

Tanums Rock Art for the less - and disabled visitors

The rock carvings in Tanum constitute a priceless part of our cultural heritage of mankind and have therefore been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1994.

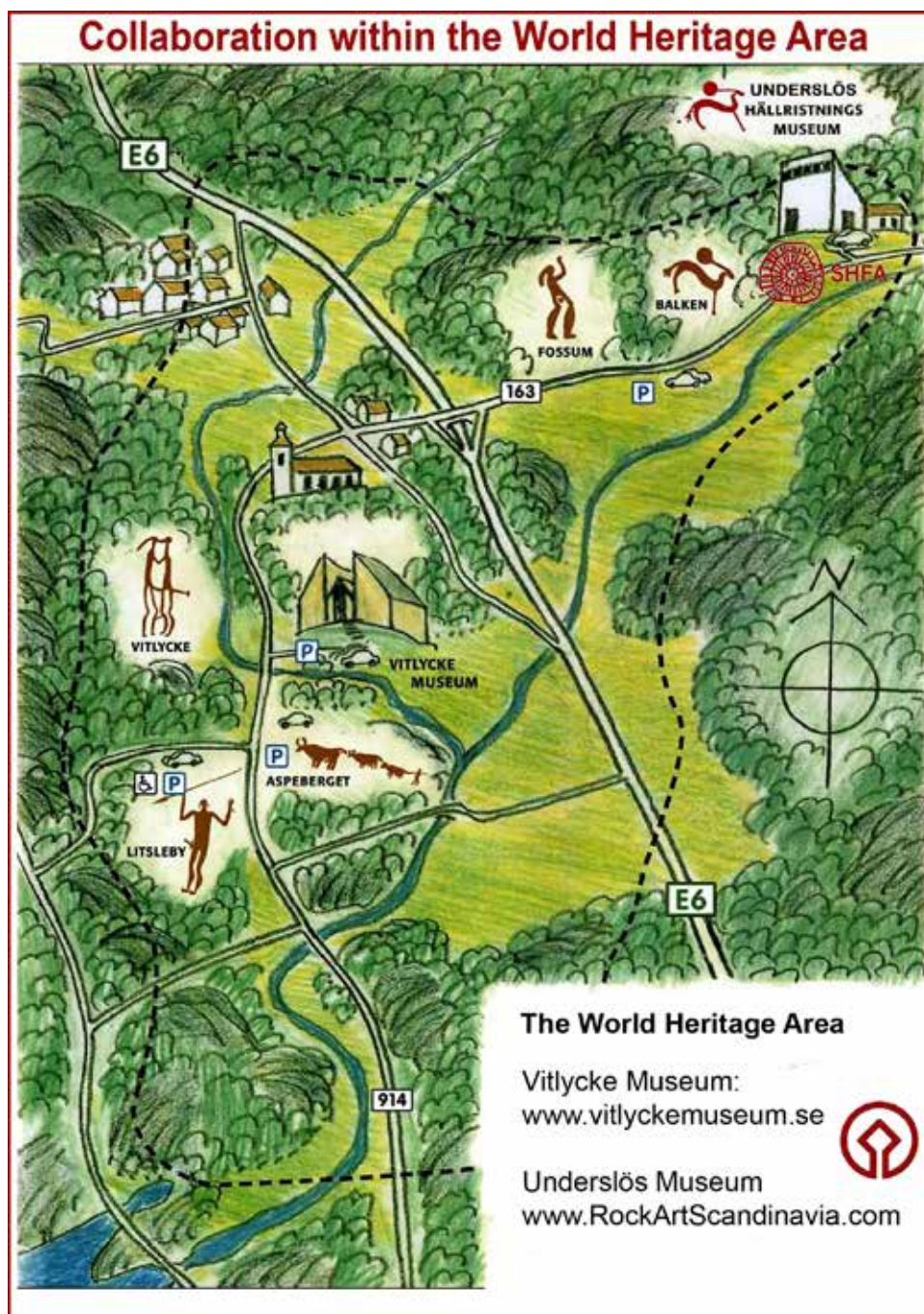
The World Heritage Site in Tanum is an outstanding example of Bronze Age art of the highest quality, where people from the Bronze Age carved out thousands of images on smooth rocks in the landscape of Bohuslän. The range of motifs is a unique testimony of life during the European Bronze Age.

Within the area four different places have been made accessible for visitors. These four places can be seen as a good reference for the approx. 600 sites known within the World Heritage Area. Many of these sites have been painted for better visibility.

Unfortunately only one of these sites is accessible for wheelchairs. This, however, does not mean that the other sites cannot be visited if one is disabled to a certain extent. Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslås has great knowledge of the various sites within the World Heritage Area and can help with visiting the panels for lesser abled persons.

To give an example, we have had a number of groups with blind people that wanted a guided tour to the rock carvings. We were anxious on how to approach this, as we, like many, consider the rock art to be first and foremost a visible art. However, it did not take long to realize that we were worried for nothing. The participants instantly started to feel and were able to "see" the carvings with their fingers.

We believe it is important for all to be able to "see" the carvings and appreciate the iconography from the Bronze Age, regardless the physical condition. In this guide we will look at the four so-called tourist rocks and list the possibilities for a visit for those with a visual or physical impairment. While this guide is structured with the blind and those in a wheelchair in mind, the advice in this guide can be used by all with an impairment.



Aspeberget

Aspeberget is also called the Holy Mountain as it has some 20 panels. The site is situated some 700 meters south from the Vitlycke Museum along the road to Kville. There is a regular parking on the left of the road as well as a special handicap parking on the road towards Aspebergets Gårdsbutik. From here it is not far to the first panel.



Entrance and handicap parking at Aspeberget. Foto Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslös

There is a ramp suitable for wheelchairs that lead up to the well-known first panel at Aspeberget with one of the remarkable sun-symbols consisting of a round disc with forklike protrusions, held up by two human figures with ponytails, often interpreted as females.

The first panel at Aspeberget. Orthophoto: SHFA



Other known images here are the large deeply carved bulls. It is believed that they have a mythical importance, not just in Scandinavia, but all over the world, and are considered to represent fertility and strength. Underneath the bulls, a man is ploughing using an ard, a predecessor to the plough. This is one of the few carvings that seem to depict work, but this is not the case. The ard and the ploughman are clearly symbolizing fertility and regrowth.

From here, the path continues with some small steps, followed by a long staircase which leads to the other side of the hill where the other panels are situated. There is no other way to reach the other panels, apart from this path, which leads over rocks and uneven ground, interspersed with wooden gangways and steps.



Staircase to the panels on the other side of the hill. Photo: Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslös

The majority of the other panels are not painted and can only be seen under the correct light conditions, that is when the sun illuminates the rock from the correct angle, usually early morning or late afternoon. The panels contain elaborate boats, human figures, some beautifully formed birds as well as a horse figure, most likely dating to the Early Iron Age. Aspeberget is particularly suitable for the visually impaired people. Some of the panels are situated close to the platforms, making it quite easy to “see” the figures with the fingers. Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslös can offer you the guidance you need.

One of the panels at Aspeberget after documentation by Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslös



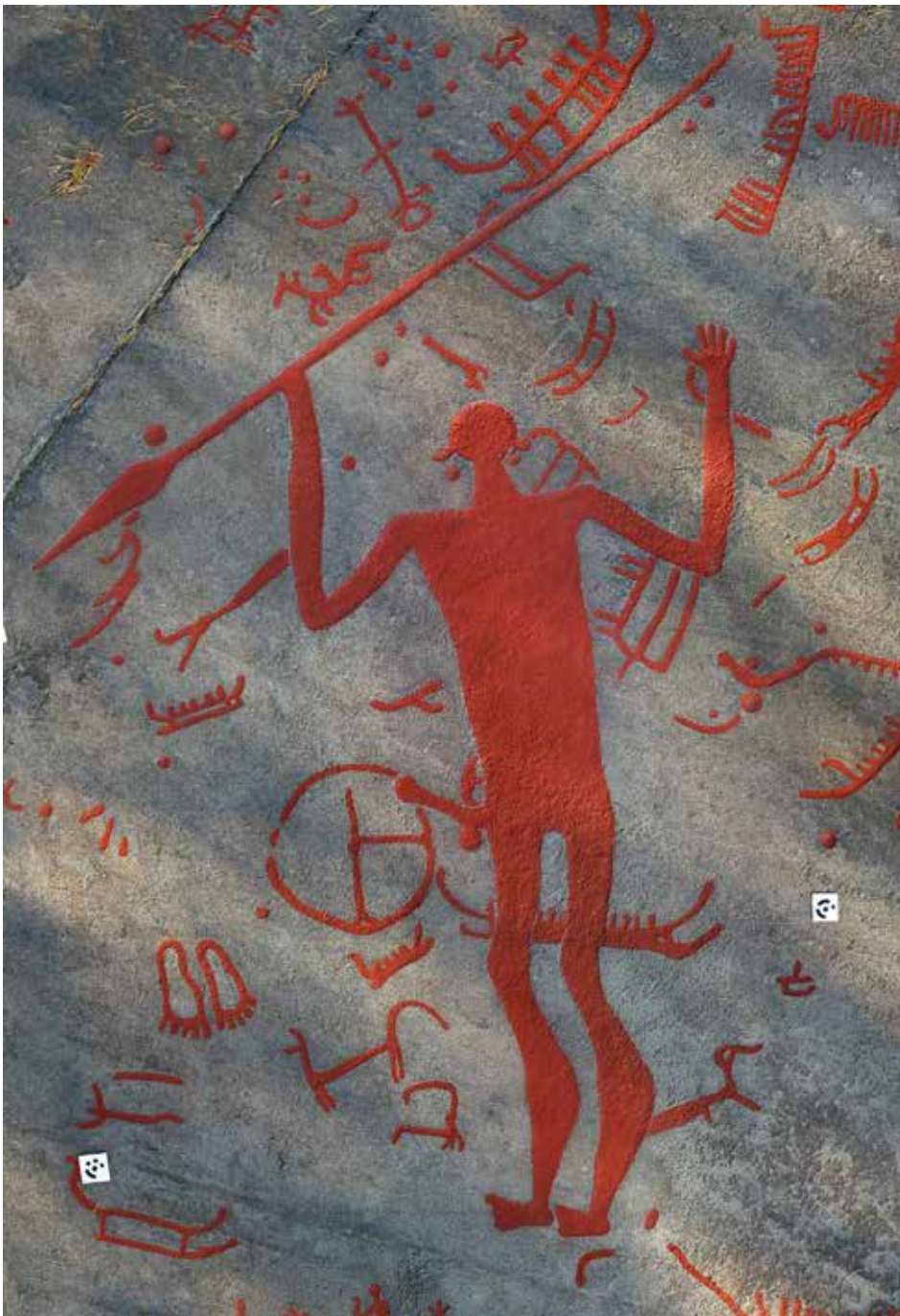
Litsleby

Litsleby is the rock with the largest human figure in Scandinavia. It is situated 2 kilometers south from the Vitlycke museum on the road to Kville. Follow the road sign Litsleby to the right and continue for approx. 1 km to a large parking place (with compost toilets). From the parking place a path leads to a ramp, specially constructed for wheelchair access.



The ramp at Litsleby. Photo: Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslös

The ramp overlooks the entire Litsleby rock, which contains the largest human figure of Sweden: 2,3 meters high. He is called 'The Spear God' and is carved over many other figures. This is quite common amongst the many panels within the World Heritage Area, but we do not know what could be the reason to superimpose existing images with newer ones. Recent research has shown that the spear is older than the human figure.



The largest human figure in Sweden. Orthophoto: SHFA

The vast majority of the panels in the World Heritage Area have been in use during the entire Bronze Age and Early Iron Age and this is especially clear to see at Litsleby. A number of boats are depicted with in-turned prows, dating to the earlier part of the Bronze Age. However Litsleby is also known for its many Iron Age boats, of which the largest are close to 2,5 meters long. Early Iron Age boats are characterized by their symmetrical shape, resembling the Hjortspring boat and was deposited in a peat bog with military equipment including iron weapons .

Between the prow and keel extension of these large ships are some round, shield-like figures. One of the shields has seven segments, one has nine, and two have thirteen. So-called stone circles, a type of grave common in the Bronze and Iron Ages, usually consist of seven, nine, eleven or thirteen stones. There is a connection between ships and death, and between circles and graves. The ships may have represented the journey to the afterlife.

The large Iron Age boats at Litsleby. Orthophoto: SHFA





The smaller panel after documentation by Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslös

The ramp continues to a smaller panel, which is not painted. The panel is dominated by smaller boats, most of them dating to the Late Bronze Age – Early Iron Age. Here to, one can clearly see how many of the images are placed in the natural water-runs flowing over the rocks.

On a small rock, 100 meters up into the woods is a remarkable rider motif. The path to this smaller rock from Litsleby is steep and uneven, and therefore not suitable for disabled persons. An alternative way to see this smaller rock, is by following the road uphill. In principle there is room for one car to park here temporarily.

The smaller Tegneby rock has eight horsemen, five of which are armed with javelins and shields. The riders carry rectangular shields of Celtic style. These became popular in the early part of the Iron Age and replaced the round shields of the Bronze Age.

The alternativ road to the smaller Tegneby rock. Photo: Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslös





The panel at Tegneby. Rubbing by Dietrich Evers

The domestic horse arrived in southern Scandinavia some time during the 21st century BC and became very important in local mythology. It was the horse that, together with the ship, pulled the sun across the sky. The art of riding came fairly late. It is most likely that humans didn't learn to ride in Scandinavia until the very late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. In pre-historic times, horses were sometimes sacrificed. As part of the ritual, the horsemeat would be eaten, while the head and lower legs were sacrificed to the gods in lakes and waterways. When Christianity was introduced, eating horsemeat became taboo, as the priests saw this as a pagan custom.

Vitlycke

The Vitlycke rock is situated opposite the visitor center. From the parking area of the Vitlycke museum, follow the path alongside the visitor center to the crossing. The walk up to the rock is somewhat steep and pebbly, but suitable for wheelchairs. Alongside the rock is a wooden ramp allowing you to overlook the entire surface.

The Vitlycke panel. Photo: Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslös

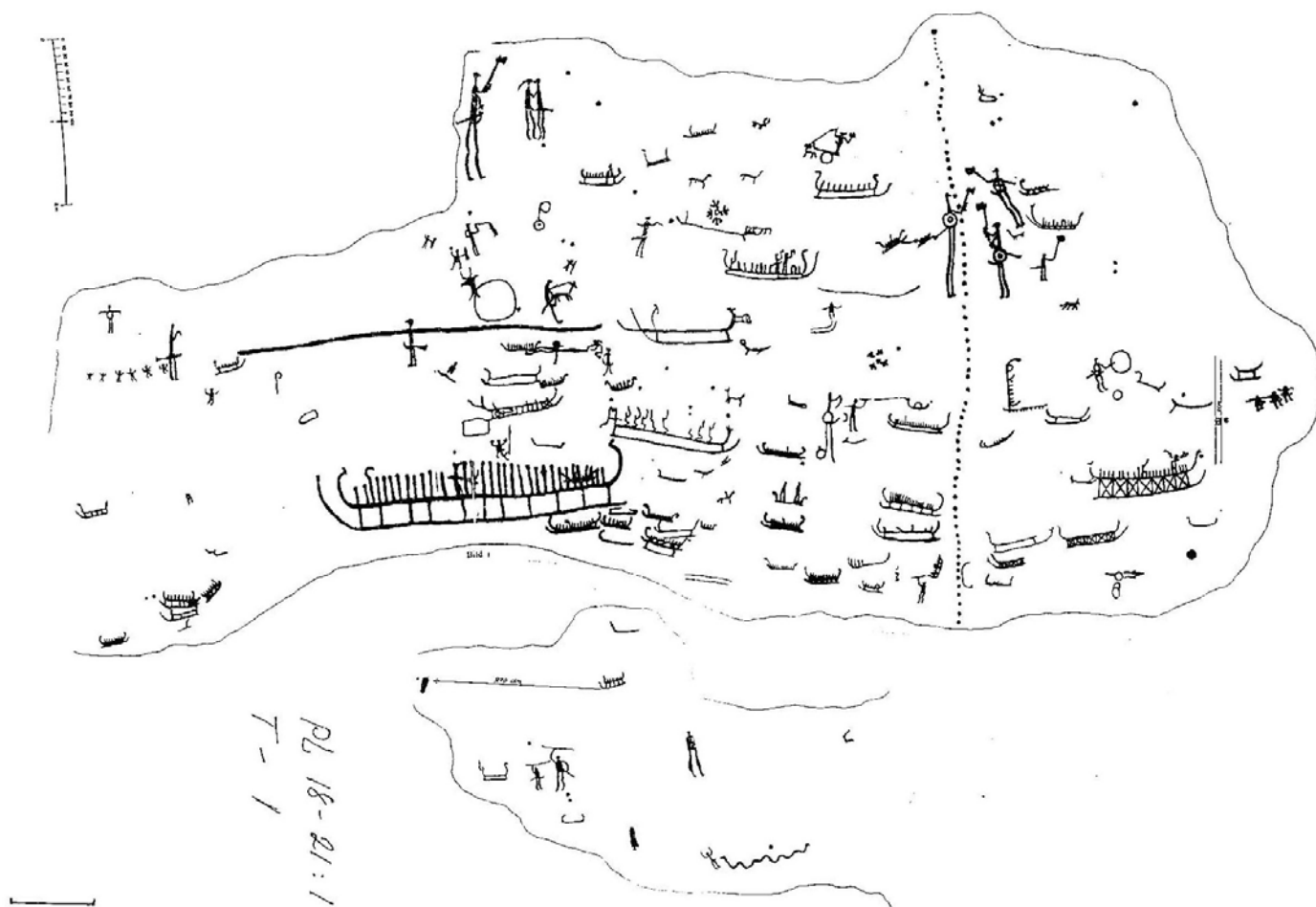




The Vitlycke panel. Photo: Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslös

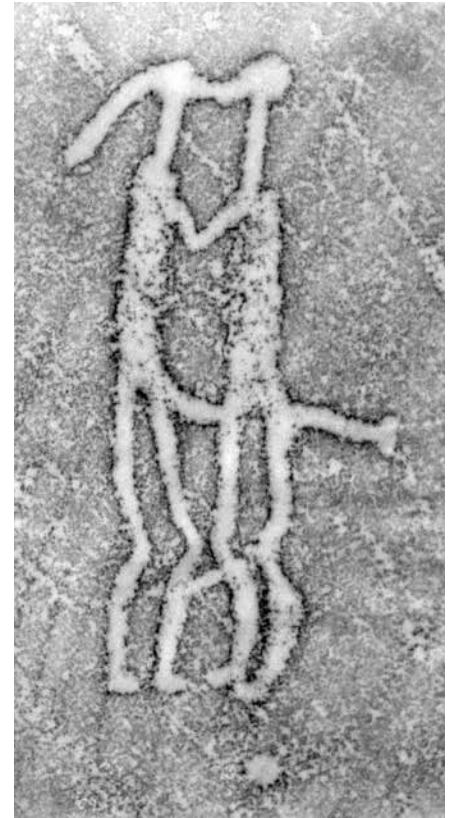
The Vitlycke rock is one of the largest in the World Heritage Area and by far the best-known rock art panel in Sweden. It contains a multitude of images; ships, humans, animals, and cup marks.

Drawing of the Vitlycke panel. Source: SHFA



The 'wedding couple'. Rubbing by Gerhard Milstreu

Undoubtedly the most famous figure on this rock is the so-called 'wedding couple'. Two figures stand close together. The figure on the right is carrying a sword which protrudes behind him. The figure on the left has their hair in a braid, which is believed to be a sign for a female. It is possible that this image depicts the wedding between the Fertility God and the Fertility Goddess. This so-called ritual wedding is known as Hieros Gamos – the Holy Wedding. According to the myth, the god makes the goddess pregnant. In the autumn, he dies and has to descend to the netherworld, where he is forced to remain until the spring, when he is allowed to return to the land of the living. The Fertility God does not only impregnate the goddess, he fertilizes all living things. This is obvious in the spring when the god returns from the netherworld and everything begins to germinate and grow. This myth, which comes from an agricultural society, is common in large parts of the Old World: from India in the East to Scandinavia in the West.

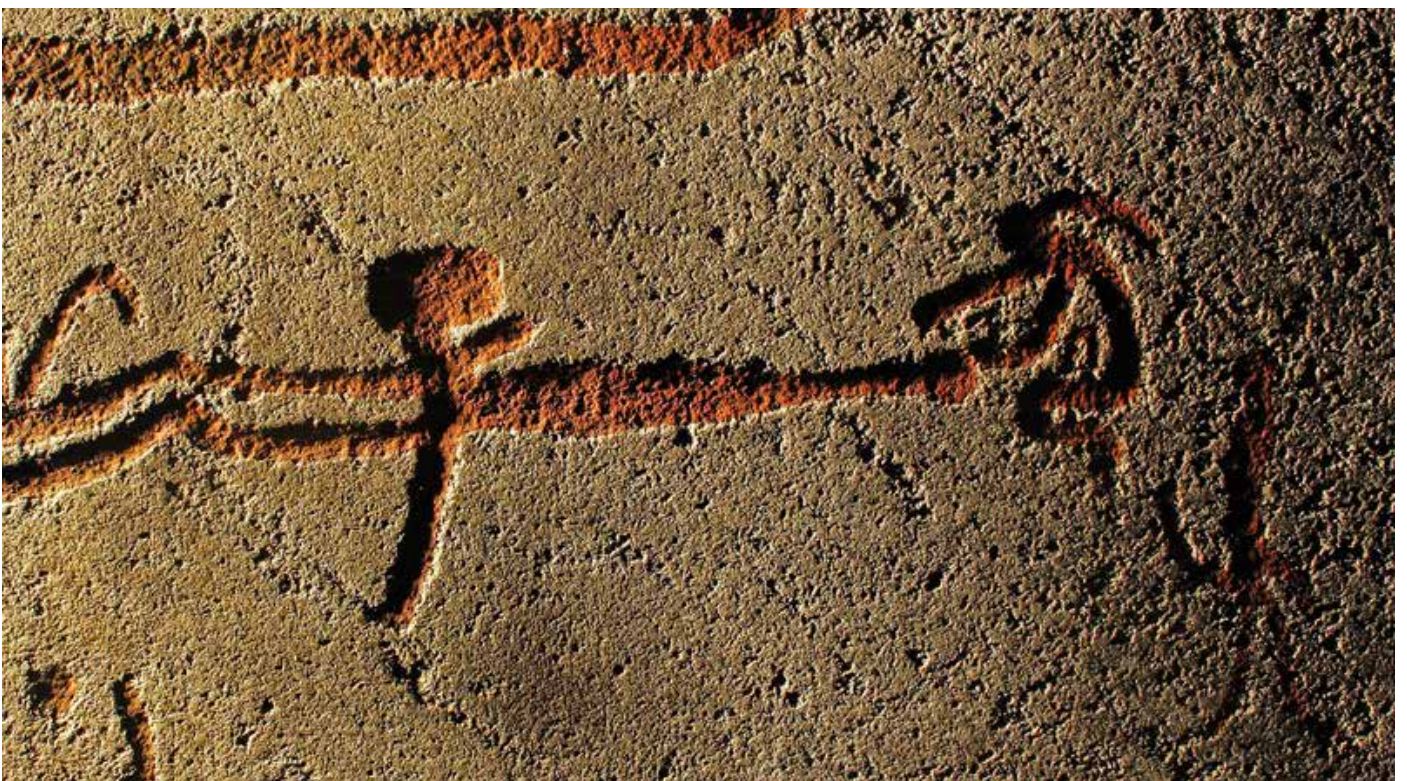


Another human figure with her hair in a braid is depicted kneeling down and hovering over a human figure lying down. Only a few human figures are depicted lying down and that posture is interpreted as a depiction of a dead person. This is why in modern times this motive is often referred to as the grieving women.

However, we have to be careful classifying and interpreting motives that were created over 3000 years ago during a period where life and living conditions and the perception of the world, were completely different to our present day perception of the world.

The rock carvings are, together with the iconography on the bronzes, the best-preserved image archive from the Bronze Age. They tell about the religion of the people, their rituals and festivals, about the journey of the sun in the firmament and about the higher powers. We believe that they let us understand how humans perceived the higher powers as well as their own role in the universe

The 'grieving woman'. Photo: Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslös



Fossum

The Fossum panel is often referred to as a Masterpiece and for good reason. The panel can be reached by taking road 163 towards Bullarebygden for approx. 2 km. The car park is on the right-hand side of the road while the Fossum panel itself is situated on the left side of the road. A small staircase leads from the car park to a pedestrian crossing. An alternative way to reach the panel is to walk back to the road and cross it opposite the entrance. The walk up to the panel is not adapted for disabled persons, but the terrain is relatively flat and smooth. The wooden ramp lies approx. 10 cm above the ground.



The situation at Fossum. Photo: Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslös

Many of the human figures at Fossum are holding large axes. Some of these axes have been found, mostly in bogs where they were left as offerings. These axes are made of clay with just a thin layer of bronze, making them ceremonial tools, useless for work or fighting.

The Fossum panel. Photo: Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslös



The many activities that are taking place in the central part of the panel, may indicate the various rituals that took place on or around the panels. We see human figures holding up axes, playing lurs, hunting, making offerings, dancing, etc. All the way to the left (when looking at the rock with your back to the road), is a human figure with her hair in a braid, holding up one arm towards a disc. Is she to be considered a priest adoring the sun? In the upper part of the panel, we see a disc with similar forklike protrusions as at Aspeberget, though this time without human figures holding it.

Visually handicapped people can quite easily feel the figures with their fingers as they are close to the ramp. As at Aspeberget, the other smaller panels at Fossum are not adapted for disabled persons as the path leads over rocks and uneven ground, interspersed with steps.



*The path to Balken.
Photo: Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslös*

The other main site at Balken can be visited by walking the 163 for approx. 300 meters to the rock on the right side of the road. There is a small opening next to the barrier, alternatively one can crawl under the barrier. Again the approach to the rock is over uneven ground, and there is a step up to the platform itself. Still, it is worth the effort. This non painted rock is best visited in the second half of the afternoon, when the sun is at the right angle opposite the surface and the motifs become highly visible.

What is undoubtedly the most elegantly carved sun-horse in all Scandinavia is found at Balken. The shape of the horse can be compared with depictions of sun-horses on some of the bronze razors, included as grave goods in Denmark and Northern Germany. Based on the find from Trundholm, Denmark (a miniature horse and ornamented disc, gilded in gold on one side, mounted on a wheeled vehicle), and the iconography on the razors, it is believed that the Sun was helped on its cyclical journey by the horse during the day and was transported back to the East at night on a boat.

After your visit to Fossum, drive on for ca. 2 km to Underslös Musuem, an information centre for rock art documentation and research. Take the guided tour through the museum or ask for the possibilities to see and experience the carvings. Whilst there is no wheelchair access to the museum at present, other persons with reduced functionality present no obstacle. There are possibilities to sit down and rest in the exhibition room.

The panel at Balken after documentation by Tanums Hällristningsmuseum Underslös





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