

Kingdom of Salt



White Gold of the Celts



Kingdom of Salt – White Gold of the Celts

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Shimmering, pure, clear – the beauty of salt’s crystalline structure reminds us of its preciousness. Indispensable ingredient in the most refined dishes from ancient times till today, a preserver of quality, an enhancer of beauty, a metaphor for friendship, a means of payment, even a religious symbol for sanctity. Since millenia, salt accompanies the history of mankind. It marks and mirrors unique milestones in civilisation.

The exhibition focuses on salt, the white gold of the Celts, and their presence in the town of Hallstatt, often referred to as the cradle of European industrialisation and World Heritage Cultural Site since 1997. The first distinctly European Iron Age civilization emerged in the Hallstatt area. The people were Celts; their culture was sustained by the mining and trading of salt. In 1846, the unique find of a large prehistoric cemetery turned Hallstatt into a world-renowned archaeological site.

Located in the Austrian Alps, Hallstatt has been involved in salt mining since more than 7,000 years. Based on state-of-the art interdisciplinary research, “White Gold of the Celts” provides amazing insights into the rise and fall of salt mining settlements, its people, traditions and culture, its vast amassment of wealth and influence in epochs long sunk into oblivion.



Hallstatt – fascinating insights into man's progress

Hallstatt was the predominant Central European culture of the European Early Iron Age (8th to 6th century BC), developing out of the Urnfield culture of Late Bronze Age (12th century BC) and followed in many parts of Central Europe by the La Tène culture (450 BC to 1st century BC).

Archaeological objects found in the salt mines of Hallstatt mediate a level of perfection, efficiency, and logistics hitherto unknown from an epoch that goes back in time for more than 4,000 years. In Hallstatt's prehistoric mines, unique artifacts have been discovered; this is due to the fact that salt helps to preserve all organic materials. They now come to life once again in an exhibition that offers stunning insights into our past, reminding us of man's inventiveness, curiosity, will-power, and relentless struggle for a better tomorrow.

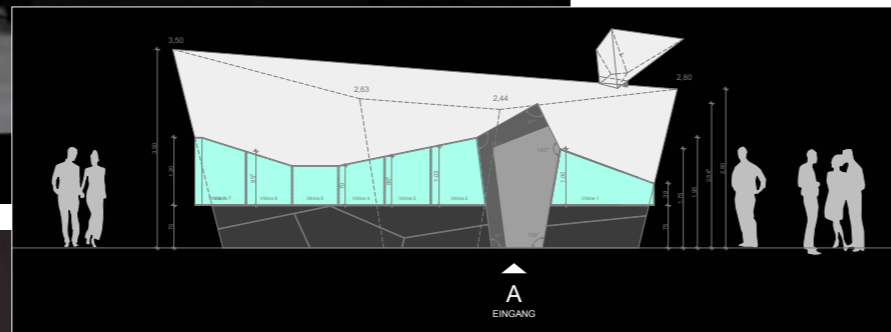
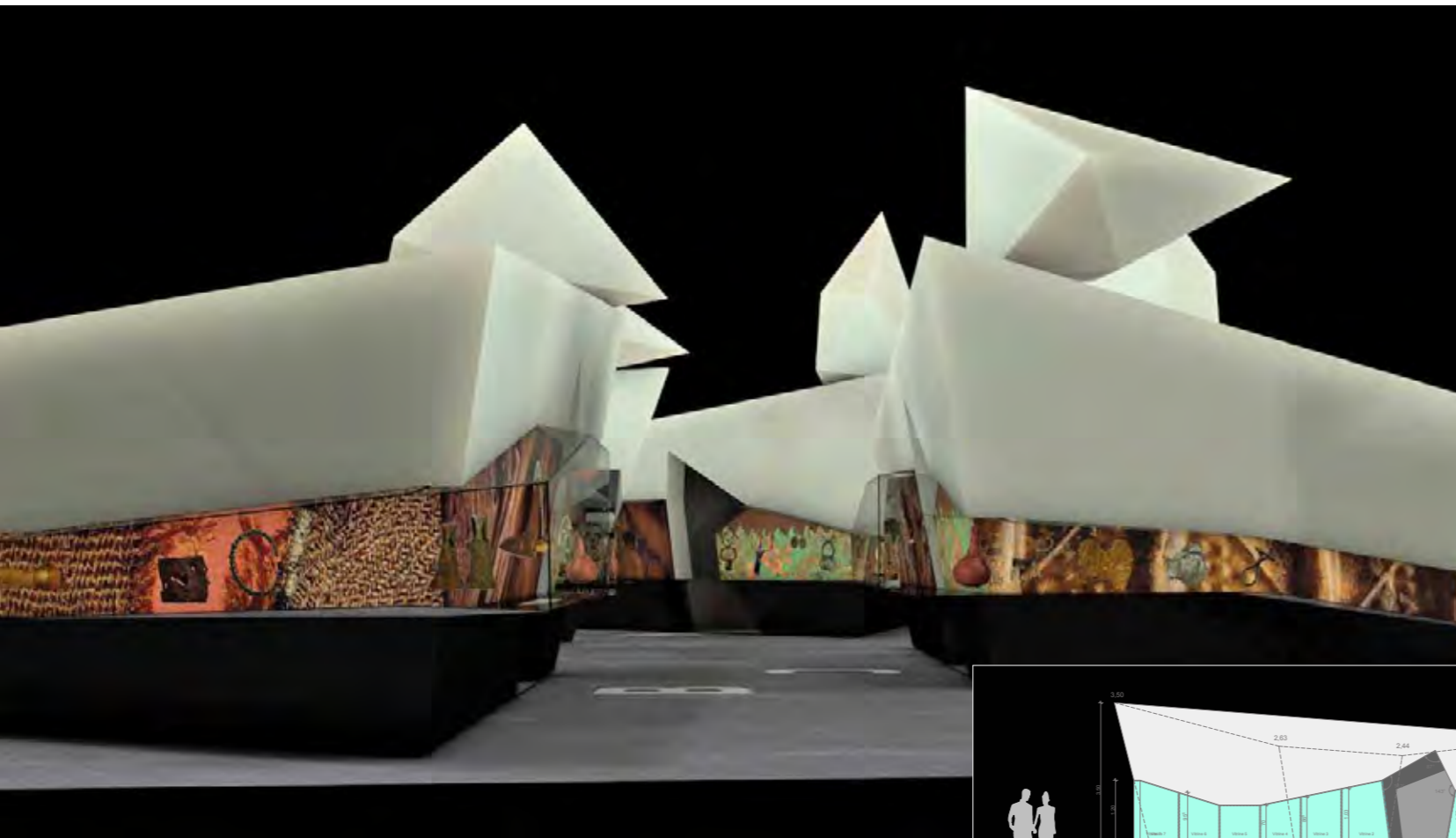


The Exhibition

Carefully selected artifacts, together with explanatory texts and ambient media, make the world of Hallstatt come to life once again. The about 250 objects, most of them never before shown outside of Austria, are from the world-famous collection of the Natural History Museum Vienna (NHM). This outstanding exhibition creates a vivid picture of ancient Hallstatt and illustrates the major impact that a natural resource had on the history of mankind.

The exhibition architecture consists of six thematic “Salt Blocks” made from a sophisticated translucent material that allows them glow in the dark. Together with an array of “Salt Splinters” used as seats and decoration, the blocks create the illusion of walking through suspended salt fragments.

The Salt Blocks bear a kaleidoscope of sensations for all senses. The outer walls present show cases containing original artifacts, as well as computer animations that provide easily understandable scientific information. Inside each Salt Block, visitors find themselves in a vibrant and exhilarating space. Ambient media installations, together with video projections, multimedia shows, and computer animations, invite the guests not only to see and listen, but also to smell, touch, and taste. As spectacular exhibit highlight, each Salt Block additionally presents an outstandingly unique archaeological object.



The modern, flexible modular design system allows exhibition set-up for floor spaces from ca. 5,400 to 8,600 square feet (about 500 to 800 square meters).

An open-floor plan invites visitors to actively access the space. More traditional presentation forms, such as display cases, alternate with state-of-the-art video screens and ultra-modern ambient media installations. A timelessly elegant, contemporary setting creates a relaxed yet polished atmosphere.

“White Gold of the Celts” will be highly appealing for visitors of all ages and interest groups. Whether school class or serious scholar, seeker of new insights in salt’s omnipresence from ancient times until today, or happy couple in search of a fun way to spend the afternoon – there is plenty in stock for everyone.

All information on the artifacts is available in English plus a freely selectable second language. Hosting venues are free to add a special local exhibition section as reference to cultural influence and environmental impact in their region.

The exhibition’s loan period per venue is a minimum of 5 months, with optional additional months.





Exhibit highlights

The following outstandingly unique archaeological objects will be displayed in the Salt Blocks:

■ Neolithic Age (5000 BC)

Antler pick

■ Bronze Age (2000 BC)

Carry sack made of cow skin, leather cap, salt chippings, rope of bast, leather palm protectors, wooden trug and scraper, bronze pick, lighting tapers, wooden vessels, protective leather finger stall, woollen textiles, tread of a wooden staircase

■ Hallstatt Age (800 BC)

Cooking vessels, wooden spoon, bentwood boxes, human excrement, eggs of intestinal worms, leaves of butterbur (prehistoric “toilet paper”), rucksack made of goat skin, fur beret, textiles, nits of a body louse, wooden pick mountings, leather shoe, salt table



■ **Maplewood shovel and Mine Trugs (13th century BC)**

Hallstatt salt mine

All the tiny chips of salt ('Hauklein') were collected up using shovels, rakes and wooden trugs and then tipped into carry sacks. The trugs were made from particularly durable wood.





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Exhibition: Structure

Visitors are free to encounter the thematic Salt Blocks in any given order. Artifacts and information material are carefully grouped together in distinct topics.





Hallstatt – a unique location

In the breathtaking landscape of the Austrian Alps, within the Salzkammergut valley, lies Hallstatt. In 1997, it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Cultural Site. Hallstatt Salzberg valley is one of the best documented industrial sites and as a well-known archaeological site of global importance. A unique place in nature, shaped by salt and 7,000 years of mankind's history.

The value of salt is mirrored in the design of ancient repositories. Another breathtakingly spectacular and globally unique treasure: organic objects, well-preserved in the prehistoric mines of Hallstatt.



■ More valuable than gold

Until the 20th century salt was one of the most important food preservatives. Owning it meant wealth, controlling its trade meant power. The value of salt is shown in the design of ancient repositories and the unique found of well-preserved prehistoric organic objects.

■ Where does the rock salt come from?

Hallstatt salt originated in a wide, shallow sea that existed 255 million years ago. This sea slowly filled up with layers of clay and coral limestone. During the formation of the Alps, 50–20 million years ago, the deposits were forced upwards, became folded and broke into discrete units.

■ Man discovers salt

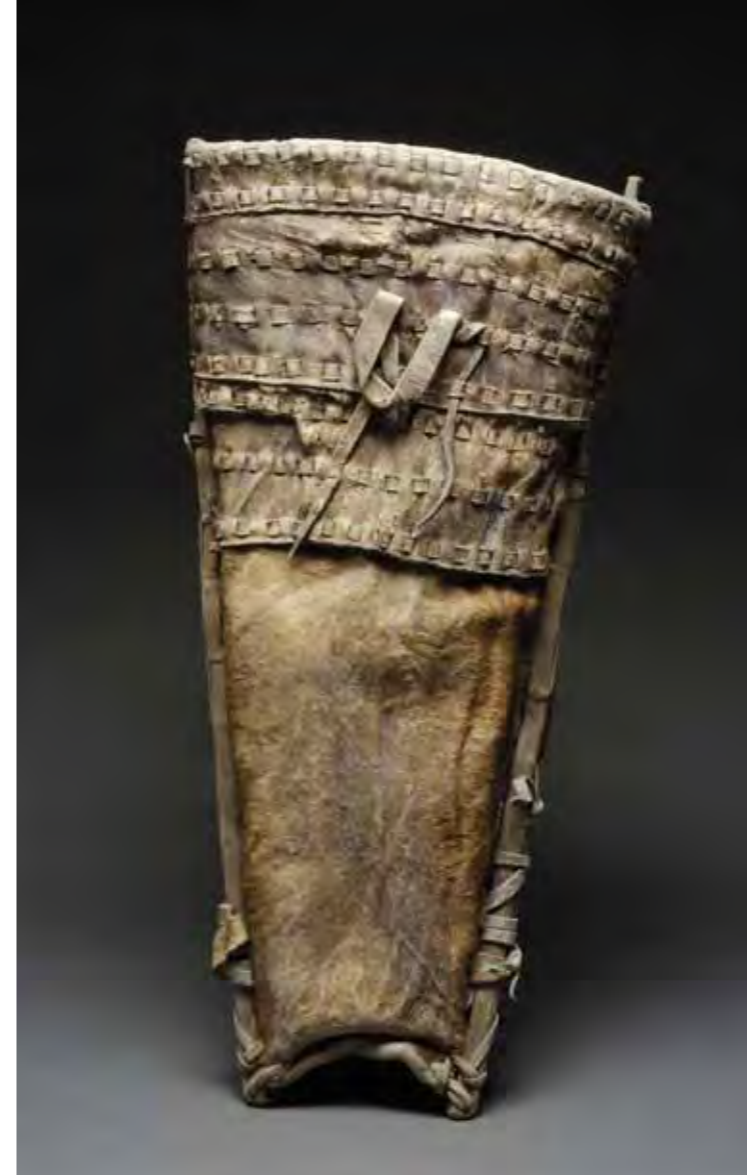
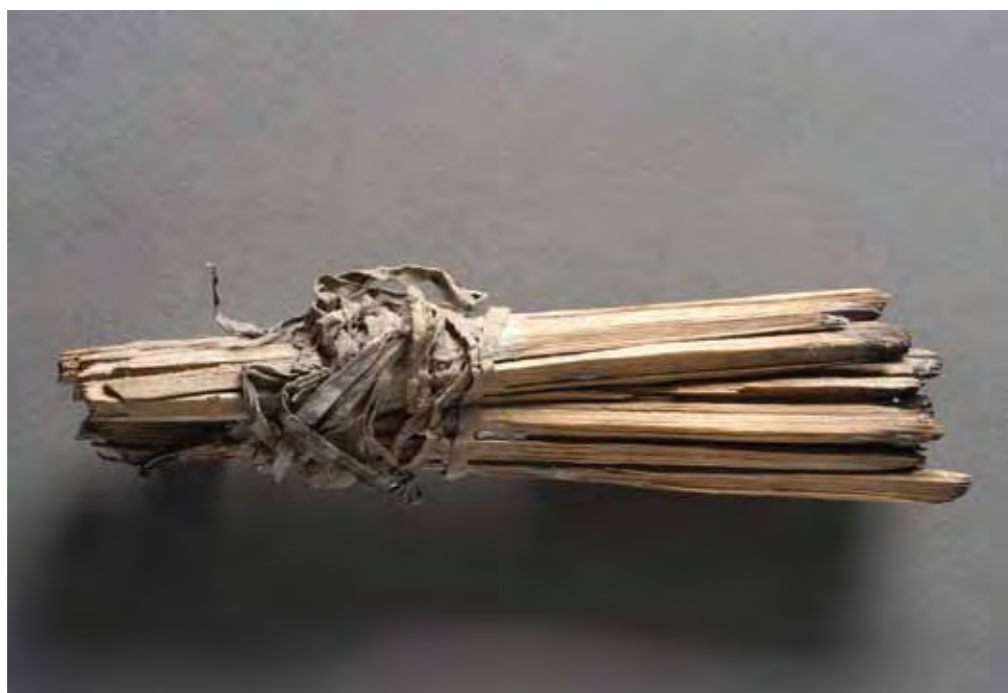
7,000 years ago humans were attracted by saline wells and settled in the remote Salzberg valley. Evidence of early mining comes from the discovery of stone axes and a pick made of deer antlers.



Mining of the Bronze Age

In 1,500 BC the mining activities in the area were fully developed. Giant shaft mines were in operation, extending more than 100 meters into the mountain. At this time, Hallstatt held a monopoly. The next salt mining locations were hundreds of kilometers away. Not only salt, but also salt-cured meat was produced in vast quantities.

An amazing finding is presented: a wooden staircase, 3,350 years old, undamaged and discovered in 2003. This oldest staircase in Europe has a unique construction and is in an excellent preservation state beyond compare.



■ Productivity and the division of labour

This carry sack can be emptied with a single movement, without the need to remove the main strap from the shoulder. The length of this strap is precisely adjustable to fit the wearer. Salt could be carried without interruption, indicating a strict division of labour and continuous production.

Computer simulations of the working patterns suggest that a day's worth of extracted salt would have been removed by joint effort in a matter of a few hours.





Mining of the Hallstatt Age

In 900 BC, the shafts had reached a depth of 200 meters. New mining strategies, technologies and recycling methods improved the output of the precious salt. As opposed to the vertical shafts of the Bronze Age, horizontal mining halls followed the course of salt veins. During these times, the salt mines reached huge dimensions. To differentiate from other vendors, Hallstatt introduced salt hearts as a hallmark and sign of quality.



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■ The trademark salt hearts

Large tablets of salt cut in a heart shape were Hallstatt's 'trademark', and allowed Hallstatt salt to be distinguished on sight from competitor products originating in Hallein. In Hallstatt, small fragments of rock salt, constituting a good tenth of the total extracted, were simply left on the mine floor.

Heart-shaped 'negatives' indicate where the large tablets were broken out from the gallery walls. In one of the surviving chambers of the prehistoric mine, known as the 'Chamber of Hearts', these are clearly visible on the walls and ceiling. So far, two halves of heart-shaped tablets that would fit the negatives have been found at Hallstatt. They weigh 12 kg and 42 kg, respectively, but attempts to break similar tablets from the rock salt have so far failed.





Global Village Hallstatt

Salt bestowed Hallstatt with fabulous wealth: Luxury products from all over Europe as well as ivory from Africa and Asia were discovered in the world-famous burial site of the Salzberg valley.





■ The Hallstatt cemetery

In the mine valley high above Lake Hallstatt is one of the wealthiest and largest prehistoric cemeteries in Europe. Since the first excavations in the 19th century, 1,500 graves have been discovered.

The salt industry was clearly responsible for the extraordinary wealth of burial objects in the Hallstatt cemetery – a cemetery which now gives its name to an entire cultural period: the Hallstatt period, from the 8th to the 6th century BC.

A long list of scholars have pursued research at Hallstatt. At first, they were almost exclusively officers of the contemporary salt mine. Pre-eminent among them is Johann Georg Ramsauer, Chief of Mines, whose watercolours of the graves in the Hallstatt cemetery, painted between 1846 and 1863, are world-famous.

The Natural History Museum, Vienna, with its state-of-the-art research facilities, has a particular focus on Hallstatt research. The Museum's most recent excavations have revealed an extremely dense burial pattern of burial, taking the total number of people buried in the high valley to about 6,000.



Crises and catastrophes. The end of Hallstatt's mining

Nature's forces put an end to mining in the Bronze Age and the Hallstatt Age. During the centuries, more than once the mining sites were destroyed by giant mudslides. Large areas of the Salzberg valley were buried, with at least one victim as proof. The so-called "man in the salt" was discovered in 1734. Not before the second century BC did the Celts risk new salt mining, but at higher elevations.



■ **Catastrophes, crises
 and new beginnings**

Each time it ended in catastrophe – both the Bronze Age mine and the Hallstatt period mine were destroyed by the powers of nature.

All prehistoric shafts are filled with material that intruded from above. Tree roots and clods of humus lie deep inside the mountain, near to ripped-apart timber casements. The famous staircase also lay buried in debris.

The Bronze Age mine came to an end in 1245 BC, and it is only 400 years later that traces of mining appear once again.

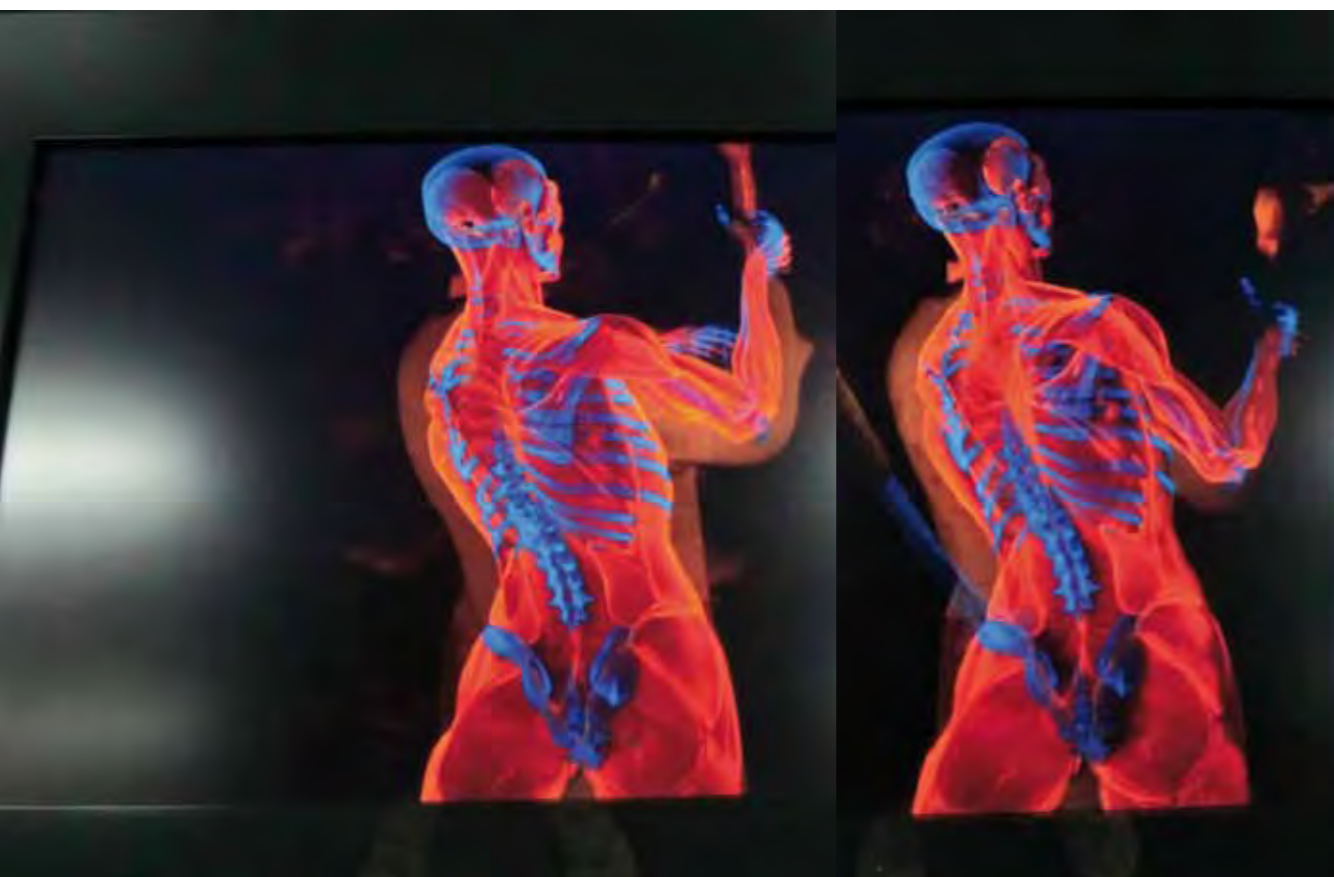
The next major crisis followed soon. In the 4th century BC, a landslide completely buried the mine and inundated large parts of the high valley. One victim of this catastrophe was the so-called 'man in the salt', discovered by miners in AD 1734.

The Celts made a new start in the 2nd century BC, resuming mining in a more sheltered and higher location. The area still suffers from catastrophic rockfalls and landslides, and people continue to risk their lives, pitting themselves against the untamed mountain world.



Salt – then and now

Even today, 300,000 tons of salt are being extracted from the Hallstatt area every year. Hallstatt bridges the gap between modernism and ancient traditions. Still operating as an industrious place, it is also home to a research station of the Natural History Museum Vienna, exploring the archaeological sites.



■ 7,000 years of industry

The salt mine at Hallstatt is the oldest salt mine still in use in Europe. Prehistoric, historic, and modern mines exist side by side.

Traces of prehistoric mining were first discovered by miners during medieval times. The historic mine in Hallstatt was established in AD 1311, and in AD 1607 archaeological finds from Hallstatt were sent to Kaiser Rudolph II for his Cabinet of Antiquities.

Today Hallstatt produces 300,000 tonnes of salt per annum, extracted by a solution process. The use of water to free the salt was already known in the Middle Ages. The purely mechanical extraction of salt in the prehistoric period produced rather less – somewhat more than 100 tonnes of rock salt per annum. Archaeologists, in collaboration with the Institute of Architectural Sciences (Vienna University of Technology), are currently trying to get a more exact estimate.

Today, Hallstatt is one of the best-researched prehistoric mining and industrial regions in the world. The Natural History Museum, Vienna, maintains a research center at Hallstatt, in close partnership with the modern salt mine company, Salinen Austria AG. This company, with its 7,000 year tradition, has adopted the motto 'Bound to tradition, devoted to progress'.

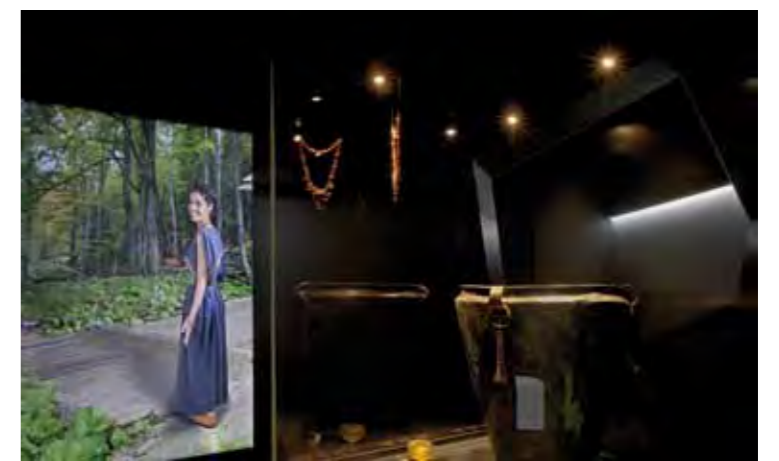


Impressions of the premiere opening of "White Gold of the Celts"

Alicante, July 2013



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Facts and Figures

- Exhibition size: From about 5,400 to 8,600 square feet or 500 to 800 square meters of floor space
- Flexible modular design system
- Accessible exhibition design
- Bilingual information (English and one other language of your choice)
- Turnkey delivery service, including content, artefacts, exhibition architecture, mantling / dismantling of exhibition, transport, insurance, logistics
- First exhibition opening in July 2013. As of February 2014, available for international museums, visitor centres, and exhibition halls
- Loan period: Minimum of 5 months / additional months on request, per venue
- Digital catalogue with explanatory texts, illustrations, and images

Photography
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NHM Natural History Museum Vienna, Austria

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The NHM Vienna, Austria, is one of the leading museums of the world. It presents the world's largest meteorite exhibit with about 1,100 meteorites on display. In its huge collection, the visitor can follow the steps of evolution of life on earth. Prehistoric research is one of the most important activities of the NHM, such as at the archeological site in Hallstatt.

www.nhm-wien.ac.at

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