

CORALS AMONG LAVAS

The Alpe di Siusi 240 million years ago

THE 'CIPIT BOULDERS'

The 'Cipit boulders' are carbonate blocks, often of huge dimensions, coming from the bioconstructed margin (reef) of upper Ladinian/lower Carnian carbonate platforms.

They collapsed into the adjacent deep basins, where very fine volcanic sediments deposited on the bottom. This is why we find them inside shales and sandstones of both the Wengen Formation and the San Cassiano Formation. They were named after the Cipit stream (Tschapit in German, Cepëi in Ladin), since they were first described 150 years ago in its small valley, lying north of the Sciliar rock rampart and adjacent to the Denti di Terrarossa.

Peculiarly, organisms are better preserved in these reef-derived blocks than on the reef itself (today Sciliar Formation), where dolomitization has made most fossils unrecognizable. Yet, before falling into the basin, the 'Cipit boulders' of the Alpe di Siusi have undergone an early diagenetic phase (chemical changes) which unfortunately damaged the fossil preservation. The most active reef builders, the cyanobacteria, did not fossilize. But their wide-spread structures, called bioliths (or, more specifically, stromatolites) are obviously contained in the blocks alongside many large, beautiful dendroid coral colonies (see photo in the exhibition) associated with a variety of other organisms such as molluscs, brachiopods, echinoderms and sponges.

(Text: Andrea Tintori)