

# Research project asks people to recreate sounds ancestors believed connected them with the spirit world

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The entrance to Victoria Cave near Settle. Credit: Dr Cobi Van Tonder

[Acoustic Atlas](#) allows people to take part in 'virtual acoustic travel'—taking participants to natural and human-made sites where they can interact, listen and create music with the acoustics of each space.

The iconic cathedrals of York and Ripon are included in the sites, along

with Dowkerbottom Cave, Ingleborough Cave and Victoria Cave near Settle.

## **Spirit world**

Other landmarks in the UK include Ely Cathedral, while further afield the sites available include Pavarotti Theatre in Italy and the Great Hall of Binche in France.

All three UK caves present repeated evidence throughout the centuries of "mortuary activities," indicating that people used the Dales caves to mediate with the spirit world.

Previous research has revealed that our ancestors would have interpreted sounds such as echoes as supernatural phenomena and the voices of spirits.

The project aims to promote heritage acoustics and create a tool that researchers worldwide can use and apply to related work.

## **Heritage sites**

Dr. Cobi Van Tonder, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Fellow in the University of York's Department of Theatre, Film, Television and Interactive Media and project lead, said: "When you make a sound, you can hear the echoes, resonances and reflections as if you are inside the place. The voice reveals the interior form and texture of these heritage sites.

"The recovery of the acoustics of these caves is particularly important in terms of their archaeological, geological and acoustic information."

"From a scientific point of view, many caves are time capsules, with flora, fauna, bacteria, minerals and fossils that hold treasures from an immensely large timescale compared to human life on earth."

## Creative potential

Dr. Van Tonder added: "Caves present themselves as archives for understanding people's mythological landscapes and how they have evolved. Victoria Cave produced prominent artifacts, including evidence of the first humans in the Dales starting in 12,500 BC.

"As our lives continue to expand into digital domains it is crucial that our digital ability to 'listen,' as well as our awareness of the processes that shape this listening experience, are equally expanded."

University of York colleague Dr. Mariana Lopez, added: "Acoustic Atlas presents a unique opportunity for engagement with the acoustical beauty of heritage sites, and an opportunity to invite users to move away from an over reliance on visual aspects and instead develop their aural connection to the spaces, discover new sites, and reflect on their creative potential."

**More information:** Acoustic Atlas project: [acousticatlas.de](https://acousticatlas.de)

Provided by University of York

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