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Unesco Swiss World Heritage Sites

Prehistoric pile dwellings around the Alps

A serial and trans-national list

Ancient lakeside settlements in the Alpine region count among the most important archaeological cultural assets in Europe. From about 1000 sites actually known, the 111 with the greatest scientific potential have been included into the UNESCO World Heritage Site. They date from 5000 to 500 BC and are situated under water, on lake shores, along rivers or in wetlands, offering exceptional conservation conditions for organic remains such as wood, textiles, plant remains or bones.

The candidature *Prehistoric Pile Dwellings around the Alps* has been staged under the auspices of the Swiss UNESCO committee. However, all Alpine countries – Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia and of course, Switzerland, are involved.



Rich pre-historic finds
www.palafittes.org

Over the past decades, pile-dwelling research has made a significant contribution to the establishment of a true-to-life picture of the past. Our knowledge of early settlement history in the pre-alpine region is largely based on scientific results obtained from pile dwelling sites.

Sites in Switzerland

56 of the 111 sites listed are located in 15 Cantons of Switzerland: Aargau, Berne, Fribourg, Geneva, Lucerne, Neuchâtel, Nidwalden, St. Gall, Schaffhausen, Solothurn, Schwyz, Thurgau, Vaud, Zug and Zurich.

Around the Three Lakes Region

22 sites can be found in this region. These sites are mostly invisible because they are either under water or buried under thick layers of sediment. The Neuchâtel tourism website features a palafitte-flyer about the region's pile dwelling sites (www.neuchateltourisme.ch).

It also mentions that a free iPhone App from the AppStore provides comprehensive commentaries about each site.

For those lucky enough to go on a trip to Switzerland, however, the region offers several information centres, museums and exhibitions covering the topic for further exploration, both indoors and out, for example, including the Museum of Morat and the Lacustrine Village at Gletterens.

Museum of Morat (Murten)

Fields of piles made their appearance 150 years ago in winter when the water level of Swiss lakes was at its lowest. These vestiges were understood to be the remains of an ancient form of habitation constructed by our ancestors. The museum features a very interesting permanent display illustrating 6000 years of the history of Morat, including settlements by the riverbank from the Neolithic and Bronze Age. The museum stands in the old water mill, situated under the surrounding walls of the city.

(More information is available at www.museummurten.ch).

The Lacustrine Village at Gletterens

Situated about 11 km northwest of Avanches, this village was built by archaeologists in 1996 on the site of a lakeside village dating back to 3000 BC. It takes you back 5000 years to farming and community life on the edge of Lake Neuchâtel.



Lacustrine Village at Gletterens
www.village-lacustre.ch

The village organises attractions and workshops around the theme of life in the period 4500 to 800 BC. You can even spend the night there in a tipi (tent) or have a Stone Age meal. Skills which can be learned are making a Neolithic knife or a Paleolithic lamp, ancient fire lighting methods and hunting with a spear.

Sources and further information:
www.erlebnismarken.ch
www.unesco.org
www.palafittes.org



Underwater archaeology
www.nb.admin.ch

Rich finds

The finds from pile dwellings display considerable cultural variety. Scholars today can identify more than 30 different cultural groups associated with the pile dwelling sites.

Therefore, the interactions – even across the Alps – between Central and South Eastern European, Western European and Mediterranean cultural traditions – can thus be studied and illustrated.