

ANNUAL REPORT: SPAIN COVA GRAN 2015 FIELD SCHOOL

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Excavation at the Platform Sector

General features

Cova Gran de Santa Linya (Catalunya, Spain) research project is directed by Dr. Jorge Martínez-Moreno and Dr. Rafael Mora from the Centre d'Estudis del Patrimoni Arqueològic de of the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona and Dr. Alfonso Benito Calvo from Centro Nacional de Investigación sobre la Evolución Humana, Burgos.

The field season took place June 28 to August 1. The 2015 season involved several different instructional techniques in an effort to further the educational experience of IFR students. The goal of the field school was to increase the student's general understanding of the archaeological characteristics of Cova Gran, a key archaeological site for the understanding of the past 50,000 years of human presence in northeast of Iberia.

Research

The main objectives planned for this year was conducted in sectors previously defined at Mora et al. (2011):

- At the Platform sector -P-, fieldwork is centered to excavate two archaeological levels assigned to Early Magdalenian. These levels, 6P and 7P have not been exhausted and will be continue been excavated in following years. Levels 6P and 7P contain important lithic, bone, bone tools and ornaments related with the possible first apparition of the Magdalenian during the Last Glacial Maximum (LGM). This period is unknown in the south side of the Pyrenees. Equally, next years will be excavated 8P, attributed provisionally to Badegoulian, a cronocultural period previous to the Early Magdalenian and poorly understood that it develops during the maximum coldest period of the LGM. Magdalenian sequence in Cova Gran will be key to understand hunter-gatherer lifestyle during this critical climatic period.

- At the Ramp sector -R-, the excavation of S1 assemblage, containing several Late Middle Paleolithic levels, continued. Past season we were excavating S1D and S1E, 2 very rich archaeological levels containing Middle Paleolithic lithic artefacts, bones and hearths.
- In this sector has been detected another sedimentary sequence named Transition sector (sector T) which provided an undefined Upper Paleolithic techno-complex. The excavation of this year show sector T has a complex history but it is essential to correlate sectors P and R. Geological studies (stratigraphic and soil microphomorphology) will provide elements to understand site formation processes, basic to characterized this part of the deposit, basic to complete the chrono-cultural sequence of Cova Gran.

Hearths, lithic and bones artifacts assigned to Early Magdalenian in sector P, Mousterian and unknown Early Upper Paleolithic periods in sector R have been recovered this year. It should be remarked that during this field season, a significant quantity bone tools and marine ornaments form Magdalenian levels (sector P) were recovered. Furthermore, previously undocumented hearths from Magdalenian and Mousterian levels were excavated. This type of archaeological find is extremely rare in most archaeological sites of these periods, but they are essentials in our fieldwork methodological proposal (Martínez-Moreno et al., under revision).

Pedagogy

Following the pedagogical structure established in 2012, students participated in lectures and fieldwork. The formative part of the program included lectures related to the theoretical and methodological elements of the project, stressing the importance of Cova Gran in the context of understanding human settlement in the southern Pyrenees. The following topics were covered in in a broad spectrum of lectures issues, dealing with aspects related to method of excavation, identification and classification of archaeological materials, laboratory and digital environment applied to fieldwork (PDA's and DM-codes) that will be implemented both in the fieldwork and in the laboratory. In parallel, the results obtained by this project are presented, contextualizing its meaning within the development of human groups in the western Mediterranean. these issues involves analyzing the different chrono-cultural stages identified in the archaeological sequence of Cova Gran: the Neanderthals of the South Pyrenees, Middle-to-Upper "transition" and Neanderthal resilience in Iberia, human adaptations in the Late Glacial Maximum, the apparition of the first farmers. Cova Gran is providing inputs to several debates that are at the heart of the current paleoanthropological research: this is a key-site to understand human lifestyle of the groups that settled in their South Pyrenees last 50.000 years.

Students were introduced to all aspects related to fieldwork and lab analysis. A significant element of the field school was academic presentations at the site and in the lab. This allowed students to participate, understand, and evaluate daily work and enabled teams to make decisions during excavation activities.

Student contribution

Students were involved in every task related to the fieldwork and lab activities. They were considered an integral part of the archaeological team. Talks about general lab work and tool classification were presented. The focus was on the classification and seriation elements of tool identification and the importance of context. Within a few days, students were able to work independently and conduct group discussions about object identification, function, and use. They acquired excavation skills, participated in digging, coordinating, selecting artifacts while screening, cleaning material, data base input, and discussions during lab work.

Visits

La Noguera has an astonishing prehistoric and historic heritage that from excursions and visits can be known, whose interest can be known from several excursions and visits to relevant historic places subsumed within an extraordinary landscape. Rocky and steep mountains of the Pre-Pyrenees mountains shape scenic landscapes like gorges Mont-Rebei or Terradets, ideal for hiking. In this sense, visit to Mousterian site of Roca dels Bous facilitates understanding of Neanderthals lifestyle 40000 years ago. Another interesting historic process was the conflictual relationship between the Christian and Islamic border –La Marca Superior- during the IX and XIIth centuries, has left a deep imprint on the landscape, which can be known by visiting castles and Romanesque monasteries as well as Muslim towns in La Noguera.

Dissemination

Cova Gran is a long term project and its investigation is focused on diverse lines of research which has resulted in a vast line of scientific activities. Currently, many papers under revision refer to methodological issues related to excavation methodology (Martinez-Moreno et al., under revision); and to define the implications of the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition from the study of the sedimentary integrity by soil micromorphology (Polo Diaz et al., under revision) and by the techno-typological change detected between Mousterian and Early Upper Paleolithic tools recovered in Cova Gran (Mora et al., under revision)