The cave is south-facing and set into the limestone cliffs that overlook the course of the Entrepeñes stream before it flows into the Güeña River, which is a tributary of the Sella. The opening has a large overhang which acts as a kind of shelter and which has been transformed considerably since the Palaeolithic period due to an ancient rock fall. Subsequent water filtration and geological changes created layers of calcite that sealed the archaeological remains in the entrance area and virtually blocked the entire cave entrance itself.

The cave’s main gallery is a narrow channel about 100 m long; the cave paintings are to be found at the end of this gallery about 70 m from the entrance.

The Buxu is situated in the basin of the Sella river which boasts the impressive cave of Tito Bustillo in Ribadesella and which is also open to visitors.
The art work is distributed among different panels and groupings in three separate areas of the gallery. The first set, which is in a poor state of preservation, is to be found on a naturally formed arch about 70 m from the entrance and is of deer painted in black together with other engravings. After passing through a narrow tunnel of about 5 m in length, the visitor reaches a small chamber which has a number of panels with engraved figures. As well as animal forms (horses and a splendidly drawn goat), there is a great variety of other shapes (rectangular cross-lined roof shapes and ladder shapes) which have led experts to identify this chamber as a possible sanctuary of abstract symbols. There is also a large inverted red “E” shape, which, together with a number of small dots at the end of the gallery, is the only evidence of the use of this colour in the cave.

A few metres from this chamber there is a small recess which holds the last set of works of cave art. This set has two panels: the one situated in the recess has a number of animal forms (horses, deer, goats and bison), created using different painting and engraving techniques. The use of fine lines is combined in some cases with multiple crossed lines in order to give the impression of internal volume (this is especially visible in one of the small horses on the left wall), while the use of black paint is limited to the outline which has scratches on it that give depth to the shape of the animal. We should point out the importance on this panel of the figure of a fallow deer, of which there are few representations in Palaeolithic art. Opposite this recess there is a panel where the figure of a horse, engraved using a technique similar to that used on the left wall of the recess, stands out from the rest.

The last Palaeolithic representation is an oval sign, painted in black, a few metres from the previous group of figures.

A careful study of the figures and of the different superimposed layers in certain panels has revealed the sequence in which the works were created, the first being the engraved signs or ideomorphs. Next, and within the same period of the Solutrean era, were the deeply engraved outlines of animal figures. Then came the animal figures painted in black, and finally the animal figures with interior modelling and scratched lines around the edges, which probably correspond to the early Magdalenian period.

Discovery and Investigation

The cave was discovered by Cesáreo Cardín in December 1916 during an expedition sponsored by the Count of La Vega del Sella (an important Asturian prehistorian and researcher) which had set out to discover archaeological sites in the area. Two years after the discovery, Vega del Sella, in collaboration with Hugo Obermaier (a German archaeologist who worked on the excavations at the Castillo Cave in Puente Viesgo, Santander), published a study on the on the cave art found here: this was one of the first scientific publications on asturian palaeolithic art.

In the middle of the 1950s work was carried out to improve access to the interior of the cave. Most of the sedimentary deposits had to be removed from the entrance areas and a trench had to be dug in the cave itself to allow access to the area where the paintings are situated. The visitor can today see from the stratigraphical remains of the original layers exposed what the palaeolithic cave floor was like and how low the gallery roof would have been: the only way of gaining access in Palaeolithic times would have been by crawling through certain sections.

The archaeological excavations, conducted by E. Olávarri and M. Menéndez, revealed a number of layers with remains of stone and bone artefacts corresponding to the end of the Solutrean period (20,000–18,000 BP before present). Menendez also carried out a further study of the cave’s art work.