



Two Castles, One Tradition: The Buergbrennen in the Commune of Niederanven

The *Buergbrennen* is undoubtedly one of the best-known and most symbolic traditions in the country. Every year, at the end of the cold season, people come together to “burn” the winter by lighting a large fire and to welcome the arrival of spring. It is an ancient pagan custom that was meant to bring light and warmth back to the villages, a tradition that has retained its importance to this day and continues to be celebrated in many communes.

In our commune as well, the *Buergbrennen* still plays an important role. Every year, not just one but two castles are built and burned: on Saturday evening in Ernster and on Sunday evening in Niederanven. Both events look back on a long history, and each has its own distinct character. What they share is the strong commitment of many volunteers.

This year, the *Buergbrennen* will take place on the weekend of 21 and 22 February. Traditionally, the *Buergbrennen* always falls on the first Sunday after Carnival, also known as *Buergsonndeg*.



© Uli Fielitz

Warm and welcoming: The Buergbrennen in Ernster

In Ernster, the castle was built for many years by the young people of the village. In 2008, the tradition experienced a revival following an appeal to the local population, and many people volunteered to lend a helping hand. In this context, the association *lernster Stoussnéckelen* was founded, which has since organised the *Buergbrennen* with great dedication and passion.

The castle is erected on the village square, a central meeting place where many people can gather and where a friendly and convivial atmosphere develops. Particularly popular is the neighbouring playground, which allows children to enjoy themselves throughout the evening. Historically, the castle



© Uli Fielitz

has been burned at various locations, including on the *lernsterbiere* from the 1950s to the 1990s, before being moved to the *Wëllt* for several years. Since 2008, the village square has once again been the permanent location for this major fire.

The castle in Ernster is around seven metres high and is constructed from pallets, straw and old Christmas trees. The material is collected throughout the year, while the actual preparations



begin about two months before the *Buergbrennen*. One week before the event, work on the structure begins, and the day before is dedicated to preparing the catering.

An important part of the evening is the torch procession, which leads from the school to the village square. The sale of torches traditionally benefits a good cause. Another cherished tradition is that a couple who were married or entered a civil partnership in the previous year lights the castle. If there is no such couple, the fire is lit collectively. Food is provided in the form of grilled sausages and lentil soup, with or without meat, two classics that are always very popular.

Impressive and defined by strong community spirit: The *Buergbrennen* in Niederaanven

On Sunday evening, the *Buergbrennen* in Niederaanven takes place. It is organised by the *Buergrfrënn* Nidderaanwen together with the *Scouten Nidderaanwn*. In recent years, this event has developed into a real crowd-puller.



© Uli Fielitz

The history of this *Buergbrennen* also goes back a long way. In the past, the Scouts organised their own *Buergbrennen* at their scout centre, while the fire brigade burned their castle on the other side of the hill. At some point, the decision was made to join forces, and two smaller castles were replaced by one large structure. Many of the young people who helped with the construction at the time have remained loyal to the *Buergbrennen*, even though they are no longer active members of

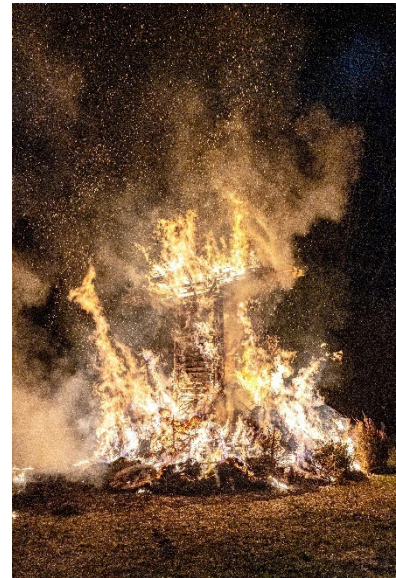
an association. From this group emerged the *Buergrfrënn*, who continue to take great care and pride in building the castle, while the Scouts are responsible for catering and logistics on the day of the event.

The castle is erected on a large open site between Niederaanven and Mensdorf, a location that offers enough space for the many visitors as well as for the impressive construction. With a height of 21 metres and a width of 14 metres, the castle can even be seen from the motorway. This castle is also built mainly from pallets, wood and Christmas trees. In total, between 2,500 and 3,000 pallets are used. Organisation and preparations begin well in advance. Around six months beforehand, the two associations meet to clarify the first organisational aspects. From that point on, pallets are actively sourced and collected. Weeks before the *Buergbrennen*, the trunks for the towers are put in place, and during the week before the event, work is carried out every day from 10 a.m. until nightfall.

The Scouts provide food in a traditional manner, offering grilled dishes as well as their popular lentil soup, also available in a vegan version, complemented by a final mulled wine of the winter season. This year, the *Buergfrënn* are also celebrating their tenth anniversary, meaning that visitors can look forward to a particularly impressive castle.

A Tradition that brings people together

The *Buergbrennen* is not limited to the day of the event itself but also includes everything that happens beforehand and around it. One beautiful tradition is the *Ophiewen*. In both locations, members of the associations go through the villages, meet and talk with residents, explain the custom and personally invite them to the celebration. Whether in Ernster or in Niederanven, the *Buergbrennen* shows year after year just how much value is placed on community spirit within the commune. It is a moment when long-standing residents and newcomers, families and friends come together to laugh and celebrate. When the builders proudly look up from below at their completed castle and passers-by stop to admire the impressive structure, this is always the greatest reward for them, confirming that the effort of many weeks and months was worthwhile, even though the castle will be engulfed in flames only a few hours later.



© Uli Fielitz

The three participating associations agree that it is important to continue encouraging young people to get involved in keeping this tradition alive. As with many associations, new members cannot be taken for granted. The organisers therefore hope that the *Buergbrennen* will remain a living tradition for many years to come and that it can continue to be celebrated safely and without restrictions in the future. They are grateful for all support provided by the communal services and sponsors, whether through the collection of Christmas trees, the setting up of tents, the provision of materials and machinery, or financial assistance. Without this cooperation, such an event would be difficult to realise.

The *Buergbrennen* is more than just a large fire. It is a piece of identity, a symbol of community and an important moment that brings together the residents of the commune of Niederanven year after year.