TITO BUSTILLO CAVE

Human Heritage Site. Afroamala Cave and Palaeolithic Cave Art of Northern Spain (declared in 2008).

Location: Ribadesella.
Directions: Take the A-8 towards Santander.
Coordinates: 43.4607, 5.08735

Recommendations: Wear warm clothing and suitable footwear. Not recommended for persons with reduced vision or reduced mobility or who suffer from claustrophobia. Visitors are asked to be punctual. Visitors who have pre-booked should arrive at least 25 minutes prior to visit to confirm their booking and obtain their tickets.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CAVE

The Ardines Range of hills, at the mouth of the River Sella is an area of limestone formations in which the San Miguel River has contributed to produce a number of cave systems including the Tito Bustillock cave. Other caves to be found here include La Lloseta, La Cuevona and the "Tennis Cave" or Viesca Cave.

The Tito Bustillock cave is about 700 metres long and consists of a single gallery with a number of smaller chambers leading off it. The original entrance, at the north western end of the cave and coinciding with the course of the San Miguel River is blocked off due to a rock fall that occurred at some time after the cave was occupied during the Palaeolithic period. The present day entrance, at the opposite end, is via a tunnel which was made in 1970 to provide access for visitors. The Ardines Range played an important role in the Palaeolithic period and the art work created here constitutes one of the best samples of Palaeolithic art in the Cantabrian coastal area. Also situated in the basin of the Sella river is the cave of El Buxu (Cardes, Cangas de Onis) which has more fine samples of cave art and is likewise open to visitors.
**DISCOVERY AND INVESTIGATION**

In April 1968 members of the Torreblanca Mountaineering Club (from Oviedo), together with two young local residents, climbed down through a ravine known as the Pozu’i Ramu, in the vicinity of the village of Ardines. When they reached the bottom they explored the main gallery of the cave and discovered some of the most important paintings to be found here (the Chamber of the Vulvas and the Main Panel). The cave was subsequently named Tito Bustillo after one of this group of mountaineers (Celestino Fernández Bustillo) who died only a few weeks later in a climbing accident.

The archaeological excavations carried out in the area of the original entrance and below the Main Panel have suggested that the cave was occupied at the end of the late Palaeolithic era (the Magdalenian period); they also led to the discovery and documentation of an important collection of Palaeolithic artistic objects which are on display in the Asturias Archaeological Museum.

**ART IN TITO BUSTILLO**

The traditional view of the art in Tito Bustillo, which contemplated eleven different groups of works divided into two sections, has been modified by recent studies which consider the artistic representations as part of a whole that was carried out in two different periods: the earlier or Pre-Magdalenian period that includes the works in the Long Gallery and the first phases of the Main Panel, and the Magdalenian period proper which includes the works near the original entrance and the later phases of the Main Panel.

This description of the cave’s art takes as its starting point the original entrance. Cave entrance: the paintings here are of red markings and animal figures that are poorly preserved. Connecting gallery: along with the engraved figures of animals (horses and bovine figures) there is a notable grill-shaped sign and a violet coloured horse more or less identical to those we can see on the Main Panel. The Main Panel: this is the only section that is open to the public. It is made up of more than a hundred figures in a complex layered sequence of painted and engraved representations which we can identify as being of two phases; the older phase (Gravettian-Solutrean) is characterised by red signs and a limited number of animal figures; the later phase (Magdalenian) includes animal paintings (bovine, horses and deer) and engraved signs and animals (deer) which use the techniques of simple lines, multiple lines, fluting and scraping. Apart from the latter, the most significant works are the painted figures of horses and reindeer which combine the use of red, black and violet colour with scraped outlines and washed pigmentation to give a polychromatic effect which makes this one of the most spectacular examples of cave art in the Cantabrian Coastal area. The Gallery of Horses: here we can see a group of animal figures (mainly horses) engraved using a single or double line which, in some cases, are adapted to the contours of the cave surface to give an impression of volume and naturalism.

The Whale Group: along with red and violet coloured stains, here we can see the engravings of a number of deer, a whale and a possible female human shape. The Long Gallery Groups: these groups are made up of a number of panels where we can see remains of red paint, square shaped signs, the outline of a human hand and ribbon shapes (“faniforme”). Other panels have been discovered more recently made of bison painted in red (the Gallery of Bison), four hanging shapes or outlines of horses’ heads set on a rock ledge, and three red human shapes in a chamber which has difficult access (the Gallery of the Anthropomorphs) and which have a stylistic “air” of having been executed in very ancient times. The Final Group: this group includes a number of panels or groups of animals engraved using simple lines or fluting (bovine figures, deer and horses), red painted signs as well as one of the most singular groups of the whole cave: the Chamber of the Vulvas, which, together with numerous red dots has sketches of female sexual organs (vulvas) in the same colour.

The improved knowledge that we have today of cave art together with the analysis and comparison with other caves in Northern Spain (La Peña de Candamo, Llonin, Castillo, La Pasiega and Altamira Caves) indicate that the artistic activity in Tito Bustillo continued over an extensive period, from before 20,000 B.P. until about 13-12,000 B.P. The period of most intense activity would have been between 15,000 and 14,000 B.P.