

# Sad news from Archéodrome

**In 2005, an end came to the Archaeological Park Archéodrome and its membership of EXARC.**

■ M.-C. FRERE-SAUTOT (F)

There were three actors involved in this.

The motorway company „Autoroute Paris-Rhin-Rhône“, a semi-public Company. Owner of the Archéodrome.

The APAB (Association pour la Promotion de l'Archéologie de Bourgogne) which ran the Archéodrome until 1993 and played a role afterwards. Their main scientific aim was to prove that exchange was possible between the public and researchers in archaeology.

Autogrill, the company who runs all hotels and restaurants on the Autoroute, and ran the Archéodrome by contract from 1993 until 2004.

Built in 1978, with funds from Autoroute, the Archéodrome was managed at first by APAB with grants from the large mother company. The park contained house constructions from the Stone Age up to the Middle Ages. In the opening year, 250,000 people visited the park, a success which was never equalled again. In 1993,

after a 6 month renovation period, the management of the park itself was transferred to Autogrill.

In its 27.5 years, including after the transfer of the park to Autogrill, APAB hosted 400 to 500 researchers, students and professors from Europe, Africa and the Middle East and helped some of them to complete PhDs or Masters. Those people have published a large number of articles and lectures and took part in different conferences organised by the APAB. Seven large books were published and several exhibitions about technology were set up.

Autogrill's new management created a new display concept concentrating attention on the museum display with many models and reconstructions in the main building, as the running of an open-air museum of archaeology was not part of either their core business or interest. Although this might have been a good step the reconstructed houses were left to decay and no new ones were built. However as it turned out most of the visitors favoured the outdoor area to the exhibition and so the number of visitors which, had already been declining, fell even more. Contributing to this may be that the entrance fees may have been too high and efforts



■ Fig. 1 Wall fragment with house from the fortress at l'Archéodrome (the author of all the pictures is Andreas Mensert. ).



■ Fig. 2 The famous Roman and watch towers (Alesia) of the l'Archéodrome.



■ Fig. 3 House at l'Archéodrome.

to reach major target groups (schools) incorrectly organised.

Autogrill did not know how to run such a place and by the time the contract ended in 2004, the number of visitors had dropped to a meagre 50.000. The park had been in debt every year and it was clear the business was not financially viable: operating cost were too high despite a drastic reduction in expenses.

In 2005, Autoroute decided to permanently close Archéodrome and change their activities. This was the status in November 2005, at the turn of the year Autoroute was privatised and is now under new management. It is unclear what decision they will take in any department of the company, let alone for Archéodrome. As for the people involved from 1978 onwards, it was an adventure and a great experience, with a sad ending.

## Summary

### Der Archäologische Park Archeodrome

Im Jahr 2005 entschied die Firma „Autoroute“ den Archäologischen Park Archeodrome zu schließen, der seit 1993 - nach der Übereignung an die Firma „Autogrill“, die Hotels und Restaurants entlang der französischen Autobahn betreibt, - einen dramatischen Besucherrückgang zu verzeichnen hatte. Während der knapp 28 Jahre seines Bestehens konnte das Archeodrome insgesamt fast 500 Forscher, Studenten und Professoren aus Europa, Afrika und dem Mittleren Osten beherbergen.

### Parc archéologique Archéodrome

En 2005, la société Autoroute a décidé de fermer l'Archéodrome qui, à partir de 1993, sous la gestion d'Autogrille, société gérant des hôtels et restaurants, perdait peu à peu ses visiteurs. Pendant 27, 5 ans de son existence, y compris la gestion d'Autogrille, Archéodrome a accueilli près de 500 chercheurs, étudiants et professeurs venus d'Europe, d'Afrique et du Proche Orient.