

Train Travel to Sylt Via the Hindenburg Dam (1928)

Abstract

The 1928 film *Fahrt nach Westerland* [Journey to Westerland] combined documentary footage with a fictional plot to showcase the transportation advantages of the *Hindenburgdamm*, a narrow railway link, completed the previous year, that connected the German mainland to the German island of Sylt, a popular North Sea vacation destination. Films like this one, known as *Wirtschaftsfilme* [industrial films], cultivated public appreciation of recent economic and technological developments. In the narrative, a mother tries to make her daughter forget a boyfriend by sending the daughter on a journey by boat to the seemingly isolated destination of Sylt, not realizing that the boyfriend can—thanks to the new rail connection—get to that island swiftly and easily. He does exactly that, and the couple happily reunites in Westerland, a main resort town on Sylt. The film incorporated earlier footage from the construction work in the tidal mudflats of the North Sea, which director Friedrich Einar Stier, an engineer by training, had managed to capture. The causeway was officially opened in June 1927 and named *Hindenburgdamm* in honor of the Reich President.

The 6.8-mile causeway shortened the journey to the island, made it much more comfortable, and provided year-round access to the mainland. People no longer had to rely on a tide-dependent ferry service that could not run during storms or cold snaps when the water froze. Despite the rail link's advantages, many islanders opposed the project, fearing an unwanted influx of people. In the end, though, the economic promise of a flourishing tourism industry carried the day. The rail connection also spared German travelers to Sylt the hassle of having to transit through Danish territory, which even required a visa at one point, in order to reach the port from which the ferry departed the mainland. Before the First World War, this ethnically mixed region had been German territory, but a 1920 referendum, decreed by the Treaty of Versailles, had passed control of it to Germany's northern neighbor. That development lent new urgency to earlier calls for a direct connection from the German island of Sylt to the German mainland.

Source

In recent years, a railroad embankment has been built through the Wadden Sea to Sylt.

On June 1, 1927, the new connection was opened by the Reich President, and since then it has been possible to travel without changing trains, comfortably seated in the dining car, across the *Hindenburgdamm* in 15 minutes through the Wadden Sea to Sylt.

Source: *Fahrt nach Westerland* (clip), dir. Friedrich E. Stier, Wirtschaftsfilm GmbH, 1928. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Filmwerk ID: 863. <https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/863/691324>

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