

GROTTE
CHAUVET 2
A R D È C H E

Document de visite pour malentendants





Instructions for use.

Welcome to Chauvet 2, the replica of the Chauvet Cave. The tour lasts 55 minutes. This brochure provides tour information. There are large white circular stickers on the floor of each of the ten viewing stations. These are numbered. Each number corresponds to a page of the brochure. The information in the brochure has been voluntarily condensed to allow you to easily identify and understand the different elements. You will then have time to admire and contemplate your surroundings.

For the comfort and quality of the tour, please turn off your mobile phone. Photos and videos are not allowed. Please do not touch the cave walls and do not drop litter. In order to allow a clear view for other visitors, we ask you to stand back from the railings. Stay with the guide and the group at all times. We hope you enjoy your visit !



The Chauvet cave is located near to the Pont d'Arc arch in the Ardeche gorges. The cave was discovered in 1994 by Jean-Marie Chauvet, Eliette Brunel and Christian Hillaire. The cave contains many drawings, some of which are at least 36 000 years old. Listed by Unesco as “humanity’s first major masterpiece”, the cave is closed to the public for conservation reasons. Today you are going to visit the replica of the cave, but you will have the impression that you are in the real one. You will enter into an underground universe and be able to observe the numerous traces that animals and humans have left here.



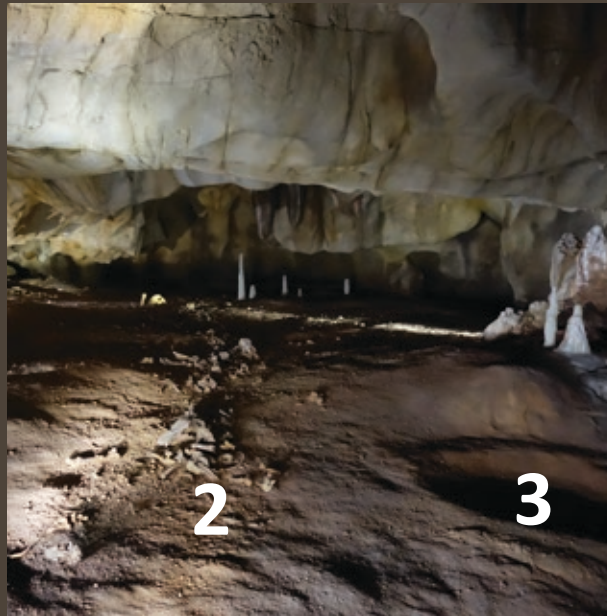
We are now in the cave as it appears today. Things have changed since prehistoric times: calcite has formed (soda straw formations, stalagmites) the ground has subsided (the sinkhole). 36 000 years ago the climate was very different, it was the ice age. It could be extremely cold. The vegetation and animals present in the area at the time were adapted to these extreme conditions. The steppe landscape of grassland, with few trees, was inhabited by large animals and other smaller ones. Many of these species have today disappeared. Our species, Homo sapiens, lived as semi nomadic hunter gatherers. They would set up camp in the open air or near rock shelters. This first chamber corresponds to the entrance used by the cavers who discovered the cave. A little further on, you will see the natural entrance that was used in prehistoric times.



1-soda straw formations
2-stalagmites
3-sinkhole



On your left you can see the natural entrance to the cave. This was sealed off 21 500 years ago by a rock fall. Further to the right there are the remains of cave bears. This species is now extinct. Cave bears used the cave for hibernation. You can see bones (some bears died during hibernation), bear hollows (where the bear scraped out a sleeping place) and paw prints. Humans most certainly did not come here at the same time as the bears. For humans, caves were not part of everyday life and were certainly not living spaces. Caves were more likely places of symbolic and spiritual expression.



1-natural cave
entrance
2-bones
3-bear hollow



Now look at the paintings. Drawings, paintings and engravings that have been created on cave walls are known as cave art. Here we are looking at palm dots: paint has been applied to the palm of the hand and then pressed onto the cave wall. The pigment is hematite. It is a red rock that has a high concentration of iron oxide. Cave art is structured, codified. There are three main themes: signs, animals and humans. We will mainly be looking at the animal depictions during the visit. We will try and identify the different species and we will also look at the techniques that were used to represent them.





Here we can see the red (hematite) outline drawing of a cave bear. We can identify the bear because of its distinctive steep sloping forehead. Just underneath there is a leopard, with its characteristic morphology. This is the only known cave art depiction of a leopard. We need to make a distinction between the animals that existed at the time and those that have been represented in the cave. We do not know what criteria determined the choice of animals. However we do understand that these choices may have been dictated by lifestyle, culture and belief systems. The animals depicted must have symbolized something, but the meaning of these symbols is lost to us today. As we move towards the next panel of drawings, just to your right, you will see other examples of red “signs”.



1- cave bear
2-leopard



Towards the bottom of the panel, a woolly rhinoceros. The outline has been enhanced using scraping and shading techniques that give detail and volume. The skillful use of this technique is common in the Chauvet cave. If you look towards the top of the panel you will see a succession of five rhinoceros. They interact and form a narrative scene. The natural shape of the rock creates the effect of a frieze. The irregularities of the rock do not limit the artists. On the contrary, the artists use and are inspired by them. Here we can also observe positive handprints (paint applied directly onto a hand, then printed onto the cave wall) and negative handprints (paint blown/sprayed around the hand)



- 1-shaded red rhinoceros
- 2-rhino frieze
- 3-positive handprint
- 4-negative handprint



On the overhanging rock to your right, a charcoal drawing of a bear. Just below, a calcite drapery. Further along the walkway, above the large sinkhole, engravings are visible. The limestone rock is covered with a soft, humid layer of clay. A finger was used to trace a horse, signs and an eagle owl. The owl is unique in prehistoric art. The Chauvet cave is fascinating because of the age and quality of its drawings. But also because of the animals that are represented, mostly animals that were not hunted. 80 cave lions, 76 woolly rhinoceros, 74 woolly mammoth, and two animals that are unique: the owl and the leopard. The choice of animals is both mysterious and complex.



- 1-bear
- 2-drapery
- 3-horse
- 4-signs
- 5-eagle owl



A flickering light illuminates the cave wall. It is important to remember that the prehistoric artists worked by fire-light: the flickering flame of a torch, a hearth or a grease lamp. Fire provides a particular type of moving light that is full of different shades and nuances. The flames cast shadows across the cave walls. A horse has been engraved mostly using a finger, but also using a stone tool along the neck and mane. To the right, wooly mammoths. You will notice how fresh and recent the traces in the soft clay seem. Placed discretely to the right there is a black torch marking. There are many of these in the Chauvet cave. Carbon 14 dating analysis reveals that these torch markings are 30 000 years old. Maybe the cave walls were marked in this way in order to create a visible signage to facilitate the passage through the cave. The torch markings are associated with a second period of human presence, period which apparently has left no artistic traces.



- 1-horse
- 2-wooly mammoth
- 3-torch marking



To your left, a downward hanging panel with charcoal drawings, representing three reindeer on the left and two mammoths standing face to face on the right. The reindeer in the center seems to have been voluntarily damaged. All around you, bears have left paw prints in the clay soil. There are also human footprints. These are thought to be associated with the nearby torch markings that are 30 000 years old. To your right, a large area with many cave bear skulls. On the large central rock, a cave bear skull has been placed. We have no clear explanation for this, but it might be relevant to remember that bears have been revered and honored for thousands of years. Bear tamers, teddy bears, fables...the bear is omnipresent in human history. Prehistoric humans seem to have discerned a special status to bears in their cultures.



- 1-reindeer
- 2-wooly mammoths
- 3-cave bear skull



You are standing in front of a prehistoric masterpiece. Carbon 14 dating indicates that this composition was created over 36 000 years ago. A great deal of preparation was required. The clay was scraped away from a 12 meter length of cave wall using stone tools. Over 50 animals are represented: horses, aurochs, cave lions, deer, and reindeer. These drawings are part of a composition that is divided into two panels situated on either side of a central alcove. Sometimes water flows from the central opening. This natural rock formation seems to have influenced the artists in their choice of setting and for the composition in general. This is a complex masterpiece that confirms a strong artistic ambition.



1-horses

2-aurochs

3-rhinoceros

4-alcove

5-lions

6-deer

7-reindeer

8-bison



This passage, known as the megalosaurus gallery, is rich in drawings, engravings and archeological vestiges. Look around you as you follow your guide.



This chamber is lit as it would have been in prehistoric times. This is how the paintings would have been seen at the time. We invite you to discover the panel of lions and take the time to contemplate this composition.



You have just visited what is today considered as humanity's first major masterpiece. It is difficult for us to understand what cave art meant to prehistoric societies. We can nonetheless suppose that these underground places were an important element of their spiritual life. These caves reveal the complexity of their way of thought. Far from the image of brutal prehistoric humans attempting to survive in a hostile natural environment. Here these Homo sapiens reveal themselves to be refined beings, who dedicated a great deal of time to the development and expression of their cultural and spiritual life. As the visit draws to an end, we hope you have enjoyed your journey in time and we would like to thank you for your presence here today. Please read further to find documentary resources that will complete and complement your visit. Please return this document to your guide or to another employee of the Grotte Chauvet 2 once you have finished your reading.

The Grotte Chauvet 2 Ardèche team.

Information about the cave replica

It was impossible to replicate the whole cave for technical and financial reasons.

The most outstanding elements and “sectors” of the cave were chosen and extracted from the 3D virtual model. The original cave has a floor surface of 9000 m². The highest vaults are 17m high and the largest chamber has a diameter of 60m. The replica has a floor surface of 3000 m², and a total surface area (floor, walls, ceilings) of 8220m².

By comparison, Lascaux 2 is 300m².

As the result of an international architecture competition in 2008, the realization of the project was awarded to the Fabre and Speller architects firm and the 3A workshop (Auvergne and Le Teil). The replica is encased in a large building .Great care was taken to evoke the atmosphere and coolness of the cave. The temperature is set to about 18° (the temperature in the Chauvet cave is 13°, but this would be too cool for visitors)

A few facts and figures: 8220 m² of surface area (floor, walls, ceilings) 160 tons of projected mortar/cement, 550 molded and sculpted animal bones, 549 metal beams, 3249 metal rods, 13725 hanging brackets, 150 km of rods bent to shape by hand (each rod is unique), 52 different sedimentary facies, 250m² of decorated cave wall, 300m² of sculpted calcite formations, colored using ochre, earth and manganese.

What else is there to do on the site?



The Aurignacian Gallery

Come face to face with prehistoric animals in the Aurignacian Gallery, a discovery center for all ages. Films, life size animals, restitutions of everyday prehistoric life, make for a fun way of travelling back in time.

Activities

A varied program of demonstrations and activities are proposed at different times of the year. They are all included in the entrance fee. Take a look at the events calendar at the reception desk to find out what's happening today.



ANIMAL – from prehistory to modern day street art. Lightshow 360°

An immersive experience, a universal language of pictures and sound. As you pass the doors of the exhibition center, you are transported into the heart of an animated scene, enhanced by an original musical composition. Wild animals have always fascinated humans. The prehistoric artists of Chauvet projected a fascinating bestiary onto the cave walls. Today street artist WAR sublimates our city walls with other animals.

ANIMAL, evokes the artists, whose work is etched onto rocky surfaces and walls and the fine thread that links the mastery of our ancestors to more recent great artists, equally inspired by nature. In the midst of a colorful bestiary, the visitor can wander between polychromy and polyphony.

The universality of artistic expression and our attachment to animals is clearly revealed.

