Vejle Ådal river valley to the Raving Engje meadowlands and continues west.

The path is popular among hikers, and the 120 km long hiking route – the 'coast-to-coast path' – starts with Bindeballestien path in Vejle. Cycle route 36 runs along Bindeballestien

path, and farther west connects to national cycle route 3, Hærvejsruten.

You can hike or cycle in the Vikings' footsteps from Jelling to Raving Engje and continue south. Regional cycle routes 34 and 35 go past Fårup Sø lake and Engelsholm Sø lake to Ravingbroen bridge, then on to Egtved. At Raving Station there is a primitive camping site with room for maximum two tents.

The station and bridge area are owned by the Danish Forest and Nature Agency. The exhibition is jointly run by Vejle Municipality, the Danish Society for Nature Conservation and the Randbøldal Museum. The brochure was published in May 1998 and revised in December 2009.

### Address:

Ravingvej 25, 7182 Bredsten  
For more information contact: Vejle Municipality: (+45) 76 81 24 67 and the Nature Agency, the Triangle Area phone: (+45) 75 88 31 99

### The exhibition's opening times

Palm Sunday to 31 August, all days between 9-20  
1 Sept. to 31 Oct. all days between 9-17  
1 Nov. to Palm Sunday, Saturdays and Sundays between 14-17



## Did you know?

Ravingbroen bridge was Denmark's longest bridge until the old Little Belt Bridge was completed in 1935.

The bridge was only in use for a very brief period, and was never repaired.



# Ravningbroen bridge

## Bridge from the Viking era

Around 980, a huge bridge was built across Vejle Adal river valley, 10 km south of the king's seat in Jelling. The bridge was almost certainly commissioned by King Harald Bluetooth. Around 1000 years later the bridge emerged from the earth, and turned out to be a masterly example of Viking engineering. It was built with oak trees from the river valley bluffs around Ravning Enge. No fewer than 1120 trees were used for the bridge's load-bearing posts. 200-300 hectares of mixed forest were probably cleared to obtain timber for the whole bridge. The felling, transport and hewing of the wood, and the plotting and building of the bridge

demanded a lot of manpower. The construction is impressively precise. It is almost completely straight, deviating no more than five cm from a straight line. The bridge was plotted using the surveying rods of the day, hazel sticks, and the precision with which this was done made the job easy for the National Museum's excavators in 1972. They knew exactly where the next span would be. The bridge was probably only used for a few years, and there is nothing to suggest that it was ever repaired. It is curious that it was built where the river valley is widest. This may have been because material from the two erosion cliffs on the north and south sides of the river valley

The old Ravning Station now houses an exhibition about Ravningbroen bridge



The reconstruction on the south side, with a view of the river valley to the north. Photo: Cees van Roeden

formed a natural foundation for the bridge. Building the bridge in a wide part of the valley would also have made it stable and resistant to water and ice pressure. Moreover, we know that since the Iron Age there has been a roadway and a ford across the river valley a little to the west of the bridge.

### The bridge emerges from the peat.

The bridge was buried in the earth for several centuries, but became visible when the river valley began to be cultivated. Draining, liming and manuring made the peat soil sink, and in the mid-1900s, rows of oak posts suddenly emerged from the depths. In some pla-

ces the earth has sunk up to 1.2 metres.

### An impressive construction

At 760 metres long, five metres wide and with 280 spans with gaps of approximately 2.40 metres, the bridge was a massive construction project. Each span had four load-bearing oak posts (30 x 30 cm) with a diagonal post jutting out on both sides. The posts' lengths would have varied according to the ground's load-carrying capacity; the longest posts were up to six metres long. Two- and four-metre posts have been found. Crossbeam would have been lain on of the vertical posts, on which a layer of bat

A bridge over Vejle Å river makes it possible to follow the old Ravning bridge's line across the river valley



The remains of an entire span. Four uprights are clearly visible and the beginnings of a horizontal structure can be seen on the right-hand side.

From the National Museum's excavation in 1972. Photo: Thorkild Ramskou

tens was laid lengthwise along the bridge. At the top, the track surface's planks were joined crosswise. The timber was hewn so carefully that the axe marks are only faintly visible on the surface. All the joints were made with wooden pegs and spikes.

### Borders in the landscape

The boundary between Ravning and the Engelsholm Ladegård house-owners's association converges with the bridge north of Vejle Å river. When the parish borders were established in the early Middle Ages, the boundary between the Bredsten and Nørup parishes was also set here. Thus the bridge or

roadway would have coincided with this administrative division. The river valley was without doubt a clear natural boundary in the landscape that prevented contact between the people living on its north and south sides. From the time of the Ravningbro bridge until 1897, there was no bridge here. Not until 1897 was a new road bridge built across the valley to lengthen the Vandelbane track, but the natural border formed by the valley remains. The locals still refer to 'the ones on the other side of the river'.

### A bridge for war

The bridge was most likely built for military use. It made it possible to

In the Viking era the bridge was approx. 1.2 metres above the river valley. Illustration: Flemming Bau

