



Stadt  
Markgröningen



# THE HISTORICAL SHEPHERDS' RACE

MARKGRÖNINGEN'S  
TRADITIONAL FESTIVAL



## THE HISTORICAL SHEPHERDS' RACE – MARKGRÖNINGEN'S TRADITIONAL FESTIVAL

On the last weekend in August Markgröningen's picturesque townscape offers visitors to the Shepherds' Race a pulsating festival atmosphere in its small lanes and side streets: whether the shopkeepers' market against the historical backdrop of half-timbered houses, the food and drinks stalls in courtyards, cellars and on squares, the crafts market at the Helene Lange High School, the festive procession past quaint half-timbered houses, the shepherds' market in front of the Oberer Torturm (Upper Gate Tower) or the amusement park.

These days it isn't only folk music that fills the air, but also jazz and oriental sounds. Small snacks and large delicacies from the most diverse of countries and regions – but also traditional Swabian fare like Maultaschen (stuffed pasta similar to ravioli) and potato salad – indulge visitors from all over the world.

### HOW IT ALL BEGAN ...

At the beginning of the 16th century a group of shepherds met for the first time on St. Bartholomew's Day, on 24th August, to compete in a barefoot race over the town's stubble field and to crown the winner as their Shepherd King. Legend has it that the Count of Gröningen organised the festival to honour his loyal shepherd Bartel. The meeting and its order of events was established with Duke Eberhard III's guild for the shepherd trade from the year 1651. The event is held at Bartholomew's market, one of four large fairgrounds with regional significance for Württemberg and which was first mentioned in 1445.

## SHEEP HERDING AND "WARM-UP" ON FRIDAY

The festival begins on Friday morning with the sheep herding. This professional competition offers an insight into the everyday life of a shepherd and the tasks of the sheep farmers with a focus on nature and rural conservation. Here the shepherds have the opportunity to prove their professional skills by tending someone else's herd with their dogs. The 7-point course is equivalent to the day of a shepherd in fast motion. To this day the Shepherds' Race is an annual meeting point for the shepherds and their families and they travel here from around the whole of the Baden-Württemberg region. To protect the sheep rearing on Markgröningen's grasslands, the town set up a sheep farming fund in 1994. In favour of this there have been additional charges on entry tickets, stand fees etc. ever since.

The stalls of the shopkeepers' market, which used to be known as Bartholomew's market, open in the afternoon. A performance by the Schäfermusik music group, which originally consisted of actual shepherds and was paid for by the guild, gets things off to a great start. Wearing regional costumes, they play traditional melodies and folk songs with historical instruments: the Alemannic bagpipe and the shawm. Visitors are offered a guided tour of the town and the first performance of the play "Der treue Bartel" ("The Loyal Bartel") takes place in the guildhall in the evening.

### Imprint

Published by: Stadt Markgröningen  
 Designed by: apk, Markgröningen, [www.apkommunikation.de](http://www.apkommunikation.de)  
 Photos: Sabine Braun, Anja Preusker, Fred Albrecht  
 Printed in Germany

## THE SHEPHERDS' RACE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SHEPHERDS' GUILD ORDER

As the successor of the Vogt (the governor or advocate), the Ludwigsburg District Administrator officially opens the festival on Saturday. The guild chest and flag are handed over to the Chairman of the State Sheep Breeders' Association for the day. The small side streets start filling up in the morning and the vibrant hustle and bustle of the market begins.

The fairground rides are already in motion at the amusement park. At the crafts market the visitors can find out about traditional production techniques and at the shepherds' market there are sheep products to eat and try on, as well as a petting zoo. The product palette of the local shepherds is varied and visitors will have the chance to experience it for themselves.

After the traditional religious service in the Church of St. Bartholomew a brightly coloured festive procession accompanied by many music bands and numerous groups wearing traditional costume makes its way through the Oberes Tor (Upper Gate) onto the stubble field. After the popular contests like the sack race, water pail carrying and rooster dance, the excitement reaches its peak as it's time for the traditional bare foot race over the stubble field. First of all it is the turn of the shepherds' daughters and trained shepherdesses to compete for the crown. Afterwards the shepherds' sons and the shepherds themselves try their luck on the stubbly, bristly course which is 300 steps long. According to old tradition, the winners receive the prize of a sheep and have the honour of being the Markgröningen Shepherd King or Queen for a whole year. To pay homage to the royal pair, the Markgröningen shepherds' dance is performed.

The procession marches through the decorated streets, back to the market square where the dancefloor is opened. Until the early hours of the morning music and laughter can be heard through the small side streets.





## THE SHEPHERDS' RACE ON SUNDAY

Markgröningen offers its guests almost exactly the same schedule on Sunday. Once again the procession with music passes through the narrow lanes, past the half-timbered houses and cheering spectators all the way to the stubble field.

A selection of scenes and songs from the play "Der treue Bartel" ("The Loyal Bartel") present the origins of the festival in an entertaining way.

The only difference here is that now it is Markgröningen's school pupils who are competing for the royal title on the stubble field. Traditional competitions involving stilt-walking and carrying pails of water are also popular.

Once the guild flag and chest have been returned to the town it is time for the Hahnentanz (rooster dance) to be performed in front of the Town Hall. In this medieval dance contest, couples wearing traditional costumes dance in a circle around the gallows, on which instead of a noose, a real rooster is sitting in a basket decorated with flowers. A cup filled with water is balanced on a wooden board suspended from a horizontal pole on the side. The couples dance the waltz under the gallows. Taking it in turns, once under the board the boys lift their partner up to try and knock the cup off with the girl's head. In the second round the girls lift their male dancers up.

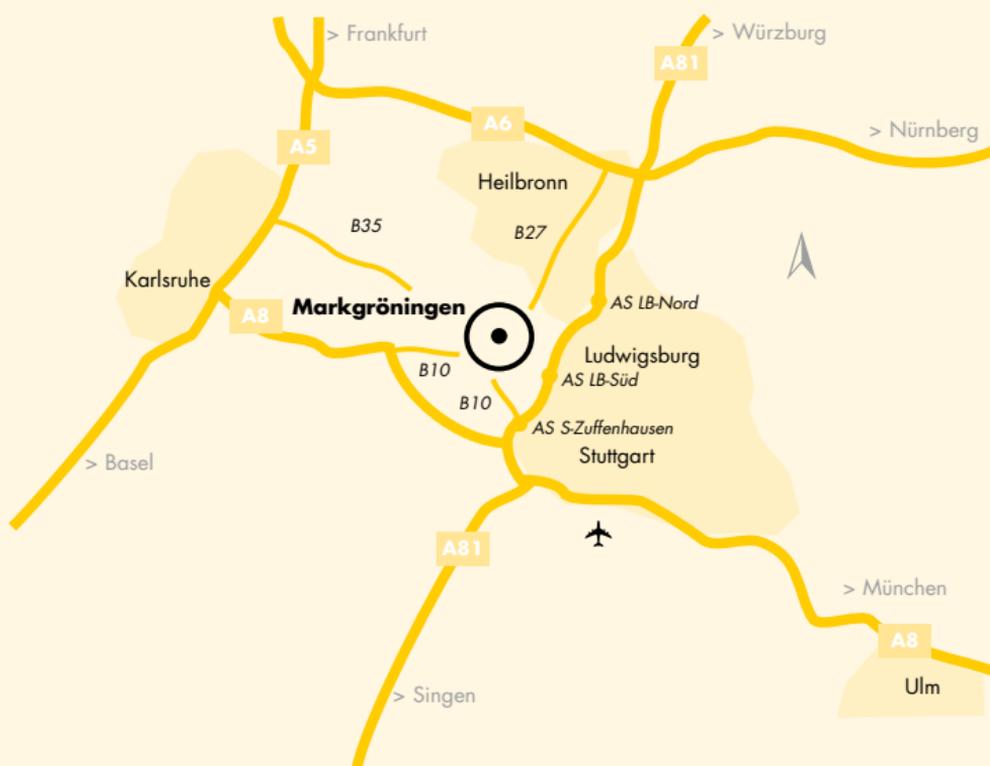
The winning couple is the one with the best waltz rhythm and who manages to knock the cup off the board without getting wet themselves. The winners receive one sheepskin each and the rooster.

## THE FESTIVAL DRAWS TO A RELAXED CLOSE ON MONDAY

The entertainment continues on the Monday afternoon. Shopkeepers offer their wares on the stalls around the Old Town. Large numbers of guests are attracted to the hustle and bustle and the taverns in the evening. The festival draws to a conclusion with a spectacular firework display.

**There is so much to see and experience at the Shepherd's Race that even the most active visitors won't get to see everything, so on that note, we're already looking forward to seeing you again next year!**





Deutsche  
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