

MUENCHBERG GUIDED TOUR

Meeting place: Citizen Center (1)

Muenchberg has approximately twelve thousand four hundred inhabitants, an altitude between 525 and 559m above sea level and lies between the Fichtelgebirge mountains and the Franconian forest in an own geological area, which is called "Muenchberger Gneismasse". This gneiss mass has an expansion of fifteen by thirty-five kilometers with the geographical center in Muenchberg. It shows some characteristics that even the geologists cannot interpret completely. The experts cannot explain the origin of these unusual rocks. Especially since the old layers are on top and the recent layers below. Nearby Stambach, the "Eklogit" rock appears with the largest deposit in Europe and only one counterpart in South America. The ambient data compared with Bamberg clearly indicate why the Fichtelgebirge, the Franconian forest and the Muenchberg Gneismasse are called „Little or Bavarian Siberia“. The mean annual temperature in Muenchberg is five to six degrees centigrade, compared with eight to nine degrees C in Bamberg. The precipitation is eight hundred to thousand millimeters per year (below six hundred millimeters in Bamberg). In other words: Spring arrives three weeks later in Muenchberg than in Bamberg which means a six weeks shorter summer.

Railway Station (4)

After a few hundred meters we reach a building that was and is important for Muenchberg and its development in several respects: the railway station. Before the first train could drive here on the first of November eighteen hundred forty eight on the so-called "Ludwig south-north course", the planning office had its seat in Muenchberg, which was responsible for building the "inclined plane" between Neuenmarkt-Wirsberg and Marktschorgast. In order to create a continuous long-distance rail between Munich and Leipzig, the watershed Elbe / Rhine had to be overcome in the Fichtelgebirge. First there was no technical solution for overcoming hundred sixty height meters over a length of seven thousand seventy meters. The locomotives could not cope with this incline. Therefore, other solutions, e.g. pulling the wagons over the highest point by horses or using a steam-driven winder have been considered first. Two technical innovations then achieved the breakthrough for a continuous steam enterprise: building the rails in the "American system" (tighter curves and better adjustment to the area), and locomotives with swivelling underframe which could follow these curves and applied a higher traction force. The overcoming of the height difference in an inclination of one to forty was the first steep railway of the world and thus made history. Incidentally, the counterpart of the "inclined level" begins exactly in the Muenchberg station.

The building of the railway brought an economic upswing for the town of Muenchberg. Now the coal could be transported to Muenchberg fast, at low cost and in sufficient quantities. Muenchberg's products, particularly from the textile industry, could of course also be dispatched by railway. The access tracks to the towns Helmbrechts and Zell, which were built later, also brought numerous workers to the textile factories. When you look at the station building more closely, you can see from the outside where the station master and chief signalman lived. The station master in the second floor, evident by the high windows with round arches. The chief signalman in the first floor - lower windows with segment arches.

On seventeenth August nineteen hundred and forty, the first two bombs that fell on Bavaria just hit Muenchberg, the „Aktien“ textile factory, and the pressure wave of the second bomb damaged a house. The question why this happened was only answered later and is connected with the railway, whose tracks lay in a terrain indentation in front of the station. This indentation with the private track of the textile factory was one of many points in Germany where Hitler with his train could hide in the case of alarm because of low-flying planes. He did this also several times in Muenchberg when he was in transit between Munich and Berlin, usually unnoticed by the local population. Besides the missing of the tracks, however, the bomb attack also came two weeks too late.

Narrow path with rock cellars (5)

Only a few steps away we arrive at the Kreuzberg narrow path with rock cellars, a far older evidence of the town's traffic. Now situated in the middle of the town, it once was an important road connection for the "Lords of Sparneck", from their castle on the Waldstein mountain into the town. Today the narrow path is a registered natural monument and a treasure. In medieval times, when ox carts still travelled on the path, contemporary witnesses describe Muenchberg as "being situated at a really eerie narrow path". Two chapels in front of the town gates made it possible to pray for a successful transit in the first and thank for it in the second chapel. In the eastern part of the path, galleries were dug, from the year one thousand three hundred twenty four, in order to search for gold, silver and copper. This was not much successful.

However, since the galleries were very suitable for cool storage of food, about sixty cellars were built in the narrow path in the course of time. At the time when each craftsman and citizen also was a farmer, "natural cooling" was very important. On the eastern side the entrances even were on two levels one above the other. Many cellars are still preserved. Some were directly built into the Muenchberger Gneiss, others provided with water supply later on and used as beer cellars.

Bahnhofsstrasse/Ottostrasse (6)

Here at the corner is the oldest part of Muenchberg. In order to secure the ford through the brook "Pulschnitz" a tower hill was built around the year thousand before Christ. A trench, the excavation of which was compacted as a rampart, and a residential tower in the center. Later the unit was extended to two yards and a "Lords' yard". On the west side the first village developed in the year thousand one hundred. Its form corresponded to the forest hooves extending from the buildings from the east to the west.

"Scherdel's Ruh "" (8)

During the first town redevelopment in the years nineteen hundred thirty six/thirty seven, the small park in the middle of the town developed in place of a property around which the Kirchenlamitz road was directed. The park was built according to the prevailing taste: rather dry, with trimmed lime trees over a gravel surface and some benches.

These benches were used time and again by the hairdresser Mr. Scherdel for a rest when customers were missing. He did this so often that in the linguistic usage of the Muenchberg citizens the name "Scherdel's rest" for the small park became accepted soon. When the park had to be redesigned in conjunction with the floodwater elimination of the Pulschnitz brook, the town decided to install a bench as a homage to Mr. Scherdel who was still alive at that time and even donated one bench. The granite sphere tells this history: in the middle of flowing hair, the hairdresser sits with its shears and rests.

When looking towards the Muehlgasse, only the name reminds us of the fact that once, instead of the Volksbank, the lower mill or box mill (one of four in the town) was situated here. It probably belonged to the already mentioned "Lords' yard". On its place the urban slaughterhouse was built later, which is now situated at the west end of the town.

The present public services building was once the electric power station of the town. Here, current was produced using diesel engines and generators. The control unit decorated with a turret can still be recognised.

Lindenstrasse (9)

The Lindenstrasse along the Pulschnitz brook entices you to stroll through the small pedestrian area of the town. A lovely art nouveau building catches your eye which once accommodated a tailor where even Bismark had his trousers made. The Emperor Frederic the second was also customer in Munchberg where he bought sausages.

"Pocksbrücke" (10)

The ford over the Pulschnitz brook was probably situated here. Today a granite bridge with two bows spans the brook, at the face of which the Muenchberg coat of arms was driven in telling us about the name of the town. They show a monk on a hill. Monk's hill.

Former Black Eagles Hotel (11)

At the beginning of the station road is the former "Black Eagles" hotel, an old coaching inn on the "Saxonian army road".

Already in thousand six hundred ninety seven, you could get off to Leipzig or Nuernberg with a "swiftly driving post carouche" twice per week. Swiftly means: two days for hundred kilometers to Nuernberg.

You can see from the building that the Muenchberg citizens enlarged existing buildings in height and width wherever it was possible. Old pictures show the building with two floors only.

Now take a look in the direction of the "Ludwig road".

The building history of the town has many repetitions. When the settlement started, the houses were situated on the Pulschnitz brook. Later the walled town had its center on the mountain side. In the meantime all shops are located in the lower part of the town again. When the town was partly fortified by a wall, there was only a small door in the lower Ludwig road to the "suburb". After a town fire a nearby building burned down. It was removed so that a passage became possible.

Until the sixties, cars could drive the steep mountain up and down before the passage was closed by a wall with a small park and became a footpath again.

Kirchplatz (13),

You can still see the gates of the old fire engine house where the fire-brigade was once accommodated. The place is dominated by the neo-Gothik Evangelic town church "Saint Peter and Paul" and the matching well in the center of the place. It was finished in thousand eight hundred seventy two and is already the seventh church at this location.

The previous churches partially burned down, became ruinous and had to be removed. After the last town fire the church in the current form was built from sandstone. It has a seventy meter high tower at the west front, which is crowned by a three meters high gold-plated cast cross. There are four staircases and seven doorways.

The interior has two galleries and there is space inside for 1200 seats. Once the upper gallery was even provided with rooflights.

The Luther school was built in thousand eight hundred thirty eight in the classicism style. The large building was planned as an administration building of a salt works company in Bad Reichenhall. After completion of the plans it was not needed any longer. As Muenchberg planned a school building at the same time, the finished plans were flatly sold. The building height was also increased. The side wings were one floor lower at the time of construction.

Ludwig road (14)

Here in the Ludwig road I take the opportunity to tell you more about the town itself. The settlement (documentary for the first time in the year thousand two hundred twenty four; as a town in thousand two hundred ninety eight), in the possession of the Lords of Sparneck, was situated between the areas of the Bamberg bishops and the reeves of Gera, Weida and Plauen. Both tried to gain ground in Muenchberg, which, however, was prevented by the Lords of Sparneck. Like so often – two parties argue, the third has the advantage, in this case the Nuernberg burgraves. They also wanted to extend their dominion and pursued the following goal. The village Mussen (situated close to the former market and the current town) was to be developed as a town in order to leave the market Muenchberg no chance. This plan did not remain secret, so that in the year one thousand three hundred sixty five Sparneck granted the town the charter of the free city of Nuernberg. Thus the town became one of the oldest in Upper Franconia, beside Hof, Bayreuth and Bamberg. However, the Nuernberg citizens came nevertheless to their goal, because in the outgoing Middle Ages the knights impoverished and the middle class became stronger. So the burgraves could take possession of the town bit by bit. The right of repurchase of the Lords of Sparneck could not be demanded.

Here in the Ludwig road the second row village with forest hoof fields extended towards the west starting from the year one thousand. An arrangement that gives reason for consideration. Normally, one would build such a village downwards the slope, so that each yard had a scarp and brook water. Had someone thought ahead and had the yards arranged in a position more favourable for the market? Here it is time to be explain the lack of historical built volumes in the town. Muenchberg was afflicted with several major fires, e.g. 1524, 1617, 1631, 1701, 1729 and 1837. We want to look at the fire of 1729 more closely. At that time 52 houses, the school, the brewing houses, the church and the town hall burned. The margrave at that time supported the reconstruction with money instead of timber (owing to the preceding fire, no more wood could be taken from the forest) and with tax exemptions of 10 years. However, he wanted to counteract the fires and issued different building codes. Among other things the gables should no longer look towards the road so that a fire wall could be established between each fifth or sixth house. He provided for transverse lanes as flight corridors and specified that the roofs be covered with slate instead of wood shingles. This was done, however only on the roadside. Headed by the mayor and pharmacist, all citizens covered the back of their houses with cheap shingles. The fraud leaked out so that the margrave threatened with cancellation of the tax exemptions. The outcome of the story is not known, however, new roof covering with slates was probably realised.

Town Hall (14)

The town hall was rebuilt in 1840 in the classic style from sandstone.

The longitudinal dimensions of the town can still be seen on the portal. Forged rods show one foot and one cubit. A quotation of 1613 by Christoph Schlepner (General superintendent in Bayreuth) is partly still valid today: "Muenchberg is a town which beside the comfort of its passage and also the agriculture, has its ornament both because of its well arranged clerical and secular classes and the fine middle-class houses". From this time no picture documents exist.

Klosterplatz (15)

One finds several historical buildings here at the monastery place. The largest is the current Bavarian yard and former new coaching inn in the Bismarck road. A little bit below the building which in 1854 accommodated the "higher royal weaving school" – today the technical college. The current tax office was already a revenue office during the king's reign. At the end of the Hofer Strasse you can still recognise the former court. Since Muenchberg possessed the higher jurisdiction (sentences also on murder and other cases of death), they kept a jealous watch over this privilege. It is known that the Weißdorf citizens once dared to bury a found dead man without investigation by the Muenchberg judges. In 1559, two marches to Weißdorf took place in order to claim the already buried person. Expenses: 9 florins, 3 groschen and 3 pence.

During epidemic plagues, the poorhouse, also known under the name „three-brother house“ was a hospital outside the town gate. The name monastery place is misleading. There is no proof for a monastery. However some indications speak for the fact that actually a monastery existed. The walled town centre would have been protected more naturally if it had been established at the upper end of the mountain. The reason that this was not done could have been that the place was already occupied, e.g. by a monk settlement. The fact that in a nearby rest place in Marienweiher a monk settlement was established could indicate that an existing settlement in Muenchberg was ceased. The place on the mountain-slope and the settling time would speak for the Benedictine monks. These would have been appendant to Bamberg where a very similar monastery exists in the "Michelsberg monastery". Last but not least the town name Muenchberg - probably derived from „monk mountain“ - speaks for this. The current coat of arms shows a monk standing on a mountain. This picture, however, may have resulted just as speculative as the previous statements.

The upper town is provided with various cellars and alleyways. In one building even a cellar with three floors exists.

Oberer Graben (16)

Here the town was naturally protected by a mountain-slope and did not require a wall. In the extension of the "upper trench" the old route led to the town of Helmbrechts through the current "Brunnengasse".

Along the "Brunnengasse" once the water was conveyed to the town through wooden tubes and water distributed to the public wells.

The water, however, did not come not from sources or wells but was won by so-called „Kanate“. Kanate are galleries almost horizontal above the water-bearing layer. The seeping water drops down and is collected in gutters and runs to the point of use with a slight downward gradient.

Due to the mountain situation the braking carriages always caused large plaster damage. The pavement tax never covered the expenditures.

Therefore, in 1786 the first by-pass road, over the moist lower trench, was indicated by a sign "drive down here!". It was never accepted, the drivers preferred to pay the tax instead.

Cemetery church (19)

After passing the Feuerbach valley (the small brook with pond was used for fire fighting) we arrive at the cemetery church "To heaven's gate". Dating back on a building of 1556, it is the oldest building of the town. This is due to the fact that it was situated outside of the town and protected against conflagrations.

The small baroque church - like the town church – has a two-storey gallery inside. The lectern altar shows an image of the „heaven's gate"

"Grimmlers house" (20)

Our tour ends at the Grimmlers house in the Kulmbacher Straße 41. The building is under monumental protection and with its construction period in the eighteenth century is one of the oldest civilian buildings of the town. It is a double-wing, two-storey building with a mansard roof which was renewed in the early nineteenth century. The old gate passage paved with granite tiles, leading from the road to the backyard still exists. Apart from the size of approximately 350 square meters, the vaults of the former kitchen area in the first floor are remarkable.

At present a temporary exhibition with the title "Work and life of hand weavers in the past" can be visited in the house. It is planned to renovate the house and perhaps accommodate a museum and exhibition hostel with a restaurant.

Many thanks for having attended our guided tour and for your interest!