



The Solnhofen Limestone: A stony heritage of many uses

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High above the valley of the River Altmühl (Bavaria, Germany), between Solnhofen to the west and Kelheim to the east, numerous quarries give access to thinly plated limestone from the Upper Jurassic, some 150 million years before the present. The main quarry areas lie around the town of Eichstätt and between the villages of Solnhofen, Langenaltheim and Mörnsheim.

Here limestone slabs have been quarried for several hundred years, some even in Roman times. Solnhofen Limestone is famous worldwide; not only because it is a beautiful building stone of high quality, but also because of the exceptionally well-preserved fossils it contains –among them the early bird Archaeopteryx.

The quarry industry between Solnhofen and Eichstätt has shaped a cultural landscape, with old and new quarries sunk into the plain and numerous spoil heaps rising above it, for the rock is not all economically useful. But many of the spoil heaps and the old quarries are environmentally protected as they provide a habitat for some rare plants and animals.

It is not necessary to cut the Solnhofen Limestone with a saw: it is split by hand into thin and even slabs or sheets which are used for flagstones and wall covers, which since centuries are sold world-wide. Locally it also serves as roof tiles for traditional houses. Thick slabs of especially fine quality may be found near Solnhofen and Mörnsheim and are used for lithography printing.