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Planned motorway was once a dinosaur thoroughfare



Some 150 million years after dinosaurs crossed a Jurassic beach, hundreds of their footprints have been found in the path of a planned motorway.

Palaeontologists have discovered nearly 500 well preserved footprints in a layer of limestone near the village of Courtedoux in canton Jura.

"The find is of exceptional scientific value," said Christian Meyer, director of Basel's natural history museum, who has studied dinosaur tracks for the past 15 years.

Excavations at Courtedoux cover an area of about 800 square metres. The tracks belong to sauropods, a group of dinosaurs consisting of large, four-legged herbivores with very long necks and tails.

The biggest sauropods could reach 70 metres in length. However, the Courtedoux animals were fairly small – a mere ten metres on average from head to tail. The estimate is based on the 50-60 centimetre size of their footprints as well as the space between them.

"This particular type of trackway has not been found before in Switzerland," Meyer said. "All the other sites where we find sauropods, the trackway width is fairly large and here it's fairly narrow."

The implication is that the tracks belong to either young dinosaurs or a specific group of sauropods.

The site is also unique in Switzerland because of its flatness. Similar finds at Moutier in canton Bern and Lommiswil in canton Solothurn are on steep rock faces exposed by the folding of mountains.

At that time, this area was comparable to the Bahamas today, with beaches, islands, a dry climate, not too much humidity and elevated temperatures.

Conifers, ferns and vegetation similar to palm trees made up the sauropods' diet.

Discussions are currently underway with the relevant government departments as to how the zone can best be conserved.

from swissinfo

Hunting in the Jura

What is now the canton Jura belonged to the bishopric of Basel before it was given to Bern in the 19th century. It was the privilege of the bishop and his friends to go hunting, but the peasants were allowed to hunt bear, lynx, wolf, wild pig as long as they sent the bishop the head and the right front paw.

When a bishop tried to restrict his subjects' right to go hunting, they revolted and went hunting anyway, only it was then called poaching... In the 18th century there were still bears and eagles in the Jura. Wolves were perceived as a danger for stock and people. Wild pigs still come from across the border.

The Swiss version of Gang warfare – Jurassic Terrorists?

The Béliers (French for ram) are a militant youth organisation of Jura separatists. Before Jura was recognized as a separate canton in 1979 the Béliers were involved in all sorts of legal and illegal protests and demonstrations. Since the formation of the canton Jura they have been fighting for a bigger canton Jura, where the districts that stayed with the canton Bern (La Neuveville, Moutier and Courtelary) would belong to the canton Jura, too.

Apart from stealing the Unspunnenstein, they toppled and smashed monuments and burned down an old wooden bridge. One Béliers even died when an explosive exploded prematurely.

The counterparts to the Béliers are the Sangliers (French for wild pig). The Sangliers are a pro-Bern organisation; however, the Sangliers accept the vote of the Delémont, Franches-Montagnes and Porrentruy districts to form an independent canton. They resist the Béliers agitation in the Jura areas that still are part of canton Bern.

Wolves in Courtedoux

The 17th century was a lawless century, a century of war, with warlords and their mercenaries marauding through Western Europe for decades, plundering and setting fire to whole villages, killing as many villagers as they could. In 1636 Swedish troops (well, not troops, just hordes of marauders) devastated the village of Courtedoux in what is now the canton Jura and then belonged to the Bishop of Basel. When they had left, packs of wolves roamed through the streets of the burnt village, feasting on the corpses.

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