

The (so-called) Hannibal's Wall

A journey back in time

Welcome to the (so-called) Hannibal's Wall !

For more than 2000 years, the ruins of this impressive wall kept its secrets, recently brought to light by archaeological research. Go back in time and follow a thousand-year-old footpath reaching the altitude of 2650 m! There are several possible ways to reach the Wall. It takes a day to get there and back. Signboards along the trails and numbered markers on the site will help you find your way around or access more information during your hike. The QR codes that accompany these panels give access to translated content, audio guides or supplementary illustrations.

The (so-called) Hannibal's Wall

The (so-called) Hannibal's Wall is an archaeological site in the Haut Val d'Entremont (Liddes, Grand-Saint-Bernard Region, Valais, Switzerland) that can only be reached on foot. This wall protected a large area of shelters and huts built in early Roman times. Soldiers serving Rome occupied this fortification for several seasons between 35 and 25 B.C.

More information here



Your safety and the protection of the site

The (so-called) Hannibal's Wall is an open and unsupervised archaeological site in the high mountains. You are solely responsible for preparing your hike and having the right equipment. The remains are fragile and we invite you to respect the site and leave it in its unaltered state. Avoid walking on the archaeological structures and look rather than touch. Future visitors will be most thankful for this...

Access

Intermediate level hikes (T2/T3) July - September

- A** Liddes - Alpage du Cœur - The (so-called) Hannibal's Wall 4hrs.
- B** Bourg St-Pierre - Boveire - The (so-called) Hannibal's Wall 3hrs. 20 min.
- C** Junction Boveire - Alpage du Cœur 40 min.
- D** Cabane de Mille - The (so-called) Hannibal's Wall 2hrs. 20 min.
- E** Route du Cœur. Communal mountain road (no cars). You can use the road to go up to Cœur by mountain bike.
- Information panel

1a 1b Initial archaeological evidence :

The archaeological surveys carried out since 2006 made it possible to define the layout of the site, the extent of its occupation and the identity of its temporary inhabitants. Roman objects (elements of weaponry, shoe nails, ring) and Celtic objects (fibulae, belt ring, pottery) confirm a military presence in the 1st century BC. It is currently believed that a military contingent of Celtic «auxiliaries» in the service of Rome, perhaps accompanied by Germanic tribesmen, were based there.



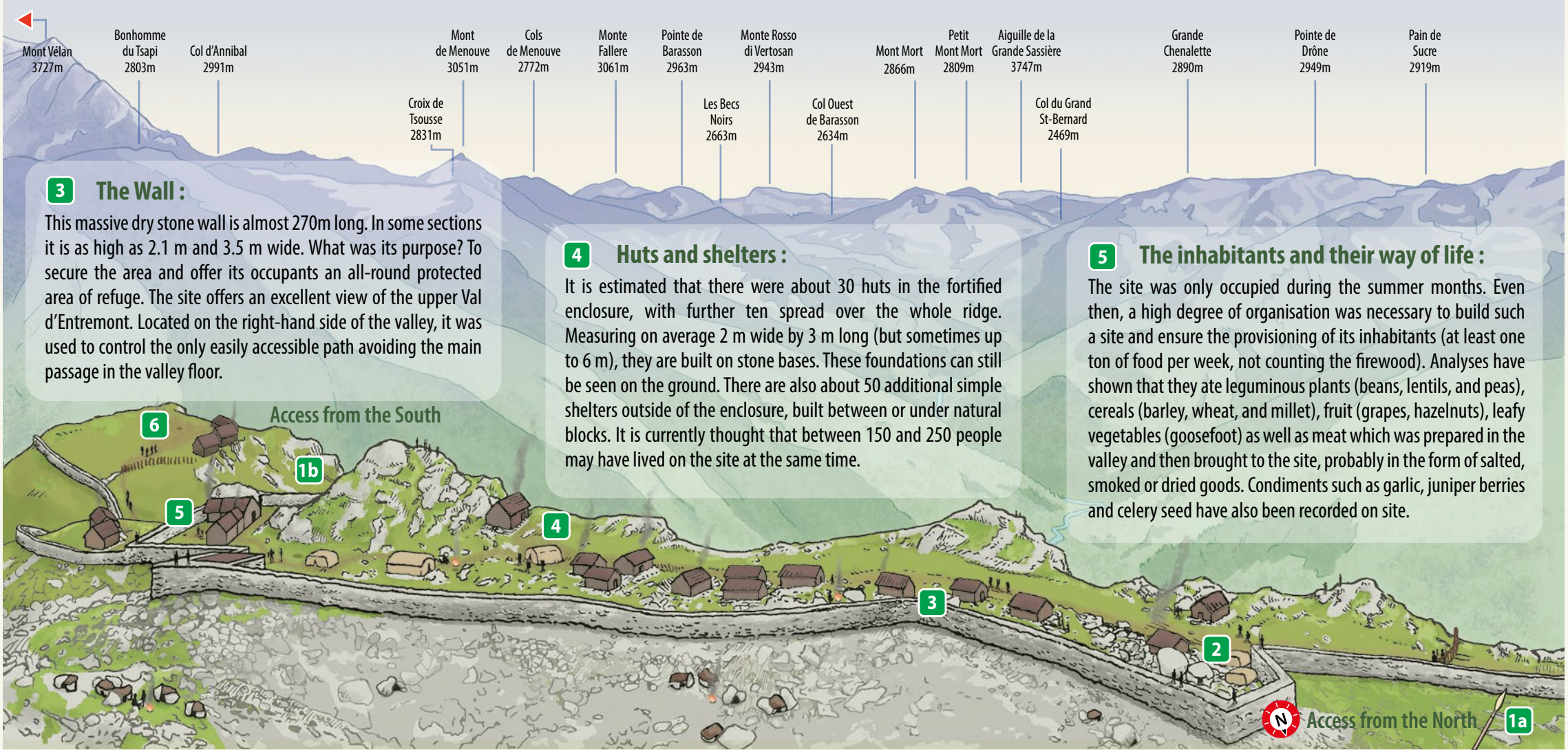
The shelter containing the inscription dedicated to Poeninos.

2 The inscription (be careful, you are welcome to come very close but do not touch it!) :

A highlight of the site is a two-line Celtic inscription carved on a block inside a small shelter under a large slab. The inscription 'Poenino ieureu', which reads from right to left, is written in the so-called 'Lugano' alphabet. It probably translates as 'I offer (this) to Poeninos', an Alpine god. With the annexation of the Alps into the Roman Empire, this god was associated with Jupiter and venerated on the Great St Bernard Pass. Offerings and gifts may have been made to him at this site to seek his protection. This Celtic inscription, which shows several signs of Latin influence, represents one of the first known written records in our region.

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3 The Wall :
This massive dry stone wall is almost 270m long. In some sections it is as high as 2.1 m and 3.5 m wide. What was its purpose? To secure the area and offer its occupants an all-round protected area of refuge. The site offers an excellent view of the upper Val d'Entremont. Located on the right-hand side of the valley, it was used to control the only easily accessible path avoiding the main passage in the valley floor.

4 Huts and shelters :
It is estimated that there were about 30 huts in the fortified enclosure, with further ten spread over the whole ridge. Measuring on average 2 m wide by 3 m long (but sometimes up to 6 m), they are built on stone bases. These foundations can still be seen on the ground. There are also about 50 additional simple shelters outside of the enclosure, built between or under natural blocks. It is currently thought that between 150 and 250 people may have lived on the site at the same time.

5 The inhabitants and their way of life :
The site was only occupied during the summer months. Even then, a high degree of organisation was necessary to build such a site and ensure the provisioning of its inhabitants (at least one ton of food per week, not counting the firewood). Analyses have shown that they ate leguminous plants (beans, lentils, and peas), cereals (barley, wheat, and millet), fruit (grapes, hazelnuts), leafy vegetables (goosefoot) as well as meat which was prepared in the valley and then brought to the site, probably in the form of salted, smoked or dried goods. Condiments such as garlic, juniper berries and celery seed have also been recorded on site.



Fibulae of Celtic inspiration

6 Historical context :
About twenty high altitude sites between Valais and Val d'Aosta have been identified since 2016 and have revealed strong similarities with the (so-called) Hannibal's Wall. In the south, three of them can be seen from this site. Thanks to the elements brought to light by the excavation and to the ancient written sources, the Wall is now known to have been inhabited between 35 and 25 BC, during three to four consecutive seasons. Several Roman military operations were launched at that time against the Salassi, a Celtic people from the present-day Aosta Valley. At that time, most of the Valais was probably already part of the Roman Empire and may even have served as a base for some of the troops serving Rome.



Roman sickle with socketed shaft



But why are we referring to Hannibal ?

Hannibal was a Carthaginian general who crossed the Alps with his army and elephants in 218 BC to attack Rome. He never actually came to the Val d'Entremont and made his crossing much further South, in the French-Italian Alps! His legendary expedition, however, inspired many generations after him, and his name was given to countless ruins and Alpine pass routes.

The pioneers

In 1983-1984, local scholars were wondering about the purpose of this structure, but it was not until the discovery of the antique inscription in 2005 that the first archaeological work was conducted. The creation of an association for Archaeological Research on Hannibal's Wall (RAMHA) in 2011 made it possible to conduct further investigations and communicate their results to the public.

How to help us

Research has been carried out under the coordination of the RAMHA association thanks to the many institutional and private partners. We invite you to visit the web page listed below to find out more about the projects we are currently working on. You may also make a contribution if you are interested.

More information here : www.ramha.ch



High altitude sites similar to the Hannibal's Wall

- Sites dated from ca. 60 to 15 BC
- ◆ Fortified
 - Unfortified
 - Similar but imprecisely dated (4th c. BC to 3rd c. AD) unfortified high-altitude sites
 - Similar high altitude sites yet to be investigated

