

Swiss urge glacier hikers to look for artifacts (Update)

June 23 2014, by John Heilprin



In this picture taken Saturday June 21, 2104, hikers take a rest on the Alvier mountain in the Swiss Alps near Trueebach , Switzerland. (AP Photo/Keystone,Arno Balzarini)

Swiss scientists are urging alpinists and hikers to keep an eye out this summer for lost items in melting ice patches—items lost hundreds or even thousands of years ago.

A project run by a Swiss cultural institute and a graduate student in the

canton (state) of Graubünden aims to gather artifacts trapped long ago in glaciers—finds that are now turning up with more frequency due to a warming planet.

The project—the brainchild of Leandra Naef, who has a master's degree in prehistoric archaeology from the University of Zurich—encourages people to turn over things like wood or clothing they might run across in eastern Switzerland where the Swiss National Park is located.

In recent decades mountaineers have found everything from goat skin leggings in the Swiss Alps to a corpse in the melting ice of South Tyrol, each about 5,000 years old.

According to the institute and her published research, Naef focused the most promising possibilities down to about 300 sites that are 2,500 meters (8,200 feet) high or more. She then prioritized them by how often they might have been used by past mountain travelers.

Some of the sites she will try to explore herself, but for most she will rely on the alert eyes of other climbers and hikers, asking them to report any finds to Swiss Alpine Club huts.



In this picture taken Saturday June 21, 2104, hikers enjoy the view from the Alvier mountain in the Swiss Alps near Trueebach , Switzerland. (AP Photo/Keystone,Arno Balzarini)

The institute is sponsoring the project through the end of 2015 in hopes of cataloging the most promising sites for archaeologists to explore further.

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