

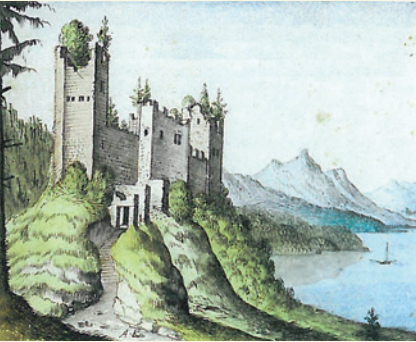
Plan of the castle complex with its construction phases. Sc. 1:5000.

- Aristocratic castle: Phases I/II (1230/1240 and c. 1300)
- Construction of the barbican as a new access point to the castle: Phase III (c. 1350)
- Use as a military stronghold: Phase IV (probably 16th cent.)
- Construction of the church: Phase V (1670/71)

Construction history of the buildings on the castle rock

The ground-plan of the complex was decided on when it was first built around 1230/40 (Phase I, red), following the usual blueprint of Hohenstaufen castle architecture. Protected by a massive shield wall, a walled courtyard with a castle gate was located in the west. The courtyard was framed in the north by residential and utility buildings and a ceremonial hall on the lakeward side. The east tower, initially only 6 m high, flanked a second courtyard. The tower was raised to its present height of 16 m in c. 1300 (Phase II, red). A new ceremonial hall with alcove windows, a raised platform and an elevated entrance was now its only usable room. A barbican was added to the castle gate in c. 1350 (Phase III, blue). After the castle was abandoned in c. 1381, the only construction work undertaken was on the enclosing walls. It was probably linked to the complex’s use as a stronghold (phase IV, green). When the church was built in 1670, all residential buildings were demolished (Phase V, yellow).

Chronology



The ruins of Ringgenberg castle above Lake Brienz before the church was built. Veduta by Albrecht Kauw, c. 1660.

Bronze Age	Evidence of human presence on the castle rock
7 th /8 th cent.	A slab cist attests to an early medieval burial ground
12 th /13 th cent.	The imperial bailiwick stretching from the Valais to Uri is divided between the barons of Brienz and Raron
around 1240	Construction of the new seat in Ringgenberg under Cuno von Brienz
around 1300	Johannes von Ringgenberg (c. 1270–1350) resides at the castle. He is a minnesinger and retainer of Emperor Henry VII and King Louis the Bavarian
1308	Burgrecht agreement with Bern
1327/28	Johannes von Ringgenberg marches to Rome as a member of the retinue of King Louis the Bavarian
1351	Parts of the castle are leased to the Interlaken Chapter of Canons
1380/81	The castle is destroyed and abandoned as part of the Ringgenberg agreement
1386	Petermann, the last Baron of Ringgenberg moves to Bern
16 th cent.	The enclosing walls are reinforced and the site is used as a stronghold
1670/71	The church is constructed within the castle ruins by Abraham Dünz I and the church services are relocated from Goldswil
1695	The cemetery is relocated from Goldswil to the castle ruins
1928	Federal heritage protection is granted and the ruins are restored
1946/1949	The enclosing walls and east tower are restored
2006-2008	Architectural survey and restoration of the ruins, construction of stairway in the tower



An attractive circular route links the Ringgenberg castle ruins with the Goldswil church ruins. The two sites have close historical links. Various paths take you past many natural and historical highlights and open up magnificent views across Lake Brienz and the Bödeli area.

- Ringgenberg castle ruins, ■ more information points on the circular route
- boundary of the nature reserve, — hiking trails

Circular route from Ringgenberg to Goldswil

The route starts at the carpark below the Ringgenberg castle rock. Stairs lead up to the castle. After visiting the tower, it is worth taking a look at the church.

From the castle ruins the route continues via the “cats’ path” towards Goldswil. At the half-way point there is an optional detour to the old watch-fire. The route continues along the hiking trail to Goldswil, approaching the hill with its church ruins from the east. The magnificent view across the Bödeli area and the impressive architecture compensate for the steep ascent. The return journey via the hiking trail on the western side of the hill is recommended. The winding road leads to the carpark at the foot of the hill. The route takes you back to Ringgenberg along the main through-road. It ends at a carpark and then continues around Lake Burgseeli. Information points along the shoreline highlight the special features of the natural landscape around the bog lake. A forest trail leads back to the Ringgenberg castle rock carpark.

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RINGGENBERG The Ringgenberg castle ruins

Useful information: A grave slab with the Ringgenberg coat of arms is preserved in the French Church in Bern. This was probably a grave marker for Petermann von Ringgenberg dated 1390/91.

Restoration and design: Protestant Parish of Ringgenberg, Archaeological Service of Canton Bern (ADB) (Martin Portmann, Urs Ryter, Daniel Gutscher, Armand Baeriswyl). Construction work: Architektengemeinschaft Imboden Architektur AG, Ringgenberg (Walter Amacher / Hans-Ulrich Imboden), and Arbeitsgemeinschaft Nufer/Anderegg/Zurbuchen, Ringgenberg (Ruedi Jaggi); Signage: ADB, Daniel Gutscher, Volker Herrmann and Max Stöckli.

Literature: Christian Frutiger, Burgruine Ringgenberg. Ein illustrierter Beitrag zur Geschichte der Burgruine Ringgenberg. Interlaken 1983; Mittelalter – Moyen Age – Medioevo – Temp medieval. Zeitschrift des Schweizerischen Burgenvereins 13, 2008/1, 1–23.

Cover picture: Aerial view of the castle ruins: ADB 2001, “Arge Alps”, Zurich.

Picture credits: Large painting: watercolour by Gabriel Lory 1828: Swiss National Library; Codex Manesse: Heidelberg University Library; south façade of the east tower: ADB; cartouche and castle courtyard: ADB, Badri Redha; ground-plan: ADB, Max Stöckli; veduta Albrecht Kauw and bell: Bernisches Historisches Museum; map: Office of Agriculture and Nature of Canton Bern, section nature promotion.



The Ringgenberg castle ruins proudly rise above the northern shore of Lake Brienz. The prominent location makes the architectural ensemble of castle and church an attractive site of Bernese history and one of the most impressive castle complexes in the Bernese Oberland. Its founders, the imperial governors of Brienz, were members of the high nobility.

The Ringgenberg castle ruins and Baroque parish church with Lake Brienz in the background, as seen from the west. Watercolour by Gabriel Lory senior, c. 1828.



Jousting scene with Johannes von Ringgenberg (next to his coat of arms). Codex Manesse, shortly after 1300.



South façade of the east tower wall with recesses. They can be interpreted as nesting holes for decoy birds used in falconry.



A 1911 Cartouche with canting arms (ring/buckle and mountain) of the Ringgenberg dynasty in the hall church built to the designs of Abraham Dünz I in the castle courtyard in 1670/71.



Castle courtyard with the façade of the east tower. The old steps were replaced by metal stairs leading to the elevated entrance into the ceremonial hall. The ground-level entrance is a post-medieval addition.

The castle of the barons of Ringgenberg

Around 1240, the imperial governor, Baron Cuno von Brienz, moved his seat to Ringgenberg, which was then called “Rinchenwile”. The new castle became the centre of the dominion of the barons of Ringgenberg, which stretched from Meiringen to the Bödeli area between Lakes Thun and Brienz.

The region was of considerable political importance at the time, thanks to its transportation routes in the Aare River Valley and across the mountain passes to northern Italy and central Switzerland. The founding of the castle on a prominent outcrop above Lake Brienz clearly points to this fact. In the 13th century the castle, the neighbouring church of Goldswil with its freestanding, Italian-style tower would have formed a possessory unit.

The high social standing of the lords of the castle in their role as imperial governors is reflected in the castle

architecture. The eastern spur of the castle rock is still dominated by a massive tower in the form of a donjon. Its upper storey was equipped with a magnificent ceremonial hall around 1300. It had a sturdy shield wall, which was later reinforced to a thickness of 5.4 m. Residential and utility buildings arranged around inner courtyards stood in its shade. In the aftermath of the “Ringgenberg agreement” between Unterwalden (today’s Obwalden) and the city of Bern, the castle was abandoned after 1381.



Small late medieval bell which was used, perhaps, as a cymbal in the castle chapel.

Between imperial politics and minnesong

Besides the lords of Raron, the governors of Brienz were a dependable source of regional support for the empire in the 12th and 13th centuries. The ancestors of the barons of Ringgenberg managed the imperial bailiwick that stretched from the Valais to Uri. The family’s loyalty to the empire was personified by Johannes von Ringgenberg (c. 1270–1350). He is mentioned in the Codex Manesse as a successful minnesinger. In 1327/28 he was part of the retinue of King Louis the Bavarian on his march to Rome.

The demise of the Ringgenberg dynasty and their ancestral seat was also closely linked to politics. In 1380 their subjects staged an uprising. Neighbouring Unterwalden intervened in the conflict for territorial reasons. The city of Bern objected to this interference in a region it claimed as its own. The “Ringgenberg agreement” of 1381 granted the region to Bern and the castle was abandoned.

Medieval aristocratic castle and Baroque church

The castle rock accommodates monuments from two historical periods and spheres of life. The ruins of the medieval aristocratic castle and the Protestant Baroque church form a distinctive, high-contrast ensemble.

The medieval courtly culture fostered here can still be felt. Nesting holes in the tower walls attest to falconry, which was popular at court. With its alcove window seats and a platform running around the walls, the ceremonial hall in the tower serves as a reminder of lavish celebrations overlooking the lake. The hall was accessed by stairs and a gallery that led to an elevated entrance.

This is juxtaposed by the austere hall church. It was inserted in the castle ruins in 1670/71. The design and fittings followed a plan commonly used in Bernese state religious architecture, fulfilling the liturgical needs of the Protestant Church, with the sermon and baptism at its core.

From ruin to monument

After the castle’s abandonment the buildings fell into ruin. The complex was reinstated as a stronghold for a short period in the 16th century. The oldest depiction shows the ruins around 1660. When the church was constructed in 1670/71, the buildings in the castle courtyard were demolished. All later depictions only show the tower ruins beside the church.

Historical interest in the castle ruins was reawakened with the founding of the Schweizerischer Burgenverein in 1928 and the enclosing wall and the east tower were restored for the first time. The ruins have since been listed as a protected monument. Further work took place in 1946/1949 and in 2006–2008. The most recent restoration was preceded by an architectural investigation. This has allowed us to roughly trace the construction history of the ensemble. Since 2008 the castle tower has been accessible via stairs, gallery and a viewing terrace.