

# Goseck

## Prehistoric Sun Observatory



Since long we have known that semi sedentary Neolithic communities in Germany have erected for their leader's huge burial cairns. Some of these round elevations are still in situ today. Others have been flattened for farming purposes long ago when archeology did not yet play an important role.

These prehistoric grave sites consisted of a wooden or stone structure forming a burial chamber. After the funeral rituals the chambers were covered with an enormous number of stones and tons of earth to form a massive well visible hill.

This monument was intended to demonstrate the former tribal head's power. Some so-called hill tombs featured an entry tunnel for later additional family burials or multiple burials of successors.

### *Ring Sanctuaries?*

But what was new to archeologists are the more recently discovered ring walls in the same areas of hill tombs. What were they erected for? Were they fortified villages like shown in the Asterix comics?

On closer investigation inside the moat and earth walls various concentric wooden palisade walls with few entrances were discovered. And it was established that these structures certainly were not built to protect a village inside. They must have been ritual sanctuaries.

### *Goseck Discovery*

This ancient cult ring was only discovered by arial surveys in 1991. Only ten years later excavations started from 2002 to 2004. The archeological results were so important, that a detailed reconstruction was decided. Finally in



December 2005 the re-erected archeological site was officially opened.

### *Goseck Museum*

Today the village of Goseck near Weissenfels south of Leipzig houses a small museum in the village manor. Here you will find some more information about the early sun observatory purpose of this Neolithic structure next to the three sign boards on site. The archeological site is well indicated and lies on the fringes of the village.

### *Surprising Age*

Experts have established for Goseck an early age in prehistoric semi sedentary settler's history of 7,000 years. This indicates that Goseck so far is the oldest known sun observatory in human history worldwide.

What a sensation that is. And it lies not in Egypt or Mesopotamia but in Germany. The site is well chosen on a plateau above the river Saale with excellent views.

### *Structure Details*

The ring structure consists of an outer moat and wall with a diameter of 71 meters. The two inner palisade walls measure 56 and 49 meters across. The observatory complex has three entrances in the north, southwest and southeast.

The inner gates are slightly narrower than the outer entrances and path crossing the



moat and passing the earth wall. The inner area has no traces of any buildings, structures or erected central poles or pits.

### *Other Discoveries*

About one kilometer away archeologists discovered the traces of an early Neolithic village as old as Goseck with long house buildings with mud plastered reed walls.





A surprise was a child grave with two ceramic ware items from the earliest pottery period. In addition, they found at Goseck various cattle bones and skulls. Were they used for meals or sacrifices?

#### ***Human Sacrifice?***

The human bones in three pits give experts more to think about. These bones show light cuts from flint stone tools indicating that meat was carefully separated from bones. Was this done as a burial ritual or for sacrifice? We do not know.

But human sacrifices were not uncommon during Neolithic times as we know from other sites. Same as separating the human skull and preparing it for use of ritual practices.

#### ***Sun Observatory***

Let's look again at the gates and their position in the concentric palisade walls. It was established that they coincide with the winter solstice about 6,800 years ago. More recently experts found further measuring points to preview also summer solstices at the time.

This pushes the first agricultural activities in ancient Germany further forward by at least another one to two thousand years. It is assumed that Goseck was only in use for 300 years. Why was it given up so early after only ten generations?

#### ***Other Important Sites***

Archeologists put other Neolithic sites in Ger-

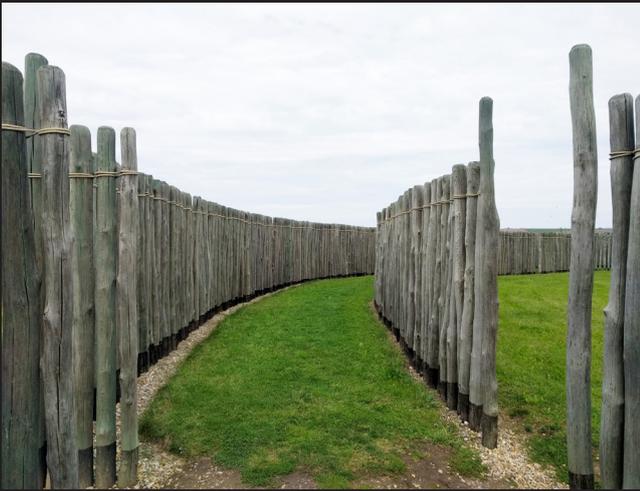
many in context to Goseck. One of the most important is the cult ring at Poemmelte some 130 kilometers in the north. This cult structure is larger and more complex with further interesting discoveries (*see picture above*).

But it falls in the same period as Stonehenge and new results show that visitors from Stonehenge were present for certain ceremonies. For more information, please see the respective article on this website.

#### ***Nebra Sky Disc***

When thinking of prehistoric sun observatories automatically the famous Nebra Sky Disc must spring in mind. But so far experts could not establish any connections with this important Bronze Age relict (*see picture below*).





Other cult rings were found in Germany at Schalkenburg near Quenstedt and Kuenzing on the borders of river Danube in Southeast Bavaria. But it can be assumed that many more such rings existed. They either were destroyed by intensive farming or just overbuilt by more modern villages.

**Summery**

Goseck is certainly worth a visit because it is one of the oldest sun observatories and gives a totally new view on the sophistication of early rural farming communities about 7,000 years ago. See Goseck first and then travel 130 kilometers north to Pommelte and you will be surprised. On your way stop at the museum in Halle to see the famous Nebra Sky Disc which is a must see prehistoric item.

