



Solnhofen
World in stone



English Edition

Town's history – Quarry – Museum





World renowned

Solnhofen, world renowned due to its limestone slabs and fossils, is one of the most southerly situated municipalities of the district Weißenburg-Gunzenhausen in Middle Franconia.

The small town is situated on both sides of the river Altmühl and has been mentioned historically by the name 'Husen' for the first time in the 2nd half of the 8th century.

Solnhofen was named after the Anglo-saxon monk 'Sola' who was sent to the Altmühl area in 750 a.d.. When he first started his missionary work, he lived in a cave, the so-called 'Sola-Cave'. You can still see the remains of the cave at the hillside high above Solnhofen (it is called 'Käppleinsberg').

The monk's mission was to convert the pagan Germanic peoples to Christianity. When Sola, whose life was wreathed in legends, died on the 3rd of December 794 a.d., he left the locality named 'Solachofinum' (documented as such in 790 a.d.) from which the name 'Solenhofen' and later 'Solnhofen' developed, to the monastery of Fulda. The monks built a tomb monument in Solnhofen and later, in 825 a.d., the Sola basilica was constructed in the exact same place. The remains of this basilica which represents one of the oldest architectural historical monuments in Germany have been preserved until the present day, still displaying its Carolingian pillars.

Not far from the Sola basilica you can see the Senefelder monument. It has been dedicated to the inventor of lithography, Alois Senefelder. Due to the invention of this new method of reproduction using the Solnhofen limestone slabs, he also promoted the development of the famous Solnhofen quarries.





The Quarries and the

„12 Apostles“ of Solnhofen



Evidence from the period 150 million years ago



Live from the primordial sea

The Alps did not yet exist when the Solnhofen limestones formed in Mesozoic times. With the exception of a few continental islands such as the Bohemian landmass, Middle Europe was flooded by the 'Pre-Mediterranean Sea'. In this shelf sea that formed the northernmost part of the Tethys Ocean, a wonderful seascape of Jurassic islands, lagoons, coral reefs and shallow water areas developed 150 million years ago.

The resulting geological landscape was named 'Solnhofen Archipelago' by scientists. Today, we find the reef rocks of this period cropping out along the rivers Altmühl and Danube as well as different types of limestones in various fossil deposits.

The Solnhofen limestones are very pure limestones that were deposited in the Archipelago's lagoons. They developed from suspensions of lime mud that settled on the lagoon floor in the form of thin laminae after storm events

Window in the earth's history

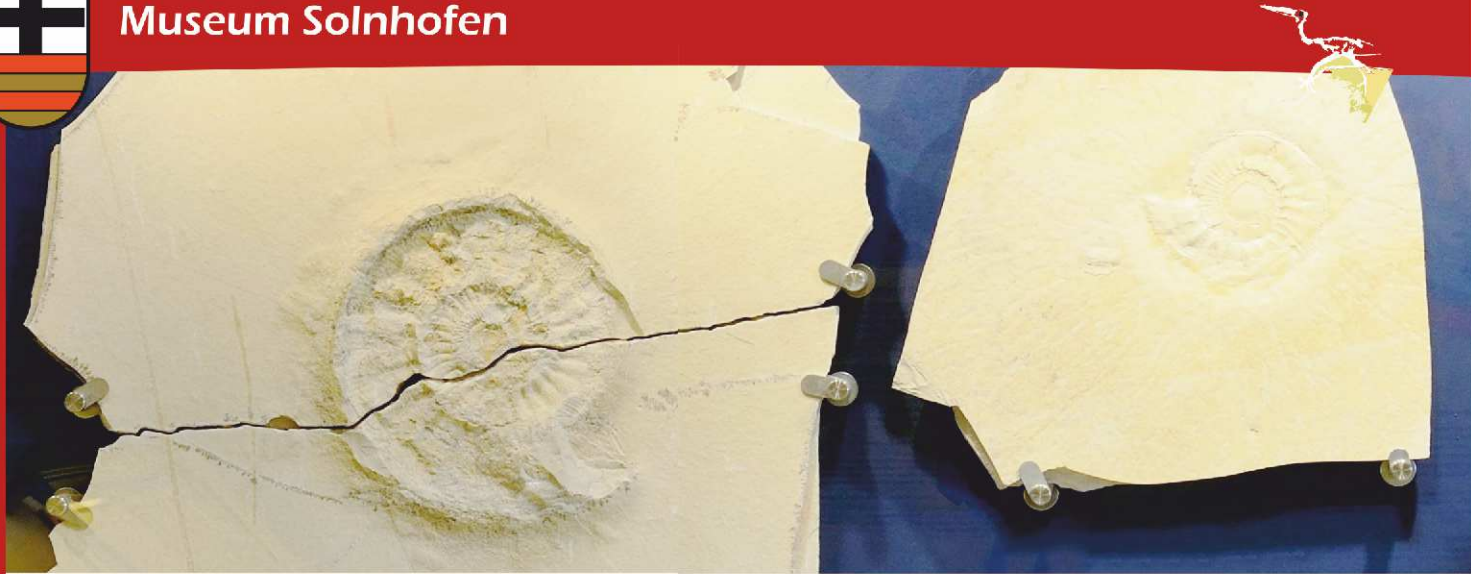
During the following calm periods, microbial mats were able to spread on the lagoon floors. Thus, just before sedimentation would set in again, their surfaces were consolidated and the former lagoon floors therefore conserved.

Today, the quarry workmen still split the limestone slabs along their natural planes of splitting. Solnhofen limestones are shipped worldwide to be used as floor and wall covering as well as treads.

The Solnhofen limestones are a biological product of nature and consist of plant-like microorganisms. Additionally, they contain important fossil remains of animals and plants that inhabited the Solnhofen Archipelago back then.

These fossils originate from the open sea, the reefs and lagoons as well as from the islands.

Thanks to the famous finds of Archaeopteryx and the different dinosaurs, Solnhofen has become one of the world's most significant windows to the geological past.



The Bürgermeister Müller

The exhibition is based on the collection of Friedrich Müller, honorary citizen of Solnhofen and founder of the museum.

Today the exhibition is complemented by outstanding loan items provided by the Bavarian State Collection of Paleontology and Geology as well as by additional exhibits from private collections.

At the start of the museum tour you will learn about the general geological history and the development of the Solnhofen Archipelago within it. Placards and diagrams are available bilingually in either English or German. The accompanying audio guide is subdivided in the three programs Basic, Medium and Expert.

The exhibition itself (which has been newly created in 2014) is divided in two sections:

See the fascinating new 'PaleoZoo' on the ground floor and, among other things, annual new special exhibitions on the first floor.

Museum

Every room in museum is colored differently representing the individual typical habitats within the Solnhofen Archipelago.

The visitor experiences a tour through the open waters of the Tethys Ocean, the underwater worlds, the lagoon, the Jurassic islands and the Archaeopteryx worlds. The latter you can find in the so-called 'icon area' where you will also find the interesting multimedia station with displays portraying the life of Archaeopteryx as well as illustrations of the continental drift.

The exhibition can be considered a complete representation of the flora and fauna within the Solnhofen Archipelago. All fossils exhibited are originals and many of them are unique.

The museum's first floor is dedicated to the 'world in stone'. The second part addresses geology, natural stone and the art of lithography. It is well worth seeing the world's largest lithography, the model quarry as well as changing special exhibitions focusing on Solnhofen fossils and lithography.

The museum exhibition is supplemented further by the amateur quarry which gives you the possibility to search for fossils yourself.



Archaeopteryx

The icon room within the 'Archaeopteryx worlds' presents irreplaceable originals of feathered predatory dinosaurs that could never be shown in such abundance without the support of private lenders.

Due to the global scientific importance of these exhibits it may be that one of the iconic fossil specimens is lent to changing special exhibitions for a short time. Each specimen by itself is worth a visit to the museum. In 2016, the museum's collection contains four icons.

The 'Solnhofen Specimen' of the primeval bird owned by the museum's founder Friedrich Müller and the right wing of the 'Ottman & Steil families' specimen, Solnhofen' both belong to the family of primeval birds.

The same is true for the 11th specimen of the primeval bird: of all twelve specimens known to date, it shows the most complete plumage.

Physically, *Archaeopteryx* can surely not be regarded as the ancestor of all modern birds, however it stands directly in the line of evolution leading from feathered predatory dinosaurs to birds.

Its plumage was already largely differentiated. In comparison, the hair-like shape, typical for the theropod named *Sciurumimus* are much more primitive. This 'chick' of only seventy cm height is supposed to represent the world's best preserved fossil find of a predatory dinosaur.



See only originals

The PaleoZoo with its iconic fossils of feathered predatory dinosaurs and primeval birds is among today's most important fossil exhibitions throughout Europe.

The novel concept 'PaleoZoo' combines conventional views of a zoo with those of a natural history museum.

Fossils of animals that would have met in life are therefore exhibited in one and the same area according to the different habitats within the Solnhofen Archipelago.

Plant fossils are arranged in the same way: the terrestrial island flora is shown in close proximity to remains of terrestrial saurians.

Life on the Jurassic islands and in the air space of the '*Archaeopteryx* worlds' plays a central role within the concept of the PaleoZoo.

The underwater worlds shown in the turquoise room constitute one centerpiece of the marine fauna: a large marine crocodile, as well as sharks, rays and a huge swarm of fish.

With a length of 8 meters the installation 'Historical biodiversity of fish' represents the exhibition's other core regarding marine fossils.

The major focus of the PaleoZoo is clearly on the evolutionary winners. Among those are crinoids, squid and marine saurians in the marine realm and the terrestrial saurians on land.

Additionally, the PaleoZoo presents simple marine algae as well as a variety of marine invertebrates. Its appeal lies in the unique diversity of life-forms and in the aesthetics of the fossil's arrangement within the compelling concept that combines colours and spatial arrangement.



Solnhofen

World in Stone



We are looking forward to your visit



Museum Solnhofen

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Opening hours of the museum:

01.04. – 31.10. daily 9:00 – 17:00
01.11. – 31.03. Sundays 13:00 – 16:00



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