



BEWUSSTSEINS  
REGION

Mauthausen - Gusen - St. Georgen

HEIMAT DER MENSCHENRECHTE  
HOME OF HUMAN RIGHTS

# TUNNEL SYSTEM „BERGKRISTALL“





# REMEMBERING FOR THE FUTURE

We live in a region that bears great responsibility. We keep historic facts in mind. We don't want the past to repeat itself.



Ing. Wahl Erich, MBA  
MAYOR St. Georgen/Gusen  
// Picture: Erwin Krinninger



TUNNEL SYSTEM  
"BERGKRISTALL"  
2016  
// Picture:  
Erwin Krinninger

Unemployment, the economic crisis, injustice and poverty as well as the consequent fears and concerns of the people provided a significant basis for the spreading of the totalitarian, inhuman and murderous system of National Socialism throughout Europe.

Human rights were violated, whole groups of people were persecuted, tortured, forced into labor and brutally murdered, just because they had different opinions (for example socialists or communists but also Christians). People who looked different or suffered from disabilities were systematically murdered by the National Socialist machinery of death. Jews, Roma and Sinti were the most affected victims.



GROUP OF VISITORS  
// Picture:  
Erwin Krinninger

AUDIOWALK GUSEN  
// Picture:  
Bernhard Mühleder





# LOOKING AHEAD

We are looking ahead and want to shape our society in accordance with the principles of human rights.

INFORMATION BOARDS  
"BERGKRISTALL"  
// Picture: Bernhard Mühleder

In May 2015, a memorial in memory of the Polish victims was endowed by the Polish government at today's entrance to the "Bergkristall" tunnel system. December 2015 saw, also through the efforts of a Polish initiative, the setting up of information boards at the very same location.

"MIRROR-BRIDGE" AT THE  
CHURCH WITH A VIEW  
TOWARDS "BERGKRISTALL"  
// Picture: Andrea Wahl

The municipalities Mauthausen, Langenstein and St. Georgen/Gusen work together with the Association of Municipalities and support association "Region of Awareness Mauthausen – Gusen – St. Georgen".

The most important **goals** are to work in the following terms:

- In awareness of the historical burden our region has to carry due to the construction of extermination camps during the time of National Socialism.
- In the effort to reappraise this historic burden through the pooling of the human and economic resources of the region as well as to make the public in the region and beyond aware of the developments and the gruesome crimes committed at the time.
- In the expectation to achieve an overall increase in critical and responsible awareness among the regional and general public.
- With the objective of contributing to the humanization of society and the objective of preventing such terrible developments from taking place in the future by providing information about regional incidents in the past and the creation of a critical and observant awareness.  
(extract from the statute)

## Program of the Region of Awareness

Fostering awareness and more: The local population is dealing with the past (especially with the period of National Socialism), the present and the future by taking part in workshops and discussion groups, and by engaging in forms of interactive learning.

Establishing an annual symposium for human rights in the region within a network comprised of experts, interested people and institutions in a national and international context.

This learning region is exemplary for other regions. Through initiatives and projects, we set current examples of a positive shaping of the present and future.

Living democracy: Through forms of living democracy, different groups of the population can take part in the shaping of their local area.





# TUNNEL SYSTEM "BERGKRISTALL" ST.GEORGEN/GUSEN

Rudolf A. Haunschmied

**The "Bergkristall" tunnel system in St. Georgen/Gusen is one of the biggest structures the National Socialists constructed in Austria. From 1944 to 1945, nearly 45000 m<sup>2</sup> of bomb-proof production area were built by prisoners of the concentration camp Gusen II under gruesome conditions and at the cost of thousands of lives.**

Under the code name "Bergkristall", the tunnel system served as a production site for fuselages and wings for the fighter jet "Me 262" which were produced on an assembly line under conditions of strictest secrecy. Furthermore, key technologies necessary to manufacture special components were kept safe from air raids in St. Georgen/Gusen.

The project had already been planned by the Air Force of the German Reich before 1944 and was subsequently carried out at the beginning of the year 1944 by exploiting prisoners of the Gusen concentration camp. The reason for choosing this location may have been the fact that the SS had already been using a sandpit in St. Georgen since 1939. Other factors contributing to this decision may have been the presence of smaller beer cellars in the area, the

infrastructure the SS had already built in St. Georgen and Gusen at the time, the successful cooperation between "Messerschmitt GmbH Regensburg" and the SS-owned "German Earth and Stone Works" (Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke GmbH - DEST.) from 1943 onwards as well as the relative proximity to the concentration camps Mauthausen and Gusen.

The realization of the project "Bergkristall" led to the additional deportation of thousands of concentration camp prisoners to Gusen who were, from May 1944 onwards, housed in the camp Gusen II under most primitive and inhumane conditions. The dirty barracks were often crammed and posed a high risk of infection. Thousands of people quickly died because of the hard work in the tunnels, due to malnutrition, sleep deprivation, the lack of hygiene and the brutality of the guards and prisoner functionaries.

The prisoners worked in round-the-clock shifts. Typically, after an eight to twelve hours work shift the prisoners would, often only for the purpose of getting some rest, be brought to the Gusen camp in open carriages via the SS-owned railway that had been running between the Gusen concentration camp and the tunnel system "Bergkristall"

US INVESTIGATORS AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE TUNNEL SYSTEM "BERGKRISTALL"  
// Picture: Memorial Committee Gusen, Collection of Rudolf A. Haunschmied



since 1943, constantly driven by the dogs of the SS and the beatings of the kapos.

The first tunnel commando of prisoners was formed on January 2, 1944. June 1944 already saw over 3000 prisoners of the concentration camp Gusen working below ground.

The construction of these tunnels and the brutal exploitation of the prisoners are also responsible for the fact that the number of victims in the Gusen camps ultimately exceeded that of the Mauthausen concentration camp. Approximately 3000 prisoners of the camp Gusen II were brought to the infirmary camp in Mauthausen after having become incapable of working in the tunnels and were left there to die. Among them was Marcel Callo, a young Frenchman who was later beatified.

The concentration camps Mauthausen and Gusen and the tunnel system "Bergkristall" highlight the spatial extent of the former concentration camp system in this area of Austria. They also reflect the area's wartime transformation from a center of the granite industry to a center of the armament industry. Nevertheless, the main objective always remained the extermination of human beings.

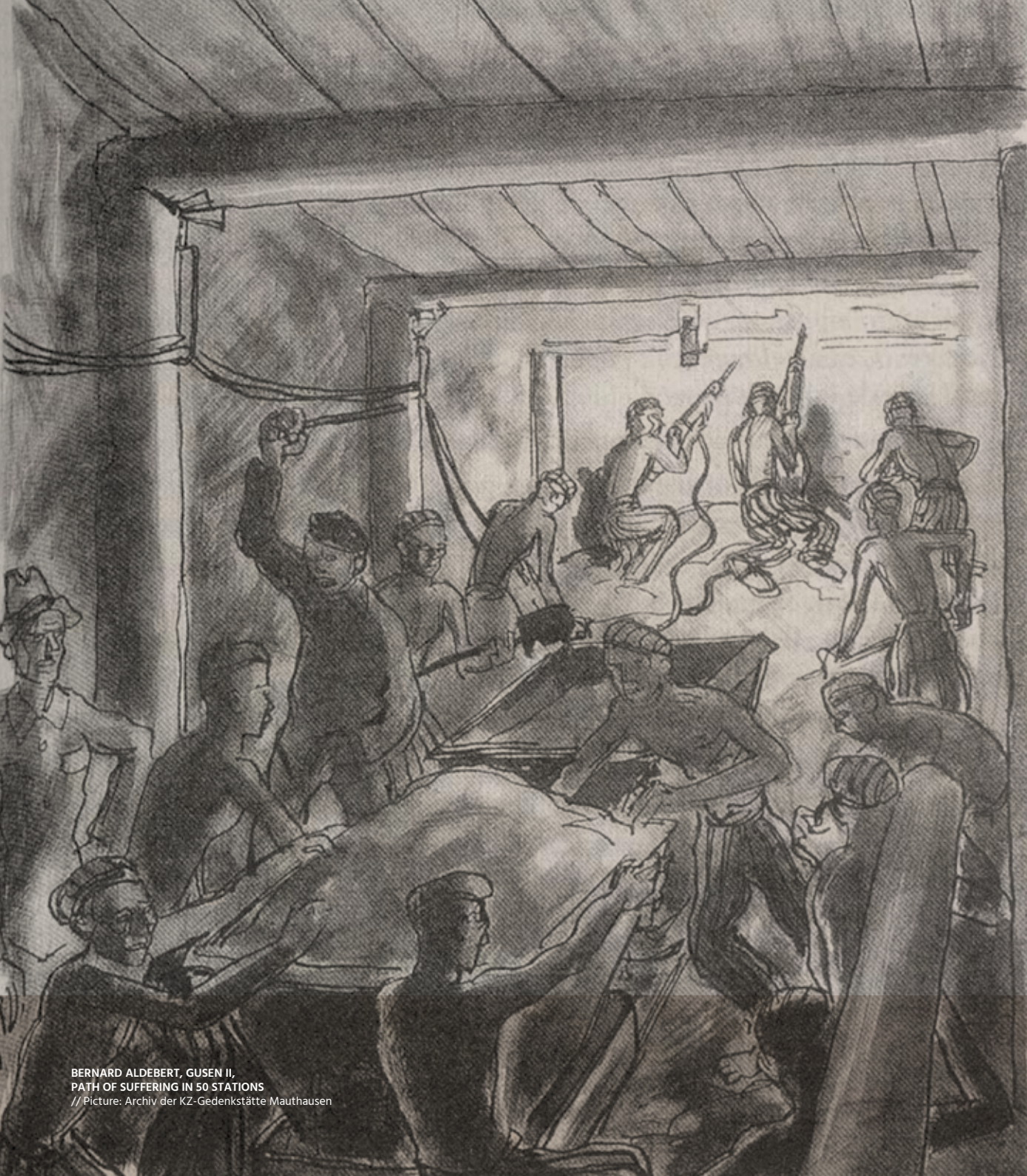


MESSERSCHMITT ME 262, 1944  
// Picture: Bundesarchiv / Picture 141-2497 / CC-BY-SA 3.0

"Bergkristall" and the concentration camps Mauthausen and Gusen I, II & III were liberated on May 5, 1945. The planned collapsing of the underground factory by means of controlled detonations, and thus the extermination of thousands of prisoners, was eventually not carried out. The tunnel system fell into the hands of the American liberators and was immediately sealed off in order to resume production in case of a continuation of the war. It was only after it became clear in early summer 1945 that the Americans would have to leave the region north of the river Danube that the most important machinery was quickly brought to the other side of the Danube, to the city of Linz, in order to prevent the Soviet Union from having access to it."







BERNARD ALDEBERT, GUSEN II,  
PATH OF SUFFERING IN 50 STATIONS  
// Picture: Archiv der KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen

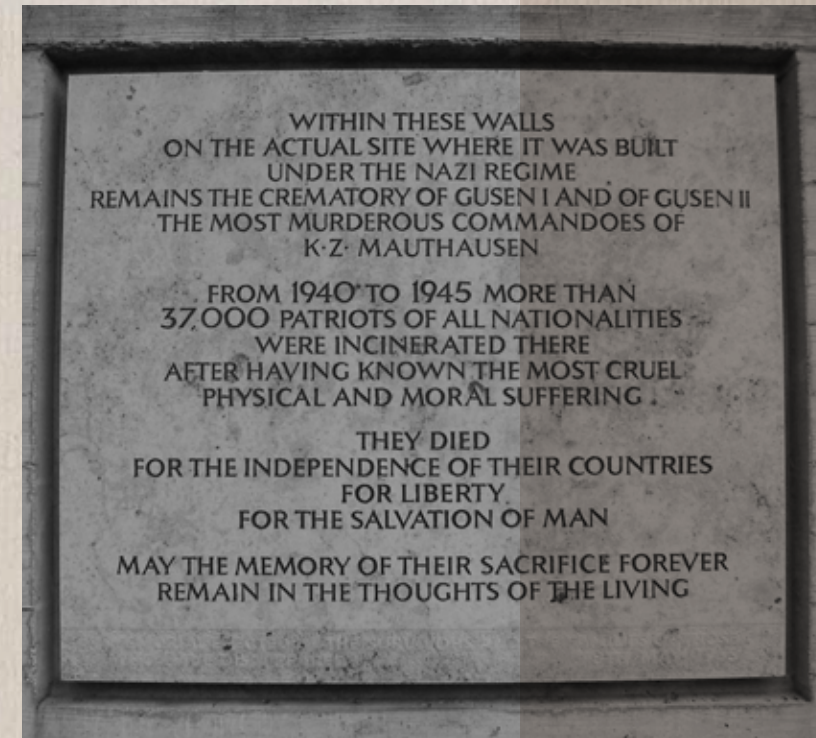
In remembrance of the concentration camp prisoners who were deliberately worked to death under most gruesome conditions in the course of this underground project.

From autumn 1945 on, "Bergkristall" came under the influence of the Soviet Union. Until 1947, nearly all of the operational equipment was dismantled and subsequently taken away from St. Georgen/Gusen. In autumn 1947, the Red Army attempted to destroy the tunnel system with the help of aerial bombs. Although this did not lead to the complete destruction of the tunnels, the facility was substantially damaged. In the following years this resulted in the partial collapse of the tunnel system in several places, with the consequent craters gradually filled up by the local population. Because "Bergkristall" had been constructed during the war without any official permission, and because Austrian officials did not show any interest in reappraising history, questions of ownership, responsibility, and accountability were left unanswered for decades.

In the decades after the war, there were various proposals for finding a new use for the heavily damaged tunnel system, such as a subterranean power station, a large civil defense bunker, or a nuclear waste disposal site. Apart from a mushroom farm and the removal of sand from where it had fallen in at the blasting sites, however, none of these were ever realized.

#### FURTHER READING:

- Bernard Aldebert, Elisabeth Hölzl (ed.), Gusen II - Leidensweg in 50 Stationen. Bibliothek der Provinz, Weitra 1997.
- Stanislaw Dobosiewicz. Vernichtungslager Gusen. Bundesministerium für Inneres, Vienna 2007.
- Reinhard Hanausch, et al. (ed.). Überleben durch Kunst: Zwangsarbeit im Konzentrationslager Gusen für das Messerschmittwerk Regensburg. Staatliche Bibliothek Regensburg, Regensburg 2012.
- Rudolf A. Haunschmied, et al. St. Georgen-Gusen-Mauthausen - Concentration Camp Mauthausen Reconsidered. Gusen Memorial Committee, Norderstedt 2007.
- Rudolf A. Haunschmied. NS-Geschichte 1938-1945. In: 400 Jahre Markt St. Georgen an der Gusen. Marktgemeinde St. Georgen/Gusen, St. Georgen/Gusen 2011. S. 99 ff.



INSCRIPTION IN MEMORY OF  
THE VICTIMS OF THE GUSEN  
CONCENTRATION CAMP  
// Picture: Rudolf A.  
Haunschmied / CC BY-SA 3.0





ALLIED RECONNAISSANCE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE CAMPS GUSEN I UND II IN 1945  
 // Picture: Memorial Committee Gusen, Collection of Rudolf A. Haunschmied

Only in the year 2001 did the Republic of Austria legally succeed to “Bergkristall” and subsequently sign it over to the federal real estate company (BIG). But because in the 1990s houses had been built above parts of the tunnel system, in 2003 and 2004 the BIG began to partially fill the tunnels to ensure the stability of the houses. In 2009, a large part of the remaining tunnels was filled by the BIG once and for all. From this moment on, there have been extensive efforts to make the surviving tunnels of St. Georgen accessible to the public as a memorial site.

In May 2010, former prisoners of the Gusen concentration camps were officially allowed to visit the “Bergkristall” tunnel system for the first time since the end of the war.



PLAN OF THE MEMORIAL AREA  
 // Picture: Archive of the KZ-Memorial Mauthausen, Graphic: Ralf Lechner

SANDPIT “MARIENGRUBE” WITH DIFFERENT ENTRANCES TO “BERGKRISTALL” ABOUT 1960  
 // Picture: Memorial Committee Gusen, Collection of Rudolf A. Haunschmied





# CONTEMPORARY WITNESSES

compiled by Bernhard Mühleder



## Testimony of a survivor of the forced labor in the tunnels:

Bernard Aldebert describes the work in the tunnels: “I worked in the shovel commando for a long time. I am behind the drillers, the men with the jackhammers. Sometimes there are three or four jackhammers at the same time. The noise is deafening.

The sand flows out of the rock like a torrent, it floods everything. If you stop shoveling only for a split second, heaps form immediately.

Civilians work with us, or rather they urge us on, add their brutality to that of the kapos.

## Most of them are Austrians.

Some of them are good, humane, some of them are bearable, and others are terrible.”

## Testimony of a civilian:

A St. Georgen resident who was 13 at the time of the liberation in 1945 recalls: “Gradually, larger and larger groups of camp prisoners came in their camp clothing. They looked pitiful. Ragged clothes, their shoes were worn out, the winter had been hard for them.

## At all times, the SS guards patrol the camp area with fierce dogs.

Well, sometimes we, the children, threw some food for the prisoners over the camp fence. That must have been a feast for those poor people. There was another method: When we visited our grandmother, we inconspicuously dropped some apples on the way. We were incredibly glad to have given them something more.

The end of the war: Sunday, May 5th, 1945, around 8 a.m. I will never forget this

day. After the liberation of the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp, the survivors were finally free. Suddenly, some of these prisoners came armed into our room. Look at that, they had only come to thank us for everything we had done for them.”

## Testimony of a student from St. Georgen:

## Well, during school time, when there was an air raid warning, we hid in the tunnels.

“The miners from Hallstadt were there and they were showing the camp prisoners how to build a tunnel. We had to study, there in the tunnels, and we weren’t thrilled at all, right. Reading and, you know, some questions our teacher asked. An then we sat down on a conveyor belt and rode back to where they were working. Didn’t say anything, though, not the camp prisoners and the SS rarely went in there anyway.”



SURVIVING PRISONERS AFTER THE LIBERATION IN 1945

// Picture: Memorial Committee Gusen

SOURCES AND INTERVIEWS:  
Survivor: Aldebert, Bernard: Gusen II - Path of suffering in 50 stations, Hg. Elisabeth Hölzl, Weitra: Bibliothek der Provinz.  
Civilian: Collection of Heimatverein St. Georgen an der Gusen. Student: Archiv der KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen.



WHY IS IT SO HARD TO TALK ABOUT  
THESE EVENTS? WHY IS IT IMPOR-  
TANT TO KNOW HISTORY? WHAT  
IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE  
HISTORY OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM  
AND THE PRESENT? WHAT PRO-  
GRESS IS THERE TODAY? WHAT CAN  
WE LEARN FROM ALL THIS?

AND WHAT IS YOUR  
PART IN THIS?

“It is not true that you cannot learn  
from history. The Second Republic of  
Austria has learned from the mistakes of  
the First Republic.

The Second Republic is not perfect – democracy is  
also based on the understanding that social  
conditions will never be perfect. But this republic  
has a stable democratic foundation: the agreement  
that democracy is, relatively speaking, the best  
political system we know, and the awareness that  
democracy has to be protected – from its enemies.

Keynote speaker 2014  
**ANTON PELINKA**  
// Picture: Anton Pelinka



These enemies are those very same people who still  
promote ludicrous constructs of race, who fabricate  
biological inequality; who nurse their racism –  
oblivious to the fact that science has long ago  
disproved the existence of races. The Republic of  
Austria exists because “we” – the citizens of this  
republic – did not lose the Second World War but  
were and still are, objectively and as beneficiaries,  
on the winners’ side.”

Speech held by Anton Pelinka on April 7, 2014, St. Georgen/Gusen



# VISITOR INFORMATION:

## **Tunnel System "Bergkristall":**

The tunnel system can be visited only on a few days of the year, if you are interested, please contact us. Phone: +43 7238 2269-51

## **Gusen Memorial**

Georgestraße 6, 4222 Langenstein

March 1st – October 31st:

Monday - Sunday: 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

November 1st - February 28th/29th:

Tuesday - Sunday: 9:00 a.m. - 3:45 p.m.

Closed on Dec. 24th - 26th, 31st, and January 1st.

[www.mauthausen-memorial.org/en/Gusen](http://www.mauthausen-memorial.org/en/Gusen)

## **Audiowalk Gusen**

[www.audioweg.gusen.org](http://www.audioweg.gusen.org)

The Audiowalk Gusen deals with the history of the concentration camps Gusen I & II.

Booking:

Mobile: +43 664 526 71 14 (Tuesday - Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 11:59 a.m.) or email:

[bernhard.muehleder@mauthausen-memorial.org](mailto:bernhard.muehleder@mauthausen-memorial.org)

## **Mauthausen Memorial**

Erinnerungsstraße 1, 4310 Mauthausen

March 1st– October 31st:

Monday - Sunday: 9:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

(Last admission 4:45 p.m.)

November 1st - February 28th/29th:

Tuesday - Sunday: 9:00 a.m. - 3:45 p.m.

(Last admission 3:00 p.m.), Closed on Monday, Closed on Dec. 24th - 26th, 31st, and January 1st.

Booking of educational offers:

Phone: +43 7238 2269-35

[www.mauthausen-memorial.org/en](http://www.mauthausen-memorial.org/en)

## **Food and Accommodation**

[www.st-georgen-gusen.at/gastronomie](http://www.st-georgen-gusen.at/gastronomie)

[www.langenstein.at](http://www.langenstein.at)

[www.mauthausen.info](http://www.mauthausen.info)

## **Region of Awareness**

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[www.bewusstseinsregion.at](http://www.bewusstseinsregion.at)

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