



Science Diver in the Blue Economy Era - International Conference

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Research and protection of shallow water archaeological sites around the Alps

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ABSTRACT

Since 2011 there has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site “Prehistoric Pile Dwellings around the Alps” in six European countries around the Alps. 111 sites have been selected to represent the approximately 1000 known prehistoric lake and moorland settlements. But with the World Heritage designation comes responsibility. In Austria there are five sites of this serial UNESCO World Heritage Site and they are all located under water in shallow water zones. Located on the shores of Lake Attersee and Lake Mondsee in Upper Austria and on a former island in Lake Keutschachersee in Carinthia, they face different threats and require different forms of monument preservation. [1]

The task of the Kuratorium Pfahlbauten is to take care of the mediation, research and protection of this underwater cultural heritage in Austria. A team of research divers, not only regularly checks the condition of the sites, but also installs under water protection measures. Regular diving activities include surface surveys, the placement and reading of erosion markers, documentation, measurements and sediment coring, as well as the installation of underwater erosion protection mats. [2] But communication with the authorities, communities, lake owners, residents, fishermen and regional associations is also an important key to protecting the lakes’ monuments. [3]

In addition to the diving work for the preservation of monuments, the diving team's annual program includes research work at various sites. Various research projects require skills in underwater excavation, sampling and retrieval and handling of artifacts. Specialists trained in archaeology with additional training in scientific diving can accompany this work. [4]

To date, around 30 prehistoric pile-dwelling settlements have been identified in Austria, but many more undiscovered sites are slumbering in our waters. Archaeology has always benefited from reports of finds from the general public. The discovery of some lakeside settlements also goes back to reports of objects collected on the shore or finds by divers. In cooperation with interested Austrian diving bases the Kuratorium Pfahlbauten also offers special courses to sensitize the diving community to the underwater cultural heritage. Because only those who recognize an object are capable to pin down its signifi-



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cance. This is important as we know, a cultural monument never stands alone, it is always part of a community and a specific context, even if it is submerged in a lake.

Digital Formats:

1. Underwater coring at the UNESCO World Heritage site Keutschachersee at Carinthia ©Kuratorium Pfahlbauten
2. Underwater excavation at the Neolithic lakeshore settlement Seewalchen at Lake Attersee ©Kuratorium Pfahlbauten

References:

[1] C. Dworsky, C. Löw, H. Pohl (2016). Unter Wasser - Die UNESCO schützt prähistorische Pfahlbauten um die Alpen und in Österreich. *Sporttaucher*, 2/2016, 14-16. [2] H. Novak (2016) Neolithic Lake Settlements: A new UNESCO World Heritage leads to the emerging of underwater- and wetland-research in Austria. *NERD*, 291, 36–44. [3] C. Dworsky, H. Novak (2012) Archäologische Überlebensstrategie UNESCO-Welterbe: Das UNESCO-Welterbe Prähistorische Pfahlbauten um die Alpen -Entstehungsgeschichte, Forschungsaufgaben und Fragen der Nachhaltigkeit. *Archäologie Österreichs*, 23/2, 2-12. [4] H. Pohl, H. Seidl da Fonseca (2020). Archäologie im Alpensee, Aus dem Alltag unterwasserarchäologischer Ausgrabungen im Projekt „Zeitensprung“ in Österreich. *Antike Welt*, 2020, 27-29.