

The Tatzelwurm Dragon of Essing

Would you have imagined to catch sight of a genuine Tatzelwurm near Essing in the valley of the Altmühl river? A Tatzelwurm is a legendary dragon-like, trouble-making creature from the Alps, with strong paws, dangerous, snapping jaws, and a snake-like body.

Upon leaving the town of Essing and heading directly toward the river, you will come across this beast, although in an entirely different – somewhat wooden – appearance.

The local nickname Tatzelwurm refers to the longest wooden bridge in Bavaria, which incidentally also is one of the longest wooden bridges in Europe.

With its overall length of 189 meters and 91 centimeters, the bridge spans not only the Main-Danube Canal but also the federal highway running alongside the canal. And it is made entirely of wood!

Constructed as a suspension bridge, it has to withstand enormous tensile stress and vibrations. For this very reason, the bridge statics were carefully calculated, and a model of the bridge was even tested in a wind tunnel. This masterpiece of bridge building was designed by the Munich architect and engineer Richard Johann Dietrich.

The resemblance to the mythical dragon-like creature is immediately apparent in the bridge's shape. The bridge seems to be standing on two pairs of paws, one on each side of the canal bank, supporting the Tatzelwurm's snake-like body.

There is no need to worry about flesh-and-blood Tatzelwurms in the valley of the Altmühl. Sightings of such creatures have always been limited to the Alps and the Alpine foothills. The last sighting of a Tatzelwurm was reported as late as 1984. Not much has been heard about the mythical creatures since. Some storytellers today still relate that Tatzelwurms, by no means extinct, are simply lurking in deep caves, waiting to crawl out and wreak havoc again on humans and livestock.

Nevertheless, the wooden Tatzelwurm bridge in Essing beautifully blends in with the fairytale landscape and its characteristic medieval knight's castles.