

ZAU ZOURA /SD AYER – POST N°11 : THE PROTECTIVE ROLE OF THE FOREST

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93.05 % of Anniviers woodland are protective forests. A perfect example is the Zau Zoura forest, or Ban of Ayer, that stands guard, as it were, over Ayer village. Long ago, our ancestors “placed a total ban” on this forest, forbidding the felling of trees. Such an extreme form of protection prevented regrowth, as trees became very old allowing little to no space for young shoots.

For a number of years now, [forest exploitation](#) in Valais has increased. From a first glance an observer can immediately tell that today's silvicultural techniques differ from those of yester years. Main changes include enlarging the size of clearings, [mechanizing interventions](#) and leaving dead wood on the ground. As a matter of fact, in a mountain forest, trees grow in clusters and need light to develop. Foresters create [treefall gaps](#) by removing unstable and unhealthy mature trees whose canopy cuts off the sunlight and starves the saplings. Thanks to these gaps, the Zau Zoura forest is rejuvenating little by little as young trees flourish and replace those that have been felled. The forest operates both as a defence against natural hazards and a biodiversity stimulant, supporting the life of insects, birds and other animals.

Plants will grow in these treefall gaps providing food for ungulates that will no longer need to destroy trees when hungry. **Branches have not been piled, a gesture that is sometimes misunderstood by the population:** however collecting and piling branches is no longer useful for the environment. Left on the ground, dead wood gradually decomposes and enriches the forest with humus. In order to steady the snow mantle, slow down falling rocks and provide protection for young shoots, trees are cut one metre from

the ground by logger-foresters from Anniviers Forest Sorting.

The main hazards threatening protective forests are fires, bostrychus attacks and the impact of recreational activities such as wilderness skiing, snowshoeing, or mountain biking on unmarked trails. These activities disturb animals and increase pressure on game and forests. We can preserve our protective forests if we respect quiet zones and protected areas, avoid lighting fires, keep dogs leashed and stick to marked trails and routes.

Mountain forests are an environment in perpetual change. The work undertaken by foresters may seem drastic at times but it is informed by the latest science and in fact it enhances our environment's potential. Cuts are made in order to ensure the rejuvenation of forests and provide life-sustaining services to our society. Enjoy your walk in the forest.

Text: Claude Salamin, Anniviers forest guard

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LE VOL DE CROA – PARCOURS ENFANT

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