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# The last hunter-gatherers of the Swiss plateau. Zooarchaeological approach of the Mesolithic rock shelter Arconciel/La Souche (Fribourg, Switzerland)

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## Abstract

The rock shelter of La Souche (Arconciel, Fribourg Canton, Switzerland), excavated between 2003 and 2012, yielded an exceptional quantity of bone material. Five very well preserved archaeological levels offer the possibility of reconstructing many aspects of the occupation of the site and the exploitation of fauna and the evolution of behaviour between 7200 and 4800 BC. The unpublished results of the archaeozoological study shed new light on the populations of the Swiss Plateau during the Second Mesolithic period. At the end of this period, a large part of Central Europe adopted the Neolithic way of life, with the exception of a vast pocket of resistance between the Jura, the Italian Pre-Alps and Lake Constance. Situated in the heart of this area, the Arconciel/La Souche site is a formidable witness to the way of life of the last hunter-gatherers. The study of more than 400,000 faunal remains, highly fragmented but very well preserved, has enabled us, among other things, to analyse in all its dimensions the acquisition and use of animal resources. From the choice of the species hunted to the destiny of the bone remains after consumption and all of the stages of the transformation of animal carcasses, we can follow the evolution of the way of life of the inhabitants of this rock shelter during the First and Second Mesolithic. The red deer is by far the main resource exploited. Wild boar and roe deer significantly complement the meat supply. A wide variety of small fur-bearing mammals also play an important role. Each occupation phase is systematically concluded by an intense combustion phase.

**Keywords:** Zooarchaeology, Switzerland, Second Mesolithic, Neolithization

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