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Chalandamarz

This custom is known in the Romansh-speaking part of the Canton of Graubünden on 1 March each year (chalanda=first, Marz=March). The event harks back to the time when the Romans occupied the land known as Raetia.

At that time, Chalandamarz marked the start of the year and served to drive out the evil spirits. Later, it became the occasion for the Presidents of the community, Community Secretary, and treasurers, who were elected in February, to be inaugurated.

Schoolchildren ring the bells moving through villages

These days, schoolchildren sing and ring bells as they move through the village, driving out the winter. The exact details of the festivities vary markedly from village to village. They include whip-cracking, cowbell playing and walking round the village well.

A beautiful description of this tradition can be found in the book "Schellenursli'" ("A bell for Ursli") by Alois Carigiet. It is available from bookshops.

from the internet

Sgraffito

Sgraffito ("scratched", plural Sgraffiti) is a technique of wall decor, produced by applying layers of plaster tinted in contrasting colors to a moistened surface and then scratching so as to produce an outline drawing. On the Engadine house Sgraffiti are often geometrical designs or abstract figures on the façades, often around the windows, which are deeply embedded in the walls; the smaller the windows, the lower the heat loss. To allow as much light into the rooms as possible, the window encasings open outwards like a funnel. *from the internet*

The oldest hut in the alps

The find in the Silvretta mountains near the Austrian border gives scientists the oldest architectural proof that early Iron Age shepherds spent summers living among the rich alpine grasses, tending to herds and using milk to make cheese, in a way much like farmers today.

Carbon dating shows the hut at 2,264 metres above sea level in canton Graubünden was being used as early as 800 BC, hundreds of years before the Roman invasions, when pile dwellings dotted Switzerland's lowland lakes and people were of pre-Celtic tribes.

Not much remains of the hut today but a team of university archeology students have spent the past three years meticulously excavating its foundation, a dry-stacked stone structure that held wood walls and a roof. The centuries had left the site overgrown with thick mud, roots and grasses. The hut could have held four to six people.

Archaeologists had already documented numerous prehistoric settlements in the Lower Engadine Valley, particularly near Ramosch, which is warmer, drier and more fit for habitation than other nearby valleys.

It would make sense that those ancient dwellers would have pushed into the high alpine regions in summer. Linguists say that a prehistoric name for one of the areas, Fimba or Fimber, even means "fattening" or "rich", a reference to the good grasses for livestock.

Starting in 2007, archeologists set out to canvass the landscape north of those early Iron Age settlements by following valleys into high pastures near modern-day Austria. When they saw an area where the ground looked different from the rest they went and dug a test trench. The team quickly found charcoal and sent a sample back to the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich for testing, which revealed the hut had been in use nearly 3,000 years ago.

The site sits just a two-minute walk from a modern-day hut. A trail has been running next to the site for years, but the ruins were so hidden that no one knew it.

This summer the team uncovered clay potsherds. They also discovered other archaeological sites, including a fire pit that may stem from the fifth millennium BC, a time when people were just transitioning from hunting and gathering to domesticating livestock.

Botanists also work on the site to help determine what the climate could have been like when the hut was in use. The hut sits on a windswept, treeless area that leads up to the Fimber Pass. The site was most likely in the woods when it was built, because fossilised trees dating to around the same time have been found preserved in bogs nearby. People have since chopped down the trees for pasture land, building homes and making fires. *from swissinfo*