

Welcome to Akershus Fortress!

Experience Akershus with the Fortress Trail. With this guide in your hands you can now explore the Fortress on your own.

The trip lasts about 50 minutes at normal walking speed. Enjoy your trip!

1 THE VISITOR CENTRE

The Artillery Building, also called the Long Red House, has the date 1774 carved into a stone near the south corner of the foundation wall. Inside the building you can still see the supporting pillars of the curtain wall. The Directorate of Cultural Heritage had its offices here until 1991. Today the building houses the Visitor Centre at Akershus Fortress.

2 THE CARP POND

The Carp Pond is part of a big pond that was divided into two when the foundations of the northern curtain wall were laid in 1592. The other part served as a moat outside the northern curtain wall. The stream originally came from the area around Christiania Square and ran through this pond and down to Munk's Pond. The Carp Pond was filled in after the mid-19th century, but recreated in the 1960s. There are carp in the pond in the summer, and a big outdoor stage beside it.

3 THE CROWN PRINCE'S BASTION

Previously called Christian's bastion, for one of Christian IV's sons. It was begun in the first phase of the Fortress' construction period (1593-1604). On a cornerstone high up and to the right on the wall outside is carved "Anno 1618 den 12 Aprilis". The bastion originally had earthen ramparts on the inside of the walls, but these were removed around 1860 to enable Akershus National Penitentiary to be expanded.

4 AKERSHUS NATIONAL PENITENTIARY

In a decree of 8 April 1652, Fredrik III laid down that all convicted of "petty larceny" should work on a chain-gang in Akershus. Some time in the 1770s this acquired the name of the Slavery. Contemporary penal theory was a mixture of detention and "moral edification" through hard work; criminals were put to hard labour instead of being executed. The forced labourers could be set to all kinds of public works or hired out to private parties. Among the inmates were famous individuals such as the repeat-escapers Gjest Baardsen and Ole Høiland. In 1842 there were as many as 530 prisoners here, always male. The institution was converted into Akershus National Penitentiary in 1902, was a detention facility from 1937 and a German military prison in the period 1940-1945. After 1945 it was used as a prison for quislings and finally closed in 1950.

The Crown Prince's Powder Magazine Tower (1755) was originally built as a powder magazine for the artillery under Fredrik V. The original façade was whitewashed. In 1830 the tower was divided into two floors and furnished as a dormitory for 50-60 convicts: Here slept the "master thief" Ole Høiland, confined in a plank cage from 1835 until he escaped in 1839 by digging a tunnel beneath the wooden floor. In 1891 punishment cells were created, called "the pits" by the prisoners; breach of regulations was punished by half rations for up to ten days and sleeping on hard pallets.

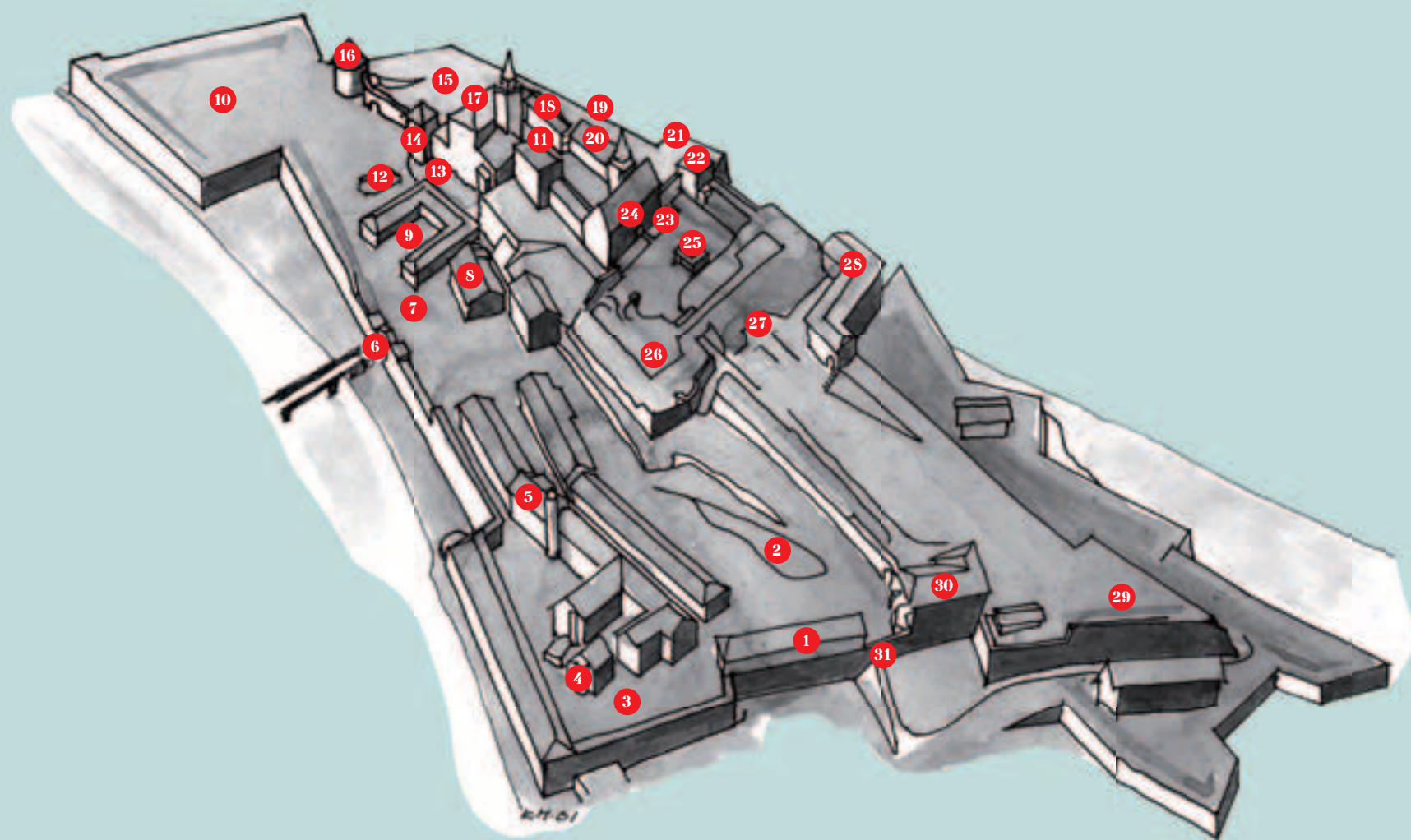
During the Second World War the tower was used as a Death Row for Norwegian Resistance fighters. The members of the so-called Pelle Group tried to escape from the powder magazine in March 1945. They broke through the cell wall and got out of the tower. However, they were spotted on the roof of the Oslo Military Association right outside the northern fortress wall, mistreated and thrown into the punishment cells.

5 THE PRISON CHAPEL

The prison chapel (1866) contained the prison kitchen and bathrooms on the ground floor and the chapel and schoolroom above. The building was refurbished as offices, library and tuition room in 1948, whereas the chapel was restored in 1968. In 1820 the corn store (1788) was rebuilt to house 150 prisoners, with a working room on the ground floor and dormitories above.

6 THE DRAWBRIDGE AND THE WINCH

The Drawbridge and the Winch (1653) As early as 1620 a large opening in the wall had been left for the main gate, but because of imminent war it was walled up again in 1624. In the middle of the 1800s a new drawbridge was built, with a winch system in the gatehouse. One of the winches is still preserved in the northern part. The drawbridge crossed a moat that was filled in when the Kongens gate was completed around 1920.



7 THE GUNS ON MICHAEL VON SUNDTS PLASS

In 1844 there were around 500 prisoners in the Slavery. In the morning of 13 October, 200 prisoners refused the new regulation breakfast – beer and bread. They threatened the guards, who fled to safety. The riot was quelled by the courage of an officer, Christian Glad, who met the prisoners alone and calmly but firmly talked them around, at the same time as the artillerymen loudly readied their cannon. These guns were loaded with grapeshot and pointed at the prison courtyard.

8 THE GUARDHOUSE (1724)

The building was originally erected as a single-story guardhouse with a hip roof. Note the carved lion heads in the foundation wall by the entrance. Eventually the Slavery appropriated this building as well as prison facilities. The building acquired its present appearance in 1855, is currently the guardhouse and a museum for His Majesty the King's Guard.

9 BARRACKS

A herb garden was created at some unknown date; it is shown on the oldest known image of Akershus, from the 1580s. It survived several extensions, including a bathhouse, a rabbit cage and an enclosure for a deer, up to the end of the 1600s, when a riding ground was created. The present building was probably erected in several stages until 1778 and is a typical military utility building of its period. In 1787 prisoners' cells were created in the northern wing. The famous peasant rebel Christian J. Lofthus was incarcerated here for ten years until his death in 1797. From 1947 the building has housed offices.

10 PRINCE CARL'S BASTION

Prince Carl's Bastion was commenced in 1616 and completed in the 1650s, when the western flank vis-à-vis Munk's Tower was completed. In the same period the walls were increased in height, which is here visible as a horizontal division in the wall. A provisional drawbridge and gate, 1628-1653, can be seen here from the outside, in Kongens gate. Twenty-pound howitzers are deployed on the flanks of the bastions, intended to enfilade the length of the moat, and on the faces are long-range guns.

11 THE MEDIEVAL CASTLE OF AKERSHUS

Akershus was begun at the end of the 1200s and is first mentioned in the year 1300. Its creator, Håkon V, was the great Norwegian castle-builder; in addition to Akershus, his residence, he built Båhus and Vardøhus as frontier fortresses, the old royal palace in Oslo plus Varberg and Hunehals in Halland, now in Sweden. The first attempt to modernise the castle was in the 1500s; from 1592 the outer fortress was constructed and the keep slowly converted into a modern Renaissance palace.

12 MUNK'S POND

The pond was originally a natural pond, debouching into the sea, and was used as a natural part of the defensive system of the medieval castle, creating a virtual moat in front of and behind the curtain wall. The pond is thought to have acquired its present form in the 1700s, but was filled in again in the 1800s. It was then restored again in connection with the restoration of the outdoor areas in the 1960s.

13 EASTERN CURTAIN WALL (ABOUT 1300)

The medieval castle was well protected by strong curtain walls on the landward side. These were about three metres thick and at least eight metres high. The enclosed area between the curtain walls and the castle itself was a dry moat. If an enemy got over or through the curtain wall, he would be completely at the mercy of the defenders in the surrounding towers and buildings of the castle.

14 THE VIRGIN'S TOWER (ABOUT 1300)

Access to the medieval castle was through this tower. Everything from the gatehouse and down to bedrock has been preserved, with visible remains of the portcullis channel and drawbridge system plus two gates. The Virgin's Tower was closed off in the middle of the 1500s and as a replacement a gate – now sealed – was opened in the wall opposite the stables. In the Middle Ages the tower was both deeper and considerably higher.

15 THE STABLES

This was the medieval castle's outer works, a fortified guardhouse. Along the outer walls used to be important economic buildings (brewery, slaughterhouse, bakery etc.) plus stables.

The little house with the red tile roof is an ancient well that was cut out of the rock. At the same time was cut a tunnel from the well to the pond outside the wall in order to safeguard the castle's water supply. This passage still exists. Behind the well, in the curtain wall, can be traced an older gate to the Stables; this gate is thought to date from the middle of the 1500s.

16 MUNK'S TOWER (1559)

In the Middle Ages the Water Tower was probably located here. This was a defensive tower and possibly cisterns for drinking water. The tower was demolished by Governor Christian Munk, who built a combined gun tower and gate tower here. The new Iron Gate was built right against the tower's western face to replace the old gate of the Virgin's Tower. In the 1800 the royal regalia was kept on the tower's top floor.

17 THE SOUTH WING (ABOUT 1300)

The cellar of the south wing contains the castle's original main entrance called the Dark passage. In this passage are visible remains of four fortified gates plus the channel for the portcullis.

In the middle of the 1500s a chapel was built that occupied the entire first floor of the wing. Later an extra floor was added to the wing to make room for the chancery of the Akershus governorship. Under Christian IV the floor was converted into opulent apartments for the royal couple with beautiful decoration. The south wing was once again altered in the 1740s, as repairs were required after a long period of neglect. After the restoration in the 1900s, the top floor is now a large room called Christian IV's Hall, which functions as the castle's reception room.

18 THE CHANCERY WING

The extension on the seaward side is called the double secret and contained lavatory facilities in two floors. Study of the walls here reveals various stages of construction: at the bottom, grey stones broken out of the bedrock in the Middle Ages, then big medieval bricks, called monk's tiles – here, however, reused in the 1600s. At the top, 17th-century tiles used by the thousand in Christian IV's rebuilding operations.

19 THE BATTERY ROAD

The western side of the castle was further fortified with walls and flanking positions with firing-slits for the infantry of the 1770s. Note the cobbles: the middle rows are laid at an angle so that horses could get a better grip when pulling heavy loads up the hill. See also the extensions in the gate to make room for the axles of the gun-carriages.

20 THE ROMERIKE WING (ABOUT 1300 AND 1633)

The lower floor was probably a storeroom with two fortified gates onto the Wood Garden for taking in supplies. In 1633 the Romerike Wing was rebuilt and a royal kitchen established in the southern part of the ground floor. At the same time, the second floor was used by the viceroy as living quarters and offices. In the period 1841-45 the poet Henrik Wergeland, then national archivist, had an office on the ground floor.

21 ROMERIKE BASTION

Romerike Bastion was previously called the Great Bastion in the Wood Garden, after the medieval woodpile in this area. The bastion was built out of timber during the Calmar War (1611-13) and was subsequently improved as a permanent stone bastion (1640-41).

22 THE KNUT TOWER (ABOUT 1300)

In the Middle Ages the Knut Tower was known as the Canons' Tower and constructed as a crossfire tower on the north-western side. For a long period it was full of prisoners. In 1641 a horse-powered mill was built here, and the tower was later used as a powder magazine too. The name is a reference to the knight Knut Alvssøn, who was said to have lain unburied in the tower for 12 years after being killed by Henrik Krummedike in 1502. In recent times the tower has been partly reconstructed on the old walls.

23 NORTHERN CURTAIN WALL (ABOUT 1300)

The medieval castle was well-protected by strong curtain walls on the landward side, about three metres thick and at least eight metres high. The enclosed area between the curtain walls and the castle itself was a dry moat. The terrain in the moat has been returned to the original level as of when the medieval castle was built.

24 THE NORTH WING (ABOUT 1300)

The building's northern facade is built of grey stone and without any trace of medieval openings due to the strategic defensive position of the building. The façade was subsequently equipped with firing-slits, probably in the 1500s. A little way down the wall, we can see traces of the walled-up cannon embrasures. The gate through the building is now the main entrance to

Akershus Castle, inaugurated in 1648. Today the wing has four floors: the Journeymen's Cellar, the Castle Hall, the Ladies' Hall and, on the top, the Royal Hall.

25 THE CORPS DE GARDE (1754)

is a well-designed baroque guardhouse, with a characteristic colonnade in front. The building has been used as a guardhouse, military jail and finally as a residence.

26 THE ROYAL BASTION

Also called the Great Rampart", originally constructed as a covering rampart for the castle to the north, where the natural terrain did not provide enough protection. The work was commenced by Hans Paaske in 1567, after Akershus had stood two sieges during the Northern Seven Years' War. After 1592 the structure became the inner defensive work of the new fortress. Medieval ornaments from demolished churches can be seen walled into the side of the passage.

27 THE EXECUTION GROUND

On 9 and 10 February, and on 17 March 1945, 42 Norwegians were executed by the German occupying power. The executions on 10 February were of ten Norwegians, in reprisal for the Resistance's liquidation of the police chief Karl Marthinsen in Blindernveien two days previously. The memorial was unveiled by H. M. King Haakon VII on 8 May 1949.

28 NORWAY'S RESISTANCE MUSEUM

Norway's Resistance Museum is in the building originally called "the Double Battery" (1691-92), built as a demi-bastion with gun battery. After being used as a depot for many years, it has housed Norway's Resistance Museum from 1967.

29 SKARPENORD'S BASTION (1592-1604)

Skarpenord's Bastion was previously also called Scherpenhoeck and Escarpe de Nord. The two cannon visible today are twelve-pounders cast in Frederiksværk in Denmark in 1766. A twelve-pounder could throw a ball weighing six kg about 850 metres with two kg of powder. In 1715 there were nine cannon here, but at the same time it is said that another four were needed for full manning of the bastion. The present artillery pieces are 7.5 cm field guns with recoil brakes with a range of 7.5 km, and purchased from the Rheinische Metallwarenfabrik in 1901. They are used for salutes.

30 SKARPENORD'S POWDER MAGAZINE

Skarpenord's Powder Magazine, also called the Great Powder Magazine, was built as a bombproof magazine and gate in 1657. Above the upper archway are mortared Fredrik III's monogram, the figure 1657 and three ornamental sandstones all deriving from viceroy Hannibal Sehested's never-completed fortress gate. The sandstone comes from a quarry in Brumunddal.

31 THE SALLY GATE

The gate was opened in 1834 after the outer fortress defences were abandoned.

History

Akershus Fortress is one of the country's most important cultural monuments, with buildings and structures from the Middle Ages to our own day. The Fortress has a special position as a national monument due to its location in the heart of the capital and its rich history connected to Crown and State. Its history ranges from dramatic military events, through tragedies of prison and occupation, to its present peaceful role as host to military schools and offices, cultural activities, and government entertaining.

The buildings and structures of the Fortress allow you to follow these developments up through the centuries, with changes brought by innovations in military engineering, new uses and needs, and the alternation of good times and bad.

In our century the Fortress has been dominated by major restoration work in which the various historical strata have been uncovered and exposed, the outdoor areas have been landscaped and the castle refurbished as state reception rooms.

Besides its historical and environmental significance, the Fortress is an important workplace, with offices, educational institutions and museums. Akershus is one of Oslo's biggest tourist attractions and in many ways is the city's public face.

Akershus Fortress today

For the City of Oslo, Akershus Fortress is an essential part of its very identity: the city's present centre was laid out under its ramparts and cannon in 1624. It is still a landmark and, together with the twin towers of City Hall, dominates Oslo's seaward silhouette. For both tourists and locals, Akershus is a green lung in the city centre. The Fortress thus offers unique peace and quiet in historical surroundings, where you can visit the museums, follow a guided tour, eat at the Carp Pond café or experience concerts and plays both indoors and out.

Rules for behaviour

The Fortress where you are now standing is one of the Norway's 14 national fortifications and a national cultural monument that we wish to preserve for future generations. It is therefore important that visitors show respect for the buildings and the outdoor areas, exercise caution when moving about and comply with the rules for behaviour. In this way you will help everyone to enjoy a good experience when they visit the Fortress.

The experience of being in such a unique location as Akershus Fortress can easily be ruined by littering and unintentional vandalism. Lighting of fires is therefore forbidden all year round; this applies also to disposable barbecues.

Dogs must be kept on a leash in the Fortress all year round.

Be careful of the high fortress walls, small children must be accompanied by adults.

Please throw all rubbish in the bins provided.

The "due care" provisions of the Norwegian Outdoor Leisure Act are otherwise applicable.



The Norwegian Defence Estates Agency

The Norwegian Defence Estates Agency has been entrusted with the management of fourteen fortresses which have been classified as national fortifications. The fortresses will be preserved as national heritage sites, and adapted to new and existing uses and activities. The Norwegian Defence Estates Agency will bring the fortresses into a new era, and preserve their character and history by developing the fortifications into attractive arenas for culture, business and events, in cooperation with other interested parties.

For further information, please visit www.nasjonalefestningsverk.no

