

State archive stores files in the bunker

The Schwyz State Archives use a former underground ammunition depot, which is unique in Switzerland.



Valentin Kessler, Head of the Office for Culture, in Cavern 3.5 with the 50-metre-long archive roller system (left). Archive manager Ralph Ruch at the static shelving systems in which works of art and objects from the antiquity collection are stored (top right). The damp entrance to Underground Passage 3 in Schruttenloch. Images: Franz Steinegger

Franz Steinegger

Store files, paintings and old objects in a bunker with water dripping from a vertical rock wall at the shady entrance? “We were sceptical at first,” said state archivist Valentin Kessler yesterday when inspecting the caverns in Hinterberg.

On closer inspection, the bunker in Schruttenloch turned out to be the ideal archive room. The total of six caverns offer plenty of space, the rooms walled into the tunnels have a constant air temperature of 10 degrees and a humidity of 50 percent. The ventilation system regulated by outside and inside sensors and mobile dehumidifiers ensure a constant room climate. Climate values can be monitored via the Internet regardless of time and location.

3.8 kilometres of space for files and objects

In 2020-2021, two caverns were prepared in Underground Passage 3 under the direction of the cantonal building construction office. They are now fire, break-in, shock and earthquake-proof.

In Cavern 3.5, a more than 50-metre-long mobile shelving system was installed over 340 square metres, which offers the State Archives new storage reserves of 2,500 linear metres for files. Cavern 3.6 serves as a cultural property protection room with static shelves with storage reserves for 1,300 linear metres. In the two caverns, which are of the same size, mesh panels have been mounted to the walls, where

A legacy of the cold war

Ammunition depot In Schruttenloch on the road from Schlattli to Aufberg, the Swiss Army built three main underground passages in 1956, each with two caverns and a technical space. The military stored ammunition there. The bombproof bunkers were part of the reduit and a legacy of the Cold War. In the aftermath of the army reform in 1995, they were put “out of service”.

In 2002 the State Archives moved into the new premises at Kollegi Schwyz. But soon there was again too little space for the huge amount of files and items to be stored. It was originally planned to expand

paintings from the canton’s art collection can be hung and stored. “This will give us storage reserves for an expected 15 years,” explained Ralph Ruch, archive manager at the State Archives. Mr Ruch is responsible for filling the new premises with the archived objects. The four other caverns in Underground Passages 1 and 2 are still in their original state and will serve as long-term reserves.

the facility at the Kollegi, with a cost estimate of 4.5 million francs. But the project was never pursued, mainly due to its cost.

In 2014, Othmar Reichmuth, building director at the time, made his government colleagues aware of the bunker in Hinterberg. In 2017, the canton acquired the entire system with the three double passages from Armasuisse, the Federal Office for Defence Procurement, for 760,000 francs.

The pillory and sword disappear into the bunker

In a first stage, the State Archives are moving extensive archive collections to Cavern 3.5. These collections are digitised or microfilmed, including large private collections as well as newspapers and case files such as those of the public prosecutor’s office. In a second stage, around 450 objects from the cantonal Art collection and a large part of the 3,300 objects in the antiquities collection are moving to Cavern 3.6: paintings, weapons, flags, executioner’s swords, the medieval pillory or everyday objects. The move will be complete in mid-June.

The external depots were necessary because the collection had become too large for the former depots in the State Archives, in the basement of the Federal Letter Museum and in the cantonal library. The alternative to expanding the Kollegi (see box) paid off: Instead of CHF 4.5 million, the expansion of the Schruttenloch external depot cost the canton (with federal support) CHF 540,000.