

# Cave art trove found in Spain 1,000 feet underground

May 27 2016, by Ciaran Giles

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This image released by the Diputacion Floral de Bizkaia on Friday May 27, 2016, shows a cave drawing. Spanish archaeologists say they have discovered an exceptional set of Paleolithic-era cave drawings that could rank among the best in a country that already boasts some of the world's most important cave art. Chief site archaeologist Diego Garate said Friday that an estimated 70 drawings were found on ledges 300 meters (1,000 feet) underground in the Atxurra cave, Berriatua, in the northern Basque region. He described the site as being in "the Champions' League" of cave art, among the top 10 sites in Europe. (Diputacion Floral de Bizkaia/Source via AP)

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Chief site archaeologist Diego Garate said Friday that an estimated 70 drawings were found on ledges 300 meters (1,000 feet) underground in the Atxurra cave in the northern Basque region. He described the site as being in "the Champions' League" of cave art, among the top 10 sites in Europe. The engravings and paintings feature horses, buffalo, goats and deer, dating back 12,500-14,500 years ago.

But Garate said access to the area is so difficult and dangerous it's not likely to be open to the public.

The cave was discovered in 1929 and first explored in 1934-35, but it was not until 2014 that Garate and his team resumed their investigations that the drawings were discovered. Experts say while it's too early to say if the discovery ranks alongside Spain's most prize prehistoric cave art site, the Altamira Caves—known as the Sistine Chapel of Paleolithic Art—Atxurra looks promising.

"No one expected a discovery of this magnitude," said Jose Yravedra, a prehistory professor at Madrid's Complutense University. "There a lot of caves with drawings but very few have this much art and this much variety and quality."



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Altamira and other major sites in Spain and France have several hundred cave-art images.

Garate highlighted one buffalo drawing, which he said must have the most hunting lances stuck in it of any such drawing in Europe. He said most hunting drawings have four or five lances but this had almost 20

and it's not clear why.

Yravedra said given the cave's hidden location and the number, variety and quality of its drawings, the site was being classified as a "sanctuary," or special Paleolithic meeting ritual place, like those at Altamira or Lascaux in France.

Regional officials hope to set up a 3-D display of the art so that the public can appreciate it.



In this image released by the Diputacion Floral de Bizkaia on Friday May 27, 2016, an archaeologist points towards a cave drawing. Spanish archaeologists say they have discovered an exceptional set of Paleolithic-era cave drawings that could rank among the best in a country that already boasts some of the world's most important cave art. Chief site archaeologist Diego Garate said Friday that an estimated 70 drawings were found on ledges 300 meters (1,000 feet) underground in the Atxurra cave, Berriatua, in the northern Basque region. He described the site as being in "the Champions' League" of cave art, among the top 10 sites in Europe. (Diputacion Floral de Bizkaia/Source via AP)

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