

Historical Overview and Map. Memorial

The Ravensbrück Women's Concentration Camp (1939–1945)

In 1939, the SS had the largest women's concentration camp in the German Reich built in the Prussian village of Ravensbrück, not far from Fürstenberg, a health resort that historically had belonged to Mecklenburg. The first female prisoners from Lichtenburg concentration camp were transferred to Ravensbrück in the spring of 1939. In April 1941, a men's camp was added, which was also under the command of the women's camp's commandant, and in June 1942, the immediately adjacent Uckermark "juvenile protective custody camp" was taken into operation.

The women's concentration camp was continually expanded until 1945. The SS had more and more huts erected to house prisoners, and in the autumn of 1944, a large tent was added. Within the camp's perimeter wall, an industrial complex comprising several production facilities was established, where female prisoners were forced to carry out tasks traditionally considered women's work such as sewing, weaving or knotting. The company Siemens & Halske had 20 workshops constructed outside the camp's perimeter, where prisoners were forced to work from the late summer of 1942. As the war progressed, over 40 satellite camps in which Ravensbrück prisoners were forced into slave labour were set up all over the German Reich.

Around 132,000 women and children, 20,000 men and 1,000 adolescent girls and young women (imprisoned in the Uckermark "juvenile protective custody camp") were registered as Ravensbrück prisoners between 1939 and 1945. These prisoners came from over 40 nations and included Jewish, Sinti and Roma people. Tens of thousands of them were murdered, died of hunger and disease or were killed in medical experiments. In the course of "Operation 14 f 13", prisoners considered infirm or unfit for work were selected and murdered. Along with the victims of "14 f 13", a number of Jewish prisoners were taken to the Bernburg "sanatorium and nursing home" and were murdered in the facility's gas chamber. In late 1944, the SS set up a provisional gas chamber at Ravensbrück in a hut next to the crematorium, where between 5,000 and 6,000 prisoners were gassed between late January and April 1945.

Shortly before the end of the war, the International, Danish and Swedish Red Cross evacuated around 7,500 prisoners to Sweden, Switzerland and France. Following an evacuation order from Himmler, Ravensbrück's commandant Fritz Suhren had the remaining 20,000 prisoners marched towards the north-west in several columns. On 30 April 1945, the Red Army liberated the camp and around 2,000 sick prisoners who had been left behind.

But for most of the women, men and children imprisoned in Ravensbrück, the suffering did not end with their liberation. Many of them died in the following weeks, months or years, and many of the survivors suffered from the consequences of their imprisonment even decades after their liberation.

The Ravensbrück National Memorial (1959–1990)

The "Ravensbrück National Memorial" was opened on 12 September 1959 and was one of the GDR's three national memorials. In their design, the architects, members of the so-called Buchenwald collective, included parts of the former concentration camp buildings such as the crematorium and the camp prison (cell building) located outside the four-metre high camp wall, as well as a section of the wall itself. In 1959, a mass grave was established outside the camp wall's western section, where the remains of prisoners from various burial sites were reburied. The bronze sculpture "Burdened Woman" ("Tragende") by Will Lammert is at the heart of the memorial's design and is still considered the memorial's symbol.

From May 1945 until late January 1994, the grounds of the former concentration camp except for the memorial area on the banks of Lake Schwedt were used for military purposes by the Soviet and later the CIS forces.

In 1959/1960, the first museum was established at the former camp prison. Survivors from various countries in Europe donated their keepsakes, drawings and documents from the time of their imprisonment. In the early 1980s, the National Memorial's management drew up a concept for the "Exhibition of Nations" at the cell building, which allowed organisations or representatives from the individual countries to design their own exhibitions. 17 such national memorial rooms were designed on the building's first floor.

From 1984, the former SS headquarters, which had been used by the Soviet troops until 1977, housed the Memorial's main permanent exhibition and was referred to as the "Museum of Anti-Fascist Resistance".

Ravensbrück

The Ravensbrück Memorial (since 1993)

After the reunification of Germany, the Memorial became part of the Brandenburg Memorials Foundation (Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten), a foundation under public law funded by the State of Brandenburg and the Federal Government. Other institutions run by the Brandenburg Memorials Foundation are the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum, the “Death March Museum” in Belower Wald near Wittstock, and the Brandenburg/Havel Documentation Centre at the Brandenburg prison.

The “Museum of Anti-Fascist Resistance” at the former SS headquarters was replaced by two new permanent exhibitions in the course of the Memorial’s redesign in the early 1990s, and three new memorial rooms were added at the cell building: one for the prisoners incarcerated at Ravensbrück following the 20 July 1944 attempt on Hitler’s life (1991), one dedicated to the camp’s Jewish prisoners (1992) and one for the Sinti and Roma imprisoned at Ravensbrück (1995). A new exhibition on the history of the cell building was opened in 2006. One of the former houses for female guards at the SS housing estate was restored according to the guidelines for the restoration of historic monuments. Since 2004, this building has contained an exhibition on the female SS guards deployed at Ravensbrück concentration camp.

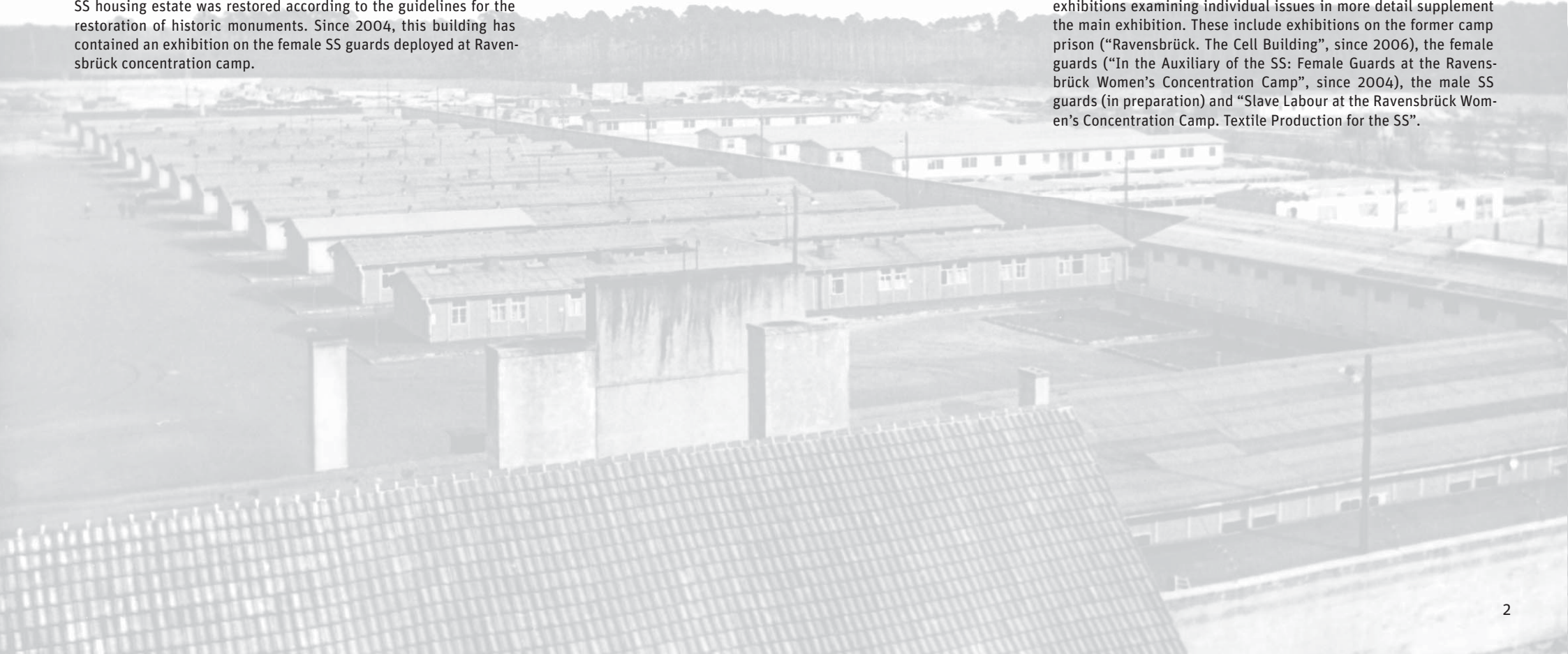
The Ravensbrück International Youth Meeting Centre (since 2002)

The International Youth Meeting Centre established in 2002 at the former houses for female SS guards is a place of historical and political education. The Memorial’s educational services offer various programmes and seminars running from one to several days. The Ravensbrück Youth Hostel offers accommodation for up to 99 guests.

Upkeep and Redesign

During the Memorial’s expansion and redesign process, which was started in 1993, the main focus was on both researching and restoring the historical structures in the grounds. Following the withdrawal of the CIS troops, the former entrance section of the camp was made accessible again in time for the 50th anniversary of the camp’s liberation in 1995. Parts of the former prisoners’ compound and the adjacent industrial complex were also made accessible for visitors through clearance and landscaping works. The industrial complex contains a former textile mill (the so-called tailors’ workshop) consisting of eight interconnected workshops, which was secured and partially restored in 1999/2000. Further renovation work is planned in the course of the Memorial’s redesign over the coming years.

The new Visitor Centre was opened in 2007. In the future, the former SS headquarters will hold the Memorial’s main exhibition, and the garage complex behind it will contain administration offices, the Memorial’s collections and a function room. Smaller permanent exhibitions examining individual issues in more detail supplement the main exhibition. These include exhibitions on the former camp prison (“Ravensbrück. The Cell Building”, since 2006), the female guards (“In the Auxiliary of the SS: Female Guards at the Ravensbrück Women’s Concentration Camp”, since 2004), the male SS guards (in preparation) and “Slave Labour at the Ravensbrück Women’s Concentration Camp. Textile Production for the SS”.



Information and Educational Services

A system of information panels guides visitors around the memorial's extensive grounds. The panels mark buildings of historical importance and other sites relevant to the history of the Ravensbrück camp complex and point out the Memorial's exhibitions. An audio-guide system for guiding visitors around the grounds is currently in preparation.

The Memorial sees itself as an "open place of learning". Its Educational Services offer a wide range of guided tours on various specific topics. These tours take between 60 and 90 minutes and are available by prior arrangement only. So-called Project Days (duration: at least four hours) as well as seminars running over several days at the International Youth Meeting Centre offer a closer examination of individual topics. These seminars for teenagers or adults on the history of the Ravensbrück concentration camp or on other related topics (if arranged beforehand) may include "inquiry-based learning" projects at the Memorial's collections, the topical use of new media as well as active media projects. Class- and seminar rooms for projects in collaboration with schools or other educational institutions are available at the International Youth Meeting Centre. The work camps, held during the summer months, combine historical learning with practical work on the historical site. The Educational Services staff will be happy to discuss a group's visit beforehand in order to adapt programmes to meet their target groups' requirements. Please book your group visits at least six weeks in advance, either by phone (+49 33093 603-85) or online at www.ravensbrueck.de.

The Ravensbrück International Youth Meeting Centre / Youth Hostel has modern seminar rooms complete with video equipment and computers and offers various additional recreational activities. It is suitable for projects or seminars running over several days as well as conferences.

The Collections

The Memorial's collections – archive, library, repository, photograph and media collection – are ideally suited for research. They were started in 1958/1959, when the first camp museum was being established at the cell building. Former prisoners donated many objects from the time of their imprisonment, including drawings, miniatures and letters. The collections include archival stocks and museum exhibits relating to the women's camp, the men's camp and the Uckermark "juvenile protective custody camp", personal effects of individual former prisoners as well as documents on the history of the Memorial. The collections focus on women's and gender studies issues in general and are therefore permanently expanded. The Memorial's reference library contains specialist literature as well as numerous interviews with survivors and other witnesses. The archive, library, repository, photograph and media collection can be used on weekdays after prior arrangement from 9 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.



Bounds of the areas accessible at present: 

Exhibitions:

- 2** »Ravensbrück. The Topography and History of the Women's Concentration Camp« | »Women of Ravensbrück«
- 23** »Slave Labour at the Ravensbrück Women's Concentration Camp. Textile Production for the SS«

26 »Ravensbrück. The Cell Building«

36 b »In the Auxiliary of the SS. Female Guards at the Ravensbrück Women's Concentration Camp«

1 Visitor Centre

At the visitor centre, which was opened in 2007, visitors can find information on the Memorial and its work. In addition, the building serves as the starting point for guided tours. The bookshop offers literature on the history of the Ravensbrück camp complex, the area's post-war history and the history of Nazi Germany in general. A model of the former camp provides orientation.

2 SS Headquarters | 1940–45

This building housed the SS headquarters and the administration of the Ravensbrück women's concentration camp. The "political department", the mail censorship office and the infirmary for SS members occupied the ground floor. The first floor housed the offices of the commandant and his adjutant, the SS headquarters office and other administrative offices. After the camp's liberation in 1945, the building was used by the Soviet Army until 1977. It has served as the Memorial's central exhibition space since 1984. The first floor currently contains the exhibitions "Ravensbrück. The Topography and History of the Women's Concentration Camp" and "Women of Ravensbrück".

3 Waterworks | 1940–45

Apart from the waterworks, this building contained garages, drivers' quarters and workshops as well as the camp's telephone and telegraph station. The building's attic was temporarily used as the camp's "personal effects store".

4 Garage Complex | 1940–45

This building, erected between 1940 and 1942, contained the camp's vehicle depot, garages, repair workshops and a cinema for SS members. Between 1945 and 1977, the garage complex was used exclusively by the Soviet Army.



5 Camp Gate and Guard Station | 1939–45

A separate door for use by individual guards and camp staff was located next to the central gate to the prisoners' compound. The guard station served to control all persons entering or leaving the camp, especially the columns of prisoners. The brick gate building that still stands here was built in 1943/44. Together with the main gate behind it, which no longer exists, the gate building formed a kind of mantrap. During the Soviet Army's occupancy of the former camp between 1945 and 1994, the gate building underwent considerable alterations.

6 Prisoners' Compound | 1939–45

Initially, the camp's main compound consisted of a camp street and two rows of huts for up to 3,000 prisoners. From 1940, the industrial complex [22] and the "New Camp" [25] with more rows of huts were added. By 1945, the prisoners' compound was made up of five rows of huts and four camp streets. Camp streets 2 to 4 were bordered by poplar trees. Many traces of the camp's original structures were obliterated during the Soviet Army's occupancy of the grounds. During the Memorial's redesign in 2000, the outlines of the huts in the first two rows were marked by shallow depressions.

7 SS Canteen | 1939/40–45

The canteen for female SS guards and civilian employees was located near the camp's entrance and was separated by a fence from the rest of the camp.

8 Utility Building | 1939–45

This single-storey utility building contained the prisoners' kitchen and the prisoners' baths. In survivors' memories, the baths hold special significance because they were the site of the humiliating admission procedures. Today, remains of the building's masonry, the floor of the prisoners' baths and the building's basement are being conserved by a concrete frame and cover.



9 Roll-Call Square | 1939–45

This large square, bordered by the utility building, the prisoners' compound and the cell building, was used for assembling the work details and for penal roll-calls.

10 Camp Street 1 | 1939–45

From May 1939, prisoners were housed in huts on both sides of camp street 1. The lime trees have grown from seedlings which lined the camp street on both sides.

11 Huts, Sickbay | 1939–45

12 Work Deployment Office | 1943–45

From November 1942, the SS used prisoners for clerical tasks related to the prisoners' "work deployment". In early 1943, the work deployment office was moved from the SS headquarters to inside the camp. 40 to 50 female prisoners worked here in three shifts from early 1944. One of their tasks was to assign prisoners to work details.

13 Huts (Blocks 1–4) | 1942–45

Prisoners who worked in the sickbays, the SS administration, the SS or prisoners' kitchen were housed in blocks 1 to 4. These blocks were kept clean, were not overcrowded, and the beds were equipped with blue-and-white striped linen. The SS made sure that hygienic conditions were better in these huts because the guards had to work in close contact with the prisoners housed here, and they wanted to reduce the risk of infections with typhoid fever or other epidemics.

14 Huts | 1939–45 Sickbay (Blocks 5–7) | 1945



15 Huts | 1939–42

Sickbay Huts (Blocks 8–11) | 1944–45

In 1944 and 1945, due to the worsening hygienic conditions in the more and more crowded camp, many prisoners contracted typhoid fever, diphtheria, tuberculosis and scabies. This prompted the SS to convert living huts in the second row of huts into sickbays, which quickly developed into huts for the dying.

16 Hut (Block 9) | 1939–45

Until October 1942, Jewish women were housed in this so-called “Jews’ block”. After they had been taken to the Bernburg “Sanatorium” to be gassed or transported to the Auschwitz extermination camp, there was no separate “Jews’ block” at the camp anymore. In mid-1944, blocks 9 and 11 were converted into sickbay wards.

17 Hut (Block 10) | 1944/45

Tuberculosis Ward | 1939–45

Prisoners suffering from tuberculosis were housed in block 10. One section of the hut, referred to by the SS as the “idiots’ room”, was used to house prisoners unable to cope mentally with the conditions of their imprisonment. Most of the women who were taken to this hut died after a short while or were selected for extermination by SS doctors.

18 Hut (Block 11) | 1939–45

See 16.

19 “New Laundry” | 1943/44–45

Former prisoners referred to the brick buildings erected outside the camp’s northern wall in 1943/44 as the “pathology department”, the “disinfection department” or the “new laundry”. Their exact purpose is unknown. Both of these brick huts underwent considerable

structural alterations after 1945, when they were used by the Soviet Army. From 1945 to 1994, the building on the left contained the kitchen and mess hall for the Soviet soldiers. The building on the right was used for medical purposes and as a dispensary.

20 “Penal Block” | 1939–45

In June 1939, one block in the first row of huts was declared the penal block and separated from the rest of the camp by a wire fence. Conditions at the penal block were made particularly harsh by constant overcrowding, withdrawal of food and especially strenuous work.

21 Transformer Station | 1943/44–45

The transformer station was one of the first buildings at the camp, built at the same time as the camp wall and the first two rows of huts. It supplied the camp complex with electricity.

22 Industrial Estate | 1940–45

The first workshop buildings where prisoners had to manufacture prisoner uniforms and later also SS uniforms were completed in 1940. By 1945, several more buildings belonging to the SS-owned company “Gesellschaft für Textil- und Lederwertung mbH (Textel), Werk Ravensbrück” (Textile and Leather Recovery plc., Ravensbrück branch) had been constructed. They included tailors’ workshops, a weaving workshop, a furriers’ workshop, a shredding workshop and an administration building.

23 “Tailors’ Workshop” | 1942–45

This complex was called the “Mechanical Workshops” or the “Tailors’ Workshop” and consists of eight interconnected manufacturing halls. After its completion in 1942, the building became one of the central sites of slave labour at the Ravensbrück women’s concentration camp. It underwent extensive renovation in 1999/2000. Today, it contains an exhibition on slave labour at the Ravensbrück camp.

24 Men’s Camp | 1941–45

The men’s camp was part of the Ravensbrück camp complex and held around 20,000 male prisoners between 1941 and 1945. The men’s camp was also under the authority of the women’s camp’s commandant. The SS set up the men’s camp to provide them with male slave labourers for the ongoing expansion of the Ravensbrück camp and its satellite camps.

25 “New Camp” | 1940–45

The women’s camp was expanded several times. The first huts of the so-called “New Camp” were completed in the late summer of 1940. Construction work on the fourth and fifth row of huts continued well into 1944. Initially, the two camp sections were separated by a wall. During the expansion process, openings were made in this wall and eventually it was demolished altogether.

26 Cell Building | 1940–45

The camp prison or cell building which the prisoners also referred to as the bunker was an integral part of the camp’s internal penal system and the site of acts of particular cruelty. The building contained 78 cells. When the Memorial was founded in 1959, the cell building held its first exhibition. In 2006, a new permanent exhibition entitled “Ravensbrück. The Cell Building” was opened, which also deals with the history of the national memorial rooms.

27 Memorial | since 1959

In 1959, the “Ravensbrück National Memorial” was opened. It contained the crematorium, the cell building, part of the historical camp wall with the burial ground in front of it, a rostrum and the monument with the steps leading into the lake. The statue entitled “Burdened Woman” (“Tragende”) by Will Lammert and the group of sculptures behind the crematorium were part of the National Memorial’s artistic concept. Visitors entered the museum in the former cell building through an opening in its wall.

28 Crematorium | 1943–45

Initially, the camp’s dead were cremated at the Fürstenberg municipal crematorium. In the spring of 1943, the SS had a crematorium for the camp built outside the camp walls, which was expanded in the autumn of 1944.

29 Gas Chamber | 1944–45

In late 1944, the SS had a gas chamber installed in a hut next to the crematorium. Between January and April 1945, 5,000 to 6,000 prisoners were murdered there. In 1991, following a request from the International Ravensbrück Committee, the site of the gas chamber was marked with a commemorative stone.

30 Burial Ground | since 1959

From the mid-1950s, the dead who had been buried in various mass graves following the liberation of the camp were reburied. The new burial ground was laid out at the foot of the “Wall of Nations”, and roses were planted on it. In 1986, a commemorative stone in memory of the murdered Jewish prisoners was added, and another stone commemorating murdered Sinti and Roma prisoners was placed on the burial ground in 1995.

31 Execution Passage | 1959

The passage between the garage complex’s rear wall and the camp wall has become known as the “execution passage”. There is, however, no historical evidence to prove that it was actually used for executions. The passage was temporarily bricked up. It was assumed that this gap between the two structures formed a “death” or “execution passage” because survivors had remembered hearing shots in the area near the crematorium, and therefore the commemorative stone was set up there in 1959.

8



32 Siemens & Halske Production Facilities (Siemens Camp) | 1942–45

Between 1942 and 1944, the company Siemens & Halske set up several production facilities on this site. Female prisoners were forced to perform slave labour inside the buildings' 20 workshops. From December 1944, the prisoners who had to work there were housed in huts that formed a separate camp section. Over 2,000 prisoners were forced to produce coils, switch parts and other parts for the armaments industry.

33 Tent | 1944/45

In August 1944, the SS had a tent erected between blocks no. 24 and 26. At times, more than 4,000 prisoners were crammed into this tent.

34 Transports | 1939–45

The Ravensbrück camp complex was connected to the German Reich's railway system. The railway tracks and platforms here were mostly used for delivering goods and materials to the SS-owned production facilities, where they were sorted and processed. The so-called loot storage huts which still stand there today were used for temporary storage. In 2005, a reconstructed goods wagon was placed near the tracks, which contains an exhibition on the transports to Ravensbrück.

35 Uckermark "Juvenile Protective Custody Camp" | 1942–45

Construction work on the Uckermark "Youth Education Camp" or "Juvenile Protective Custody Camp" started in 1941/42. By mid-1944, it consisted of 15 huts. Around 1,000 girls and young women were imprisoned there under very similar conditions to those at the women's concentration camp. Starting in December 1944, the "juvenile protective custody camp" was gradually evacuated. After the evacuation it was used by the concentration camp to carry out selections and as a camp for dying prisoners.



36 SS Housing Estate | 1940–45

The former SS housing estate reflects the hierarchy within the SS. Among other buildings, it contained four detached houses for high-ranking SS members (so-called "Führerhäuser"), ten two-family houses for mid-level SS officers (so-called "Unterführerhäuser") and eight buildings for the female guards. From the camp's liberation until 1994, these buildings mostly served as living quarters for members of the Soviet and later CIS Army. Since 2002, the former guards' quarters have housed the Ravensbrück Youth Meeting Centre and Youth Hostel. One of the guards' houses today contains the offices of the Memorial's educational services [36a], and the exhibition "In the Auxiliary of the SS: Female Guards at the Ravensbrück Women's Concentration Camp" is shown at the building next to it [36b]. From 2010, an exhibition on the male SS staff at Ravensbrück will be shown at one of the officers' houses [36c].

37 Häftlingslager | 1939–45

The marked site offers a view of the main compound of the former Ravensbrück women's concentration camp. A photograph taken in 1945 gives an impression of the historical camp layout [6].

38 Ravensbrück Train Stop | 1941–45

The majority of the prisoners were taken to the Ravensbrück camp complex via the Fürstenberg goods station. In 1941, the Ravensbrück train stop was established on the railway line between Lychen and Templin, which today is only used by handcars.

39 Supermarket | 1991

In the summer of 1991, the construction of a supermarket at the Memorial's access road brought the town of Fürstenberg to international attention. The building was never used as a supermarket and has stood vacant for most of the time since its completion.



40 Sculpture entitled "Mothers" | since 1965

The group of sculptures entitled "Mothers" ("Müttergruppe") by sculptor Fritz Cremer was unveiled in 1965.

Outside the Map

41 Fürstenberg Station | 1939–45

Between 1939 and 1945, transports of Ravensbrück concentration camp prisoners arrived at and left from the goods station at Fürstenberg train station.



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Opening Times Exhibitions
October to April: Tue–Sun 9 a.m.–5 p.m.
May to September: Tue–Sun 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Opening Times Memorial Grounds
October to April: daily 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
May to September: daily, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Opening Times Collections (Archives, Repository and Library)
Mon–Fri 9 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.
Tel +49 (0)33093 608-14/-16

Opening Times Educational Services
Tue–Fri 8 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.
Tel +49 (0)33093 603-85

Guided tours and project days in German cost € 15.00 for groups of up to 15 people and € 25.00 for groups of up to 30 people. Tours in other languages are available at a surcharge of € 25.00 per group.

Directions

By train:

Regional train (RE) 5 from Berlin to Stralsund/Rostock stops at Fürstenberg and runs every hour. The Memorial is a 25-minute walk from Fürstenberg station, where taxis are also available.

By car:

Fürstenberg is located 80 kilometres north of Berlin on Bundesstraße (Federal Highway) 96, which runs from Berlin to Stralsund; the way to the Memorial from Fürstenberg is signposted.

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