

VISIT TO NEOCAVE



## The Neocave, a palaeolithic place

The Neocave presents Altamira as it was between 36,000 and 13,000 years ago, when it was inhabited by different groups of people living in family bands.

They obtained food by hunting and gathering, making the most of the natural resources found in different areas of a large territory. In a well-planned, orderly manner, they covered this territory by moving from one spot to another with each changing season.

Most of the everyday activities took place around several hearths set up near the entrance. The space further inside the cave was used to express the ideas, values or beliefs they cherished, often accompanied by figures and signs, like an almost indecipherable code which spread throughout the entire cave. In the last gallery, which is also at the back of the Neocave, beside the same animals and signs similar to those on the great ceiling, we find the masks of those who lived or made their mark here, of those who suddenly appear before us, observe us and accompany us.

Engraving, drawing and painting were used separately or in conjunction; the charcoal of the hearths and the red or brown tones obtained from the mineral ochre are the colours of Altamira. The art of Altamira is noted for the high quality of its paintings and engravings, for the diversity of techniques and styles used, and for the presence of numerous and varied works which have gradually filled the cave over more than ten thousand years—for all of these reasons, it is particularly fascinating to scholars and appealing to visitors from around the world.



## Altamira is the masterpiece of the earliest human art

Since the cave was first discovered, its scientific importance and beauty have attracted scholars, artists and visitors from all walks of life.

In the depths where the light barely penetrates, in eternal twilight, and beyond, in total darkness, we find the places used for celebrating myths and performing rites. Only certain animals (a select few, always of the same species), signs and nearly-human figures must have witnessed the sacred discourses, which may have been man's way of understanding the world at the dawn of our history as a species.

When man ventured into the caves to create his figures, the light cast lines and shadows, allowing him to detect the natural contours and fissures of the rock. These elements were used to depict animals in various positions: standing still, facing each other, bellowing, in rut or in heat, rolling around or in a natural reclining pose on the ground.

The cave of Altamira was added to the list of World Heritage Sites in 1985. Given its fragility, the cave is temporarily closed to visitors to ensure its proper conservation.



### Bison lying down

This figure is engraved, drawn and painted with charcoal and ochre, and the natural contours and cracks of the rock face were used to enhance its shape and volume.

**14,500 BP.**



### Bison head

Drawn in charcoal. The lines are emphasised and made bolder or softer using the same shading technique that today's artists employ when drawing with charcoal pencils. The original body was covered up by that of a polychrome bison painted some time later.

**14,500 BP.**



### Hind

Engraved, drawn and painted with ochre and charcoal. The belly of the animal coincides with a natural bulge on the ceiling, a feature that the artist may have deliberately used to suggest pregnancy.

**14,500 BP.**



### Bison

Depicted using the characteristic Altamira technique: drawing and details engraved and coloured in black with a red body. This rendering is highly naturalistic, like all figures in this type of art, and accurately replicates the musculature and enormous size of an adult male.

**14,500 BP.**



### Sign

Composed by several parallel lines of double curvature. It is the most ancient dated painting in the cave; it belongs to the Aurignacian period, the former of the Palaeolithic art.

**36,000 BP.**



### Wild goat

Drawn using only a few strokes (so few they can be counted). The faithfulness to the natural model allows us to determine that this is a rendering of the "Spanish ibex", which can be distinguished from the "Alpine ibex" by the double curvature of its horns.

**18,000 BP.**



### Hand

Impression created by pressing a human hand against the rock coated in red ochre.

**22,000 BP.**



### Rampant horse

Rearing up on its hind legs, drawn using lines of thick, closely placed dots. This technique is characteristic of certain caves in Cantabria.

**22,000 BP.**