

# The Emsland Camps...

Between 1933 and 1945, the Nazi state ran 15 prisoner camps in Emsland and the county of Bentheim.

As part of the SS, justice and Wehrmacht system, all camps were places of terror. A total of up to 10,000 concentration camp inmates and 70,000 convicts suffered in the Emsland camps. During the war, they housed far more than 100,000 POWs. Until the end of the war, the prisoners and convicts had to perform heavy forced labor in moorland cultivation, in the peat and armaments industry, in agriculture and also in clearing air raid damages.

More than 20,000 people, most of them Soviet prisoners of war, starved to death, died of exhaustion and disease, following physical abuse or were „shot dead while on the run“.

In the post-war period, the camps provided shelter for former forced laborers, later also for refugees and displaced persons. Today, prisons, housing estates and farmland can be found on the sites of the former Emsland camps.



ESTERWEGEN MEMORIAL |  
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Free  
admission

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## Opening hours

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

## Public guided tours

**February to December**  
on the first Sunday of the month  
at 11 a.m. & 3 p.m.

Open on Easter Monday & Whit Monday  
Closed from 15 December to 15 January

VGH Stiftung

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Emsland

Der Beauftragte der Bundesregierung  
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Esterwegen

„We  
must  
never  
forget.“



# In the distance...

In the summer of 1933, the Prussian State built the concentration camp Esterwegen on the site of today's memorial to accommodate political prisoners.

From 1934 to 1936, it was under the control of the SS „Concentration Camps Inspectorate“. In 1936, the camp was dissolved; the successor camp was the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin. Doubtless, one of the best-known inmates in Esterwegen was the 1935 Nobel Peace Prize winner Carl von Ossietzky.

From 1937 to 1945, Camp Esterwegen housed convicts of the criminal justice system of the „Reich“. During the Second World War, mainly soldiers sentenced by Wehrmacht courts were imprisoned here and in other Emsland camps. In 1943/44, resistance fighters from various Western European countries, so-called „Nacht und Nebel“ (Night and Fog) prisoners, were incarcerated in one part of the camp („Camp South“).

## History...

### Summer 1933

**Establishment** of the Esterwegen concentration camp by the Prussian State, set-up as a double camp for 1,000 prisoners each.

### 1934

Takeover of the camp by the SS. **Consolidation** of the two sub-camps; construction of the 2.50 m high outer wall with two watchtowers and a high entrance gate. Inner gate with watchtower for a machine gun post at the entrance to the prisoner camp. Construction of leisure facilities for the SS.

### Autumn 1936

**Dissolution** of the Esterwegen concentration camp; transfer to Oranienburg (Sachsenhausen concentration camp).

### Ab 1937

**Takeover** by the justice administration as a convict camp. Enlargement of the prisoner camp, conversion of the guard camp, construction of two further watchtowers and a new inner gate, planting of trees on both sides of the camp road.

### May 1943 – April 1944

Separation of „**Camp South**“ for a total of 2,700 „Nacht und Nebel“ prisoners. These were resistance fighters, especially from Belgium.

### May 1945 – July 1947

**Internment** camp of the British occupying forces; subsequently department of the „Emsland Penal Institutions“ until 1951.

### 1953 – 1959

**Transit camp for refugees.** Dismantling of all buildings of the former camp.

### 1963 – 2001

**Bundeswehr** depot with 18 barracks erected on both sides of the camp road. A strip of American red oaks was planted behind them (1970s).

### 2009 – 2011

Establishment of the **Esterwegen Memorial**: Corten steel panels as „translation“ of the wall, watchtowers and gates. Lava gravel to cover the prisoner camp. Tree islands to mark the barrack locations.



# Here and now...

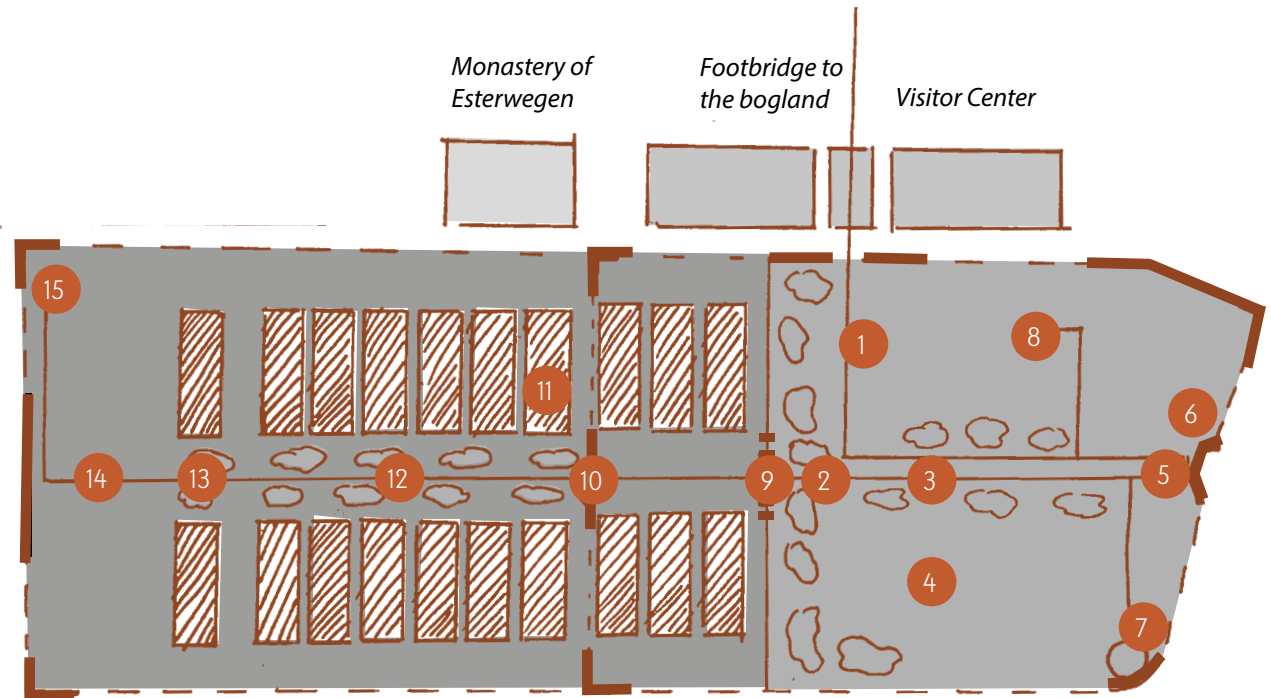
**The Memorial is a European site of remembrance for all 15 Emsland camps and their victims.**

It points the way to a future without dictatorship, violent politics and terror, without nationalism and racism. It calls for a commitment to human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

In the former Bundeswehr depot halls from the 1970s, the visitor center now houses the exhibitions, seminar rooms, a library, the archives and the cafeteria.

## Map...

- 1 **Fountain** in the guard camp
- 2 **Camp road**
- 3 **Stairway** to an NS memorial
- 4 **Buried NS memorial stone**
- 5 **Main gate** of the camp
- 6 **Carl v. Ossietzky memorial stones**
- 7 **Leisure area** in the guard camp with the so-called „Feldherrenhügel“
- 8 Site of the former „communal hall“ of the prison camp guards
- 9 **Inner gate** of the convict camp and of „Camp South“ of the „Nacht und Nebel“ prisoners
- 10 **Gate to the protective** custody camp of the concentration camp 1934-1936
- 11 **Place of learning “barrack”**
- 12 **Prisoner barracks** on both sides of the camp road, which served as a roll call area and place of public abuse
- 13 **Prisoners’ kitchen and bathroom**
- 14 **Emergency gate** and memorial wall
- 15 **Watchtower** in the north-west corner





## Exhibitions...

**The principal exhibition documents the history of the Emsland camps from 1933 to 1945.**

It chronologically provides a context for the events within the history of the "Third Reich", including the regional aspects. The focus is on the experiences of the prisoners and convicts working in the moorland and on how they lived and suffered in the camps. The side exhibition covers the postwar history of the Emsland camps.



## The Camp grounds...

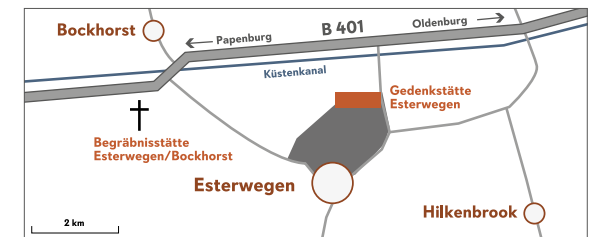
**Walking the grounds, the traces of the former camp can be seen.**

Those parts of the camp topography that are no longer visible and which stand for violence and threat, have been translated into a modern design language (steel elements). "Packages of trees" visualize the locations of the former barracks. Covered with lava gravel, the former prison area suggests a reddish-brown moor landscape. A steel footbridge links the historical site of the Esterwegen Camp with a renaturalized bog close-by, which symbolizes the place of heavy forced labor.



## Activities...

- » Guided tours by appointment (a participation fee is charged)
- » Readings and lectures
- » special exhibitions
- » Project days, seminars and teacher training
- » Internships for students of secondary and higher education; positions for a voluntary social year
- » Use of the memorial library
- » Support for relatives and information on prisoners and convicts



*Imprint:*

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