Alkmaar Cycle Route

This route through the Alkmaar region shows you typical Dutch polders, canals and windmills. Highlight of the route is the historic centre of Alkmaar, with its cheese market, narrow streets and draw bridges.

At the Zes Wielen you see some fine examples of polder mills, formerly used for pumping excess water out the polders. In Oudorp you cross the canal constructed for one of the most large-scale drainage projects of the 17th century. The route takes you to Koedijk and the Noordhollandsch Kanaal which you follow back into the historic centre of Alkmaar.

Distance: 24 km (1h35). Description: see page 4.
Starting point: Alkmaar train station
- Bicycle rental
- Car parking
Public transport to route: Train to Alkmaar train station

Canals in Alkmaar

Holland is known for its many canals. Although they might all look pretty similar to an outsider, they can have very diverse functions as you’ll see along this route. The first canal you come across runs around the old centre of Alkmaar (*singel*). Originally it was part of the town’s defence works.

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Alkmaar Cycle Route - Description

Start: Alkmaar train station - on the side of the town centre

Turn right as you leave train station. Follow Stationsweg. At traffic lights turn left. At roundabout turn second right. Follow the canal (Kennemersingel and later Nieuwlandersingel) until the Wolfsbrug, which you cross. Continue straight on past harbour (Bierkade).

Cheese market: To visit the cheese market, turn left at canal (Luttik Oudorp). Park your bike at the draw bridge. Continue on foot to the Waagplein, which you can see ahead of you.

To continue the route, go back to the Bierkade and turn left. Cross the canal at Fries Brug. From here you follow the numbered cycle network: 50-72-51. From 51 you follow the LF 15.

After the main road bridge, where the LF15 turns off to go under the main road, you continue along the water (Huygendijk). After passing under another main road bridge, you make a loop to the right to get onto the bridge (Nollenweg). Follow the path to the right (Herenweg). Cross the road (Robbenkooi). Continue straight along a winding cycle path (Achtergeestpad). At the end of it, turn left (Achtergeest).

Turn right and cross the railway. Turn second right at Boetserlaan and then first right (cycle path). Follow the path, turn left before the railway bridge (Molenpad). Follow cycle path past the windmill to Twuyverweg, which you follow to the left. Here you pick up the numbered cycle network to 68, 92, 16 and direction 71.

Follow the Noordhollandsch Kanaal to the first bridge (Koedijkervlotbrug). Continue along the other side past a windmill until you reach a second bridge. Cross the canal to 71 and follow the canal along Noorderkade to 50 (Friesbrug).

Follow the numbered cycle network through town: 50-74-73.

At 73 continue straight on across bridge. At traffic lights, turn right (Stationsweg) to get back to Alkmaar train station.
The water formed a barrier that had to keep enemy armies out. As you head towards the cheese market the canals are narrow and straight (grachten). In the past these canals were used as the town’s sewage system. The smell must have been pretty unbearable! The canals were also an important transport link for goods. On days that the cheese market is held you can still see how cheese was brought into town on small boats.

**Cheese market**

Holland’s reputation as cheese making nation goes back a long way. Already in the Middle Ages Dutch cheese was shipped abroad. Dairy farmers from the Alkmaar area made their cheese at home and brought it into town to be sold at the cheese market, held in the same square as today, the Waagplein. As the demand for Dutch cheese grew, so did the cheese market. In 1365 there was only one set of scales for weighing the cheese, by 1612 as many as four were being used. The cheese trade was so important that the Waagplein needed to be enlarged a number of times.

Now many tourists from all over the world come every year to see how a traditional cheese market used to work - from the opening of the market to the completion of a deal. Demonstrations are held from 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. on Friday mornings, from 1 April to the first Friday in September.

**Schermerpolder and polder mills**

At Oudorp you cross an impressive cyclist and pedestrian bridge over the Schermerringvaart. Ahead of you the land drops several metres. What you see used to be the bottom of a lake. The Schermerpolder was reclaimed in the early 17th century. First a canal was dug around the area that was to be drained (ringvaart). Then the water was pumped up out of the lake into this canal by polder mills. Seven of the windmills you see along this route are such polder mills. It took four years and as many as 52 windmills to pump all the water out of the former lake. The windmills had to work in groups of three to pump the water up from one level to the next as the polder lies four metres below sea level. Once the water had reached the highest level, it could flow from the ringvaart via further canals into the sea.

opened in 1824 it was the largest canal in the world, giving the port of Amsterdam a direct connection with the North Sea. This was crucial as over the years the waters at Pampus (east of Amsterdam) had become so shallow that large ships were having problems reaching the capital via the Zuiderzee. As a result ships were avoiding the once thriving trading port of Amsterdam. Remember, this was before the time of dredging machines.

But why dig an 80 km-long canal from Amsterdam, via Alkmaar all the way up north to Den Helder, when as the crow flies the North Sea is only 20 km away? Taking the direct route would have meant digging a huge gap through the dunes, Holland’s main flood barrier. Engineers at the time considered this too risky. By the second half of the 19th century sea ships had become too large to access the canal and a new one was built, this time cutting straight through the dunes. The Noordzeekanaal is still in use now.

**Noordhollandsch Kanaal**

The Noordhollandsch Kanaal was designed as a transport link. It is hard to imagine now that when the Noordhollandsch Kanaal was

**Floating bridges**

The Noordhollandsch Kanaal was constructed in such a way that two Dutch navy ships could pass each other. At the time engineers did not yet have the technology to build bridges that could span such a broad stretch of water. So they constructed floating bridges (vlotbruggen). To allow ships through, the floating middle sections could slide underneath fixed sections at each end. Nine such floating bridges, originally made out of wood, were built over the Noordhollandsch Kanaal. The Koebrug at Koedijk is one of the four remaining floating bridges.