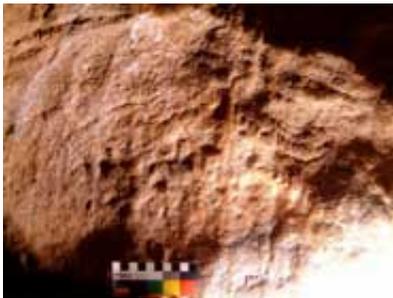


Ancient drawing of mammoth found in Cheddar caves

August 15 2007



The 13,000-year-old carving found in Cheddar Caves

A possible Palaeolithic engraving has been discovered at Cheddar Caves and Gorge by members of the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society (UBSS).

This new find follows the discovery of presumed Mesolithic engravings at Aveline's Hole in Burrington Combe, Somerset and in Long Hole Cheddar Gorge by UBSS in 2005.

The team, led by Graham Mullan and Linda Wilson, has carried out investigations in a number of the Cheddar Gorge caves. The latest find is of a possibly late Upper Palaeolithic engraving in a small alcove in the main showcave, Gough's Cave.

The engraving, which is difficult to see owing to some degradation of

the rock surface since the last Ice Age, appears to be an outline drawing of a mammoth made by the addition of what is believed to be humanly engraved lines to some natural features of the rock, a technique which is well-known from the famous French and Spanish decorated caves.

Graham Mullan said: "Unlike our previous finds of abstract designs in the caves in this area, this is a clear representation of an animal. We are more confident that at least part of it was humanly made and the subject material places it firmly in the latter part of the last Ice Age. Finds of mammoth ivory of that age have been made in this cave in the past indicating that these animals would have been known to the inhabitants.

"Although the cave has been studied by many archaeologists, this engraving has previously escaped notice because it is quite difficult to make out. For this reason, a careful study has been made and this announcement was delayed until we were reasonably confident of the attribution."

Bob Smart of Cheddar Caves and Gorge said: "We welcome yet another indication of how important the Cheddar Caves were to our ancestors 13,000 years ago, and hope this will broaden the general understanding of early British life. We were intrigued when Graham and Linda first suggested this project, and are delighted that they have brought it to a successful conclusion both in Gough's Cave and in Long Hole. We congratulate them on the persistence and perceptivity with which they have brought to light evidence which had been overlooked for a century."

The Spelaeological Society's research into the engravings is being carried out in conjunction with the British Museum's Department of Prehistory and Europe.

Jill Cook, Deputy Keeper in the Department said: "Had I been shown

this outline of a mammoth during a visit to one of the well known cave art sites in France or Spain, I would have nodded and been able to accept it in the context of other more obvious pictures. At Gough's, or anywhere in England, it is not so easy. Cave art is so rare here that we must always question and test to make sure we are getting it right. Opinions on this may differ but we do seem to be looking at an area of ancient rock surface and the lines which appear to form the head and back of the mammoth could have been made by a stone tool. They are certainly different from natural markings on the cave wall.

"This little cartoon might well represent a moment of quiet reflection by someone using the cave 13,000 years ago. It is yet another aspect of the site which suggests that the cave may have been special to the people who used it at the end of the Last Ice Age."

Source: University of Bristol

Citation: Ancient drawing of mammoth found in Cheddar caves (2007, August 15) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2007-08-ancient-mammoth-cheddar-caves.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.