

‘When you see me, weep’

Hunger stones as warning signs of impending hardship

When the water level drops during periods of extreme drought, so-called hunger stones become visible on some riverbanks. These marker stones often bear inscriptions and dates carved into them. They serve as reminders of years of drought and warn of the danger of impending famine. Throughout history, a lack of rainfall led to significant crop failures. Low water levels also jeopardised inland waterway transport as a means of transporting food.

After a particularly dry summer in 1846, only half as much rye as usual could be harvested in the Rhineland. The potato harvest was also poor due to the drought and potato blight. Despite duty-free grain imports, famine prevailed in the Rhineland in 1846 and 1847.