

### **Webinar: EUROPEAN GREEN BELT**





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Borders Separate - Nature Unites: European Green Belt Youth Encounters



# **BESTbelt - More power for the European Green Belt**



The EU-funded BESTbelt project, part of the European Green Belt Initiative, aims to enhance biodiversity conservation across 24 countries. Launched in 2021, it empowers civil society organizations with small grants to protect biodiversity, restore nature, raise environmental awareness, strengthen communities, and create green jobs until the project's end in 2026. With 49 projects in 21 countries involving around 80 organizations, BESTbelt promotes cross-border collaboration to turn the vision of safeguarding Europe's longest green network into reality.









### **Borders Separate – Nature Unites**



#### **Our Project...**

...connects young people across borders exploring nature and history of the

European Green Belt borders.

- Empowering young people through environmental education and landscape maintenance activities.
- Exploring the European Green Belt's rich biodiversity and the fates of people along the former Iron Curtain.
- Strengthening cross-border cooperation.











#### **Our Partners**





National Park Örseg, Hungary





Municipality Salovci, Slovenia









### European Green Belt Partner region Raab-Örseg-Goricko



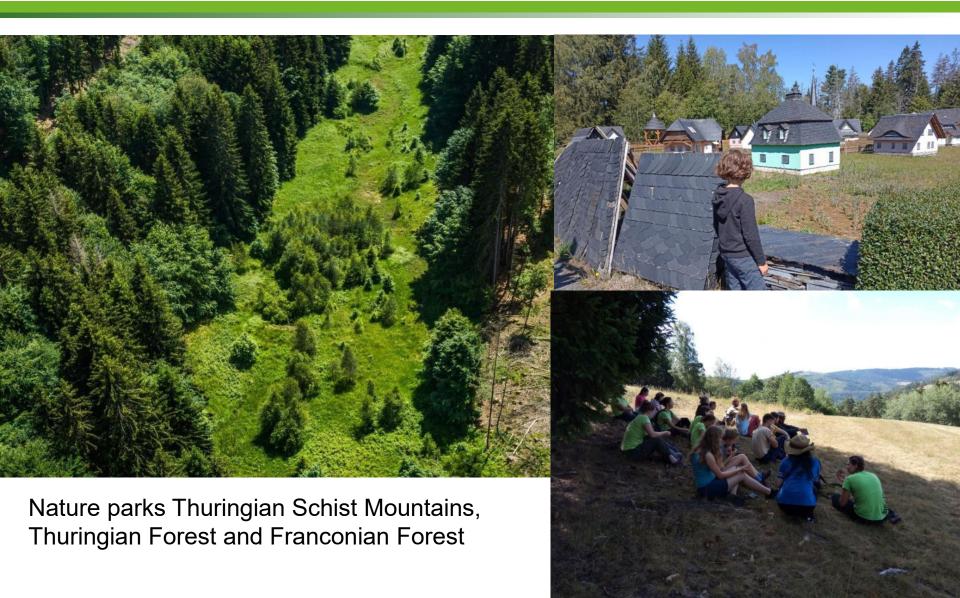
#### Partners:

- National park Örseg, Hungary
- Municipality Salovci in the Nature park Goricko, Slovenia



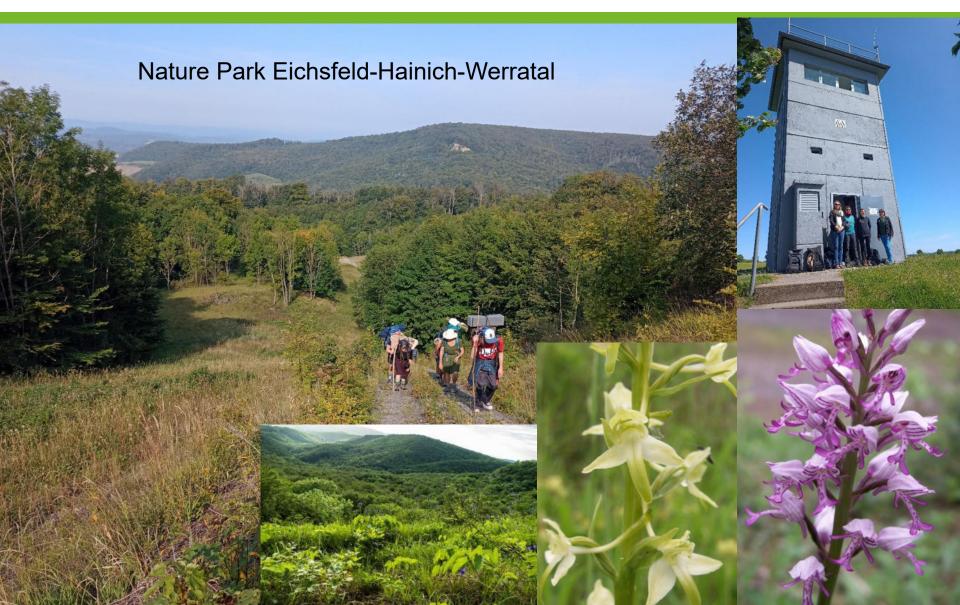


# European Green Belt Partner region Thuringian Schist Mountains





### European Green Belt Partner region Werra Mountains





### **Our Programs** for Young People





### Content and Activities I



- . History of the Iron Curtain from the Second World War until 1989, encompassing the two military power blocs and social and economic systems
- Personal Stories (experiences of escape, forced) resettlement, life in the restricted zone, or as border guard)
- · The development of the Green Belt as posivitve example of transformation (National Natural Monument, Natura 2000)
- · The importance of the Green Belt for biodiversity, species protection and habitat connectivity
- Landscape History: explaing geology, cultural landscape, influence on biodiversity and habitats at the Green Belt
- . Dependence of species spectrum on Site Conditions
- Succession versus landscape management
- Borders (personal, visible, invisible borders)

- · Excursions, including identification of local animals and plants, and visits to historical remnants of the former border.
- · School projects with field trips (e.g., assessing site conditions and habitats, identifying plants and animals, conducting water quality and hydromorphic al structure).
- . Green Belt Rallys, featuring environmental games and nature discoveries, e.g. with kindergardens.
- Work camps/ Youth camps with locals and internationals/ Landscape management with volunteers (e.g., scything, clearing bushes, creating animal shelters, land art)
- · Youth leader/multiplyer training: multi-day hikes exploring, the Green Belt with expert inputs and contemporary witnesses
- Readings and conversations with contemporary witnesses around the campfire
- · Supervision of seminar papers
- Virtual 360 degree tours (e.g. www.360-grad.bund.net/gruenesband/rhoen) top explore the Green Belt regions digitally











#### **Youth Work Camps**



















#### **The Iron Curtain**















#### **History of the Iron Curtain**



- 11.9.1944 London Protocol: Great Britain, USA and USSR plan the division into four occupation zones in a post-war order
- 8.5.1945 The German Wehrmacht surrenders.
- 30.6.1946 Soviet military administration closes the demarcation line of the occupation zones.
- 7.10.1949 Foundation of the German Democratic Republic.
- 26.5.1952 Decree of the GDR Council of Ministers on measures on the demarcation line, establishment of a 5 km exclusion zone and a 500 m wide protective strip. First wave of forced resettlement of more than 10,000 "untrustworthy" people
- 1961-1972 Expansion of the border fortifications, laying of mines, automatic firing systems.
- 1983-1985 Dismantling of mines and automatic firing systems.
- 1985-1989 Gorbatchovs reforms weaken the strict control of the USSR over Eastern Europe Summer 1989 Mass exodus of GDR citizens via Budapest and Prague to the FRG.
- 9.11.1989 Opening of the borders from the GDR to the FRG.
- 1.7.1990 Economic, monetary and social union between the FRG and the GDR
- 3.10.1990 The accession of the GDR to the FRG initiates the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the conclusion of the Cold War.











# **Grinding of villages Loss of homes**













### Separation of families friends and lovers







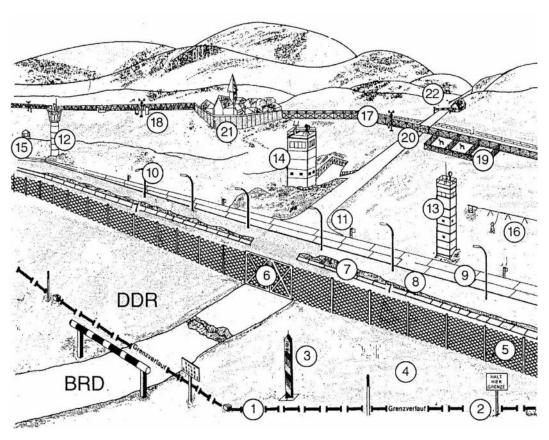






# Structure of the German border fortifications





- 1 national border, 2 border sign
- 3 border post, 4 upstream territory
- 5 expanded metal fence
- 6 gate for border guards
- 7 vehicle barrier ditch and minefield
- 8 harrowed K6 lane
- 9 column road
- 10 traffic light system
- 11 call and intercom pillar
- 12/13 observation towers
- 14/15 command post/bunker
- 16,19 dog kennel and dog run
- 17 border signal fence 2 with gate
- 18 power distribution/switchgear
- 21 Concrete barrier wall at villages
- 22 Checkpoint on the access roads





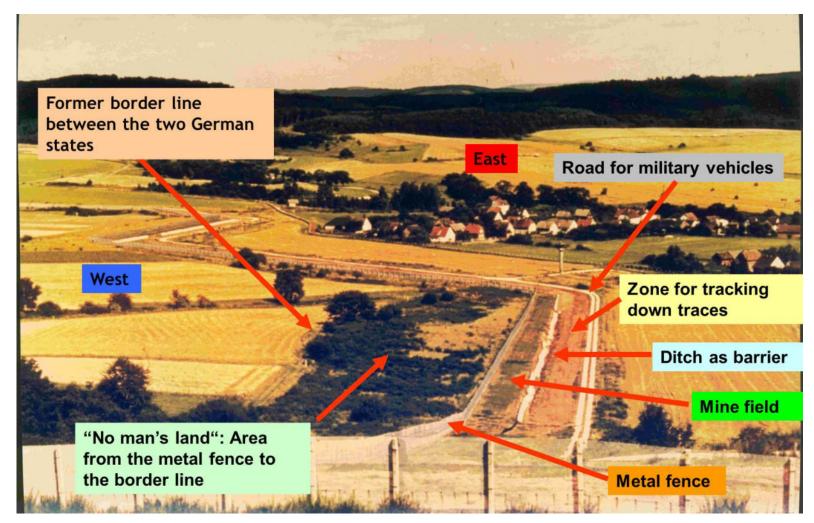






### Structure of the German border fortifications















#### Nature in the border area















# Young ornithologists discover rare birds in the border zone in the 70ies















### Whinchat on border post













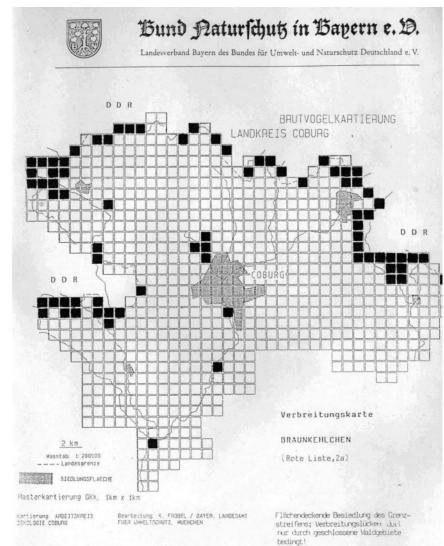


#### **Press articles 1981**





Whinchats singing out of the death strip like pearls on a string







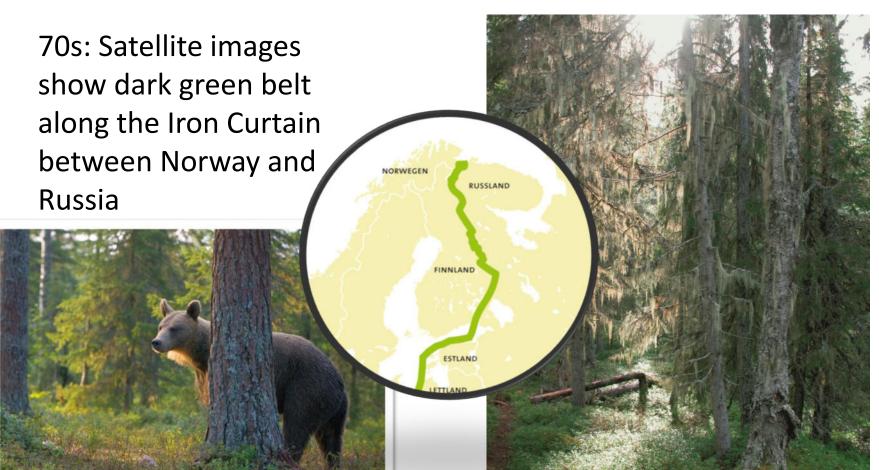






# A dark green belt seen from space













# August 1989 a first hole in the Iron Curtain





Paneuropean Picnic leads to Mass escape of GDR citizens from Hungary to Austria









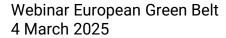


### First cross-border Green Belt meeting one month after the opening of the Berlin wall





400 nature conservationists from GDR and FRG meet invited by BUND and pass a resolution on the protection of the Green Belt













### The history of the European Green Belt



The European Green Belt forms a transcontinental axis of the European ecological network along the former 'Iron Curtain'. It has a total length of over 12.500 km. It passes through eight biogeographic regions and touches 24 states. Along the Green Belt a lot of valuable landscapes can be found. Additionally it serves as a refuge for numerous threatened species and habitats.

Finally the European Green Belt forms a historical memorial to the former division of Europe. Protecting and developing the Green Belt therefore also contributes to the process of Europe growing together.

Main target of the initiative ,European Green Belt' is to develop and to protect the Green Belt as one of the most important pan-European habitat axes in the long-run. For further information: <a href="https://www.europeangreenbelt.org">www.europeangreenbelt.org</a>













- 2005 first Central European Green Belt Conference took in Mitwitz (Germany), organized by BUND and funded by BfN
- 2006 first EU-funded INTERREG III B- EGB project initiated by BUND with 18 partners from 8 countries, contents: gap analysis, sustainable regional development, sensitive infrastructure development, PR work, touristic marketing and the establishment of a trans-boundary network of stakeholders
- 2008 The Albanian part of the Jablanica-Shebenik-Mountains becomes national park
- 2009 BUND initiates the INTERREG IV B-project 'baltic green belt' with 15 partners of the riparian states from Germany to the Finnish-Russian border
- 2009 Coalition agreement in Germany "we want to initiate the development of a "European Green Belt"
- 2010 he Ministers for Environment of Finland, Norway and Russia sign a Memorandum of Understanding for working jointly towards the conservation of the Fennoscandian Green Belt













- 2011 INTERREG -project 'GreenNet' (Central Europe Programme) with 22 project partners from & states along the Green Belt, including 'Lunch Debate' to present the Egb Initiative to Members of the European Parliament
- 2011 New organizational structure planned:
- 2012 EGB Association Euronatur chair, 4 regional coordinators incl. Baltic Sea states
- 2013 EU-Commission on Green Infrastructure identifies EGB Initiative as model project for the implementation of pan-European GI
- 2013 Celebration of the 10th anniversary of the EGB initiative by the German Ministry of Environment in Berlin, 11 states sign **Joint Declaration of Intent on the European Green Belt'**; followed by 7 others and supporters
- 2013 the Finnish Ministry for Environment announces a trilateral project to facilitate the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Fennoscandian Green Belt











- 2014 The 'European Green Belt Association e.V.' is founded at the 8<sup>th</sup> pan-European Green Belt conference in Slavonice, Czech Republic
- 2014 Project "Protecting Biodiversity in the Balkans Strengthening cooperation along the Balkan Green Belt", run by EuroNatur and IUCN, financially supported by the German Federal Environmental Foundation

  Presentation of the EGB at the World Parks Congress (WPC) in Sydney and at the European Economic and Social Committee (EWSA) at the Green Week in Brussels
- 2015 Project "The European Green Belt as part of Green Infrastructure"
- **2016 Start of the** 10 years implementation period of the large scale nature conservation project "Grünes Band Rodachtal-Lange Berge-Steinachtal"
- 2018 Start of the INTERREG -project "DaRe to Connect" (D2C) with 11 partners from 8 states for further development of the connectivity of the Green Belt as backbone of a trans-national ecological corridor













- 2018 The **"Eisenacher Resolution"** prepared by the European Green Belt Association e.V., was passed at 10<sup>th</sup> Pan-European Green Belt Conference by the 120 participants of the conference. It calls on decision-makers from European to local level to implement the necessary measures to preserve the Green Belt as part of the Green Infrastructure and as natural and cultural heritage
- 2018 designation of the Thuringian Green Belt as National Nature Monument, followed by other federal states, even in Western Germany
- 2022 Process started to designate the EGB as World Natural and Cultural Heritage



**BEST**helt







# "Green Infrastructure" Green Belt Europe

#### Protected areas along the European Green Belt

- Protected areas in 1 km corridor: 47 %
- Protected areas in 50 km corridor: : 27 %

With decreasing distance to the former Iron Curtain...

the proportion of protected areas increases

and

the average distance between the protected areas decreases

\*laut UNSCR 1244 und IGH Gutachten

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### European Green Belt





Traverses

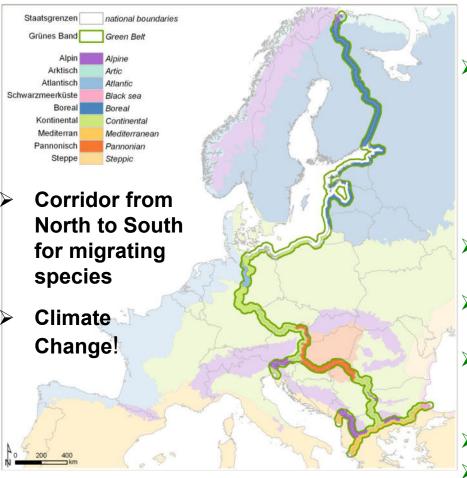
- 8 biogeographic regions
- 24 states
- Comprises
  - Wilderness areas
  - Cultural landscapes
  - Water ecosystems and coasts
  - Threatened species
- Contributes to the diversity of European nature
- Contributes to the pan-European Ecological Network
- Unique European memorial landscape connecting nature and history
- Tells millions of personal stories
- Brings together people formerly separated

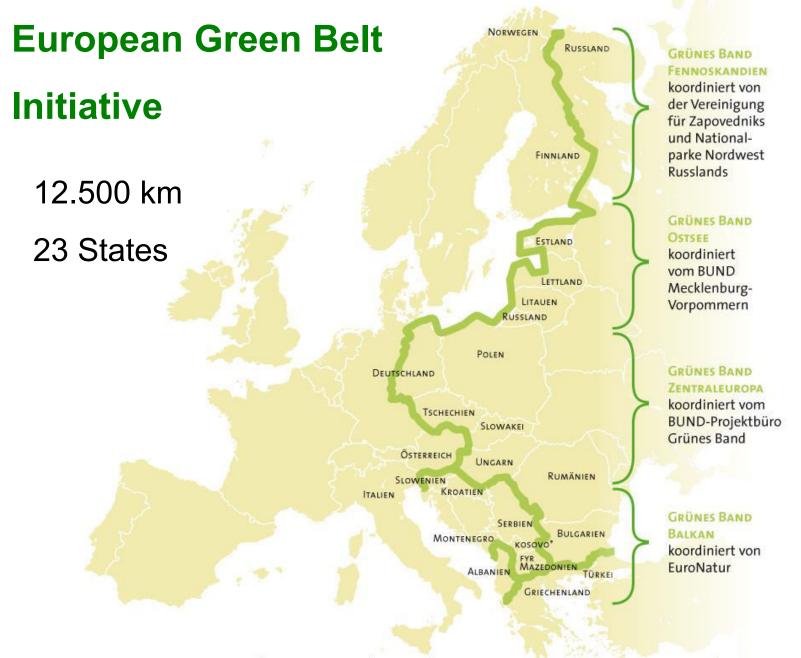










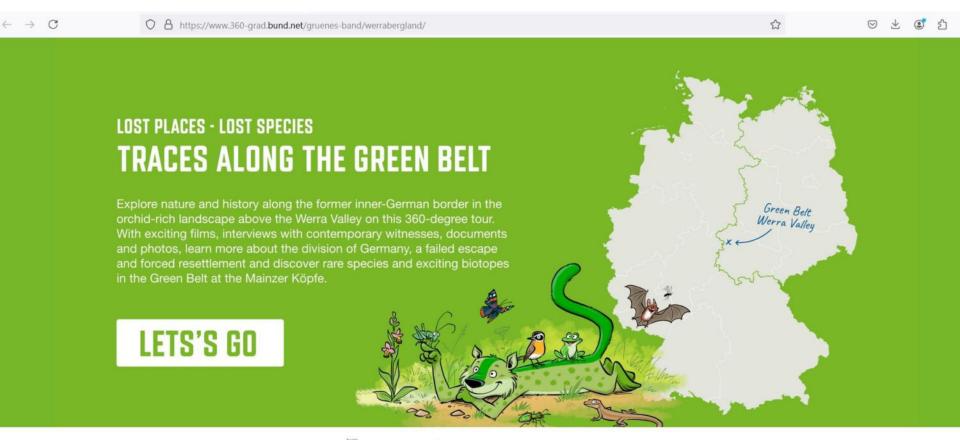






### VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE GREEN BELT BY 360 DEGREE TOURS

Presenting nature and history of Green Belt regions for inhabitants, tourists and especially young people















#### **CONCEPT AND EXAMPLES**

The Green Belt idea is shown at the specific example of regions along the Green Belt, at the same time promoting these regions sustainably

- finished: Werra Mountain Range, Rhoen (also in English) and Altmark
- in progress: Thuringian Schist Mountains (inner German Green Belt) and Inner Bavarian/Bohemian Forest (Germany/Czech Republic)

Embedded in high resolution 360 degree pictures (aereal and on the soil), visitors can explore different points in a distance of up to 5 kmres and find:

- film clips (species, acitivities, historic videos)
- interviews with historians, contemporary witnesses and species specialists
- picture serieses
- text tables
- further panoramas





### 360 DEGREE TOUR WERRA MOUNTAIN RANGE

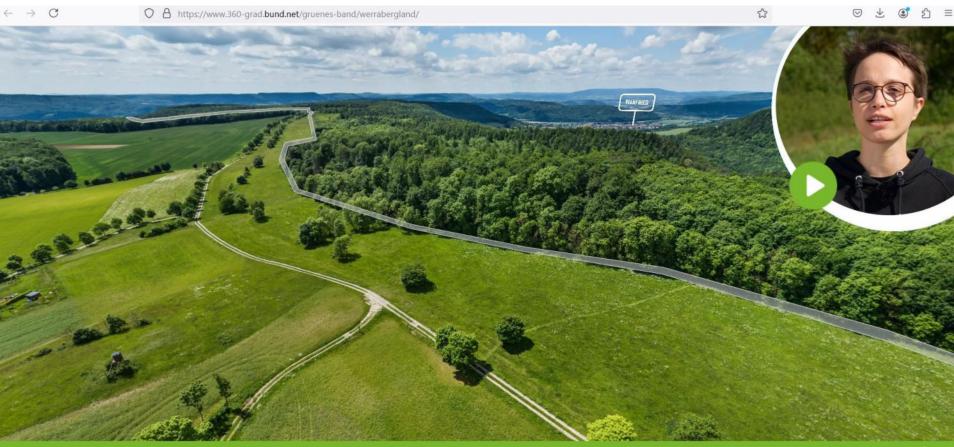
Starting from an aereal panorama, Sophia from BUNDjugend Thuringia (Young Friends of the Earth Germany) explains the tour and its context





#### **360 DEGREE TOUR WERRA MOUNTAINS**

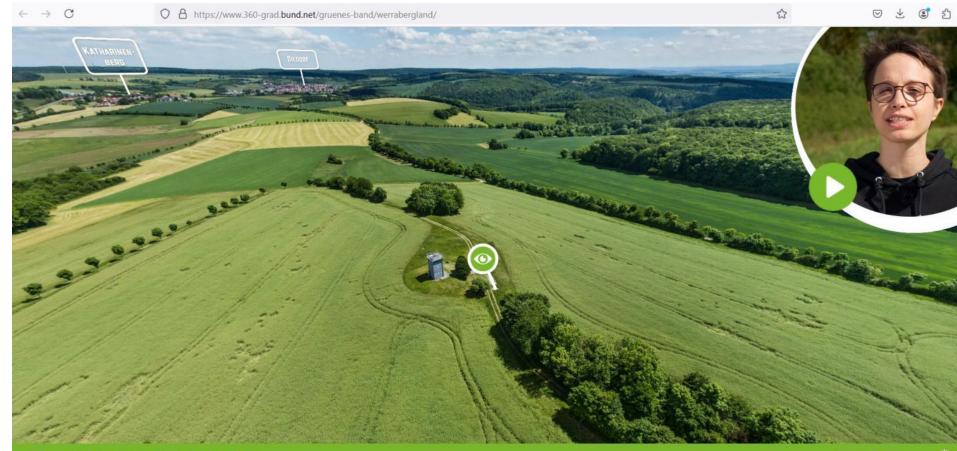
The former border line can be switched on





#### **360 DEGREE TOUR WERRA MOUNTAINS**

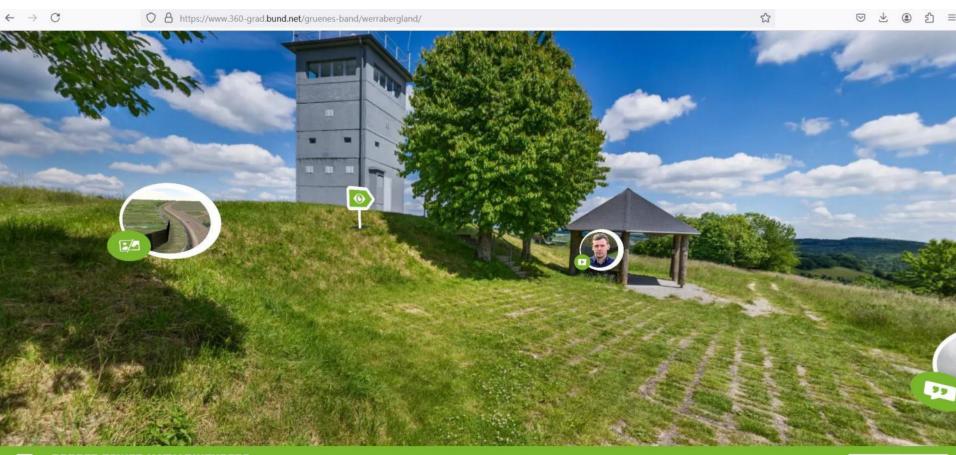
After turning around virtually you can see the former border tower, where you can "go down" and find more information





#### **360 DEGREE TOUR WERRA MOUNTAINS**

Listen to an interview with a historian, look at schemes of border installations and Green Belt, see documents and a Stalin quotation concerning border fortification and forced resettlement.





#### **360 DEGREE TOUR WERRA MOUNTAINS**

Historian Dr. Stöber explains the history of the former inner German border





"Go" inside the tower, explore it and meet contemporary witness Katharina Schlothauer, who lived in the border area as a child and felt the permanent fear of her grandmother and parents to provoke resettlement



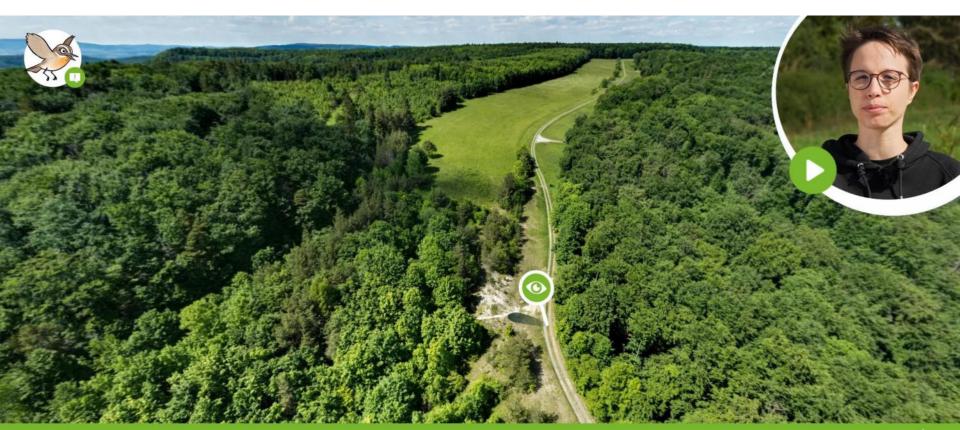


On the top of the tower, you meet Rudolf Hülfenshaus, who failed to escape restriction as a young man and was badly injured





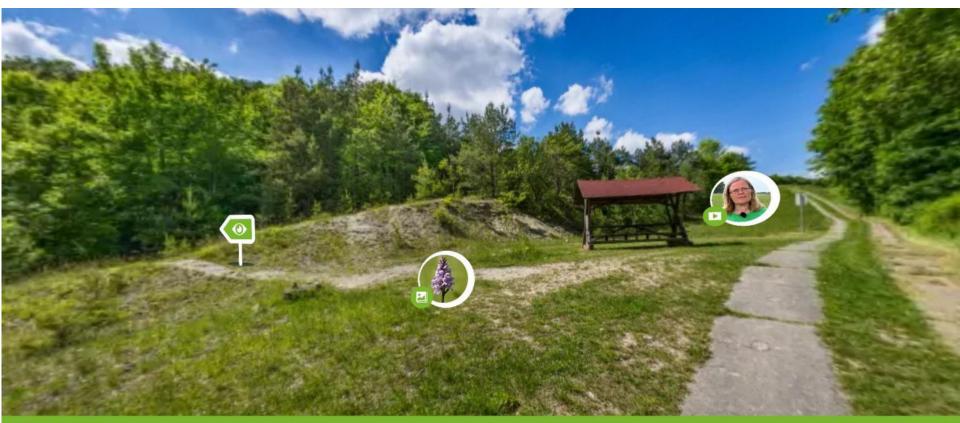
Going back to the aereal panorama, you can switch to the Green Belt From above you see the Green Belt near the calcaric mountain area "Mainzer Köpfe"





#### Going down you find

- · an interview about the Green Belt
- a picture series about rare plants and information on local geology
- and can move to relicts of the former border



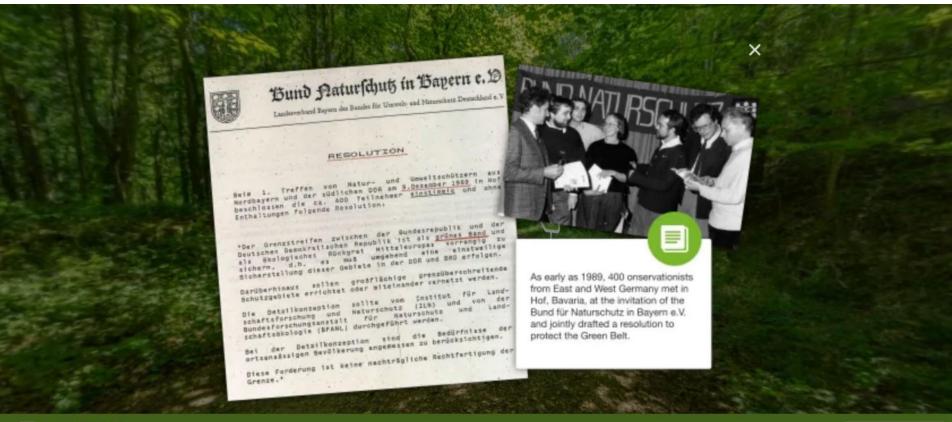


You can "walk" virtually to an orchid meadow in the Green Belt



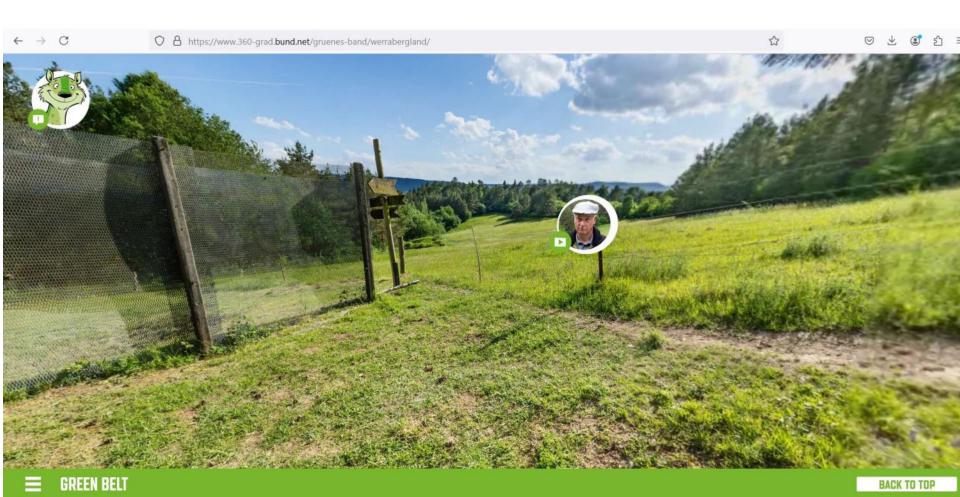


In between you find the Green Belt resolution approved at the first Green Belt conference on December 9th 1989



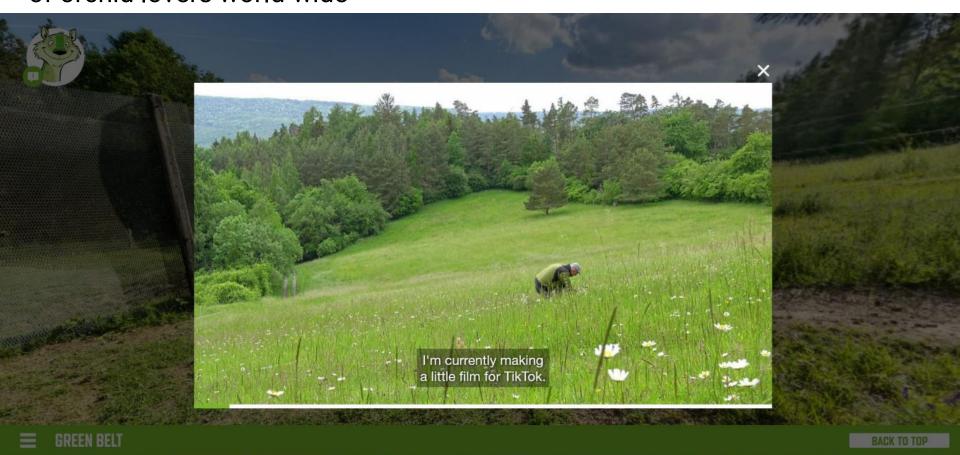


You see relicts of the border fence, a historian tells you something about agent sluices and orchid specialist Gerhard Gramm-Wallner explains orchid ecology





The filmers were quite astonished, that after the filming this not so young man went into the meadow to take a video for tik-tok to reach his followers of orchid lovers world-wide





# **EXAMPLE 360 DEGREE TOUR WERRA MOUNTAINS**

You can also "walk" to two demolished objects, a traditional guesthouse and an estate long inhabited by two families, who suffered forced resettlement.





## "Gasthaus zur Guten Hoffnung"

First the innkeeper and his family were resettled over night and their land was used for agriculture. Later the guesthouse was torn down.





#### **HOW AND WHY IT WORKS**

- 1. We have very good resonance on the tours in the regions. Nature park info and biosphere reserve centers use them.
- 2. People love stories. Interest can be raised, if we get them emotionally with fascinating nature and exciting and emotional stories.
- 3. Esp. young people love to explore interactively and are used to switch from information to background, to side information, to video and vice versa.
- 4. Pictures, videos and audios are complementary and illustrate information.
- 5. Users decide by themselves, which information they want to know better. They are free to skip parts or hear rsdp. watch videos and audios twice.
- 6. It is (only) a bit like exploring in the field, which it can be combined with.
- 7. In every region you can decide freely, which main topics you want to present.





## Promotion of the 360 degree tours

- QR Code with integration into websites, flyers, etc. of cooperations partners like biosphere reserves or nature parks
- Posters, tables and post cards with links and QR code to take away: www.360-grad.bund.net/gruenes-band/werrabergland/ www.360-grad.bund.net/gruenes-band/rhoen www.360-grad.bund.net/gruenes-band/altmark
- Integration into permanent exhibition of nature park
- Presentation before teachers, youth leaders, at history fair etc.
- Presentation in the field, on tablets











#### **SAVE THE DATES**



#### 2 More Webinars:

March 20, 2:30 - 4:00 PM April 29, 2:30 - 4:00 PM

Creating projects along the Green Belt Skill-sharing on personal projects at the European

with groups – From planning to Green Belt – Exchange between experienced and

implementation. future group leaders. No prior knowledge required!

#### **Camps**

- June 12-15, 2025: Youth Leader Training at the Green Belt Thuringia
- July 13-20, 2025: Youth Camp at the Green Belt in the Tri-Border Region of Austria, Hungary, and Slovenia
- August 1-8, 2026: Work Camp at the Green Belt in Thuringia











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## Thank you for your attention



