

= Bikernieki Memorial =

Bikernieki Memorial (Latvian : Biķernieku memoriāls) is a war memorial to The Holocaust victims of World War II in Bikernieki forest (Latvian : Biķernieku mežs) , near Riga , Latvia . Bikernieki forest is the biggest mass murder site during The Holocaust in Latvia with two memorial territories spanning over 80 @, @ 000 square metres (860 @, @ 000 sq ft) with 55 marked burial sites with around 20 @, @ 000 victims still buried in total .

The memorial was initially planned and construction started in 1986 , but was delayed after Latvia declared independence in 1991 . The construction was revived in 2000 by German War Graves Commission with the help of local Latvian organisations and several German cities . It was financed mostly by German government and organisations , Austrian State Fund , and involved city donations . It was designed by Sergey Rizh and opened on November 30 , 2001 .

= = Description = =

The architect of the memorial is Sergey Rizh (Russian : ????? ? ? ???) , who worked for 15 years on the design of the memorial , saying it was " his human obligation " to devote his career to this . The memorial is located in the Bikernieki forest , next to the Bikernieku Street (Latvian : Biķernieku iela) passing through the forest . There are two memorial territories ? 6 @, @ 550 and 79 @, @ 630 square metres (70 @, @ 500 and 857 @, @ 100 sq ft) wide on both sides from the road . In addition to smaller forest pathways , there are two roads leading to the memorial 's central square ? a historic road used to bring the victims and the main central road paved with concrete slabs and marked with a concrete arc exiting to Bikernieku Street .

The centre of assembly houses a black granite cube ? a symbolic altar with engraving from Book of Job 16 : 18 " Earth , don 't cover my blood . Let my cry have no place to rest . " in Latvian , Russian , German , and Hebrew languages . The immediate area is surrounded by 4 @, @ 000 granite stones arranged in a grid of forty @-@ five 4 @-@ by @-@ 4 @-@ metre (13 ft x 13 ft) squares , and resembles a traditional Jewish cemetery . The unique rough @-@ hewn 0 @. @ 2 @-@ to @-@ 1 @. @ 5 @-@ metre (0 @. @ 66 to 4 @. @ 92 ft) high granite stones of black , gray , and reddish colors come from Zhytomyr region in Ukraine . The stones are carved with European city names representing the home towns of the victims . The entrances to the memorial and other grave sites in the forest are marked with concrete pillars with symbols representing various groups of the fallen ? Star of David representing Jews , Crown of Thorns representing war prisoners , and Christian cross representing civilians . Historians from the New Synagogue Berlin ? Centrum Judaicum , educational establishment House of the Wannsee Conference , and historians from the member cities have documented the names of over 31 @, @ 000 victims , published in Book of Remembrance : The German , Austrian and Czechoslovakian Jews deported to the Baltic States (2003) .

Despite the nature of memorial , the surrounding hills are a popular summer hiking and winter sledding and skiing location . Although Germany supplies annual funding for memorial maintenance , it is insufficient to fund regular police patrols and surveillance . The memorial and gravestones have been vandalised several times , each time attracting media attention .

= = History = =

Bikernieki forest is Latvia 's biggest mass murder site during The Holocaust of World War II during years 1941 ? 44 . There are 55 marked mass burial sites in the forest . About 46 @, @ 500 people were reported to have been killed there , including Latvian and Western European Jews , Soviet prisoners of war , and Nazis ' political adversaries . The exact number of victims is unknown . Although Soviet Nazi War Crime Research Committee declared over 46 @, @ 000 murders , later excavations did not confirm this number . The number of victims is speculated to be closer to 30 @, @ 000 .

The first victims were a few thousand men arrested in July 1941 and brought from Riga Central

Prison . In 1942 another 12 @, @ 000 Jews were brought from Germany , Austria , and Czechoslovakia . In 1943 Riga Ghetto prisoners were brought here who were unable to work at Kaiserwald concentration camp , followed by those from the camp itself unable to work in 1944 . In 1943 and onwards Nazis dug up graves and burned the bodies to hide the evidence . It is estimated that there are now around 20 @, @ 000 victims buried in the forest .

= = Planning and construction = =

In the 1960s , only a simple commemorative plaque was placed in the forest and the grave sites were marked with concrete borders . The plaque stated that 46 @, @ 500 Soviet citizens had died and omitted mentioning nationalities . The location had been neglected and slowly degrading since . The first plans for the Bikernieki forest grave site cleanup were formed in 1986 by a team from the Komun?lprojekts Institute . The team included Ga?ina Loba?eva , Vija Jansone , Ga?ina Alsina , Ineta V?tola , M?ris Galarovskis , and Sergey Rizh in the lead . The project received Riga City Council 's approval and state funding and the works continued until 1991 when the current government was dissolved after Latvia declared independence . The work halted at around a fifth of the completion with only the surrounding terrain cleared and central and entrance memorial signs erected .

The project was revived in 1993 ? 4 by the initiative of Eric Herzl , an expert from Austrian Society of Memorials , who obtained the permission from Riga City Council to continue the construction work . Austria brought the project to the attention of the German War Graves Commission and more than a dozen German cities in 1999 . On May 23 , 2000 , 13 German city representatives and the president of German War Graves Commission met in Berlin to form German Riga Committee . [a] The chapter was formed to plan and build a war memorial in Bikernieki forest to commemorate the Jews deported and killed at the start of the 1940s . The project was funded by German War Graves Commission , the National Fund of the Republic of Austria , the German government including Central Council of Jews in Germany , and donations from several German town municipalities . The work was carried out by The German Commission , Latvian Fraternal Cemeteries Commission , and the Riga City Council . The projected cost was DEM 900 @, @ 000 and the actual project cost DEM 1M (or LVL 285 @, @ 000) .

The memorial was opened on November 30 , 2001 , 60 years after the start of the deportations . The event was opened by the former president of Latvia Vaira V??e @-@ Freiberga who in her speech noted the importance of raising people 's awareness about the events that took place there . The event was well attended , including former Latvian Prime Minister Andris B?rzi?? , Latvian chief rabbi Natans Barkans , officials and ambassadors from various countries , former ghetto and concentration camp inmates , and relatives of the victims from Lithuania , Estonia , Germany , Israel , Austria , and Russia . Several research , education , and remembrance events were held after the opening ceremony . The opening and the following events received local and foreign media coverage . The opening ceremony ended with a Jewish prayer Kaddish by Riga Jewish community cantor Vlad Shulman .

= = Reception = =

The architect Sergey Rizh says he attempted to show the idea of the memorial with a " concise language of architectural forms " . His goal was to encompass the surrounding terrain in line with contemporary art . Art historian Solvita Krese called the project successful and lauded the design for avoiding exaggeration of themes at hand . She also noted that the memorial fit well with the terrain . Architect Ausma Skuji?a also said the project was successful among many other less successful ones . She stressed its positive nature and how the memorial " reconciles with the pain , and evens it out . " Winfried Nachtwei describes it as the " first of its kind in Eastern Europe " .