

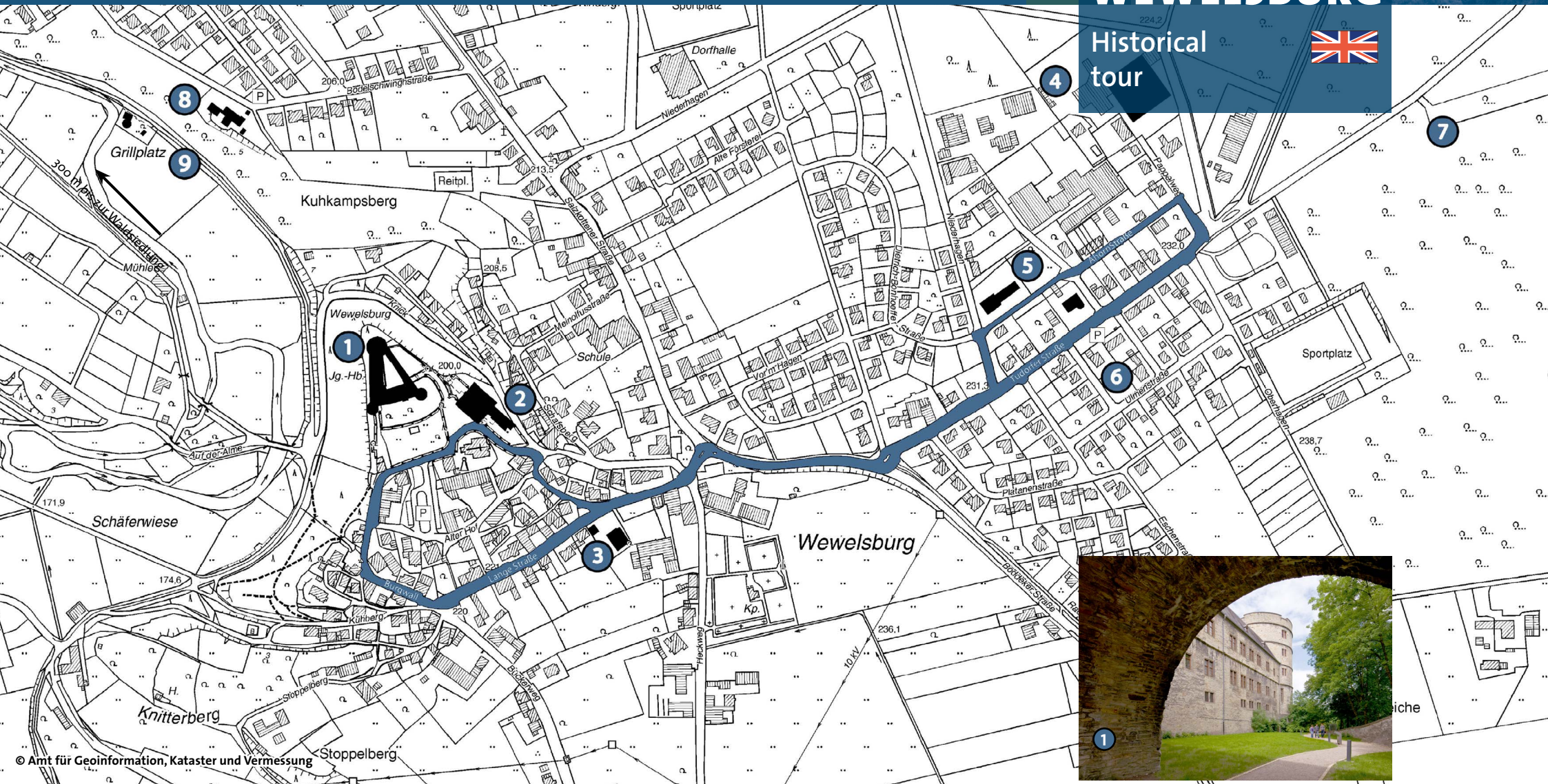
Opening times:
Tuesdays-Fridays: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Saturdays, Sundays,
public holidays: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Last admission: 30 minutes before closing.
Closed Mondays, Christmas Eve, Christmas
Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day.

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WEWELSBURG

Historical
tour



KREISMUSEUM
Wewelsburg

From 1933 to 1945, the SS played a decisive role in the development of the village of Wewelsburg. After “Reich Leader SS” Heinrich Himmler had leased Wewelsburg Castle, what had begun as an idea to establish a “Reich Leaders’ School SS” evolved over the years into plans to create a central meeting place for the SS Gruppenführerkorps in the parish. From 1939 on, the workers doing the extensive construction work consisted mainly of inmates interned at a concentration camp established for this very purpose.

1 Wewelsburg Castle North Tower

In 1815, the tower’s interior was destroyed by lightning. From 1939 to 1943, work – never completed – was done by inmates and private companies on the planned focal point of the SS’s “new Wewelsburg”; the ground floor was planned as an Obergruppenführer Hall and the cellar as a crypt. The upper floors were removed in 1942. They were reconstructed in 1972 – 1975. (Today, parts of the tower are used as Youth Hostel rooms.)

2 The former SS guardhouse

(now Wewelsburg Memorial Museum 1933 – 1945)

was built in 1936-37 as the official apartment of the SS Castle Captain and as an administration building. Badly damaged after being dynamited by the SS in 1945, it was restored after the War. All that remains of the SS Staff Building (built by inmates 1939 – 1941 and later blown up) bordering it to the south are remnants of the foundations. These were partly integrated into the new District Museum administration building constructed in 2006.

3 The former village community house

(formerly Ottens Hof)

The 300-year-old half-timbered house was bought by the SS in 1935 and reconstructed with the aid of the villagers and the Reicharbeitsdienst up to 1937. It was intended as the village’s new cultural focal point – as defined by the SS. An equally old half-timbered barn (to the right) was converted into an apartment for the building manager. The oriel, built opposite the village community centre in 1936, documents the compromise between the “neo-heathen” will to build (runes, symbols) on the part of the SS, and the Christian significance assigned to it by the village vicar against the will of the SS. The Low German saying means:

What man does through the Lord God is a seed that never dies. Human works executed through God cannot die as time passes. Life has its ups and downs, God is with us everywhere.

4 The site of the former Niederhagen Concentration Camp

(now a residential and commercial estate)

Between 1940 and 1943, the concentration camp inmates built a camp in the local district of Niederhagen (formerly part of the parish forest) to the left of the road to Niedertudorf.

The concentration camp served the sole purpose of implementing SS construction plans to convert and extend the old castle and the village of Wewelsburg. The aim was to create a new, gigantic SS castle and settlement. The new Niederhagen State Concentration Camp between 1941 and 1943 (Himmler chose the name to obscure any associations with Wewelsburg) was the smallest independent concentration camp in the German Reich and the only camp in what is now the state of North-Rhine Westphalia. Of the camp’s approximately 3,900 inmates, 1,285 (known by name) lost their lives. In other words, the living and working conditions fulfilled Himmler’s demand: to achieve “annihilation through work”.

The western part of the site formed the protective custody camp (enclosed by an electric fence), which was the inmates actual living space; the eastern part was the so-called enterprise or economic yard, containing commercial buildings and the camp’s own crematorium (built in 1942).

After Niederhagen Concentration Camp had been dissolved as an independent camp in 1943 (only a small commando of 42 inmates remained), the barracks served as a resettlement camp of the SS institution the Main Welfare Office for Ethnic Germans compulsorily resettled from Eastern Europe. After the camp was liberated by US troops on 2 April 1945, it was used for former “alien workers” from Eastern Europe and subsequently to accommodate refugees and expellees from Germany’s former Eastern Territories.

As Wewelsburg had such a large barracks camp, the number of people transferred there exceeded that of the village population. The lack of accommodation, and the tendency – witnessed not only here – to forget an unpleasant past as quickly as possible, resulted in the gradual demolition of the barracks: funded by public grants. Many of the descendants of the former refugees and displaced persons still live on this residential and commercial estate.

5 The memorial on the former Roll-Call Square

On 2 April 2000, a memorial, proposed by the Wewelsburg working group Memorial Day 2nd April, was inaugurated in the presence of former inmates.

Local natural stone was used of the type the inmates had been forced to break and process for SS building projects. The memorial is composed of equilateral triangles joined to create a large triangle. A scroll round the memorial commemorates the victims of SS violence in Wewelsburg. Every year, a commemorative ceremony is held on the anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp inmates.

6 The site of the former SS camp (now a residential area)

The buildings containing the barracks (erected in 1941) for the SS guards and the concentration camp command staff were demolished in the 1950s, after they had been used, from 1943 to 1945, as “paramilitary camps” for youth’s and, later on, to accommodate refugees.

7 The former firing range

(The site is now being exposed and maintained by work camps.)

The Firing Range, 150 metres long and 15 wide, was built by inmates in 1941. The guards practised shooting here and it was, in all likelihood, the scene of executions of Gestapo prisoners and most certainly of a mass shooting in March 1945. The range was partially demolished between 1954 and 1948.

8 The former leader’s house I – Villa Bartels

(now the Protestant Church and the Parish House, named after the Protestant theologian Paul Schneider, who was murdered in Buchenwald Concentration Camp)

The villa was built in 1939 – 1942 by inmates for Himmler’s chief architect Hermann Bartels.

9 Former SS settlement houses

(now part of the Waldsiedlung housing estate)

– built from prefabricated parts by inmates in Heimatschutzstil in 1942.

Translation: Robert Benson Translation Service, Berlin

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