



Views of the Fortress and the Danube in Neu-Ulm

Glacis Park, Federal Fortress and a Fascinating Church



Audio point 1: Schießhausallee

Before we walk along the footpath that leads into Glacis Park, let's stop for a moment ...

... because here, we can already show you a first remnant of the Federal Fortress that once stood here.

See how the footpath leads gently uphill? The park area rises slightly.

This gentle rise was the first protective wall of the fortress – a so-called “glacis”.

And now, imagine this landscape without any of the trees and the houses on the other side of the road.

Because at that time there were the so-called rayon laws, which stipulated that people weren't allowed to build any structures at all within a certain radius of the fortress. That ensured that enemies had nowhere to hide.

So now we'll take the footpath up to the former glacis. Back with you in a few moments!

Audio point 2: Glacis

We continue straight on here, and then we'll stop briefly above the children's playground.

Then, further back, you'll already be able to see the massive outer wall of the fortress, with its many embrasures, or shooting slits.

And now compare the height of the glacis, on which we're standing, with the height of the fortress wall.

The glacis was purposely built just high enough to place it on the same level as the wall.

We'll walk down to the playground now, and then continue on to the right.

Audio point 3: Playground

Well, you've already heard quite a bit about military defence – but today, this place has been turned into something completely different. The Glacis has become an area for playing, relaxing and strolling – and today, among other things, you'll find cafés, clubs and exhibitions inside the former fortress buildings.

Before the rope bridge, we'll go up the steps to the right - so we'll stay here on the right side of the moat.

Directions: Up the steps and then continue to the left

At the top of the steps we continue on to the left, along the footpath.

Audio point 4: Fortress wall

While you're listening to this audiopoint, we'll continue walking along the footpath.

The walls here in Glacis Park are among the best preserved of the Federal Fortress. And even though their dimensions are huge, they're just a tiny fraction of the whole thing! On your screen we're showing you a map of the fortifications that once completely surrounded the cities of Ulm and Neu-Ulm – extending over a distance of around nine kilometres!

On the map, our location right now is marked with a red dot.

To the north was the command centre – the so-called Wilhelmsburg Citadel.

The fortress was designed to accommodate up to 100,000 soldiers! And all of this only because of France, the arch-enemy at the time, from whom the German Confederation wanted to protect itself – hence the name Federal Fortress. The confederation consisted of almost 40 states, and was formed after the victory over Napoleon.

Several towns formed the defence line, directly on the border with France, and the Federal Fortress of Ulm was built as an additional stronghold behind them. The fortress here took a whole 17 years to build and was completed in 1859.

The construction method was something completely new at that time. Before then, fortresses had usually been built in a star shape – to avoid blind spots.

Now, there was now a much larger oval ground plan instead, with elongated walls, as we see here.

One advantage of this was that there was more space inside the fortress.

And next, we're going to see which structure ensured that here, in this layout, there were no blind spots where enemies could hide. We'll continue straight ahead along the footpath.

Audio point 5: Caponnière

We'll continue down to the small bridge, which we'll be crossing in a few moments.

We've now arrived at the so-called caponnière - the structure protruding forward from the fortress wall here.

It made it possible to fire at the trench from the sides as well.

Above the embrasures in the caponnière, you can see small slits. Their function was to allow the smoke from the guns and cannons to escape to the outside.

And the roof of the caponnière is made of earth - there's a reason for that, too.

It was supposed to buffer cannon impacts.

Our route now leads over the bridge and then to the left, along the caponnière.

This place also shows us once again how times have changed. In those days there used to be defence plans... today, they've become event plans ...

... for the large open-air stage!

Applause

And if you want to raise a glass and toast a united, peaceful Europe, there's a nice beer garden just behind the caponnière! So - cheers!

Beer glasses clinking

Audio point 6: View beyond the wall

Now we'll go through the passage in the wall - so, up the steps ...

... and after that, we'll continue to the left.

Here you can look out through the embrasures - this was the soldiers' point of view back then.

And on closer inspection you'll notice that even the area beyond the wall was doubly secured, with additional embrasures.

If you continue to the left along the wall, you'll come to a small gate. That's where we'll be back in touch again, in a moment.

Audio point 7: Gate

The gate in front of us led from the inside of the fortress to the outside ...

And notice the two grooves in each of the side walls... on the right and left.

In an emergency, the soldiers could push wooden beams into them to reinforce the gate. Because a gate like this was naturally a weak point that had to be specially secured!

We'll go through the gate now and then continue further along the fortress wall.

On the way you'll see countless embrasures, which - like everything else here - were designed down to the smallest detail.

They were constructed in such a way that, if possible, every single location in front of the wall could be fired at.

At the same time, these slits in the wall limited the field of fire for the soldiers in the fortress - preventing them from accidentally hitting each other.

We'll follow the wall further.

Audio point 8: Aggressive underwater enemy

Even though the days of the fortress are fortunately over, there's one aggressive enemy who still exists here - and he's under the water. We're showing him on your screen ...

... the pike!

You can sit on the parapet here - it's best to go up to it quietly and calmly - and then look down into the water.

Then with a little patience, you'll have a good chance of spotting fish.

The pike is an expert at hiding in the reeds here - and whenever its prey comes swimming along, it shoots out like an arrow.

Pike of almost one metre in length have been seen here in the moat.

We'll leave you to observe the water a little longer - then, we'll continue on our way.

Audio point 9: Barely built - already obsolete

When the Federal Fortress was completed in 1859, it ranked as the most modern fortress in Europe. The state of the art. But just a few years later, all that was over. Everything we see here - the wall, the moat, and the glacis - suddenly became obsolete.

This was mainly because weapons technology had changed. Guns suddenly had a much longer range - and the new ammunition didn't just stay put after impact, it exploded. So the walls were no longer sufficient for protection and, despite various attempts at modernisation, the Ulm fortress simply could not keep up with developments any longer.

Even before the Second World War, Neu-Ulm had finally lost its status as a fortress town.

The fact that we can walk here through such attractive natural scenery today, by the way, is thanks to a state garden show in 1980. It transformed the glacis, which was rather dilapidated back then, into a park.

So, let's carry on enjoying it as we continue along beside the wall.

Directions: Turn right, through the passage

Next we turn to the right.

So we go through the passageway, and then follow the footpath upwards.

Like the glacis earlier, the hill we're walking up here was also built up artificially.

Around 8,000 workers were employed to build the Federal Fortress!

It was a really huge project. The terrain was flat, so all the ramparts we still see today first had to be heaped up at great expense.

Incidentally, the whole thing was financed largely by the high reparations France had to pay after Napoleon's defeat.

When you reach the top of the path, first continue a little way to the left.

Then you'll see a flight of steps leading down to the right, to Neu-Ulm's landmark: the water tower.

And underneath the tower is where we'll be back in touch again.

Audio point 10: Water Tower

When the people of Neu-Ulm inaugurated this water tower in 1900, the fortress had already lost most of its importance. That's also clear from the fact that the tower is built on top of a former powder magazine. That gave it more height, which was important for the water pressure.

At the top of the tower there's still a huge water tank, which supplied Neu-Ulm's inhabitants with tap-water for the first time. People had previously had to fetch their water from pumping stations, but the new water tower enabled the city to supply 400 households all at once. A step into the modern age – and the people of Neu-Ulm were very proud of it. That's also reflected in the tower's striking neo-Baroque look.

Wedding music

These days, the water tower's used for something else entirely. As you can hear ...

Wedding music

... it now contains a wedding venue!

Wedding music

If you walk along the side of the water tower, you'll still be able to make out the former powder magazine on which it is built.

The openings in the wall look like embrasures, but they were actually ventilation shafts – put there to ensure that the gunpowder inside the magazine was always well ventilated and remained dry.

You've now seen Neu-Ulm's most famous sight.

And if you look around, you can also see Ulm's most famous one as well! It's over three times higher. We'll be telling you more about it in a moment, down on the banks of the Danube.

We'll leave the park now, and go immediately to the left along the road.

Directions: Straight ahead

We keep going straight ahead here.

Audio point 11: Memminger Gate

Earlier on we saw that the outer gates of the fortress were specially reinforced – and here you can experience the same thing, but on a much larger scale!

The Federal Fortress had only two entrances on the Neu-Ulm side. And the Memminger Gate here was one of them!

You can go through it.

And then you'll notice several grooves in the side walls again, which were there to slide wooden beams into if necessary.

At the end of the passage, you'll arrive at the main gate, where almost everything is still original:

From the solid iron armour plating on the outside ...

... all the way to the so-called "wicket gate", set into the large gate. This small entrance made it possible to gain access to the fortress even after the main gate had been barred shut.

Our walk then leads on past the Memminger Gate, and along the road we were on just now.

Audio point 12: White Tower

The last remnant of the Federal Fortress that we'd like to show you on today's tour is the so-called White Tower. If you walk over to the parapet and look across the Danube... it's over there on the other bank... a little to the left.

The gun turret was intended to defend the Danube - and it has an earthen roof as well.

If you compare the turret with the fortifications you've seen so far on our tour, notice any difference?

The name "White Tower" already gives it away.

Like all the fortifications over on the Ulm side, it's built of white limestone. The fortifications here in Neu-Ulm, on the other hand, are mainly built of red brick.

From this we can see that two different powers were at work in the construction of the fortress: the kingdoms of Württemberg and Bavaria. The fact that the two of them were rivals can still be seen in the fortress today. The Württembergers used their limestone quarries for the construction work on the Ulm side - and the Bavarian construction manager responsible for Neu-Ulm decided to use red bricks that he'd had specially produced for the fortress.

If you're curious to find out even more about the fortress at this point and explore more of it, we recommend the signposted "Festungsweg", or Fortress Trail.

We'll carry on walking to the right now, under the bridge - and around 200 metres further on, we'll be back in touch again.

Audio point 13: View of Ulm

If there's anyone from Neu-Ulm among you, it's best if you cover your ears briefly for this next piece of information - after all, you must have heard it often enough. Okay, here we go:

"The most beautiful thing about Neu-Ulm is ...

... the view across to Ulm."

Ha! Well, as we're showing you on this audiotour, Neu-Ulm does have a lot of other great things to offer, even if they might not be noticeable at first glance.

But everyone seems to agree that this certainly is a fantastic panoramic view of the city.

Let's start with Ulm's two landmarks. The first is, of course, Ulm Minster - with the highest church spire in the world, at 161 metres... Well, that is until the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona is completed. According to the plans, it's meant to a few metres higher still.

Now, Ulm has a second landmark, and to see it you'll have to look a little closer ...

... because it's very small ...

... and sitting on the Minster.

More precisely, on the roof of the nave.

Sparrow chirps

That's right, the Ulm Sparrow.

You can see it from here on the upper edge of the roof. You can also take a look at it through one of the telescopes provided along the path here.

Or - just scroll down a little on your smartphone screen. You'll see it there too.

According to legend, the sparrow helped the people of Ulm build the spire for their Minster! There was a problem with the wooden beams for the scaffolding - they simply wouldn't fit through the city gates. That was because the people of Ulm tried to carry the beams sideways. A little sparrow, carrying a twig, then showed them how to do it better. The townspeople copied the little bird - and were finally able to get their beams to the Minster.

Did it really happen? We don't know - but what we do know is that the spire was completed in 1890.

If you scroll down on your screen a bit further, you'll see what the Minster looked like before that - still without its completed spire.

The people of Ulm began construction work on their Minster back in the Middle Ages - but then suddenly stopped in the 16th century.

This was because the Minster was financed by the citizens of Ulm - so when the city's economic performance went downhill in the 16th century, money also became scarce. The Reformation meant that there was no longer much interest in building the spire, and the Gothic architectural style was now considered unfashionable too, so the Minster lay dormant until the 19th century. But at that point there was renewed interest in the German Middle Ages and, with a new national pride, the willingness to donate also returned.

At our next audiopoint, you'll be finding out even more about the city panorama - including the so-called "Leaning Tower of Ulm". You can keep an eye out for it right now!

Continue along the bank of the river, and we'll be back in touch again around 200 metres further on.

Audio point 14: A piece of the Minster

You've been looking across at the Minster for a while, and here, it's suddenly close enough to touch - well, a section of it is anyway!

Look across to the left of the path – that stone is one of many that the builders replaced over time.

The Minster is considered a permanent building site: There's usually scaffolding to be seen somewhere or other.

Let's continue walking along the riverbank now, because this is where we want to show you the "Leaning Tower of Ulm".

You can see it to the right of the Minster. It's the so-called "Metzgerturm", or "Butchers' Tower", with its distinctive roof. The tower was part of the medieval city fortifications, and was built in around 1340!

Actually, the whole tower is a lot more crooked than it seems from here. It's actually leaning backwards to the left more than two metres!

According to legend, some butchers in the city used to mix sawdust into their sausages. As a punishment, they were locked up in the tower. And when the executioner came to get them and stood in the doorway, the butchers apparently fled to the furthest corner of their cell – making the tower suddenly tilt to one side.

So much for the legend – what's the real story? Well, it has to do with the fact that the people of Ulm drained water from their bank of the Danube. Originally, the medieval city wall, which we can still see in front of the tower, was located in the middle of the river to better fend off attackers. So when the ground was drained, the foundations of the Metzger Tower sank down, and gave it that special tilt. Today, however, it's standing securely once again!

If you continue along the riverbank path now, you'll arrive at a special viewing platform. That's our next audiopoint.

Audio point 15: Viewing platform

And here we are at the very best place for a perfect photo of Ulm: the viewing platform. The cityscape is particularly beautiful from here!

In the foreground, we have the high house gables along the city wall ...

... beyond them, the modern glass pyramid of the city library ...

... the Minster, towering above everything else ...

... and to the right of it, the Butchers' Tower ...

... which looks especially impressive because of its distinctive roof!

Those coloured tiles were very expensive in the Middle Ages, and the tower roof was supposed to display the wealth of the city from afar. Back then, Ulm was indeed one of the richest cities in what is now Germany – partly because of its highly favourable strategic location.

Our tour now continues along the river.

Audio point 16: The “new Ulm”

When we looked across at Ulm just now, we saw a lot of old structures. Here in Neu-Ulm, things look completely different.

And that’s also because Neu-Ulm really is still quite “new”, as the name suggests. It only came into being at the beginning of the 19th century as a fortress town built on a flat meadow, so to speak – and during the Second World War, Neu-Ulm was also badly damaged. Hardly anything remained of its original 19th-century structures, and nearly everything had to be rebuilt. And this was often done in the rather functional style of the post-war period.

Ahead of us we’ll cross the big road, and then continue on the footpath along the river.

Directions: Keep left

At this point, here’s a quick piece of information for later on. After our next audiopoint, we’ll be walking along the road that continues to the right here.

For now, however, we’ll keep left – so we’ll continue along beside the river.

Audio point 17: The Schwal

We’ll walk left now and cross over the bridge ...

... and that’ll take us to so-called “Schwal” – an island in the Danube.

At the end of the bridge, we’ll continue to the right – to the tip of the island.

This island, the Schwal, has an interesting history. During the 18th century it was the place where masses of emigrants met up – the so-called “Danube Swabians”. Around 200 of them came here every week, apparently, and set off from here by boat for Hungary – hoping for a better life.

The tradition of the special boats known as “Ulmer Schachteln” (or “Ulm Boxes”) also dates back to that time. On your screen we’re showing you a photo of one – you might catch sight of one today, as an excursion boat on the Danube!

And even further down the screen, we’d like to draw your attention to the Donauschwäbische Zentralmuseum, or “Danube Swabian Central Museum” – for anyone who’d like to learn more about the history of the Danube Swabians, that’s where you should go.

We’ll be back in touch again at the tip of the island.

Audio point 18: The Tailor of Ulm

Now we’d like you to look across to the left – to the other side of the Danube. More precisely, to the tower... with the red-and-white spiral staircase.

This brings us to a fascinating and also tragic story – it’s been the subject of an opera, a novel and even a cinema film!

It’s the tale of the so-called Schneider von Ulm, or “Tailor of Ulm”. In 1811, he made a daring flight attempt here – and it failed spectacularly. On your screen we’re showing you a picture of the glider that Albrecht Ludwig Berblinger, a tailor by profession, developed all by himself. Before that, he’d also invented a prosthetic leg, for example.

To demonstrate his new flying machine, he erected some wooden scaffolding beside the Danube that was roughly as high as today’s tower. He planned to take off from the top, and glide across the river.

Imagine around 10,000 spectators here on the banks of the Danube all waiting in excitement and anticipation – and among them, the King of Württemberg!

So what happened then? Well... then there was no wind. Allegedly, someone simply kicked him, and he fell into the Danube. Today, the tailor of Ulm is a cult figure – back then, Ludwig Berblinger was a figure of fun, and he died in abject poverty.

Let’s now take a look at the large memorial stone here at the tip of the island. It brings us to a different subject entirely: in 1932, Edwin Scharff, one of the most important German sculptors at that time, created this stone in memory of those who died in the First World War.

Take a look at the stone from all sides. You’ll see a grieving woman ...

... a mother with her child ...

... a father with his son ...

... and an old fisherman, possibly symbolizing the voyage into the afterlife.

A lot of war memorials commemorate the honourable aspect of dying for one’s country. Edwin Scharff took a different approach here: he presents the suffering of the bereaved left behind.

You can find out more about the exciting work of Edwin Scharff, who was born in Neu-Ulm, at the Edwin Scharff Museum not far from here on Petrusplatz. At the bottom of your screen, we’re showing you a few photos, plus a link to the museum’s homepage, in case you want to visit. – The Edwin Scharff Museum also includes a children’s museum, by the way, with lots to touch and discover.

Our route now takes us back over the bridge we crossed just now to get to the island.

And we’ll then continue along the road to the right that we showed you earlier on.

Directions: Straight ahead to the church

We’ll cross the road here – and opposite, beside the church, is where we’ll be back in touch again.

Please watch out for the traffic!

Audio point 19: Church of St. John the Baptist

At the end of our audiotour, at this church, we can see some building materials we already encountered en masse in the first part of our tour: clinker and limestone.

And where did they come from?

That's right, from the old Federal Fortress! The remains of it were used to build this church.

Throughout Germany, it ranks as one of the most important churches of the Expressionist movement. It was designed in the 1920s by the architect Dominikus Böhm.

Look, for example, how he wrote the names of the three figures of the saints on the façade, in the plinths.

The unusual-looking lettering alone makes it clear what Expressionism was all about. Everything had to express something – from the architecture to the lettering.

You can experience this particularly impressively once you're inside the church. To make sure no one is disturbed there, please turn the volume down on your phone now and hold it close to your ear.

Okay, let's go inside ...

..and now you'll experience a formal language that is typical of Expressionism.

As you can imagine, back in the 1920s, a church like this was something totally new. All the holy figures and paintings up that churches had up to then are missing here – and instead, we have bare walls, completely reduced and without frills. The effect of this church is conveyed solely through its clear lines and the interplay of light and shadow.

It's considered a milestone in modern church architecture – and is one of very few Expressionist churches in Germany.

Notice how the altar attracts attention from all sides.

To reinforce this effect, Dominikus Böhm slanted the pillars at each side of the nave.

The windows are also slanted, so that their light falls forward towards the altar.

Dominikus Böhm designed this church down to the tiniest detail – including the furnishings, which are still partially preserved. At the front of the side altars, the brass candlesticks, for example, were made especially for this interior.

Let's now walk around the front left, into the first side chapel.

There, a figure of the crucified Jesus hangs on the wall – also typically Expressionist.

The fingers look dead and stiff.

His face – even though it’s so simplified – is extremely expressive.

A few steps further on, you’ll come to the next side chapel, which adjoins this room.

And there, you’ll experience what Dominikus Böhm referred to as a “light turbine”.

Let’s take a look at the floor first.

The bricks are laid in such a way that they lead to the centre like a vortex.

This dynamic is taken up by the walls ...

... and now imagine them picking up the movement as well – and starting to spin in circles. They spin and spin, and at some point they take off with the chapel. Well, that’s the idea behind it! The space is called the Resurrection Chapel, and is meant to render the ascension to heaven visible and tangible.

We’ll let you discover the two chapels on the opposite side for yourself.

First you come to the so-called “Guardian Angel” chapel.

It’s built low, and for many it radiates a sense of security and protection.

And after that, you’ll experience the baptistery. Since this church is dedicated to John the Baptist, Dominikus Böhm designed this chapel in a very special way. Here, a beam of light is used as an integral part of the architecture. We see a small ray of, as it were, heavenly light radiating out across the room. It becomes clear, yet again, how Dominikus Böhm managed to create special moods – simply through the interplay of space and light.

Well, that brings us to the end of today’s audiotour. If you enjoyed it, maybe we’ll be back together again soon on another of our audiotours in Bavarian Swabia – you can find all of them here in the app.

The way back to the starting-point of our tour in Schiesshausallee is marked in the app. It’s around a quarter of an hour’s walk from here.

Well, thank you for listening and have a great time in Neu-Ulm!

Directly to the Apple-iStore
or google-Play-Store

