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## Reviewed Article:

# "Days of Living Archaeology" at the Prehistoric Archaeopark Vsestary, Czech Republic

Persistent Identifier: <https://exarc.net/ark:/88735/10287>

EXARC Journal Issue 2017/2 | Publication Date: 2017-06-01

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Until recently, the presentation of archaeology in the Czech Republic was solely connected to classic museum exhibitions. Unfortunately, not all museums have archaeological exhibitions. For example, the National Museum in Prague currently does not have any, not even temporary, archaeological exhibition due to the reconstruction of the historical building. With the exception of the successful exhibition *Lovci mamutů* (Mammoth hunters) archaeology was present only as a side topic in temporary exhibitions. Another example of missing

permanent archaeological exhibition is from Eastern Bohemia, the regional museum in Hradec Králové. This situation led to the founding of the Prehistoric *Archaeopark Všestary*.



From the programmes of museum events we can see that in Czech prehistorical museology there is a long-term tendency to tailor all programmes to children. This causes excessive simplifying of presented reality. The original aim of the Archaeopark was to introduce visitors to our current knowledge of prehistory supported by experiments, although certain activities / experiments are not fully available to modern visitors because of time demands, for example, pottery firing, as it takes too long.

The concept of alternative forms of archaeological presentation via archaeological experimentation and an open-air museum has, in the Czech Republic, been known for a long time, from foreign examples. During the 1960s, the idea was that this should be carried out by a central specialised organisation, namely the Institute of Archaeology of the Czechoslovak Academy of Science in Prague (Sklenář 1983). It was successfully carried out in Březno u Loun (north-western Bohemia) on the site of an excavated polycultural prehistoric and medieval settlement (Štauber 2000). Unfortunately, this project, with reconstructions of several prehistoric and medieval buildings, served mostly archaeologists and not the general public.

At the same time in Kosmonosy, north of Prague, there was the Dětský pravěký skanzen Altamira (children's archaeological open-air museum) (Cvrček & Najman 2000). Following the 'Velvet Revolution', the new democratic environment of the 1990s led to the appearance of a number of archaeological open-air museum projects. The common denominator was the construction of prehistoric and medieval buildings, which were the most sought-after features by both general public and archaeologists. A number of these projects were never finished, while others changed their location (*Keltoi Mladá Boleslav* moved to Prášily in southern Bohemia). One of the long-term successes is Villa Nova Uhřetín in Orlické Mountains in east Bohemia, which pursues both research and education (Dragoun 2000). Another site also in eastern Bohemia, the Celtic Archaeopark in Nasavrky is currently restarting. The

situation in Moravia has developed differently. Due to the leadership of Archaeological Institute of Czech Academy of Science in Brno, an open-air museum with a reconstruction of an early medieval hill-fort was created on an excavated site, in Chotěbuz on the Moravian-Polish border. With help from the town Modrá u Velehradu, a Great Moravian (early medieval) church, princely hall and part of a hill-fort was constructed.

## Archaeoparks

The Prehistoric Archaeopark Všestary was founded in 2012 – 2013 to replace the Centre of Experimental Archaeology, which was created in 2000. The new feature of the Archaeopark is

a combination of a building with a permanent archaeological exhibition and an open-air museum (Tichý2012). This combination was also used in Chotěbuz in 2016.

The term “archaeopark” has started to be used widely. In 2016 a new museum in southern Moravia dedicated to the period of Mammoth hunters, called *Archaeopark Pavlov* has been founded. At the moment, it has only an indoors exhibition but there are plans for an open-air addition. The topical problem now is how to ‘enliven’ such sites. After the initial wave from 1990s onwards, in which the original projects were by enthusiasts, the parks have now been taken over by state owned museum institutions.

This has demonstrated that creating dynamic programmes is a demanding task, and may succeed only one to three times a year, which is usually not enough for those in charge of the sites. One solution seems to be moving ‘enthusiasts’ into economically stable state institutions (Makýš 2003, 209). At the same time within Czech archaeology, the division between archaeology and its presentation has persisted (Mikešová 2015), even leading to doubts as to whether such presentation is part of archaeology or just ‘playing’ (Tichý2014 a). The following text presents one possible approach to archaeology presentation, as practised in the Prehistoric Archaeopark Věstary.

## Aims of the Prehistoric Archaeopark Věstary

The Prehistoric Archaeopark in Věstary was created as a combination of an open-air and indoors exhibition (Tichý 2012). The building hosts a permanent exhibition divided into three floors. This exhibition covers archaeological finds within their context, a model of a prehistoric landscape and a chronological overview of prehistory. There is a hall for temporary exhibitions (which presents original archaeological material from rescue excavations) and a projection hall. The open-air part of the Archaeopark contains prehistoric buildings, a cemetery, workshops, clay pits and other features. An important part of the open-air exhibition is a roofed model of an archaeological excavation. The Archaeopark is connected to Hradec Králové, the regional centre and the biggest potential source of visitors, by a cycle path which goes through some important archaeological sites.

After its opening in 2013, we realised that the time when a visitor simply walked from one exhibit to another was gone. It was necessary to start again and complement both permanent and temporary exhibitions with interactive programmes. Apart from programmes for schools, there are also thematic weekends. These ‘Days of Living Archaeology’ have become important features for the Archaeopark, these weekends truly make the Archaeopark ‘an archaeopark’ and are the reason for repeated visits by archaeology fans. There are not many such activities in the Czech environment, as the current trend is to focus on entertainment and sport activities for children rather than education.

There are also economic reasons for the organisation of the 'Days of Living Archaeology'. The Archaeopark acquires 40% of its support from the region of Hradec Králové, but the rest of budget depends on entry fees and support from the University of Hradec Králové. This allows us to keep in the programme 'live', with elements of prehistoric technologies, contact with replicas and space for hands-on activities for visitors.

Virtual reality is used in the Archaeopark in only one touch screen where it is necessary. The programme of the cinema hall is a projection with a live commentary. Hands-on activities are appreciated especially by grandparents, but there has been an increase in damage to the Archaeopark equipment. This is partially due to a lack of discipline in some visitors ("Nobody told us that we can't take that home.") and partially to lack of manual dexterity, the prerequisite for hands-on activities.

From the programmes of museum events we can see that in Czech prehistorical museology there is a long-term tendency to tailor all programmes to children. This causes excessive simplifying of presented reality. The original aim of the Archaeopark was to introduce visitors to our current knowledge of prehistory supported by experiments, although certain activities / experiments are not fully available to modern visitors because of time demands, for example, pottery firing, as it takes too long.

The situation as described led to the idea of a programme of twelve 'Days of Living Archaeology' a year, one each month. At the beginning it seemed that the content of each event would be based on a topic, for example food, rituals, but time has shown that the public prefers events dedicated to time periods, for example Mammoth Hunters, Celts or Romans. The 'Days' content is therefore a combination of both approaches. The great ambition is to not to repeat any activities during any one year.

## Current situation

From the opening of Archaeopark Věstary in 2013, the content of 'Day of Living Archaeology' has constantly evolved. The open-air part of the park (See Figure 2) creates a backdrop for some of the activities, especially at times of favourable weather. In Bohemia, favourable weather is unpredictable. Even in summer, excessive heat or torrential rains can negatively influence an event. Despite that the popular topics mentioned earlier, topics with technology presentations like Neolithic, Hallstatt or Bronze Age are put on from April to September. Other topics demand adverse weather (Winter in Prehistory) or use roofed areas (See Figure 3). They can also make use of the interior of the building (See Figure 1) when the open-air exhibition is not connected to the topic (Classical World, Evolution).

Each event has a similar structure. There is an interactive projection on the given topic in the Archaeopark cinema, and a stall with hands-on activities for children. In winter months with less visitors, there is a game for children connecting posts in the archaeopark, stalls with

educational information or technology demonstrations (See Figure 4 and 5), or a theatre (puppets or live actors) (See Figure 5). Some of the technology presentations are run by guests including foreign colleagues and members of the Department of Archaeology of Hradec Králové University. The aim is that every visitor, both adult and child, takes home with them information about the period presented (Tichý 2014b) (See Figure 7). The single stalls present a mosaic of various elements of the given period, the connecting component is the interactive projection. Its realisation is demanding because of the composition of the target group, especially the number of children. The presence of children does not mean there is a pressure on the speaker to simplify the topic. The Archaeopark is not visited by large numbers (about 15,000 a year including schools) and the visitors are often deeply interested in archaeology.

Below we are presenting a yearly list of events based on what topics proved successful due to the time of the year, possibilities of technology presentation and visitor accessibility. In winter there may be only 200 visitors over the weekend while in summer there can be over 600 visitors which is the maximum capacity of the Archaeopark. In winter therefore, there are more contact activities, while in summer there needs to be distance from the visitor due to the large visitor numbers.

**January:** January is the most likely month in the Czech Republic for snow. Therefore, *Winter in Prehistory* (See Figure 8) is a natural choice of presentation. The aim is to allow the visitor to see the open-air part in the way they do not know it (See Figure 9). The stalls concentrate on topics connected to keeping warm (textile working, felt making, fire starting, there is a possibility to sit by fire in the house), cycle of the Ice Ages and the find of the 'Iceman' - the well-preserved natural mummy of a man who died around 3,300 BCE in Tyrolean Alps.

**February:** *Human Evolution* is a topic which has no support in the open-air area. Bleak February weather favours staying inside. The only open-air part is throwing a fully wooden spear. The topics of the stalls include demonstrations of making scrapers and hand axes from flint, a wooden spear and a bone tool (See Figure 10). Children can work on a wooden stick with a flint.

**March:** *Classical World*, which was present in the Czech Republic in Moravia. This topic again has no support from the open-air part of the archaeopark. The children's workshop is set up as the interior of a Roman villa (See Figure 11). Hands-on activities are represented by making of a mosaic tile and Samian Ware. Visitors always enjoy tasting baked goods and wine. The children can also try on Roman clothes.

**April:** *Salt and Iron* are topics connected to the Early Iron Age. In the open-air area there is a smelting kiln, salt extraction (See Figure 12) and grinding of corn with a Greek style quern, children can play about the trade of the time, there is also a stall which makes



predictions from liver. Children can also make an ornament known from a ritual site in southern Bohemia.

**May:** *Romans and Germans* theme presents the Age of the Roman Empire and the Migration of Peoples. The topic concerns the border regions of Rome, with demonstrations of fighting (See Figure 13). There is a possibility to shoot a bow, throw a spear, and play board games with a 'Roman'. Children can also make a painted shield, and have their face painted as well.

**June:** The theme of *The First Farmers of the Neolithic* includes summer solstice celebration in the roundel, drilling and polishing stone, grinding corn (See Figure 3), pottery firing, demonstration of the use of a sickle and other agriculture implements. Visitors can make an amulet from stone by drilling with a flint drill.

**July:** *Celtic Crafts* is one of the most visited events. The topic contains iron smelting (See Figure 14), bronze casting, pottery firing (See Figure 15) and also making flour with a rotary quern. The atmosphere is complemented by a theatre programme about Celtic warfare. The children can mint a coin.

**August:** *Mammoth Hunters* is another popular programme. Technology is represented by knapping demonstrations. It is also possible to try an atlatl, or spear-thrower. Exhibition of spears and a ceremony led by a Shaman are used to indicate the importance of hunting. Engraving on stone is done by a presenter but animal figures from clay can be made by visitors.

**September:** The technological topic of *The Bronze Age* is bronze casting (See Figure 4). Demonstrations include making moulds, weaving and cloth dying, and cooking in a footed pot. Visitors can try the sharpness of bronze and stone tools, children can make jewellery from wire and a 'Phaistos disc'.

**October:** The topic *Archaeology* coincides with the International Day of Archaeology and presents archaeology from various environments and different methods (dendrochronology, metal detecting, surveying and documentation). Children fulfil tasks for young archaeologists (See Figure 16).

**November:** The *All Soul's Remembrance of Ancestors* is reminded by a programme featuring the Aeneolithic. Visitors get to take part in a ceremony around an 'ancestral' grave (See Figure 17). The workshop stalls represent some of the injuries and illnesses of the era, smithing of the first copper objects, herbal infusions, and creation of rock art from the Alpine regions. Children can make masks and immediately use them during the ceremony.

**December:** We normally address the topic of *Rituals* but because of low visitor numbers during Advent it was decided to not have any programme in December in 2017. The topic of various rituals will be addressed throughout the year as mentioned above.

## Conclusion

Regular yearly conferences on presentation and reconstruction of archaeological features organised by Bohumír Dragoun, founder and head of Villa Nova Uhřínov pod Deštnou (Dragoun 2014) plays an important role in the Czech environment. It is a place where representatives of archaeological open-air museums and archaeoparks can meet and discuss the sector. Experimental archaeology is less and less presented in conference contributions. There are even less experiments as part of archaeological demonstrations. A significant role is now played by re-enactment, which is implemented for later periods of protohistory and the Middle Ages. Another increasing phenomenon are interactive exhibitions. Unfortunately, this often only shows objects which the visitor could see in glass cases again in photographs on the screens of various tablets and computers, which does not explore the full possibilities of the media to widen the visitor's experience.

The last conference in Uhřínově pod Deštnou in November 2016 showed unambiguously that to attract more visitors, projects have to focus on entertainment rather than education. Inevitably this means that the number of visitors learning something new is the same as in educational projects with smaller visitor numbers. Everything has to reflect the economic footing the project is based on. The founders of the Archaeopark, Hradec Králové Region and the University of Hradec Králové will not increase financial support, it is therefore necessary to make the running of the museum sustainable within the terms of lower visitor numbers and consequent financial income. This is pursued by quality programmes for visitors based on hands-on activities and elements of archaeological experimentation, visitor experience and the capabilities of presenters. It is possible that word of mouth may bring new visitors. This could be also helped by the proximity of a new motorway and the results of the large archaeological excavations connected with its construction. The strong authenticity of place and landscape inhabited since prehistory hopefully also adds to the innovative exhibitions and sense of place.

📖 **Keywords** children  
archaeological open-air museum  
education  
experience

📖 **Country** Czech Republic

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## Gallery Image



FIG 1. INSIDE THE MUSEUM BUILDING



FIG 2. THE OPEN-AIR PART OF THE MUSEUM DURING A DAYS OF LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY DEDICATED TO THE NEOLITHIC; DRILLING STONE





FIG 3. THE ROOFED OUTSIDE SPACE DURING A DAYS OF LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY DEDICATED TO THE NEOLITHIC





FIG 4. DAYS OF LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY' DEDICATED TO THE BRONZE AGE; BRONZE SMELTING



FIG 5. EXAMPLE OF A SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENT; RICHARD THÉR DURING THE FIRING OF LA TÉNE POTTERY





FIG 6. DAYS OF LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY DEDICATED TO LA TÉNE; CELTIC WARRIORS

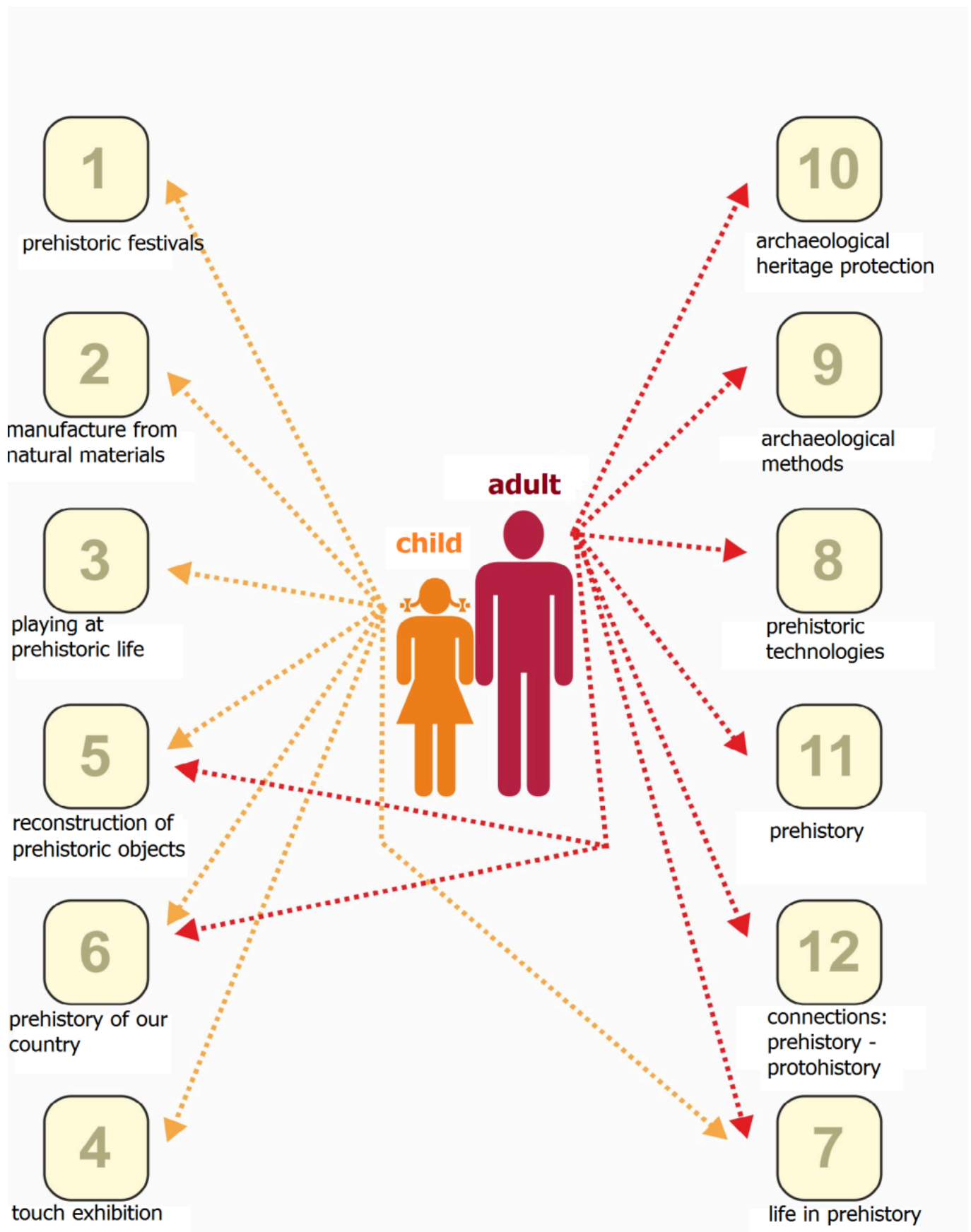


FIG 7. ATTEMPT TO GRAPHICALLY EXPRESS DIFFERENT WAYS OF PERCEIVING A PREHISTORY PRESENTATION DEPENDENT ON THE AGE OF A VISITOR





FIG 8. DAYS OF LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY DEDICATED TO WINTER IN PREHISTORY; MEETING VISITORS IN THE NEOLITHIC HOUSE





FIG 9. THE NEOLITHIC HOUSE IN WINTER



FIG 10. DAYS OF LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY DEDICATED TO HUMAN EVOLUTION; BONE TOOLS





FIG 11. DAYS OF LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY DEDICATED TO THE CLASSICAL WORLD; VISITOR TAKING A PICTURE OF HIS SIBLING, WHO IS IN ROMAN CLOTHES, IN FRONT OF A MODEL OF A ROMAN VILLA



FIG 12. DAYS OF LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY DEDICATED TO HALLSTATT; DEMONSTRATION OF SALT EXTRACTION



FIG 13. DAYS OF LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY DEDICATED TO ROMANS AND GERMANS; BEFORE A FIGHT DEMONSTRATION





FIG 14. DAYS OF LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY DEDICATED TO CELTS; OUR BELGIAN COLLEAGUES DEMONSTRATE THE REDUCTION OF IRON ORE





FIG 15. DAYS OF LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY DEDICATED TO CELTS; DEMONSTRATION OF POTTERY FIRING





FIG 16. DAYS OF LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY DEDICATED TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODS; DEMONSTRATION OF RECORDING



FIG 17. DAYS OF LIVING ARCHAEOLOGY DEDICATED TO AENEOLITHIC; AN ANCESTOR VENERATION CEREMONY WHICH NEEDS VISITORS' PARTICIPATION.