



The Bömerich mill and the adjacent mill pond.
Photo: Lisa Kröger



In the kitchen yard, on the right in the picture, farming was still practised until 1982. St Mark's Chapel, in the centre of the picture, is the oldest building in Altenberg. The Altenberger Hof, on the left of the picture, is where the monastery inn once stood.
Photo: Xandra Wildung



A watercourse near the Diepentaler dam in the border area of the towns of Leverkusen, Leichlingen and Burscheid.
Photo: Christoph Hagen

Cistercian
landscapes
connecting Europe



CISTERSCAPES – Cistercian landscapes connecting Europe

„Cisterscapes“: The project name is a play on the words „Cistercian“ and „landscape“. What is meant is a historic cultural landscape with a Cistercian character.

The monastery landscapes of the Cistercians still have typical elements to this day. What is special about is that these are not singular, but can be found all over Europe.

The reason for this lies above all in the structure of the Order and its extremely successful network, which is why the Cistercians are often referred to as the „first Europeans“.

The Cisterscapes network, with 17 partners in five countries, is a representative sample of the formerly more than one hundred active Cisterces in Europe.

The Altenberg monastery landscape is part of this European network.

Cisterscapes - Europäisches Kulturerbe-Siegel
Klosterlandschaft Altenberg

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Title: Altenberg Cathedral from Prinzenplatz | Photo: Sophia Sprinkmeier
The Altenberg Monastery Landscape Trail was built as part of the „Inwertsetzung der Zisterzienserklosterlandschaft Altenberg zur Erlangung des europäischen Kulturerbesiegels“ [Enhancing the value of the Cistercian monastery landscape of Altenberg to obtain the European Heritage Label] LEADER project.

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Projekträger:



Rheinisch-Bergischer Kreis



Kreis



MONASTERY
LANDSCAPE TRAIL
ALTENBERG



Altenberg Cathedral in autumn
Photo: Xandra Wildung



The fish ponds to the east of Altenberg Cathedral were created by the Cistercians and are used by a fishing club today.
Photo: David Bosbach



A flock of sheep grazes in the former garden of the Altenberg Abbey, south of the convent buildings. The orangery dates from the 18th century.
Photo: Lisa Kröger

1 Altenberg Cathedral

The monastery grounds of Altenberg Cistercian Abbey

Surrounded by a long circular wall, there were numerous buildings and open spaces on the grounds of Altenberg Abbey. These structures, located within the walls – intra muros – were divided into an area reserved for the monks and an economic area of the monastery. The convent buildings adjoined the monastery church, the „Altenberg Cathedral“, to the south.

2 The life of the monks

Rules and a strict daily routine

„Ora et labora“ - „pray and work“ - was the abbey's supreme rule. The regulations to which Cistercian monastic communities were subject, including those of the Cistercians in Altenberg, were fundamentally laid down in the „Carta Caritatis“. The monks of the Cistercian Order also had to adhere to certain dietary regulations. The fish ponds to the east of Altenberg Cathedral were created by the Cistercians.

3 Livestock breeding

Sheep, pigs and oxen: Cattle breeding by the Cistercians

The Cistercian monks of Altenberg Abbey practised both agriculture and animal husbandry in the monastic landscape surrounding them. They abstained from eating meat, but animal husbandry was important for the use of animal skins and the leather for clothing and shoes. In addition to the wet meadows around the riverbanks, the Altenberg monks also used the existing forest areas as grazing areas for their livestock.

4 Arable farming

Special skills and high yields

The monks of the Cistercian Order lived according to the ideals of seclusion, asceticism, poverty and self-sufficiency. Hence why the brothers themselves also worked in the fields surrounding the monastery complex, especially during harvest time. To this day, the Cistercians are said to be particularly skilled in agriculture, which increased the yields of their arable land many times over.

5 Cultivated landscape

The Cistercians as landscape designers

Among the historical cultivated landscapes, the monastery landscapes, such as here in Altenberg, occupy a special position. Initially, they developed in a limited area, from which they expanded over time. The core of every monastery landscapes – the abbey with at least one church and the immediate architecture to house its inhabitants, surrounded by a monastery wall – the „intra muros“ grounds.



MONASTERY LANDSCAPE TRAIL ALTENBERG



The monastic landscape of Altenberg Abbey can be explored on an approximately 13.5 km long circular trail through the Dhünn valley. Ten selected stops along the way provide insight into the life and work of the Cistercian monks and show what traces the Order has left in the landscape. Start on the north side of Altenberg Cathedral!

Length: 13,5 km | Walking time: approx. 3,5 Stunden

6 Orchards

Cultivation in the abbey and monastery landscape

In the Middle Ages and well into modern times, agriculture was the most important source of sustenance for the people. In addition to arable farming, orchards played an important role in the Altenberg monastery landscape for supplying the abbey.

7 Mill technology

Harnessing the power of water – the Cistercians and their mill economy

For the fulfilment of Cistercian ideals of self-sufficiency, seclusion and simplicity, the use of the natural resources found on site was enormously important.

8 Monastery farms

Supply and prosperity: The monastery farms of Altenberg Abbey and their cultivation

In addition to pastureland and arable land, the Cistercian monasteries had monastery farms, so-called granaries. These monastery farms produced goods for the supply of Altenberg Abbey as well as surplus goods for trade. For the Order, they therefore played a central role in securing food on the one hand and economic prosperity on the other.

9 Reclamation

The Cistercians and the use of available resources

In their founding legends, the Cistercians emphasised that they cleared the wilderness they found in order to create the conditions for founding their monasteries. Abandoned, wild places far from civilisation are said to have been where members of the Order ventured.

10 Hydraulic engineering

Ponds, canals and dams: The Cistercians as pioneers of hydraulic engineering

The Cistercian monasteries in Europe had an excellent hydraulic engineering system. Flowing water and control over this resource were central to life in the monasteries. A decisive factor for the location of Altenberg was in particular its proximity to the water-course of the Dhünn, which offered excellent conditions for the observance of Cistercian building, living and farming methods.