

Have you found anything in or around the ice?

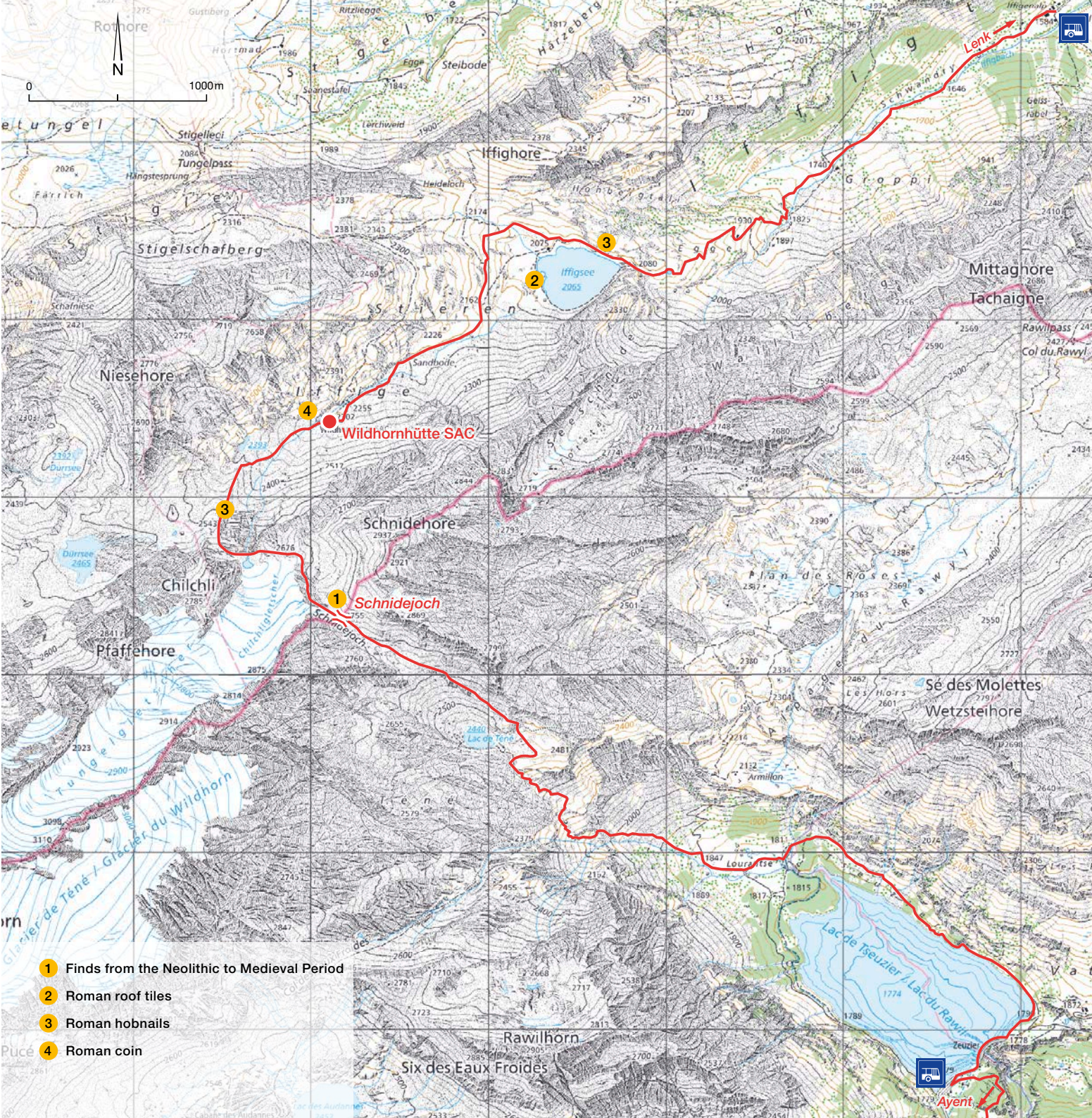
- Do not recover the object or only if it is directly threatened.
- Photograph the object and its wider surroundings.
- Mark the location.
- Write down the coordinates of the location or mark it on a map.
- Archaeological finds belong to the canton in which they were found. Report them to the relevant cantonal authority.

Archäologischer Dienst des Kantons Bern
Brünnenstrasse 66
Postfach
3001 Bern
Tel. +41 31 633 98 00
adb.bauen@be.ch
www.be.ch/archaeologie

Service des bâtiments, monuments et archéologie
Avenue du midi 18
Case postale
1950 Sion
Tél. +41 27 606 38 00
SBMA-ARCHEOLOGIE@admin.vs.ch
www.vs.ch/web/archeologie/home

Thank you very much!

For archaeological services of other cantons and information:
www.alparch.ch



Bildungs- und Kulturdirektion des Kantons Bern
Direction de l'instruction publique et de la culture
du canton de Berne

Amt für Kultur | Archäologischer Dienst
Office de la culture | Service archéologique
Brünnenstrasse 66 | Postfach/Case postale | 3001 Bern/Berne
adb.sab@be.ch | www.be.ch/archaeologie

Departement für Mobilität, Raumentwicklung
und Umwelt des Kantons Valais
Département de la mobilité, du territoire
et de l'environnement du canton du Valais

Dienststelle für Hochbau, Denkmalpflege und Archäologie
Service des bâtiments, monuments et archéologie
Case postale | 1950 Sion | Téléphone +41 27 606 38 00
SBMA-ARCHEOLOGIE@admin.vs.ch
www.vs.ch/web/archeologie/home

Useful information: Iffigenalp and the Barrage du Tseuzier can be reached by public transport. The hiking trails are mountain trails (T2/T3). Sure-footedness and good footwear are required, as well as appropriate clothing for the wind and weather conditions.

Publications: Albert Hafner, Schnidejoch und Lötschenpass. Archäologische Forschungen in den Berner Alpen. Bern 2015. – Hanspeter Holzhauser, Samuel U. Nussbaumer und Heinz J. Zumbühl, Die beiden Gletscher von Grindelwald. In: Heinz J. Zumbühl et al. (Hrsg), Die Grindelwaldgletscher. Kunst und Wissenschaft. Bern 2016, 13–44. – Christoph Schwörer et al., Holocene climate, fire and vegetation dynamics at the treeline in the North-western Swiss Alps. Vegetation History and Archaeobotany 23 (5), 2014, 479–496.

Cover picture: The Schnidejoch in the foreground and behind the Wildhorn.

Picture Credits: cover picture, site: ADB, Rolf Wenger; artefacts: Badri Redha; reconstruction bow case: Max Stöckli. Reconstruction figure: Bernisches Historisches Museum, Christine Moor. Reconstruction shoe: ADB and Gentle Craft, Lausanne. Map: Federal Office for Topography and ADB, Eliane Schranz (entries).

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Kanton Bern
Canton de Berne

Archäologie
Archéologie



Bernese Alps
Archaeology
of the Schnidejoch





Melting ice and firn continue to release archaeological finds. These are often objects made of organic materials such as wood or leather, which are not preserved at most archaeological sites and therefore provide extremely rare insights into the past. Once the frozen objects have thawed, they can disintegrate within a short period of time.

The north side of the Schnidejoch in the summer of 2005 with the Chilchli glacier in the background.

A forgotten pass

For many thousands of years, the Schnidejoch served as pass between the town of Lenk in the Bernese Oberland and Ayent in the Valais. In Medieval and modern times, the pass was forgotten, and written sources document the Rawil Pass as an alpine crossing. People transported goods and cattle over the Rawil Pass to sell them or for summer grazing on alpine pastures like the Wallisdole on Iffigenalp.

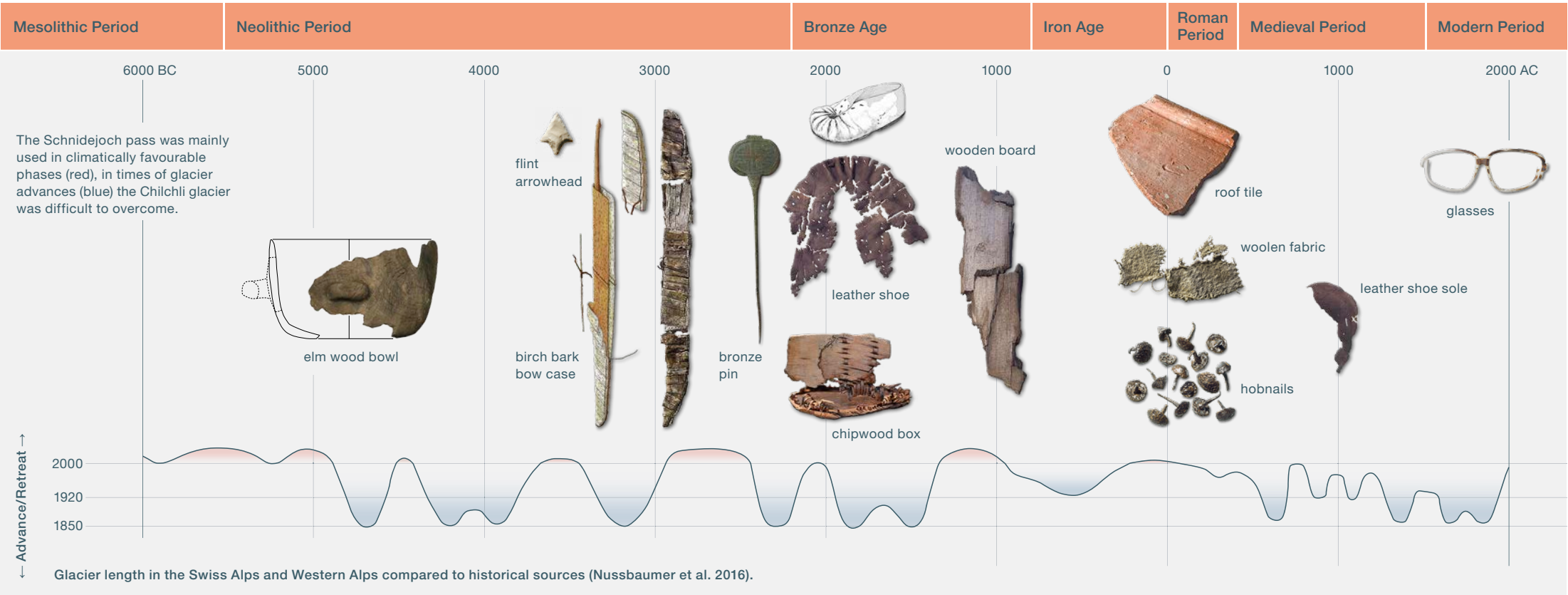
The Schnidejoch only came into focus again in 2003, when a hiker discovered a Neolithic bow case on the pass. Since then and due to the melting of two ice patches on the north side of the pass, over 300 mostly organic objects have been recovered by the archaeological services of the Cantons Bern and Valais. Their preservation in the ice is proof that the Schnidejoch has been frequented for at least 6500 years. Especially during warm climate phases, objects were left behind on the pass. During

these times, the Chilchli glacier retreated so far that it could be bypassed above the escarpment at 2610 m above sea level, as it can be today. In cold phases the glacier lay here and, because of its crevasses, was difficult to overcome.

As early as the 20th century, the discovery of roof tiles on Lake Iffig and a coin near the Wildhorn hut suggested that the pass or at the least the alpine pastures around the lake were used in the Roman Period.



Reconstruction of the owner of the Neolithic bow case.



Unique objects from the Neolithic

The oldest objects from the Schnidejoch are fragments of an elm wood bowl and arrows dating to the 5th millennium BC. Other objects dating to the time around 2800 BC probably all belong to the equipment of one individual. In addition to a bow case, a bow made of yew wood, the presumably accompanying bowstring, arrow shafts and heads, a legging made of goatskin and the remains of leather shoes were discovered. The bow case, made from several layers of birch bark, has no parallel and is thus of great scientific importance.

Pollen and other plant remains from sediments of Lake Iffig prove that pasture farming was already practiced around the lake from the 5th millennium BC onwards. The shepherds probably came up with their animals from the Valais and over the Schnidejoch. Clear evidence of Neolithic settlements in the Bernese Oberland has yet to be discovered.

Finds from the Bronze Age and the Roman Period

A bronze pin, a typical example of the Early Bronze Age (2200–1600 BC), and other objects such as leather shoes and a chipwood box show that in the Bronze Age the pass was also frequented, and objects were occasionally left behind. Patches on shoes and the Neolithic legging illustrate how carefully the equipment was maintained and cared for. The chipwood box made of stone pine and willow wood was a unique find until 2012, when an almost identical object from roughly the same period was found on the Lötschen Pass.

A single wooden board from the period around 1000 BC hints at a Late Bronze Age pass ascent. The next younger finds date to shortly before the turn of the millennium: Roman hobnails, remains of woolen fabrics and leather shoes. At Lake Iffig, the discovery of Roman roof tiles suggests a building, perhaps some type of lodging or a sanctuary.

Climate change and alpine archaeology

The melting of glaciers and ice patches in the Alps in recent decades is both a blessing and a curse for archaeology. The release of the archaeological artefacts from their frozen contexts repeatedly opens a window into the past. However, these windows are only open for a short time. Once the fragile objects are exposed to the elements, wooden and leather objects decompose quickly. Moreover, many ice patches will probably disappear completely in the next few years or decades.

The archaeological services of the Cantons of Bern and Valais regularly check the known sites in order to safeguard and study these finds for posterity.

New objects are documented and recovered; the transformation of the landscape is recorded photographically. However, the archaeological services are also reliant on reports and information from the general public.