



# Punishment that makes a difference?

RESCALED principles practiced in existing Norwegian prisons

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## 4.2 Søndre Vestfold fengsel, Berg avdeling

### Introduction

Søndre Vestfold fengsel, Berg avdeling (Southern Vestfold prison, Berg department, from now on “Berg prison”) is a lower-security prison opened in 1975. Berg is located in the outskirts of Tønsberg, in Vestfold and Telemark county.

The prison is built as a camp, with several barracks serving a range of different purposes. Berg is especially known for providing versatile educational and working opportunities. For instance, the prison runs a farm, where the incarcerated are given the responsibility of tending cattle, sheep and cultivating a range of agricultural products.



*Photo: Tom A. Paulsen / Wikimedia Commons*

### Prison size

Berg prison has a capacity of 48 beds, which makes it a small to medium sized prison in a Norwegian context.

### Differentiation

#### *Security level:*

As a lower-security prison, Berg has no extensive security measures aside from a high fence around the prison area. It is located a fifteen-minute distance from the city centre of Tønsberg by bus. The main gates of the prison are open on weekdays, and the residents are free to roam the entire prison area at will. Some of the residents are also employed in workplaces outside the prison as a part of their reintegration programme. They are therefore allowed to leave the prison on weekdays by bus or their private cars.

The key to the security in Berg is dynamic security, based on the mutual trust and relations between the residents and the officers. The residents have a range of privileges at Berg, and have more to lose if they misbehave.

Residents who break certain rules, or are acting oppositional or hostile towards the officers or others, may be sanctioned by being transferred to a high-security prison.

#### *Target group:*

Berg accepts people imprisoned for all types of offences and of all ages. The residents are nevertheless carefully selected through interviews and based on a recommendation by their current prisons. Ideally, the people accepted to

#### RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

Berg have some years of their prison sentence left, thus there is enough time to work on personal development. As well as people with ordinary sentences, Berg also accepts people on preventive detention.

### **Activities:**

Berg has a great focus on the use of activities as means of the reintegration process. When the residents arrive at Berg, they are employed at one of several different workplaces according to their own wishes. The workplaces include a carpentry workshop, an automobile workshop, a kitchen, the farm and greenhouse, and a laundry room. However, it is not always possible to offer work at their preferred activity, as it also depends on the needs and capacity at the time of arrival.



*Olive oil, pesto and honey are some of the many products produced at Berg. Photo: Norwegian Correctional Service / Flickr*

At the workplaces, the residents are offered the possibility to take different courses which may result in a certificate of apprenticeship in subjects such as cooking, as a carpenter, in agriculture or as a car mechanic. Additionally, some people lacking formal education may take secondary school courses. The residents may also take full-time courses and degrees in higher education at the nearby University of Southeastern Norway, or digital courses in other institutions.

Some of the residents work outside the prison and therefore leave the prison daily. Some work for instance in postal services or automobile repair shops.

Berg has a special focus on evening activities, and they have employed a leisure time coordinator who organises different activities for the residents, along with the officers. This may be fishing trips outside of the prison, spinning classes in the gym, yoga, football, volleyball training or other activities. Inside the prison area is a 2 km mulch pathway going around the prison, a volleyball court, football field and several disc golf courses. In addition, they have cycling and running groups, who exercise weekly outside of the prison gates. The residents are also offered weekly rehearsals with a music teacher from the local upper secondary school.

**Agriculture:** The residents working in the agricultural section at Berg have the responsibility of tending a dozen cattle and almost one hundred spelsau, the oldest breed of sheep in Norway.

As well as the officers being a natural part of the activities at Berg, a priest is available some days of the week if the residents want to talk freely to someone from the "outside". The prison priest also organises weekly walks in the mulch pathway for those who want it. Other activities include weekly shopping in the local grocery store.

### **Community-integration:**

#### **Location and architecture:**

Berg is located in the outskirts of Tønsberg, a city of around 50.000 people at an hour drive from Oslo. Berg is situated on top of a small hill in an agricultural landscape. The open area of the prison, accompanied by large green spaces, is greatly valued by the residents. The area around the prison is a popular hiking area as well, and the residents have contributed to clearing a forest pathway around the area nicknamed "Bergstien" which is popular among local joggers and hikers.

Even though Berg is located in the outskirts of Tønsberg, it is close to the popular residential areas of Eik and Søndre Berg. The bus directed towards the city centre stops 200 metres from the prison gates every 15 minutes.



*The buildings in the bottom right constitute the automobile workshop, while the buildings in the top left are a part of the agricultural section. Photo: Gule sider*

The buildings at Berg are mostly barracks with one floor from the 60s and 70s, recently renovated. The 48 residents live in three barracks with single rooms for every person. In each of the three barracks, there are shared bathrooms, a kitchen and a living room with a TV.

The low profile of the buildings, and the large area assigned to the prison, reminds of a camp, and not a traditional prison. In addition to barracks and mechanical workshops for the workplaces and living areas, there are buildings for the administration, school/library, cantina with visitor rooms, fitness centre and a house for visits by children of the residents.

Many of the Norwegian lower-security prisons were originally built for a different purpose. Berg opened as an ordinary prison in 1975. The site, however, has a grim history, as it was originally built in 1942 as an internment camp by the Nazi state police. Nicknamed "Quislings chicken coop", it was the sole internment camp primarily run by Norwegians during the war. Over 1200 people were imprisoned at Berg throughout the war, including 227 Jews who were transferred from Berg to extinction camps in Germany and Poland, primarily Auschwitz I and II. Only 7 survived.<sup>34</sup>

### *Interaction with the community*

Berg is active within the local community. Outside of the prison gates, there is a 24-hour open sales stall, known as "Bergboden", where the residents sell the products produced at Berg, such as vegetables, honey and benches, stools and birdhouses. They also sell a range of different seeds and flowers grown in the greenhouse. Every autumn, the residents arrange a popular farmers market where the local community can buy the products of Berg and nearby Bastøy prison<sup>35</sup>, directly from the residents.

At times, the residents judge local football matches, or help with organising local marathons and cycling races. Residents who are part of the cycling group also participate in the yearly national Birkebeiner cycling race.

Berg is also tasked with the dissemination of the history of Berg internment camp. The only surviving structure of the internment camp is the isolation cellar under the kitchen barracks where prisoners were sent when they resisted the prison regime. Here, the residents have helped with building a museum telling the stories of the imprisoned during the war. This has resulted in a collaboration with local schools and the Vestfold county museum. Thousands of youth are every year given a tour of the museum cellar inside the prison, and learn about the history of the camp, the German occupation and the Holocaust. Outside of the prison gates is a stone memorial dedicated to those imprisoned for their resistance against the Nazi regime, as well as the Jews who were sent to their deaths in Auschwitz through Berg.

**Remembrance:** The Vestfold county museum has developed a learning programme called "It also applies to you" for youth who have visited the museum cellar at Berg. Incarcerated people with a particular interest in history are invited to lecture about Berg's history in front of the pupils.



*This stone was discovered within the prison compound and found to be engraved by prisoners at Berg during the war. Today the stone is the centre-piece of a memorial to the victims of Holocaust and the people imprisoned at Berg. Photo: Marius Ruud / Creative Commons*

<sup>34</sup> Despite the cruel treatment of prisoners, no deaths were recorded at Berg.

<sup>35</sup> Berg and Bastøy are situated in the same county and therefore collaborate. It takes about 20 minutes to drive from Berg to the harbour where the ferry to Bastøy departs from.

Berg is an important example of being able to preserve and disseminate the history of sites of tragedy, while at the same time using it for an important societal cause. The contrasts between the conditions at Berg in 1942 and 2022 could not be starker.

The residents of Berg are actively engaged in the maintenance of the museum and history of Berg. When people arrive at Berg for detention, they are given the opportunity to receive a tour of the museum cellar. The staff encourages the residents to take their visitors on a tour of the museum cellar as well.

### Søndre Vestfold fengsel, Berg avdeling

Built: 1942

Capacity: 48 males

Security level: Low

Nearest city/town: Tønsberg

Nature of interaction: Visit

#### Publicity/read more:

- About Berg prison at the official website of the Norwegian Correctional Service: <https://www.kriminalomsorgen.no/soendre-vestfold-fengsel-berg-avdeling.5029286-237612.html>
- About the products produced in the prison: <https://www.prisonmade.no/fengsler/s%C3%B8ndre-vestfold-fengsel>
- About the history of the internment camp: <https://www.memorialmuseums.org/eng/denkmaeler/view/635#>
- About the forest pathway going around Berg: [https://www.oslofjorden.com/kyststi/vestfold/berg-stien\\_toensberg.html](https://www.oslofjorden.com/kyststi/vestfold/berg-stien_toensberg.html)
- Literature on the history of the internment camp and eyewitness accounts:
  - Bugge, Svein. (1948). *Quislings hønsegård: Berg interneringsleir*. Oslo: Alb. Cammermeyers forlag
  - Jacoby, A. og Sachnowitz, H. (2016 [1976]). *Det angår også deg. Herman Sachnowitz forteller*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm AS