

## 10 years of UNESCO World Heritage listing for the "Prehistoric Pile Dwellings around the Alps"



In 2021, archaeology is celebrating a small jubilee! Ten years ago, on June 27<sup>th</sup> 2011, the "Prehistoric Pile Dwellings around the Alps" were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The entry is a selection of 111 unique prehistoric sites in Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland and are combined as a transnational serial World Heritage site. The 111 sites are representing more than 1,000 other known Neolithic and Bronze Age sites. Numerous special events are taking place around the Alps in this anniversary year.

The "Prehistoric Pile Dwellings around the Alps" constitute deposits of prime importance for the knowledge of European societies in recent prehistory. After a prolonged drought, the water levels of the Alpine lakes had lowered so much that in 1854, an abundance of prehistoric wooden piles, ceramics, and stone tools, became visible on the shores of Lake Zurich, in Switzerland. These easily accessible remains of villages on piles were quickly dated to an intermediate period between the end of the last Ice Age and ancient historic times. This allowed archaeologists to prove the existence of Neolithic settlements in the area, a period in time, when prehistoric populations practiced agriculture and animal husbandry for the first time.

The pile dwelling sites are also of exceptional value because of their particular conservation conditions. Due to the absence of oxygen underwater, and in a wet soil environment, many remains of organic elements, such as wood, plant and food materials, as well as textiles, have been perfectly preserved. The pile dwelling sites represent a unique archive for research into everyday life in the Neolithic and Bronze Age. They also provide a better understanding of the effects of climatic fluctuations in prehistoric and historic times. For all these reasons, UNESCO has inscribed them on the World Heritage List.

In 2021, we celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inscription with events at various locations around the Alps, on lakes and marshes, along educational trails and in museums. An overview of the joint projects in the six countries and information on other activities can be found on the website [www.palafittes.org](http://www.palafittes.org). Under the title "10 years - 100 stories", our virtual showcase provides highlights of pile dwelling sites and everyday objects that have been found there.

### General information

Since its inscription on the World Heritage List in 2011, the management of the property has been shared between the six participating countries, Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland. The International Coordination Group UNESCO Palafittes (ICG) was established to ensure international coordination. Its work is supported by a secretariat in Basel, Switzerland, which is the contact point for all questions and information concerning the World Heritage property.



## Country-specific information

You can request the images shown here and other images in printable quality at [info@palafittes.org](mailto:info@palafittes.org).



### Switzerland

56 of the UNESCO pile dwelling sites are located in Switzerland. They are found around the greater lakes of Lake Geneva and Lake Constance as well as across the marshes, moors and shores of the many lesser lakes of eastern and north-western Switzerland, and the Swiss Central Plateau. This is also where the “Pile Dwelling Fever” had its beginnings and from where it spread across the entire Alpine region. Now famous sites, such as Cortaillod, Auvernier, Lüscherz, and Arbon, became known beyond the nation’s borders, and eventually became eponymous for entire periods of prehistoric material culture.

Responsible for the management of the world heritage sites is the association “Swiss Coordination Group UNESCO Palafittes”, which is made up of the fifteen Swiss Cantons that are home to the sites, the State Department for Culture, and the Swiss Archaeological Society.

The Cantons, together with other stakeholders, such as museums, collections, the Swiss association “World Heritage Experience Switzerland ” and the Swiss UNESCO Commission, will present many interesting events during the ten-year-jubilee. One of the highlights will be the 8<sup>th</sup> International Log Boat Regatta at Lake Greifensee, Kanton Zurich, on September 11-12. For more information and updates, visit our event calendar at [www.palafittes.org](http://www.palafittes.org).

*[photo: Late Bronze Age site of Bevaix , Lake Neuchâtel ©Laténium, F. Langenegger]*

### Austria

Five of the 111 sites of the world heritage site complex “Prehistoric Pile Dwellings around the Alps” are found in Austria. Four of them are in Upper Austria, at Lake Attersee and Lake Mondsee, and another is at Lake Keutschacher in Carinthia. The total number of lacustrine settlements in Austria is hard to estimate. Some may not even have been discovered while others have already disappeared forever.

There are currently 27 scientifically recorded sites, of which the majority belong to the Lake Mondsee culture of the 4th millennium BC. The most recent settlements date almost into historic times around 500 BC. The highest density of settlements is seen on the western shore of Lake Attersee.

It is interesting to note that the pile dwellings at Lake Keutschacher were not built on the lake shore but on shallow banks in the center of the lake. They were discovered by Ferdinand Hochstetter, the first Director of the Natural History Museum in Vienna, in the year 1864. Thanks to this fact, the Museum was able to add some rare and important artefacts to its collection and exhibits. The Austrian section of the transnational UNESCO heritage site is managed by the Pile Dwelling Conservatory Organization, which was founded by the Republic of Austria and the federal states of Upper Austria and Carinthia.

*[photo: Research dive at the pile-dwelling site in Lake Keutschachersee, Carinthia © Kuratorium Pfahlbauten]*





### France

Eleven of the pile dwelling sites inscribed on the World Heritage List are located in the French Jura, Savoie and Haute-Savoie, in the waters of the lakes of Chalain, Clairvaux, Aiguebelette, Bourget, Léman and Annecy. The oldest village dates from 6000 years ago, in the Middle Neolithic, while the most recent ones were abandoned during the transition between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, 2700 years ago, when a climatic episode of cooling and greater rainfall raised the water level of the lakes and inundated the villages.

Presided over by the Prefect of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region, the French state, local authorities, various institutions and associations, are working to study the sites to guarantee their continued preservation and "exceptional universal value". The recognition by UNESCO is also an incentive to make the sites and their study known to as many people as possible.

Several temporary exhibitions, at the Musée d'Archéologie Nationale in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and in the museums of Lons-le-Saunier (Jura), and Annecy (Haute-Savoie), present the results of the archaeological research carried out to date. The first monograph devoted to the Savoyard and Haute-Savoyard pile dwelling sites will be published at the end of June 2021 by the Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles d'Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes.

*[Lac de Chalain (Jura). Documentation of a neolithic travois © Centre de recherche archéologique de la vallée de l'Ain / P. Pétrequin]*

### Germany

18 of the inscribed sites are located in Germany, between the western shore of Lake Constance in Baden-Württemberg and the shore of the Starnberger Lake in Bavaria. They represent an important part of the serial and transnational world heritage site "Prehistoric Pile Dwellings around the Alps." Along the shores of Lake Constance there are nine inscribed sites, with another six sites located around the smaller lakes of Upper Swabia and its moors and marshes. The three sites in Bavaria are found northeast of Landsberg am Lech, and on the Roseninsel of Starnberger Lake. The State Monuments Office in Stuttgart has mounted an exhibit entitled "Piles, Walls and Cacti" with a focus on wetland archaeology and the world heritage sites that will be on display at the Garden Fair in Überlingen until October 17th, 2021. Another exhibit in Bad Buchau at the Federsee Museum showcases "Knotted und Sewn Up: Grasses, Bast and Bark – Jacks-of-All-Trades of the Stone Age" and introduces new discoveries in textile archaeology. It will be on view until October 24th.

On World Heritage Information Day, July 3rd, a colorful and interesting program will be presented along the visitors' trail on the Roseninsel, including archaeological divers showcasing some of their equipment and talking about their work under water. On July 23rd, the Stone Age Village of Pestenacker will be reopened with a brand-new exhibition in the visitors' pavilion, lots of new information displays, and fun activities for all ages in the outdoor areas.

Also, the online Foodblog [www.palafitfood.com](http://www.palafitfood.com) is worth a visit for kitchen chefs of all sizes, with new weekly glimpses into the pots and pans of Stone Age and Bronze Age cooks. For more inspiration and recipes, and information about the monthly Cook-Off-Challenge, check out the Instagram channel @palafitfood.

*[photo: wild apples approx. 5700 years old, Alleshhausen-Grundwiesen (Biberach) © Landesamt für Denkmalpflege im RP Stuttgart, U. Maier]*





### Italy

19 UNESCO World Heritage sites are found across five regions of Italy: ten in Lombardy, four in Venetia, two in Piedmont, one in Friuli Venezia Giulia, and two in Trentino Alto Adige. The pile dwelling phenomenon extends from the pre-Alpine lakes in the north to the valley of the river Po in the South. The majority of the pile dwelling settlements are located in the vicinity of Lake Garda and Lake Varese. So far, the oldest discovered remains date to the Early Neolithic, around 5000 BC. During the Early and Middle Bronze Age, we see settlement activities increase. Then, by the end of the second millennium BC, the pile dwellings seem to disappear. Excavations have brought to light a trove of artefacts, made of bronze, antler, animal bones, stone, and especially pottery. Because of the excellent preservation conditions, objects of organic materials were also recovered, like wood and textiles. The high level of technological development of the Bronze Age pile dwellers laid the foundation for the following cultural development of the entire area. During the ten-year-jubilee of 2021, numerous events are taking place: exhibitions in Venice, Varese, Brescia, Turin, Gavardo, Manerba, and Desenzano, concerts in Polpenazze del Garda, a science fair in Varese, educational and experiential projects, experimental archaeology, and the inauguration of the Archeo-Park Palafitte di Fiavè.

*[photo: Parco Archeo Natura Fiavè © Soprintendenza per i beni culturali – Trento]*

### Slovenia

Two of the inscribed World Heritage pile dwelling sites are located in the municipality of Ig, in Ljubljansko barje marsh. In the area of Ljubljansko barje there are over 40 known locations of pile dwelling settlement remains. With periodic interruptions, the pile dwellings were occupied at Ljubljansko barje between 4500 BC and 2000 BC. Abundant materials were found, including decorated ceramics and sculptures, as well as the oldest wooden wheel in the world.

Krajinski park Ljubljansko barje is a public institution for the management and protection of the whole area and specifically of the two UNESCO pile dwelling sites. Working closely with local stakeholders, the organization is focused on the conservation, the protection and the promotion of the outstanding universal value of the pile dwellings.

Beside regular activities of hydrological monitoring of underground water level, and communication with stakeholders, Krajinski park Ljubljansko barje is developing a project for a new Information and Visitor Center, with an educational walking trail and a reconstructed pile dwelling village. The emphasis will be on the presentation of pile dwelling cultural heritage as well as the natural site and conditions that guaranteed its preservation over thousands of years.

*[photo: pile dwelling site of Špica, Ljubljana © City Museum of Ljubljana, MGML, G.Babič]*



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