





## Archaeology along the Albula and Bernina line

 Locations of archaeological finds

 Ore storage sites


 Therapeutic springs

### Core zone

 Core zone with railway and cultural landscape

### Buffer zone

 Buffer zone in the near area

 Buffer zone in the distant area (backdrop)

 Horizon line

### Other contents

 Other stretches of the Rhaetian Railway

Sources:

Basic map: PK 200'000 swisstopo, Wabern

Geo-data: Amt für Raumentwicklung Graubünden

Thematic data: Mathias Seifert

Design: Süsskind, SGD, Chur

Reproduced by permission of swisstopo (BM062220)



## 2.b History and Development

### 2.b.1 Archaeology along the Albula and Bernina line

Archaeological finds in the cultural landscape of the Albula/Bernina date back to the Neolithic. Thanks to the routes across the passes and the resources of ores, these mountain valleys retained their importance as settlement locations through the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman period until the threshold of the Middle Ages. Despite the cultural links with the north and south, the regional independence, due to their remoteness, is striking in all periods of pre-history and early history.

After the end of the last Ice Age, some 19,000 years ago, the Alps of the Graubünden were modelled to form the landscape we know today by the retreat of the glaciers and the erosive effect of the rivers flowing from them. Ranges running from west to east separate the Engadin from the Albula and Poschiavo valleys and are the watersheds for the waters of the Albula, Inn and Poschiavino rivers flowing north, east or south. They also separate the three distinct cultural areas of the Albula, Upper Engadin and Poschiavo Valleys. Due to the remoteness, the regional character of these valleys is usually clearly recognisable in the pattern of archaeological finds. The fundamental cultural orientation to the north is determinant for the Albula Valley, and that to the south for the Upper Engadin and Poschiavo – and this through all periods of pre- and early history.

#### Palaeolithic and Mesolithic

**(11,000 – 10,000 BC and 10,000 – 6,000 BC)**

The first inhabitants of the alpine region lived towards the end of the Palaeolithic era. As hunters they followed the game to the sparse vegetation of the mountain valleys coming from what is now

southern Germany in the north and upper Italy in the south. The Domleschg and Poschiavo valleys were two of the gateways for settlers. To date there have been no finds along the Albula-Bernina route to document this pioneer phase. The subsequent changes to the valleys due to flooding and rockfall have washed away relics of the camps, which were only used for a few days, so that any archaeological finds throughout the alpine region indicating these early settlers are really lucky finds. Similarly there are no known habitation or burials sites from the following Mesolithic period, when the people continued to live as hunters and foragers under changed environmental conditions. However, relevant finds in the neighbouring valleys suggest seasonally used camps in the Albula/Bernina region as well. That the Alps were crossed in both directions even in the Mesolithic era is evidenced by the import of high quality flint to the neighbouring valleys.

#### Neolithic (6000 – 2200 BC)

There was a fundamental change in the way of living during the Neolithic era. The hunters and foragers started planting crops and raising animals, they settled, built wooden houses and start-



Cazis-Petrushügel > The hill plateau was settled in the Neolithic age (some 2800 BC).  
Archäologischer Dienst  
Graubünden

Neolithic artefacts found in the high Alpine region.  
All photos: Archäologischer Dienst  
Graubünden



Obervaz > Flint blades.



St. Moritz > Flint arrow heads.



Bernina Pass > Hard rock axe blades.



Poschiavo area > Copper axe (some 3000 BC).

ed to make clay vessels. As flooding, rockfall and rockslides are always to be expected in the mountains, the villages are usually built on hills on the flanks of the valleys. The Neolithic Petrushugel high-altitude settlement at Cazis (some 2800 BC) is located on a high terrace on the flank of the Heizenberg. Several archaeological excavations have produced a rich inventory of clay vessels, bone, flint and stone tools. Erosion has wiped out any traces of the settlement on the 1,800 square metre plateau. Specially decorated clay vessels document the connections with south German regions.

According to present findings, the Neolithic people settled in places below 1,000 m; only isolated flint tools and weapons have been found at higher altitudes to date. However, a remarkable flint blade was found by a hiker in the Albula Valley at 2,250 m, above Obervaz. An arrow head was found during building work in St. Moritz, in the Upper Engadin. A stone axe head found high above the Poschiavo valley proves that people did cross the high altitude zone. All these artefacts were probably used by passing traders and hunters or herdsmen who spent the summer on the alps with their livestock. A copper axe was discovered in the Poschiavo area; the same type as the one carried by the “Ice Man” found on the Similaun glacier. This find suggests that the Alpine resources of ores were already sought and exploited 3000 BC.

In view of the proven transfer of raw materials from south to north (flint) and away from the Alps (hard rock for axe heads), we can assume that there was a well used network of paths over the alpine passes already in the Neolithic era. The variety of shapes and decoration on the ceramic vessels and jewellery makes it clear that despite the volume of transit traf-

fic, the Domleschg, as far as the Albula Pass, was culturally oriented to the north, whereas the Poschiavo valley, was rather oriented to the south due to the barrier of the Bernina massif. To date it has not been possible to evidence any Neolithic settlement in the Upper Engadin which lies between them.

### **Bronze Age (2200 – 800 BC)**

With the triumphal advance of bronze (an alloy of copper and tin) as the new tool-making material, the importance of the Alps as a mining area increased. Copper ore is found at various places along the Albula/Bernina route and in the neighbouring valleys. The deposits at Filisur, Bergün/Bravuogn, Madulain and Pontresina deserve special mention. Large slag heaps, the waste dumps from ore processing, have been discovered providing tangible evidence of the prehistoric mining activities. A dump of broken bronze hammers found at Filisur indicates the importance of mining in the Albula Valley during the Bronze Age.

The clear increase of settlements during this period, evidenced by archaeology, was not solely due to the Bronze Age people’s search for and exploitation of ore deposits. Progress in planting crops and keeping animals led to an improved economic basis that was reflected by the growth in population. Settlement sites and individual finds at various locations along the Albula/Bernina route prove the existence of Bronze Age villages. The Cazis-Cresta settlement is quite exceptional. It was built in a six metre wide and 100 metre long rock cleft on a hill flanking the Heizenberg. This site was inhabited throughout the Bronze Age and has provided a unique range of finds in clay, stone, bone and metal. The Bronze Age settlement site on the rocky hilltops of Craistas Pitschna



**Filisur > Bronze Age hoard with broken bronze hammers.**  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden



**Bergün/Bravuogn-Craistas Pitschna > The Bronze Age settlement in a dominant position on a rocky outcrop.**  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden



**Madulain > Today, the Bronze Age waste heap on the Alp Es-Cha is almost completely overgrown.**  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden



**Bergün/Bravuogn > Isolated find of a bronze bangle (some 1300 BC).**  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden



**Madulain > Isolated find of a Bronze Age dagger blade (some 1400 BC).**  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden



and Craistas Grond at the entrance to the wide Bergün/Bravuogn valley basin protected and controlled the route across the Albula pass. The proximity of the copper ore deposits in Val Plazbi were probably another reason for establishing a village here. A slag heap discovered on Alp Es-cha near Madulain in the Upper Engadin, from about 900 BC, is linked to a settlement site that has not yet been located; chance finds like a bronze dagger back up this hypothesis. A bronze sickle found in Bever indicates that crops were planted in the Engadin up to an altitude of 1,700 m at this time. Mot la Scera near Poschiavo, to the south of the Bernina Pass, has already been localised as a Bronze Age settlement site. Isolated finds at various points indicate the presence of villages in the Poschiavo valley during the Bronze Age, even if these have not yet been discovered. Transalpine trade with raw materials and finished products also increased as a result of denser settlement. A well-developed trade and carrier traffic across the across the Bernina and Albula passes in the Bronze Age can be assumed. Tools, weapons and clay vessels from the south German or north Italian regions found their way into the inner recesses of the Alps. The far-reaching connections are evidenced not only by the goods transported. The unique rock art at Carschenna (at Sils i.D.) is striking as the oldest evidence of cult activities. These Bronze and Iron Age drawings on several slabs of rock along a rock face at the entrance to the Albula valley, 500 metres above the valley floor, are the most important and largest collection of rock drawings in Switzerland. The chiselled drawings – concentric circles, animals, human figures and line systems – can probably be interpreted as symbolic cult representations. It is interesting that comparable images are also

found in the Valtellina and Val Camonica, at the southern tip of the Albula/Bernina route.

The holy waters are another focus of religious activity. In the alpine zones with their deposits of ores, warm springs enriched with iron and sulphur rise to the surface in various places. It is probable, though not yet confirmed, that the springs at Rothenbrunnen and Alvaneu, which are still used today, were holy sites in the Bronze Age as bronze artefacts have been found near them. The Bronze Age construction to tap the spring at St. Moritz is unique. This comprises three hollowed out larch trunks as pipes, a log built wooden box frame, four wooden hooks and a sturdy log ladder. They were embedded in moist clay which explains why they have been so well preserved. Dendochronology (tree ring dating) has established that they originate from the 15th century before Christ. Bronze votive offerings were laid at the base of one of the pipes (a dagger, three swords, a needle).

The differentiation of the regional cultural areas Albula, Upper Engadin and Poschiavo valleys, with their relevant orientation to the north and south, continued during the Bronze Age. Nevertheless a mesh of connections across the ridge of the Alps can be assumed. The proportion of foreign forms in the finds makes it clear that not only trade wares found their way across the Alps. Again and again, groups of people from the south and from the north moved to this region contributing to the blending of the various population groups.

### **Iron Age (800 – 15 B.C.)**

Knowledge of how to process iron reached the Alps towards the end of the Bronze Age. Processing copper to make bronze was easier than making iron, but the new metal offered advantages with respect to hardness and elasticity. The switch to making tools and weap-



**Bever > Chance find of a bronze sickle (about 1000 BC).**  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden



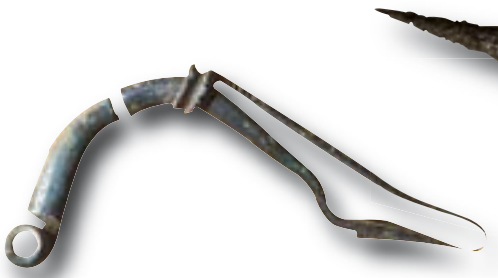
**Poschiavo > Chance find of Bronze axe (about 1500 BC).**  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden



**Carschenna at Sils i.D. > Section of a rock slab engraved with signs and symbols (Bronze/Iron Age).**  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden



**St. Moritz > The Bronze Age larch wood arrangement to tap the spring.**  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden



**Scharans > Bronze fibulae – used to fasten clothes –made in the Celtic tradition, from the Scharans-Spundas settlement (some 200 BC).**  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden



**Pontresina > Chance find; Iron Age spearheads (3rd/2nd century BC).**  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden



ons from iron was very rapid in the Iron Age. Bronze was still used, but only for jewellery. Deposits of iron compounds are much more common than copper ore along the Albula/Bernina route. The deposits at Filisur, Bergün/Bravuogn, Madulain and Pontresina deserve special mention. As the resources were exploited on a large scale from the Middle Ages until modern times, hardly any traces are left of mining in the Iron Age. Large slag heaps and charcoal dumps indicate systematic mining by Iron Age standards. The distribution of the few, known settlement sites gives an incomplete picture of the effective situation during the Iron Age; research should fill this gap. In view of the broad distribution of mining and the transalpine exchange of goods between the Celts in the north and the Etruscans in the south, the density of settlements along the Albula/Bernina route must have been considerably higher than in the Bronze Age. To date, village sites have been found only in the Domleschg valley. The settlement near Scharans, built on the steep flank of the Spundas hill at the entrance to the Albula Valley, dates back to the 2nd century BC. The wood and dry stone wall buildings were scattered across the hillside. They were set deep into the slope on the uphill side and supported by columns on the downhill side. Besides regional characteristics, the finds reflect a certain Celtic influence. There was another Iron Age village at Cazis on the Crestas hill already mentioned; this was inhabited throughout the Bronze Age. Iron lance heads have been found in the Upper Engadin and Poschiavo indicating that there were probably settlement sites there. With the appearance of the Celts in the north and the Etruscans in the south the north-south cultural orientation of the valleys becomes more distinctly visible in the range of finds than in the previous eras.

### **Roman Era, Early Middle Ages (15 BC – 400 AD, 400 – 800 BC)**

In 16 – 14 BC, Drusus and Tiberius, the stepsons of the Emperor Augustus, led the military conquest of the alpine region. Some remarkable finds at the entrance to the Albula Valley document this historic event that has left its mark in Graubünden to the present day. The campaign, which progressed from Bergell over the Septimer Pass into the Albula Valley and then down the Rhine Valley to the Lake of Constance, met with resistance from the inhabitants. Lead catapult ammunition bearing the sigils of the Roman legions was discovered above Tiefencastel as well as Roman and alpine battle axes and lance heads indicating a battle site. Incorporation in the Roman Empire brought more than military control by Rome across the Alps; the achievements of the highly developed culture from the south rapidly changed the way of life and the settlement landscape of the alpine peoples. The expansion of the road network, the coinage system, the building of stone houses, baths and Roman cuisine are only a few examples. The virtually complete pervasion with Roman culture meant that the regional differences are no longer recognisable in the archaeological pattern; this also applies for the Albula/Bernina region. To date Roman settlement sites have been discovered in the Domleschg and Albula valleys. There was a Roman hamlet perched on the plateau of the imposing and naturally fortified Hohenrätia crag at Sils i.D. valley. No Roman village settlements have been definitively localised in the Upper Engadin and Poschiavo valleys to date. But isolated finds along the St. Moritz – Poschiavo stretch do evidence transit traffic, so the existence of Roman villages appears probable.



Tiefencastel > Lead catapult ammunition with the sigils of the Roman legions.  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden



Tiefencastel > There was a fortified settlement on the present church hill in late Roman times.  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden



Sils i.D. > The terrain around the Middle Ages fort of Hohenrhätien was settled already in Roman times.  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden



Pontresina and Poschiavo > Chance finds of Roman spearheads (1st – 4th century BC).  
Archäologischer Dienst Graubünden

Mining continued to be an important economic factor in Roman times but, analogous to pre-historic mining, direct proof is rare as ore was mined uninterruptedly until modern times. However, the smithy pits found in some settlements do indicate systematic exploitation.

With the increasing threat from invading Germanic tribes in conjunction with the internal decline of the Roman Empire in the 4th century, security and prosperity fell in the alpine region. Subsequently fortified settlements appear in various places. The striking late Roman complex at Tiefencastel, on the present church hill, marks the important strategic point where the Albula and Julier separate. The remains of several 4th–5th century pillar dwellings complete with hearths have been excavated here. The modest number of finds – apart from an excellent bronze disc-shaped fibula, for the most part vessels made from alpine soapstone – presage the economic and political decline of the Roman Empire.

According to legend, the Christian faith spread through the alpine region already in the 2nd century; written and archaeological sources, however, can only evidence it from the 5th century. The transition to the Christian religion was gradual and it is not rare for the early churches to be built on Roman religious sites.

The number of finds dwindles towards the end of the Roman era. A few isolated finds and graves along the Albula/Bernina route indicate the continued existence of the settlements in the 5th and 6th centuries. The alpine region did not flourish again until under the sway of the Merovingians and later the Carolingians. The great importance of the passes linking north and south is underlined by the impressive churches and monasteries that were built in Domleschg and along the Albula route between 600 and 800.