

Hitler in the Mountains: Excerpt from *Adolf Hitler's Wahlheimat* (1933)

Abstract

Nazi conceptions of Germany and the environment aimed to give every German the sense of a personal connection to nature. To encourage this attitude, the Nazi elite felt that it was important to demonstrate and perform this affinity, in part to connect Germans to their political leaders, but also to remind Germans of their belonging to a national, racial community. In this preface to a book on Hitler's life in his "adopted home," publisher and author Walter Schmidkunz describes Adolf Hitler's first visit to Berchtesgaden in the southeastern Bavarian Alps in July 1923, taking care to present this visit as a formative moment for the future Führer. The region would later become the location of Adolf Hitler's vacation home, the Berghof, and one of his headquarters, the Eagle's Nest, which was located on the peaks above the village of Obersalzberg. These lands, explained Hoffmann, were Adolf Hitler's "adopted home," a quiet, contemplative place where the "master builder of the coming Reich" could plan his vision for Germany and from which he gained resolve and creative energy.

Source

Berchtesgaden Area – Salzberg – The Hitler House

In July 1923—exactly ten years have passed since then—Adolf Hitler came to the Berchtesgaden area for the first time. Dietrich Eckart, Anton Drexler, and Hermann Esser—spearheads and pioneers—were with him. On the quiet, green slopes of the Obersalzberg there was the fortuitous home that guaranteed peace, gathering and preparation for the great work of 1923, the momentous year that began under the heavy impression of the Ruhr invasion and ended with the Black Day in front of the Munich Feldherrnhalle.

Those days in Berchtesgaden connected Adolf Hitler most intimately with the mountains and with the country that became his adopted home.

It was not an escape from the restlessness of the world that graciously opened up for him here, where he could indulge in the blessings of the heights in contemplative leisure. No, at that time the quiet Salzberg became the sought-after place for the master builder of the coming Reich, where, in view of the towering mountains, looking down on the blossoming, blessed valley and fields, and in the wide view of the flat primeval German land, his mission, goal, and will had the chance to ferment, develop, and mature.

But a quiet stay was not granted to the restless fighter. Meetings with the faithful, a few breaths of mountain air, a few nights of restful sleep—then the self-imposed duty called him again. There was still a long and hard way to go, obstacles towered above obstacles, but in growing masses youth and men rallied around the recognized and beloved leader and for him, for his cause, their cause, the German cause, they went through blood and fire.

Again and again, however, he was drawn—even if only for short hours—up to the Salzberg, the green island in the mountain-surrounded bay, on the shore of which his restless heart had dropped anchor.

[...]

Long and famous is the list of names of those who have been Berchtesgaden's happy guests throughout

the ages. Crowned heads of all times loved the delightful country, which the lively noble Augustinian canons had discovered and settled. German, Bavarian, Austrian, Russian and Dutch rulers stayed here for summer holidays, rest or hunting, the Wittelsbach dynasty had been here through the decades as the “first guests” of their and this country, beginning with the great Ludwig I., who discovered the country with his painters and liked to have lunch in the open air at the Boschbergehen in the Strub, and remained at home here up to the hunter Luitpold and the last Ludwig, who had to flee miserably from the red revolt into the remote silence of St. Bartholomä.

Napoleon's wife Marie-Louise was here as well as the third Napoleon. Bismarck admired the Watzmann and Moltke had a silent trout adventure in the old Kerschbaumerhaus. One of the last great guests was the Field Marshal General and Reich President von Hindenburg. Once Berchtesgaden was also the place of high politics of past years, when in 1908 at the Schoenhäusl at the Ministerial Conference with the Italian Foreign Minister Tittoni, the Austro-Hungarian Baron von Aehrenthal, and the Russian Minister Iswolsky, things were discussed and decided which were as short-lived and transient like the beauty of a summer day.

[...]

It is difficult to count the number of great minds who spent blissful days here or became regulars in the Berchtesgaden garden of God, from the great Humboldt, who measured the beauty of the area against Naples and Constantinople, and the Tyrolean Speckbacher, who showed his boy the Königssee between the battles of the ninth year, from Jonas Lie, the Norwegian, Ferdinand Gregorovius, Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer and Henrik Ibsen to Eckener, Dietrich Eckart and the man who anchored his German heart firmly in his adopted country—Adolf Hitler.

Whoever has seen and experienced this land, whoever has even only guessed at its uniqueness, believes that, as the legend tells, Noah's ark settled here at the Archenköpfe crags on the Watzmann after the great flood, and that from here the peace-bringing dove flew into the world, and understands that the creator of the nascent new Reich, the leader of the German people, sought and found the home of his heart precisely here.

[...]

Years ago, a man from Hamburg had built the house Wachenfels on the Obersalzberg as his summer residence. Times changed, then it stood empty.

When Adolf Hitler returned to the Salzberg in 1924, this little piece of earth in the mountains “from which freedom comes” may have grown doubly close to his heart and awakened the desire to find a home here. A coincidence came to the rescue, and a few years later Adolf Hitler rented the house Wachenfels and called his sister, who had become lonely, to inhabit and manage it.

Under her sisterly and housewifely care, the home on the Salzberg became comfortable. On the ground floor, which one enters from the terrace on which the house stands, the large bay window room, which takes up the entire width of the house, became the living room and center of the house. The bay windows overlook the group of houses near the Türkenwirt while the Untersberg looks in through the front windows and just a part of Berchtesgaden looks up to them. The wide bay window surrounded by flowers with the round table in front of it and the heavy, homely, green tiled stove with the comfortable stove bench on the long wall characterize the living room; the desk on the end wall, although important documents often lie on and in it and the telephone, which is located there, is connected to domestic and international calls, is not the focal point of the room here, which, like the whole house, is intended for resting. Rather, the colorful budgies with their resounding chirping are the demanding tone-setters of the living room, which, together with the radio, must enliven Ms. Angelika's quiet, visitorless days.

The household furnishings keep a happy medium between bourgeois-urban and peasant-rural furniture and are all about homeliness; the floor covering—Bavarian knotted and rag rugs—mostly come from nearby home looms. The abundance of cushions for sitting, resting, and ornamentation reminds one of the floods of congratulations on April 20, when for days the poor letter carrier had to lug sack after sack of bundled and enveloped adoration and love, of innumerable, oh, so well-intentioned and yet so often repetitive small and large donations up here to the Salzberg, where the well-wishers hoped to reach their chancellor and leader more safely than with the simultaneous stream of letters and donations that poured over the Reich Chancellery in Berlin. In a room on the upper floor this love is piled up and in the foreground are not the splendid or the curious donation greetings, but the naive and warm-hearted ones of the children, who wrote to “dear Uncle Hitler,” enclosed candy for the dogs or even bought a beautiful pen from savings pennies and sent it “in case you, dear Uncle Hitler, need one.” The German children and the growing youth are the great love of the people’s chancellor. He took the time to read the many, many children’s letters, and their little wandering flocks are also, like the youth from the Salzberg, occasionally allowed into the house in order to pet “Blonda” and to eat the thick sandwiches of the good “aunt” at the big “uncle’s,” while, as will be understood, the house must remain off limits to all others, even the most enthusiastic.

Even the rare special guests who come here with the Chancellor or visit him here—of whom Reich Minister Dr. Goebbels has become particularly fond of the beautiful Salzberg—have to stick to Ms. Angelika’s famous butter sandwiches, that is, the cuisine of the Hitler House is simple, adapted to the Salzberg and naturally influenced by the unpretentiousness of the Chancellor, who lives a vegetarian life, does not smoke and prefers clear water to other beverages, even though here, as in the times of Frederick the Great, everyone may enjoy themselves after their own fashion. And the guests feel so comfortable up here that, like the Führer, they savor every minute and, like Hitler’s sister, are only angry at the grandfather clock in the bay window, which runs much too fast for all of them.

Usually it is only a few hours that the chancellor is allowed here. Often a quick flight, which means no interruption of his government business, brings him from Berlin to Munich; in the night he still drives into the mountains and to his plot of land, only to sleep here, detached from all disturbing and complaining, a few hours deeply and deeply and to gather fresh strength. A view of the great mountains in the morning light, a dairy breakfast with rough peasant bread—and by noon he is back in Berlin and with his circle of colleagues. The chancellor needs little sleep, just as all personal needs are very secondary to him. He always looks forward to his bed on the Salzberg, next to which the balcony door opens onto the freedom of the mountains, where the world is silent and only the well roars, and those close to him have often heard him say: “Only up there on the Salzberg does one sleep well, and up there on the mountain is where the best thoughts come”

Source: Karl Schuster-Winkelhof, *Adolf Hitlers Wahlheimat*. Accompanying commentary by Walter Schmidkunz. Munich: Münchner Buchverlag, 1933, pp. 3, 8, 14–15.

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