

Places of Memory in Jáchymov

(recent) history guide



educational supplement
to the Hell of Jáchymov educational trail



You can order a tour of the former uranium camps in Jáchymov for your school, company or friends at experience@politicalprisoners.eu.

Introduction

*This manual is the result of a joint Czech-German project of three NGOs focusing on the position of places of memory in education and on how we can learn from our past. Our objective is to **provide educators** (in both formal and informal education) and the general public with a **methodology handbook on how to approach the difficult topics of our modern history and how to inform about the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century effectively and attractively**. The manual will be particularly useful for the Jáchymov region and for places included in the Hell of Jáchymov educational trail. We are convinced, however, that many of the tips from this handbook will be useful also at other places of memory and will help you enrich your teaching of modern history and make your work with young people more efficient to help them truly learn about the past.*

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www.jachymovskepeklo.cz

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1. Places of Memory – Places of Education

The single common purpose of all attempts to remember and understand the past is to find in it some lesson for our present and future. Back in the days of Ancient Rome, Cicero said that “history is life’s teacher”. In the early 20th century, the American philosopher George Santayana clarified this point further: “Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” And yet humankind still keeps making the same historical mistakes.

1.1 What does it mean to learn from the past?

Three ancient historians have shown us three ways of learning from the past.

1. Herodotus wrote the history of the Greek-Persian wars so that “the great deeds of men are not forgotten by lapse of time”. He wrote about events that he saw or that he was told about. Of course that not all the deeds of men were great. But **not forgetting what happened and learning more about the events is undeniably important.**

2. Thucydides chose a different approach to write about the history of the Peloponnesian War. His work is analytical. He aims to discover the causes and consequences of events and not just to describe them. Today we call this the scientific approach to history. **Learning from the past does not mean just knowing the events, but also understanding their causes and their consequences.**

3. Plutarch studied history through individual life stories. He wrote biographies of famous people, exploring their personal decisions and deeds. He was interested in personal motivations rather than social causes, and wanted to understand the impact that historical events have on individuals rather than society. **His writings grow from the ideas of virtue and vice; he examines history through the lens of values and attitudes.**

1.2 Lessons are always personal

Everyone learns for themselves. The same school lessons, the same educational trips, and the same life experiences mean different things to different people. This is because each of them brings to the situation their own baggage – their knowledge, skills, experiences, convictions and values.

At every place you visit, there are three things we recommend doing:

1. Search the treasure trove of your knowledge. What do you already know about this topic? How do the things that you’re learning about here relate to things that you already knew? Is there any new chain of possible causes and consequences forming between these pieces of knowledge? In other words, **“anchor” everything you learn in the knowledge that you already have.**

2. Do not fear questions. Be ready to question everything you’ve learned so far, your interpretations of events and even your judgements about a period and its events. Do not

forget that before our knowledge can reach a full stop at the end of a sentence, it needs to start with question marks. **If you leave a place of memory with a new question, this does not mean that your knowledge has diminished. Quite the contrary – you've given it a new opportunity for growth.** Also don't forget that a question is a great guide whenever you encounter a story that is emotionally too difficult. If you feel your emotions taking hold of you, ask yourself the question: why? What was the cause of this event? **Activate your reasoning and seek possible rational answers. That is the only way to avoid the necessity of reliving the past.** If you easily succumb to emotions, you will leave places of memory with new worries but little knowledge.

3. Confront the stories and events with your own life experiences. Think about the values that you cherish and how you approach difficult life situations. Find out who you are. Could you or your loved ones find themselves in a similar situation? Have you experienced anything that would at least slightly resemble what is being talked about? What would I do in this situation? In which everyday situation can I "train" the responses that I want to have? **Try to "anchor" everything that you learn in your own life experience. Only then can history become your life's teacher.** But be careful! Think about the situations as they happened – do not change them to make your decision easier. And be honest with yourself – don't think about the version of you that you want to be or your image of yourself (which may be more negative than the real you). Think about what you really do in your life.

1.3 Adapt lessons to age

People of different ages come to learn. When you work with them, you need to be aware of their psychological and moral development. Of course that everyone is an individual, but there still is some general advice to follow, based on Piaget's developmental psychology and Kohlberg's theory of moral development.

4–8 years – Talk to children about good and evil; don't make things too complicated, ignore the context – beating people is bad, not letting people sleep is bad, easing other people's suffering is good.

8–10 years – Talk to children about good and evil in the context of a specific situation – what would be the right thing to do here? Who deserves punishment and for what? Who did the right thing and why?

10–13 years – Children already have an idea of who is good and who is bad; they know what good people should do and what evil people often do; you can place greater emphasis on the description of events – what are they telling us, what exactly happened here. If they ask for causes, answer, but simplify so they can understand. Do not be too abstract, do not relativize because their casual thinking is still developing. In terms of morals, they still need to work with a black-and-white idea of good and evil. Let them do so, talk to them about it, but do not do their work for them – they can tell you who did the right thing and who did not. And if they're mature enough, they will figure out that things are not always black and white.

Children over 13 can engage in more complex causal analyses and generally develop more abstract thinking. As the capacity for abstraction grows, you can start building

the bridge to present day – what in today's society resembles what we are learning about here? What does "doing the right thing" mean today? What is the right thing that I can do in today's world?

Moral development may well end here. The black-and-white view of good and evil may gain new shades of grey over time, but that is no longer a qualitative leap but rather a gradual improvement of moral development that had already been achieved and that people will retain throughout their adult life. Many people, however, progress to another stage in the following years – to morals based on rules. Young people are aware of social norms and understand their importance in protecting the rights of individuals, justice and order in society. In the events and stories discovered at places of memory, they learn how were social norms violated and how despite the circumstances, some people still acted like "decent human beings". Education of people at this stage of moral development has the form of forging new connections in the ever-expanding network of knowledge; finding a better understanding of causal links and the moral principles and rules of "decency".

People who progress beyond this stage of moral development (and it happens) no longer need any external guidance.

1.4 Learning from the past in Jáchymov

The town of Jáchymov and the surrounding region have a long memory. From its richness and variety, we will focus on the second third of the 20th century when the place became a symbol of the worst excesses of totalitarian regimes. Please consider this manual your guide for a walk on which we'll together try and help ensure that neither we nor our children will be forced to relive the hell experienced by previous generations.

In this handbook, there are several educational tasks associated with every place of memory, divided into three categories by the age of those who come to learn.

1. Tasks for the youngest – for preschool children or children in early stages of their school education.
2. Tasks for older girls and boys – for those who have plenty of experience with school but haven't yet encountered the complications of growing up.
3. Tasks for teenagers and adults – for everyone who doesn't want to listen to good advice from the older and more experienced, but instead wants to figure out things for themselves.

Remember that everyone who visits the Hell of Jáchymov educational trail is entering a place of memory where they can learn something new. There are three things they should do:

1. Remember what they know about the communist totalitarian regime, about forced labour and penal camps and about the Krušné Mountains. New knowledge should be anchored in old knowledge.
2. Come to the trail with the willingness to learn and do not assume that you already know everything that's important. Do not fear questions because they expand your

knowledge. Use questions as a weapon against strong emotions – we need to learn from the past rather than let it scare us.

3. Connect your new knowledge with your life experience. See yourself as not just an observer of the past, but as a participant in the present and the future. Bad things only happen when too many people do not know what to do and only watch history go by.

If you're coming as a parent, a teacher or the guide of a group of people who wants to help them learn the lessons of Jáchymov's past, do not forget to pay attention to the group's age and individual differences.

2. The Hell of Jáchymov Educational Trail



The Hell of Jáchymov Educational Trail takes you on a walk through the places of memory near Jáchymov. The trail leads through the sites of former forced labour camps where prisoners mined uranium for the German and Soviet nuclear programmes in the 1940s and 1950s.

The trail focuses in particular on these camps and their inmates. But the history of Jáchymov is much longer and much more varied (the uranium rush only lasted for about two decades while the silver rush for several centuries, with some interruptions), which is why the trail also informs about the town's older history, nature and ecology.

There are twelve panels on the trail and five stops that feature QR codes linking to a website with a description. In the terrain, the trail follows the yellow tourist markings before switching to blue towards the end. The total length is 8.5 kilometres. It is a medium difficulty walk, but because it's located in the mountains, it becomes more difficult in winter and in rain. On the other hand, it's also well suitable for bicycles, cross-country skis or snowshoes.

2.1 History of the trail

The original trail was first marked in the hills above Jáchymov in 2001 by the now defunct Barbora Mining Association of Jáchymov. The trail was supported by the Karlovy Vary branch of the Confederation of Political Prisoners of the Czech Republic, the town of Jáchymov, the Regional Authority and the Czech Tourist Club in Karlovy Vary.



Inauguration of the first panel by patrons of the restored trail, former political prisoners F. Wiendl, H. Truncová and Z. Mandrholec (photo Ondřej Besperát).

Over the years, vandalism and harsh weather conditions took their toll; experts also agreed that the texts were a bit too brief and not always grounded in solid historical research. Many people worried that the trail would eventually disappear entirely. In 2013, the volunteer association Političtí vězňi.cz / Political Prisoners.eu embarked on a project of renewing the trail. In 2014, it managed to launch a successful campaign at the crowdfunding portal Hithit.com and also received important contributions from the Avast Fund and several smaller donors. Other members of the association, survivors, historians and staff of the local museum joined in. Many former political prisoners helped the project, of whom we particularly wish to thank Zdeněk Mandrholec of Karlovy Vary and František Wiendl of Klatovy. The town of Jáchymov also supported the idea and is now in charge of the trail's maintenance.

The trail was renewed in 2015; this specifically meant making and installing new panels with updated and expanded content and with a new visual design. The restored trail was opened on 27 June 2015, on the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Communism. The first panel was ceremonially unveiled by three survivors: Hana Truncová, Zdeněk Mandrholec and František Wiendl. One hundred participants then walked the trail on a commented tour, culminating in the evening Concert for Jáchymov by The Tap Tap, a music band of people with disabilities. Because the band was also very helpful during the preparations of the project, Političtí vězňi.cz was nominated for the Mosty (Bridges) Award in 2015 by the National Council of People with Disabilities.

2.2 The route

The looping trail follows yellow tourist markings. It starts with the panel "The Hell of Jáchymov Educational Trail" at the "Way of the Cross to Freedom" in front of the St Joachim and St Anne Church in Jáchymov. The trail continues uphill past the mint and up the steps to the "Svornost Mine" panel. From here, the trail continues half a kilometre upwards through the woods, past the "Adit No. 1" and "Mauthausen Steps" to the plateau where Svornost Camp used to be. There you will find the information panel "Svornost Camp" and more information about the recently discovered solitary confinement building (known as "korekce"), a torture chamber and a prison within a prison.

The trail continues for about 1.2 kilometres on level terrain to the "City Pond" panel and then half a kilometre upwards to the site of the former Nikolaj Camp; the information panel here explains what the infamous "Russian bus" was. From Nikolaj, the trail follows a road for about 700 metres, going past the "Forests of Jáchymov" panel to the site of the former Eduard Mine where you will find another panel. This is where the bus had its final stop and where the prisoners started their work shift.

From Eduard, the trail goes downwards to the "Heinz Pond" panel and then continues for another kilometre through the Eliáš Brook valley to the "Eliáš Camp" panel. Here you can take a short detour to the Scouts' Cross and a memorial to the boy scouts who were imprisoned here. The trail then goes upwards for another kilometre to the "Rovnost Camp" station with a QR code and the "Rovnost Mine and Camps" panel on the site of the largest labour camp complex in the region.



The first panel of The Hell of Jáchymov educational trail.

The remaining 1.3 kilometres follow blue tourist markings past the three final QR code stations: "Švýcar", "Chapel of the Mother of God" and "Chapel of the Virgin Mary of Al-töttin". The trail then descends back to the town past the Šlikovka Tower (the remains of Castle Freudenstein), which offers nice views of Klínovec mountain, and the mining museum Adit No. 1 operated by the Museum of Sokolov (next to the Sokolov Château and Jeroným Mine).

2.3 The Story of Jáchymov

The mining town of Jáchymov (St Joachimsthal) was founded during the silver rush of 1516 on the orders of Count Štěpán Šlik. In the following decades, the site became famous for some of the deepest mines in the world where more than 18,000 miners dug for silver. About a century later, the pendulum of history swung the other way and the pick-axes and mining hammers went silent. The silver rush era and the production of silver coins (known as "Joachimsthallers" or simply "thalers", a name that eventually evolved into "dollars") ended and while the region still remained known for mining, it was much smaller in scale and focused on other metal ores and minerals. After all, the number of different ores that have been found in the Krušné Mountains is more than 420. A sad paradox of history is that after the Second World War, mining activities restarted here at a similar scope and even with a very similar number of miners as back in the early



View of Jáchymov (2018, photo: Filip Vonka).

16th century. Some 70 thousand people spent some time in the Jáchymov camps in the 1950s, with total population reaching up to 15 thousand people at a time; this means that together with civilian employees, the total number of miners in this period was almost the same as in the glory days of the silver rush. There was a difference, however – the mining process was somewhat more modern and the ore they were looking for was quite different. After 1939, the focus was no longer on sparkling silver for coins, but on uranium. Many (though not all) of the miners were forced to work here: they were prisoners of war, prisoners of retribution, criminal prisoners as well as political prisoners, not allowed to leave under penalty of death. During the Second World War and particularly in the years afterwards, Jáchymov became a gulag with twelve forced labour camps servicing the uranium mines. This modern-day slavery in a zone controlled by the military erased the region from the country's memory and made it marginal even within the already marginalised borderlands.

This unique situation is captured in the texts of the Hell of Jáchymov educational trail. But even this recent past has long roots – without silver mining in the 16th century, we would not have the extensive network of adits and shafts and would not be aware of the presence of radioactive metals in the ore known in the old days as Pechblende, or "Bad Luck Ore". The information panels on the site tell the story of this extraordinary place and invite people to experience it on a walk or ride through the mountains, or even just a virtual tour of their half-forgotten past. You will find here beautiful nature as well as several surviving sites that bear the memory of many life stories, traumas and new meanings.

During the Second World War, the Nazis mined uranium here for their military research. After the war (starting already in late summer 1945), the Czechoslovak government gave access to this single discovered lode of uranium in Central Europe to the Soviets to enable them to quickly obtain uranium for the research and development of nuclear weapons. The mining of this strategic metal ended here in the early 1960s. New buildings, mainly

used for recreation, appeared near the former mines and artificially planted tree monocultures hid the rest. The memory of the uranium mines was deliberately pushed into the background; it was only revived thanks to the efforts of survivors, mainly former political prisoners, after 1989. Before then, reminding people of uranium mining in the region was simply never allowed. In the 90s, an educational trail winding through some (but not all) of the former camps and mines was marked here by the local Barbora Mining Association together with the Czech Tourist Club and several survivors. In 2015, the trail was restored by the volunteer research association *Politických vězňů* and new information panels were made thanks to crowdfunding. The panels are fitted with QR codes provided by the Sokolov Museum which has opened a popular mining museum at the "Adit No. 1" station.

2.4 Jáchymov after the war

At first, the main labour force in the Jáchymov uranium mines were German prisoners of war and civilian workers. The latter were shuttled here by bus from Karlovy Vary, and were very well compensated for their work (unlike the prisoners). After the communist coup in former Czechoslovakia in 1948, the regime started using Czechoslovak prisoners as a labour force (in the mines and elsewhere), including criminal and political prisoners. Since the 1940s, the country systematically developed a network of forced labour camps which was after 1948 significantly expanded and made more efficient following the example of Soviet gulags. In the years 1949–1961, some 70 thousand prisoners passed through the twelve forced labour camps. They were kept in primitive and unsanitary barracks behind barbed wire, within walking distance of the mining pit and immeasurably far away from their loved ones. The aim of the system was to utilise cheap labour and to ensure that inmates can get to the mines as quickly as possible, rather than to exterminate them (which was the purpose of Nazi concentration camps). And yet the conditions were so brutal that political prisoners adopted for themselves the moniker MUKL (from "Muž určený k likvidaci", or "Man Designated for Liquidation"). Their everyday forced labour in the mines and on the surface was accompanied by frequent injuries, radiation sickness and contagious diseases. Over the course of fifteen post-war years, 7,940 tonnes of concentrated uranium was mined in Jáchymov and delivered to the Soviet Union; some 1,102 kilometres of tunnels were dug. In this period, the entire region was turned into a restricted zone into which only locals and employees bearing a special ID were permitted. No one has yet managed to put a price on the damage caused to local nature and the inmates' physical and mental health, and it may be impossible to do so.

2.5 Structure of people working in the Jáchymov uranium industry after the Second World War:

- *German prisoners of war.* Originally Nazi soldiers captured by the Soviet army. They were transported to Jáchymov from Soviet POW camps and from camps in Szczecin (Poland) in a total number of about 4 thousand men. In 1949, they were relocated to Germany.

Year	Total number of workers	Civilians	Prisoners	Prisoners of war
1945	237	237		
1946	909	62		847
1947	3 742	1 786		1 956
1948	7 966	4 303		3 663
1949	13 653	9 128	1 135	3 390
1950	17 781	11 002	6 779	
1951	24 867	14 119	10 748	
1952	33 320	19 946	13 374	
1953	40 317	26 496	13 821	
1954	44 368	32 398	11 970	
1955	46 351	37 137	9 214	
1956	43 897	36 772	7 125	
1957	42 848	36 532	6 316	
1958	37 167	30 564	6 603	
1959	30 244	25 251	4 993	
1960	25 633	22 710	2 923	
1970	24 116	24 116		
1980	30 914	30 914		
1990	20 953	20 953		

Source: KARLSCH, Rainer – ZEMAN, Zbyněk. Uranium Matters. Central European Uranium in International Politics, 1900–1960. New York: Central European University Press, 2008, 114.

Total number of workers and percentage of prisoners in the national enterprise Jáchymov Mines.

	1946	1947	1948	1949
GDR	15,7	150	321,2	767,8
Czechoslovakia	18	49,1	103,2	147,3
Bulgaria	26,6	7,6	18,2	30,3
Poland	–	2,3	9,3	43,3

Source: BOCH, Rudolf-KARLSCH, Rainer. Uranbergbau im Kalten Krieg. Die Wismut im sowjetischen Atomkomplex. Band 1: Studien. Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2011, 65.

Uranium mining for nuclear energy (in tonnes).

- *Prisoners of retribution.* People sentenced by Extraordinary People's Courts, established by the President's two retribution decrees (known colloquially as the "big and small decree") of 1945. This group mainly consisted of German war criminals, Czech collaborators and representatives of the Fascist Slovak Republic. In the post-war period, most prisoners belonged to this group. German prisoners were eventually released and forcibly relocated to Germany (most of them by 1950, the last remaining prisoners by 1955).
- *Criminal prisoners.* People sentenced by regional and district criminal courts for criminal offences.
- *Political prisoners.* People who were usually sentenced by a state court for crimes against the security of the republic in accordance with Act No. 231/1948 Coll., on the Protection of the People's Democratic Republic, and later criminal Act No. 86/1950 Coll. It is estimated that this group accounted for up to 40% of the prison population.
- *Forced Labour Camp Detainees.* The Forced Labour Camps (known as TNPs) were established by Act No. 247/1948 Coll., on Forced Labour Camps, and most people were interred here without due court process for up to two years. The officially stated reason was to prevent potential criminal activities of people considered hostile to the regime. People were not sent to TNPs by courts, but rather by committees formed by regional authorities or various bodies of the communist party.
- *Civilians.* Due to a lack of workforce, civilian employees received a high salary with many benefits. Many civilians tried to help the political prisoners for example by smuggling secret letters (known as "motáky") to their family or carrying books from/to the camp.

2.6 Other places of memory outside the trail

There were several more labour camps and uranium mines outside the 8.5km of the trail, including the Mariánská, Barbora, Bratrství or the uranium ore processing facility known today as "National Cultural Monument Red Tower of Death" (formerly codenamed "site L") where prisoners, particularly priests and other political prisoners, were exposed to high doses of radioactivity. At the Red Tower of Death, the mined ore was sorted, crushed and loaded on freight trains that went from Czechoslovakia to the Soviet Union up to several times a week. We have no financial estimate of the value of the ore that was exported (or, arguably, stolen) and the Czech state was never compensated for the loss – probably due to the terms of the secret Soviet-Czechoslovak agreement on uranium deliveries from late 1945. The tower still stands and is being converted to an international slave labour memorial and an educational centre.

The Hell of Jáchymov Educational Trail

Stops on the trail:

- 1 THE HELL OF JÁCHYMOV EDUCATIONAL TRAIL
- 2 THE "CONCORD" MINE
- 3 THE ADIT NO. 1
- 4 THE MAUTHAUSEN STAIRS
- 5 THE "CONCORD" CAMP
- 6 THE CITY POND
- 7 THE LABOUR CAMP NIKOLAJ
- 8 THE FORESTS OF JÁCHYMOV
- 9 THE EDUARD MINE
- 10 THE HEINZ POND
- 11 THE ELIÁŠ CAMPS
- 12 THE MINE AND CAMPS "EQUALITY"

3. Discover Jáchymov's Places of Memory

3.1 The Way of the Cross to Freedom

In the upper part of Jáchymov's main square, the very first monument to the communist oppression of forced labourers in former Czechoslovakia was erected in 1996. The memorial, known as "The Way of the Cross to Freedom", was built to remember the labour camps and uranium mines not only in Jáchymov, but also Horní Slavkov and Příbram. It was sculpted by Roman Podrázský on the request of Zdeněk Mandrholec from the Karlovy Vary branch of the Confederation of Political Prisoners of the Czech Republic. The Way of the Cross consists of stone sculptures bearing the names of the individual camps and mines, and a central statue called the "Gate to Freedom". The gate represents broken-through prison bars supported by a male figure in the front and a female figure in the back. Even though no women were forced to work in the uranium mines, they still suffered in other prisons and many had to cope with separation from their partners or family members. They also had to fight discrimination that was widespread in Czechoslovak society at the time. In fact, women's stories of persecution remain often forgotten even today.

Every year, a remembrance ceremony is held at the site by survivors from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Since 1990, former inmates meet here on the last Saturday in May together with politicians and media representatives for a church mass and a ceremony called "The Hell of Jáchymov". Wreaths are laid at the memorial while a military band



Place of remembrance in front of St. Joachim Church in 2015.

plays; politicians speak about the need to remember. For this reason, Jáchymov is often considered the symbol of the suffering caused by the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, despite the fact that the town was founded more than 500 years ago and the communist gulag existed "only" for about 12 years.

The memorial is a place of pilgrimage that was explicitly built to remember political persecution in Czechoslovakia in the years 1948–1989. It therefore focuses on the fates of Czechoslovak political prisoners. This, however, neglects the suffering of prisoners of war as well as inmates incarcerated in the early post-war period, namely criminal prisoners and prisoners of retribution, even though these, too, have spent time in the local camps and uranium mines and left them with the "Jáchymov sickness" caused by radiation. This is where the restored "Hell of Jáchymov" educational trail begins and ends. There is also an informational panel that describes the trail and its twelve stations.

3.1.1 Tasks

Task for the youngest

1. Focus on the symbol of prison bars on the central statue. Talk to the children about what it represents. How do people feel in a cage? Behind bars? In prison? Is it right to put behind bars someone who thinks different things than I do?

Tasks for older girls and boys

1. Look at the central statue. Focus on the symbol of prison bars and the suffering of the depicted figures. Talk about what freedom and its loss mean to people. When is it right (acceptable) to restrict someone's freedom? What could we tell people who want to unjustly take other people's freedom away?
2. Talk about when and how we could help people whose freedom is being restricted.
3. Walk through the stops of the Way of the Cross and talk about what they depict, what probably happened there.

Tasks for teenagers and adults

1. The memorial is called "The Way of the Cross to Freedom". Find out what is a Way of the Cross and how is it related to a memorial to political prisoners held in Czechoslovak uranium mines after 1948.
2. On the central statue, there is a male figure on the front side and a female figure on the back. Explain why she is there even though all the prisoners in the mines and camps of Jáchymov, Slavkov and Příbram were men.
3. Explain why is the monument dated 1948–1989, even though uranium mines in Jáchymov, Slavkov and Příbram were all closed by 1961.
4. Try to find out why the memorial only commemorates the suffering of political prisoners in uranium mines and camps. Explain the reason.
5. Describe what could be in your opinion the main motivation for politicians today to take part in the annual mass and remembrance ceremony "The Hell of Jáchymov".
6. Propose the design of a monument that would also commemorate prisoners of war and the prisoners of the early post-war era (e.g. German-speaking prisoners of retribution) in Jáchymov. This could include the shape, symbols, inscriptions, material or location. Explain your choices.

3.2 "Mauthausen Steps" and the Svornost Camp

The 260 steps nicknamed "Mauthausen" by the inmates led from the Svornost Camp (also known by its German name Eintracht, in both languages meaning "Concord") to the Svornost Mine through a barbed wire corridor on a very steep slope. The nickname is a reference to the Nazi concentration camp in Mauthausen which some prisoners saw as a parallel to their Jáchymov experience. In 1939–1945, prisoners of war captured by the Nazis were interred at Svornost and forced to mine uranium for the research and development of nuclear weapons. In autumn 1938, Jáchymov was together with the rest of the Sudetenland surrendered to the Reich. After the Second World War, Jáchymov was restored on the political map of Czechoslovakia and the Svornost Camp started filling up first with prisoners of retribution and POWs of German origin. After 1949, it was used to hold political prisoners of the communist regime. The "Mauthausen Steps" connected the camp to the Svornost Mine in the middle of the city until 1954 when the camp was disbanded. The camp's inmates, of whom there were several hundred, had to walk down and up these steps every day on their way to their work shift and back. The steep slope was particularly difficult to climb in the rain and snow, but always well guarded by armed men on both ends. Because the camp did not have access to drinking water in the early days, prisoners had to carry it up the steps. After the camp was disbanded, the steps lost their purpose. In the 60s, the secret police had the steps and the barbed-wire corridor removed and by 1993, they were completely forgotten. The Barbora Mining Association decided to restore half of the steps for the newly built "Hell of Jáchymov" educational trail. Over time, however, both the trail and the steps fell into disrepair and their memory started slowly disappearing again. In 2015, the Sokolov Museum revitalised the Adit No. 1 site and as part of this project, rebuilt the steps, several sections of the fence and a Svornost Camp watchtower. The camp's solitary confinement building was uncovered and made accessible at this time. The Političtí vězni.cz association then decided to join the initiative to restore the "Hell of Jáchymov" educational trail and its panels (as explained above).

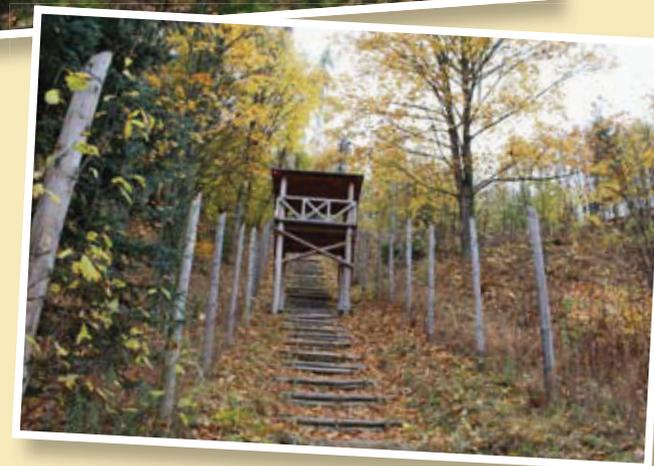
3.2.1 Tasks

Tasks for the youngest

1. Try walking up the steps together. Watch for the moment when you start feeling tired and no longer want to go on. Then discuss what it would be like to climb the steps when you're tired, for example after hard work. Mention good working conditions as a very valuable achievement of modern society.
2. Discuss whether it's right to punish someone by making them suffer, for example by exhausting them.

Tasks for older girls and boys

1. Start by talking together about a day in the life of a prisoner in this camp. How they walked to work, what they did there and how they walked back. About the conditions waiting for them in the camp. What was their life like?
2. The camp guards were not all the same. Some were nicer, some were very cruel. How could a more humane guard treat prisoners to ease their suffering?



Mauthausen Steps before reconstruction in 2014, and after in 2018.

3. What could have other people done if they had learned about the prisoners' hard life to prevent this suffering? Why didn't they do it or what prevented them from doing it?

Tasks for teenagers and adults

1. Read the information about this site and its history – who were the inmates and who were the guards. Try to guess who nicknamed these steps the "Mauthausen Steps" and why? What does it say about the author of the nickname and the steps themselves? (If you don't know what Mauthausen is famous for, ask someone better informed or use Google.)

- Describe the drawing made by a former political prisoner. Explain what is important and what is unclear in the drawing.
- Find out why the communist regime decided to partially demolish the "Mauthausen Steps" in the 60s.
- In a team, write down arguments for and against rebuilding the steps.
- Why do you think did the Sokolov Museum and [Politicti vèzni.cz](http://Politicti.vezni.cz) decide to restore the former camp, including the steps, and the "Hell of Jáchymov" educational trail?

3.3 The Russian Bus and Nikolaj Camp

"The "Russian Bus" was a nickname for a formation of human bodies. In the camp, hundreds of prisoners were forced to stand together, closely packed in rows of five. Then the prison guards bound the entire group together with hemp rope, or later with steel wire rope. The rope was secured with a padlock and the key to it was carried by the head of the escort party. The prisoners were warned every time that anyone trying to escape would be shot without warning. The group of 250–300 bodies had to start moving, all at the same pace, under any weather, and cross the civilian zone to the workplace at Eduard Mine some 950 metres away. I did the math and found out that I walked more than 1,140 kilometres this way."

Zdeněk Mandrholec (*1930), former political prisoner forced to work at various camps in Jáchymov including Nikolaj. Source: Survivor testimony given to [Politicti vèzni.cz](http://Politicti.vezni.cz) for the informational panel on the restored Hell of Jáchymov educational trail, 24 May 2015.

Unlike the other camps in the Jáchymov region, Camp Nikolaj, originally a Forced Labour Camp (TNP) and since 1951 a Correctional Labour Camp (NPT), was not located in the immediate vicinity of a uranium mine. The political and criminal prisoners held here by the Czechoslovak communist regime were forced to "commute" to the nearest pit in the Eduard Mine. Here they had to mine uranium for the Soviet nuclear industry. Because the road to the mine was very busy and used to transport uranium ore as well as civilian employees, the prisoners were bound together and closely watched. The inmates gave this primitive yet highly functional system involving a hemp or steel wire rope the mocking nickname of "Russian Bus". The idea was that this was about as advanced as public transport got in the Soviet Union. Because of this system combined with particularly harsh weather conditions and an even harsher prison regime, the Nikolaj Camp was one of the country's worst prisons. Prisoners released from the camp had to sign a statement in which they agreed never to tell anybody about their experiences from the camps and mines.

3.3.1 Tasks

Task for the youngest

- Try tying your right leg and your child's left leg together. Promise a reward if you manage to reach a certain place (the nearest tree, an anthill, a nearby forest clearing...). Then discuss whether it was easy or difficult. What would it be like if someone forced you to walk like this to school or work?



Paleček's Castle at the former Equality Camp in 2015.

Tasks for older girls and boys

- Why didn't the prison guards want inmates to go to work the same way others did, for example by taking the bus? Why didn't they want to let the prisoners talk to people who were not imprisoned in the camps?
- Who today ensures that people know about what is going on and that inconvenient information cannot be kept secret?

Tasks for teenagers and adults

- Explain what a "Russian Bus" is.
- Who could have used the term and why?
- What do you think the civilians thought when they saw prisoners marched like this on a road?
- Try to imagine being a former prisoner released from Nikolaj Camp who was forced to promise never to tell anyone. Describe a situation in which they would break the promise and mention the "Russian Bus" in a private conversation.

3.4 The "Paleček Castle" and Rovnost Camp

Recommended educational video:

The site of the former prison camp Rovnost (also known by its German name Gleichheit, both meaning "Equality"; before 1945 called the Werner Pit), which was one of the largest in Jáchymov, is today a weekend settlement with about two dozen cottages, only partially accessible to the public.



Miners' changing barrack at a former Equality Mine.

In 1939–1945, the Werner Pit was worked by prisoners of war from East Europe who mined uranium for Nazi Germany. After the Second World War, the nearby camp mainly held criminal prisoners and German POWs, forced in accordance with a Czechoslovak-Soviet agreement to mine uranium for the development of Soviet nuclear weapons. In early 1949, the first political prisoners of the Czechoslovak communist regime arrived here. The living conditions were very hard and work on the surface and in the pit frequently resulted in injuries.

Some sources claim that in the 50s, the main gate bore the inscription "Práci ke svobodě", the Czech equivalent of "Arbeit macht frei" ("Work sets you free"). Today, there is a simple barrier reading "Private", preventing unauthorised people from accessing the settlement on the site of the former camp. This area has changed considerably since the 1950s and virtually no trace of the former camp and mine remains; even their size and general shape are difficult to recognise in the terrain. That's why volunteer researchers and scientists from Politicti.vezni.cz joined forces with students of geoinformatics and cartography at the Faculty of Science, Charles University in Prague, and developed a 3D visualisation that shows the site in the early 50s.

The 3D model also features the Paleček Castle. This is a brick model of a mediaeval castle, built by the inmates of Rovnost Camp on the orders of the sadistic camp commander František Paleček. According to former political prisoners, Paleček personally shot at least four prisoners who attempted to escape. He also delighted in punishing Jehovah's Witnesses by forcing them to stand at attention in a snow blizzard for several hours because they refused to mine uranium for military purposes. The Paleček Castle still exists and is located a short walk away from the "Rovnost Mine and Camp" panel, in a freely accessible part of the settlement on the site of the former mine. The front of the castle



*Mining wagon used in the holiday resort at the former Equality Mine.
A bar in the former entrance to the Equality Camp that prevents visitors to enter the current holiday cabins and summer houses.*

was selected as the main visual motif for the logo of the renewed "Hell of Jáchymov" educational trail. Nearby you'll find the ruined remains of the changing station where prisoners changed into their mining clothes, hung to dry from the ceiling on chain pulleys. This station was built in 1956 and is therefore not included in the model. The station is slowly crumbling away next to a newly built weekend home.

3.4.1 Tasks

Task for the youngest

1. Have you ever seen someone stronger forcing someone weaker to do things that are pointless, unpleasant or the weaker person doesn't want to do them? How does this make the weaker person feel? Was this behaviour punished? What could happen if it wasn't?

Tasks for older girls and boys

1. Imagine a situation in which someone stronger forces someone weaker to do something unpleasant and pointless. What should the weaker person do? What could we do to help if we learned about it?
2. Read the information about this site. Try to describe a normal workday of camp commander Paleček. You can try for example writing an entry for his diary.

Tasks for teenagers and adults

1. Share your ideas concerning the Rovnost camp and mine as shown in the 3D animation in the Adit No. 1 museum in Jáchymov. Show which parts you find particularly interesting.
2. What does the inscription "Prací ke svobodě" ("Arbeit macht frei") above the main gate to Rovnost Camp remind you of? Try to find out who could have decided to put this inscription there in the 1950s.
3. Look at the pictures of the former site of Rovnost mine and camp. Try to guess what would a former inmate think if they saw the place today.
4. Do you think the Paleček Castle is a suitable motif for the logo of the trail commemorating Jáchymov's history? Explain why.
5. Should we restore the changing station back to its original state from 1956? Explain why you think so.
6. Would you like to spend a holiday in a cottage on the site of a former mine or forced labour camp? Explain why you think so.
7. Discuss with your classmates whether it's better to utilise the area of the former mine and labour camp for recreation or to make it completely inaccessible to the public. Is there any other meaningful way to use the site?

3.5 Eliáš Memorial and camps for imprisoned scouts

The Boy Scout movement, founded in England in 1907, spread also to Czechoslovakia under the name "Junák". The fleur-de-lis and the clover are traditional scouting symbols. The general objective of scouting as an international and religiously and politically independent movement is to support young people's development and teach them to accept responsibility. After the communist coup of 1948, Junák was banned and youth activities could only be organised by the state. The communists feared scouting as a pro-western and imperialist movement that was hostile to the regime. Many scouts ignored the ban and continued to meet illegally. In political show trials, some adult scouts were sentenced to many years in prison and forced to work in the Jáchymov uranium mines. Scouting



Scout memorial Elias (2018).

was briefly allowed during the Prague Spring era of political thawing in 1968–1970, but banned again afterwards. In 1992, a wooden cross was erected at the Eliáš site near Jáchymov to remember scouts imprisoned in uranium labour camps and mines. The cross was restored in 2013.

Near the cross is a plaque with more information about this place of memory and the suffering of boy scouts under the communist regime. It was placed here by Tomáš Barth, who leads the Jáchymov branch of Junák – Arnika, and his fellow scouts.

3.5.1 Tasks

Task for the youngest

1. Note the inscription "Fight evil!" on the memorial. Discuss whether you have ever seen someone fight evil, for example by defending someone weaker. Talk about the importance of being brave. Talk about bravery in situations when we're not facing someone evil, but for example when our own laziness tells us not to tidy our room, not to help our parents in the kitchen etc. Or it could be a friend who suggests much better ideas of how to spend the time when you should be tidying or helping.



Scouts' information panel near the Elias Memorial (2017).

Tasks for older girls and boys

1. Learn more about scouting. Ask someone or use your smartphone. Which values are important to scouts? What should someone who respects these values do if they see a Russian bus at Nikolaj Camp or prisoners carrying water up the Mauthausen Steps to Rovnost Camp?
2. Think about the motto "Fight evil". Remember one situation when you fought evil and another when you didn't. What do people who do not want to fight evil lack? What did you lack?
3. What could help people not succumb to evil? How can you help?
4. Return to this site for a scouts' remembrance ceremony and discuss these topics with today's scouts or with the older generation, including those who themselves were persecuted by the communist regime.

Tasks for teenagers and adults

1. Find out in whose memory was the cross built and by whom.
2. Explain why this particular site was chosen for the cross.
3. Explain the dates 1948–1968, an important period of recent Czechoslovak history, and how they are related to the plaque on the cross.
4. Describe why the communist regime in Czechoslovakia considered scouts to be dangerous. Try to think of some other youth movements that could have been banned for similar reasons.
5. List and explain the symbols used on the Eliáš memorial, including the motto: "Fight evil!"
6. Explain how this scouting memorial relates to people who are not scouts.



One of the last ruins of the "Jachymov Hell" at disposal during a hike at the former Equality Camp. Remains of a changing room at the former Equality Camp (photo: Filip Vonka, 2017).

4. Actionbound

Actionbound

Visit the stations of the educational trail with the Actionbound app! You can learn more and try various interactive tasks at the individual stations. Accessing the content is easy:



About Actionbound

"Play is the highest form of research." (Albert Einstein)

With Actionbound and the browser editor (Bound-Creator), you can easily create your own pathway, known as a Bound, and publish it to others.

Through digital media and gamification, you can turn anything into an interactive journey of discovery. Let your players explore the issue by doing quizzes, solving puzzles and completing fun missions. Tell the story by letting players become part of it. With Actionbound, you can create an experience that will be fun for your class and will let you unleash your creativity.

Actionbound is a start-up from Berlin. Its objective is to make gamification accessible to everyone and to allow anyone to include game elements in their learning. People use Actionbound to make fun activities for birthday parties or stag/hen events. Teachers use it to make their classes more lively. Institutions such as museums and universities deploy Actionbound to create interactive tours for their visitors. Companies large and small use the app's unique didactic approach to train and develop their employees.

* If you don't have mobile data, download the Actionbound content in advance over wifi (press "Download bound" after scanning the QR code / searching on Actionbound). Make sure GPS location is turned on. The app is free.*

Design your own Bound at www.actionbound.com.

5. A Few Words about This Manual and Its Partners



As mentioned on the copyright page, this manual was written for teachers and other educators who took part in the "Learning from the Past: How to Mediate Historical Topics in Civic Education" project organised in 2019 by EUTIS together with *Političtí vězni.cz* and the German non-governmental organisation BBAG e.V. The project was co-funded from the Erasmus+ programme. For more information about the activities of all three organisations, visit www.eutis.cz, www.politictivezni.cz and www.bbag-ev.de.

The Erasmus+ programme aims to provide informal education to young people aged 13 to 30 and people working with youth. The general objectives of Erasmus+ include motivating young people to be active, to become involved in society and to remove barriers. It gives them the opportunity to develop their ideas, improve mobility and language skills and gain practical experience with work in an international environment. The programme particularly emphasises equal participation of all young people including those with limited opportunities, helping develop tolerance and solidarity. The programme also includes the support of people working with youth and their further development. It also aims to create a European system for the development and innovation of informal learning.



Czech and German participants of the project "Learning from the Past: How to Mediate Historical Topics in Civic Education" (2019).

We wish to thank all the active participants in the project for their pilot trial of the proposed education methods and specific tasks for the individual places of memory near Jáchymov. We also thank the Czech Government Office for printing this manual as part of the Europe for Citizens project (see below). The content of this handbook is based on educational activities of the volunteer association *Političtí vězni.cz* and its project led by Tomáš Bouška which designed the materials for Uran, an educational website for the Czech-German borderlands launched by the Georg Eckert Institut think-tank and Theresa Langer as editor.

EUROPE FOR CITIZENS 2014–2020

The European Union's main programme for the co-financing of international projects aimed at promoting active European citizenship.



OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES

- to contribute to citizens' understanding of the Union, its history and diversity
- to foster European citizenship and to improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at Union level

STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAMME

Strand 1 – European remembrance: Raise awareness of remembrance, common history and values and the Union's aims
Strand 2 – Democratic engagement and civic participation: Encourage democratic and civic participation of citizens at Union level.

Measures in this strands are:

- Town Twinning
- Networks of Towns
- Civil Society Projects

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Non-profit organisations, including civil society organisations, survivors' associations, and cultural, youth, educational and research organisations. Towns/municipalities or their twinning committees or networks; Other levels of local/regional authorities; Federations/associations of local authorities. Natural persons are NOT eligible under this programme.

FUNDING MECHANISMS

The grant is calculated on the basis of a lump sum financing system fixed per "tranches". The same parameters are valid for all participating countries.

AWARD CRITERIA (% of points available)

30% Consistency with the objectives of the Programme and Programme strands: The proposed activities and expected outcomes should contribute to: achieve the objectives of the Programme, strand and measure and comply with the Programme features.

35% Quality of the activity plan of the project:

Efficiency: results should be obtained at reasonable cost.
Projects demonstrate a clear European dimension (i.e. themes addressed within the project activities have to stimulate the reflection on EU history and values beyond national perspective for Strand 1 and engaging citizens in EU public and political life for Strand 2).
Projects gather different types of organisations or develop different types of activities or involve citizens coming from number of professional and social backgrounds.
Projects use new working methods or propose innovative activities.

15% Dissemination:

The proposed project create a multiplier effect among a wider audience than that directly participating in the activities. Use of innovative channels of e-participation, such as social media and information and communication technologies.

20% Impact and Citizens involvement:

The number of organisations, participants and countries involved should be large

enough to ensure a real European outreach of the proposed project.

Sustainability: Proposed projects/activities should be sustainable, reaching medium-or long-term results.

The proposed activities should give participants the possibility to engage actively in the project and with the issue raised.

Projects involve citizens from underrepresented groups or with fewer opportunities will be preferred.

CALENDAR 2020

Strand 1 – European remembrance

Deadline for submission:	Eligibility period: Projects must start between:
1. February 2020	1. September 2020 a 29. February 2021

Strand 2 – Democratic engagement and civic participation

Measure:	Deadline for submission:	Eligibility period: Projects must start between:
Town Twinning	1. February 2020	1. July 2020 a 31. March 2021
	1. September 2020	1. February a 31. October 2021
Networks of Towns	1. March 2020	1. September 2020 a 29. February 2021
	1. September 2020	1. March a 31. August 2021
Civil Society Projects	1. September 2020	1. March a 31. August 2021

CONTACTS

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EACEA – Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

Unit C1 Europe for Citizens
Avenue du Bourget, 1 (SPA203/85), B-1140 Brussels –Belgium
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/europe-for-citizens_en

Strand 1 – European remembrance:

EACEA-C1-REMEMBRANCE@ec.europa.eu

Strand 2 – Democratic engagement and civic participation: EACEA-C1-TT-NT@ec.europa.eu (Town twinning & Networks of towns), EACEA-C1-CIVILSOCIETY@ec.europa.eu (Civil society projects)



WORKING
VERSION

Learning from the Past

HOW TO MEDIATE HISTORICAL
TOPICS IN CIVIC EDUCATION

EUTIS

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