

Your Bike & Barge Tour

Eleven Cities Tour



ELF 2012

ELEVEN CITIES TOUR



When the temperature drops below zero all of The Netherlands but especially the province of Friesland is captivated by skating and the Eleven Cities Tour. The Eleven Cities Tour, also known as the 'Tocht der Tochten', the Tour of Tours, is a skating race over nearly 200 kilometres of natural ice, ridden in one day. The last Eleven Cities Tour was held in 1997 and the entire country was enthralled by this colourful spectacle.

The Eleven Cities Tour on bike is also very popular. Not only do you follow the ice-skating route along the lakes and canals for as much as possible, but you also call in at the eleven Frisian cities: Stavoren, Hindeloopen, Workum, Bolsward, Harlingen, Franeker, Dokkum, Leeuwarden, IJlst, Sneek and Sloten.

SATURDAY: Stavoren. Embarking at 4 pm, cycling to Makkum; 30 km.

When you arrive on board the boat you can put your luggage away in your cabin and then enjoy a cup of coffee or tea. It is also a good moment to become acquainted with the guide, skipper and crew and of course your fellow passengers.

The bicycles are distributed and you can try yours out.



After dinner you ride to Hindeloopen, the only town with its own dialect, traditional costume and painting style. In earlier times Hindeloopen did not have its own harbour, but only anchorage. The fleet was in Amsterdam while the captains spent the winters in their 'commandeurswoning' (captain's residences) in Hindeloopen. At Nieuwstad in the town centre you can admire these well-preserved houses.

You continue riding through the meadows to Workum, a town that flourished around 1300 when other towns lost their connection to the open sea. At that time it was mainly Workum's large fleet that determined the herring trade in London. This wealth enabled the construction of the St. Gertrudiskerk; however, this church was never completed due to insufficient funds, because the trade collapsed. That is why the tower and the church are separate buildings.



From Workum you ride to Makkum, a beautiful fishing village on the IJsselmeer. When you return to the boat you have already got to know the first three towns of the Eleven Cities Tour.

SUNDAY: Makkum – Franeker; 45 km

You cycle from Makkum to Bolsward, a country town formerly trading in butter and cheese, and also an important religious centre. The various monasteries on the edge of town still testify to this and the atmosphere of provincial respectability is visible in the modest Martinikerk, the elegant town hall and the austere houses lining the canals.

You ride further through the old polders to Kimsward with its statue of Grutte Pier, the resistance fighter who opposed the Saxons and the Burgundians. He used a password to distinguish friend and foe: 'buter, brea en griene tsiis, hwa' t dat net sizze ken is gjin oprjochte Fries' ('butter, bread and green cheese, if you can't say that you're not a real Frisian').

Now you arrive in Harlingen, a fishing town that developed strongly in the 16th century because Friesland directed its economy more towards Holland. The beautifully restored warehouses have names like Polen (Poland), Sumatra and Java, reminders of the trade with far-away places. For three centuries the town was the most important harbour in the northern Netherlands, but it was finally overshadowed by Delfzijl and harbours in the western Netherlands.



You ride through the harbour area to reach Franeker, an old university town with a lovely town hall. Another attraction worth visiting is the historical Eise Eisinga Planetarium, where planets have revolved in their fixed orbits on the ceiling since the 18th century.

Eise Eisinga was a Dutch amateur astronomer who built his own orrery. He was born the son of a woolcomber. Though moderately gifted he was not allowed to go to grammar school. When he was only fifteen he published a mathematics book of over 600 pages and at the age of seventeen he published a small book regarding the principles of astronomy. Eisinga became a woolcomber in Franeker and improved himself on mathematics and astronomy.

When in 1774 a conjunction of the moon and the planets Mercury, Venus, Mars and Jupiter was to take place, the reverend Alta from Bozum published a booklet predicting these celestial bodies to collide. The earth would be spun out of its orbit and burnt by the sun. Great panic arose in Friesland after these predictions. Eisinga decided to prove there was no reason to panic and started building an orrery in the living room of his house. He expected to finish it within six months, but it was only in 1781

that he finished his work. In that very year the planet Uranus was discovered, but for this far-away planet there was no more room in Eisinga's living room.

MONDAY: Franeker – Leeuwarden; 50 km

From Franeker you ride into the western arable corner, with predominantly agriculture and horticulture. On the loam ground of the reclaimed land it is mainly seed potatoes that are grown.

At the start of the Christian era houses and even entire villages were built on top of artificial hills, to protect them against the abundance of water and floodings.

These hills were called 'terps' or 'wierden'. In later centuries the ground from the *terps* was used again to fertilise the land. Only the ground around the church was spared. This

is clearly visible in Boer, Westernijkerk, Ferwerd and Hogebeintum, the latter sitting on the highest *terp* in Friesland, further along the route.



In St. Annaparochie there is a statue of Rembrandt van Rijn with his young bride Saskia van Uylenburgh. They got married here in the old village church.



You now enter Het Bildt, a polder area laid out in accordance with the 18th-century Renaissance principles: straight ditches, straight roads and straight dikes. Along these dikes the small workers' cottages are on the outside of the dike, while the large gentleman farmers' residences are on the 'good' side of the dike. The social differences that held sway over the country emerge clearly here.

After Oudebildtzijl you will soon be back on the 'old land' and once again the roads wind through the landscape. The villages you pass through are considerably older and can often be recognised as *terp* villages.

In one of them, Jelsum, you can visit an old Frisian 'state' (estate). The Frisian landed nobility would live in these in these *states* for many centuries. Jelsum *state* is one of the few that are authentically furnished and are on show. A visit to this *state* with its adjacent walled-in garden is definitely worthwhile.

From Jelsum the last stretch to Leeuwarden. Leeuwarden is the capital of Friesland and is a typically Dutch city with narrow streets, brick houses and canals, where you can visit various museums, shops and the historic town centre with a beautiful park.



TUESDAY: Leeuwarden – Dokkum – Leeuwarden; 50 km

On your way to Dokkum you can visit several *terp* villages. The small Bartlehiem is the best-known town of the Eleven Cities Tour. Here the skaters pass the low bridge over the Finkumervaart twice; when the skater passes the bridge the second time, he knows he will receive the highly-coveted medal.



You head for the pilgrim town of Dokkum along the Ee, an important but narrow waterway used a great deal these days by pleasure boats. The asphalt bike path, originally a towpath, is totally separate from the road for quite a distance. Nature, the cows and the white sails in the landscape are your company. Dokkum is a lovely little town sitting high on its *terps*. Dokkum was already an important harbour town in the 8th century, with a link to the Lauwerszee. Huge debts, incurred through a failed project for a towing barge canal to Groningen, meant that Dokkum lost any connection and came to grief as a harbour town. Dokkum is best-known in Dutch history for the murder of the bishop Bonifatius in the year 745; it grew into a place of pilgrimage.

After Dokkum the Ee is left behind and you now cycle through open, wide meadow land with wonderful views. Later, when the soil gets somewhat sandier, there are more groves to be seen. There is also a possibility to go for a swim in a recreation lake.



In Oenkerk you pass by another *state*; this one is used as a restaurant and for other commercial purposes. After Oenkerk you can see Leeuwarden in the distance. The remaining part for today once again takes you through grazing cattle. You may even come across a cow temporarily blocking your way.

WEDNESDAY: Leeuwarden – Sneek; 42 km

When you leave Leeuwarden, you ride past several *terp* villages. You can recognise old dikes meandering through the landscape, like the Slachtedijk. The Slachtedijk, which in the old days bore the plural form as a name (Slachtedijken), is part of an old water control system in Friesland. The Slachtedijk is a so-called inner dike, 42 kilometres in length. The beginning of the dike is at the Zeedijk (Sea Dike) in Oosterbierum and it runs with a curve through south-west Friesland to Oosterwierum. It is composed of parts of several old sea polder dikes. These primaeval dikes were not all built at the same time. The oldest date from approximately 900, the latest were made in about 1200. The Slachtedijk divides the old land into two parts. In the dike there used to be several sluice gates, called 'zijlen', which could be closed with sluice doors or beams in case of high water. In 1825 the Slachtedijk stemmed the sea water for the last time. When the Delta Project was finished the Slachtedijk had lost its status of sea wall. In the banks of the Slachtedijk many interesting plants grow and many animal species find a sanctuary and a source of food here. The dike makes an unforgettable impression on you as it winds through the landscape in a picturesque way.



Bozum offers you a wonderful example of Romanesque architecture: the church St. Maartenskerk. The church was built from tuff stone in the 12th century, and a century later its height was increased with bricks. Thick walls, small windows and little in the way of decoration show the austerity of this edifice.

IJlst is an idyllic little town with a narrow town canal, low houses and a ribbon of linden trees. It used to be the market town for dairy products, meat, salt and skins. Shipbuilding and the lumber industry also arose in the late Middle Ages. The saws in the lumber mill De Rat (The Rat) from Zaandam are still wind-powered.

The banks of the connecting waterway between IJlst and Sneek are covered with a fringe of reeds and the occasional willow and alder. Riding through this green landscape you can enjoy the abundant flora and fauna special to this region.

Sneek is the regional centre of the southwest corner and best-known for its Waterpoort (Water Gate) The sailing



competitions on the Sneekermeer (Sneek's Lake) make it a national and international water sport centre, and greatly loved by many a yachtsman.

THURSDAY: Sneek – Sloten; 26 km

From of old Sneek has been a pronounced water town. Among other things this is evident from the original name of the city, Ter Snake, meaning 'on the spit of land'. The neck of land of Ter Snake sat in the former Middelzee. The town originated around the 'kerkterp' (church *terp*) of St. Maarten.

On the *terp* we can now find the Dutch Reformed Martini Church which was enlarged several times over the years. The higher ground of the church still forms the centre of the town.

Besides the 16th-century Waterpoort (Water Gate), Sneek also boasts the Friese Scheepvaartmuseum (Frisian Maritime Museum). Here you get an impression of the



Frisian history of seagoing and inland shipping as well as of shipbuilding and the ice-skating sport.

The Pontdyk takes you to Langweer on the Langweerderwielen (Langweerder Lake), an old village with a rich history. It is mentioned in the archives of the diocese of Utrecht, proving it existed as early as in 1256. It must have been a prominent place, with at least two small castles, occupied by noble families for centuries. In the wide vicinity Langweer was also highly respected because it had its own weighing house, a privilege only for towns of importance. And that, whereas the village on the Langweerderwielen was very isolated: for many centuries it was accessible only via the water.

Nowadays Langweer is a typical water sport village with a yachting harbour, camping ground and catering establishments.



You cycle past the Vegelinsbossen (forests), a green enclave in the lake district, to St. Nicolaasga, where the large church from 1887 dominates the village.

The smallest city in the Frisian eleven is Sloten with only 650 inhabitants. Menno van Coehoorn (1641-1704), the fortress builder of the Dutch Republic, designed the fortifications. He lived in Wijckel, where you can visit his splendid grave in the village church.

FRIDAY: Sloten – Stavoren; 35 km

You ride via the Van Coehoornbosch (Van Coehoorn Forest) to Balk, central village of the Gaasterland region. Gaasterland has everything that you normally do not bump into in Friesland: wide forests, patches of heath, pools and even undulating scenery with 'gaasten' (higher-lying parts) making you feel your calves.

From of old Balk has known various religious communities. One of them were the Mennonites, who practised a very strict form of religion. In the middle of the 19th century a large group of them went into exile to the United States and settled near Goshen, Indiana. A stone tablet in Balk reminds us of this old community of faith.

The river Luts is your route as you cycle to Oudemirdum on the edge of the Gaasterland forest. On the south coast of Friesland at Laaksum there is a slave monument with the inscription: 'leaver dea as slaef' (rather dead than enslaved).



After riding the entire Eleven Cities Tour you end up back in Stavoren, the oldest town of the eleven. Stavoren is known for the saga of 'The Lady of Stavoren', from the 16th century. The story tells about a rich merchant's widow who lived in a house in Stavoren with gold floors and silver walls. She owned more ships than all the other merchants of the town together and grew richer every day. In spite of her great wealth she was still not satisfied: she wanted to have the most precious thing on earth. She therefore ordered a captain to go find and get it for her. After a long search the captain returned from Danzig with his holds full of wheat, which seemed to him more valuable than gold. However, this was not what the lady thought. She furiously asked him: 'On which side did you load the grain?' 'On starboard side.' 'Then throw it into the sea on port side!' A passer-by heard her say this and told her she had better not have this done; should she ever be reduced to beggary she would definitely find wheat more valuable than gold.

She then took off her gold ring from her finger and threw it far into the sea, saying: 'I poor? How dare you? This ring will return to my hand before I am ever left a pauper!' Then one day one of her servants brought her a fish for dinner. When cutting the fish on her plate she hit on something hard; it was her own gold ring. From then on the tide started to turn for the lady. Eventually her life ended in poverty.

The Vrouwenzand (Lady's Sand), a sandbank near Stavoren, is the place where people say the valuable cargo was thrown overboard. A grain-like vegetation is said to grow there - without any grains of corns in the ears.

There are small sandy beaches within walking distance of our barge.

SATURDAY: Stavoren, end of the trip after breakfast