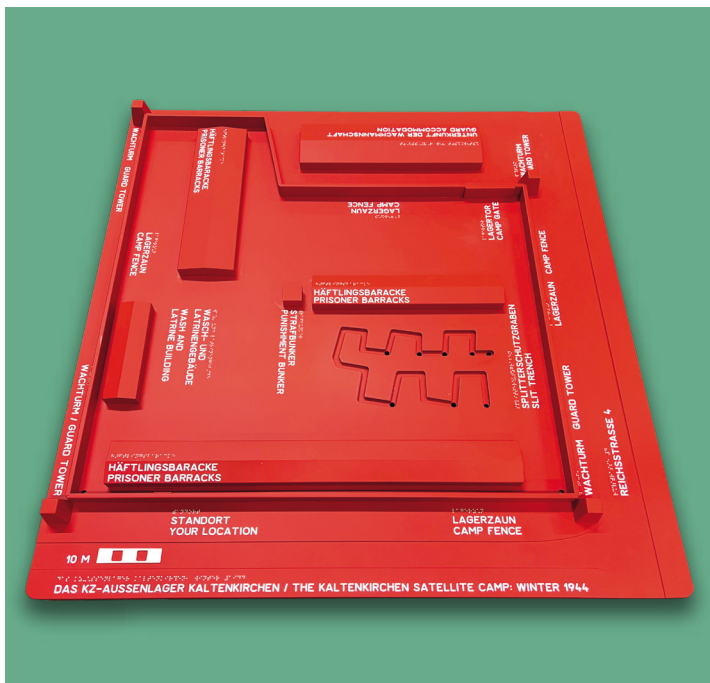




Exploration of the former camp site



Model 2024

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This brochure is part of the KZ-Gedenkstätte Kaltenkirchen exhibition
 „Spotlight on Kaltenkirchen: history and post-history of
 a satellite concentration camp.“

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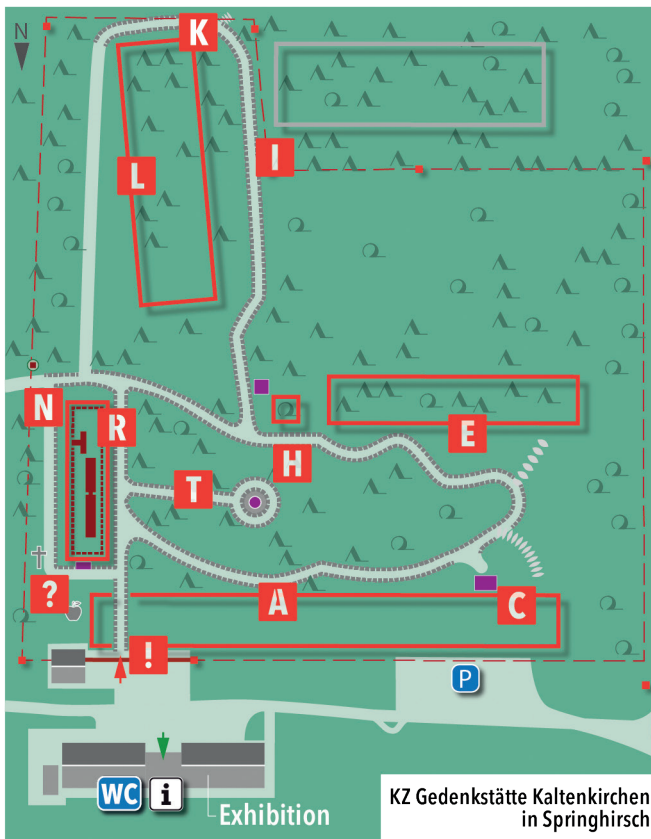
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Further information can be found at www.kz-gedenkstaette-kaltenkirchen.de

For Orientation



KZ Gedenkstätte Kaltenkirchen
in Springhirsch

■ Sculptures of remembrance ■ — — — Course of the former camp fence

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The Kaltenkirchen satellite camp

In the summer of 1944, the SS set up a satellite camp of the Neuen-gamme concentration camp at this site. The prisoners were made to work as forced labourers at the nearby military airfield. Around 500 men were imprisoned here at any one time, with the total number rising to as high as 1,000.

Prisoners from various European countries were subjected to forced labour and camp imprisonment: hunger, cold, disease and violence. Records show that 190 of these prisoners died at the Kaltenkirchen satellite camp.

The SS had the camp cleared shortly before the end of the war. The prisoners were transported to the Wöbbelin satellite camp near Ludwigslust, where many of them died just before the camp was liberated.

For a long time after 1945, nobody spoke of the existence of the camp. Today, the memorial site documents the suffering of the prisoners and shines a light on the history of the site.

Bridge of remembrance

A lot of what we know today about the history of this site is thanks to the information provided by former prisoners. With this in mind, the "bridge of remembrance" serves as a gateway to these events of the past. We invite you to cross this bridge.

Survival

When the prisoners arrived at this camp, all they had left were their lives. Any personal belongings had already been taken from them. The SS even stripped them of their names; as camp prisoners, they were all given numbers.

Human life was of little value here. It was often pure chance who managed to survive.

"As if by a miracle, I survived."

(Sergej Kiritschenko, 20 years old at the time)

North barracks

Wooden prisoner barracks. Approx. 75 metres long and 8 metres wide. Used by German soldiers prior to the satellite camp being set up. Also housed the camp kitchen and a small carpenter's workshop.

Hunger

Hunger especially impacted the daily lives of the prisoners. There was never enough of the poor quality bread or watery soup to go around. Given the prisoners' hard physical work, hunger was deadly; many men died from exhaustion, others developed life-threatening diseases.

"We got up at 5 a.m., breakfast = a quarter of a litre of warm water and a small slice of camp bread. At 6 a.m. we set off to work. Midday: a meal on the go = half a litre of warm water and a slice of bread. We returned from work at 7 p.m. Evening meal: a litre of soup."

(Pierre Humbert, 34 years old at the time)

Sculptures of commemoration

Since 2002, the series of works by sculptor Ingo Warnke has formed part of the commemoration of the camp. His sculptures prompt visitors to reflect on the prisoners' suffering. The inscriptions on the small pillars show the descriptions used in 1944/45.



The "Küchenstein" (kitchen stone) near the former camp kitchen alludes to an empty table and perpetual hunger. This sculpture is the first of a four-part series at the site. The remaining three focus on the torture, death and commemoration of the victims.

Central barracks

Wooden prisoner barracks. Approx. 40 metres long and 7.5 metres wide. Used by German soldiers prior to the satellite camp being set up. Also housed the room occupied by the "Lagerältester" (camp elder) and the so-called infirmary.

Camp hierarchy

The SS forced the prisoners into an organisational hierarchy with roles such as camp clerk, camp doctor, "Blockältester" (block elder) and "Lagerältester" (camp elder). These men had to enforce the orders that came from the commandant. In return, as "Funktionshäftlinge" (prisoner functionaries), they avoided the daily drudgery on the airfield.

Disease

The camp was a breeding ground for disease with the permanent state of malnutrition, immense workload and excruciating cold against which prisoners were insufficiently protected. Diseases causing diarrhoea such as dysentery, which left the men completely debilitated, soon raged through the camp. The prisoners were often unable to receive medical attention, even in the infirmary.

"We were all ill in Kaltenkirchen, which means we all had dysentery. We were all ill, we turned to ashes like a small fire."

(Roger Rémond, 19 years old at the time)

Punishment bunker

This building was known as the punishment bunker. Presumably 4 × 4 metres large. Built in 1944 when the satellite camp was set up.

Torture

Violence was a daily occurrence. Other forms of abuse such as solitary confinement and food deprivation were carried out in the punishment bunker. The reasons for this were often trivial and arbitrary.

"The poor treatment, they kicked us around, all over our bodies ..."

(Roger Rémond, 19 years old at the time)

Roll call area

No trees covered this site back when the camp was in operation. There was an open space between the barracks that served as a roll call area. The prisoners had to appear here for roll call every morning and evening. The exhausting time spent standing in the wind and rain, cold and snow was often dragged out by the SS and the other guards on purpose – an additional form of everyday torture for the prisoners.

Slit trench

At some point after mid-October 1944, the prisoners had to dig out a slit trench. This was meant to provide cover from flying shrapnel during air strikes.



Guard barracks

Wooden barracks used as accommodation for the guards. 43 metres long and 13 metres wide. Originally also built for the Wehrmacht.

"The guards, with few exceptions, abused the prisoners for no reason and struck them with the butts of their rifles."

(Victor Chevreuil, 56 years old at the time)

Guards

The guards' accommodation was located on the other side of the fence, outside the prisoners' camp. The guards comprised up to 80 Luftwaffe soldiers and several SS men. They also supervised the daily lines of prisoners as they made their way to their places of work.

Camp gate

Former camp gate. Originally located at the end of the fence, directly opposite the guards' accommodation.

Forced labour

The prisoners passed through the camp gate every day: the march to the military airport took one-and-a-half hours. They had been tasked with extending the airport runway. The men would trudge

"It was extremely hard work, it was really cold, really cold ... Several comrades died every day, they died, they died from exhaustion, from the cold, it was horrific."

(Henri Stroweis, 27 years old at the time)

back to the camp exhausted in the evening. The dead also had to be taken back to the camp.

Local residents

The residents of Kaltenkirchen were aware of the prisoners' situation. They saw first-hand and heard from others that the men working on the airfield and elsewhere were forced to perform hard labour.

The residents could hear and see how the lines of prisoners set off in the morning and returned to the camp in the evening.

"The civilian population, with whom each one of us came into contact, perceived us as criminals and wished our deaths upon us."

(Lucien Robinet, 41 years old at the time)

A red square logo with a white letter 'K' inside.

East barracks

Wooden prisoner barracks. Approx. 42 metres long and 12 metres wide. Used by German soldiers prior to the satellite camp being set up.

Cold

The winter of 1944/45 was cold. The men had to work outside the whole day, without warm clothing or sturdy shoes. Back in the barracks in the evening, the prisoners could barely warm themselves up.

"We had simple striped outfits without any underwear. Which meant everyone suffered as it was cold. Me included. I shivered the entire time."

(Mieczysław Swierczewski, 15 years old at the time)



Camp fence

Camp fence, originally comprised of concrete posts and barbed wire. Remains of a post preserved in the ground.

Escape

Escape was pretty much futile, but that didn't stop a few desperate prisoners from trying their luck. Most of them were caught soon after and executed. Only a few individuals managed to actually flee the camp.

"I just decided: I'm going to leave ... and I fled. I was on the move for around four days, in the mornings. I went through the woods, of course I couldn't use the roads ... And then after four days, mornings, I'm moving around, looking, wondering how on earth I'm going to cross the road, keep looking: Kaltenkirchen, the concentration camp. I'd just done a big circle ..."

(Witalij Semjonow, 18 years old at the time)

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Wash and latrine building

Wooden building with a couple of washing facilities and toilets. Approx. 22 metres long and 6.5 metres wide. Built in the summer of 1944 when the satellite camp was set up. Brick foundation with underground cesspool.

Death

Prisoners died almost every day. Their corpses were first brought to this building before being buried at various nearby sites. Not all of the victims are known by name.

"One toilet was closed there, and in the other we laid the dead ... From time to time, I don't know how often during the week, or when there were too many, we took them somewhere to be buried."

(Henri Stroweis, 27 years old at the time)

With this site, the prisoners' surviving dependants and descendants now have somewhere they can remember the victims. They may not have survived the satellite camp, but by remembering them, at least the knowledge of the crimes committed here will live on.

Heavy like memories ...

The "Drehstein" (revolving stone) by sculptor Ingo Warnke located at the centre of this memorial site has to be actively set in motion to read the final verses of the poem "The Ashes of Birkenau" by Stephan Hermlin:

*"For those who believe in hope,
The birch will be green.
When the shadows of doves
Fly over the ashes:
Song of death, faded away,
Which is suddenly akin to life:
Heavy like memories
And, like forgetting, light."*

Sculpture of commemoration

The "Sargstein" (coffin stone) by artist Ingo Warnke commemorates the dead. Some of the numbers engraved on the stone had been assigned to prisoners who died in Kaltenkirchen. You can look up the names of these prisoners in the exhibition building.

A cross. And an apple tree

Have you seen the cross? And the apple tree? Church youth groups erected a wooden cross behind the former wash and latrine building in 2002 and planted an apple tree behind the former north barracks in 2006. The cross is intended to recall the prisoners' suffering, while the tree is meant as a symbol of hope.

The memorial site accepted the cross despite initial debate. However, some people still find the Christian symbol unsettling to this day.

For the prisoners at the Kaltenkirchen camp, an apple was an unattainable treasure; an apple tree on the camp grounds was simply inconceivable. What does the tree mean to you? Do you feel as though it belongs on the site?

Take a look at the exhibition in the memorial site building and find out how the history of the site was dealt with after the end of the war.

