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Inter-Spaces I: Mauthausen Railway Station – Mauthausen Memorial

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Inter-Spaces I: Mauthausen Railway Station – Mauthausen Memorial

0. INTRO: The Audio Guide from the Railway Station to the Memorial Museum

This audio guide takes you from Mauthausen railway station to the concentration camp memorial site via several stopping points. By and large it follows the route that the prisoners were forced to take on their march to the concentration camp.

At what town had the prisoners arrived? What was the relationship between the residents and the Mauthausen concentration camp? What did the population know about the crimes committed there? What was their reaction to them? The audio stations explore these questions in more detail. As you walk between the stopping points you can listen as former prisoners recount their memories of arriving in Mauthausen.

The blue dot on the map marks your current position. The red dot with the number 1 marks the first audio station. Move towards it and tap on the red dot to start the audio track.

1. Arrival in Mauthausen

Most prisoners were brought to the Mauthausen concentration camp by rail.

Built in 1872, Mauthausen railway station lay on a line that no longer exists between the Western Railway and the Summerauer Railway. This route ran via Budweis to Prague and on to Berlin. Later on, another line was built going east along the Danube. Good links to the railway network was one of the reasons that the SS selected Mauthausen as the location for a concentration camp.

A permanent labour detachment of around 20 concentration camp prisoners was assigned to the railway station. They had to unload goods sent to the camp. The stone products manufactured by prisoners in the concentration camp quarries were dispatched from here to destinations across the German Reich. The wall in front of you was part of a loading ramp with rail access built by concentration camp prisoners. Today it has been converted into a small memorial. The original station building no longer exists.

The German Reich Railways and the Austrian Federal Railways, which became part of the German railway network in 1938, played a major role in the Nazi policy of deportation and extermination. Often they used regular passenger trains to transport prisoners to the Mauthausen concentration camp. Sometimes a separate prison carriage was attached to this sort of train. Larger transports from other camps were run as special trains. Prisoners were often crammed in their hundreds into goods or cattle trucks.

Towards the end of the war, ever larger prisoner transports arrived at Mauthausen. They had often been underway for weeks. Countless prisoners died of exhaustion, the unbearable heat or bitter cold, of hunger, thirst or disease. Often the SS simply threw the corpses out of the trucks during the journey. The dead bodies unloaded in Mauthausen were usually buried in a military cemetery dating from the First World War located to the east of the

station. The prisoners who were still alive were forced by SS guards to march through the town to the camp, four kilometres away.

2. Bernard Aldebert

The French caricaturist Jean-Bernard Aldebert was arrested in 1944. He came to Mauthausen via the Buchenwald concentration camp and was later transferred to Gusen. He remembers his arrival at the station:

'Probably in order to warm themselves up, the SS men pummel with all their might the men who fall clumsily out of the trucks, stiff from cold. Some, driven to madness by thirst, run to a fountain. They drink in spite of the blows from the cudgels.

We cross the tracks at a run, grabbing a handful of snow as we pass, gulping it down.

Travellers are standing on the platform, waiting for a train. They are the indifferent witnesses to our arrival; it is impossible to read their closed faces.

Still running we pass through the village, which must be a cheerful little place in times of peace. We have to drag along the sick, who plead softly and gently for an end to their ordeal.

The residents regard us without curiosity, already accustomed to such a sight. Blonde children make their way to school.'

3. The Stone Industry and the Workers' Movement

We are standing at what is now a closed up entrance to the 'Heinrichsbruch' quarry. This quarry was owned before, during and after the Nazi period by the company Granitwerke Poschacher. From the 19th century onwards, Poschacher was the largest stone producer in the region.

During the Nazi period, up to 60 young concentration camp prisoners from Spain were forced to work here. The administration of the Mauthausen concentration camp assigned them to the Poschacher company as slave labourers. In autumn 1944 the young men were officially released from the camp. From then on they were housed in barracks near to the quarry. They could move around the town with relative freedom and in some cases made contact with the civilian population.

Granite has been quarried in the region around Mauthausen and neighbouring Gusen since the late 18th century. The stone products could be shipped on the Danube. They were used for buildings and paving in Vienna, for bridges in Budapest and Pressburg (now Bratislava), and for prestigious buildings and churches in large parts of the Habsburg Monarchy.

In the late 19th century, the quarry workers began to organise themselves in associations and within the Social Democratic Party, later also within the Communist Party. After the end of the First World War the stone industry entered a state of crisis. High unemployment

prevailed throughout the interwar period. The quarry workers responded with strikes and a growing level of organisation.

Under the austrofascist government from 1934 onwards, state oppression of the workforce increased. Their political parties were banned. At the same time, a growing proportion of the population was sympathetic to National Socialism. Some of the workers in Mauthausen also switched their political allegiance. The gradual rise of National Socialism finally culminated in March 1938 in the annexation or 'Anschluss' of Austria to the German Reich.

4. Josef Schwaiger

Josef Schwaiger from Germany was transferred to Mauthausen from Dachau concentration camp in 1939. He remembers the hunger that tortured him as he passed through the town:

'It would have been about 8 in the morning, the train stopped and we had reached our destination. As we exited the train car in twos, the first thing our eyes fell on was the railway station with the inscription "Mauthausen bei Linz, Oberdonau". A large number of SS men were standing guard. As we prisoners lined up, my God what a sight of miserable figures! (…) Their faces were covered with bloody crusts, some had to be supported, led, and so on.

Passing a line of civilians, the march now began. For the Austrians, our transport was still a novelty at that time and they observed us sometimes with pity, but sometimes with cynicism. Since we were given nothing to eat and still had some way to go through Mauthausen, we looked hungrily and thirstily in at the windows of the bakery and butchers shop. Outside the town it also got easier with the prying eyes, but the guards became more brazen and got better at driving us hungry ones on.'

5. Local Residents Between Adaptation and Resistance

The building in front of you was used during the Nazi period by the local Hitler Youth, the youth organisation of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazi Party.

The Mauthausen chapter of the Nazi Party was founded in 1923. Just one year later it took two seats on the local council. When the Nazi Party was banned in Austria in 1933, illegal propaganda campaigns became more frequent in Mauthausen. Following the failed Nazi putsch of July 1934, 29 illegal members of the Nazi Party were arrested in the Mauthausen region.

On 11 March 1938, one day before Austria's 'Anschluss' to the German Reich, the local police record notes:

'Here in Mauthausen the Nazis gathered in the Rocher Quarry and marched, singing songs, via Heindl Quay and Upper Market back to the aforementioned quarry. They were joined by local residents and with discipline and order, the German people in Austria became free and National Socialist.'

The enthusiasm for National Socialism was not shared by all. Some residents of Mauthausen opposed the new regime and therefore suffered persecution themselves.

To the right of the Hitler Youth building lived a woman called Anna Pointner. She watched as every day, a group of young Spanish concentration camp prisoners marched past her house on their way to work as forced labourers in the nearby quarry owned by the Poschacher company. Anna Pointner initiated contact with them, gave them food and invited them into her house, where they were also able to listen to Allied radio broadcasts. Towards the end of the war one of the prisoners asked for her help—could she hide photos smuggled illegally out of the camp in her house. In spite of the great danger this put her in, Anna Pointner agreed and the photos were saved. They are visual evidence of the crimes committed in the Mauthausen concentration camp. Anna Pointner stayed in contact with the Spanish survivors even after the war. Today a memorial commemorates her courageous actions.

6 The Concentration Camp as an Economic Factor

The building with the two large garage doors was built by the Hartl transport company during the Nazi era. The company carried out the majority of goods transports for the concentration camp. This helped it to grow from a small transport company into a large haulage firm. It also owned a garage near the 'Wiener Graben' concentration camp quarry.

Other local businesses also reaped economic benefits from the establishment of the concentration camp. The Brückler carpentry workshop supplied the camp with over 1,000 prisoner beds between 1938 and 1940. The Korner carpentry company also supplied beds and at least 160 coffins in the years 1943 and 1944.

SS-Hauptscharführer Ernst Kirschbichler came from Mauthausen and was assigned to the concentration camp as head of the construction department. At the same time he ran his own construction firm in the town of Mauthausen. He deployed dozens of concentration camp prisoners as slave labourers in his firm. Among other things, they were forced to build Kirschbichler's private villa.

The concentration camp also created jobs for sections of the population. Up to 200 civilian stone workers, many of them from the region, worked in the concentration camp quarries of Mauthausen and neighbouring Gusen. Young people completed their apprenticeships in manual trades in the industrial operations of the Mauthausen and Gusen camps. Civilians worked as clerks in the offices of the camp administration. Many women earned additional income as domestic servants in the households of SS officers.

A farmer who supplied food to the concentration camp later stated in an interview: *'All the SS officers as well as (camp commandant) Ziereis bought milk from me during the war. I had a good understanding with Ziereis. For example, at one time I needed painters to repaint my house, and he provided me with 2 prisoners who were painters and two SS guards. The 2 painters had studied fine art and proved failures as house painters. I gave all four of them a good meal.'*

7. Heinz Junge

Heinz Junge was persecuted in the German Reich as a Communist. He was deported to Sachsenhausen concentration camp and from there to Mauthausen. He remembers some of the town's residents protesting:

'There were all those able to walk, they were lined up at the station, and then we started up the hill. It was so terrible, we were beaten from all sides, with whips. "Go, run!", and so on. We were thirsty, we were hungry – (…) and then we saw a rivulet off to the side --. One man jumped down and drank from it, naturally he got his head smashed in. (…)

And then three women were there, they must have known the SS men, maybe from the village, or from a dance. And the women scolded them: "You should be ashamed, you can't beat prisoners!", and so on. They scolded something dreadful. The women were about 80 metres away from where we were marching, maybe only 50 metres. But the SS men couldn't move away from us. (…) They threatened them: "We'll shoot you down if you don't go inside!" But they didn't do anything to the women."

8. Lisa Scheuer

Lisa Scheuer from Bohemia survived Auschwitz concentration camp and was deported from the Freiberg camp to Mauthausen in April 1945. She reports on her journey to the camp:

'Mauthausen is situated in a very picturesque mountain valley, surrounded by chains of high Alps. In the distance I saw the Rosen Alps, which were familiar from my youth. In the centre of town we passed a fountain. It was a round stone fountain, which had in the middle a bronze figure with three fish, whose mouths spouted water. We rushed to the running water, wanting to drink and refresh ourselves, but were very rudely chased away. The fat villagers with large stomachs and the swastika on their Tyrolean costumes—not our guards—prevented us from drinking and chased us away from the fountain with shouts and angry curses. As always when he was embarrassed and didn't know what to do, the Hauptscharführer acted as if he hadn't seen or heard a thing and ordered the guards to keep us marching onwards.'

9. The Concentration Camp and the Civilian Authorities

You are standing on Mauthausen's market square, the Marktplatz. During the Nazi period it was renamed 'Adolf Hitler Platz'. The building in front of you is the town hall. Then as now it was the centre of the civilian administration.

Following Austria's 'Anschluss' to the German Reich, the municipal area of Mauthausen was expanded. The Nazis made sure the local administration was politically loyal. The staunch Nazi August Gattinger was appointed mayor. The officers of the local constabulary had to swear an oath of loyalty to Adolf Hitler.

Nevertheless, conflicts often arose between the civilian authorities and the concentration camp administration. Members of the SS were frequently reported to the constabulary for vandalism, theft or assaults on the population. In December 1939, Camp Commandant Franz Ziereis and Higher SS and Police Leader Ernst Kaltenbrunner went to the police station in person to demand that all such investigations be halted.

The SS gradually established its own legal jurisdiction over the concentration camp. The civilian authorities were no longer to have any say over it. If prisoners were shot by SS guards, for example, in the early days this was investigated by the civilian courts. From June 1940 onwards, only the SS courts had jurisdiction. Likewise, at first prisoners who died in the concentration camp were recorded in the register of deaths at the local Mauthausen registry office. In summer 1941, the concentration camp got its own registry office, the "Registry Office II". After this, death notices no longer made it out of the camp.

More and more, the SS managed to withdraw the concentration camp from public view. Even so, the crimes committed there did not remain hidden from the local population.

10. Concentration Camp Relics

This park is home to three objects made in concentration camps in the region. One has the form of a fawn, the other two are skilfully carved basins.

A work detachment existed in the Gusen branch camp made up of prisoners with a particular talent for sculpture. As slave labourers, they produced a variety of artistic sculptures. Some were used outside the camp, for example in the basilica of the nearby St. Florian Monastery to the south of the Danube. These prisoners also produced gravestones for members of the SS and their families.

The fawn was produced by two members of this work detachment, Stanisław Krzekotowski and Czesław Tomaszewski. It was commissioned by Camp Commandant Franz Ziereis, who was a passionate huntsman, for his private villa. It stood there until the end of the war. Later it was moved here. Today a plaque commemorates the sculpture's origins and one of the two artists.

The two other objects were originally used as basins in the washrooms of the prisoners' barracks. It is not known when they were moved here or by whom. For a long time they were used as planters for flowers. Over time, the basins' origins were forgotten. Only later did the municipality assume responsibility for them and remove the flowers. Today the stone basins can be seen as monuments to how the Nazi past has been dealt with in the region.

11. Roman Frister

Roman Frister was persecuted as a Jew and deported to Auschwitz. From there he was transferred to Mauthausen at the beginning of 1945. In his book 'The Cap. The Price of a Life', he describes the march to the camp in the middle of winter:

'The fine weather was against us, since the sun that melted the top layer of snow exposed the slippery ice beneath it. Each time I slipped, our escorts hammered me to my feet with their rifle butts. They were trained to strike at the base of the back, causing irreparable damage to the kidneys.

My prisoner's clogs made things worse. Their wet tops chafed my toes and the wooden soles refused to grip the ground. After a while I kicked them off and continued barefoot. At first the frost burned like fire. Then I lost all feeling and could keep up.'

12. Living with the SS

The building in front of you is the local primary school. It was built in the late 19th century. After the Mauthausen concentration camp was established in August 1938, the children of the high-ranking SS officers also went to school here. They spent their schooldays and free time with the town's children.

Achmed K. was in the same class as the son of Camp Commandant Ziereis. In their own way, both were outsiders. Achmed was from a poor family and had dark skin. The commandant's son was not from the town and his father's work was a taboo subject. He is supposed to have boasted to classmates that, on his birthday, his father let him shoot prisoners.

Many members of the SS camp administration came from different parts of the German Reich and brought their families with them to Mauthausen. The municipality had to provide them with housing. Camp Commandant Ziereis and his family lived in an apartment in the 'Apothekerhaus' building. The family of Georg Bachmayer, head of the protective custody camp, lived next door in the Hotel Post. Later on, both families moved into newly built SS housing in nearby St. Georgen. In 1941, the SS forced prisoners to start building a housing estate near to the camp. The first houses were ready to move into in 1943 and from then on, it was home to the commandant and several high-ranking officers.

A range of social contacts and relationships existed between locals and members of the SS. People met each other in taverns, at football matches, on hunting trips or at SS events in the camp. Some unmarried SS men fell in love with local women. Their weddings often took place in the concentration camp.

Yet there was also competition and dispute, sometimes ending in open violence. Eduard Krebsbach, the SS camp doctor, shot at a group of soldiers on home leave as they passed noisily through the SS housing estate. He killed a soldier. Krebsbach was not charged, but he was transferred to a different camp shortly afterwards.

13. Joseph Drexel

Joseph Drexel from Bavaria was deported to the Mauthausen concentration camp in 1944 for resistance activities. In his memoirs he describes how he fostered thoughts of escape while en route to the camp:

'Even now, during our march from Mauthausen station to the camp, a convoluted path since it was a shortcut along paths and steep garden tracks, through woods and alongside meadows, I didn't miss the chance to commit every single thing to memory in such detail that I could have found my way back safely at night. I noted the exact spot where a ravine crossed our path not far from an isolated tavern and then fell away to the Danube valley, whose thick undergrowth seemed to offer a hiding place. It was summer, the nights were warm, the waters of the Danube surely not too cold, and I was a good and, if necessary, indefatigable swimmer. (…)

I had noted the ferries and crossings it would be necessary to avoid. I could speak the local dialect as well as my own, and in case it came to having to use it, I trusted adamantly in the never-failing help of women more than in that of men, who by their nature tend towards cowardice and indecision (…)

I considered myself (…) fully equipped. And only the complete ignorance of what a concentration camp really meant can excuse the foolish imagination that I devoted to the project, an imagination schooled hitherto only by the harmless experiences of a prison and a penal system that operated within the law.'

14. The City of Vienna and the Mauthausen Stone Industry

You are now at the 'Bettelberg' quarry. It is one of the oldest and largest quarries in the region. The long building next to you originally housed the compressors, which supplied the quarry machinery with compressed air.

Granite was already being quarried at the 'Bettelberg' in the early 19th century. In 1922 ownership of the quarry passed to the City of Vienna. The city had previously acquired the 'Wiener Graben' and 'Windeggbruch' quarries. For a long time, the City of Vienna played a key role in Mauthausen's quarry industry. It wanted to use granite from Mauthausen, in particular the stone from the 'Bettelberg' quarry, to meet the ever growing demand for paving stones. After the 'Wiener Graben' quarry closed down in 1932, the 'Bettelberg' remained the only one of the City of Vienna's quarries still in operation.

After the 'Anschluss' of Austria to the German Reich in March 1938, a new player came on the scene: the SS, or rather its company the 'German Earth and Stone Works', DESt for short in German. DESt had been set up in April 1938 to profit from the exploitation of concentration camp prisoners as slave labourers in the construction materials industry. Starting in May 1938, DESt leased several quarries in Gusen and the 'Wiener Graben' quarry in Mauthausen. In 1940 it built its local company headquarters in nearby St. Georgen.

Due to the Bettelberg's high quality granite, DESt also expressed an interest in this quarry. However, its attempts to take over the quarry failed due to resistance from the City of Vienna. The city remained the owner of the 'Bettelberg' until the early 1980s. Today the site is owned by the Municipality of Mauthausen.

15. Juri Piljar

Juri Piljar, a soldier in the Soviet army, was taken as a prisoner of war by the Germans. He arrived at the Mauthausen concentration camp in 1943. In his memoir he describes the harassment meted out by the guards during the march to the camp:

‘”Tempo!”

The command is given from the front. The voice is slavering and augurs bad things. We speed up our steps.

“Tempo!”

We walk faster still, but keep marching in step. For some reason this now displeases the guards, even though they usually always demand it.

“Faster!”

We almost break into a run. And naturally it makes us get out of step. The dogs snarl and pull on their leads.

“March, march!”

That is the command to run. We don’t run too fast in order to ration our strength. We are accompanied by the muzzles of the submachine guns and the vicious, watchful eyes of the SS men. The dogs jump and pull on their leads with hoarse, angry barks. We run probably no longer than five minutes but it feels like an eternity. At the back some start to fall behind. We hear shouts: “Faster!” and blows. A tin bowl clatters on the asphalt. Someone yells “Get up!” and then again: “Tempo!” Finally the repugnant voice orders “Walk!”’

16. A Completely Normal Town?

We are now leaving the town of Mauthausen. This was the start of the prisoners’ arduous climb up to the concentration camp.

The relationships between the town and the camp were diverse. During the early phase in particular, conflicts often arose between local residents and the camp SS. The SS soon prevailed. The town’s economic and political elite came to terms with the new powers. The camp’s existence facilitated their economic gains and brought them more political power. At first the local population was intimidated by the visible atrocities and the circulating rumours, but over time these became a normal part of life. For some of the town’s residents the camp offered jobs, others had economic or social ties to the SS. There were also people who helped the prisoners, who resisted, or who became victims of the Nazi regime themselves.

After 1945 neither official Austria nor the municipality and its residents wanted much to do with the site of the former concentration camp and its historical burden. The Mauthausen Memorial therefore remained isolated for a long time after it was established in 1949. Since the 1980s this picture has been changing. In neighbouring St. Georgen, a group of people

formed the ‘Gedenkdienstkomittee Gusen’ and worked intensively to recover the memory of the all but forgotten camp complex in Gusen. 2004 saw the creation of the association ‘Perspektive Mauthausen’, which seeks to embed remembrance of the Mauthausen concentration camp at a local level. In 2016 the municipalities of Mauthausen, Langenstein and St. Georgen came together to form the ‘Awareness Region’, which campaigns for commemoration and human rights.

We are standing in front of the New Middle School in Mauthausen. Like many other local institutions, it tries hard to sustain the memory of the past and to take from this lessons for the future. The Mauthausen Middle School is a member of the network ‘Schools without Racism—Schools with Courage’. Every year, its pupils take part in the liberation ceremony at the Mauthausen Memorial.

17. The Final Ascent

Many reports by survivors feature the exhausting final climb up to the concentration camp. Gustav Gratz was 69 years old when he was deported from Hungary to Mauthausen in 1944. He recalls:

‘Until shortly before I was dragged away from my home, I was forced to use a stick when out walking on the street—a result of my long illness. This time I had no stick. Thus equipped we had to set off for the camp. It was a route of around six to eight kilometres, and uphill—we needed a full two hours for its completion. At first the tempo was set by the young people marching at the front. Of course it was too fast for us, since our group contained eight people over 65 years of age, and another eight who had passed their 50th year. The climb up the hill hadn’t even begun when Rassay, who was walking next to me and had a weak heart, could not carry on. He was wheezing heavily and threatened to collapse. Someone took his luggage and I grasped him under his arm to support him. My request to allow him a short rest was initially met with a harsh refusal. When the ascent up the hill began, Rassay totally collapsed. I asked again for a rest, but the only result was that the group at the front were ordered to slow their pace. Rassay wheezed heavily and finally stirred the pity of a man in the escort. A rest was then granted and then a second and a third until, after two hours of marching, we arrived at the camp.’

18. Where the Camp Begins and Ends

The final ascent is now behind us. This is where the prisoners entered the direct sphere of the SS. The large building to the left of the road is called the ‘Frellerhof’ and is now a restaurant. Originally it was used as a service building for operations in the ‘Wiener Graben’ quarry. When in 1938 the SS leased and later bought the quarry from the City of Vienna, it also acquired the Frellerhof farm. From then on, the farm supplied the concentration camp with food. Several dozen prisoners were assigned to a separate work detachment to carry out agricultural work.

The transition between the camp and its surroundings was fluid. During the day numerous prisoner work detachments carried out forced labour outside the camp. This frequently

resulted in contact with the local population. The detachments were escorted by SS guards. Larger work detachments would be guarded by a cordon made up of several guards.

The camp itself was surrounded by a large and a small cordon. During the day, when the work detachments left the confines of the prisoner camp, the large cordon would form up. It was made up of wooden watchtowers or simple guard posts and created a wide circle around the area of the camp. When the prisoner work detachments came back to the camp in the evening, the small cordon would take up position. It consisted of stone watchtowers, walls and an electrified barbed-wire fence. The cordons presented an almost insurmountable obstacle to the prisoners. Successful escape was practically impossible. Should a prisoner nevertheless attempt to escape, the result was usually death.

19. Betty Schimmel

Betty Schimmel was persecuted by the National Socialists as a Jew. She was deported from Hungary to the Mauthausen concentration camp in 1945 with her mother and two siblings. In her memoir she remembers her feelings on arriving at the camp:

'Finally we reached the clearing on the hill and gazed out over the view, which was partially hidden by trees. I noticed a house below the camp. A small and pretty Alpine house with smoke coming out of the chimney. What would happen if I simply ran down there and knocked on the door? Would they let me in? Give me something to eat? Did they have children? Were the people who lived there friendly or mean? It was cruel that our suffering took place a mere stone's throw from this peaceful idyll.

Suddenly I heard Rose sobbing.

"What's wrong, Rose?", I rasped with difficulty, almost inaudible over the icy wind, which had split open my raw lips. Rose shivered. "Do you see that, Little One? Naked bodies are stacked up on each other over there."

And then I saw it too. On the right-hand side of the hill, the canvases of a tent camp were flapping in the wind. Between the normal tents and what later turned out to be the infirmary there were piles of corpses, which seemed yet more frightful in their nakedness. People were humiliated even in death.'

20. The Mauthausen Memorial

During the camp's existence, there was also a barrier here. When the prisoners passed it, they had finally arrived at the concentration camp.

This audio guide ends here. Should you wish, you can now visit the Mauthausen Memorial. There is a separate module available for this, which can be accessed via the home page of the 'Virtual Guide'.

You can also continue your walk through the region. Please select the module 'Inter-Spaces II' on the home page of the 'Virtual Guide'. Another audio guide will then take you from the

‘Wiener Graben’ quarry to the Gusen Memorial, which is located around four kilometres away.

Inter-Spaces II: 'Wiener Graben' – Gusen

0. INTRO: The audio guide from the 'Wiener Graben' to Gusen

This audio guide takes you from the 'Wiener Graben' quarry via several stopping points to the Gusen Memorial, around four kilometres away. The audio guide explores the connections between the Mauthausen concentration camp and its Gusen branch camp. How were these camps embedded in the region? Where did one camp end and the other begin? What lay in the spaces between? What effect did prisoners' forced labour have on the region's development?

The blue dot on the map marks your current position. The red dot with the number 1 marks the first audio station. Move towards it and press the red dot to start the audio track.

1. The Mauthausen/Gusen Concentration Camp System

You are standing in a former quarry known as the 'Wiener Graben'. Prisoners of the Mauthausen concentration camp worked here as slave labourers. Today the quarry is part of the memorial site.

The granite quarries were the main reason that concentration camps were set up in this region. In spring 1938, shortly after the 'Anschluss' or 'annexation' of Austria to the German Reich, the SS carried out an initial assessment of the quarries in Mauthausen and Gusen. In April, the SS founded the 'German Earth and Stone Works', or DESt for short in German, a construction materials company. Starting in May 1938, the company leased several quarries in Mauthausen and Gusen. It set up its regional headquarters in nearby St. Georgen. Housing estates were built for senior management both in St. Georgen and near the exit of the 'Wiener Graben', not far from where you are now.

The Mauthausen concentration camp was built in August 1938 by prisoners transferred from Dachau concentration camp. Before the end of the year, prisoner labour detachments from Mauthausen were being marched to the quarries in Gusen and back every day to work as forced labourers. In late 1939, prisoners from Mauthausen began to construct the Gusen camp and it went into operation as a branch camp in May 1940. Today Mauthausen and Gusen are considered a 'double camp'.

The SS linked the quarries in Mauthausen and Gusen with a network of railways and developed the two sites into a huge and profitable industrial complex, of which few traces remain today. At the same time, the quarries were places of 'extermination through labour'. Arbitrary murder and abuse were part of everyday life. Between 1940 and 1942, the death rate in Gusen was several times higher than in Mauthausen. For many prisoners, a transfer to Gusen during this period would have meant death.

Between 1938 and 1945, a total of around 190,000 people were imprisoned in the Mauthausen/Gusen concentration camp system with its 40 or so subcamps. More than half of these prisoners died.

2. Production and Extermination

Here, to the right of the road, you can find pieces of walls and foundations in the undergrowth. They are all that remains of a once imposing facility for turning blocks of granite into gravel. Together with workshops, a cable crane and a dense railway network, it was part of a vast industrial complex for producing stone spread across Mauthausen and Gusen.

This rock crusher was built in 1939 by prisoners of the Mauthausen concentration camp on the orders of the DESt company. Just one year later it was already producing 400 tonnes of gravel per day. This was used in the construction of railways, roads and power stations.

Originally, DESt wanted to use the quarries in Mauthausen and Gusen to produce cut stone for large building projects, for example in Linz, which had been named a 'Führer city'. Cut stone was more profitable but could only be produced by trained specialists.

In March 1940, a report by the management of the 'Wiener Graben' quarry complained that:

'The prisoners' physical condition [is] exceptionally poor […], meaning that the profitable exploitation of quarry operations is barely possible at present.'

Insufficient rations and everyday violence meant that in many cases, prisoners were too weak to carry out skilled work. The much simpler production of gravel, which used the offcuts from the manufacture of cut stones, was therefore increasingly important for DESt's balance sheets.

In 1941, DESt ordered prisoners to build an even bigger rock crushing facility at the Gusen concentration camp. At that time it was the biggest in Europe. A large number of prisoners died building or later operating this facility at Gusen. In contrast to the rock crusher in Mauthausen, the one in Gusen has survived and can still be seen. More information about it is available in the Virtual Guide under 'Historical Traces'.

3. The Camp and its Borders

You are standing in front of the remains of a wall of a former guard post. The quarry, like the entire area covered by the camp, was a restricted zone. It could only be accessed by members of the SS or by those with special permission. An SS guard checked anyone entering or leaving the restricted zone.

During the day, the large cordon, as it was termed, formed up around the expanded camp operations. Armed SS guards stationed in wooden watchtowers or simple guard posts spaced a few dozen metres apart prevented the prisoners from escaping. At the same time, the camp was shielded from its surroundings and hidden from public view. The civilian population was not supposed to see what went on in the camp.

However, the camp's borders were porous. For example, the quarries also employed civilian workers, who came to and from the camp to work on a daily basis. Various companies and farms delivered goods to the camp. The road that still runs through the 'Wiener Graben' existed before the camp. People from the area regularly passed through here. For some children, it was on their walk to school. As a rule, civilians passing through the restricted zone would be accompanied by an SS guard.

Ida J., who lived near the 'Wiener Graben' as a child, remembers her weekly walk to the village bakery:

'I can still picture the machines, the rock crusher. […] Naturally it was all very loud and the banging… We were able to look in from the road because there was always an SS man with us. […] When we walked through the Wiener Graben we saw the prisoners breaking rocks. […] Like hunger in human form, these men sat there and had to break rocks, and there was the SS man with his gun and a whip. […] My sister once dropped a bread roll. I was too scared, but she was bold like that.'

4. Female Prisoners in the Mauthausen Concentration Camp

Our route branches off to the left here. At the time of the camp, two hundred metres further on there was a large, barn-like building known as the 'Zweinzner barracks'. Towards the end of the war, hundreds of female prisoners from the Mauthausen concentration camp were held here. Today, nothing remains of the barracks.

Originally, Mauthausen was a men's camp. In 1942, the first few women were deported here. Some of them were executed on arrival, others were forced to become sex workers in the camp brothels of the Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps. For large groups of female prisoners, Mauthausen functioned as a transit camp. They were usually held here for just a few weeks before being transferred elsewhere.

Starting in September 1944, the SS set up or took over several subcamps in which only female prisoners were used as forced labourers. The largest were located in Lenzing in Upper Austria and Hirtenberg to the south of Vienna. Not until the beginning of 1945 were larger groups of women imprisoned at Mauthausen for any length of time. They were housed in a separate part of the prisoner camp, in the infirmary camp, in two workshops of the 'Wiener Graben' quarry, and here in the 'Zweinzner barracks'. In total, as many as 10,000 women passed through the Mauthausen camp system.

Survivors describe the 'Zweinzner barracks' as being like a barn. The prisoners had to sleep on the damp ground. They had to go to the toilet in buckets or outside. The only source of water was the nearby 'Zweinzner stream'.

One of the prisoners was Esther Feinkoch from Poland. When out searching for food and water one day she managed to escape through a hole in the fence. She made it to a nearby house owned by the Schatz family, who fed her and hid her from the SS until the end of the war. In 2009, Johann and Maria Schatz were posthumously honoured as 'Righteous Among the Nations' by the Yad Vashem memorial in Israel.

5. Life in the Shadow of the Concentration Camp

The farmhouse you are standing next to was here before the camp. It lay directly on one of the march routes between the Mauthausen and Gusen camps. In 1938 and 1939, detachments of prisoners were marched past here daily in both directions in order to work in the Gusen quarries and to build the camp. Later on, prisoners who were being transferred from the Mauthausen to the Gusen camp, or back again, regularly came past here.

The people who were living in the area between the Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps at that time became witnesses to these events. Nevertheless, some farms also had economic ties to the camps. One witness, August H., tells of how, as a teenager, he regularly joined his father on food deliveries to the Gusen concentration camp. The SS forced some farms to hand over part of their harvest. For others, however, business with the concentration camp represented an additional source of income.

The SS also seized properties. The Schmidtberger family, resident in Gusen, owned quarries. The SS laid claim to these quarries in order to exploit them using concentration camp prisoner labour. In 1942 the family was forcibly relocated to Lower Austria. Their farmhouse was converted into housing for members of the SS.

Some houses in the area were so situated that from them, it was possible to see directly into the 'Wiener Graben' quarry. Their inhabitants could watch as the SS and kapos abused and killed the prisoners who were carrying out heavy manual labour. Eleonore G., who lived nearby, made a complaint to the local police force in which she stated:

'I am already sickly and having to view this kind of thing upsets my nerves to such an extent that I cannot endure it for any length of time. I request that such inhuman treatment is ceased or is carried out where it is not visible.'

6. Mauthausen/Gusen and the Network of Subcamps

At this point you are halfway between the former Mauthausen and Gusen camps. From here there is a good view of the surrounding area. To the south is the Danube valley. When visibility is good you can see the industrial complex in St. Valentin downstream on the other side of the river.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, the Steyr-Daimler-Puch company built a large tank factory in St. Valentin. Known as the 'Nibelungen Works', the factory went into operation in 1940. The majority of the people who worked there were forced labourers from territories occupied by Germany. They made a significant contribution to the industrialisation of the entire region during the Nazi period. In August 1944, a subcamp was created in St. Valentin for prisoners of the Mauthausen concentration camp. Almost 1,600 concentration camp prisoners from several different countries worked there in tank production. Sick and weak prisoners were regularly transferred back to the Mauthausen main camp in order to die. At least 150 concentration camp prisoners died in St. Valentin itself.

To the right of St. Valentin is the town of Enns, which can be recognised from its distinctive tower. There was also an external labour detachment of the Mauthausen/Gusen concentration camp in Enns. Beginning in early 1945, around 2,000 prisoners were forced to build bunkers and fortifications here. Enns also witnessed the death marches. During the final weeks of the war, tens of thousands of Jews from forced labour camps in eastern Austria were marched through Enns en route to Mauthausen and Gusen. Those who were no longer able to walk were shot by the side of the road. Many of those who made it to Mauthausen were then forced to march further westwards to the camp at Gunskirchen near Wels, where several thousand more people died.

It was not only this region but the whole of Austria to the east of Salzburg that had close ties to the Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps during the Nazi period. In total there were more than 40 subcamps. The prisoners were forced to build infrastructure such as roads, bridges and power stations, and were a significant factor in the war economy. At the same time, the region is strewn with places where concentration camp prisoners met a violent death.

7. Under Fire: The Concentration Camps and Underground Relocation

On the hill in front of you is a farm. It was there already before the camp. In 1944, the Wehrmacht and SS positioned several anti-aircraft guns on this same hill. These guns were intended to protect the arms industries located in St. Valentin, Linz and Gusen from Allied bombing attacks.

From 1943 onwards, the Gusen concentration camp became a centre of the arms industry. The company Steyr-Daimler-Puch used prisoners to manufacture parts for guns and aeroplane motors. The Messerschmitt company used them to make fuselages and wing panels for fighter jets. In autumn 1943, the area targeted by Allied bomber squadrons included Austria for the first time. From the beginning of 1944 onwards, the industrial complexes in the nearby towns of Steyr, Linz and St. Valentin suffered heavy damage during air raids.

Early on, the SS began to look in Gusen for ways to provide the arms companies with bomb-proof underground premises. Starting in late 1943, prisoners were forced to excavate a tunnel complex of around 8,000 square metres to the north of the Gusen concentration camp. At the start of 1944, a large-scale building project codenamed ‘Bergkristall’ commenced in neighbouring St. Georgen. Thousands of prisoners from the Gusen II camp were forced to build a tunnel complex around 8 kilometres in length with 50,000 square metres of usable space. It was used for the production of the Me262 Messerschmitt jet fighter plane. In Mauthausen, Gusen and St. Georgen, concentration camp prisoners were forced to build smaller air-raid shelters for members of the SS. Many thousands of them died in the construction of these large underground complexes.

The anti-aircraft weapons around Gusen concentration camp were deployed with increasing regularity from summer 1944 onwards. Although several bombs detonated not far from the camp, neither it nor its industrial facilities were ever hit. Among the prisoners, the Allied

bombings fed hopes that the war would soon be over and gave them the determination to keep going.

8. The Quarries of the Gusen Concentration Camp

On the left-hand side of the road you can see an abandoned quarry. It is now overgrown. The 'Pierbauer' quarry has always been privately owned. In 1941, the SS company 'German Earth and Stone Works' – DESt for short in German – leased it from a local farming family. The quarry then became part of a huge industrial complex for producing stone that stretched from the 'Wiener Graben' all the way to Gusen.

The 'Pierbauer' quarry was the smallest of a total of four quarries in which the prisoners of the Gusen concentration camp were forced to work. Until the end of 1943, every day a labour detachment of around 40 prisoners came here to quarry granite. There were larger quarries right next to the camp. DESt began to exploit the Kastenhof quarry – divided into upper and lower quarries – as early as late 1938. However, the first quarry to be claimed by DESt was the Gusen quarry, also known as the 'Engländer Bruch'. Its granite was of especially high quality and was used in the construction of the Nazis' monumental buildings throughout the Reich.

The DESt quarries in Mauthausen and Gusen were linked by a network of railways. These were used to transport the quarried stone to the shipping pier on the Danube near Mauthausen. There the stone was loaded and shipped to different parts of the German Reich. In addition, a railway line connected the Gusen concentration camp to the Reichsbahn station in St. Georgen. This line was not only used to transport stone but also arms products, supplies and prisoners.

Until mid-1943, the quarrying operations in Gusen underwent continuous expansion. At their highpoint, they deployed as many as 2,800 prisoners as forced labourers. After mid-1943, stone production became less important. In turn, arms production became more and more significant. By the end of 1943, DESt had given up the 'Pierbauer' quarry.

9. The Spilberg Prisoner Detachment

If you look down the hill in the direction you are walking in, you will see the woods that border the Danube. When visibility is good, in the middle of the woods you can make out the fortified tower of the medieval ruins of Spilberg Castle. The castle was built in the 12th century. The Nazis were interested in the ruin because they could link it to their Germanic 'blood and soil' mythology. The ruins were to be made safe and turned into a hiking hostel for the Hitler Youth.

In late 1940, the SS commissioned archaeological excavations around Spilberg Castle. Prisoners from the Gusen concentration camp were deployed as forced labourers for the dig. Around 30 inmates, most of whom were Polish clergymen, dug up and catalogued the finds. In April 1941, during construction of a railway bed between the Gusen concentration camp and St. Georgen station, prehistoric graves were discovered at Koglberg hill. The

Spilberg work detachment was transferred to this site. The prisoners carried out excavations, restored the finds and made detailed drawings.

The excavation detachment on Koglberg hill was led by the two Polish prisoners Dr. Władysław Gębik and Pof. Kazimiersz Gelinek. The archaeological finds were kept at Gusen concentration camp in a specially built museum. This was managed by the Austrian priest Dr. Johann Gruber. Gruber, who had good contacts to the outside world, managed to smuggle money into and information out of the camp. He used his privileged position to build up a secret aid organisation for his fellow prisoners. When his resistance network was discovered, the SS had Gruber brutally murdered on Good Friday in 1944. The remainder of the Spilberg detachment continued to work under privileged conditions until liberation. One member of the detachment described it as a 'seemingly unreal oasis in the midst of a desert of evil.'

10. The Prisoners' Forced Labour

To the side of the road you can see the remains of a terrace wall built by prisoners. Like this piece of land, almost the entire site of the Gusen concentration camp had to be levelled by the prisoners, largely by hand. When the camp was in operation, this walled-off area contained several wooden barracks. These were used by the SS administration as workshops. Skilled prisoners were forced to work here, serving the Gusen camp as joiners, carpenters, tinsmiths and painters.

On the opposite side of the road, now hidden by the undergrowth, is the Gusen quarry. It was taken over by the SS as early as May 1938 and was a central location of prisoner forced labour.

In line with the principle of 'extermination through labour', all concentration camp prisoners capable of working were forced to carry out heavy manual labour. They had to build their own camp and maintain its supplies. They had to quarry granite, process it and load it for transport. They had to build arms factories and manufacture armaments such as weapons and aeroplanes. And they were forced to excavate multi-branched tunnel systems in order to house these factories in bomb-proof sites.

A prisoner's chance of survival was heavily dependent on his labour detachment. In particular, work building the camp or carrying stones would drain a prisoner's strength. Whether in the freezing cold of winter or under the blazing summer sun, the prisoners were at the mercy of the climate with no protection from the elements. Prisoners with a trade or technical education were deployed in the workshops or in arms production. Their lives had a certain value for the SS. They were given better rations, usually worked indoors and were less at the mercy of violent kapos and guards. Working in the tunnels was especially feared. In the cold and damp tunnels, the prisoners rarely saw daylight. With no safety measures whatsoever fatal accidents were a regular occurrence. Mainly Jewish prisoners were assigned to this especially brutal work. Their lives meant nothing to the SS. The dead could always be replaced by new deportees.

11. The Concentration Camp as Employer

The elongated building below you on the right-hand side of the road was a metalworking shop when the camp was in existence. It was part of the huge industrial complex at the Gusen concentration camp operated by the SS-owned company the 'German Earth and Stone Works', or DESt for short in German. The right-hand section of the building is largely unchanged today.

The SS founded the company DESt in 1938 partly in order to run the quarries in Gusen and Mauthausen. For this, it utilized the concentration camp prisoners as forced labourers. In 1943, DESt began to work with arms manufacturers, in particular Steyr-Daimler-Puch and Messerschmitt. The SS leased prisoners as well as buildings and other infrastructure to these companies.

For the region's civilian population, DESt was a major employer. Numerous skilled civilian workers found jobs in the quarries and workshops of the Gusen and Mauthausen concentration camps. The metalworking shop next to you was also used to train civilian apprentices in various trades. To accommodate those who came from further away, the SS ordered the construction of a separate apprentice hostel in neighbouring St. Georgen.

Franz H. grew up near Gusen. At the age of 15 he began a metalworking apprenticeship in this building. The dozen or so apprentices who were training here shared their place of work with around 30 concentration camp prisoners. Contact with them was strictly forbidden. The apprentices were not allowed to say anything about what they saw or heard in the camp. H's father had found a job with DESt before him. He was employed in the 'Wiener Graben' quarry in Mauthausen. The family lived in the housing estate near the quarry built by DESt.

The civilian population found jobs not only with DESt. Many civilians also found work with the arms companies or in the administration of the concentration camps.

12. The Gusen I and II Camps

We have now left the area where the prisoners worked and are standing in the former centre of power of the Gusen concentration camp. This was the area of the camp SS. The SS was the armed organisation that ran the concentration camps throughout Reich territory.

Of the many buildings that served to house and feed the SS, only a few remain today. The elongated building next to you was here during the camp. It supplied heating to all the SS barracks. It was also used as a base for SS guards on duty and the camp fire brigade. Behind this building is another that has been preserved. It housed a barbers and wash area for SS men. Several barracks on this site were torn down shortly after liberation. A former SS officers' club was used as accommodation for quarry workers until the 1960s.

Looking down the access road, which branches off from the main road, you can see a hedge that hides a house beyond. When the camp was in operation, this was known as the 'Jourhaus'. It formed the main entrance to the Gusen I prisoner camp. The large archway

can still be seen today. The building housed the offices of the SS administration and a prison where inmates were abused and murdered.

The prisoners' camp began behind the 'Jourhaus'. It was surrounded by walls, an electric barbed-wire fence and watchtowers. As many as 14,000 prisoners were crammed together here in 32 barracks. At the beginning of 1944, the SS ordered the construction of a second prisoner camp around 500 metres further along today's main road. This was the Gusen II camp. It was intended for prisoners who were working as forced labourers building the 'Bergkristall' tunnel complex in St. Georgen. The Gusen II camp was made up of 12 barracks, in which as many as 12,500 prisoners were forced to live in the most primitive conditions.

Today the two former prisoner camps have been built over with an estate of detached family homes. But some few remnants have survived. Further information is available in the module on the Gusen concentration camp in the 'Virtual Guide'.

13. Remembering the Gusen Concentration Camp

You are now at the Memorial de Gusen. This memorial was created in 1965 around the surviving oven of the camp crematorium. It was funded by donations from survivors of Gusen from different countries. In Austria, there was little effort after the war to preserve the Gusen concentration camp in public memory.

Shortly after the liberation, and before the end of May 1945, the US Army burned the Gusen II camp to the ground because of the threat of an epidemic. In the summer of that year, the Soviet occupying authorities assumed responsibility for the site of the former camp. The Soviets continued to operate the quarries until 1955. During this period, the majority of the buildings were destroyed. Unneeded barracks were sold off or looted by the local population. The stones from the camp walls and watchtowers were reused as building materials in postwar construction projects in the region.

After the departure of the Soviets in 1955, ownership of the site passed to the Republic of Austria. A prisoner cemetery created shortly after liberation by the US Army was closed down. The mortal remains were reinterred at the Mauthausen Memorial. Parts of the site, including surviving buildings, were given back to their former private owners. Other parts were sold off as building plots. Memory of the camp disappeared.

Located in the middle of what was becoming a new housing estate, the surviving crematorium oven was the only visible memory of the mass murder committed here. However, the Austrian authorities saw it as disruptive. They wanted to remove the oven and relocate it to the Mauthausen Memorial. This plan was met with resistance from international survivors' associations. Using their own money, they bought the land and created the Memorial de Gusen here. It was opened in 1965. In 1997 the Republic of Austria assumed responsibility for the site.

The memorial was designed by the architect group BBPR from Milan. Two of its members had been concentration camp prisoners: Lodovico Barbiano de Belgiojoso survived imprisonment at Gusen. Gianluigi Banfi, however, was killed here shortly before liberation.

14. OUTRO

The audio guide ends here. Further information is available in the module on the Gusen concentration camp in the ‘Virtual Guide’.

You can now visit the Memorial de Gusen. There is an exhibition on the history of the Gusen concentration camp in the Visitor Centre located behind the memorial.

The Visitor Centre is also the starting point for the ‘Audioweg Gusen’. This mobile audio installation takes you through the site of the former Gusen I and II camps to St. Georgen.

Advance registration is required to use the Audioweg. More information can be found in this app or on the website of the Mauthausen Memorial: mauthausen-memorial.org