

Historisch-Technisches Museum Peenemünde

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The Peenemünde Historical Technical Museum

The Peenemünde Military Test Site was the largest armaments centre in Europe in the years between 1936 and 1945. On an area of 25 km², up to 12,000 people were working on new weapon systems, most famously the world's first cruise missiles and the first ever functioning large-scale rockets. The first successful launch of a rocket into space in Peenemünde in October 1942 marked one of the most spectacular - but at the same time one of the most dangerous technological breakthroughs of the 20th century. From the start the research was directed toward one goal only: achieving military superiority through advanced technology. Preparations for mass production of missiles at Peenemünde came to an end in August 1943 by a massive air attack by the Royal Air Force. A new factory was then set up in underground tunnels near Nordhausen in the Harz Mountains. Slave laborers, concentration camp inmates and prisoners of war provided the work that enabled the construction of the test sites and the later serial production of the weapons, which the Nazi propaganda referred to as "Vergeltungswaffe", in so short a period of time. Both the inhumane labor conditions and the attacks on Belgian, British and French cities using the supposed "wonder weapon" claimed thousands of lives.

The Peenemünde Historical Technical Museum reconstructs the history of the creation and use of these weapons. It was opened in 1991 and until today more than 5.5 Million visitors came to Peenemünde. The exhibition illustrates the historical development that led from the dreams of the early rocket pioneers to the systematic development of the first large-scale military missiles in Peenemünde and their serial production and use in warfare. The exhibitions document who worked in Peenemünde, how the people lived and why the enormously elaborate weaponry projects were carried out. A second part of the exhibition is devoted to the further development of rocket technology after the Second World War - largely to the arms race during the "Cold War", but also to the first breakthroughs in civil spaceflight.

The Museum is housed in the power station of the former Military Test Site - the largest technical monument in the German state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. It is the last remaining complete historical building of Peenemünde and conveys the industrial nature of the work during the armament projects. The whole building is designed as a freely accessible monument today. A glass elevator leads to a viewing platform on the roof. From there, visitors can look out at a height of 30 metres over the spatial dimensions of the former armament facilities and the complexity and monstrosity of the Peenemünde project that the exhibitions can only insinuate.

Many ruins of the military past have remained in Peenemünde too, reclaimed by nature. The "Monument Landscape" is a circular route, 25km in length, currently with 23 stations at the most historically interesting points. Starting at the Peenemünde Historical Technical Museum, the individual circular route enables the visitor to experience the ecological and symbolic value of this landscape, as it makes visitors think about the relation between humans, nature and technology.

Today the Peenemünde Museum is also an international meeting place. Every year major events, such as the annual concerts in the former turbine hall of the power station, make Peenemünde a focal point of national and international cultural activities. During the very first Peenemünde Concert in 2002 the museum was awarded the Coventry Cross of Nails for its efforts toward reconciliation and peace.