

Proposals

The Memorial of Esterwegen proposes various activities:

- special exhibitions, readings and talks
- day workshops, seminars and continuing education for teachers
- traineeships for students of secondary and higher education
- guided tours for groups of students and others from upwards of 15 people by appointment

For an individual arrangement regarding the schedule and the content of a guided tour, please contact the Memorial.

Public guided tours take place from February through December on the first Sunday of the month at 11 a.m. and at 3 p.m. No reservations required. Each guided tour consists of an accompanied visit of the exhibitions and the camp grounds.

Prices for a guided tour per person
Adults 4,00 € Students 2,00 €

Visits by groups of students and young people from Lower Saxony can be subsidised following an application made to the Stiftung niedersächsischer Gedenkstätten at Celle.

For up-to-date information, please consult the web-site of the Memorial.

Contact

Gedenkstätte Esterwegen

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Opening hours

From April to October Tuesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
From November to March Tuesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Closed from 15 December to 15 January

Admission free.



The Memorial of Esterwegen



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Gedenkstätte Esterwegen

The Emsland Camps

Between 1933 and 1945, the NS-State ran 15 prisoner camps in Emsland and the county of Bentheim. As with the criminal justice system and the Wehrmacht, all these were places of NS-terror. Until well into World War Two, the prisoners had to do heavy manual labour in cultivating the moors, from the latter half of 1942 working in the peat and armament industries as well as clearing air raid damages.

About 80,000 inmates of concentration camps and convicts suffered in the Emsland Camps, before the war; then they housed far more than 100,000 POWs. More than 20,000 starved, died of exhaustion and illness, following grievous bodily harm, or "were shot dead while on the run". In the post-war period, the camps also provided shelter for former forced labourers, later also for refugees and displaced persons. Today, prisons, housing estates and farmland can be found on the sites of the former Emsland Camps.

Camp Esterwegen

In the summer of 1933, the Prussian State built the concentration camp Esterwegen on the site of today's memorial in order to accommodate political prisoners. From 1934 to 1936, Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer SS, was directly responsible for the concentration camp. He dissolved it in 1936; subsequently, political prisoners were held at Sachsenhausen near Berlin. Doubtless, one of the best-known inmates of the concentration camp Esterwegen was the Nobel Laureate for Peace 1935, Carl von Ossietzky. From 1937 through 1945, Camp Esterwegen housed convicts



of the criminal justice system of the "Reich". During World War Two, German soldiers convicted by courts martial of the Wehrmacht were imprisoned here and on other sites. Resistance fighters from various West-European countries, also called "Nacht- und Nebel" prisoners, were incarcerated in one part of Camp Esterwegen ("Camp South"). In the immediate post-war period, Esterwegen was used as an internment camp by the British occupying forces. From 1953 through 1959, it was a transition camp for refugees from the German Democratic Republic. At that time, all buildings of the former camp were dismantled. From 1963 through 2001/2005, Bundeswehr used the site as an army depot.

The Memorial of Esterwegen

The Memorial is a European site of remembrance for all 15 Emsland camps and their victims. It points the way to a future without dictatorship, violent politics and terror, without nationalism and racism. It asks for a commitment to human rights, the rule of law and democracy. The visitors' centre now houses the exhibitions, seminar rooms, a library, the archives and the cafeteria. All these are located in two warehouses built in the 1970s for the former Bundeswehr depot, now linked by a new lobby.

The Exhibitions

The principal exhibition documents the history of the Emsland Camps from 1933 through 1945 and chronologically provides a context for the events within the history of the "Third Reich", including the regional aspects. The focus is on the experiences of the prisoners while working in the moor and on how they lived and suffered in the camps. The secondary exhibition covers the post-war history of the Emsland Camps which is to be understood as a complex process that, although it has undergone various phases, is still incomplete today.

The Camp grounds

Walking the grounds, the traces of the former camp can be seen, while those parts of the camp topography that are no longer visible and which stand for violence and threatening behaviour, have been translated into a modern formal idiom (as with the steel elements). "Packages of trees" help to imagine the sites of the former prison huts. Covered with lava gravel, the former prison area suggests a reddish brown moor landscape. A steel footbridge links the historical site of Camp Esterwegen with a moor close-by, which symbolises the place of heavy hard labour.