



# Traces of the Past along the German Green Belt

***“Those who cannot remember their past  
are condemned to repeat it.”  
(George Santayana)***



*East German border guard on patrol*



*Opening of the border at Mödlareuth*



*“Western tourists” at the Iron Curtain*



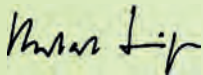
# FOREWORD

Dear visitors of the Green Belt and the borderland museums,

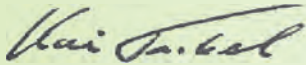
For more than 25 years, the Green Belt, the stretch of unspoilt nature that has arisen as a result of the inhumane inner-German border, has been a constant reminder of our once divided nation. Nature has been left to its own devices here, not because we want to forget, but because we want to remember. Scores of people visit the Green Belt in an attempt to come to terms with history: the history of their country, their mothers and fathers, relatives, friends or even their own personal fate. And more and more people come here to enjoy the treasures of nature spanning our country like a string of pearls over a remarkable distance of almost 1,400 kilometres. Only living reminders enable us to learn lessons from the past and act on them in the future.

We would urge every visitor to the Green Belt to take the opportunity of visiting one of the many borderland museums. And we would urge anybody visiting one of the many borderland museums to step outside for a walk into “Germany's longest open-air museum” and reflect on what he/she has learned from the museums in the tranquility of nature. This experience will inevitably make you more keenly aware of how fortunate we are today to be able to move freely through Germany along the former “death strip”.

Historical research has shown that this border cost at least 900 human lives. Today it is a peaceful trace in the landscape. However, without the former border fortifications, the fences and watchtowers, this trace of the past is often difficult to detect at first glance. Certain questions immediately spring to mind when visiting the Green Belt: Where exactly was the border? Why is there a row of trees here? Where was the fence? Where were the landmines laid? This brochure is intended to assist you in your search for traces of the past in one of Germany's most moving commemorative landscapes!



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*The Green Belt  
between Mitwitz  
and Neustadt*

## What is meant by the “Green Belt”?

As early as December 1989, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, nature conservationists from East and West met in the North Bavarian town of Hof to formulate their vision for the former “death strip” on the initiative of the Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland e.V. (BUND) – Friends of the Earth Germany. It was agreed that “the biodiversity of the border zone should be preserved in the form of a green belt”. During the decades of German division, the border strip on the East German side was left largely untouched. The East German border troops merely cleared it of vegetation every few years in the interest of maintaining an unobstructed view of the border zone.

This presented a unique opportunity for nature to thrive. The result was an idyllic refuge for countless rare animals and plants – a belt measuring between 50 and 200 metres in width and 1,393 kilometres in length, making it the largest habitat network in Germany. What makes it so special and explains the remarkable abundance of species is the fact that the various different types of habitats are closely interlinked with each other.

In 2007, the German Federal Government adopted the National Strategy for Biodiversity. Conservation of the Green Belt is a flagship project forming part of this biodiversity strategy. Since 2009, the protection of the Green Belt has also been enshrined in Article 21 of the German Federal Nature Conservation Act (Bundesnaturschutzgesetz).

Hence, the Federal Environment Ministry (Bundesumweltministerium) is funding the project “Closing Gaps in the Green Belt Germany” (Lückenschluss Grünes Band) along with this brochure under the Federal Programme for Biodiversity. The BUND is utilising this project to pursue its goal of closing the gaps that have appeared in the habitat network of the Green Belt since 1989 – and thus preserve a memorial landscape as a reminder of the painful era of German division.

### The facts:

1,393 km in length  
covers an area of 17,712 ha - 146 different  
types of habitats - over 1,200 species on Germany's  
Red Lists - 64 % of the area consists of endangered  
types of habitats included in Germany's Red List - 29 %  
nature reserves - 64 % EU protected areas (Natura2000)  
21 % inland waters - 21 % extensive grassland - 7 % unused  
fallow land & 29 % woodland - 87 % of the area still in a  
near-natural state - 13 % damaged or destroyed,  
mainly due to cultivation or intensive  
grassland



## What did the border fortifications consist of and what remains of them today?

As from 1952, the GDR (German Democratic Republic/East Germany) secured the border between the two German states in a variety of ways. These included “military engineering measures” such as border fences, anti-vehicle ditches and minefields. In addition, “administrative border security measures” were implemented, i.e. restricted zones (Sperrzonen) and protective strips (Schutzstreifen), where restraints were imposed on accessing and cultivating the land. Guarding the border was the responsibility of the East German border troops, who numbered 55,000 men and women in the latter days of the regime.

### The facts:

- 1,265 km of metal mesh fencing
- 829 km of anti-vehicle ditches
- 1,339 km of patrol tracks
- 232 km of illuminated control strips
- 473 observation bunkers (Erdbunker)
- 578 observation towers



Erection of the border fence

All these measures left an remaining “ecological footprint” on the landscape – one that this brochure aims to help trace and explain.

The East German government continually expanded its border fortifications. After German reunification, there was an understandable urge to eliminate all reminders of the much-hated border as swiftly as possible. Within a short period of time, the fences had been removed, the observation towers torn down and virtually everything else completely dismantled. Only in a few isolated spots were relics preserved thanks to private initiatives and the emergence of border museums.

This brochure only explores relics of the border fortifications that are not always obvious to the casual observer but can still be seen today.





## The patrol track (Kolonnenweg)



*Patrol track and single-row metal mesh fence*

The patrol track ran parallel to the border along its entire length (1,393 km) from the Baltic Sea to Vogtland. Following the opening of the border, it was possible for a brief period to travel the full length of the patrol track by bicycle, for example. Today, however, it is overgrown and even interrupted in many places.

The East German border troops used it for patrolling on foot or by vehicle as well as for transporting personnel and materials when changing shifts or carrying out construction work. It could hence be described as the “lifeline” of the border fortifications.

Owing to the way in which it was built, the patrol track is the most commonly preserved relic of the border fortifications. It mainly consists of perforated concrete road slabs measuring 300 x 100 x 19 cm (L x W x H). The initial sections were built as early as the late 1950s. The slabs were set in the ground in two parallel rows spaced at a distance of 80 cm, creating a 280-cm-wide track. The track is very robustly built. For this reason, dismantling has generally only been done in places where the land has been ploughed or roads cut through the Green Belt.

From time to time, telephone cables unearthed by ploughing can be seen along the patrol track. They were part of the border telecommunications network that converged in the watch-towers. However, today there is little sign of the concrete posts that once served as connection points along the track.



*Patrol track*



*Cyclists riding along the patrol track*





*The control strip*

## The control strip (Spurensicherungsstreifen)

The control strip was a six-metre-wide strip of land between the patrol track and the anti-vehicle ditch. Generally speaking, it was directly adjacent to the patrol track. The abbreviation “K 6” stood for “Kontrollstreifen (control strip), six metres wide”. It was machine-harrowed, raked by hand or treated with herbicides to keep it free of vegetation. Whenever patrol guards discovered footprints on the control strip, they triggered an alarm.

However, contrary to claims made in certain sensationalist press reports, it is not true that the control strip was one of the areas in Germany with the highest level of herbicide contamination. The herbicides used were of the standard type applied to crop fields in East Germany. The crop protection departments of the East German agrochemical centres were responsible for administering the herbicides. If a section of the border lay within their territory, they received a “herbicide quota for the state border with the West”, which was only intended for use on the inner-German border. The specialists from the agrochemical centres administered the herbicides under the watchful eye of the East German border guards.

These herbicides were only produced in limited “target quantities” specified in the national plan and sometimes even had to be purchased from abroad (against foreign currency), which made them very expensive. As a result, the East German government and the agricultural production cooperatives did not even have sufficient stocks for farming purposes. As the word “quota” suggests, there were only limited quantities available, and placing repeat orders was out of the question. Like so many other commodities, herbicides were in short supply in the socialist state of East Germany. Hence, there was veritable competition between the agricultural production cooperatives and the border troops as far as the distribution of herbicides was concerned. This significantly reduced the extent to which they were used – unlike in the West, where there were almost no limits on the deployment of herbicides. Initially, experts in the Federal Republic of Germany grossly overestimated the quantities administered. In actual fact, the dosage was consistent with the regulations governing the use of herbicides on roads and squares. Owing to the lack of vegetation cover, it was impossible for the substances to reach higher concentrations. Instead, they were either washed away by the rain or seeped into the ground.

In 1994, the Federal Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt) commissioned a study on herbicide concentrations in the ground belonging to the border strip. The results of the study did not reveal any values exceeding the general level of contamination found on comparable arable land. During the same period, more herbicides were used on the neighbouring West German crop fields, railway lines, paths and squares than at any time in the border strip.

In 1990, despite the former control strip supposedly being highly contaminated, it produced an exceptional abundance and variety of wild meadow flora that was recognised as being of high ecological value. In the years that followed, it became displaced by grass. To this day, there is still no evidence of the vegetation in the control strip being any different than in other untreated parts of the border zone.

This open strip of land that was partly kept clear by harrowing was a popular feeding area for rare, insectivorous species of bird such as the whinchat. The fact that vegetation cover was totally lacking or kept low also allowed large numbers of small animal species that thrive in a warm environment and on open land to use the border strip as a means of expanding their habitat (e.g. the wasp spider, which spread as far as the Harz Mountains). Today, the control strip is barely recognisable. It is only on ridges and steep south or southwest-facing slopes that rare semi-arid grassland or raw-soil habitats have been able to develop. The lack of vegetation led to the nutrient-rich fine soil being washed away by the rain or blown away by the wind.

The soil left behind was then too poor and dry for most plants. It nevertheless offered a habitat for certain species of plant that are well adapted to such conditions and otherwise rarely seen in our part of the world. However, in today's "Green Belt", many open-land habitats need to be looked after by man or grazed by cows and sheep on a regular basis to prevent them from becoming overgrown with shrubs.



*A Robur LO 1800A patrolling the control strip*

## The anti-vehicle ditch (Kfz-Sperrgraben)



*Anti-vehicle ditch*

Generally speaking, the control strip adjoined the anti-vehicle ditch towards the “enemy side” – i.e. the side closest to the inner-German border. On the enemy side, the anti-vehicle ditch took the form of a steep trench of varying proportions depending on the terrain, while on the “friendly side” it was flatter. The steep side was clad with thin concrete slabs known as “cassette slabs” that resembled flat troughs. Owing to the limited thickness of the cladding, any vehicle approaching from the East would have crashed through the concrete and got stuck. Had the border really been intended as an “anti-fascist protective wall”, the concrete slabs would have had to be laid facing the opposite direction to achieve the same effect. Along sections of the border with steep upward or downward inclines facing the border and/or loose soil unsuitable for digging out a ditch, a terrace was built into the terrain instead. This was also covered with cassette slabs.



*Anti-vehicle ditch filled with water*

The anti-vehicle ditches were filled in after 1989, especially if the land was used for farming or grassland. However, owing to the fact that the soil was not compacted subsequently, erosion has led to “secondary ditches” forming on the sites of some of the original ones. In some places, the original ditches are still visible; many of them have collected water and formed little wetland habitats. The terraces – with or without cassette slabs – are also still visible in a few isolated places. The surviving ditches or terraces are to be found in sections of the border deemed unsuitable for cultivation or construction owing to their topography; many of these sites are now classed as conservation areas. Nowadays, they are mostly ecologically valuable raw-soil habitats.



## The metal mesh fence

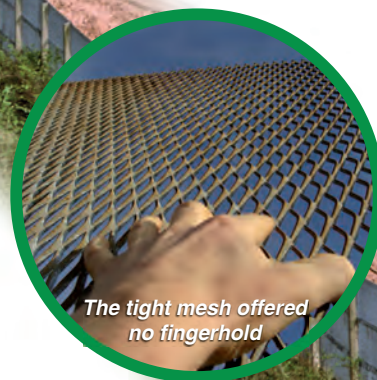
Our image of the inner-German border is primarily dominated by fences. New types of fencing were introduced at regular intervals to replace the existing ones. As from around 1979, a single-row 3.20-metre-high metal mesh fence made from expanded metal panels posed the final obstacle to crossing the border. This type of fencing superseded the double-row 2.10-metre-high metal mesh fence that was combined with landmines laid in the dividing space.

“Expanded metal” owed its name to the way it was produced: slits were punched vertically into steel sheets, which were then stretched lengthwise while cold. This process resulted in the slits being shaped like diamonds. At the same time, the material twisted itself around the slits, lending the panels a certain spatial depth. This made them sturdy and ensured that it was only possible to look through the fence when viewing it from an angle of 90 degrees. The inner edges of the diamonds were so sharp that anyone attempting to climb over the fence would have severed their fingertips. Concrete slabs were set vertically into the ground beneath the fence to prevent tunnelling.

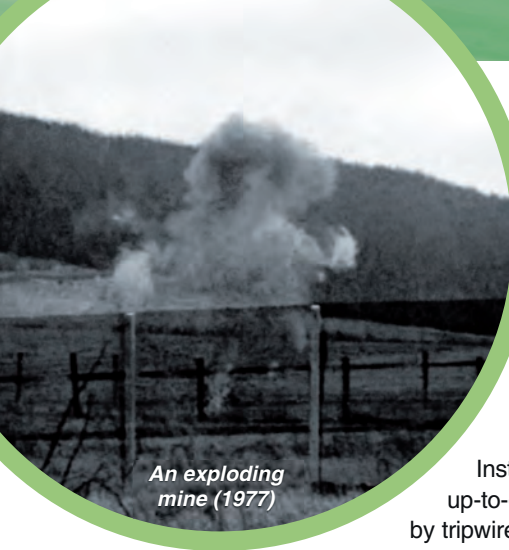
The distance between the anti-vehicle ditch and the fence was generally five to ten metres, depending on the terrain. When the double-row fence was dismantled, the minefields between the two rows of fencing were also cleared. It was less common for the single-row metal mesh fence to be combined with landmines, but where this was the case, the mines were installed in the area between the ditch and the fence. However, automated firing devices were mounted along all 450 kilometres of the fence.

In the rare instances where sections of fence have been preserved outside museums, this has been done in a conscious effort to create a memorial. Where the border strip is designated as a conservation area and/or extensively cultivated, a row of bushes or trees can often be found where the fence once stood. The patrol track running parallel to it provides the final clue to the position of the fence. In towns and villages close to the former border, you can still sometimes see enclosures made from expanded metal fencing that has been dismantled.

The fence and posts proved to be an unintended attraction for rare species of bird in the border zone: whinchats, red-backed shrikes and yellow-hammers used it as an elevated perch from which to sing and observe potential prey.



*The tight mesh offered no fingerhold*



*An exploding mine (1977)*

## Landmines

At the time of building the Berlin Wall in 1961, the East German border troops also reinforced the border fortifications. Minefields were installed between the anti-vehicle ditch and the border fence. Between 1961 and the end of 1979, mines were laid along the border over a distance of up to 850 kilometres. A total of 1.3 million anti-personnel mines were deployed, though not all at the same time.

Instead, old landmines were repeatedly replaced with more up-to-date versions. While the original landmines were triggered by tripwires, subsequent versions had pressure-sensitive fuses which were activated when trodden on.

The position of the minefields also changed in the course of modifications to the border fences (changeover from barbed wire to double-row metal mesh fences with minefields between the two rows of fencing). In addition, cluster mines were installed as well as automated firing devices that were mounted directly on the metal mesh fence over a total distance of 450 kilometres. The “up-stream territory”, i.e. the strip between the fence and the actual border, was always kept free of mines.

Landmining reached its peak around the mid 1970s. At the time of the changeover from double-row to single-row metal mesh fencing, which started from around 1978, a large number of minefields were cleared; as from 1979, hardly any new landmines were laid. In order to secure a loan worth a total of 4.6 billion Deutschmarks from the Federal Republic of Germany, as from 1983, the East German government ordered all minefields to be cleared and the automated firing devices to be dismantled. From 1985 onwards, the inner-German border was officially free of mines.

*Empty case of an anti-personnel mine*

Mines were nevertheless discovered while dismantling the border fortifications in the summer of 1990. As it was then obvious that there was no relying upon the old documents drawn up by the East German border troops, a renewed mine-clearing operation had to be carried out along the entire border strip. This led to the discovery of a further 1,064 mines of various types. A comparison of the number of mines laid and the number cleared or detonated revealed a shortfall of 33,000 devices whose whereabouts are still unknown to this day.

Given the possible risks, warnings are displayed on information boards in areas of the Green Belt such as Thuringia, where there is reason to believe that land-mines may still exist. However, cases have been confirmed of animals – presumably mainly foxes – carrying off mines and depositing them elsewhere. On steep slopes and floodplains bordering inland waters, there is also an increased risk owing to soil displacement caused by erosion.



The chances of coming across such a left-over mine are nevertheless extremely remote. In order to exclude all possible risks, the following rules of conduct should be observed:

1. Please keep to the paved paths or the patrol track. As in all nature reserves, it is strictly prohibited to stray from the paths.
2. Should you come across a suspicious object, do not touch it! Please mark the spot where you found it by means of a paper handkerchief attached to a stick, for example, notify the police and, if possible, stay nearby to warn anyone else who may be passing.

Please note that mines may not be instantly recognisable as such after lying in the ground for 30 years or more.

## Beware of mines!

The barbaric border between East and West Germany was equipped with so-called anti-personnel mines. Although the likelihood of finding a left-over mine still in working order is very low, a residual risk remains and is somewhat higher in certain areas of the Green Belt. It is therefore imperative that you keep to the paths at all times when visiting the Green Belt!





*Red-backed shrike*



*Arnica*



*Copper butterfly*

## The upstream territory

“Upstream territory” was East Germany's official term for the terrain between the border fence and the actual border. It was marked by boundary stones and the distinctive border pillars; the latter were positioned a few metres behind the border on East German territory. Nowhere did the border fence stand directly on the border. The distance between the fence and the border could be anything from 10 to 100 metres depending on the topography of the terrain.

It became customary to refer to this strip colloquially as “no-man's land”, although this was not an accurate description and was apt to cause dangerous misunderstandings: the upstream territory was by no means a “free-for-all” area, but in fact East German territory that was guarded accordingly! Surveillance of the area was the responsibility of the border reconnaissance troops (Grenzaufklärer), a special unit within the East German border troops made up of long-serving or professional soldiers. They patrolled this area on foot – always in twos.

Anyone stepping over the border from the West – which was easily possible – and running into a patrol, risked being arrested as a “border violator”, and anyone attempting to escape was in danger of being shot.



*Upstream territory*



*Whinchat on a border post*

The upstream territory was managed in a variety of ways. Some of it was left fallow and only cleared of shrubs every few years to improve visibility for the border troops.

Other less accessible areas developed into forests or wetlands that remained untouched for decades. Some parts were mown once or twice a year. In any event, this territory was predominantly an open-land habitat and hence, from a nature conservation perspective, particularly valuable for open-land species driven out of the surrounding agricultural landscape due to intensified land usage.



*Today, sheep graze on the former upstream territory*



*Otter*

It is for this reason and because of its width that the upstream territory is the most important part of the Green Belt.

Today you can still see where the former border strip is under conservation or at least being extensively cultivated or kept open. These areas typically consist of wasteland covered in dead grass with a few areas of scrub. Where the Green Belt runs through woodland, it is often completely overgrown with trees – in many cases 25-year-old spruce or pine monocultures.



## Observation towers (Beobachtungstürme)

The border zone was observed from towers positioned at intervals of approximately three kilometres. From 1969 onwards, the border troops replaced the original wooden towers with new, round observation towers made from pre-cast concrete elements (see photo to the left). These consisted of tube-shaped concrete sections (1.5 metres in diameter and 1.0 metres high). Depending on the number of elements, these structures were classed as BT-6, BT-9 or BT-11 towers. At the top of each tower there was an octagonal lookout turret. The round observation towers were later found to be susceptible to wind and in danger of falling down – generally due to being built on inadequate foundations and in unfavourable positions. Following the collapse of one observation tower in a storm, the border guards were no longer permitted to enter them in gusty weather. Today, it is generally only possible to view these towers on museum grounds.

In the 1970s, the border troops began supplementing the round towers with square ones (observation tower “BTv 2x2”, see photo on p. 17). These measured two by two metres and were built on firm foundations.

The total height of each tower including the integrated lookout turret was nine metres. The windows were made of mirrored glass, making it impossible to tell from the outside whether the towers were manned.



BT11 at Lindenberg  
near Duderstadt (1990)



Observation tower BTv 4x4



Very few of these towers have been preserved. Most of them are no longer open to the public. The foundations are the most likely relics to be found, and in some cases you may still come across severed power cables.

In the mid 1980s, new commando centres were installed in pre-cast concrete towers with a ground plan measuring approximately 4.2 x 4.2 metres and a height of nine metres (square observation tower "BTv 4x4", see photo on the right of p. 16). Each tower was assembled from concrete elements and had three floors plus a basement. They were accessed via metal step ladders. Each commando tower had its own parking area surrounded by a concrete wall. This was where the various vehicles used by the border guards were parked.

Railings ran around the entire perimeter of the roof. Originally, a series of aerials, a wind gauge and a searchlight (1000 watt) were installed next to the railings. The searchlight could be rotated from the lookout turret.



*Two-man patrol in the upstream territory*

Today, little remains of these rather more elaborately equipped towers apart from the foundations or remnants of the various fixtures (cellar, septic tank, parking area).

Only a few have been preserved, of which even fewer are open to the public.



*Observation tower BTv 2x2*

*Floodlit  
control strip by day*



## The floodlit control strip (Lichttrasse)

Sections of the border strip where surveillance by the border troops was problematic (e.g. woodland areas) or where more frequent escape attempts were anticipated (e.g. in the vicinity of border crossings) were illuminated at night. Searchlights were generally used for this purpose. They projected beams of light onto the control strip. Fully preserved searchlights can only be seen in museums.

All that remains of them in the former border strip are concrete mast stumps or remnants of cables projecting out of the ground. You can recognise them by their silver-coloured aluminium core that was typical of East Germany.



*Floodlit control strip by night*

## Barracks of the East German border troops

The soldiers actually entrusted with guarding the inner-German border, most of whom were conscripts, were divided into border guard units. Every border guard unit had its own barracks. They were generally situated close to or on the edge of a village in the protective strip. Buildings located directly in town centres were avoided in the interests of secrecy. In total, there were probably around 70 barracks of this kind in 1989.

Following reunification, some of these buildings were demolished; in some places, the ruins can still be seen today. However, in many instances, the buildings were used for a variety of other purposes. They were always identical in terms of appearance and size. Hence, those still standing are easily recognisable as what they once were, irrespective of their present condition or use.



*Barracks belonging to the NVA (Nationale Volksarmee – National People's Army) in Ecklingerode*

## Restricted zone (Sperrzone) and protective strip (Schutzstreifen)

In 1952, a “police directive for establishing special security arrangements in the border zone” led to the last five kilometres of land before the border being declared a “restricted zone” and the last 500 metres a “protective strip”. In the course of “Operation Vermin” (Aktion Ungeziefer) in 1952 and “Operation Fortification” (Aktion Festigung) in 1961, 12,000 undesirable persons from the restricted zone were forcibly resettled to the country's interior. The remaining inhabitants were given a stamp in their ID papers; entry to this zone was otherwise only possible with a special pass. Other measures implemented in the protective strip included curfews and forcible evacuation. Control posts were set up on the access roads and corresponding warning signs erected in the area. In addition, observation towers were erected on the boundary with the restricted zone, although these were made of brick as opposed to pre-cast concrete elements and had no interior fittings or glazing. They were only manned when there was an alarm.

In 1973, the protective strip was sealed off on the inward-facing side by means of the so-called “border security signal fence” (Grenzsicherheitssignalzaun), a 2.4-metre-high expanded metal fence with wires attached to it. The latter carried a weak electric current. When touched, the electric circuit was grounded and an alarm was triggered at the fence itself as well as in the commando centres; subsequently there was only a “silent alarm” in the commando centres. As from 1979, any sizeable streams or small rivers intersecting the border were blocked off at the entry to the protective strip by means of barrier gates that could be raised. From then on, the people of the villages in the protective strip lived in an area that was enclosed by two fences and had only one access road. Access to areas used for agricultural and forestry purposes was via gates specially installed in the fence and controlled by two East German border guards. These measures ultimately resulted in all the inhabitants of some villages in the protective strip moving away. These villages were completely razed.

In today's landscape, there are barely any signs of the profound effects this had on people's lives along the border. Where the signal fence once stood, you can sometimes see a cutting with young trees and bushes in the woods, well set back from the border, or a narrow strip of meadow adjoining open fields. A few brick observation towers have also been preserved. Today, various memorials commemorate the places where villages in the protective strip were razed. Forests in the protective strip were only cultivated extensively, with the result that they now feature greater structural diversity, including numerous beech trees and shrub-like undergrowth. On the embankments of waterways that used to intersect the border, you can sometimes still see where the barrier gates were installed at the entry to the protective strip.



*Signal and protective strip fence  
with access point*



1989





*current state*





1989



2015





1989



2015







*1990: the metal mesh fence is reduced to a heap of scrap metal*

## Protection of historical monuments in the Green Belt

All too frequently, the Green Belt along with the surviving relics of the former East German border fortifications have been breached or entirely destroyed, although they ought to be treated as a joint entity and protected accordingly. Wherever they disappear, it is not only natural species and their habitats disappearing with them, but a piece of German history too. And ultimately, once the last witnesses to this area being a border zone have passed away, we will lose all recollection of its existence. As a historic monument, the Green Belt testifies to history. As an ecological monument, it is a living treasure trove of biodiversity. That is why it is static yet dynamic and forms a link between the past and the future. The national significance we attach to the

Green Belt and the way we handle it are indicative of our culture of remembrance and our ability to master our future. Were we to lose or destroy it, we would be partially destroying our roots and hence the foundations of our future, which is why the regional state of Thuringia and the BUND advocate designating the Green Belt a “national natural monument”.

At European level, the Green Belt may one day also be acknowledged by UNESCO as one of the world's natural and cultural heritage sites. It is imperative that the remains of the border fortifications, in particular the patrol track, be preserved – in the interests of protecting our historic monuments and conserving nature!



*Destruction of the patrol track – a sacrilege against nature and history*

## Walking and cycling in the Green Belt

- The Green Belt is a refuge for animals and plants in need of peace and quiet. **Please show consideration for wildlife.** Tread quietly – especially in less-frequented areas – and avoid places likely to be used as breeding sites. Please do not pick rare or protected plants.
- Keep to the patrol track: stay away from thickets, waterway embankments and steep slopes – not just for the sake of the animals and plants, but because of the landmine problem.
- An excellent overview of **walking and cycling routes** can be found in the BUND books by Reiner Cornelius and the cycling guide by Michael Cramer (ISBN: 978-3-85000-672-9).
- The Green Belt in its entire length is not a well developed and signposted hike and bicycle path. It is not always easy to tell where the former border strip was, as most of the border fortifications have been dismantled. Moreover, in some places the Green Belt is not recognisable because parts of it are now used as intensive grassland, arable land or woodland.
- The best “guide” along the Green Belt is the patrol track because, unlike the other border fortifications, it is largely still intact.

**The Green Belt book series for cyclists and walkers, available only in German**  
**(For further information or to place an order, go to: [www.grünes-band-wandern.de](http://www.grünes-band-wandern.de))**





## The border museums in the Green Belt



- 1 Baltic Sea watchtower, Kühlungsborn
- 2 Federal police academy, Lübeck
- 3 Border documentation site, Lübeck-Schlutup
- 4 Border house (Grenzhus), Schlagsdorf
- 5 Memorial site, Elbberg Boizenburg-Elbe
- 6 Marsh village (Marschhufendorf), Konau
- 7 The old customs house museum, Hitzacker (Elbe)
- 8 Borderland museum, Schnackenburg
- 9 Borderland museum »Swinmark«, Schnega
- 10 Federal border force and information rooms, Bad Bodenteich
- 11 Historical museum, Böckwitz-Zicherie
- 12 Castle and local history museum, Oebisfelde
- 13 Zonal border museum, Helmstedt
- 14 Memorial to the division of Germany, Marienborn
- 15 Border memorial, Hötensleben
- 16 Border memorial site, Mattierzoll
- 17 Local history museum, Hornburg
- 18 Open-air border museum, Sorge
- 19 Borderland museum, Bad Sachsa
- 20 Borderland museum, Eichsfeld
- 21 Border museum, Schiffersgrund
- 22 Documentation centre, Wanfried
- 23 Wildecker museum of border and local history
- 24 Border museum, Philippsthal (Werra)
- 25 Memorial site Point Alpha

- 26 Local history museum in the former district court of Geisa
- 27 borderinformation centre, Tann
- 28 Open-air museum of the inner-German border, Behrungen
- 29 Border memorial, Gompertshausen
- 30 Museum of cross-border commuters, Bad Königshofen
- 31 Memorial site, Billmuthausen
- 32 Information centre, Neustadt near Coburg
- 33 Border and peace chapel, Burggrub
- 34 Border and local history museum Georg Stift, Gräfenenthal
- 35 Town history museum, Nordhalben
- 36 Museum of the inner-German border, Mödlareuth
- 37 Berlin Wall memorial site
- 38 Refugee camp memorial site, Marienfelde
- 39 Wall Museum at Checkpoint Charlie
- 40 »Parliament of Trees« monument, Schiffbauerdamm, Berlin
- 41 Border watchtower, Nieder Neuendorf
- 42 Border watchtower, Schlesischer Busch
- 43 Former border crossing point, Drewitz-Dreilinden
- 44 Information archive, Oldenburg
- 45 Educational border trail, Idafehn
- 46 Memorial site, Heinersdorf-Welitsch
- 47 Memorial site, Eislefeld-Rottenbach
- 48 Open air museum at »The Black Bog«, Fladungen

### Further Green Belt information centres

- A Ecological education facility Upper Franconia, Mitwitz
- B »House of the People« (Haus des Volkes), Probstzella
- C National park visitor centre TorfHaus (BUND)
- D Visitor centre, Lenzen Castle (BUND)

## The Borderland Museum Eichsfeld

The Borderland Museum Eichsfeld in Teistungen/Thuringia was opened on 11/11/1995 on the site of the former border crossing point Duderstadt/Worbis. In 2010, it was completely refurbished and is now one of the four most important border museums. With an exhibition area of 1,100 squaremetres, the museum houses exhibits, installations and documents relating to East German border security, "life at and with the border", travel and the reunification of Germany. Special temporary exhibitions provide a deep and interesting insight into East German politics and society. In addition, the outdoor grounds feature a number of original and reconstructed East German border



*Observation tower  
open to the public*

fortifications together with a watchtower housing an exhibition; guided tours of the watchtower are available. A 6.5-km-long circular educational trail featuring an electronic visitor information system cuts through the grounds. A separate exhibition room in a former mill located within the grounds is dedicated to the Green Belt.

Furthermore, a pavilion specially erected in 2013 provides visitors with information about the European Green Belt. The inhumane border situation along the entire former Iron Curtain has resulted in the emergence of a refuge for a multitude of highly endangered animal and plant species over a distance of more than 12,500 kilometres.

There is now a living memorial to the past division of Europe and a transcontinental habitat network spanning eight biogeographical regions and 24 countries from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea: the European Green Belt, the largest pan-European nature conservation project initiated by the BUND in 2002.



## Conservation activities undertaken by organisations and public authorities

Despite widespread consensus among politicians and the general public about the unique importance of the Green Belt for our natural and cultural heritage, there is no guarantee that it will be protected. This is because around one third of the Green Belt has still no legal protection status. In many regions, the Green Belt has been destroyed over a length of several kilometres.

Although the BUND formulated its vision for the “Green Belt” in collaboration with nature conservationists from East and West back in December 1989 and demanded that it be preserved, reality looked very different, particularly in the early years following the opening of the border: ownership status was often still unclear at that time and nature conservation authorities were in their infancy. During this period, almost 2,000 hectares of the Green Belt habitat were converted into arable land or intensive grassland. However, there were a few gratifying exceptions: thanks to the efforts of the local nature conservation authority in Saxony, for instance, almost the entire Green Belt there was granted conservation status.



*April 1990: Kai Frobel at a border post on the BUND's first press excursion to the Green Belt*

As early as the 1970s, the BUND began mapping the numerous endangered species of bird in the Green Belt along 10 % of its length. As from 1989, the organisation worked tirelessly to promote the protection of the Green Belt. One important question facing the BUND was how to deal with the plots of land that had been confiscated by the East German government but not reclaimed by their former owners. The BUND called for these areas, which accounted for almost half of the Green Belt, to be dedicated to nature conservation. It was another 15 years before this demand was met and the land was transferred to the nature conservation trusts as part of the “nation's natural heritage”.

The political activities aimed at preserving the Green Belt are being accompanied by land purchases funded by donations. There are already 800 hectares of select land in the possession of the BUND and its regional branches.



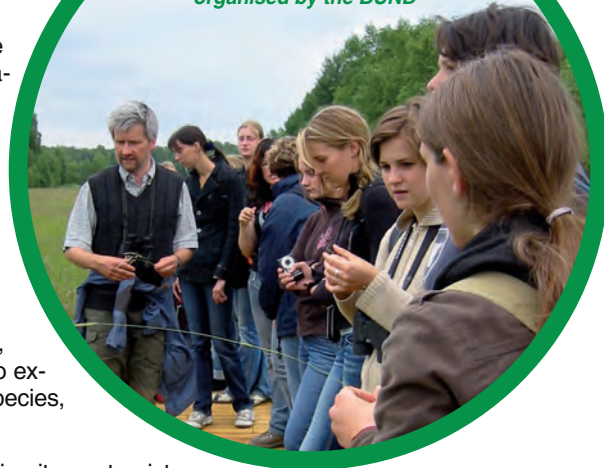
Since the turn of the millennium, the protection efforts have gained considerable momentum thanks to the dedication of the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (Bundesamt für Naturschutz). It funded the habitat mapping along the entire Green Belt, a process that was repeated 11 years later. The data gathered from this mapping exercise provided a basis for planning measures and underlined the huge importance of the Green Belt as a habitat network spanning the whole of Germany.

The second mapping operation in 2012 revealed that 13 % of the 1,393-km-long Green Belt was no longer discernible in the landscape. Therefore, the BUND initiated a project under the heading “Closing the Gaps in the Green Belt” (Lückenschluss Grünes Band), funded by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation as part of the “Federal Programme for Biological Diversity” (Bundesprogramm Biologische Vielfalt) with financial resources from the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety. This project involves switching from intensive to extensive farming in select model regions, creating biotopes for endangered species, and keeping areas of land open in the interests of preserving rare habitats.

A further element of the Green Belt conservation strategy consists in promoting it as a tourist destination of natural, cultural and historic interest. The offerings developed under the “Experience Green Belt” project include a whole host of options for learning about the division and reunification of Germany with the help of clearly presented on-site information. For further details, go to: [www.experiencegreenbelt.de](http://www.experiencegreenbelt.de)

The European Green Belt (see map on page 27) is divided into four regions. The BUND acts as the coordinator for Central Europe and the Baltic. It cooperates with the regional coordinators for Fennoscandia and the Balkans as well as national contacts and further representatives from public agencies and non-government organisations to form a pan-European initiative spanning 24 states. One of the topics the initiative addresses is the potential of a nomination of the European Green Belt as World Heritage site. The European Union and the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation play a major role in funding the initiative's activities. In 2013, almost all the neighbouring countries signed a “joint declaration of intent” to preserve and develop the European Green Belt as an ecological corridor for the protection of animal and plant populations. The year 2014 saw the founding of the European Green Belt Association e.V., which represents the initiative and ensures the exchange of information among the various bodies belonging to the European Green Belt community. The BUND is one of the 23 founding members and is represented on the board of directors. For further information, go to: [www.europeangreenbelt.org](http://www.europeangreenbelt.org)

*A youth excursion  
to the Green Belt  
organised by the BUND*





## Legal notice

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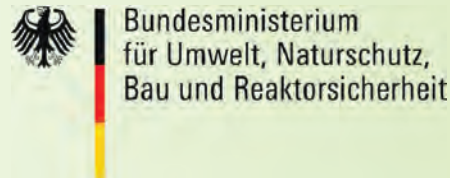


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Head of the museum's environmental education division and responsible since 1998 for disseminating information about the Green Belt at original sites through a variety of means.



The Green Belt along the Thuringia - Hesse border between Obersuhl and Berka



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