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and their

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The hauntingly beautiful Grjótagjá caves near Mývatn Lake, Iceland. (CC BY 3.0)

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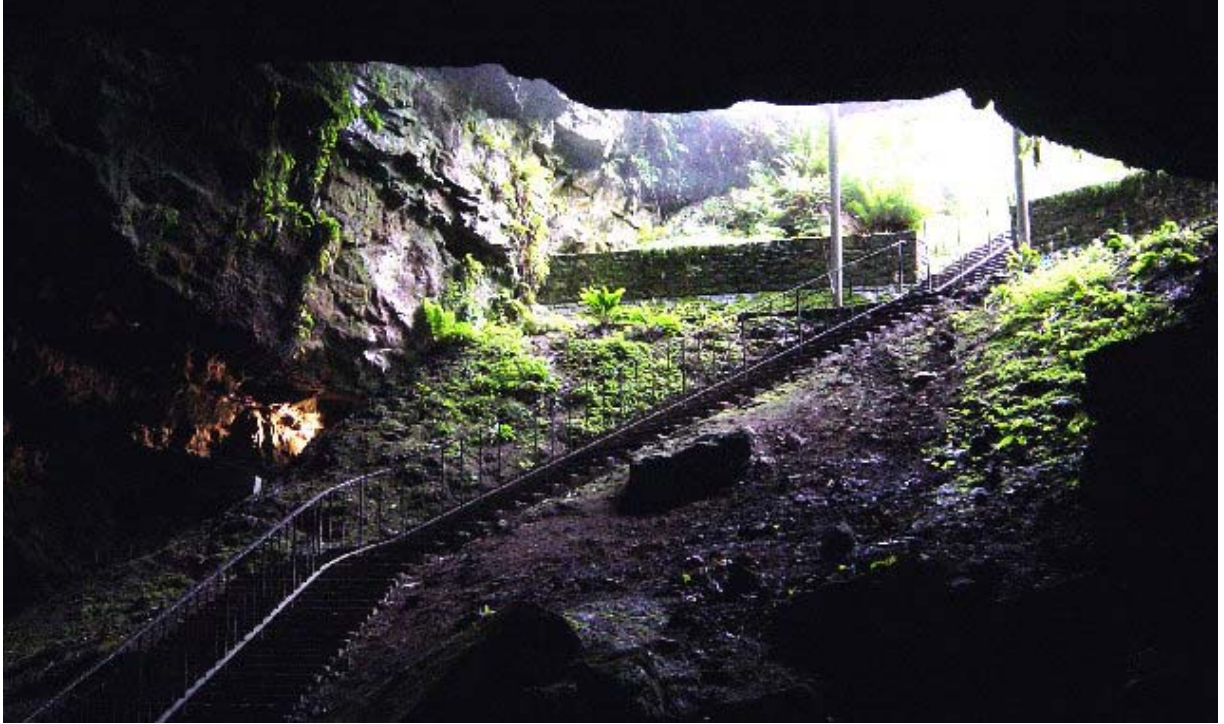
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The Dark Reputation of the Dunmore Cave of Ireland

Kilkenny, Ireland

At the “Darkest Place in Ireland” bones tell of ancient massacre

[ANCIENT-ORIGINS](#) | [Dhwty](#)



Dunmore cave, County Kilkenny, once reputed the darkest place in Ireland. Crispin Purdye (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Caves play an important role in the story of humanity. In addition to providing shelter for our earliest ancestors, caves were also often considered to be mystical and magical realms. For some cultures, caves are the gateways to the Underworld, while others believed that supernatural beings dwelled in these subterranean areas. Dunmore Cave of Ireland is one such place where stories both of real events and the supernatural can be found.

Dunmore (meaning ‘great fort’ in Irish) Cave is a limestone cave located about 11 kilometers (6.8 miles) to the north of Kilkenny City, near Castlecomer. Within the cave, there is around 300 meters (99 feet) of known passages and caverns.

Prior to the 18th century, caves, including Dunmore Cave, were regarded as places of dread and few, if any, dared to explore them. It was only from the 18th century onwards that people actually visited and explored the site, though the existence of the cave had already been known for centuries. After all, Dunmore Cave was at one point of time within the territory of the ancient Irish kingdom of Ossory, which was situated between the Viking strongholds of Dublin,

Waterford and Limerick. The rivalry of the different Viking clans in Ireland provided one of the most chilling episodes in the history of Dunmore Cave.



Landing of a Viking fleet at Dublin. (Public Domain)

According to the *Annals of the Four Masters*, around AD 928, the Vikings of Dublin were marching to attack their rivals in Waterford. On their way to their enemy's place, it is said they raided and pillaged the surrounding countryside. When they arrived at Dunmore Cave, they found a large number of women and children hiding in it. Allegedly hoping to capture them alive so that they could then be sold as slaves, the Vikings devised a plan to drive them out of the cave. They lit large fires at the mouth of the cave in order to force them out of their hiding. The fires grew too large and consumed the oxygen in the cave, resulting in the suffocation of the refugees. It is recorded that a thousand people died in this manner.

In 1973, the bones of 44 people, mainly belonging to women, children and the elderly, were found in Dunmore Cave, thus giving some credence to the annals. Yet, whether there were as many as a thousand victims, or perhaps less, is another question.



The prow of a Viking boat in Northern Ireland. Ardfern (CC-BY-SA 3.0)

Another sign of the Viking presence in Dunmore cave is the small hoard of silver and bronze items discovered in 1999. The treasure, which was discovered by a tour guide cleaning the site, made headlines, and the cave was closed for archaeological work. In addition to these precious objects, a silk garment was also found. More importantly was the fact that it was dyed with purple from the murex shell, thus showing that the Vikings of Ireland were trading as far afield as the Mediterranean.

The fact that the hoard was left in the cave indicates that either its owner did not have the chance to return and claim his treasure, or that it was left as an offering for the supernatural beings believed to reside in it.

“When they arrived at Dunmore Cave, they found a large number of women and children hiding in it. Allegedly hoping to capture them alive so that they could then be sold as slaves, the Vikings devised a plan to drive them out of the cave.”



The richly textured walls of the cave are created by calcite formations. Olivier Bruchez (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Speaking of the supernatural, Dunmore Cave also has its share of fantastical stories. According to a 12th century tale, this cave was the site where Aithbel, an Irish warrior woman, fought and killed a cat-like monster called Luchtigen, the “Lord of the Mice”. Another legend relates to the Fairy Floor, an area where there are no fallen stones from the partially collapsed ceiling above. It is said that fairies sweep the stones away so that they may continue with their dancing.

Dunmore Cave is also said to be the hiding place of Dame Alice Kyteler, a 14th century woman who was accused of witchcraft and sentenced to death, but managed to escape. After seeking refuge in Dunmore Cave, it is claimed that Kyteler managed to flee to England.

Dunmore Cave is indeed an interesting place to visit. Apart from its rich history, the cave is also famed for its geological wonders, including some of the “finest calcite formations found in any Irish cave”. **Although a ninth century Irish triad poem mentions Dunmore Cave as one of the ‘darkest places in Ireland’, it continues to attract many visitors who are keen to immerse in its rich and compelling history.**



Looking out from the dark Dunmore cave, Ireland. Stephen Hanafin (CC BY-SA 2.0)

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VISITOR INFO

Dunmore Cave, Ballyfoyle, Castlecomer Road, Kilkenny, Ireland

Coordinates: N52.7341, W7.2477.

dunmorecaves@opw.ie | Phone +353 56 776 7726

Open Times: Open all year.

March – Mid June: Daily 9.30 – 17.00

Mid June – Mid September: Daily 9.30 – 18.00

Mid September – End October: Daily 9.30 – 17.00

November to March: Sat, Sun and Bank Holidays 10.00 – 17.00

Admission Prices :

Adult: 2.90 Euro

Senior/Group: 2.10 Euro

Student/Children: 1.30 Euro

Family: 7.40 Euro

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Guided tours only. Average visit 1 hour, all visitors must have exited the cave before dark!

Exhibitions and displays in the Visitor Centre. The cave is inaccessible for wheelchair users, you climb/descend 700 steps.

Guidebooks available in English, Irish, German, French, Italian, Spanish.

It is cold and damp in the cave – pack a sweater and hat!

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<https://goo.gl/maps/GwGwF>



Lovelock Cave: A Tale of Giants or A Giant Tale of Fiction?

Nevada, United States

Were the ancient caves home to cannibalistic, red-haired giants?

[ANCIENT-ORIGINS](#) | [Bryan Hilliard](#)



The historic Lovelock Cave – Ancient artifacts and legends of giants. (CC BY-SA 2.0)

The Paiutes, a Native-American tribe indigenous to parts of Nevada, have an oral tradition that they told to early white settlers of the area about a race of red-haired, white giants or ‘barbarians’ that their ancestors referred to as the “Si-Te-Cah.” The story was written down in 1882 by Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, daughter of a Paiute Indian chief in her book *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*. These “giants” were described as being vicious, unfriendly and cannibalistic.

In this story, the Paiutes speak of a great battle that took place which led to their extermination at site known today as Lovelock Cave. During the early part of the 20th century archaeologists found thousands of artifacts inside this cave leading to a lengthy excavation of the site. There was some speculation that the Paiute legend was real.



Sarah Winnemucca, Paiute Writer and Lecturer, alongside her father and Chief Poito Winnemucca of the Paiute Natives in Nevada. Circa 1882. (Public Domain)

“Si-Te-Cah” or Saiduka literally translates as “tule-eaters” in the Northern Paiute language. The tule is a fibrous water plant, which according to legend, the giants wove into rafts to escape attacks by the Paiute. They used the rafts to navigate across what remained then of Lake Lahontan, an ancient lake that once covered most of northern Nevada during the last ice age. As the Paiute tale goes, after years of warfare, all the tribes in the area joined together to rid themselves of the Si-Te-Cah.

One day, as the tribes chased down the last remaining red-haired people, the giants took refuge in a cave. The Paiutes demanded their enemy come out of the cave and fight, but the giants refused. The coalition of tribes proceeded to shoot arrows at them while starting a large fire at the mouth of the cave. The smoke drove out a few who died in a hail of arrows while the rest were all either burned alive or asphyxiated. Over time, the entrance to the cave collapsed leaving it accessible only to bats. It was cut off from human contact.

Lovelock Cave, known also as Bat Cave, Horseshoe Cave, Sunset Guano Cave and Indian Cave is located 20 miles south of modern day Lovelock, Nevada. It’s a very old cave that pre-dates humans on the continent and in prehistoric times was underneath Lake Lahontan.

In 1886, a mining engineer from Lovelock named John T. Reid was told of the legend by local Indians, who took him to the site to prove it existed. Reid was unsuccessful in getting an archeological dig started immediately, but two miners, James Hart and David Pugh, realized the

value of guano as an ingredient of gunpowder, and created a company to start digging it out in 1911. They stripped a layer of guano from the cave approximately three to six feet deep, using a pick and shovel with little regard to the artifacts, and shipped some 250 tons (230 metric tonnes) of it to the Hawaiian Fertilizer Company in San Francisco.



Exterior, the entrance to Lovelock Cave. (Public Domain)

Alfred Kroeber, founder of the University of California Anthropology Department was contacted by Hart and Pugh when they reported finding prehistoric artifacts. This spurred the first archeological dig of Lovelock in 1912 led by L.L. Loud (also of the University of California). A second dig took place in 1924 and after finishing the excavations, Loud collaborated on a report that was published in 1929.

What L.L. Loud found was nothing short of amazing. Approximately 10,000 archaeological specimens were uncovered including tools, bones, baskets, and weapons. According to the report, 60 average-height mummies were unearthed. Duck decoys (among the oldest known in the world with feathers still attached) and a sandal over 15 inches long were excavated. A donut-shaped stone with 365 notches carved along the outside and 52 corresponding notches inside was found, which some scientists believe is a calendar.

Interestingly, radiocarbon dating done on follow up visits found vegetable material dating back to 2030 BC, a human femur dating to 1450 BC, human muscle tissue dating 1420 BC, and basketry dating back to 1218 BC. Archaeologists concluded from this that human occupation of Lovelock cave, by this culture, started in 1500 BC. Today's anthropologists call the people who lived in the area the Lovelock Culture with the Period lasting some 3,000 years. Many archaeologists believe that the Lovelock Culture was replaced by Northern Paiutes.



Duck Decoy: A canvasback drake duck decoy, found in the Lovelock Cave archaeological site, Nevada, USA., circa 400 BC – AD 100. Braun Research Library Collection, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; LS.3302. (CC BY-SA 3.0)

There is some debate as to the veracity of the claims made regarding the Lovelock Giants. During the initial excavations, there were reports of mummified remains being found of two red-haired giants—one, a female 6.5-feet (1.96 meters) tall, the other male, over 8-feet (2.44 meters) tall. However, no such evidence remains. In Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins book, *“Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims”*, she does not mention giants but does refer to ‘barbarians’. Skeptics claim that chemical staining by earth after burial was a likely reason why mummified remains have red hair instead of black, like most Indians in the area. A study done at the University of Nevada indicates the “giants” were about six feet tall, and not up to eight feet tall as had been claimed.

To others, the uncovering of 15-inch (38 centimeter) sandals at Lovelock Cave is proof enough that the Paiute tale is real. In an article published in the Nevada Review-Miner in 1931, in February and June of that same year, it was reported that two very large skeletons were found in the Humboldt dry lake bed near Lovelock, Nevada. One measured 8.5-feet (2.57 meters) tall and was later described as having been wrapped in a gum-covered fabric similar to Egyptian mummies. The other was supposedly nearly 10-feet (3 meters) long.

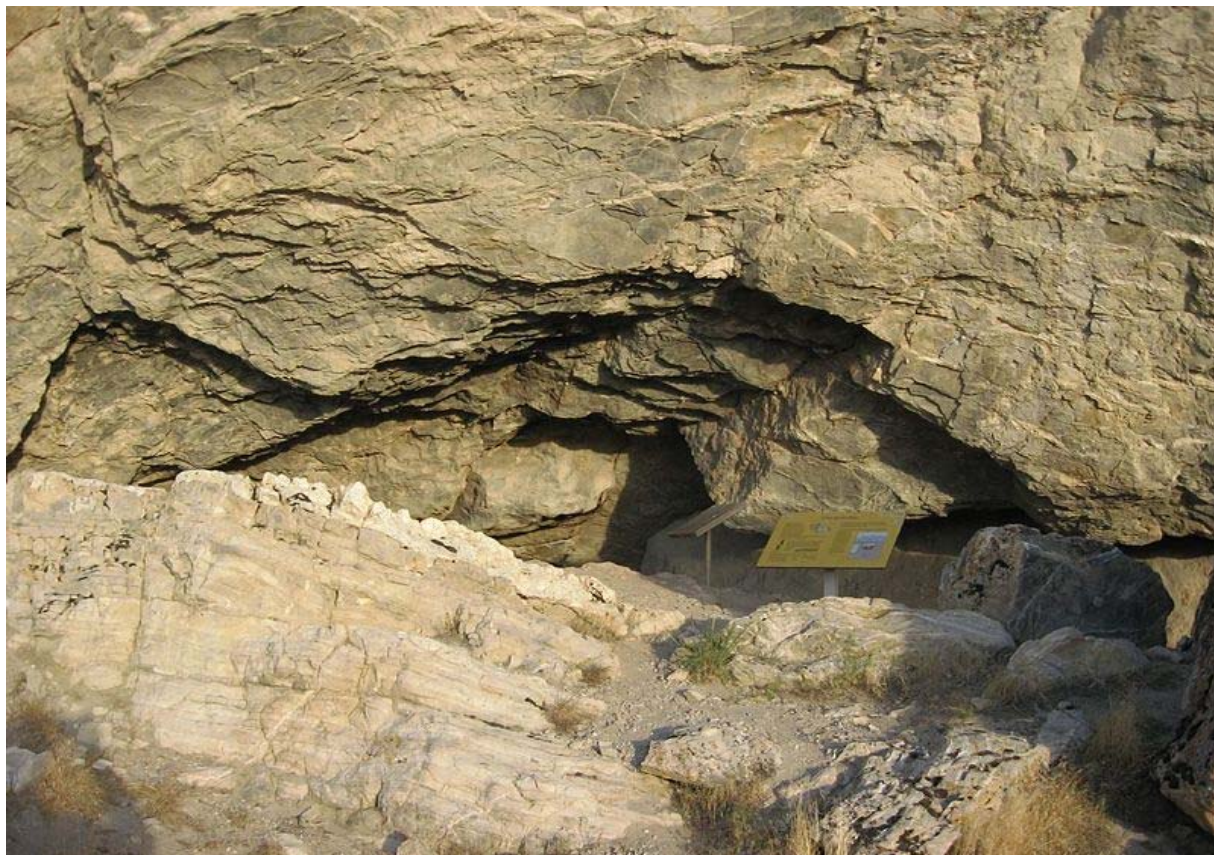
Some other evidence for the Lovelock Giants includes a set of images showing a handprint, more than double the size of a normal man’s hand imprinted on a stone bolder in the cave

which was released by Bigfoot investigators MK Davis and Don Monroe in 2013. Along the Peru/Bolivia border skulls have been found near Lake Titicaca, with claims being made they were from giants with reddish hair and elongated skulls. The legends tell of the Uros Indians making reed boats and living on islands on Lake Titicaca similar to the Paiute. The Incas apparently drove them to live this way much like the Paiutes' ancestors apparently did to the giants at Lake Lahontan.

Today, many of the original artifacts found at Lovelock (but no giants) can be viewed at a small natural history museum located in Winnemucca, Nevada. Objects such as the duck decoys are housed at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C., and the basketry and bones belong to the Nevada State Museum. The site is significant in an archaeological context because it is an example of evidence that turned up, and was scientifically analyzed to confirm the legend that Paiutes elders told tribal children for years, even if not everything was entirely accurate and accounted for. The Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California published a paper on Lovelock cave in 2005 had this to say:

“The site has been extensively pot-hunted and many materials remain in private collections. Lovelock Cave, despite years of destruction, is one of the most important sites in the history of North American archaeology.”

Lovelock Cave was officially designated a historical site in 1984.



Entrance to the historic Lovelock Cave, Nevada, USA. (CC BY-SA 2.0)

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"Online Nevada Encyclopedia." Great Basin Prehistoric Footwear. [Online] <http://www.onlinenevada.org/articles/great-basin-prehistoric-footwear>.

VISITOR INFO

Lovelock Cave, 22 miles south of Lovelock, Nevada, USA

Artifacts via the **Humboldt Museum** | Phone 1 775 623-2912

175 W Jungo Rd,

Winnemucca, Nevada,

89445, United States

<http://humboldtmuseum.org/mini-tour/item/6-american-indians/28-lovelock-cave-artifacts>

Open Times:

Wednesday - Friday: 9:00AM - 4:00PM

Saturday: 10:00AM - 4:00PM

Sunday - Tuesday: Closed

Admission Price:

Free, but \$3 donation suggested

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Cave visits via the Bureau of Land Management and the Marzen House Museum: **Lovelock Cave & Backcountry Byway Tour**

775-623-1500 or mmcgucki@blm.gov

The driving tour begins at Marzen House Museum in Lovelock, Nevada. It is approximately 40 miles round trip. The walking visit to the site and nature trail will take visitors approximately 2 hours. Walking shoes and weather attire recommended.

<http://travelnevada.com/discover/great-outdoors/roading/lovelock-cave-backcountry-byway>

Pershing County Marzen House Museum

Lovelock, NV 89419

United States

Phone: 1 775 273-7213

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📍 Enigmatic symbols and carvings in man-made cave in England confound experts

Royston, England

The mysteriously carved walls played backdrop for secret societies

[ANCIENT-ORIGINS](#) | [MRReese](#)



Enigmatic carvings decorate the walls of the mysterious Royston Cave in England. Marco Chiesa (CC BY 2.0)

The mysterious Royston Cave is an artificial cave in Hertfordshire, England. It is not known who created the cave or what it was used for, but there has been much speculation as to its elusive origins. Some believe that it was used by the Knights Templar. Others believe it may have been an Augustinian store mine. Another theory is that it was a Neolithic flint mine. None of these theories have been substantiated, and the origin of the Royston Cave remains a mystery.

Royston cave was discovered by accident in August 1742 in Royston. A worker was digging holes to build footing for a new bench at a market. He discovered a millstone while he was digging, and when he dug around to remove it, he found the shaft leading to the cave. When the cave was discovered, it was half-filled with dirt and rock. Efforts were made to remove the dirt and rock, which was subsequently discarded. Some believed that treasure would be found within Royston cave. Removal of the dirt did not reveal any treasure, however, there were sculptures and carvings found within. It is worth noting that had the soil not been discarded, today's technology could have allowed for a soil analysis.



The moody glow illuminates the strange designs found all throughout Royston Cave, Royston, Hertfordshire. Sizbut (CC BY 2.0)

The sculptures found within are believed to be about 800 years old. It is likely that the sculptures were originally colored, although due to the passage of time only very small traces of color remain visible. The images are mostly religious, depicting St. Catherine, the Holy Family, the Crucifixion, St. Lawrence holding the gridiron on which he was martyred, and a figure holding a sword who could either be St. George, or St. Michael.

Holes located beneath the sculptures appear to have held candles or lamps which would have lit the carvings and sculptures.

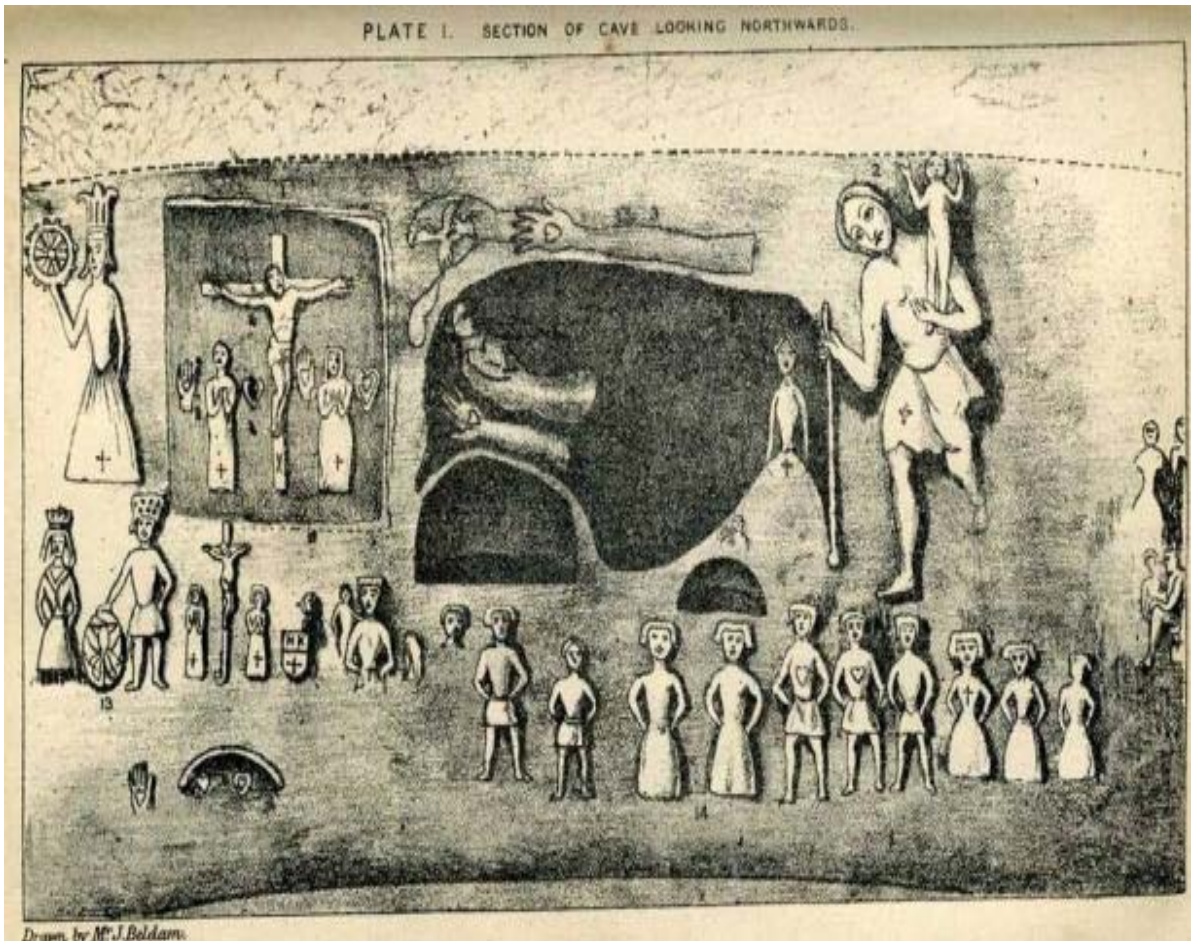


Plate I from Joseph Beldam's book "The Origins and Use of the Royston Cave", 1884 showing some of the numerous carvings. Public Domain

One of the main theories as to the origin of Royston cave is that it was used by the Knights Templar prior to their dissolution by Pope Clement V in 1312. Some believe that the cave had been split into two levels using a wooden floor.

Figures near a damaged section of the cave depict two knights riding a single horse, which may be the remains of a Templar symbol. Architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner has written that the date of the carvings "is hard to guess. They have been called Anglo-Saxon, but are more probably of various dates between the C14 and C17 (the work of unskilled men)."

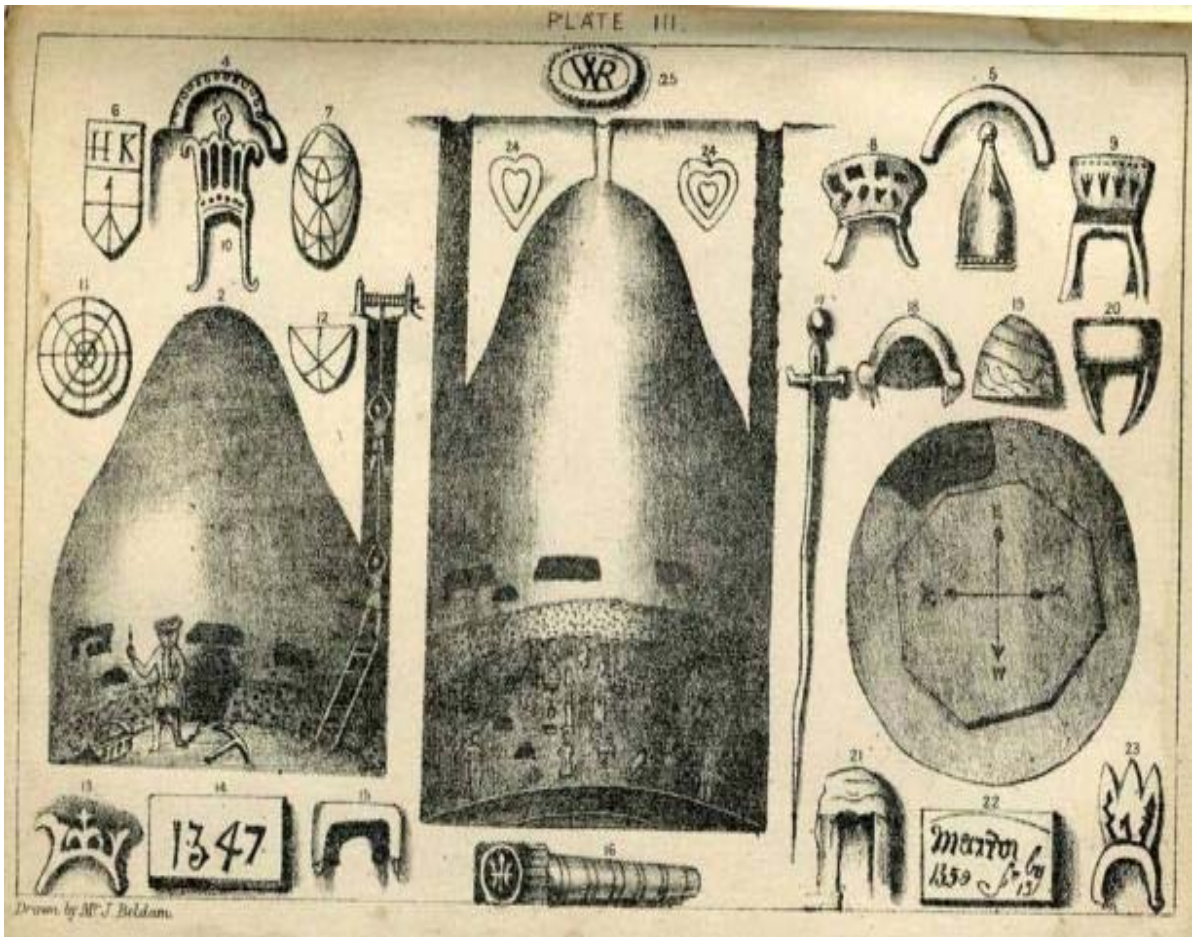


Plate III from Joseph Beldam's book "The Origins and Use of the Royston Cave", 1884 showing the shape and floor plan of the cave. Public Domain

Another theory is that Royston cave was used as an Augustinian store house. As their name implies, the Augustinians were an Order created by St Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, in Africa. Founded in 1061 AD, they first came into England during the reign of Henry I.

From the 12th century, Royston in Hertfordshire was a center of monastic life and the Augustinian priory continued without break there for nearly 400 years. It has been said that local Augustinian monks used Royston cave as a cool storage space for their produce and as a chapel.



One theory suggests Augustinian monks used Royston cave as a storehouse. Public Domain

Some speculate it may have been used as a Neolithic flint mine as early as 3,000 BC, where flint would have been gathered for making axes and other tools. However, the chalk in this area only provides small flint nodules, generally unsuitable for axe making, so this casts some doubt on this theory.

To this date there remains much mystery as to who created Royston cave and for what purpose. It is always possible that whichever group originally created the cave may have abandoned it at some point, allowing it to be used by another group. The mystery surrounding the cave and the carvings within makes the site an interesting location for visitors who would like to view the elaborate designs and investigate the origins of this ancient wonder.

Royston cave has required regular maintenance and restoration, as it was discovered that insect larvae and worms were damaging the walls and structure of the cave. By August 2014, work to prevent such damage was deemed successful. Rather than using insecticides, the preservation workers removed some of the earth, thereby eliminating the worms' food supply. Hopefully subsequent repair work to pipes to avoid flooding, and other work to prevent vibration damage from the traffic above, will help to preserve the cave into the future.



The Royston Cave, lighted by candlelight, reveals mysterious markings to visitors. Sizbut (CC BY 2.0)

References

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VISITOR INFO

Royston Cave, Katherine's Yard, Melbourn Street, Royston, England. SG8 7BZ.

Phone 01763 245484

<http://www.roystoncave.co.uk>

Open Times:

From 04 April 2015 to 27 September 2015, only on the days specified below:

Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays from 2.30 to 5 pm.

August only open on Wednesdays from 2.30 to 5 pm.

Last admission is always 4.30 pm.

Tickets cannot be pre-booked. First come first served, and be prepared to queue.

Entry is by guided tour only (around 30 to 40 minutes) and only 18 people are allowed down at any one time. Tours are normally at 2:30, 3:10, 3:50 and 4:30 although exact times may vary.

No video filming, but photography is allowed. Cave is damp and may be slippery – explore with caution.

Admission Price:

Adults (16 plus) £5 (7.80 USD) / Senior Citizens (60 or over) £4 (6.24 USD)

Children* FREE

Children must be accompanied by an adult.

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📍 Devetashka - the Bulgarian Cave with 70,000 Years of Human Habitation

Devetaki, Bulgaria

“Eyes” watch as you tour ancient cave with majestic natural features

[ANCIENT-ORIGINS](#) | [April Holloway](#)



Incredible soaring heights and sun-lighted paths of the prehistoric Devetashka Cave, Bulgaria.

Utar Sigmal (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Devetashka cave is an enormous cave in Bulgaria, which has provided shelter for groups of humans since the late Paleolithic era, and continuously for tens of thousands of years since then. Now abandoned by humans, it remains a site of national and international significance and is home to some 30,000 bats.

Devetashka cave, which is known as Devetashka peshtera in Bulgaria, is located roughly 18 kilometres (11 miles) north of Lovech, near the village of Devetaki. It is a karst cave formed from the dissolution of soluble rocks and characterized by sinkholes, caves, and underground drainage systems.



Soaring caverns where ancient peoples dwelled, in Devetashka Cave, Bulgaria. (BigStockPhoto)

The cave itself is immense, measuring approximately 2 kilometres (1.2 miles) in length and with a huge entrance 'hall' measuring 60 metres (197 feet) in height. In places the ceiling is 100 metres (328 feet) above the ground and there are seven huge holes through which daylight illuminates the vast interior. It is these holes that earned the cave the name Maarata or Oknata ("the eyes").



A man-made archway looks out into the immense caverns. (Public Domain)



The peering 'eyes' in the roof of the Devetashka cave. (BigStockPhoto)

About 200 meters (656 feet) from the entrance, the cave separates into two branches. On the left side, a small river runs along it, forming miniature lakes and waterfalls, passing through the main hall and eventually flowing into the Osam River. The right side is warm and dry and contains several chambers, ending with a round hall, known as the Altar.

Beautiful stalactites and stalagmites, rivulets, majestic natural domes and arches can be found within the enormous cave and one can see why various human populations would have chosen Devetashka as their home.

Devetashka Cave was rediscovered by a Bulgarian scientist in 1921 but was not fully excavated until the 1950s when the intention was to transform the cave into a giant warehouse. Studies revealed that it has been inhabited almost continuously since the late Paleolithic era. The earliest traces of human presence date back to the middle of the Early Stone Age around 70,000 years ago. The Devetashka cave also contained one of the richest sources of cultural artifacts from the Neolithic (6th millennium - 4th millennium BC).



Striking bronze artifact found in Devetashka cave (5th century BC). Spiritia (CC BY-SA 3.0)

During the 1950s, Devetashka Cave was used as a military site and for the storage of petroleum, leading to the destruction of some of the natural formations in the cave. Today, concrete bases remain inside the cave where large oil tanks had been installed. A railroad was built leading to the entrance of the cave, and some remnants of a bridge can be found across the river.

Beautiful stalactites and stalagmites, rivulets, majestic natural domes and arches can be found within the enormous cave and one can see why various human populations would have chosen Devetashka as their home.



One of the dark entrances leading into Devetashka Cave. (BigStockPhoto)

The cave is probably best known for its part in the action movie 'The Expendables 2', filmed in 2011, in which Sylvester Stallone crash lands a plane into Jean Claude Van Damme's subterranean lair. After the film, local naturalists noted that the bat population had significantly diminished due to stress incurred during filming, and the Supreme Administrative Court of Bulgaria declared that this filming was in breach of Bulgaria's environmental regulations. In June, 1996, Devetashka Cave was declared a natural landmark, so as to protect the rich history of the majestic caves.

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VISITOR INFO

Devetashka Cave, near village of Devetaki, near Lovech, Bulgaria

Coordinates: Latitude 43.23482326800119 / Longitude: 24.888625144958496

http://bulgariatravel.org/en/object/355/Devetashka_peshtera

Open Times:

June - September

Admission Price:

Free

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Self-guided tours. Location slightly tricky to find, and local assistance may be required. There is a road sign for the cave, and from there it is a 1 kilometer (0.62 mile) walk to the cave along a small eco trail. A sign indicates the cave entrance. Signs may be in Cyrillic.

The Tourist Information Center of Lovech organizes a tour of the town and the nearby landmarks with a guide provided; the price depends on the number of people in the group. Guided tours are available in Bulgarian and in German.

Lovech Municipality Phone +359 68 688 212

e-mail: obshtina@lovech.bg

Website: www.lovech.bg

MAKE YOUR WAY THERE | MAPS

Click on the link below to find the location on Google Maps.

<https://goo.gl/maps/PmZ6L>

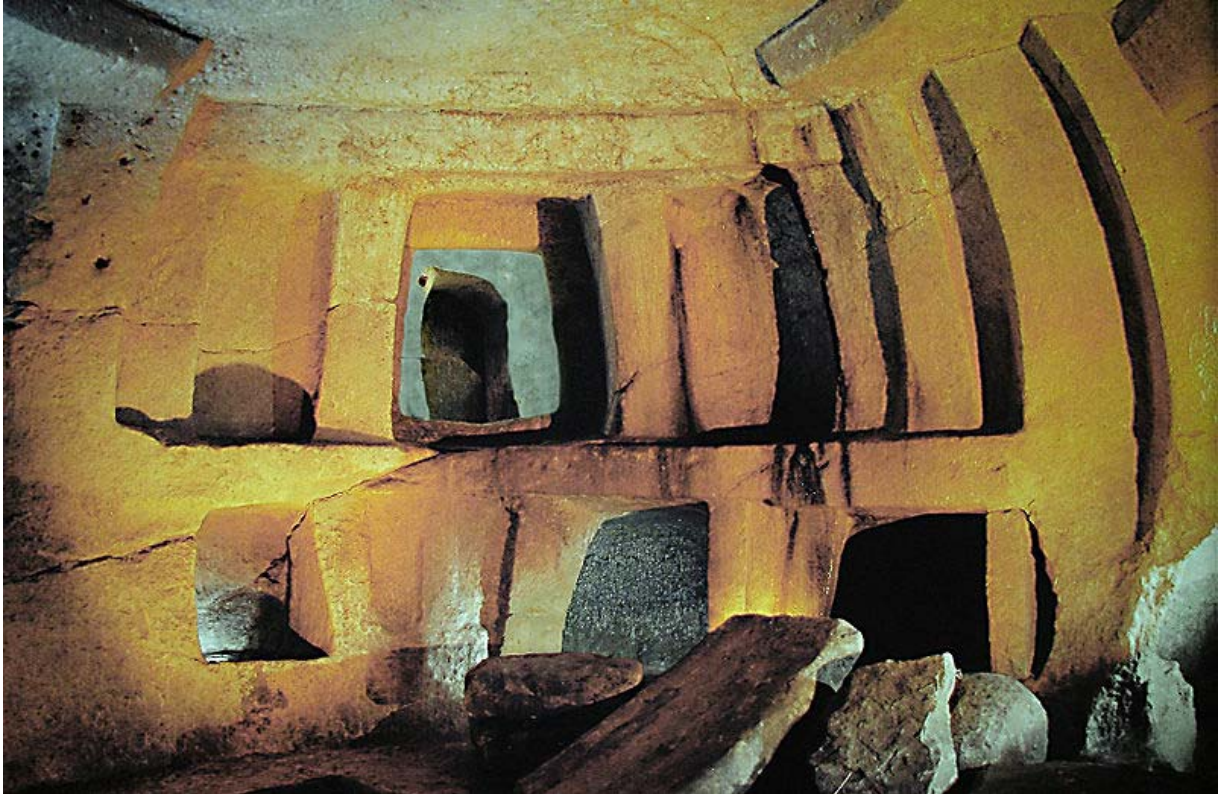


The incredible sound effects of Malta's Ancient Hypogeum Hal Saflieni

Paola, Malta

Twisting, subterranean labyrinth echoes with ancient voices

[ANCIENT-ORIGINS](#) | [April Holloway](#)



The prehistoric underground temples carved out of sheer rock echo with otherworldly, ancient acoustics (CC BY-SA 1.0)

The Hypogeum of Hal Saflieni in Malta is a UNESCO World Heritage Site which is believed to be the oldest prehistoric underground temple in the world. The subterranean structure is shrouded in mystery, from the discovery of elongated skulls to stories of paranormal phenomena. But the characteristic that has been attracting experts from around the globe is the unique acoustic properties found within the underground chambers of the Hypogeum.

Hal Saflieni Hypogeum is a cultural property of exceptional prehistoric value, dating back approximately 5,000 years, and is the only known example of a subterranean structure of the Bronze Age. The 'labyrinth', as it is often called, consists of a series of elliptical chambers and alveoli of varying importance across three levels, to which access is gained by different corridors. The principal rooms distinguish themselves by their domed vaulting and by the

elaborate structure of false bays inspired by the doorways and windows of contemporary terrestrial constructions.

Although not known for certain, it is believed that the hypogeum was originally used as a sanctuary, possibly for an oracle. It is for this reason that a unique chamber carved out of solid limestone and demonstrating incredible acoustic properties has been called ‘the Oracle Chamber’.

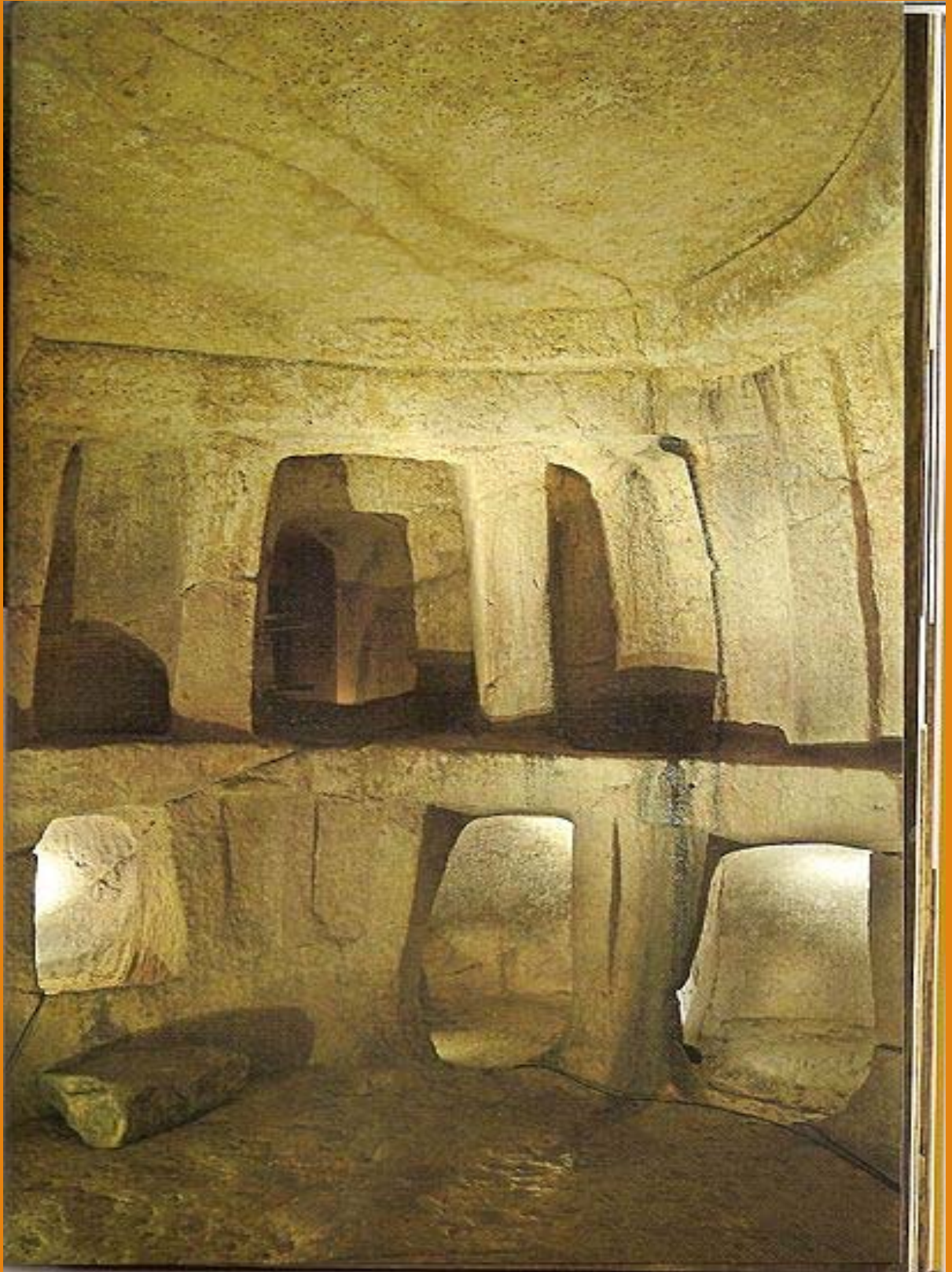
According to William Arthur Griffiths, who wrote ‘Malta and its Recently Discovered Prehistoric Temples’:

a word spoken in the Oracle room is “magnified a hundredfold and is audible throughout the entire structure. The effect upon the credulous can be imagined when the oracle spoke and the words came thundering forth through the dark and mysterious place with terrifying impressiveness.”



*Stairs descend into the deep, multi-level, ancient caverns of the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum in Malta.
Hamelin de Guettelet / (CC BY-SA 2.0)*

It is said that standing in the Hypogeum is like being inside a giant bell. At certain pitches, one feels the sound vibrating in bone and tissue as much as hearing it in the ear. Sarasota arts and architecture critic Richard Storm explained the sensation: *"Because you sense something coming from somewhere else you can't identify, you are transfixed."*



A circular chamber in the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum with strange recesses and niches.

The acoustic properties within the Hypogeum have already been studied extensively. It was found by Maltese composer Ruben Zahra and a research team from Italy that sound resonates at 110 Hz within the Oracle chamber, and this matches the same or similar frequency that has been found in many other ancient chambers around the world, including Newgrange in Ireland. According to Dr. Robert Jahn from Princeton University, it may be the dimensions of the room or the quality of the stone that determines the exact pitch of this echo behavior.

But the question remains – was it intentional? Was the Hypogeum actually designed to enhance amplification? If so, why? Is it possible that the designers of these spaces knew something that modern scientists are just rediscovering?

One theory put forward by Paolo Debertolis and Niccolo Bisconti of the Universities of Trieste and Siena respectively, is that the chamber was constructed in such a way as to create acoustics that would affect the psyche of people, perhaps to enhance mystical experiences during rituals, and this perspective has received scientific backing. Dr. Ian Cook of UCLA and colleagues published findings in 2008 of an experiment in which regional brain activity in a number of healthy volunteers was monitored by EEG through exposure to different resonance frequencies. Their findings indicated that at 110 Hz the patterns of activity over the prefrontal cortex abruptly shifted, resulting in a relative deactivation of the language center and a temporary shifting from left to right-sided dominance related to emotional processing. This shifting did not occur at other frequencies.



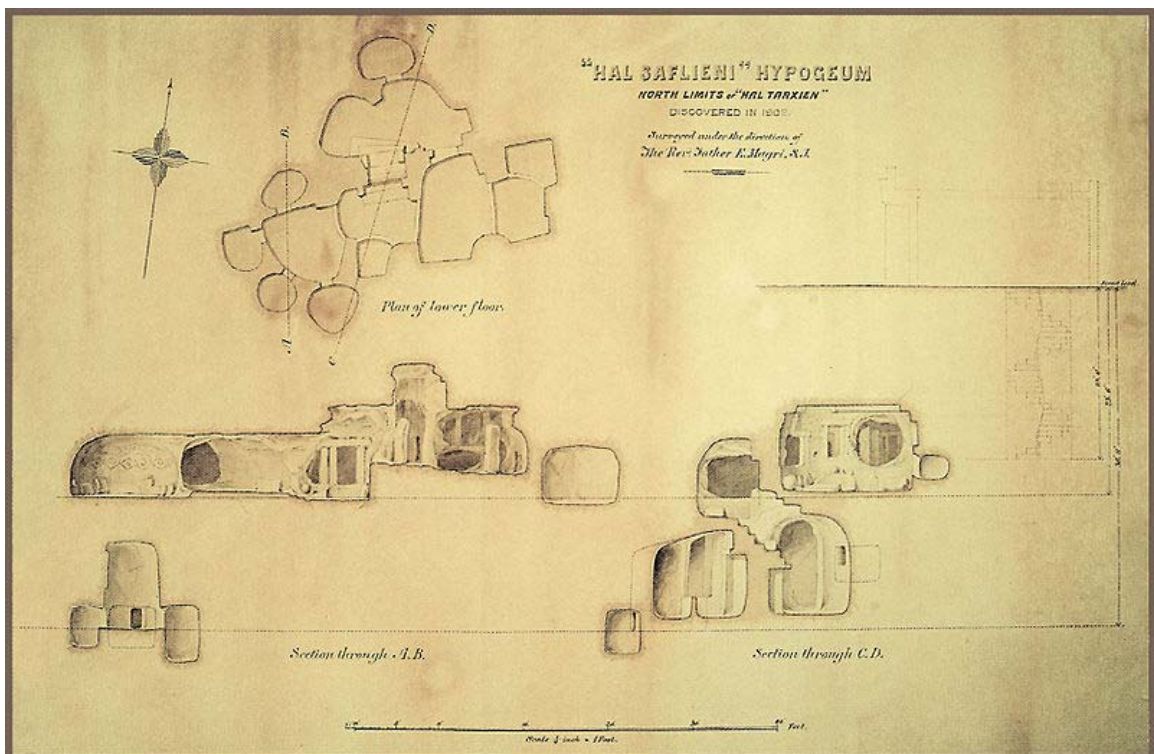
*The “Sleeping Lady”, a beautiful artifact recovered deep within the chambers of the ancient Hypogeum.
Glen Bowman/(CC BY-SA 2.0)*

Whether it was deliberate or not, the people who spent time in the Hypogeum under conditions that may have included ritual chanting -- were exposing themselves to vibrations that may have impacted their thinking. In addition to stimulating their more creative sides, it appears that an atmosphere of resonant sound in the frequency of 110 Hz would have been "switching on" an area of the brain that bio-behavioral scientists believe relates to mood, empathy and social behavior.

Despite the plethora of research on the acoustic properties of the Oracle Room, there remain just as many questions as answers. It is for this reason that the Hypogeum was the key location for an Archaeoacoustics Conference. During the event, a multi-disciplinary undertook a challenging and unprecedented experiment. Ultrasensitive microphones were placed in the Oracle Chamber of the Hypogeum and digital recorders were used to test the response of the chamber by different voices and by simple musical instruments which could have been present in the time the Hypogeum was in use (4000 - 2,500 BC).

The results revealed that a male human voice can stimulate the resonance of the structure at two frequencies (114 Hz and 68-70 Hz). The use of a horn and conch shell did not create any resonance at all, while a friction drum produced low resonance. Interestingly, a shamanic natural skin hoop drum created a strong stimulation of resonance by harmonics of the drum at 114 Hz. The response was the same as that produced by a male voice singing 'ooh'. A female voice did not produce the same effect.

While we may never know for certain what transpired within the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum 5,000 years ago, scientists are moving ever closer to unravelling some of the mysteries of this ancient and incredible site.



Interesting site map of the Hypogeum made in October 1907. Public Domain



A model of the various chambers of the ancient Hypogeum. Did the ancients use sophisticated acoustics to affect brain waves and alter mood and social behavior? (CC BY-SA 3.0)

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VISITOR INFO

Hypogeum of Hal Saflieni. Burial Street, Paola, PLA 1116, Malta

<http://www.visitmalta.com/en/info/hypogeum>

<http://heritagemalta.org/>

Phone: +356 21805019 / +356 22954000

Email: info@heritagemalta.org

Open Times:

Monday - Sunday: 0900hrs till 1600hrs.

Closed: 24, 25 & 31 December, 1 January & Good Friday.

Admission Price:

Adults 30 Euros

Seniors and Students 15 Euros

Children 12 Euros

****NOTE** The Hypogeum will be closed from 9th September 2015 to April 2016 due to conservation and restoration works.**

Tickets are normally booked very far in advance (many months) online. You can book online, but it is advised to call the location to confirm reservation. Tours limited to 8 a day, only 10 people at a time.

Bookings: <http://www.heritagemalta.org/>

20 tickets a day for the following day can be purchased in person at Valletta's [Museum of Fine Arts](#). The museum opens at 9am. First come, first serve, and no guarantees of availability.

To get there take the bus to Paola town center and follow the signs from there.

No photos/video allowed - bags are locked up before you enter the site. Guided tour through Hypogeum with wearable electronic audio-guide. Short film is shown. Caves are dark and damp. Good walking shoes are recommended, tour approximately 45 minutes long.

The Tarxien Temples, which belong to the Megalithic Temples of Malta WHS are within short walking distance from the Hypogeum.

MAKE YOUR WAY THERE | MAPS

Click on the link below to find the location on Google Maps.

<https://goo.gl/maps/TdOxK>



The Hellfire Caves of West Wycombe

Buckinghamshire, England

Parties, dark rituals, and secret society symbolism beneath the streets

[ANCIENT-ORIGINS](#) | [April Holloway](#)



The mysterious caves and caverns which were secret passageways for the Hellfire Club. Jonhantoni (CC BY-SA 2.0)

The Hellfire Caves of West Wycombe are a network of man-made chalk and flint caverns in Buckinghamshire, England, made famous by their sordid past. They are named after the infamous Hellfire Club, made up of high-ranking members of society, noblemen, and politicians, who are believed to have engaged in pagan rituals, orgies, and black magic deep within the subterranean chambers beneath West Wycombe. Nevertheless, the caves are a place where myth and reality are so entangled that it is difficult to separate one from the other.

According to accepted accounts, English politician Sir Francis Dashwood commissioned an ambitious project in 1748 to supply chalk for a 5 kilometer (3 mile) road between West Wycombe and High Wycombe. This was supposedly in attempt to combat local poverty by providing jobs to farm workers who were impoverished by a succession of droughts and failed harvests. The workers were employed at one shilling per day (enough to sustain a family in the Georgian era) to mine chalk and flint on his estate. Considering they were all dug by hand, the caves are often regarded as an incredible feat of engineering.

However, the theory that the caves were dug out for mining is questionable because the Chiltern Hills flint bed overlays the chalk escarpment and does not have to be mined, except by means of small open flint dells, of which there are many in the area. Could it be that Sir Francis had another reason for creating the underground network of rooms?



Peering into the doorways of the Hellfire Caves. Neil Rickards (CC BY 3.0)

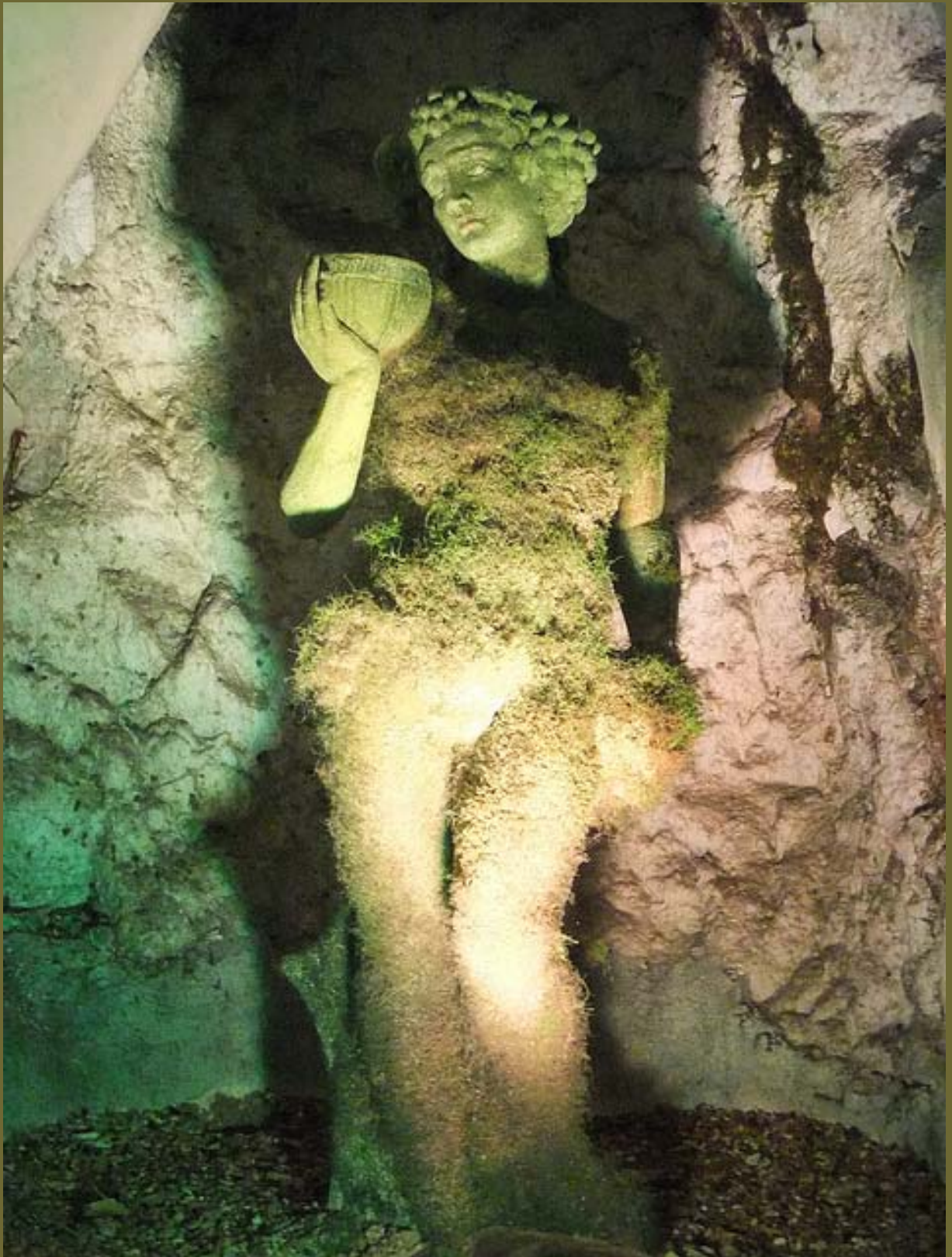
The Hellfire Club

In addition to being a politician, Sir Francis Dashwood established the Knights of St Francis of Wycombe, a private members club which later became known as the Hellfire Club. The club became the playground for “persons of quality”, which included members of the British aristocracy, politicians, and other elite members of society, including William Hogarth, John Wilkes, Thomas Potter and John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich. Though not believed to have been a member, Benjamin Franklin was a close friend of Dashwood and visited the caves on more than one occasion.

The club motto was *Fais ce que tu voudras* (Do what thou wilt), a philosophy of life later used by Aleister Crowley. Legend has it that members engaged in numerous illicit activities including sex parties, drinking, wenching, and mock rituals. It is no wonder Sir Francis was looking for somewhere private to hold his meetings.

According to Horace Walpole (1717-1797), 4th Earl of Orford was an English art historian, antiquarian and Whig politician, the members' *"practice was rigorously pagan: Bacchus and Venus were the deities to whom they almost publicly sacrificed; and the nymphs and the hogsheads that were laid in against the festivals of this new church, sufficiently informed the neighborhood of the complexion of those hermits."*

Dashwood's garden at West Wycombe contained numerous statues and shrines to different gods; Daphne and Flora, Priapus and the previously mentioned Venus and Dionysus.



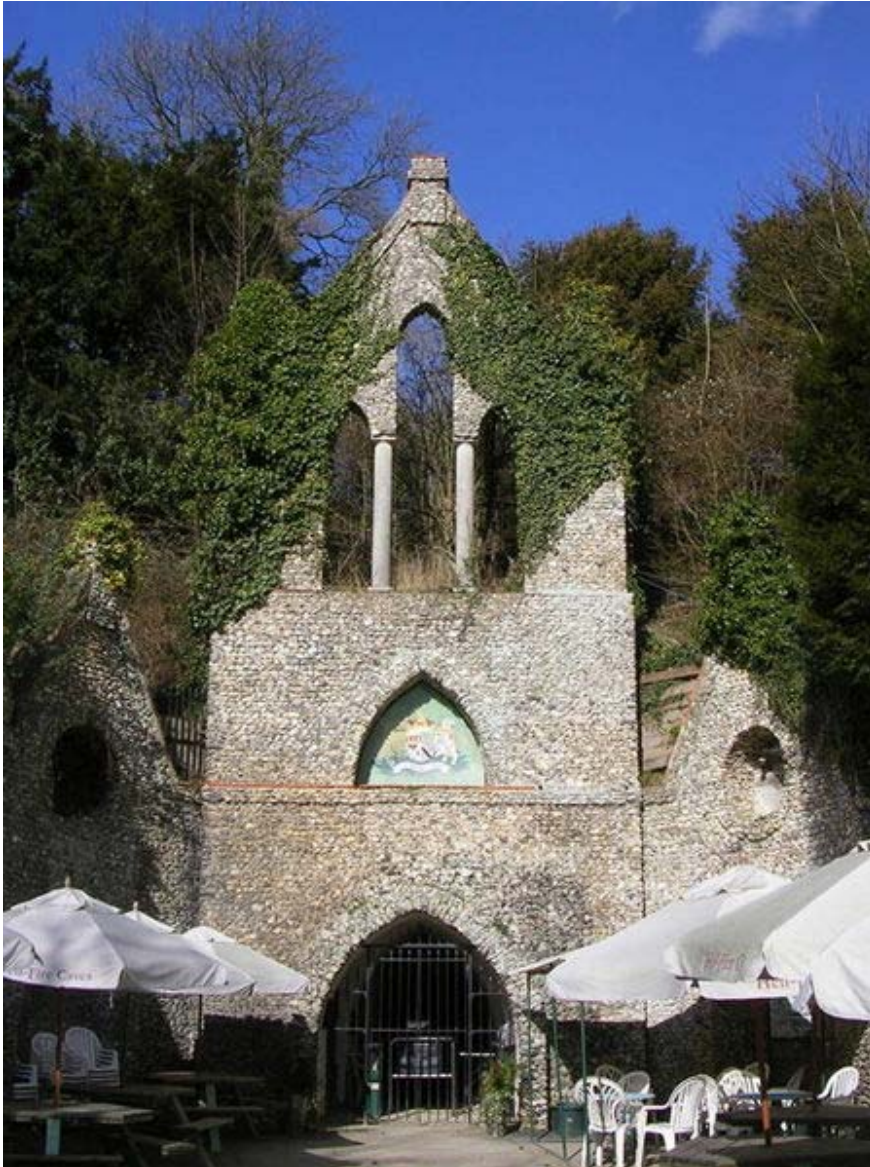
Beautiful and haunting statuary inside the Hellfire Caves of West Wycombe. Krissyho (CC BY-ND 2.0)



*Shadows dance behind the dramatic statuary found in the underground caverns of the Hellfire Caves.
Scott Wylie (CC BY 2.0)*

Layout of the Caves

The grand entrance of the Hellfire caves was designed as the façade of a mock gothic church and built from flint and chalk mortar, which was erected in around 1752. Both the entrance and the layout of the subterranean network were inspired by Sir Francis Dashwood's visits to Italy, Greece, Turkey, Syria and other areas of the Ottoman Empire during his Grand Tour.



Dramatic entrance to the Hellfire Caves. Mark Percy (CC BY-SA 2.0)

The caves extend 400 meters (1300 feet) underground, running deep into the hillside above West Wycombe village and directly below St Lawrence's Church and Mausoleum. The individual chambers are connected by a series of narrow tunnels and passageways, leading visitors from the Entrance Hall, to the Steward's Chamber and Whitehead's Cave, through Lord Sandwich's Circle, Franklin's Cave, the Banqueting Hall (allegedly the largest man-made chalk cavern in the world), the Triangle, to the Miner's Cave; and finally, across a subterranean river

name the Styx, to the Inner Temple, where the meetings of the Hellfire Club were held, and which is said to lie directly beneath St Lawrence's Church.

In Greek mythology, the River Styx separated the mortal world from Hades, and the subterranean position of the Inner Temple directly beneath St Lawrence's Church was supposed to signify Heaven and Hell.



The River Styx in the Hellfire Caves behind dark metal bars (stalagmites and stalactites were later added for decoration once the caves became a tourist attraction). Ashley Rehnblom (CC BY 2.0)

An alternative viewpoint was advanced by Daniel P. Mannix in his book about The Hellfire Club. This theory suggests that the caves had been intentionally created by Dashwood according to a sexual design. The design begins at the 'womb' of the Banqueting Hall, leading to rebirth through the female triangle, followed by baptism in the River Styx and the pleasures thereafter of the Inner Temple.



A diorama depicting the festivities or rituals held in the Inner Temple. Ashley Rehnblom (CC BY 2.0)

The early 1760s saw the downfall of Dashwood's exclusive club, and by 1766, the Hellfire Club was dissolved. Following the death of Sir Francis in 1781, the caves fell into disrepair and were not used again until World War II when plans were made to use the caves as an air-raid shelter, but the area was never targeted and so the plans were not carried out. During the late 1940s and early 1950s the caves were renovated and turned into a local visitor attraction by a member of the Dashwood family, who used the profit earned to refurbish the dilapidated West Wycombe Park. The caves continue to operate as a tourist attraction and have had over two million visitors since they reopened in 1951.

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VISITOR INFO

Hellfire Caves of West Wycombe, below St Lawrence's Church and Mausoleum, Buckinghamshire, England

Coordinates: 51° 38' 45.23" N, 0° 48' 11.8" W

The Estate Office, West Wycombe Park,

High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP14 3AJ, UK | Phone 01494 524411

<http://www.westwycombeestate.co.uk/the-hell-fire-caves/>

The Hellfire Caves

Church Lane, West Wycombe, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP14 3AH, United Kingdom

<http://www.hellfirecaves.co.uk/>

Open Times:

*From 1st April 2015

Summer Season - The Caves are now open daily

March 23rd to 31st October 11am to 5.30pm every day

Winter Season (November - March)

Saturday & Sundays: 11am - dusk

Also Bank & School Holidays (Buckinghamshire): 11am - dusk

Christmas Day & Boxing Day: Closed

Admission Price:

Adults - £6 (9.36 USD)

Children - £5 (7.80 USD) (under threes go free)

Concessions - £5 (7.80 USD) (OAPs, Students, National Trust)

Family tickets (Max 2 adults and 2 children) - £18 (28.09 USD)

For Group bookings of 20 or more people, please contact Phone 01494 533739

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Hell-Fire Tea Room and Gift Shop serves snacks and souvenirs. The Caves are available for private and corporate parties including receptions, dinners. Location for TV, film, music and video production. School holiday workshops and Halloween themed events.

Hellfire Caves are unsuitable for pushchairs and wheelchairs.

MAKE YOUR WAY THERE | MAPS

Click on the link below to find the location on Google Maps.

<https://goo.gl/maps/cYZxr>



Fire Mummies - The Smoked Human Remains of the Kabayan Caves

Kabayan, Philippines

The incredible ancient death and preservation rituals of the Ibaloi tribe

[ANCIENT-ORIGINS](#) | [MR Reese](#)



The ancient Ibaloi people preserved their dead with fire and smoke, then sealed them in wooden coffins in caves within the mountains of Kabayan. (Image shows smoked mummies of Papua New Guinea) via Dreamstime

Mummification of the deceased is a fairly well-known practice from ancient times. Most notably, the Egyptians utilized a mummification process that led to today's cliché image of a deceased body covered in gauzy wrappings. The discovery of mummified remains in several caves in the Philippines represents a different type of mummy – the fire mummy.

Found in caves in the town of Kabayan, in the Benguet province of the Philippines, the fire mummies are human remains that were preserved through a lengthy dehydration and smoking process. These well-preserved remains have given researchers insight into a unique mummification process, and into the tribal people who engaged in those methods.

The Kabayan mummies are also known as the Ibaloi mummies, Benguet mummies, or Fire mummies. They were located in many caves in the area, including Timbak, Bangao, Tenongchol, Naapay, and Opdas.

Smoking is not a common mummification technique, and it was a very lengthy process, but it was successfully used to preserve many bodies throughout the years. Scientists have estimated that the Kabayan mummies were created by members of the Ibaloi tribe sometime between 1200 and 1500 AD. The timeline is debated, as some scientists have speculated that the mummification practice dates back thousands of years. While the date that the practice began is in dispute, there is agreement that it ended in the 1500s. When Spain colonized the Philippines, the smoking mummification process died out, and was no longer practiced.

It is believed by some that only tribal leaders were mummified through smoking. The unique mummification process was said to actually begin before death, with an individual participating in the initial steps.

As death approached, the individual would drink a beverage with a very high concentration of salt. Drinking saltwater is known to dehydrate the body, so this initial step was used to start the drying process prior to death. After the individual passed away, the rest of the mummification process would take place. It is estimated that this process took anywhere from several weeks, to several months to complete.

The body was thoroughly washed, and then placed above a heat source in a seated position. The body was not exposed to actual fire or flames, but remained suspended above the smoldering kindling. Rather than burning the body, the heat and smoke would slowly and completely dehydrate the entire body. The internal drying process was ritually furthered along by blowing tobacco smoke into the deceased's mouth. This was thought to help to remove all fluids from the internal organs.

Finally, the smoked body was rubbed down with herbs. Upon completion of the mummification process, the body was placed in one of the caves, where they were eventually discovered.

To this day, the Kabayan mummies remain in the caves within which they were found. Although the caves are located in a very remote area, theft and vandalism are very real concerns, leading the area to be designated as one of the 100 Most Endangered Sites in the world, by Monument Watch. It is also under consideration to be designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



The beautiful, lush landscape of Mount Pulag, Benguet, Philippines. Benedict Kwok (CC BY-SA 3.0)

One mummy of distinction, known as Apo Annu, was stolen from the caves in the early 1900s. Apo Annu was dressed in clothing that would have been worn by a tribal chief, and he was in a crouching position. His mummified body was covered in intricately designed tattoos. Apo Annu is considered to have been a great hunter, and was believed to be half human, half deity. Eventually, Apo Annu was returned to the Ibaloi tribe. They greatly desired the return of Apo Annu, because they believed that his absence caused many natural disasters, including earthquakes, droughts, disease, and poor harvests.

Upon the return of Apo Annu, the Ibaloi reburied the mummy in hopes of restoring the balance that had been disrupted by his disappearance. Today, there are still several stolen Kabayan mummies that have not yet been returned, however the return of Apo Annu signals a desire to maintain the mummies in their rightful burial locations.



Man of the Ifugao tribe in traditional costume. Photo by CEphoto, Uwe Aranas (CC BY-SA 3.0) (The Ibaloi, Ifugao, and others are indigenous peoples collectively known as Igorot.)

Threatened by both theft and vandalism, the Kabayan mummies, which have lasted through several centuries, may be at risk of disappearance and destruction. By declaring the Kabayan caves to be a protected site, and by keeping the location of some of the mummies secret, the caves and the mummies may be protected against future looting and damages.

The Kabayan mummies are a striking example of the ingenuity of the ancient Ibaloi tribe, and the painstakingly lengthy processes they would go through to tend to their deceased. To this day, the Ibaloi tribe believes these to be sacred burial grounds.

Hopefully, continued protections will allow the discovery of further information about the ancient Ibaloi tribe and the unique fire mummies, while preserving the sacred remains and the areas in which they were found.

References

Remains of the Fire Mummies: Ancient Ibaloi people SMOKED their dead 1,000 years ago... and stored them in caverns 4,000ft up the side of a Philippine mountain where they still lie – Daily Mail. [Online] Available from: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2919847/Remains-Fire-Mummies-Ancient-Ibaloi-people-SMOKED-dead-1-000-years-ago-stored-caverns-4-000ft-Philippine-mountain-lie.html#ixzz3QjhCWfTJ>

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World: Asia-Pacific Burial for mummy remains – BBC News. [Online] Available from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/350179.stm>

Kabayan Mummy Caves – World Monuments Fund. [Online] Available from: <http://www.wmf.org/project/kabayan-mummy-caves>

VISITOR INFO

Timbac Caves, Kabayan, Benguet Province (Cordillera Mountains), site of the Kabayan mummies

http://www.tripadvisor.ca/ShowUserReviews-g2223296-d3671178-r248601182-Timbac_Caves-Kabayan_Benguet_Province_Cordillera_Region_Luzon.html#

Open Times:

-

Admission Price:

Donation

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****NOTE**** Access to preserved/protected Kabayan mummies may need to be coordinated through local guides, if it is possible at all, as the **mummies and burial sites are listed as endangered by UNESCO**. Challenging multi-kilometer/mile hikes may be involved to secluded locations. Cave entrances and caves/passages are small.

From the Halsema Highway, Kabayan, Luzon, Philippines.

Timbac Caves - Mt. Timbac is about 1,200 meters (4000 feet) above Kabayan, and is accessible by van or hike. A narrow road goes up the mountainside. Vehicles are left in a small parking lot area at the top. Guides or locals will be necessary as the caves are locked. The hike to the caves takes 20-45 minutes.

No facilities available. Not wheelchair accessible. May be for seasoned hikers only.

MAKE YOUR WAY THERE | MAPS

Click on the link below to find the location on Google Maps.

<https://goo.gl/maps/Tnuix>

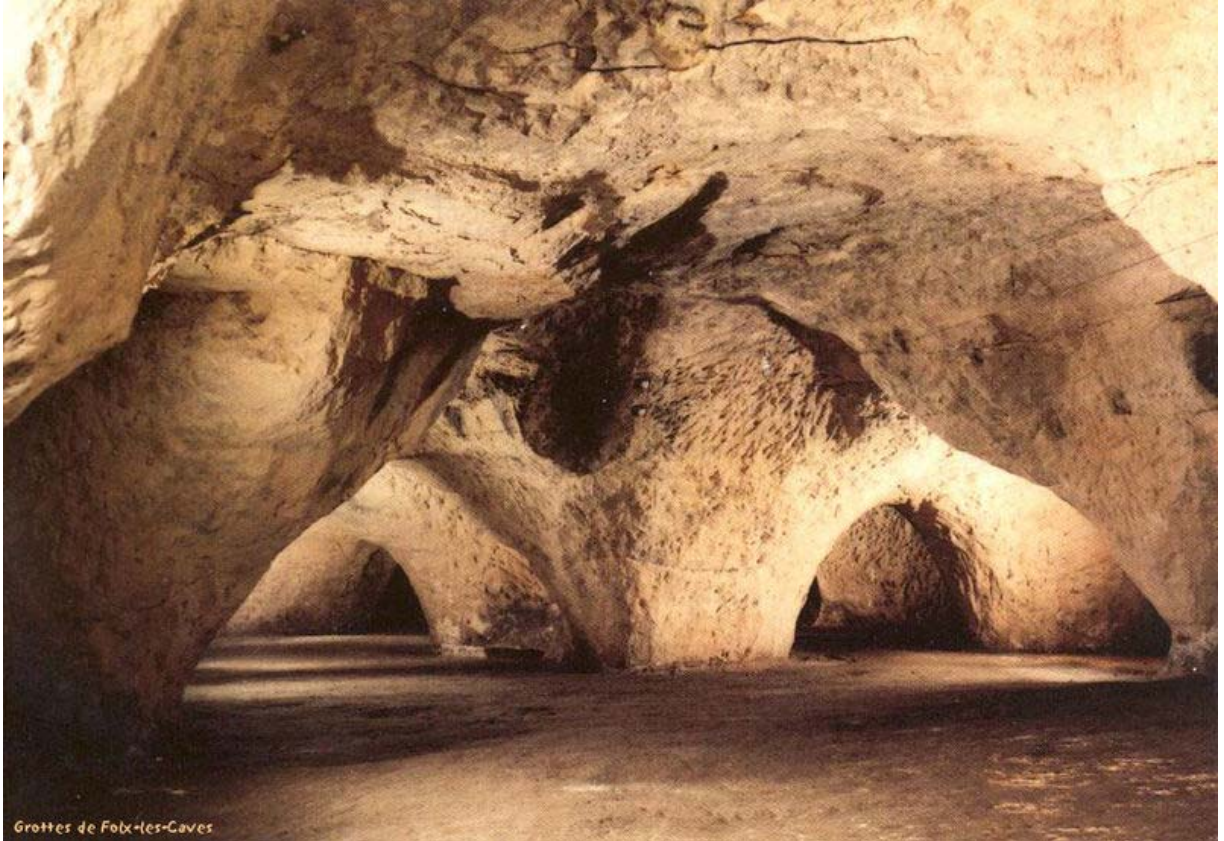


The Historic Grottoes of Folx-les-Caves: Ancient Hideout and Traveler Waypoint

Orp-Jauche, Belgium

Romans, robbers, and Nazis may have hidden in these ancient caves

[ANCIENT-ORIGINS](#) | [Dhwtj](#)



These ancient man-made caves harbored many during the centuries, from fleeing refugees to cunning criminals. (CC BY-SA 3.0)

The mysterious man-made caves in Belgium burrow thousands of feet into the soft rock south of Brussels. Said to have been carved out in during the Neolithic, all sorts of people have frequented the caves, from fleeing refugees to cunning criminals.

The grottoes of Folx-les-Caves are located in the municipality of Orp-Jauche in the province of Walloon Brabant. In the distant past, the grottoes were used as mines. One of the rocks found there was *tuff*, a type of soft volcanic rock which is rich in calcium carbonate. These were mined for use by farmers as fertilizer. Later on, the harder limestone found deeper in the caves was mined for local building projects.

It is unclear when humans first mined the grottoes. Some have speculated that they were in use since Neolithic times, i.e. around 2600 BC, and that aurochs horns were used as mining tools.

This is perhaps due to the fact that traces of mining activity dating to the Neolithic have been found in Spiennes in the province of Hainaut, situated to the west of Folx-les-Caves. Unlike the lesser known grottoes, Spiennes is a World Heritage Site, as its flint mines are the largest and earliest concentration of ancient mines in north-west Europe.



Aurochs skull and horns. The horns of the large beasts were said to be used by Neolithic miners to carve out the Folx-Les Caves in Belgium. Eden Pictures (CC BY-SA 3.0)

It has also been theorized that the grottoes of Folx-le-Caves were first dug some time during the late Roman period, or early Medieval period. Although little is known about its origins, the subsequent history of the grottoes is better known and contains some pretty fascinating stories.

The mines are a labyrinth of about 60,000 square meters (650,000 square feet) as a result of centuries of mining. This made it a perfect hiding place for refugees seeking to escape those who occupied Belgium over the centuries. It has been suggested that the mines were used by refugees as early as the Roman period all the way to the Second World War. Yet, curiously, apart from carvings on stone and graffiti of the cave walls, no objects have been left behind by such refugees in the grottoes, according to research.

Apart from being an alleged safe haven in times of trouble, the grottoes were used at times as a garage for farming vehicles, a place for the cultivation of mushrooms (since 1886) and a

distillery (1862). The grottoes' moist and dark surroundings are ideal for the growth of mushrooms, while the natural springs running in the lower caves provide pure water for the distillery.

The most famous tale relating to the grottoes of Folx-les-Caves is that of Pierre Colon, who lived some time during the 18th century. Colon was a thief dubbed the 'Belgian Robin Hood', as he, like his English counterpart, stole from the rich and gave to the poor. Colon was said to rob rich merchants passing through a forest nearby, and his hideout was the grottoes of Folx-les-Caves.

According to legend his accomplice was his wife, who would warn Colon whenever the police approached, so that he could hide in another part of the grottoes. Eventually, it's said the law caught up with the benevolent thief, and he was hanged to death on the spot where he committed his crimes.

Today, the first weekend of October is celebrated annually as Colon Day, in honor of the generosity and ingenuity of Pierre Colon.



Statue dedicated to the Robin Hood of Belgium, Pierre Colon, at the Grottoes of Folx-les-Caves. (Public Domain)

The grottoes of Folx-le-Caves eventually became a tourist spot, and were opened to the public. Following the death of its proprietor and guide, Maurice Racourt, the grottoes were closed. In the middle of 2010, the grottoes of Folx-le-Caves were reopened to the public.

The grottoes of Folx-le-Caves remain an interesting part of Belgium's ancient, and more recent past.

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VISITOR INFO

Folx-Les-Caves, Rue Auguste Baccus, 35, Orp-Jauche, 1350, Belgium

Coordinates: 50°39'00"N 4°55'59"E

Phone 081/81 36 20

Folx-les-Caves, Rue Auguste Baccus,

35, Orp-Jauche, 1350, Belgium

<http://www.folx-les-caves.com/grottes/>

Email: grottes@folx-les-caves.com

Open Times:

All year round

Weekend: 14:00-18:00

Group visits during the week on request.

In wintertime: 14:00-17:00

Admission Price:

5 Euros per person

4 Euros for seniors

3 Euros for children over 6 years

free for children under 6 years

Caves are not wheelchair or reduced-mobility accessible. Length of visit is approximately 1 hour.

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Dikteon Cave: The Legendary Birthplace of Zeus

Psychro, Crete

The dramatic sacred cave of cult worship for ancient Greek myth

[ANCIENT-ORIGINS](#) | [Bryan Hilliard](#)



The mysterious and impressive cave of Dikteon (Psychro cave) of Crete. Jerzy Strzelecki (CC BY-SA 3.0)

The Dikteon Cave is one of the most important and famous cult places of Minoan Crete. It is located in the high mountains on the island of Crete in Greece and is associated with the birthplace of the Greek god Zeus. For centuries it was considered a sacred place of cult worship where offerings were made and few were allowed to enter.

The use of caves as cult places was one of the basic characteristics of the religion of the ancient Cretans, and Dikteon Cave was among the most important and sacred.

The Dikteon Cave, also known as Psychro Cave (due to its vicinity to the village of Psychro) or Andron Cave, is situated at an altitude of 1025 meters (3360 feet) on the northern slopes of Mount Dicte, which dominates the Lassithi Plateau and the whole of Eastern Crete. The Lassithi Plateau was inhabited as early as the Neolithic Period and is one of the few sites in the Mediterranean where settlements were at high altitude.

Dikteon Cave, as it stands today, consists of five chambers with an upper and lower section. The upper cave or Ano spileo, resembles a rocky cavern and is devoid of stalactites or stalagmites. A trek down a steep set of stairs 100 meters (328 feet) into the mountainside reveals the lower cave or Kato Spileo. There is a larger hall on the right, which has small stone

basins filled with water that legend says was a drinking spot for the god Zeus. The most impressive sight is a small lake which is surrounded by large stalactites and stalagmites along the stairwell.

There is also what is known as the “Mantle of Zeus” which is a stalactite that hangs over the lake similar to that of a chandelier.

***At the back of the lake there is a small chamber,
where it is said that Zeus was born.***



The amazing formations found within the sacred cave of Dikteon (Psychro cave), Crete. Jerzy Strzelecki (CC BY-SA 3.0)

To the ancient Greeks, Zeus was the all-knowing, all seeing deity associated with thunder, lightning, rain and the ruler of all other gods. He was also the ruler of the sky, the earth and was regarded by the ancient Greeks as the personification of the laws of nature. He headed a family of twelve other major gods and goddesses called the Olympians, and lived on the mythical Mount Olympus, the highest peak in Greece. In Greek Mythology, Zeus was said to have been born on the island of Crete. Hesiod, the Greek epic poet who scholars believed lived during the eighth century BC, tells us that the birth of Zeus took place near the city of Lyktos in east-central Crete. However, he does not specify the precise location of Zeus's birthplace therefore, two caves, namely the Dikteon and Ideon, both located in the Cretan mountains have been put forward as his place of birth.



"Zeus and Thetis" Painting by John Duncan, 1811. (Public Domain)

According to the ancient tradition as described by Hesoid in Theogony, Cronus, the Titan god of time and ages, and Rhea, the Titan goddess of fertility and motherhood, had five children before Zeus, all of which ended up in the stomach of Cronus. **He ate his offspring out of fear they would take his throne.** When Rhea became pregnant with Zeus, she did not want him to share the same fate and asked her parents Uranus and Gaia for help. In order to deceive her husband Cronus, Rhea gave him a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes instead of the baby. He swallowed the supposed infant at once and relaxed, certain that his throne was not at risk from his children. Meanwhile, Zeus grew up in the cave where he remained hidden away in the mountains of Crete from his cannibalistic father.



The majesty and fearsomeness of the legendary harpy. Сергей Панасенко-Михалкин (CC BY-SA 3.0)



Saturn (Cronos) eating one of his children, painting by Rubens 1636-1638. (Public Domain)

As soon as Rhea gave birth to Zeus she gave him to the Curetes (gods of the wild mountainside) to look after. So Cronus would not hear the cries of the infant Zeus, the Curetes drowned out his sounds with a frenzied dance of clashing spears and shields. The goat nurse Amalthea and nymph Melissa also played an important role in his upbringing. Amalthea, suckled the holy infant from her horn while Melissa nursed Zeus and looked after him, feeding him honey. Several other myths surround the Dikteon cave, demonstrating its significance to both Crete and ancient Greece.

A lesser known story, speaks of the Harpies or mythical winged maidens that once lived there.

Archaeological evidence has revealed that the Dikteon Cave was used by humans in antiquity. Excavations to date show uninterrupted human presence in the Dikteon Cave from the end of the Neolithic period onwards or for about the last 6,000 years. It operated as a cult center from the Minoan to the Archaic Period (2000-700 BC), while worship at the cave continued sporadically until Roman times (1st century BC - 1st century AD). From the 16th century AD until 1883, the Dikteon Cave was used as a shelter by local shepherds and hunters.

In the late 1800s, some of the secrets of the cave and its cult significance were unearthed by chance.



Minoan girl, c. 1600-1500 BCE, bronze, Minoan, Crete, Cleveland Museum of Art. (CC0 1.0)

Joseph Chatzidakis and Italian archaeologist Federico Halbherr carried out the first, small-scale excavations of the site in 1886. The first systematic excavation began in 1899 by British Archaeologist David Hogarth. The findings of the cave were published in 1961 by art historian and archaeologist John Boardman. The excavation found many artifacts such as small statues, tables, double axes, rings, and broaches. Stone tablets inscribed with Linear A script were found at the site along with religious bronze and clay figurines. In the antechamber of the Dikteon Cave the foundations of a built altar and the remains of offerings placed in rock crevices were discovered. Pilgrims made offerings at the site, including olive oil, honey, wine, wheat and animal sacrifices, which were placed on the altar and burnt. The numerous artifacts are on display at the Heraklion Museum in Heraklion Greece and Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, England.

Today, Diketeon Cave is a popular tourist attraction that impresses both physically and geologically, and for its rich and fascinating history.

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VISITOR INFO

Dikteon Cave, Mount Dicte range in East Crete, on the Lassithi Plateau

Phone +30 28440 31316

Psychro Cave, Crete 720 52, Greece

<http://www.explorecrete.com/archaeology/dikteon-andron-cave.html>

Open Times:

10am-2.30pm, extended hours possible Jul-Aug

Admission Price:

4 Euros per person

Parking 2 Euros

Donkey 10 to 15 Euros

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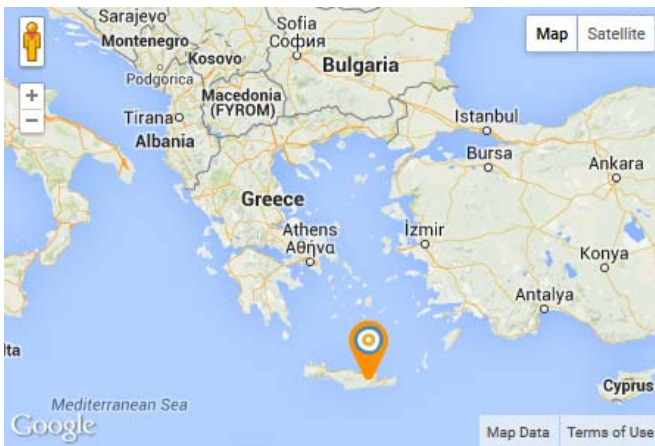
A steep 15-minute (800 meter) walk takes you up to the cave entrance. There is a rough but shaded track on the right with high plateau views, and an unshaded paved trail on the left of the car park. You can rent/hire a donkey to get you up to the cave (costing around €10 or €15 return).

Walking shoes/attire and water might be advisable, however there is a café and shops at the top of the climb. Once inside the cave there are many stairs which may be wet and slippery.

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The Mysterious Tierradentro Hypogea, Tombs and Corpses of the Pre-Colombians

Tierradentro, Cauca, Columbia

Mysterious pre-Columbian elaborately painted ancient walls in darkness

[ANCIENT-ORIGINS](#) | [MRReese](#)



Tierradentro is a national archeological park in Colombia, South America. Within the Tierradentro Park are structures known as hypogea. Hypogea are defined as any structure built underground, but more commonly they are known as ancient tombs or temples, sometimes with niches for human remains, and often decorated with paintings or carvings scored into the rock. The name hypogea refers to the funerary aspects of the structures. These South American hypogea give visitors a glance into Colombia's ancient past.

This UNESCO World Heritage Site is found in Inza, Department of Cauca, Colombia. The Tierradentro Archaeological Park consists of five main areas:

- Alto de Segovia is the largest area in the park, measuring approximately 13,000 square meters, and containing 30 large hypogea.
- Alto del Aguacate is an artificially flattened area containing seventy side-by-side hypogea that run along a ridgeline.
- Alto de San Andrés is the location of six large hypogea.

- Alto del Duende is the location of four hypogea.
- El Tablón is an area that contains no hypogea, but hosts eleven statues in standing human forms, of varying heights and sizes which are associated with tombs of earlier periods.



Statues from El Tablón in the Tierradentro Archaeological Park. Aliman5040 (CC BY-SA 3.0)

The many hypogea were found during a series of excavations. Through carbon dating the hypogea have been shown to date between 600 and 900 AD. Little is known about the pre-Colombian culture that once inhabited the area, and which created the hypogea as a burial ground. It is unknown how they carved the deep hypogea into the solid rock surface, how they moved the vast amounts of earth, or how they were able to paint the walls of the hypogea in darkness, without any natural light reaching the depths of the tombs. It is quite possible that we will never know the answers to these questions, as many of those secrets may have died with the corpses buried within.



Burial mounds in Tierradentro National Park. (BigStockPhoto)

While there is variation among the hypogea, each one was typically constructed with an entry oriented towards the west. The main chamber of each hypogeum is reached by a spiral staircase that winds five to eight meters (16 to 26 feet) below the earth's surface. There are some variations in depth, with some chambers reaching as deep as 25 meters (82 feet) beneath the surface. Branching off from the main chamber are several sub-chambers, each containing a single corpse. The ceilings are domed and supported by columns.



Staircase descending into the tombs in Alto de Segovia, Tierradentro, Inza, Cauca. Aliman5040 (CC BY-SA 3.0)

The identities and relationships of those buried have not been determined. Within the chambers, images grace the walls in precise geometric, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic shapes and patterns. These images are painted in red, black, and white, and form very complex, and very beautiful patterns. It is believed that red represents life, black represents death, and white represents the hope of making it to the next life.

Before the hypogea were declared a protected area, grave robbers stole many of the relics and artifacts from within, making it difficult to determine exactly what the tombs once contained. However, a few statues and some remains of pottery, fabrics, and other small pieces have been recovered. Some researchers say that the details of the paintings and sculptures are reflective of those from the nearby San Agustín culture. The area remains preserved as it was created, although the stairs within the hypogea have been reinforced to prevent erosion, and to preserve the only mode of entrance into the tombs.



*Ancient tomb decorated in beautiful geometric patterns and faces carved into rock peer out at visitors.
Tierradentro. Inycho (CC BY 2.0)*

Those who are interested can visit this historical archaeological park in Colombia. They can see the amazing hypogea and learn more about its cultural significance first-hand. In addition to being a UNSECO World Heritage Site, the Tierradentro Hypogea are also listed on the World Monuments Fund's 2012 World Monuments Watch list of 100 Most Endangered Sites.

Images are painted in red, black, and white, and form very complex, and very beautiful patterns. It is believed that red represents life, black represents death, and white represents the hope of making it to the next life.

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VISITOR INFO

Tierradentro Archaeological Park, Inza, Department of Cauca, Colombia, South America

Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History - ICANH

Calle 12 No. 2-41 Bogota, Colombia

Switch: (57-1) 4440544, Fax: (57-1) 4440530

Bogota online free: 0180003426042 - Outside Bogota: 018000119811

Email: quejasyreclamos@icanh.gov.co

<http://www.parklifehostel.com/tierradentro-colombia-a-unesco-site/>

<http://www.icanh.gov.co/index.php?idcategoria=1234>

Open Times:

The best time to visit Tierradentro is from December to February and July to August when there's less chance of rain and the weather is pleasant. Area tombs are only open 8am - 4pm, and are locked the rest of the time.

Tierradentro Archaeological Park Museum is open Monday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 pm

Admission Price:

Tierradentro Archaeological Park Museum (approximates)

Adults: \$8 USD

Children under 7, Adults over 60, indigenous communities: Free

Children 7 – 14: \$2 USD

Students with ID, or groups (10 people or more) \$4 USD

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Full walking tour recommended for seasoned travelers only. Visiting the Tierradentro Archaeological Park is a 14 kilometer walk/hike circuit of tombs and monuments, needing good hiking footwear, maps, and water. San Andres de Pisimbala (San Andres) is the hamlet where most people stay 2 days plus to visit at a more relaxed pace. A bus is available in Popayan and San Agustin. It is recommended to bring cash in small bills – no cash point is available, and bigger bills will be difficult to change. Stock up on water and a flashlight/torch as the caves and

tombs may be dark. Rain jacket and appropriate footwear advisable. Accommodations and meals are available in nearby villages (Popayan, San Agustin, Cali), but take note of military or guerilla situations before setting out.

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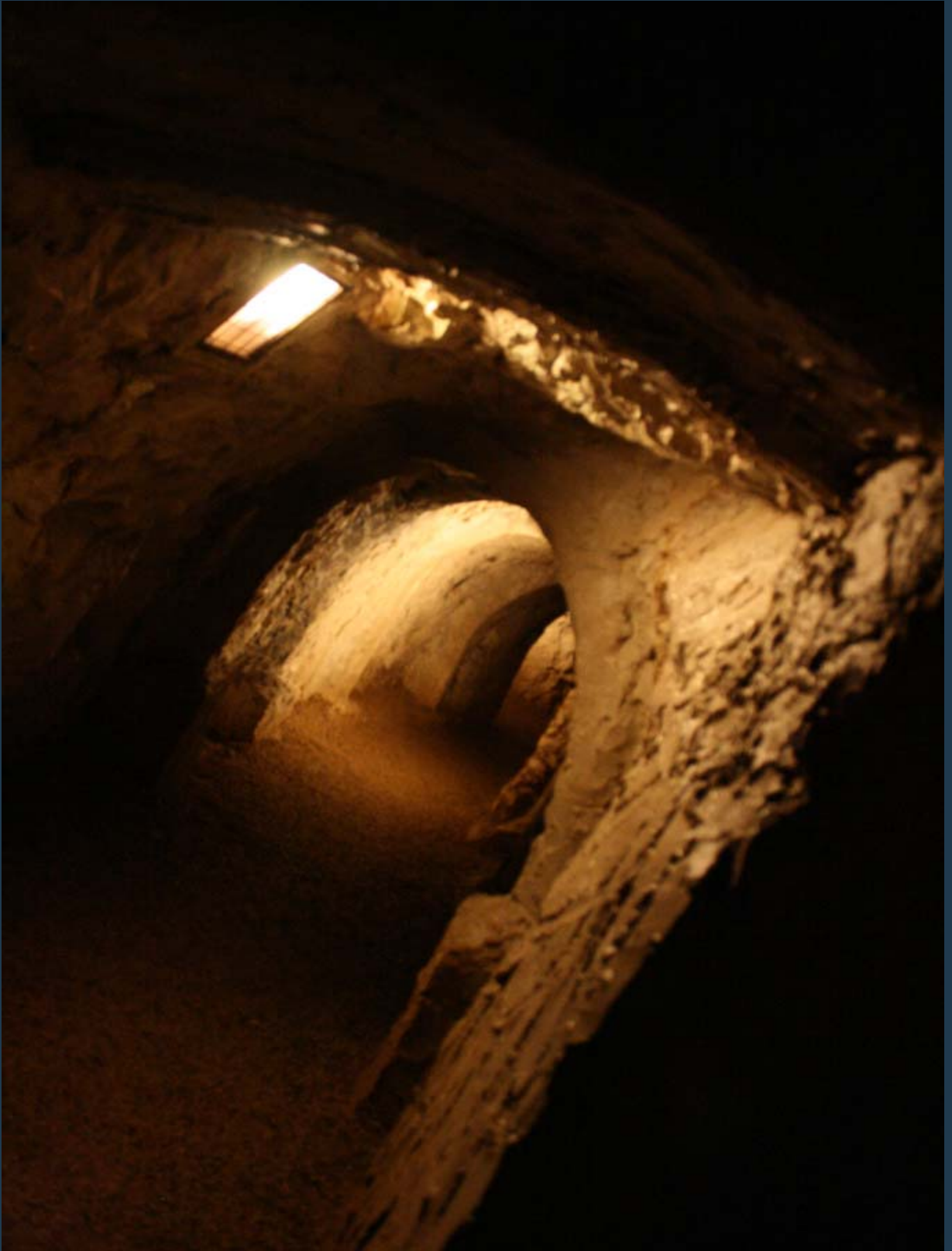
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Deep, dark tunnels of the Hellfire Club in Wycombe, England. Ashley Rehnblom (CC BY 2.0)