

Exploring Monte Kali: A towering mountain of table salt rising in central Germany

The town of Heringen, in central Germany, is home to a heap of sodium chloride (table salt) so massive that it has come to be known as Monte Kali. It is the world's largest artificial salt mountain.

The origin of Monte Kali can be traced back to the year 1976, when potash salt started being extracted from mines around the town of Hessen. Back then, potash was used to make products like soap and glass, but today it is an important ingredient in several fertilizers, synthetic rubber, and even some medicines, so extraction intensified over the last few decades. The problem with potash is that mining it generates a lot of sodium chloride as a byproduct, so you need somewhere to store it. The company operating the mines started dumping all this salt a few miles from Heringen, and over the years it created a giant salt mountain locals named Monte Kali or Kalimanjaro (puns for Kalisalz, the German word for 'potash').



Photo: Wolkenkratzer/Wikimedia Commons

As of 2017, Monte Kali stands at 530 meters (1,740 ft) above sea level and covers an area of over 100 hectares, so calling it an artificial mountain is no exaggeration. You can see it from anywhere in Heringen, or even driving past it on the motorway, and it has become somewhat of a tourist attraction. In fact, at one point, people could pay to ascend this giant waste dump, as part of a guided tour. The ascent took the average person around 15 minutes, and the 23-hectare summit plateau offered views of the entire Werra Valley all the way to the Rhön and the Thuringian Forest.



