

Notes

We, the initiators of the petition for a new fossil museum in Bundenbach, Christoph Leins and Wouter Südkamp, express our personal point of view below. These comments are not the subject of the petition. The signatories may not share our comments.

Our comments may provide suggestions to decision-makers and show ways in which the objectives set out in the petition can be implemented in concrete terms.

1) Focus on fossils

Bundenbach's unique feature is its globally significant fossils. Over 90% of all fossils found in the Hunsrück slate come from Bundenbach. We consider the fossils to be the "flagship" for the acquisition of funding.

An appreciation of fossils, mentioned in the same breath as historical settlements (Celtic settlement Altburg, Schmidtburg) and scenic attractions ("Valley of the Millennia"), ignores the unique potential of fossils and mining. We therefore distance ourselves from the "*Strategy concept for the "Valley of the Millennia" in the municipality of Bundenbach*" dated November 30, 2022, according to which the previous fossil museum "*should give way to a multifunctional building that combines aspects of the mining, geological and settlement history of the region and serves equally as a meeting room, meeting place with sanitary facilities and, if necessary, simple overnight accommodation*".

We understand the wish ("Bundenbach Declaration of 21.11.2024") that a new fossil museum *should be seen in a "triad of the themes of 'fossils, slate and history' with a connecting link, the scenic beauty of the valley"*, but we think that the topic of fossils and mining deserves special importance.

We also understand the intention to use existing structures under the umbrella of the tourism and marketing departments, as recently initiated:

"A new tourism working group has been formed in the local community of Bundenbach, which is also addressing the measures surrounding the museum."

"In the near future ... we will discuss what will happen with the existing association "Valley of the Millennia e.V.", which is currently hardly active anymore, but which could be restructured for the purposes of a support association for the valley. We are of the opinion that an existing association structure could be used."

However, we believe it is essential to use scientific expertise in the field of paleontology as an advocate for the topic of fossils and not to leave this to non-specialists.

2) Goal of a new fossil museum

In 2011, representatives from politics and technical experts came together drawing the conclusion:

"Some Bundenbach fossils are world famous."

Decision-makers at that time acknowledged the need for a new fossil museum:

"The whole thing must be more vivid, more lively, more colorful, more transparent and three-dimensional." "In a modern format, with images of the life of its present-day descendants in the animal world and a film animation, the outstanding value of the site, which actually deserves UNESCO World Heritage status, could be highlighted accordingly."

(Dr. Wuttke, Head of the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage in Rhineland-Palatinate).

"The Bundenbach Fossil Museum, which has existed since 1976, urgently needs to be modernized."

At that time, there were even concrete plans for a new fossil museum. These failed due to unclear financing, especially maintenance costs.

On 20/21 June 2024, representatives from politics and technical experts met again for a symposium and came to a similar conclusion as in 2011:

"Bundenbach is world-famous in specialist circles. Geologists encourage the hosts at the symposium: fossil finds are unique and have huge potential for tourism."

Unlike in 2011, this time there was no commitment to a new fossil museum, which is why the previously critical question of financing was also left out. Instead, the focus was on short-term measures with the aim of modernization. On November 21, 2024, the organizers sent out the "Bundenbach Declaration" (excerpt):

"There was agreement that the Bundenbach Fossil Museum, which is now showing its age, needs to be modernized in order to do justice to the globally significant finds it houses. New ideas have already emerged on site, and some short-term measures are now to be implemented immediately or have already been implemented. This includes, for example, a new inventory of the current fossil exhibition and high-quality digitization of the finds."

We consider the "Bundenbach Declaration" to be a first step towards an overall concept. In our opinion, the current fossil museum is neither spatially (back room to the Bergmannschänke) nor structurally (moisture damage) suitable for the accommodation and presentation of important finds. The inventory and research by Wouter Südkamp comes to the following conclusion:

"The original Bundenbach fossil collection from the 1930s was representative of the species diversity known at the time in the Hunsrück slate. As far as is known, however, since the fossil museum was housed at the Herrenberg mine, at least 20 fossil plates, mostly top pieces, have disappeared. In addition, the collection does not contain any new finds from the 1990s from the Obereschbach mine (such as primitive arthropods, bristle worms and trace fossils).

The collection has become mediocre due to the loss of top pieces, and the many "duplicate" exhibits should not all be exhibited. The current collection is therefore not sufficient to fill a contemporary, attractive new museum with Bundenbach fossils. The fossil museum was and is not a museum in the true sense of the word. The way the museum is managed (no administrator/curator for the collection; mayors who have paid little attention to it; during opening hours the outside door is open and anyone can enter the museum, unseen by the staff in the kiosk and without paying) has unfortunately led to a significant loss of top pieces."

3) project

Typically, the project begins with a project profile with the project goal, participants, budget, duration and, if applicable, individual milestones. The responsibilities of the project participants must be defined, different activities managed and the results transparently documented. A support association, which is yet to be established, should provide technical leadership. A project advisory board may also be available. Funding bodies act as control bodies. In an early planning phase, the feasibility study serves to check whether and how the project goal can be achieved. The work should be carried out by those involved in the project, ideally by the support association as a self-service effort.

4) project participants

a) EU/country

The investment costs are to be financed primarily through EU funds (assumption: >75%). Status 2011: "Redesign costs 350,000 €". The complementary financing of the investment costs is to be provided by state funds (assumption: <25%). See also Monument Protection Act Rhineland Palatinate:

*"The task of monument protection and preservation is also to scientifically research monuments and to make the results accessible to the public, in particular for educational purposes...
The state promotes monument protection and preservation measures within the framework of the available funds of the state budget."*

b) association/local municipality

Herrstein-Rhaunen collective municipality, Bundenbach local community.

c) support association

A registered support association, which is yet to be founded, should define non-profit goals in its statutes. If a new fossil museum is built, the association is required to create the necessary conditions (in addition to burglar protection and video surveillance: air conditioning, insurance).

d) collectors

The museum's collection is thinned out, there is a lack of outstanding exhibits ("eye-catchers"). Fewer pieces are needed that, when put into the right light, tell an exciting story. An iconic exhibit should be chosen as a "pioneer", e.g. the "primeval insect" (Devonohexapodus).

e) experts

The appreciation of fossils requires expertise. This applies in particular to

- application as TOP "IUGS Geological Heritage Site"
- project proposal to finance a new fossil museum
- application as a UNESCO/Geopark, possibly World Heritage Site
- supervision of the museum by curator (guided tours, publications, advice on finds, etc.)

Wouter Südkamp, Dr. Susanne Pohler, Dr. Christina Ifrim, Dr. Thomas Schindler, Markus Poschmann and Christoph Leins have already pledged their support at the symposium.

g) Birkenfeld district

h) museum partners

Possible cooperation partners include

- Schlossparkmuseum Bad Kreuznach
- Hunsrück Museum Simmern
- Natural History Museum Mainz
- GEOSKOP Prehistoric World Museum/Lichtenberg Castle

i) tourism partner

- Tourist Information EdelSteinLand
- Naheland-Touristik GmbH

j) economic development

- Economic Development and Project Development Company Birkenfeld District mbH

5) financing

Previous plans have failed due to the lack of funding for maintenance. We are aware of this difficulty and strongly support the efforts:

"The local community of Bundenbach and we are doing our utmost here, especially with regard to the financial framework available. We are doing everything we can to successfully advance the project, but ultimately the implementation of the "big solution" depends in particular on financing and funding opportunities, as mentioned above, we are also discussed here.

I can also report at this point that the main and finance committee of the Herrstein-Rhaunen collective municipality approved a grant of €12,500 for the local community of Bundenbach last week to promote the tourist facilities in Bundenbach."

Following the symposium, the press reported:

"We have to make the museum so attractive that it can pay for itself through entrance fees. Our goal should be to reach around 35,000 visitors per year instead of 3,500."

This seems unrealistic at the current location, also in view of the lack of parking spaces.

Maintenance costs should be the central topic of a feasibility study. We therefore encourage to think about unconventional solutions.

The "Strategy concept for the "Valley of the Millennia" in the municipality of Bundenbach" dated November 30, 2022, sees the need for " a multifunctional building ... as an assembly room, meeting place with sanitary facilities and, if necessary, simple overnight accommodation ". In the event of a new fossil museum elsewhere, the local community should consider leasing the Bergmannschänke and its extension in order to reduce current maintenance costs. Experience has shown that entrepreneurs are better suited than the public sector to respond to the needs of the market.

6) public-private partnership

No fossils without mining. Active mining in the Bundenbach area is essential for

- the attractiveness of the Fossil Museum
- the application as a TOP " IUGS Geological Heritage Site"
- Marketing activities in the Bundenbach area
- Continuation of the Nahecaris project .

The decision-makers should therefore lobby the licensing authority for slate mining in the Frühberg mine. A public-private partnership with the slate pit has the following goals: to make slate material (overburden) available to visitors (knocking area); to hand over fossils of no scientific interest to the fossil museum for preparation, exhibition or resale on site.

7) Fundraising, Sponsoring and Marketing

7.1 Fundraising

In order to cover the costs of maintaining a new fossil museum, additional resources are required. In addition to "regular" donations (museum) and contributions (members of the support association), the following are conceivable:

- transfer of fossils (from any location) as a gift or inheritance by private individuals;
- sale of donated fossils in the museum and online shop;
- annual fossil exchange in the Glückaufhalle;
- exclusive tours for premium donors (museum, mine);
- promotion and fundraising on social media and internet platforms.

7.2 Sponsoring

Fossils as contemporary witnesses of evolution are suitable for addressing current social issues and reaching a broad audience.

Depending on the emphasis, companies from different sectors can be approached as potential sponsors. Fossils can convey values that companies also identify with (uniqueness, longevity, sustainability, "survival of the fittest"). A museum that addresses future issues is attractive to companies that want to assume social responsibility.

Tailor-made exposés can be created for specific industries, in which selected companies are optimally approached as possible sponsors. The name "Fossil Museum" is not "set in stone" and could be adapted. For BioNTech IMFS GmbH in Idar-Oberstein, a sponsorship for an "Intelligent Design Museum" in Bundenbach could possibly be considered. The play on words refers to a creationist view of the evolution of life - the pharmaceutical company's modern genome sequence analysis. Böhringer-Ingelheim could possibly be asked to sponsor an "Evolution Laboratory" in Bundenbach. For other companies, e.g. BASF, Schott or Hornbach, as a possible main sponsor, the name of the museum may be of secondary importance if a meaningful commitment to Rhineland-Palatinate is linked to their company name, e.g. "BASF Fossil Museum" in Bundenbach.

If naming the sponsor goes too far or no individual sponsor is willing to cover the (as yet unknown) maintenance costs for a certain period of time (e.g. 10 years), companies could be offered sponsorships of individual display cases (e.g. "Kling display case").

7.3 Marketing

Bundenbach fossils are represented in all natural history museums, but they still lead a shadowy existence in the digital world. The website of the local community of Bundenbach, which has remained unchanged for 20 years, urgently needs to be supplemented with attractive images.

A fossil atlas as a digital archive for all 280 species found arouses curiosity, but is no substitute for a visit to the museum (see e.g. <https://www.solnhofen-fossilienatlas.de/>).

Bundenbach is a recreational area. Why not also a prehistoric community?

To Do's

- The Bundenbach Fossil Museum: Facts, Inventories, Recommendations
- original fossils in the Herrenberg mine: inventory
- photo documentation
- application as TOP "IUGS Geological Heritage Site"
- project assignment, project profile, project management
- support association with statutes
- cost estimate investment /maintenance
- exposés for sponsorship
- sponsors contact
- public-private partnership
- feasibility study