

CAVE ART INTERPRETATION CENTRE PRADES MOUNTAINS

The main objectives of the Interpretation Centre for Cave Art in the Prades Mountains (CIAR) are the dissemination, research and conservation of prehistoric art and, in particular, that of the Prades Mountains, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1998. The monolith that presides over us here corresponds to the cave paintings of the Mas d'en Carles shelter, which constitute the anagram of the CIAR.

THE VISIT

It is advisable to start the visit in the audiovisual room (first door on the left) where we are introduced to the appearance of prehistoric art and the cave art context of the Prades Mountains.

Entrance: second gate. Start the tour. The panel numbers are indicated at the top right.

1. THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- 1.1. The county of Conca de Barberà covers an area of 648.9 km². It is divided into three large geographical units: the plateaus of Baixa Segarra, the "strict" Conca and the Prades Mountains.
- 1.2. The relief is marked by the elevations of the Prades Mountains and the Miramar mountain range, which enclose the region to the south and southeast.
- 1.3. The climate is influenced by the Mediterranean Sea and is dry and semi-humid, with small variations in the Prades Mountains.
- 1.4. Water is supplied by the hydrographic network of the Francolí, Gaià and Siurana rivers.
- 1.5. Forest, shrub and riverside environments, areas dominated by Aleppo pine forests, holm oak woods and oak groves.
- 1.6. Cave and cavern environments, terrains formed by cliffs, slopes and underground cavities, which are a refuge for reptiles and birds.
- 1.7. Rural, agricultural and anthropic environments are the most characteristic spaces in the region, generally surrounded by woodland, fields and small inhabited areas.

2. HISTORY OF THE EARTH AND OF LIFE

2.1. History of the Earth and the beginning of life, situated about 4.6 billion years ago and divided into the following periods: Precambrian (divided into: Hydaean, Archean and Proterozoic), Palaeozoic (Primary Era), Mesozoic (Secondary Era), Cenozoic (Tertiary Era) and finally the Quaternary stage.

The first organisms were unicellular, and later the eukaryotic cell, characteristic of the great majority of living beings today, emerged.

2.2. During the Palaeozoic, the Prades Mountains did not exist, but were a large marine basin where sediments were deposited that later formed the mountains.

2.2.a. Diorama recreating what the region looked like during the Palaeozoic with its marine species, including graptolites.

2.3-2.3.a. In this sea, from the Silurian period (Primary Era), black shale rocks are formed.

2.4. Throughout the Mesozoic (Secondary Era), sediments from the Triassic period are deposited on the seabed of the region, where numerous fossil remains have been discovered.

2.4.a. Diorama with the recreation of the sea during the Triassic period (Secondary Era), where less depth can be observed and which is inhabited by larger animals. It is the era of the big dinosaurs.

2.5. Fossils discovered in the Triassic levels of the Alcover area. Most of them are marine species and the fish *Alcoveria brevis* stands out.

2.5.a. Mould of the fish *Alcoveria brevis*.

2.6. During the Cenozoic Era (Tertiary Era), the land emerges, plants and mammals develop and the world's first hominid species appear.

2.6.a. A diorama shows the end of the Tertiary period in the region. The Conca and the Prades Mountains have a similar appearance to the present day.

2.7. Fossils from the sites in the Sarral area (Oligocene period), where numerous plant remains have been found.

2.7.a. Fossilised leaves from the Sarral area.

2.8. Other fossils from the Conca de Barberà region.

2.9. During the Quaternary, the ice-age people occupied a large part of the planet. The most remarkable fact of this time is the evolution of human beings.

2.10. The emergence of humans.

2.11. Human settlements in caves, shelters and open-air prehistoric sites. Archaeological excavations in Conca de Barberà and its surroundings.

2.12. The occupation of the caves.

2.12.a. Recreation of a cave to exemplify its various functions as a place of habitation, burial and sacred or ceremonial space.

3. ART AND HUMANS

Prehistoric art introductory room.

3.1. Outline of the evolution of human beings.

3.2. The art of humans: development of art and technology over time.

3.3. The birth of art and symbolic thought: the environment and "supernatural" forces lead to a mean of expression that transmits information, knowledge, beliefs and cultural values, which we know as prehistoric art.

3.4. The first artistic manifestations: cave art is represented both in shelters or rocks in the open air and on the walls and ceilings of deep caves, and includes the techniques of painting, engraving, bas-relief and sculpture.

Portable art, on the other hand, is found on small pieces with incised or painted images, as well as on tools and small sculptures or figurines with sacred or ritual symbolism.

3.5. The discovery of prehistoric art. The first finds, at the end of the 19th century, were rejected by official science. Fortunately, Henri Breuil, a French abbot (today considered the father of prehistoric art) proved the authenticity of prehistoric art.

3.6. The caves of Western Europe represent the most important nucleus in the world. They are one of the oldest expressions of the art of Upper Palaeolithic hunter-fisher-gatherer societies.

3.7. Cave paintings in shelters and rocks in the open air represent the most abundant expressions on all continents. They generally belong to hunter-gatherer and agricultural-herding societies of the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and later stages.

3.8. Megalithic monuments also have symbolic designs. Farming, herding and metalworking peoples erected great architectural ensembles and colossal sculptures that are part of prehistoric art.

3.9. Portable art is found throughout the world in a wide variety of forms and materials. It is usually discovered during archaeological excavations.

3.10. Prehistoric art in the Iberian Peninsula.

3.11. The region of Cantabria contains the most abundant and important nucleus of caves with Upper Palaeolithic paintings and engravings.

3.12. Among the cave sanctuaries in the Basque Country we would highlight, among many others: the caves of Ekain, Altxerri and Santimamiñe and, in the Principality of Asturias, the Peña del Candamo, El Pinal and Tito Bustillo.

3.13. On the Atlantic side of the Peninsula (Galicia, Portugal and the Canary Islands) there is a predominance of engravings on rocks in the open air from different periods.

3.14. In the peninsular Mediterranean, the so-called "Levantine art" (declared World Heritage by UNESCO in 1998) stands out, including important sites in the Aragon area such as the Vero River Valley and some cave paintings in the Prades Mountains.

3.15. Within the same Mediterranean area, the Levantine art of Castelló and Tarragona, the macro-schematic art of Alicante, and the Palaeolithic and schematic art of Andalusia stand out.

3.16. In the interior of the Peninsula (La Meseta), most of the chronocultural and stylistic trends converge. The caves of Los Casaste and Maltravieso with Palaeolithic art stand out.

3.17. The diversity of portable art has contributed to a better social and chronological definition of each stage of peninsular history.

3.18-3.18.a. These last showcases summarise the techniques and materials, modelling on clay, painting with a pen, with the fingers or by blowing; burins for engraving on stone, engravings and bas-reliefs worked with stone tools.

We leave the introductory room and enter the next room.

4. CAVE ART IN THE PRADES MOUNTAINS

This room introduces visitors to the cave art of the Prades Mountains with reproductions of full-scale painted panels from the two most important cave traditions: Levantine art

(with dynamic and naturalistic figures) and schematic art (with simplified and abstract images). Groups that lived between 10,000 and 3,000 years ago, i.e. from the post-Palaeolithic to the Iron Age, surviving into the Middle Ages.

The history of the first discoveries (since 1830) is also presented, with the news of the priest Fèlix Torres Amat about some abstract signs at the Portillo de las Letras.

4.1. The cave art sites in the Prades Mountains. There are currently more than forty prehistoric cave art sites registered, which represent a third of the total number of sites in Catalonia.

4.2. The Mas d'en Llord is a small shelter containing a panel with about five naturalistic representations and other schematic remains, including an archer with defined facial features holding a bow and arrow, and the rest of his animals, mostly caprids.

4.3. The Portell de les Lletres is a wall containing various compositions of schematic and abstract figures, located at a height of 3.50 m. The designs correspond to radiating semicircles, curved lines, elliptical shapes, bars, anthropomorphs and quadrupeds. The proximity to the Mas d'en Llord shelter indicates the survival of a significant site.

4.4. The Cova del Minaire cave consists of a small room. At the entrance there are several engravings in schematic and abstract style with ramiforms, radiating semicircles and a possible anthropomorphic figure, similar to the Portell de les Lletres.

We leave the room and enter room 5.

5-5.1. The Mas de Ramon Bessó is a shelter that houses one of the best examples of Levantine cave art in the Prades Mountains. You can enjoy a life-size copy of the shelter. It stands out for the figure of a bull that presides over the centre of a hunt in which small archers take part. Throughout the cavity there are small remains of ruined figures, among them a group of bees, which possibly correspond to the honey gathering activity of the hunting people.

We leave the room and enter room 6.

6. The room is dedicated to representing life-size copies of the most significant shelters with schematic-abstract cave paintings in the Prades Mountains, such as:

6.1. Britus I and II, where we can see schematic representations, including triangular borders (Britus I), which coincide with the decorative motifs of Neolithic-Bronze Age ceramics.

6.2. Mas del Gran stands out for its composition of shepherds with a dog and two ovicaprids, unique in Catalonia. Possibly from the Neolithic period.

6.3. Mas d'en Carles, located at the base of a large rocky monolith where we find the symbol representing the CIAR. It contains a panel with schematic human representations and some idols or jug-armed figures. Most of them are finger-painted.

We leave room 6 and enter corridor 7.

7. Cova de les Creus cave, where there is another figure with arms akimbo, an idol in the shape of a Greek *phy*, similar to those found in the shelter of Mas d'en Carles. The

reproduction shows the same technique, with the fingers, as in the one at Mas d'en Carles.

7.1. Mas de l'Arlequí: contains a small group of schematic-abstract style representations and calligraphic features in a reddish colour, including the representation of a mirror.

7.2. Abrics de Baridiana I and II shelters: these show the remains of some very degraded pictorial motifs in a schematic style with the superimposition of small engravings from the medieval period.

7.3. Caves Cova de la Mola de la Roquerola and Cova Britus III: other isolated schematic and abstract figures have been discovered in these cavities. Those of La Roquerola include calligraphic fingerings and traces.

7.4. The Cova Gallicant is one of the largest caves in the area in the Siurana river valley. Its panel is made up of two groups of schematic figures, where we can still see digitations, bars, lines, traces and remains with human representations.

In the Abric de la Mussara shelter, the figures are very faded, with a small group of schematic human representations standing out.

7.5. The Molí del Salt mill is an archaeological site (in the municipality of Vimbodí) where, among other materials, slabs and blocks of schist with engraved figures of animals and other motifs have been discovered. It is one of the most important examples of Catalan portable art.

We continue along the corridor, which changes direction and numbering.

8. THE CAVE ART OF CATALONIA

This map shows the distribution of the cave paintings in Catalonia up to 2005. Nowadays, the register and the new discoveries have increased the list.

8.1. The Roca dels Moros in Cogul shows a certain diversity of stylistic forms which, in 1908, led to the first chronocultural controversy among researchers. The compositions include paintings of animals: deer, large bovids, caprids and possibly wild boar, as well as human representations, including a small male figure surrounded by women and some animals. The panel also contains ancient and recent engraved figures.

8.2. The Vall de la Coma valley, the Balma dels Punts grotto and the Roca Roja rock integrate schematic and abstract images, as well as naturalistic ones.

The Balma dels Punts contains several rows of dots associated with a naturalistic deer. The Roca Roja shows a magnificent representation of a naturalistic billy goat with large antlers.

8.3. The nucleus of the mountain range of La Pietat constitutes, numerically, the most important group of post-Palaeolithic naturalistic Levantine art in Catalonia.

Within this group of shelters with cave paintings, we must highlight the Ermites I shelter, with a very dynamic scene of hunting deer and caprids, where a character with a large bow and facial features stands out. In the Ermites V shelter we can see the only horse hunt in the cave art of Catalonia, nowadays very degraded by natural phenomena.

8.4. The cave Cova del Tendo (Montsià) contains the only representation of a bovid from the Palaeolithic period in Catalonia. Unfortunately, it was plundered from the cave.

The cave Cova del Ramat (Tivissa) presents a group of caprids and the cave Cova del Taller preserves one of the most remarkable naturalistic deer figures in Catalonia.

8.5. In the cave Cova de Cabra Feixet, several naturalistic figures stand out, including a stylised figure of an archer in front of three cervids and a magnificent caprid.

The Cova Pintada complex contains a unique figure of a large triskel.

8.6. The Cova dels Vilasos cave has a large frieze dominated by schematic and semi-naturalistic figures with human figures, quadrupeds and concentric circles.

The Cova del Tabac cave integrates, in the entrance gallery, schematic and abstract forms in black.

The Aparets group of shelters is made up of four cavities that integrate several panels with schematic and abstract motifs.

In the Barranc de Sant Jaume ravine there are some horizontal triangular elements and a sign in the form of an inverted trident.

In the Barranc de Canà shelter you can see a schematic animal and a geometric structure that resembles the shape of three houses.

8.7. The Cova dels Segarulls cave has two pictorial groups. The first, on the outside, is dominated by two schematic archers and, inside the cave, there are groups of dots, digitations and bars covering the walls and ceiling.

At the Pedra de les Orenetes stone there is an important group of pictographs, basically schematic, including dots, bars, quadrupeds and a woman with figurative features.

8.8. In Catalonia, archaeological research has yielded several examples of furniture art with geometric and figurative decorations.

9. THE ENGRAVINGS OF THE PRADES MOUNTAINS AND CATALONIA

From here to the end of the corridor we find another type of cave art from the mountains of Serra de Prades and Catalonia: the engraving technique.

9.a. The Cogullons. Below the glass we can see a copy of the Cogullons engravings and next to it a photograph of the group 9.b.

9.b. Most of the images belong to the Middle Ages, although there are some older ones. They show the symbolic survival of the Prades Mountains.

9.2. In the Coll de la Mola, crosses are the most frequently represented theme and correspond to a space with a magical and sacralised content.

9.3. The set of engravings from the Ferradures de Prades include feet, horseshoe shapes and an Iberian inscription.

9.4. The Pedres de Sabassona stones, the Roca Guinarda rock and the Racó Molero. The first group has been linked to 17th century witchcraft. The second is known as Els Escrits del Bandoler (The Bandit's Writings), with inscriptions from the 16th century, and the last one corresponds to religious themes of 16th century shepherds.

9.5. Medieval symbolism can also be found in engravings on the funerary monuments of the Megalithic period.

9.6. The Pedres de Passanant stones.

We leave the corridor to enter the last room.

10. THE RESEARCH FOR MEANINGS

At the beginning of the 20th century, cave art was considered to be the result of a purely aesthetic expression of "art for art's sake". In contrast, the latest interpretative trends attribute to prehistoric art a communicative and socially cohesive intention.

11. WORLD CAVE ART: CAVE ART, A WORLD HERITAGE SITE

11.1. Europe. Prehistoric cave art: Altamira cave (Spain), decorated caves of the Vézère Valley (France), prehistoric cave art engravings of the Côa Valley (Portugal).

11.2. Europe. Post-Palaeolithic cave art: Valcamonica cave art (Italy), Tanum rock engravings (Sweden), Alta cave art (Norway), the cave art of the Mediterranean arc of the Iberian Peninsula (Spain).

11.3. Africa: Tassili n'Ajjer (Algeria), Tradart Acacus rock sites (Libya), Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg Park (South Africa), Todilo (Botswana), Matobo (Zimbabwe).

11.4. America: Cave paintings of Sierra de San Francisco (Mexico), Sierra de Capibara National Park (Brazil), Cueva de las Manos, Río Pinturas (Argentina).

11.5. Asia and Oceania: Bhimbetka rock shelters (India), Kakadu National Park (Australia), Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park (Australia).

12. CAVE ART, A HERITAGE TO BE PROTECTED

12.1. Phenomena affecting cave art.

12.2. Research, documentation and dissemination.

12.3. Management to preserve this heritage.