

Informational tour of the Former Uckermark Youth Concentration Camp for Girls and Young Women and Later Extermination Site (Updated 2009)

There have been working and networking exchange camps on this land for the last 12 years. We work towards drawing attention to this “forgotten and/or denied” part of German history at these camps, and also towards making the land physically accessible and towards contributing to the creation of an “Uckermark Memorial”.

This tour will lead to some of the areas which the camps have made accessible.

The Youth Concentration Camp Uckermark was conceived of as a “Youth Protection Camp” by the National Socialists and was built between 1941 and 1942 by the prisoners from the Women’s Concentration Camp Ravensbrück. In June, 1942 the first 70 girls were imprisoned here; they were mostly sent from “public welfare institutions.” Until 1945, 1200 girls and young women between the ages of 16 and 21 as well as a few young boys, were imprisoned here for a variety of reasons. In January 1945, the concentration camp was turned into the Women Concentration Camp Ravensbrück’s extermination camp. In April 1945, the camp was liberated by the Red Army.

Station 1) Historical Camp Entrance

We are standing here at the historical entrance to the Concentration Camp; it is here that the young women would first step onto the premises. There is not much left to show for this fact; it is difficult to be able to picture what the original camp structure was like, due to the dominating construction completed by the Soviet army.

There is a quote from Stanka Simoneti who was imprisoned here as a Slovenian partisan. Through her own words, we are able to share her thoughts as she first arrived at the camp.

It is no coincidence that the camp was built here. In 1941, they decided to construct the camp in close proximity to the Women’s Concentration Camp Ravensbrück in order to be able to easily make use of their supply system. Moreover, the girls and young women could also then be exploited by the resident armament factories at Ravensbrück, above all by Siemens.

The girls had to endure the admission procedure in the women’s concentration camp and had to spend a few days to several weeks in the admissions block in Ravensbrück before they were transferred to the Uckermark Camp. This once again makes the close cooperation between Ravensbrück and the Uckermark Camp clear.

Anita Köcke:

“We got off at Fürstenberg. There were probably about 250-300 people on the collective transport. Everyone had to line up and we were counted (...) We arrived at the Concentration Camp Ravensbrück. I still remember the entry gate, there was a barracks on the right side (...) and then there was something like a room where everyone had to undress and be examined one after another. Since not everyone could go in at once, the process lasted several hours. First, we were checked for sexually transmitted diseases, for that, we had to lie on a chair. Then our hair was shaved off, under the arms and on top. I cried wretchedly. That was quite a condition to be in; I didn’t have a suitcase, clothes, nothing was left (...) I still remember the day exactly, when I was taken to the Youth Protection Camp in Ravensbrück (...) I was put in Block One, that was the quarantine block. New arrivals were assigned a bed there (...) and then it was made clear to us, that it was discipline which ruled here.”

Station 2) Former Camp Street

The approximate route of the former camp street is marked by red dots starting from the historical camp entrance. Due to a lack of excavations at the site, it is difficult to imagine the size of the premises of the former concentration camp, so you have to try to figure out what the area was like by following the few traces which remain.

Mostly girls and young women from Germany, Austria and Slovenia aged 16-21 were imprisoned in the Youth Concentration Camp Uckermark, although some of them were much younger.

The young girls were discriminated against as, what was known as “antisocial”, by the “public welfare association” and were sent to the camp as “hopeless cases”. Any behavior which contradicted the “national socialist ethnic community” set of norms was considered “antisocial.” This stigmatization was arbitrary and says nothing about the individuals persecuted, but rather something about the perpetrators’ ideological views.

Some alleged reasons for the girls’ persecution were the following:

- Refusal to work
- Parents’ alcoholism
- being a vagabond
- Rebellion against and running away from the oppressive welfare organisations

Young women who did not conform to the dominant feminine ideal were sent to the concentration camp and labeled as “sexually depraved.” During the war, the police as well as the welfare organisations increased their inspections of unassimilated youth.

In this context, going to a dance club, violating the ban on alcohol and going out at night, belonging to the “Swing Kids” (a youth group which opposed National Socialist Ideology), befriends friends with Jews or refusal to join the “League of German Girls” were all grounds for arrest.

Girls who were oppositional or active in the resistance or whose parents were fighting in the resistance were imprisoned as political prisoners.

It is further known that girls from Poland and at least two Sinti/Roma girls were imprisoned in the camp.

Anita Köcke describes her story in the following way:

“I was born out of wedlock in Weimar in 1925. The Youth Welfare Office had a say in my life from birth on. My mother was a cook and wasn’t able to keep me. I grew up with foster parents for the first 8 years. When I was 8 I was sent to an orphanage; my mother sent me packages and visited me.

When I was 12, I went to live with my aunt, my mother’s sister. I milked 10-12 cows early every morning when I was only 12. Since I had to do that, I was excused from the first hour at school and only had to be there at 8 o’clock.

Afterwards, I spent a mandatory year with a farmer in 1939. I belonged to the League of German Girls for a short time while I was there. I didn’t like it however and after a short period of time, I was thrown out anyway. Then I was sent to another farmer. I didn’t like it

there. I was about 15 years old. I stole food that I wanted to bring to my mother. The farmer turned me in for theft. I ran away several times. That was reported to the Youth Welfare Office. I couldn't stand to stay anywhere for very long, I was a rover. People described me as a rolling stone and antisocial. People told me I belonged in an institution. That's what they called you, when you didn't obey and I was in fact just the opposite to obedient. The Youth Welfare Office was after me because I didn't comply with the compulsory registration. And that's how my life went, I was sent to prison and then from one prison to the next."

Station 3) at the beginning of the roundabout facing the columns marking the barracks

These metal columns, subsequently erected here, mark the area of a camp barrack. The brick foundation of this and one other barrack were exposed during archaeological excavations during the first working camp in 1997.

The exact layout and size of the camp, as well as the location of other barracks is unknown. There were probably a total of 20 barracks; most of them were the same size as this one. There were living and working barracks for the young prisoners on the concentration camp's premises. The entire area was fenced in with barbed wire. Those in charge of the camp and the principally female SS personnel were quartered outside of the camp close to the entrance area. There was also a special block for the Slovenian prisoners there.

According to what was known as "criminal biological aspects", girls and young women were separated into three categories and depending on the category they were assigned to particular blocks. Next to the "observation block" in which newly delivered prisoners had to stay for half a year, there was a block for girls who were classified as "educatable", and another block for the prisoners who were classified as "uneducatable" in the national socialist ideology, the latter had to occupy the lowest ranking in the hierarchy. This separation of prisoners determined their daily life in the camp and was a matter of life and death.

The daily camp life was specified precisely and it wasn't possible for the youth to have any personal control over what they did and when they did it. After being awoken with the camp siren at 5am, everybody had to go to what was called "early sport". The young girls had to go outdoors barefoot and in their underwear in all kinds of weather. Then they used whistles and commandos to force them to run around the barracks or to do knee-bends or the like with military discipline and speed, over and over again.

In the camp, the youth were under the constant control of the SS wardens. An integral part of the daily routine were the numerous forms of roll calls which often lasted for hours (along with roll calls, there were for example, inspections of clothes, beds, cleanliness or dishes.) Due to a 24 hour speaking ban, any kind of contact between the prisoners was basically impossible.

Survivor quote:

"We weren't allowed to speak either. As soon as you tried to make contact, the punishment rained down. I only had to remain standing for long periods as punishment. But I know that girls were also beaten. We saw the girls in the evenings in the shower, and saw how black and blue they were."

Punishments were random. They ranged from food deprivation, standing for long periods, arrest to hard physical violence; for instance beating and whipping. They also set the dogs on the prisoners. The punishments sometimes led to the girls' death.

The largest portion of the day was spent by forced labor. After 1945, the youth were either never compensated, or only marginally: The youth exploitation did not only lead to damaged health, but in numerous cases also to death, whether it be from a work accident, illness or as a consequence of malnutrition.

The majority of the work was done outside of the camp, on surrounding farms or in private companies, in the Women's Concentration Camp Ravensbrück armament factory and the camp, Dallgow-Döberitz, known as a "transitional camp". Some of the work was also done on the camp premises. There was a camp-owned sewing centre and knitting mill in the northern part of the camp. Others worked in the cooking barracks in front of the camp gates, in a crafts room, where dolls were made for the children of fallen SS soldiers, in the SS administration, in barracks which were probably allocated to the breeding of angora rabbits, or in one of the two Siemens barracks on the premises:

From 1942-44, Siemens had Ravensbrück prisoners build a production facility with 20 large halls. Small parts for the armament industry were produced there; at the end parts for the rocket known as the V2 rocket were also produced there. The first Siemens factory barrack in the Uckermark Concentration Camp for Girls and Young Women was built in June 1942.

In addition, the prisoners had to plant a vegetable garden for the camp SS. Moreover, the young girls had to undergo great physical exertion with only inadequate nourishment while draining the Havel inlet.

Käthe Anders, admitted to Uckermark in 1942, describes this work in the following citation:

"We began to drain the marshes in July or August. It was hard work. Grass had grown over the marshes, you sank in half a meter. We had to cut out squares with the shovels, lift them up and stack them up in a heap. Then we dug out ditches, real gutters, the dirt was taken away. We stood in the marsh until November, until the ground was frozen. We took off the wooden sandals; otherwise we would have had to spend half an hour scrubbing them to get them clean again. Standing in that, barefoot! We all have rheumatism and arthritis from it; that is what we are left with."

Barges which were docked on the Havel were also loaded and unloaded by the youth. The way to the Havel was at the other end of the premises (show this). We made the path to the Havel accessible once again at the working camp last August.

Station 4) Infirmary

The former infirmary is supposed to have stood here. It represents two parts of the Uckermark Camp's history. It was used for the Youth Camp between 1942-1944, and finally served as a place for killing the sick and weakened women from the Ravensbrück camp.

The prisoners' medical care at the Youth Concentration Camp Uckermark was not fit for humans: the state of hygiene was inadequate and medication was only seldom available.

Before the morning roll call, sick prisoners had to report to the block elder who was responsible. This individual decided if it was necessary for them to be sent to the infirmary. Nurses who were for the most part themselves prisoners worked in the infirmary. Doctors came from the Ravensbrück Women's Concentration Camp twice a

week in order to examine prisoners in the sick prisoners barrack. Adequate care was not possible. Seriously ill prisoners were hospitalized in the Ravensbrück Women's Concentration Camp, where operations were also performed.

Female overseers were responsible for the direction of the sick prisoners barracks. Among them, Hildegard Manning was particularly known for her brutality. She beat sick girls and women with a dog whip.

The patients in the sick barracks also had to participate twice a day in the long and energy-stealing roll call. They were given work within the camp; this policy was called "therapeutic measures".

Survivors report that regular medical interventions were performed on prisoners in the infirmary. Once a month, they were administered with an injection in their chest musculature. It is unknown what this injection contained.

The Youth Concentration Camp was partially evacuated in January 1945 and then transformed into a selection and extermination camp. Older, sick and weakened women from Ravensbrück were brought to Uckermark for extermination by neglect and murder. Blankets and warm coats were taken from them, all day long roll calls and removal of food and water led to enfeeblement, starvation and freezing to death.

Irma Trksak describes the way from Ravensbrück to Uckermark:

"I got to Uckermark at the beginning of 1945. I was transferred from Ravensbrück as a punishment along with Karbusova, a Czech woman who was the block elder. We were sent to Uckermark and were made block elders there. At the end of 1944, the head overseer Binz made the rounds in Ravensbrück and informed all the block elders that the Youth Protection Camp Uckermark was going to be closed down and instead old and sick women were to be sent to Uckermark in order to make more room for the many prisoners who were still supposed to come to Ravensbrück. A so-called "protection camp" was supposedly built in Uckermark for sick and old women. Uckermark was supposed to be especially good for the sick and the weak because of where it was located, in the middle of the woods with fresh air and better services, particularly good for the sick and the weak, and they wouldn't have to work there."

Thousands of these women were selected for extermination and then brought to the so-called gymnasium (show where this is). Lotte S. describes the condition of the gymnasium in the following way:

"The women were brought to the gymnasium after the selection, where they sometimes waited hours or even days in order to be transported to the gas chambers. The gymnasium was a large room without beds, straw mattresses, blankets or heat. The women received almost no food; even water was kept from them. The situation was made even worse since the windows were closed and they weren't allowed to go to the toilet."

They were transported from here in gas trucks and were killed by piped-in exhaust fumes or were taken to Ravensbrück and murdered in the gas chambers constructed for that purpose. The SS killed at least 5000 women in this way between January and April 1945.

The infirmary was also used to murder the prisoners from the beginning of 1945 up until the Red Army liberation. Fatal doses of the neurotoxin strychnine were systematically administered here. This caused long-lasting excruciating cramping until finally the prisoner would die of respiratory paralysis.

Former prisoners who had to work as the block elder in the infirmary estimate that between 30 and 40 women were murdered by poisonous substances every day.

The imprisoned Czech woman Vera Salvequat was instated as a nurse and the block elder. She was feared due to her brutality and she murdered many of her fellow prisoners. She was condemned to death during the first Ravensbrück court case and hung on May 3, 1947. Many others who were principally responsible for the murders were able to conceal their acts and were found not guilty.

The camp was evacuated at the end of April 1945; a portion of the prisoners went on the death march.

Station 5) Gate / “Maschas”

We would like to try to come back to the here and now. After visualizing, or at least approaching the horrible things that have happened here, the crimes and the suffering of the women who were imprisoned here, many questions come up:

How do we handle the history of this place, the stories of the victims and the stories of the perpetrators?

What forms of remembrance seem to be appropriate?

What consequences are there for our daily lives and for our political understanding?

With this in mind, we would like to recite a quote – a call to action – from a survivor.

Jelka belonged to the Slovenian partisans, she says:

“Hope is like a fire by which one can warm oneself when it is cold everywhere.

As long as we fought against Hitler, we thought:

“Tomorrow there will be justice...”

Nothing came of that.

We can't let the embers die now. Another fire can be started out of the embers. But if it goes out, there will only be ash.”

So that the embers don't go out,

So that the traces of the Youth Concentration Uckermark aren't obliterated,

So that people remember, think and learn from the past

That is the goal of our working camp.

We would like to end our tour here.

We will happily answer your questions or talk to you about your impressions. We are curious about what kind of impressions you have.

Map Legend

- 1 SS-Block
- 2 Kitchen
- 3 Special block
- 4 Houses for staff and camp commandants
- 5 Camp administration
- 6,7 SS Blocks
- 8 Camp Entrance
- 9 „Chamber“
- 10 „A-Block“
- 11 Infirmary
- 12 Mouse Farm/Crafts room
- 13 SS vegetable garden
- 14 Sewing room/knitting mill
- 15 Horse and pig stalls
- 16 Greenhouse
- 17 Material storage

There are red posts which mark the historical locations of the camp, from points A-H:

A Camp Entrance

B Camp Street

C Barack Foundation

D Infirmary

Info Box

E Gym

Memorial Stone

F Path to Havel

Circuit Tour with
Historical Information

G Functional Building

H Stalls

Inner border of the Youth Concentration
Camp

Outer border of the Youth Concentration
Camp

Paths up until 1945

CIS-Military Fence

CIS-Buildings and current paths