

T H E H O M E I N D E X

Practical Companion

F R E I B U R G

Herdern

*The city, the district,
and what it would mean to live there*

Herdern · Wiehre · Altstadt · Vauban · Rieselfeld

Herdern first.

Hoc est opus. Et satis est.

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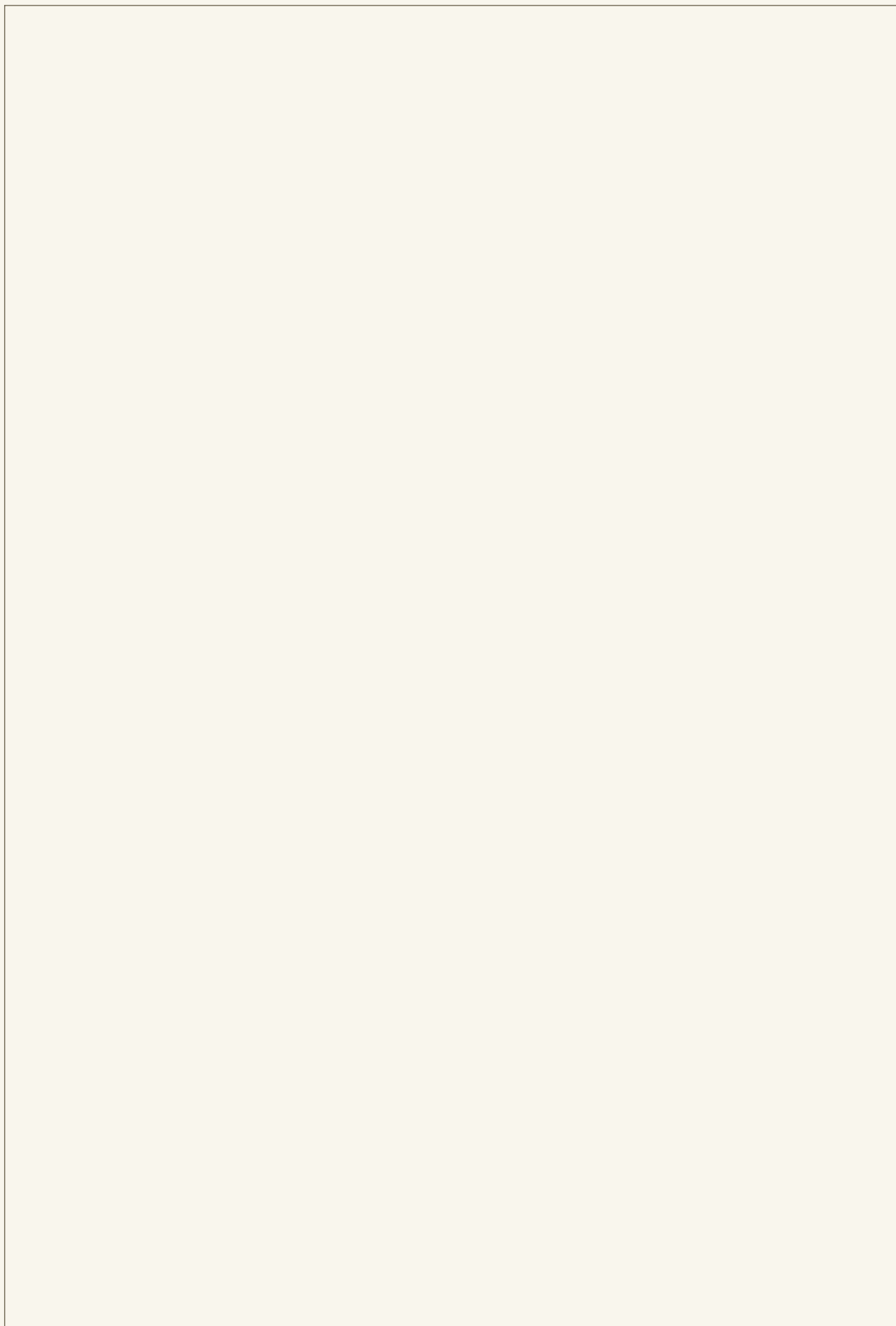
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What This Guide Is For

Most writing about cities is written for people who are leaving again. It tells you what to see in three days, where to eat once, which view is worth the climb. It is written from the outside, and it assumes you will go back out.

This is written from the other direction. It assumes you are considering staying.

Freiburg came to our attention because it kept performing well against the things we think actually matter about where a person lives — not what a place offers a visitor, but what it gives back on an ordinary Tuesday in February. Having spent enough time with it to be confident the interest was warranted, we did the obvious next thing: we asked where inside Freiburg we would live.

Five parts of the city were considered seriously. Herdern finished first, ahead of Wiehre, Altstadt, Vauban and Rieselfeld.

This guide takes that result seriously enough to ask the question that follows it. If we really were going to live in Freiburg, and really were going to live in Herdern, what would that be like — and how would we go about it? Where would we look for a flat, and what would it cost? Where would we buy bread? Where would we walk on a Sunday, and where would we go when we wanted to sit somewhere and not be spoken to? What changes in August, and what changes in January?

Two things this is not.

It is not tourism. Nothing here is recommended because it is famous or photogenic. Every place named is named because it does something for a person who lives nearby.

And it is not a prescription. We are describing our own judgment, not yours. A guide that pretended otherwise would be useless — the whole point of stating a preference clearly is that it can be argued with. So the four districts that did not win are given real room later in the book, with an honest account of what each does better than Herdern and who should choose it instead. If you finish this and conclude that Wiehre is your place, the guide has worked.

The reasoning behind the ranking, the sources behind the claims, and the limits of what we could establish are all at the back. They are there for anyone who wants them, and they stay there. The book itself is about the place.

P A R T O N E

Freiburg

I · 1

Why Freiburg

You can leave the house after supper and be under trees before the light goes.

Not driving to a trailhead. Not planning it the night before. Walking to the top of your own street until the houses give out and the path starts. Along the eastern and southern edges of Freiburg this is simply how the city ends — the Black Forest comes down to the last row of gardens, and the hills do not sit at a distance being scenery. They begin where the pavement ends.

This is the fact from which everything else about Freiburg follows, and it is worth being precise about why it matters. Plenty of cities have mountains nearby. What is unusual here is the absence of a threshold between the two. There is no drive, no car park, no sense of having mounted an expedition. There is a street, and then there is a track, and the transition happens without ceremony while you are still digesting dinner. A city where the forest requires an outing produces occasional walkers. A city where the forest requires a decision to turn left produces something else entirely.

The Dreisam does something similar with water. It comes down out of the mountains and runs straight through the middle of the city, and the paths along it — eight and a half kilometres of made surface on the southern bank — are not a promenade to be visited on Sundays. They are a route across town, traffic-free from end to end, with the water on one side and the city on the other. A river that can be used rather than admired changes the shape of a place's day.

And the Schlossberg stands directly over the eastern edge of the old town. From the Schwabentor the path climbs to the Kanonenplatz, where the view opens over the roofs and, on a clear day, across the plain to the Vosges. This is a hill you can be on top of during a lunch break.

Down in the streets themselves the Bächle still run — narrow channels of water set into the pavement, threading through the old town. They are the sort of thing that sounds like heritage decoration until you have lived beside them, at which point they become the sound the town makes.

Scale.

Freiburg holds something over 237,000 people. That is large enough to be a real city — a cathedral, a long-established university, a proper centre with proper shops, a university hospital — and small enough that all of it stays inside the same day. The old town is compact, and much of it is given over to people on foot. Trams reach the districts on the edge.

This is the quality that is hardest to convey and easiest to underrate. In most cities of Freiburg's ambition, the forest is a weekend, the centre is an errand, and your neighbourhood is where you sleep. Here they can be parts of the same afternoon. You can work in the middle of town, buy bread in a village street, and be walking uphill in woodland before dark, and none of those will have required a plan.

The bicycle geography.

Ride south on a Saturday morning and the vineyards begin on the slopes above Merzhausen. Beyond them the Vorbergzone rises towards the Schönberg, which at 644 metres is the highest ground in that first line of hills and the closest thing Freiburg has to a local mountain that is not the Black Forest proper. Keep going and you are in the Markgräflerland, which is villages and wine and long views west.

Ride west instead and you reach the Rhine, and beyond the Rhine is Alsace. Colmar is not a foreign expedition from Freiburg; it is a plausible day on a bicycle, and the country in between is flat and quiet. The Kaiserstuhl — a range of hills standing alone in the middle of that plain, given over almost entirely to vines — is north-west, and equally reachable.

The point is not that these are attractions. The point is that Freiburg is not divided into the part you live in and the part you go to. It is one piece of usable ground, and a bicycle covers much of it.

The year.

What makes Freiburg a place to live rather than to admire is that the year keeps changing what it offers instead of taking it away.

In spring the evenings stretch out and the vines come back into leaf on the hillsides while the forest above is still bare enough to see through. This is the best few weeks for the high paths — light on the ground, long views between the trunks, nothing yet closed in.

Summer is genuinely hot. Freiburg sits in the trough of the Upper Rhine and is one of the warmest cities in Germany, and the rhythm of the day reorganises around shade and water and the second half of the afternoon. The sealed centre runs several degrees warmer than the ground around it. By late summer the Dreisam can be running thin over its stones; the city tracks the number of low-flow days each year, and residents notice the dry bed. You go up rather than out. And at night the cold air comes down out of the Black Forest — reliably enough that the city now treats the channels it arrives by as things to be protected in planning.

Then autumn arrives, and for a stretch of six or eight weeks Freiburg does something it does not do at any other time. The vintage is on in the Markgräflerland and the Kaiserstuhl. The forest turns above the town. The light goes long and low across the slopes. The evenings are warm enough to sit out and cool enough to walk far.

And then winter strips it back. The vines are cut to stumps. The plain can lie under low cloud for days together. But the hill paths go bare and open, and show you the valley through the trees in a way that is impossible for the rest of the year. The tram matters more. The markets shrink and carry on.

Four different cities, in effect, sharing a set of streets. That is not a small thing when you are choosing where to spend years rather than a long weekend.

I · 2

The Residential Choice

A city is not a place to live. A neighbourhood is.

Five parts of Freiburg were considered as serious residential propositions — not the five most attractive, or the five most talked about, but five that could each plausibly be the answer to *where would we actually live here*. They differ enough from one another that the comparison is genuinely informative.

Herdern — an absorbed village on the northern slope, Jugendstil villas, an afternoon market, forest above the roofs.

Wiehre — the elegant nineteenth-century district south of the Dreisam, with the fastest access to woodland in the city.

Altstadt — the old town itself, medieval, dense, everything at the door.

Vauban — the former barracks in the south, rebuilt from the 1990s as a low-car, high-participation quarter, and internationally known for it.

Rieselfeld — the planned western district on flat ground, newer, more spacious, edged by a nature reserve.

The result:

1	Herdern	2.0205
2	Wiehre	2.2808
3	Altstadt	2.5685
4	Vauban	2.9178
5	Rieselfeld	3.3493

Lower is better.

Numbers of this kind are useful for ordering and useless for understanding, so here is what the ordering means in the only terms that matter.

Every one of these five is a defensible place to live, and three of them are genuinely lovely. The distances between them are not distances between good and bad. They are distances between different sets of compromises.

Altstadt gives you the most city per step — you can live inside eight hundred years of continuous town, with the cathedral in earshot and the Schlossberg at the end of the street. It is also stone, and stone holds heat, and the centre of Freiburg runs measurably more than three degrees warmer than the ground around it in a city that is getting hotter. Vauban gives you the most coherent idea of how a neighbourhood might work, and it is a real achievement rather than a brochure; it also hangs off a single tram branch and turns its back on a busy road that has to be crossed to reach anything green. Rieselfeld gives you space, light, newer buildings and an enormous quiet horizon to the west — a horizon that is a nature reserve which the city deliberately keeps paths out of, so that what you have is a magnificent view of ground you cannot walk on.

Wiehre is the serious rival and it stayed serious to the end. It has the shortest distance from a front door to real woodland of anywhere in the field; cross the railway at the Wiehre station and you are in the Sternwald almost at once. It has two genuinely different walks from the same

starting point — one that climbs, and one that runs three and a half kilometres east through the trees, level and shaded the whole way. It is beautiful, it is convenient, and a great many people would be very happy there.

Herdern finished ahead of it for a reason that is easier to feel than to score. It is not that Herdern is better at any single thing; Wiehre reaches the forest faster, Altstadt reaches everything faster, Vauban means more. It is that Herdern is the district where it becomes hardest to find the thing you have given up.

The market is a short walk and it happens twice a week in the afternoon. The bread and the groceries and the chemist are on two different streets, either of which would do on its own. The forest starts above the top of the district and runs as far as you have time for. The centre of Freiburg is a short way downhill, on foot or by tram. The houses are the handsomest ordinary housing stock in the city. Very little in the arrangement requires you to accept one thing in exchange for another.

There is one exception, and it is the hill itself. That belongs to the next chapter.

P A R T T W O

Herdern

Herdern was a village before Freiburg was in a position to absorb it, and in the part of it that matters it has not entirely stopped being one.

The first document naming it is from 1008, when an emperor signed away his hunting rights in the Breisgau forests. The village was old even then. Freiburg took it in in 1457 — earlier than most of the city's other districts, and long enough ago that the absorption has had five centuries to become complete, which it never quite has.

What it grew was wine. The church on the old square is St. Urban's, named for the patron saint of winegrowers, and a single vineyard is still there below the panorama road — the last of what used to cover this slope. The rest went in the 1890s, when a mayor with expansive ideas turned the vines into building plots, and the hillside filled up with the Gründerzeit and Jugendstil houses that give Herdern its face today. The same mayor is responsible for the sequoias. They are scattered through the district, absurd and magnificent, standing over gardens they were never scaled for.

Twelve and a half thousand people live here now. It reads, from inside, as three or four different places that happen to share a name.

The shape of it.

Herdern lies on the northern side of Freiburg, rising from the flatter ground near the centre towards the Roßkopf. The Glasbach comes down off that mountain and runs east to west straight through the district on its way to the city, which tells you the essential thing about the topography: this is a slope with a stream in it, and everything about living here is organised by height.

Low down, on the flatter western ground, Herdern is a city district — Habsburgerstraße running north with shops along it, the tram on its own green track down the middle, traffic, the sort of street where things happen. Running east from it is the Hauptstraße, and along that street, a few hundred metres up, the old village core survives around the church: a square, a

market twice a week, small shops, the scale of somewhere that was never planned. Above and behind that the villa streets climb, quieter with every hundred metres, deep gardens, big trees, the noise falling away behind you. And above them the Eichhalde runs a kilometre and a half along the hillside, with a meadow above the road and, above the meadow, the nature reserve and the woods and the mountain.

You can stand in the middle of Herdern and see all four of those layers at once.

The houses.

The dwelling proposition here is a flat in an old building, and it is important to be clear about that because it is the single thing most likely to delight or disappoint you.

Most of Herdern went up between about 1890 and the First World War, with more added between the wars and a looser, more spacious pattern of building in the northern part through the twentieth century. What that means in practice is high ceilings, deep windows, stucco, staircases with proportions nobody builds any more, and — on the slope streets — villas that have mostly been divided into two or three or four flats apiece, often with a share of a garden that would be unaffordable as a house.

It also means everything else that comes with buildings of that age. Stairs, and often no lift. Windows that are beautiful and that lose heat. Heating systems of varying vintages and varying honesty about their running costs. Bathrooms fitted into rooms not designed for them. Some of the stock has been thoroughly modernised and some has not, and the difference between those two conditions is much larger, in lived terms, than the difference between one street and the next.

Nothing about this is a warning. Old buildings are a large part of why Herdern is worth living in. But a person who has only ever rented post-war flats should walk into their first Herdern viewing knowing what they are looking at.

The ordinary week.

Here is what the district actually does for you.

There are two small parades of shops rather than one, at either end of the same axis, about six hundred metres apart. At the western end, on Habsburgerstraße, a supermarket, a bakery and a chemist stand within seventy metres of each other. At the eastern end, in the old village street, the same three sit closer still. Either would be a perfectly good local centre on its own. Having both means that the ordinary week has a fallback — a thing you never notice until the day the supermarket is shut for refitting and you realise you have another one.

Twice a week, on Tuesday and Friday afternoons, the market goes up on the church square and stands until six. Afternoon markets are a different institution from morning ones. A morning market serves the whole city; a market that opens at three on a Tuesday serves the people who are already home. You walk down for it, you buy what the season is doing, and you carry it back up.

On Sunday mornings there is bread, which in Germany is not to be assumed.

And in the other direction, above the houses, the ground goes up into woodland that carries on as far as anyone reasonably wants to walk. In one direction from the old square you are at the market. In the other you are climbing. The whole district is arranged along that axis.

Quiet without isolation.

This is the quality that most distinguishes Herdern from anywhere else in the field, and it is worth naming precisely, because "quiet" is usually a euphemism for "far away".

The villa streets are genuinely quiet — the ordinary residential quiet of gardens and big trees and no through traffic — and they are a short walk from a market, and a short way above a tram that runs into the middle of a real city. That combination is not common. Most places offer either the quiet or the access, and charge you the other one for it.

What makes it work is the layering. The busy street is at the bottom, doing its job. The village is along from it, doing its job. The quiet is above them both, close enough to reach everything on foot and high enough to be out of it.

The bargain.

And here is the cost, stated once and completely, because the rest of this book will assume you have understood it.

Everything in Herdern's arrangement points downhill. Both parades of shops are in the flatter part of the district. The tram is at the bottom. The streets people want most — the quiet ones with the outlook and the deep gardens — are the ones above them.

So there is a tax, and it is paid in the legs. The walk *to* everything is downhill, easy, and one of the more agreeable parts of the day. The walk *back* is uphill, in every weather, carrying whatever you have just bought. In October with a light bag this is a pleasure. In February rain with two bags and a cold coming on, it is a fact about your life. The higher you live, the more of it there is.

This single feature is the district's great beauty and its only serious cost, and they are the same feature. The slope is why the streets are quiet, why the gardens are deep, why the outlook exists, why the forest is close, and why the shopping is a climb. You cannot buy one half of it.

Everything that follows — where to look for a flat, what an ordinary Tuesday feels like, whether to own a bicycle, who should live here and who should not — is an application of that one fact.

Two further costs, smaller but real. The houses are expensive: Herdern asks noticeably more per square metre than the Freiburg average, and the northern half of the district asks more still, in a city where the whole market is tight and where finding anything at all takes persistence. And the summers here are Freiburg's summers. The district's old nickname is *Klein-Nizza* — Little Nice — earned for a position said to be sheltered and mild. We are not able to tell you that the hillside sleeps cooler than the valley on the worst nights of August. It may. Shelter and ventilation are not the same thing, and the honest position is that we do not know.

None of this changes the recommendation. It *is* the recommendation, stated completely. Herdern is where the compromises are hardest to find, not where they are absent — and the one that is easy to find is a hill, which is also the reason the district is beautiful.

PART THREE

Living There

III · 1

Home

Suppose you have decided. What do you actually do?

What you are looking for.

Realistically, a flat in a period building. That is what Herdern mostly is, and the sooner you stop scrolling past listings that say *Altbau* the better. Sizes vary enormously because the conversions were done at different times by different people; you will see two-room flats carved out of a villa's upper floor and five-room flats that were once a whole family's apartment and have never been divided. Newer stock exists, more of it in the north, and it is generally less interesting and more efficient.

Things to look at hard, in this order: heating system and what it costs to run; window condition; whether there is a lift and how many flights there are if not; and which way the flat faces on the slope, which affects light more than you would expect.

Where in Herdern — the altitude question.

The hill decides this, and it decides it before anything else does.

We would concentrate the search in the middle band — the streets around and just above the old village core, close enough to the Hauptstraße shops to walk down for bread without thinking about it, high enough to be out of the traffic on Habsburgerstraße.

That is a genuine recommendation and not a hedge. The lowest streets give up the quiet that is most of the point of Herdern. The highest streets give the quiet back with interest, and charge for it every single day.

The practical test is simple and worth doing before you sign anything: walk from the flat down to the shops and back up again, carrying something, in bad weather. If that walk is a pleasure, take the higher flat and enjoy the rest of your life there. If it is a chore on the first attempt, it will not improve.

And if you are choosing between two otherwise equal flats, take the lower one unless you are certain about the hill.

What it costs.

Freiburg publishes a proper rent index — the *Mietspiegel* — covering 2025 and 2026, produced with tenant and landlord representatives at the table and location classes worked out on a geographical basis rather than by reputation. The city puts it online free as a PDF and provides a free calculator alongside it.

Use it. It is the single most valuable thing a newcomer to the German rental market can have, because it tells you what a given flat, of a given size and age and fit-out, in a given location, ought to cost — and therefore whether the rent being asked is reasonable, and whether a future increase is lawful.

Do not use the "rent index" pages published by property portals. They are aggregations of asking prices, they disagree with each other substantially — for Herdern we found published averages ranging from about €13 to nearly €16 per square metre depending on which portal you consulted — and none of them is the instrument that carries legal weight.

For orientation only: Freiburg as a whole was running near €14.50 per square metre in early 2026 on portal figures, up around five per cent on the year, with Herdern's northern half among the more expensive parts of the city at close to €16. Treat those as the shape of the thing, not as the number.

Budget separately for *Nebenkosten* — the service charges, which on an old building can be substantial — and for a deposit, commonly three months' base rent.

Where to look.

The private market, first and mainly. This is the route that actually houses newcomers. The large national portals carry the bulk of what is available; set up saved searches for Herdern specifically rather than for Freiburg, and be ready to respond within hours rather than days, because in a market this tight speed matters more than the perfect message.

Freiburger Stadtbau, in parallel where appropriate. The municipal housing company holds more than nine and a half thousand flats across the city at below-market rents, and applications go in through an online form. Its own guidance is candid that demand is very high. There is no cost to applying and no obligation on either side.

The cooperatives, as a longer horizon. Freiburg's three large housing cooperatives hold some 8,800 dwellings between around 30,700 members, and what they offer is genuinely good: moderate rents, low running costs, well-maintained buildings, and tenancies that are effectively secure for life.

They are not, in practice, an immediate way in for someone who needs a home on arrival, and the reason differs from one to the next. One requires two years of membership before you may even apply for a flat, with allocation after that depending on demand and location and often taking years more; it also asks for further shares and a savings deposit at the point of allocation. Another was not admitting new members at all when we looked. A third allocates largely by length of membership and expects a personal visit before the board considers an application.

Check each one's current admission rules individually before you plan around any of them. They change, they differ, and the difference between "join today" and "not currently accepting members" is the whole question.

Before you respond to a listing.

Have the paperwork ready as a single PDF: proof of income for the last three months, a credit report, identity document, and a short covering note. In a tight market, landlords choose between complete applications and incomplete ones long before they choose between people.

Read the listing for the words that change the arrangement: whether the rent is a *Staffelmiete* that steps up on a schedule, whether a kitchen is included or must be bought from the outgoing tenant, and what the heating actually is.

And go and stand in the street in the evening before you commit. Herdern is quiet, but it is quiet in different amounts in different places, and half an hour on a pavement will tell you more than any listing.

One Freiburg note, in passing: the city has a tradition of the Baugruppe, in which future residents form a group, buy a plot and commission their own building together. It is a route into new build on new sites, and Herdern has nowhere to put one — so it is worth knowing about and not worth waiting for.

What the market actually looked like.

A snapshot taken on 28 August 2026. Treat the shape as durable and the specifics as perishable.

Two things stood out, and the first was the sheer thinness. Across the major portals, Herdern showed a couple of dozen entries at most, and that figure flattered the market — it included commercial premises, wanted advertisements, and results dragged in from neighbouring districts. The number of ordinary flats genuinely available to an ordinary applicant on any given day is small. Not zero; small. This is what a tight market looks like from the outside, and it is why the advice above is to watch daily and respond in hours.

The second was stranger and more revealing. A striking share of the Herdern entries were not lettings at all but **swap offers** — sitting tenants advertising their flat in exchange for a different one, usually larger. Two rooms near the market square offered for something bigger; a three-room maisonette with a rooftop view offered from the following summer; a fifty-two square metre flat offered for more space. When people would rather trade their tenancy than give it up, it tells you what those tenancies are worth. It also tells you the flats you would most like are largely not on the market at all.

What was advertised matched the district described in Part II almost exactly: old buildings, wooden floors, stucco ceilings, no lift, a share of a garden, a converted eighteenth-century cottage on the church square. One portal put Herdern's average asking rent at €14.74 per square metre. A garage space in one building was quoted separately at sixty euros a month, which is the kind of detail that only appears in the small print.

The landlords' own copy, incidentally, sells precisely what this book has been describing — ten minutes on foot to the old town, ten minutes to the woods. They are not wrong.

The Week

This is where Herdern stops being an idea.

Tuesday.

You need bread, something for dinner, and a prescription. In most cities that is three errands and a plan. Here it is a short walk and a decision about which direction to take.

Go east, along the old village street, and the three of them are within fifty metres of one another: a grocer, a baker, a chemist, in a row of ordinary shopfronts on a street that has been the middle of somewhere for a very long time. Go west instead, to Habsburgerstraße, and you get the same three within seventy metres — a larger supermarket, a bakery, another chemist — with the difference that the western street is busier, has longer hours, and is where the post office, the parcel machines and the tram are.

Neither is better. They are for different moods and different times of day. What matters is that Herdern has both, six hundred metres apart at either end of the same street, so that a closed shop is an inconvenience rather than an event.

If it is a Tuesday afternoon, though, you go east, because the market is on.

The market.

Tuesdays and Fridays, on the church square, from mid-afternoon until six. Not a morning market — which is the whole character of it. Morning markets belong to the city and its visitors; a market that opens at three belongs to the people who live within walking distance and are home by then.

It is small. That is not a criticism. There is produce and bread and what the season is doing, on a square in front of the church named for the winegrowers' saint, which is either a coincidence or a very long continuity depending on how you like to think about such things.

On Saturday mornings there is a second market at the other end of the district, on Habsburgerstraße, running from eight until one. Different rhythm, different crowd, and it catches the week's proper shop rather than the afternoon top-up.

Between the two, Herdern has a market on three days out of seven.

Sunday.

On Sundays, Herdern's supermarkets are closed. A person newly arrived from a country with Sunday trading will get caught out exactly once, on their first weekend, and will never get caught again.

But there is bread. Both of Herdern's ends keep a bakery open on Sunday mornings, and one of them runs all day, every day of the week. This is a small structural fact with a large effect on how the weekend feels: you can wake up on a Sunday with nothing in the house and still have a proper breakfast a short walk later.

Plan the actual shopping for Saturday, and note that one of the two supermarkets closes at two on Saturday afternoons — early enough to catch you out if you have been walking all morning. The other runs to eight and is the safer bet.

Post and parcels.

Both are on the western side. There is a post office counter on Habsburgerstraße with the standard German opening hours, meaning a lunchtime closure and a short Saturday, and there are two parcel machines a few hundred metres further north that are available around the clock.

Carrying it home.

This is where the hill turns up in the week, and it is worth being unsentimental about it: everything you buy in Herdern, you buy at the bottom. From the middle band the return is a short rise and the shopping is simply the shopping. From higher up, the weekly shop becomes a decision rather than an errand — and smaller shops more often, a rucksack instead of bags, or a bicycle with panniers all become sensible ways to make the climb less consequential.

None of that is a hardship. It is simply the shape of the week here, and it is better to know it before the first Saturday than after.

What Herdern does not do.

The district covers food, bread, medicine, post and the twice-weekly market comfortably. It does not cover everything.

For a full drugstore, hardware, anything bulky, or a large-format supermarket, you go out — and the nearest large supermarket is only about six hundred metres north-west of the Habsburgerstraße parade, which is a walk with a trolley or a few minutes on a bicycle. Beyond that, the middle of Freiburg is downhill and close, and that is where the rest of it lives: the department stores, the bigger chemists, the specialist shops, the Saturday crowds on Kaiser-Joseph-Straße.

This is the correct division of labour for a district of Herdern's size, and it is worth stating positively rather than as a deficiency. Herdern handles the recurring week without your ever needing a car. Everything else is a short trip into a city that is genuinely good at being a city.

III · 3

Moving

On foot.

Most of your week, and everything in III.2. The one variable is the one you already know about.

The walk into the centre of Freiburg is a real option rather than a theoretical one, and the asymmetry is the point: it is downhill going in and uphill coming home. That suits some evenings and not others, and the tram exists for the others.

By tram.

The line runs up Habsburgerstraße on its own green track, with three stops serving the district — Tennenbacher Straße, Hauptstraße and Okenstraße — all rebuilt to be step-free when the route through Habsburgerstraße was renewed in 2009 and 2010. It carries on north to Zähringen and south into the centre, where Bertoldsbrunnen is the network's main interchange and puts the rest of Freiburg within one change.

The Hauptstraße stop is the useful one for most of Herdern: get off there and the old village street runs east from you, with the market square a few hundred metres up it.

Trams, buses and local trains across Freiburg and the two surrounding districts share a single fare network, the RVF. Within Freiburg itself everything is the lowest fare stage; the network

runs to three zones, reaching out to Titisee and Neustadt in the Black Forest. The monthly ticket for the whole area is the RegioKarte, and it is the sensible purchase for anyone living here.

The hill applies here too, in a way worth planning around when you choose a flat. The tram is at the bottom of the district. Living high means the tram is a walk down and a climb back, which for a daily commute is a different proposition from living two streets above a stop.

By bicycle.

The city is thoroughly set up for cycling and continues to invest in it. From Herdern the ride into town is straightforward and mostly downhill, and the return is a climb that will make you fitter than you intended. An electric bicycle changes the calculation for the upper streets substantially, and if you are seriously considering a flat high on the slope you should price one in as part of the decision rather than as a later luxury.

The more important cycling fact is what lies beyond the city, and it is dealt with properly in III.5. For everyday purposes: the Dreisam path is the traffic-free spine across town, and once you are on it you can cross Freiburg without a junction.

By car, and whether to have one.

You do not need a car to live in Herdern. That is a genuine statement and not an aspiration: the recurring week is walkable, the city is trammable, and the regional rail network reaches much of the Black Forest and the Rhine plain.

What a car buys you is the awkward middle distance — the Sunday to a village no train reaches, the trip to a furniture warehouse, the elderly relative two valleys over. Those are real, and some households will want one.

If you do keep one, Herdern's parking is managed and was recently tightened. The district falls within the city's resident-permit system, and in August 2024 the Herdern zone was enlarged — north as far as the Okenstraße, east as far as the Wintererstraße — with parking reordered and pavement parking reduced. Anyone without a resident's permit pays on weekdays from nine until seven. The city was explicit about why: commuters and shoppers had been parking free in these streets, and the pressure had become considerable.

Two consequences worth knowing before you sign a lease. A resident's permit does not entitle you to a space; it entitles you to look for one on better terms than everyone else. And where pavement parking has been removed from narrow streets, spaces have been lost outright, so the walk between your car and your door may be longer than you expect — which, on this

hill, is not a neutral fact. Many period buildings have no off-street space at all, so a garage or parking space is a separate cost and worth asking about at the viewing rather than after it.

The realistic pattern for most people here is car-light rather than car-free: no car, and a car-share account or a rental for the handful of days a year when nothing else will do.

III · 4

Ground

This is the chapter about walking out of your own front door.

The route we would use.

Up through the villa streets to the Eichhalde, along it, and then above it into the meadow and the woods.

The Eichhalde is a road along the hillside above the houses, a kilometre and a half of it, running with the slope falling away below and the trees above. It is made surface, it is quiet, and it is the most pleasant stretch of ordinary movement available in the district. The sequoias stand over the gardens on the lower side. On a clear evening the plain is out there to the west.

Above the road is the Eichhalde meadow, and above the meadow the ground is inside the Roßkopf–Schlossberg nature reserve, which is where the walking properly begins.

What each outing gives you.

After dinner. Up to the Eichhalde, along it, back down by a different street. No planning, no boots, no decision. This is the walk that will justify the whole district to you in the first week.

An evening or a spare morning. Onto the meadow and into the reserve, up into the woods behind the district, and back. Enough climbing to feel it, entirely under trees.

Half a day. The Roßkopf, which stands at 737 metres and is the local mountain in every meaningful sense — Freiburg's northern hill, with a lookout tower on top and a view over the Rhine plain to the Kandel, the Feldberg and, in the right conditions, the Vosges. A documented out-and-back from the city runs to about nine kilometres with something near 480 metres of climb, rated moderate and taking most of a morning at walking pace. Or the Zähringer Burg,

the ruined castle north of Herdern, on a circuit of about ten and a half kilometres, with a longer variant of nearly fourteen that continues to Wildtal.

Running. The Eichhalde is the obvious training route — a kilometre and a half of quiet made surface with an out-and-back that makes three. Above it the ground is mostly broad forest road, shaded, climbing steadily, and there is as much of it as you want.

What the ground is actually like.

Mostly *Forstwege* — broad, made forest roads, shaded, of the kind that take a running shoe without complaint. Higher up and further along the ridge the tracks narrow into footpaths where sure footing matters, particularly on the stretch out towards the Martinsfelsen.

After snow or wet winter weather, the upper forest roads can be soft or muddy, and a runner should not assume that the forest tracks will be cleared or gritted. Snow lies on the higher ground into spring in some years. Shoes with some grip and a willingness to come home dirty are the sensible preparation; the Eichhalde itself, being a made road, stays usable when the tracks above it are not.

One thing to know.

The path network in the woods between Herdern and Zähringen is not self-explaining. Waymarking there is inconsistent enough that route descriptions specifically warn about it, and the first few times you go up you should carry a map or a phone with one on it and pay attention to where you joined.

This is a genuine caveat and also, oddly, part of the appeal. A district whose local wood takes a month to learn is a district with a local wood worth learning.

III · 5

Landscape

The chapter above was about the ground behind your house. This one is about everything that ground connects to.

The distinction matters, because in most cities "landscape" means places you drive to on a Sunday. In Freiburg it means the geography you happen to live inside.

North and east: the Black Forest.

From Herdern the forest starts above the district and does not stop. The Roßkopf is the first summit; behind it the country opens into the Black Forest proper.

The practical route into the mountains is the Höllentalbahn. It starts at Freiburg's main station and runs out across flat country to Kirchzarten, and then the line begins to climb — tight curves, steep rock walls, gradients reaching 5.5 per cent, which makes it one of the steepest adhesion railways in Germany. It climbs past the Ravenna gorge and its viaduct to Hinterzarten, the highest station on the line, then drops to Titisee at 858 metres and runs on to Neustadt and eventually Donaueschingen. At Titisee the Dreiseenbahn branches off over the Feldberg and the Schluchsee to Seebrugg.

The important thing is that none of this is an excursion railway. These are ordinary regional services on ordinary tickets — the Freiburg fare network covers them out to Titisee and Neustadt — which turns the high Black Forest into a day that requires no car and no planning beyond looking at a departure board. In winter it is how Freiburg goes to the snow.

South: the hills and the wine.

The Schönberg stands across the valley to the south — 644 metres, the highest of the first line of hills, with a panorama over the Rhine plain. Below and around it the Markgräflerland begins: villages, vineyards, and a landscape that is worked rather than preserved.

West: the plain, the Kaiserstuhl, and France.

The Rhine plain is flat, warm, and threaded with quiet lanes, which makes it the natural direction for a long ride. The Kaiserstuhl sits out in the middle of it, an isolated range of hills in otherwise level country, given over to vines and marketed by the region as a natural garden. Its own small railway loops around it from Breisach through Vogtsburg and Endingen, so it can be reached, ridden in, and left from a different side than you arrived on.

And past the Rhine is Alsace. This is the thing most likely to be underestimated by someone who has not lived here, so here is the number: Freiburg to Colmar by way of Breisach is about

fifty-one kilometres, with something in the order of forty metres of climb. Fifty-one kilometres and forty metres. It is one of the flattest days you will ever ride, most of it on signposted cycle routes away from main roads — over the Rhine on the Europabrücke, through Neuf-Brisach, then through woods and along the Ill into Colmar. Breisach's tourist office sells a cycling map covering exactly this ground, in German and French, with twenty-six route suggestions on both sides of the river.

And you do not have to ride the whole way home. Colmar has no rail link back to Freiburg — the line that once ran through lost its Rhine bridge in 1945 and has terminated at Breisach ever since. But Breisach is the halfway point and the Breisgau S-Bahn runs from there into the city. Ride out to Colmar, eat in Alsace, ride back over the river as far as Breisach, and put the bicycle on the train for the last stretch.

The river.

The Dreisam runs across the bottom of the city and is the spine of everyday movement. From Herdern it is a short way downhill, and once you are on it you can go east towards the mountains or west across the plain without meeting a car.

What this adds up to.

A person living in Herdern has, without owning anything or planning anything: woodland from the front door, a mountain within a morning, a railway into the high Black Forest, vineyards within a short ride, a great river plain, and another country before lunch.

Very few cities of this size can make that list. It is, in the end, most of the reason Freiburg is in this book.

III · 6

Sanctuary

Everyone needs somewhere to go and simply be — without buying anything, without being greeted, without anyone forming a view about how long they have been there.

These are not attractions and they are not places to take visitors. The test is narrow and it excludes a great deal: you must be able to arrive without arrangement, stay for an hour doing

nothing in particular, and leave without having transacted with anybody. That rules out cafés, which are a perfectly good thing and a different thing. It also rules out several places we would have liked to include and could not confirm.

Two places pass it clearly, and they complement each other, because one works in summer and the other works when the weather is against you.

The Eichhalde meadow.

Above the road, below the woods, inside the nature reserve and designated as ground for local recreation. The slope falls away and the plain is beyond it. There are no facilities, which is the point. You can sit on the grass for two hours and the only thing that will happen is the light changing.

Best in the late afternoon and early evening. Not much good in rain, and nothing to sit on but the ground.

The Alter Friedhof.

Freiburg's old cemetery lies just below Herdern — properly speaking in the neighbouring district of Neuburg, though it is commonly misattributed to Herdern, including by local sources, and from most of Herdern it is a short walk downhill.

It has not been used for burials since 1872. What is left is two and a half hectares of walled, treed, park-like ground with around twelve hundred monuments in it, some baroque, most nineteenth-century, all of them slowly losing an argument with the trees. Entry is free and level, from Stadtstraße and from Karlstraße, and there are benches. It is open through the year, though gate times are the sort of thing that changes with the season and is worth checking on the day if you are going late.

The wall is what makes it work. Inside it the city goes quiet in a way that is genuinely surprising given how close the traffic is, and the old trees hold deep shade through a hot afternoon. It is also one of the few places around here that is still worth sitting in under a grey sky in November, which is rarer than shade. There is a chapel from 1720 in the middle of it, rebuilt after the war, which opens for occasional events rather than routinely.

If you live in Herdern and you have a bad week, this is where you go.

What did not make the list.

The parish church on the market square would be an obvious candidate and we could not establish its ordinary opening arrangements, so it is not certified here — if you find it open on a weekday, you have found a third place. The Münster in town is magnificent and we have not verified what a person may do there uninterrupted. Better a short list that holds than a long one that does not.

III · 7

The Year

Winter.

The plain lies grey. Freiburg gets fog and low cloud in the cold months, and there are stretches where the sun is a rumour.

The compensation is directly overhead. On the right January day, climbing above Herdern may take you towards clearer ground while the plain stays under low cloud. When it happens it is one of the genuine pleasures of living on a slope, and it is worth going up to look for.

The woods are bare and open, and the views between the trunks are the best of the year. After snow or wet weather the upper forest roads can be soft or muddy, and nothing up there should be assumed to be cleared or gritted. Snow reaches Herdern occasionally and the higher ground more reliably, with the Black Forest proper half an hour up the Höllental by train.

The tram matters more. So do the bakeries, and the markets keep going.

Spring.

The evenings stretch. The vines come back into leaf on the hillsides while the forest above is still bare enough to see through, which makes late March and April the best few weeks of the year for the high paths — though the upper ground can still be wet underfoot, and in some years there is snow on the ridge into April.

Herdern's gardens do a great deal in a short time. The district is unusually well-treed and it shows most in the six weeks when everything is coming out at once.

Summer.

Freiburg is hot. This needs saying plainly, because it is the single biggest adjustment for someone arriving from a cooler place, and because it is getting more so.

The city sits in the trough of the Upper Rhine and is among the warmest in Germany. The sealed centre runs more than three degrees above the surrounding ground. Hot days are becoming more frequent, and so are nights that never drop below twenty degrees — and it is the nights, not the days, that do the damage, because a body that cannot cool overnight does not recover. In the most recent extreme episode the city centre recorded almost a fortnight of such nights in a row, more than in the notorious summer of 2003, and forty degrees was passed at the great majority of the city's measuring points.

The day reorganises. Shade becomes a resource you plan around. The second half of the afternoon becomes the usable part. You go up rather than out, because the woods above Herdern are cooler than the streets and they are close. The river runs thin. The evening is when the city comes back to life, and Freiburg is very good at evenings.

On whether Herdern is cooler.

At night the cold air comes down off the Black Forest into the city — reliably enough that Freiburg now treats the channels it arrives through as things to be protected when it plans. Where exactly that air reaches, and how much of it gets into which streets, varies across the city.

Whether Herdern's slope benefits is not something we can tell you. The district's own nickname, *Klein-Nizza*, rests on a reputation for being sheltered, and shelter is not the same as ventilation — if anything the two pull in opposite directions. We looked, and we could not settle it.

What we can say is that height helps, that trees help, and that Herdern has both. Beyond that, if you are viewing a flat in July, ask which way the bedroom faces and whether it gets cross-ventilation, and treat the answer as important.

Autumn.

The best stretch, if you want an opinion.

The vintage comes in across the Markgräflerland and the Kaiserstuhl. The forest turns above the town. The light goes long and low across the slope and finds the sequoias. The evenings stay

warm enough to sit out and cool enough to walk far, and the paths that were airless in August become the best thing about the week.

If you visit Freiburg once before deciding, come in October.

PART FOUR

Worthy Contenders

Four districts did not win, and none of them lost badly. Each is a coherent place to live with a real case behind it, and for a certain reader each is the right answer. What follows is that case, made as well as we can make it.

Wiehre

South of the Dreisam, and the closest thing Freiburg has to a rival for Herdern's proposition.

Wiehre reads as the nineteenth-century city at its most confident, and it has a station of its own on the mountain railway. The impression is of broad streets, substantial houses and mature trees, with the shops and cafés that tend to survive in a district that has been comfortable for a long time.

What it does better than anywhere else in Freiburg is get you into the woods. From the Wiehre station you cross the railway and you are in the Sternwald almost immediately — the fastest transition from street to forest in the whole field, faster than Herdern's, and by a clear margin. And once you are in, Wiehre gives you two genuinely different walks from the same doorstep: a climbing route up through the woods to the Sternwaldeck and the Wasserschlössle, and a second that runs three and a half kilometres east to Littenweiler, level the whole way and shaded the whole way. That second one is more valuable than it sounds. A district with a flat, shaded route is a district that stays usable through injury, illness, pregnancy and age, and very few places have one.

Why it did not win is harder to state than why Herdern did, because Wiehre does almost nothing wrong. It is a beautiful residential district rather than a place with a centre of its own — where Herdern has kept a village, Wiehre has kept an address. Its principal hill, the Lorettoberg, remains a working local amenity, though access across the summit itself is restricted and walkers

take alternative routes over the hill. And it is expensive: the southern part of it sits at very much the same level as Herdern's north.

Choose Wiehre if you run or walk daily and want the trees to start immediately, or if a level shaded route matters more to you than a market square, or if the elegance of the nineteenth-century city appeals to you more than the survival of a village inside a city.

Altstadt

The old town, and the most concentrated urban life in the region.

Living in the Altstadt means living inside eight hundred years of continuous city. The Münster is there, the Bächle run past your door, and Freiburg's shopping, eating, drinking and cultural life is within a few minutes' walk. It is largely closed to traffic. It is small enough to cross on foot without thinking about it.

And it is not cut off from the landscape either, which is the thing people get wrong about it. The Schlossberg rises directly from the eastern edge; from the Schwabentor you are climbing within moments, and the Kanonenplatz view over the roofs is a lunch-hour walk. The Dreisam path is at the southern edge.

What stopped it is the stone. The centre of Freiburg runs more than three degrees warmer than the ground around it, and in the summers Freiburg is now having, that is not an abstraction — it is the difference between a flat that cools at night and one that does not. Add the ordinary costs of living in a historic centre: noise, visitors, the difficulty of parking anything, and housing that is old in ways less forgiving than Herdern's, because the buildings are older and the sites more constrained.

Choose Altstadt if you want the city itself and are prepared to manage the heat — if you are out most evenings, want everything on foot, and would rather have the cathedral at the end of the street than a garden.

Vauban

The most interesting neighbourhood in Freiburg, and the one with the strongest opinions about how people should live.

Built from the 1990s on a former barracks site in the south, Vauban was planned around reduced car use and high energy standards, and is widely described as having been shaped by an unusual degree of resident participation in what got built. The result is not the sterile eco-showcase a sceptic might expect: it is a green, sociable place, full of trees and of buildings that look as though the people who live in them had a hand in the design. The street layout is deliberately graded, from the fifty-kilometre road at the edge, through the quarter's tram-lined spine at thirty, down to residential streets at walking pace and finally to paths and pedestrian areas. There is real community here in a way that is difficult to manufacture.

It also reaches the countryside on foot: south along the Dorfbach corridor towards Merzhausen, and from there up towards the Schönberg — a long, flat warm-up followed by a proper climb, which is a better arrangement than it sounds.

What held it back is mostly practical. The route out crosses that fifty-kilometre corridor. There is a signalled pedestrian crossing where it matters, so this is not a barrier that defeats the walk — but local voices describe the road as a substantial one and report awkward pedestrian signal sequencing around the tram movements, and it is the first thing between you and open ground. The quarter is served by a single tram branch; recent track works showed that when that branch is interrupted, direct service stops and replacement buses take over. And cycling conditions on the boundary road are contested locally, which is a striking thing to have to say about Freiburg's cycling district.

Choose Vauban if you want to live car-free rather than car-light and mean it, or if you want your neighbourhood to be a project you participate in rather than a place you inhabit, or if you want streets your children can be let out onto.

Rieselfeld

The newest of the five, and the most misread.

Rieselfeld was planned from scratch in the 1990s on flat ground west of the city, and it does the things new districts do well: light, space, wide pavements, the kind of newer stock that generally comes with lifts and insulation, and a district centre that was planned rather than left to happen. It is flat, which after several chapters about a hill deserves emphasis — everything here is reachable by anybody, with a pushchair, on a bad day, at any age.

To the west it is bounded by 257 hectares of nature reserve, and the light and quiet coming off that open ground is genuinely remarkable.

The reserve is also the honest complication, and it is the most interesting thing this comparison turned up. It is a conservation area rather than a park, and the city deliberately keeps paths out of it in order to protect what lives there; its own planning documents say so. So Rieselfeld has exceptional ecological adjacency without equivalent recreational permeability: an enormous, beautiful, quiet horizon that you look at rather than walk into. What is actually available underfoot is the district park, the restored river corridor and the paths towards the animal enclosure — and the main running route west along the Dreisam runs alongside a trunk road, screened by trees for much of its length but a road margin all the same.

Add the distance from the centre, and the district's newness, which some people experience as light and others as an absence of accumulated character.

Choose Rieselfeld if you need flat ground — for a pushchair, a wheelchair, a bad knee, or simply a preference — or if you want a modern, well-insulated flat rather than a beautiful cold one, or if space and a wide western horizon matter to you more than a village square.

P A R T F I V E

Verdicts

Everything so far has described a territory. This part answers a question, and a question always belongs to somebody.

Where we would live: Herdern.

The middle band of it — the streets around and just above the old village core. Close enough to walk down to the market without thinking about it. High enough to be out of the traffic. Below the point where the weekly shop becomes a project, and above the point where you stop hearing your own garden.

We would take a flat in a period building, accept the stairs and the heating bills, and count a share of a garden as a large part of the rent. We would walk the Eichhalde most evenings. We would shop on the village street on Tuesdays and Fridays and use the western parade for everything with awkward hours.

That is the recommendation, without qualification, for a household with no unusual constraints.

Where the answer changes.

If anyone in the household has limited mobility, or you will be pushing a pram for the next three years — change altitude before you change district. This is the most useful judgment in the book and it is almost always overlooked, because comparisons are built between districts and lives are lived on particular streets. For many mobility constraints, look first at lower Herdern, where the shops, the market and the tram are concentrated and the daily climb is greatly reduced. If genuinely level ground or wheelchair-oriented accessibility is a hard requirement, Rieselfeld becomes the stronger answer — and a good one rather than a consolation.

If you run or walk every day without exception — look hard at Wiehre. The forest is faster from there, and the level shaded route to Littenweiler is a real asset that Herdern cannot match. This is the closest of the conditional calls and it turns on how central daily movement is to your life.

If you intend to be genuinely car-free and want that to be the neighbourhood's assumption rather than your private arrangement — Vauban. Not because Herdern requires a car, which it does not, but because Vauban is built around the choice and you will be among people who made it too.

If you are out most nights and want the city itself — Altstadt, with your eyes open about August. Ask which way the flat faces and whether it cools.

If you are arriving with very little time and need somewhere quickly — this is a practical rather than a geographical verdict. Freiburg's rental market is tight, and Herdern is not a district we would plan to secure from abroad on a deadline. Take something adequate elsewhere for a year and search properly from inside the city, where you can view at two hours' notice and walk the street in the evening before deciding. Moving twice is annoying. Signing a bad lease on a hillside you have not walked in the rain is worse.

There is no ranking hidden in the above. These are five different questions with five different answers, and only the first one is ours.

What We Could Not Establish

Every guide has holes. Most conceal them. Listing ours seems more useful, and it lets you judge how far to trust the rest.

Things that would change what we tell you.

Whether Herdern cools at night. Freiburg's summers are hot and getting hotter, and cold air comes down out of the Black Forest at night. Whether that air reaches Herdern's streets in useful quantity — and whether the upper slope does better than the lower — we could not establish. This matters, because in a warming city the answer could change how attractive the district is in August. We have declined to guess in either direction. The local nickname suggests shelter; shelter is not ventilation.

Things that limit precision without changing the recommendation.

Gradients. Distances are documented and one climb figure is; cumulative ascent for the routes above Herdern generally is not. Where we say a walk is steep, we mean it is steep, not that we have measured it.

Ordinary opening arrangements for the parish church on the market square, which is why it does not appear in the Sanctuary chapter despite being the obvious candidate.

The live rental picture. The structural account of Herdern's housing is durable. The snapshot in Home is not: it records a single day, 28 August 2026, and it will age faster than anything else in this book. Read the shape of it — the thinness, the swap offers, the kind of stock advertised — and treat the individual figures as already out of date.

We have not listed everything we chose not to investigate. A guide is not improved by cataloguing the questions it decided were beside the point.

Evidence Register

Organised by section, with numbered claim clusters. Sources are given for claims where a reader might reasonably want to check, disagree, or go further. Where a source is a trade or advocacy publication rather than a public record, that is stated, because it changes how much weight the claim should carry.

Municipal and statistical figures carry the date of the record rather than the date of writing. Establishment details — addresses, opening hours, market days — were compiled from a commercial geographical inventory and are accurate to the date of compilation; they are re-checked before each edition.

I.1 Why Freiburg

1.1 The Dreisam paths. Approximately 8.5 km of predominantly paved path along the southern bank; the western section runs from the Schwabentorbrücke to the Lehener Brücke, the eastern towards the sports complex and the Dreisamstadion. *Great Runs, Freiburg.*

1.2 Schlossberg access. Ascent from the Schwabentor to the Kanonenplatz, with views over the city towards the Vosges, continuing along the Roßkopf edge. *Route documentation, freiburg-schwarzwald.de.*

1.3 City figures. Population 237,460 (31 December 2024); area 153.04 km²; elevation 278 m. *Wikipedia, Freiburg im Breisgau, citing municipal statistics.*

1.4 Regional geography. Schönberg 644 m, highest point of the Vorbergzone, with panorama route from Merzhausen over Ebringen; Merzhausen 254–538 m; Roßkopf 737 m, between the Glotter and Dreisam valleys. *planetoutdoor; Wikipedia, Roßkopf (Breisgau).*

1.5 Climatic character. Freiburg among the hottest cities in Germany owing to its position in the Upper Rhine Graben. *Stadt Freiburg, Klimaanpassungskonzept Hitze.*

1.6 Low water on the Dreisam. The city publishes an annual analysis of low-flow days from the Ebnet gauge; the dried-out riverbed is named among the changes residents report noticing. *Stadt Freiburg, Klima in Freiburg.*

1.7 Heat island. Inner-city temperatures usually more than 3°C above the surrounding area. *Stadt Freiburg — see 10.2.*

1.8 The old town, the university and the Bächle. No source here establishes the university's foundation date, the origin or age of the Bächle, or the precise extent of traffic restriction in the old town. The text accordingly describes these without dates or measures.

I.2 The Residential Choice

2.1 The board. Herdern 2.0205; Wiehre 2.2808; Altstadt 2.5685; Vauban 2.9178; Rieselfeld 3.3493. Lower is better. *Home Index, Freiburg comparison. See Method Note.*

All district-level claims in this section are carried by the clusters for the relevant chapter: Herdern at 3.x, the contenders at 11.x.

II Herdern

3.1 History and incorporation. First documentary mention 1008, in a donation of hunting rights in the Breisgau forests; incorporated into Freiburg 1457. *Wikipedia, Herdern (Freiburg).*

3.2 Population. 12,509 (31 December 2020). *Wikipedia, Herdern (Freiburg).*

3.3 The wine village and the 1890s development. Herdern as a former independent winegrowing village; one vineyard surviving below the Eichhalde panorama road; St. Urban's named for the winegrowers' patron; conversion of vines to building land under the mayor elected in 1888; Gründerzeit and Jugendstil building on the slopes of Herdern and the Wiehre; the sequoias. *SolidImmo, estate agency — trade source. Historically checkable and consistent with 3.4, but not a public record.*

3.4 Building stock. Majority of houses from the Jugendstil period; villas on generous plots on the slopes; continued building through the twentieth century with looser development in the northern part. *Engel & Völkers — trade source.*

3.5 Topography and the Glasbach. The Glasbach rises on the Roßkopf and flows east to west through Herdern. *Wikipedia, Herdern (Freiburg).*

3.6 The Eichhalde. A 1.5 km scenic road along the hillside above Herdern; above it the Eichhalde meadow, within the Roßkopf–Schlossberg nature reserve, serving as a local recreation area. *Wikipedia, Herdern (Freiburg).*

3.7 The two provision clusters. Western cluster on Habsburgerstraße: supermarket at nos. 60–62, bakery and pharmacy sharing no. 59 — approximately 70 m apart. Eastern cluster on Hauptstraße: supermarket at no. 68, bakery at no. 66, pharmacy at no. 58 — approximately 50 m apart. Separation between clusters approximately 630 m. *Distances computed from establishment coordinates; establishments from commercial geographical inventory. See 5.1–5.2.*

3.8 Absence of everyday provision on the upper slope. A second search biased on the Immentalstraße / Sonnhalde / Eichhalde area returned no grocery, bakery or pharmacy above the two clusters. *Same inventory. This establishes that the inventory found none, not that none exists.*

3.9 Rents relative to the city. See 4.2.

3.10 Klein-Nizza. The district's nickname, attributed locally to a sheltered position and mild climate. *SolidImmo — trade source, reporting a folk name. Carried in the text as a reputation, not a climatic finding. See 10.5.*

III.1 Home

4.1 The Mietspiegel. Qualified rent index for 2025/2026, valid 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2026, prepared with a parity working group of tenant and landlord representatives with judicial and municipal advisers, data collected and analysed by the EMA-Institut für empirische Marktanalysen, Regensburg. For this edition the base rent table was restructured by floor area and construction year, and location classes were surveyed and evaluated on a geographical basis. Published free as a PDF with an online calculator. *Stadt Freiburg, Mietspiegel; mietspiegeltabelle.de.*

4.2 Portal figures and their divergence. Freiburg approximately €14.49/m² in Q1 2026, up around 4.9% year on year, with Herdern-Nord at €15.95/m² (ImmoScout24); Herdern average €13.07/m², range €10.98–16.66

(immoportal); Herdern €14.91/m² (miet-check). *Three portals, asking-rent aggregations, not the qualified instrument. The divergence is itself the reported finding.*

4.3 Freiburger Stadtbau. More than 9,500 dwellings let at below-market rents; the largest housing company in Freiburg; online application; deposit of three times the base rent on conclusion of contract; the company's own statement that demand is particularly high given the tight market. *wohneninfreiburg.de / Freiburger Stadtbau.*

4.4 The cooperatives. Three large cooperatives holding approximately 8,800 dwellings among some 30,700 members. Bauverein Breisgau: approximately 5,000 dwellings; lifelong right of residence; application possible at earliest after two years of membership; on allocation, five further shares at €155 (€930 with the first) plus a compulsory savings deposit of three months' usage fee; waiting times of several years depending on location; three refusals trigger a six-month block. Familienheim Freiburg: approximately 2,700 dwellings; admission of new members generally excluded at the date of checking. Heimbau Breisgau: approximately 1,300 units; allocation as a rule by length of membership; personal attendance expected before the board decides. *Energieagentur Regio Freiburg; Bauverein Breisgau eG; wohnungsbaugenossenschaften-freiburg.de. Admission rules change, which is why the text tells the reader to check each cooperative individually.*

4.5 Live market snapshot, 28 August 2026. Across the major portals, Herdern returned only a couple of dozen entries, a figure inflated by commercial premises, wanted advertisements and results from adjoining districts. A substantial proportion of the Herdern entries were flat-swap offers (*Tauschangebote*) placed by sitting tenants rather than lettings — examples included a two-room ground-floor flat near the market square, a three-room maisonette offered from the following summer, and a 52 m² flat offered in exchange for something larger. Advertised stock was predominantly period: wooden floors, stucco ceilings, absence of lifts, garden shares, and a converted late-eighteenth-century cottage on the church square. One portal reported a current Herdern average of €14.74/m². A garage space in one building was quoted at €60 per month. *ImmoScout24, immowelt, immonet, immobilo, wohnungsboerse, meinestadt — portal listings, dated snapshot. Asking prices, and counts vary with each portal's method. The proportion of swap offers is reported as observed on the day rather than as a measured share of the market.*

4.6 General rental practice. The application-document list, the *Staffelmiete* and kitchen-transfer conventions, and the description of the *Baugruppe* reflect ordinary German rental practice rather than findings specific to Freiburg.

III.2 The Week

5.1 Eastern cluster. DANNER Frischemarkt, Hauptstraße 68 (Mon–Fri 07:00–19:00, Sat 07:00–14:00, Sun closed); Bäckerei Reiß Beck, Hauptstraße 66 (Mon–Fri 06:30–18:30, Sat 06:30–17:00, Sun 07:30–17:00); Urban-Apotheke, Hauptstraße 58 (Mon–Fri 08:30–13:30 and 14:30–18:30, Sat 08:30–13:00); Bäckerei Heitzmann, Urbanstraße 16. *Commercial geographical inventory, compiled to date of retrieval.*

5.2 Western cluster. EDEKA Barwig, Habsburgerstraße 60–62 (Mon–Sat 08:00–20:00, Sun closed); Dorfbäckerei Ritter, Habsburgerstraße 59 (07:00–18:00, seven days including Sunday); Herdern-Apotheke, Habsburgerstraße 59 (Mon–Fri 08:30–19:00, Sat 08:30–13:00). *Same.*

5.3 Post and parcels. Deutsche Post branch, Habsburgerstraße 29 (Mon–Fri 09:00–12:30 and 14:00–18:30, Sat 09:00–13:00); two DHL parcel machines, Habsburgerstraße 19, available 24 hours. *Same.*

5.4 Markets. Herderner Bauernmarkt, Hauptstraße 39: Tuesdays 15:00–18:00, Fridays 14:00–18:00. Wochenmarkt, Habsburgerstraße: Saturdays 08:00–13:00. *Same.*

5.5 Nearest large-format supermarket. Kaufland, Waldkircher Straße 57, approximately 610 m north-west of the Habsburgerstraße cluster. *Same; distance computed from coordinates.*

5.6 Sunday closing. Every supermarket record at 5.1 and 5.2 shows Sunday closure, and both bakeries record Sunday opening. The text describes the pattern observed in those records rather than the statutory rule behind it.

III.3 Moving

6.1 The tram through Herdern. The Habsburgerstraße section was comprehensively renewed between February 2009 and November 2010, receiving a largely green track bed over much of its length; the three stops Tennenbacher Straße, Hauptstraße and Okenstraße were rebuilt to be step-free. The line continues north to Zähringen. *Wikipedia, Straßenbahn Freiburg im Breisgau.*

6.2 Bertoldsbrunnen. The central interchange of the Freiburg tram network, served by all lines except the one routed over the Rotteckring. *freiburg-im-netz.de.*

6.3 Fare integration. RVF tariff conditions apply on Deutsche Bahn routes in all local services (S-Bahn, RegionalBahn, RegionalExpress, InterRegioExpress). The network is divided into three fare zones; within Freiburg, fare stage 1 applies. The RegioKarte is the monthly ticket for the whole network area. Titisee and Neustadt stations lie in RVF zone C. *Regio-Verkehrsverbund Freiburg, Gemeinschaftstarif, as published in the city's Ortsrecht; bahnhoffreiburg.de, regional tariffs (stated current at 2 April 2026); Wikipedia, Titisee and Neustadt (Schwarzw) stations.*

6.4 Resident parking in Herdern. Herdern lies within the city's resident-permit parking system. From 15 August 2024 the existing Herdern–Neuburg zone was redrawn and extended north to the Okenstraße and east to the Wintererstraße, with parking reordered and pavement parking reduced; all households in the extended zones were written to in advance. For non-permit holders, parking is chargeable on weekdays 09:00–19:00 (in fee zone 1, until 23:00), at €3.80 per hour in zone 1, €3.20 in zone 2 and €1.80 in zone 3. The city gives as its reason the high parking pressure in quarters adjoining the existing zones, where commuters and shoppers had parked free. Where pavement parking is removed from streets too narrow for two-way traffic, passing places are created and a larger number of spaces is lost; the city acknowledges that distances between parking space and dwelling may lengthen. A resident's permit does not guarantee a fixed space. *Stadt Freiburg, Bewohnerparken and Service A–Z; municipal announcement as reported by RegioTrends and baden24.* Permit fees are not given here: the city's fee schedule has been before the Verwaltungsgerichtshof and the Bundesverwaltungsgericht, and a figure taken from a secondary source could mislead.

6.5 Cycling investment. The city operates a continuing programme of pedestrian and cycle improvements, including reallocation of carriageway to cycle lanes at major junctions. *Stadt Freiburg, Fuß- und Radoffensive.*

Service frequency is not stated in the text and is not carried here; it is published by the operator and changes with the timetable.

III.4 Ground

7.1 The Eichhalde. 1.5 km scenic road along the hillside above Herdern; Eichhalde meadow above it. *See 3.6.*

7.2 Roßkopf. 737 m; on the city boundary between the Glotter and Dreisam valleys; lookout tower; part of the forest under special protection. *Wikipedia, Roßkopf (Breisgau).* A documented out-and-back route from Freiburg: 8.9 km, 481 m of elevation difference, rated moderate, 3.5–4 hours. *AllTrails.* **The only ascent figure in the book; start point is Freiburg generally, not Herdern specifically.**

7.3 Zähringer Burg circuits. Approximately 10.5 km from Herdern, rated moderate; a longer variant of approximately 13.8 km continuing to Wildtal. *Route documentation, outdooractive / komoot.*

7.4 Surface character. Predominantly broad forest roads, mostly shaded; sure footing required on the narrower paths between St. Otilien and the Martinsfelsen. *KOMPASS; outdooractive.*

7.5 Winter condition. Snow recorded lying on the ridge into April in at least one year, with forest roads muddy after it; no evidence of clearing or gritting on the forest network. *Walker's account, wandern-flanieren.de: a single observer in one season, which is why the text describes what to prepare for rather than a norm.*

7.6 Waymarking. Route descriptions specifically warn of path confusion in the woods between Zähringen and Herdern, requiring orientation. *KOMPASS.*

7.7 Views from the Roßkopf tower. Kandel, Schauinsland and Feldberg; the Vosges in suitable conditions. *Walker's account, wandern-flanieren.de.*

III.5 Landscape

8.1 Schönberg. 644 m; highest point of the Vorbergzone; described as, after the Schauinsland, the most attractive local destination for Freiburgers. *planetoutdoor.*

8.2 The Höllentalbahn. Begins at Freiburg Hbf and runs through flat country to Kirchzarten, from where the line climbs markedly through the Höllental in tight curves along steep rock walls, with gradients of up to 5.5%, making it one of the steepest adhesion railways in Germany. It climbs past the Ravenna gorge and its viaduct to Hinterzarten, the highest station on the line, then descends to Titisee and continues to Neustadt and on towards Donaueschingen; the Dreiseenbahn branches at Titisee over the Feldberg and Schluchsee to Seebrugg. Services are operated by regional trains. Titisee station stands at 858 m. *bahnhofsfreiburg.de; Wikipedia, Titisee station and Neustadt (Schwarzw) station.* Fare basis at 6.3.

8.3 Freiburg to Colmar by bicycle. A published route Freiburg – Breisach – Colmar: 51 km, 43 m of ascent. From Breisach the signposted route crosses the Rhine on the Europabrücke via Volgelsheim to Neuf-Breisach, then away from main roads through the Hardt woods to the Ill and into Colmar. Breisach-Touristik publishes a cycling map covering Colmar to Freiburg with 26 route suggestions on both banks in German and French, showing all officially signposted routes. *bikemap; outdooractive / Schwarzwald Tourismus; tourismus.breisach.de.*

8.4 Rail return from Breisach. The Breisgau S-Bahn connects Breisach to Freiburg via Gottenheim, over the surviving section of the former Freiburg–Colmar line; the Rhine bridge between Breisach and Neuf-Breisach was destroyed in 1945 and the line has terminated at Breisach since. Breisach elevation 225 m. *Wikipedia, Breisach and Freiburg–Colmar railway.*

8.5 The Kaiserstuhl. An upland area in the Rhine plain, in wine cultivation, promoted regionally as the "Naturgarten Kaiserstuhl"; the Kaiserstuhlbahn connects Breisach to Riegel via Vogtsburg and Endingen. *Wikipedia, Breisach; tourismus.breisach.de.* The Kaiserstuhl's volcanic origin, terraced cultivation and distinctive flora are widely reported but are not carried by a source here, and the text does not claim them.

8.6 Visibility of the Vosges. Established from the Kanonenplatz on the Schlossberg (1.2) and reported from the Roßkopf tower (7.7). No source places them in view from Herdern's own slope, and the text makes no such claim.

III.6 Sanctuary

9.1 The Eichhalde meadow. Within the Roßkopf–Schlossberg nature reserve; designated as a local recreation area. *Wikipedia, Herdern (Freiburg)*. Access is by public recreation designation, satisfying the ordinary-access test.

9.2 The Alter Friedhof. Located in Neuburg, not Herdern, and commonly misattributed to Herdern including by local press. 2.65 hectares; park-like character; one of the oldest German cemeteries preserved in its entirety; approximately 1,200 monuments; in use as a burial ground from 1683 to 1872; classified as a cultural and natural monument. Level entrances from Stadtstraße and Karlstraße; high enclosing wall; mature shade trees; park benches; described as giving an impression of complete seclusion in the middle of the city. Open year-round. St. Michael's Chapel at the centre, built 1720, badly damaged in the Second World War and rebuilt to the original, opening for occasional events rather than routinely. *Wikipedia, Alter Friedhof (Freiburg im Breisgau); visit.freiburg.de; schwarzwaldregion-freiburg.de; freiburg-schwarzwald.de*. Year-round opening rests on a single excursion listing rather than an official schedule; seasonal gate times are not published in the sources consulted, which is why the text advises checking on the day.

9.3 Places excluded. The parish church on the market square is not certified because its ordinary opening arrangements could not be established; the Münster for the same reason. Cafés are excluded by definition, requiring a transaction. *Stated in the text*.

III.7 The Year

10.1 Observed record. Average temperature across the municipal area 9.8°C in the 1971–2000 reference period, above the German mean; the heavily sealed inner city already reaching 11.4°C. In the last ten years the annual mean exceeded the long-term average in eight; annual precipitation fell below the long-term mean in all ten, by as much as 33%. *Stadt Freiburg, Klima in Freiburg*. **Observed record.**

10.2 Heat island. Inner-city temperatures usually more than 3°C above the surrounding area, attributed to sealed surface and the absence of green and tree structure in the central districts. *Same*.

10.3 Night heat. Tropical nights — never falling below 20°C — increasing; the city identifies missing nocturnal cooling as the greatest heat burden on people, because the body cannot sufficiently regenerate overnight. *Same*.

10.4 The recent extreme episode. On 27 June 2026 the 40°C mark was exceeded at 29 of the city's street-level measuring stations, the highest reading 43.1°C in front of the Medical Center; the city centre recorded thirteen consecutive tropical nights, more than in August 2003; temperatures exceeded those of the 2003 summer by late June. Readings are taken at 3 m in streets, parks and over farmland and are not directly comparable with standard national weather-service measurements taken outside dense development. *Universität Freiburg, street-level weather station network*.

10.5 Cold air and the unresolved district question. Cold-air drainage from the Black Forest is a recognised feature of Freiburg's climate, and the protection of cold-air channels and ventilation lanes is among the measures of the city's heat adaptation concept, which since a council resolution of February 2019 must be taken into account in land-use planning and project approvals. Whether this reaches Herdern's built fabric, and whether the upper slope differs from the lower, was not established. *Stadt Freiburg, Klimaanpassungskonzept Hitze*. **See What We Could Not Establish.**

10.6 Winter cloud. Fog and low cloud in the cold months are described from general regional character rather than from a measured record. The text accordingly states the possibility of climbing into clearer air, not its likelihood.

IV Worthy Contenders

11.1 Wiehre. From the Wiehre station the route crosses the Höllentalbahn and enters forest immediately. The Sternwald am Bromberg holds the Wasserschlössle, the Franzosenweg and the Sternwaldeck viewpoint, with the Deicheleweiher nearby. A forest path parallel to the Waldseestraße reaches Littenweiler in 3.5 km, shaded throughout and level. *wiehre-online*. The path over the Lorettoberg summit is closed and no longer passable, with a locked gate at the northern end and a detour possible; a runner's account attributes the closure to the way being a private road. The Lorettoberg summit stands at 384.5 m, with a 348 m spur to the north carrying the Lorettokapelle; the hill remains a popular local walking and recreation destination. *Route warning, wanderatlas; a runner's account, in which the private-road explanation is a reported reason rather than an ownership record; Wikipedia, Lorettoberg. Unterwiehre-Süd at €15.91/m². ImmoScout24 — asking rents.*

11.2 Altstadt. Heat island as 10.2. Schlossberg access as 1.2. Dreisam path at the southern edge as 1.1.

11.3 Vauban. The quarter's traffic concept grades streets from the surrounding higher-order roads at 50 km/h, via the Vaubanallee as main access road at 30 km/h with managed parking, to calmed residential streets at walking pace and finally to the supplementary foot and cycle network and pedestrian areas. *Stadt Freiburg, Vauban*. The tram runs largely on a green track bed through the Merzhauser Straße, turning into the Vaubanallee at Paula-Modersohn-Platz. *Wikipedia, Straßenbahn Freiburg im Breisgau*. Track renewal works in 2024 interrupted service on the branch and required replacement buses. *VAG Freiburg*. A separate cycle path exists on the Merzhauser Straße in normal conditions, established by inversion from works notices; local criticism describes the cycle paths there as narrow and states that overtaking slower cyclists requires entering the motor lane. *VAG Freiburg; AK Verkehr Vauban; VCD — advocacy assessment, not measurement*. The route south runs from Paula-Modersohn-Platz via the Vaubanallee and Alte Straße to the Elmar-Bitzenhofer-Weg beside the Dorfbach, then Merzhausen and the Schöenberg. *planetoutdoor*. A signalised pedestrian crossing exists at the Vaubanallee entrance to the Merzhauser Straße. *Independently verified against a Vauban traffic study, a current local Vauban source, and the Öko-Institut's visitor directions.*

11.4 Rieselfeld. Nature reserve of 257 hectares, designated 1995, bounded west by the A5 and east by the district. The city states that no paths lead into the reserve or the Mooswald in order to protect them, that recreation is provided outside the conservation areas by the renaturalised Dreisam, the Dietenbachpark and planned green space, and that the reserve is to be protected from large visitor flows. A Naturerlebnispfad laid out in 2001 runs west of the district at the edge of the Mundenhof. *Stadt Freiburg, Dietenbach planning documentation; municipal and regional sources*. The western Dreisam route runs 5.5 km from the Schwabentorbrücke to the Lehener Brücke alongside the B31a, with a tree buffer for much of the way; a path branches south towards the Dietenbachpark near the 3 km mark. *Great Runs*.

11.5 Contender characterisations. Wiehre's streets and long comfort, the degree of resident participation in Vauban, and the fit-out of Rieselfeld's newer stock are not carried by sources here. The text presents them as impressions — what these districts read like — rather than as findings, and no recommendation rests on them.

Method Note

The Home Index is an attempt to rank places by what they are like to live in rather than by what they are like to visit.

Freiburg entered this book because it performed strongly on that basis. Within Freiburg, five districts were defined as candidates and assessed against a common set of criteria covering the things that structure ordinary residential life — housing, everyday provision, quiet, safety, movement without a car, access to the wider city, walking and running, greenery, landscape, character, and places of refuge. The result was:

1	Herdern	2.0205
2	Wiehre	2.2808
3	Altstadt	2.5685
4	Vauban	2.9178
5	Rieselfeld	3.3493

Lower is better. The scores are comparative rather than absolute: they order these five candidates against each other and mean nothing outside that comparison. A gap of a quarter of a point between first and second is a real difference and not a decisive one, which is why the second-placed district gets a serious chapter rather than a footnote.

The ranking selected the subject of this book. It did not write it. Everything in Parts II and III rests on evidence gathered afterwards, to answer a different question — not *which district scores best* but *what would living there actually consist of*. Where that later evidence was uncertain, the text says so.

Colophon

The Home Index · Practical Companion

Freiburg — Herdern

First edition.

Set in EB Garamond, with IBM Plex Mono.

Research and text: the Home Index.

Errors are ours; corrections are welcome and will be carried into subsequent editions.

Hoc est opus. Et satis est.