

Fig. 75.— Llonín Cave. Paintings and engravings on the main panel. According to Magín Berenguer.

Fig. 75.— Cueva de Llonín. Pinturas y grabados del panel principal. Según Magín Berenguer.



Fig. 79 B.

General Directorate of Fine Arts, a post I held at that time. I then reported the finding to the aforesaid General Directorate and to the General Commission for

Excavations by two memos on March 30, 1971, along with a preliminary report on the art appraisal of this very important legacy.

The cave is located at the base of a tectonic layer of the south face of the Sierra de la Cuera, opposite Peñamellera Peak, more than one half mile from the village of Llonín. However, its easiest access is from district highway number 6,312 going from Panes to Cangas de Onís at a place called Molinuca that is some nine kilometers from Panes. From Molinuca to the cave it is less than half a mile going up a steep, rocky, narrow path sometimes choked with hazelnut branches and weeds.

The current entrance is one of the points providing easiest access through the remains dislodged from the overhang of its ancient opening that probably collapsed with the change of the climate from frozen to temperate. This current access must have been one of the same ones used by Paleolithic man, judging from the many kitchen remains sited there. This collapse of the ancient entrance could have also very possibly broken the continuity of an offshoot gallery, that today is separated and has a different entrance. The roof is high. The known length is some 60 feet, turning at a right angle some 23 feet from the entrance. It finally becomes narrower and continues on as a sinkhole or cat-hole that may come back into the cave. In this gallery there is a sign series in the form of punctuations, lines, etc. painted in red.

Once we get inside, we find some steps constructed by the

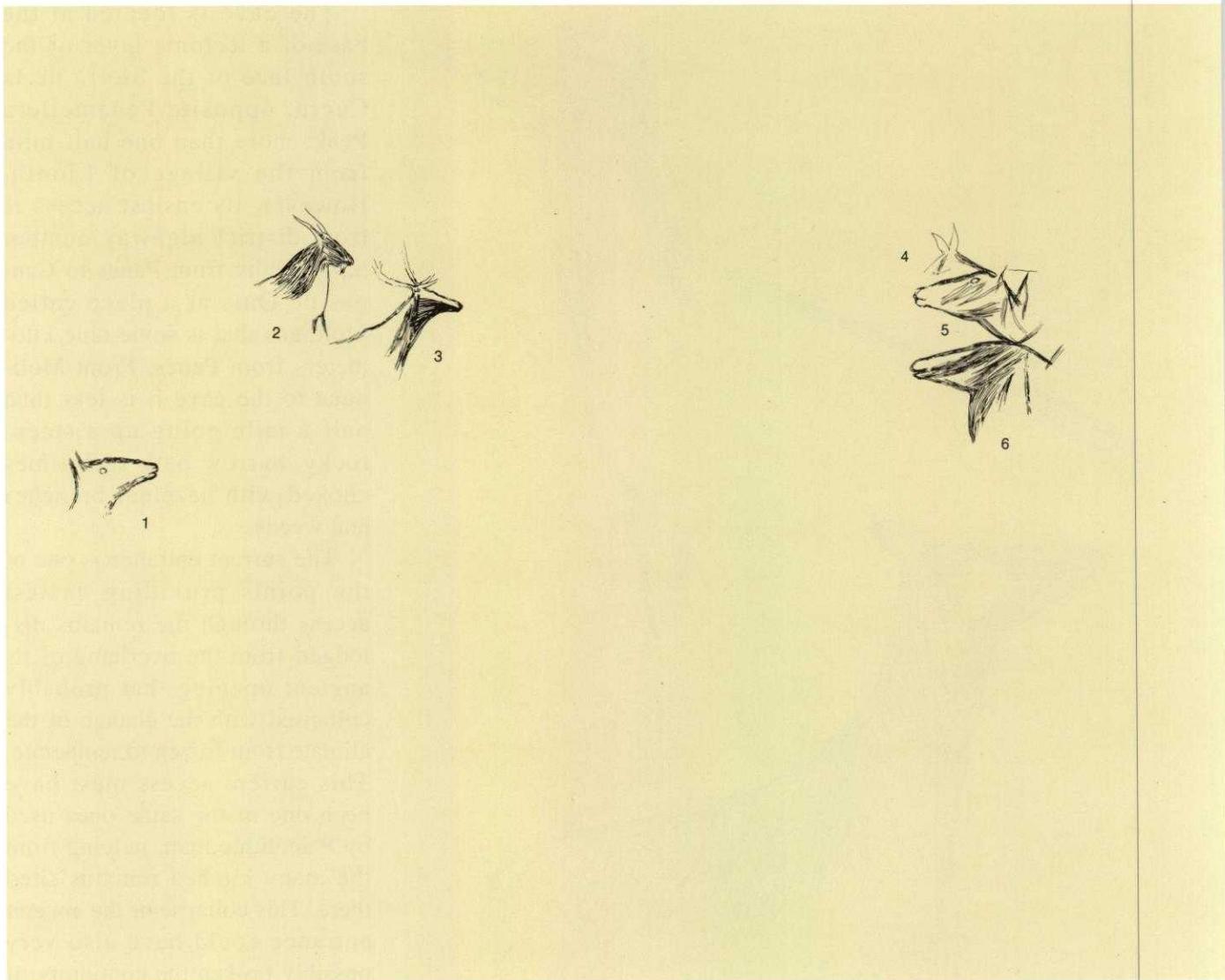


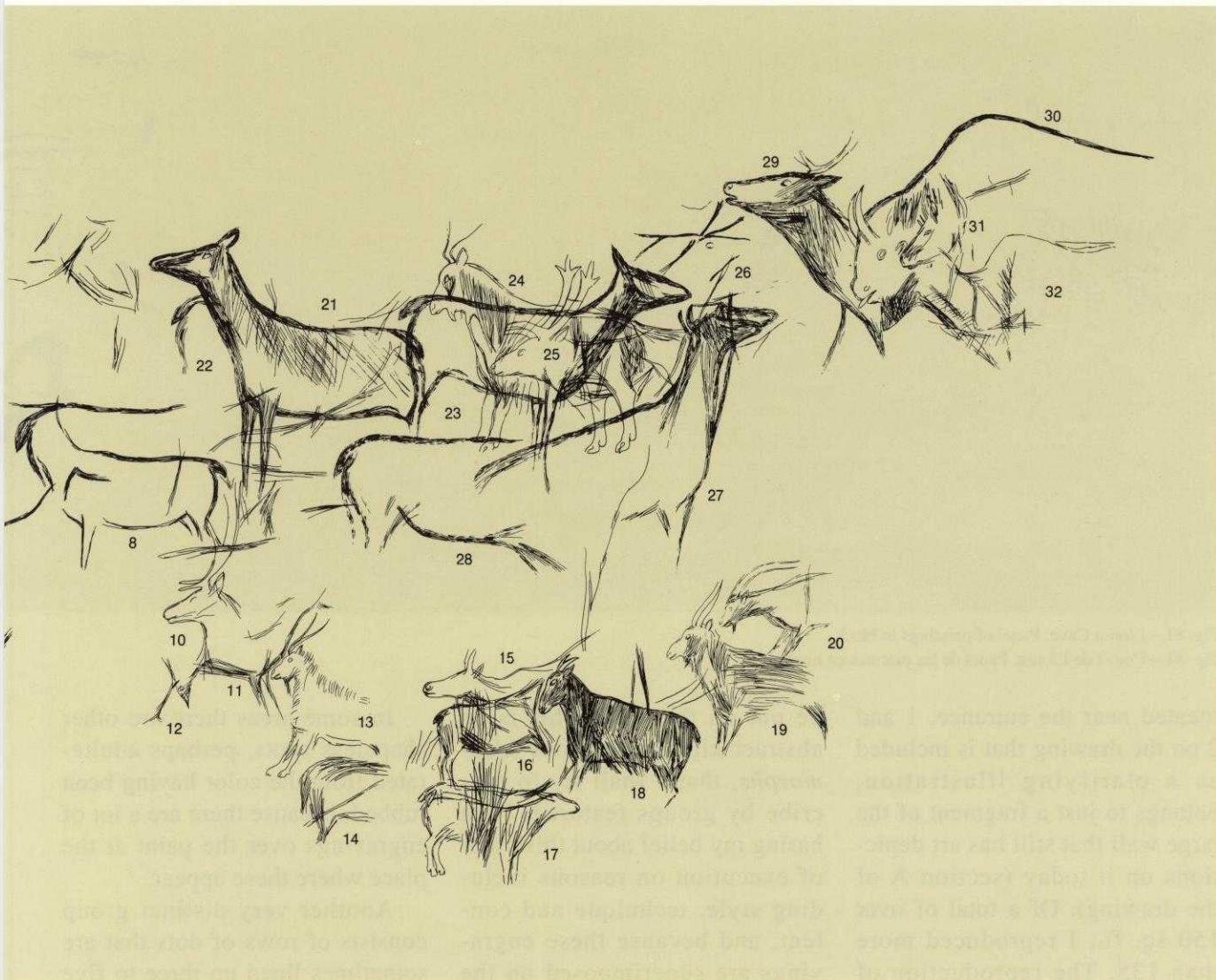
Fig. 80.—Llonín Cave. Group of engraved figures.  
Fig. 80.—Cueva de Llonín. Conjunto de las figuras grabadas.

Monje brothers during their stay. Before going all the way down, there is a wall to our left that has a small recess in it about 45 feet away having some red lines, remains of what no doubt would have been the figure of a deer, and near this, a very well defined depiction of a doe, having a length of 19 inches from the muzzle to the

tail. At the foot of this recess there is a strange sign engraved with very deep, wide cutting of a single line; its maximum length is 18 inches (fig. 73).

Some 25 feet from the above recess there is another one, and appearing on one of its walls is a horsehead also painted in red line with simple stroke and little artistic quality.

In this high area of the cave there is a fantastic forest of stalagmite and stalactite formations that have become joined together from top to bottom, forming a very beautiful colonnade with a height of over 20 feet in some places. The overall height of the cave from the bottom level to the ceiling goes all the way up to 70 feet.



The floor slopes down like a ramp, a small part of which is traversed by the above mentioned stairs, down to the floor near the wall where it becomes partially horizontal.

The layout is a rough oval measuring some 135 by 100 feet. (fig. 74)

The lowest level of the cave stops at the wall along which the

Art works of the main panel are displayed one after another.

For greater clarity in the reproductions, irregularities in the rock have been flattened out; that is, if a figure is engraved in a crack, the depiction in the copy is done by giving it its true measurements and not the ones seen in the display; in this way, certain barely noticeable

differences in location are produced.

### Description of Paintings and Engravings

Before going into this description, we shall state that the panel being reproduced, with the exception of the isolated figures

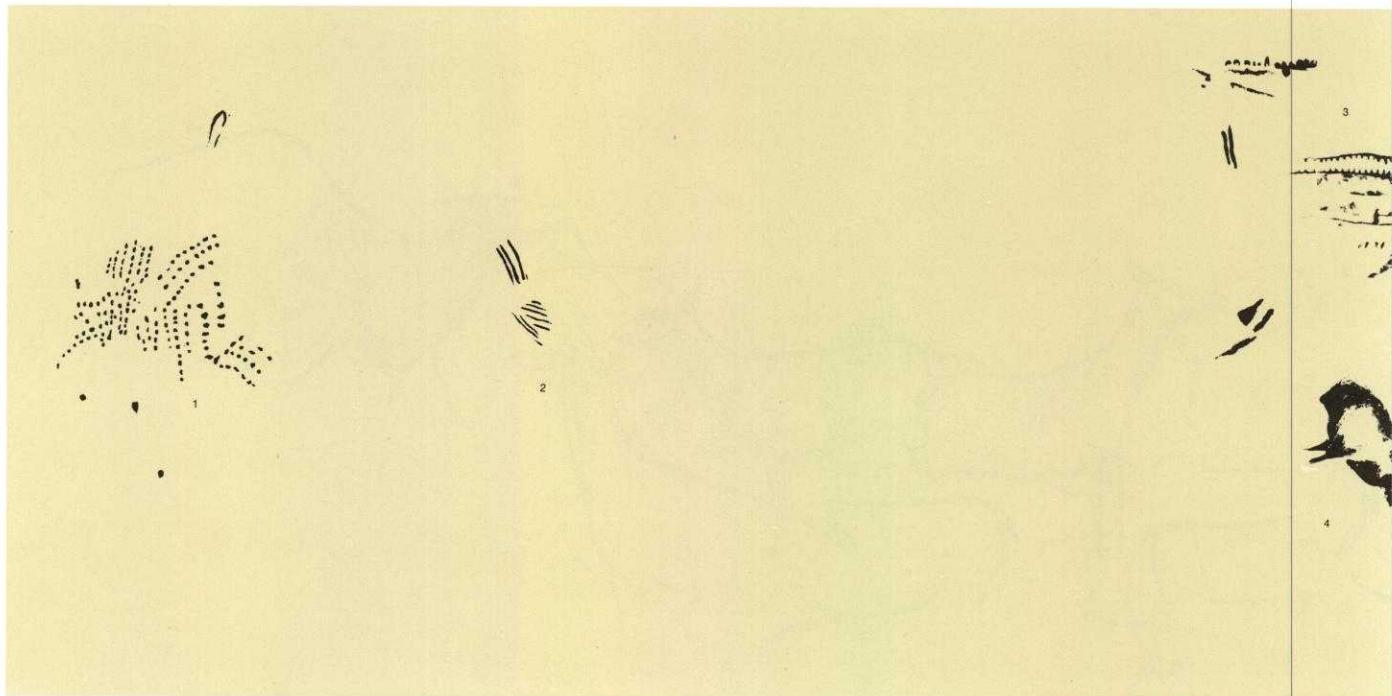


Fig. 81.— Llonín Cave. Panel of paintings in black.  
Fig. 81.— Cueva de Llonín. Panel de las pinturas en negro.

located near the entrance, 1 and 2 on the drawing that is included as a clarifying illustration, belongs to just a fragment of the large wall that still has art depictions on it today (section A of the drawing). Of a total of over 150 sq. ft., I reproduced more than 135. The reproduction of another fragment of about 55 sq. ft. is still pending, separated from the one before by an interruption of some sixty feet and another six feet to the left of the part studied (section B of the drawing) where there are only strokes or short lines of red paint and some engraving.

The wall is decorated with red and black paint, and with engravings. (fig. 75)

In my judgement, the depictions in red paint are the first to

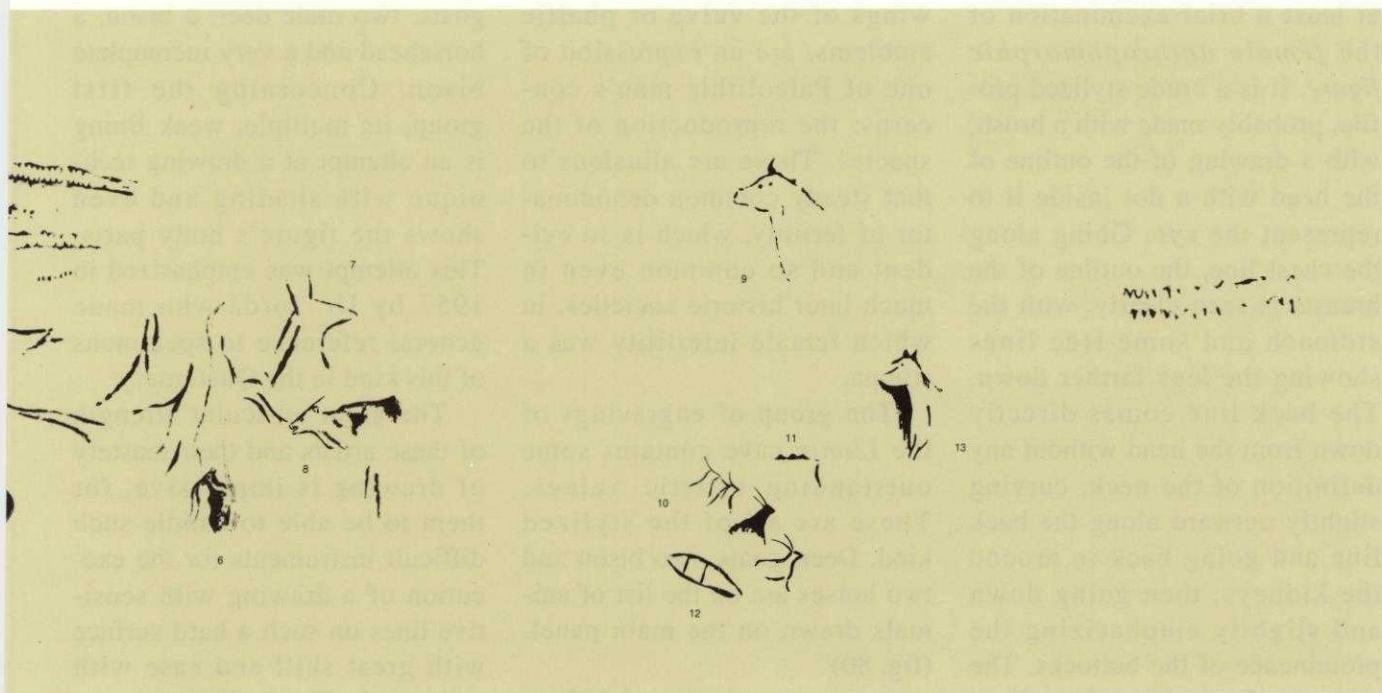
be put on the wall. This is an abstract kind of series or *ideomorphs*, that I shall try to describe by groups featured. I am basing my belief about this order of execution on reasons including style, technique and content, and because these engravings are superimposed on the red paint but not on the black paint except in rare instances, in which the latter appears to have been done at the same time as the engraving. (fig. 76)

This large group of signs includes a group of more or less vertical strokes that are sometimes wider on their higher part, gradually becoming thinner down to the base, giving the impression of having been drawn with paint smeared fingertips or with a brushing instrument.

In some areas there are other shapeless spots, perhaps adulterated from the color having been rubbed, because there are a lot of engravings over the paint at the place where these appear.

Another very distinct group consists of rows of dots that are sometimes lined up three to five in the deep.

Last, there is another one made up of signs that I would consider to be more unique. One is made up of six thick vertical strokes set forth in a horizontal row, along with another much longer, slightly curved stroke starting close to the center of the bottom part of the row, with the group taking on the strange appearance of a tinned shovel. Another most unique formulation is the one shown as N° 12



on the illustration of the red panel. This is a *female anthropomorph* and is the only example known up to now in Cantabrian wall Art.

In the lower part of the area where the above figure is painted, there is a serpent shape shown wound around in four pronounced curves, two above and two below, where the thickenings of the body are shown by a double line. Last, near the serpent shape, there are two groups of lines describing semicircular concentric arcs.

Analyzing these flourishes in red paint, we see that most of them are often found on many decorated walls in other caves, such as the punctuations and comma spots that are quite common in all of Cantabrian art as

well as art in other caves as far away as *La Pileta* (Málaga) or *Maltravieso* (Cáceres). However, these punctuations at *Llonín* have an intimate relationship with the ones at the Cave of *Chufín* (Riclones-Cantabria), and the lengths of the groups are even the same.

One of the most unique symbols is the one with the semicircular concentric lines that together with another similar one stylized in the above mentioned *Maltravieso* cave, are the only signs of this kind in our Quaternary Art. The painting at *Maltravieso* also has a serpent shape. There is a certain amount of similar figures, engraved or painted, in French Cantabrian Art. However, the most intimate relationship in shapes is defini-

tely between *Llonín*, *Chufín* and *Maltravieso*, making up a curious triangle of probable cultural unity, with its corners located at Cantabria, Cáceres and Asturias.

Prof. Almagro Bach classifies the paintings at *Chufín* as Aurignacian-Gravettian and the paintings at *Maltravieso* as Aurignacian, with ancient Perigordian as a possibility.

Within that age, we must consider the *ideomorphs* from the *Llonín Cave* as belonging to an evolutionary trend that would have started out in a pre-Aurignacian stage, going fully into Aurignacian with its later spread.

We should not end these commentaries on the red paintings of *Llonín* without stopping to make

at least a brief examination of the *female anthropomorphic figure*. It is a crude stylized profile, probably made with a brush, with a drawing of the outline of the head with a dot inside it to represent the eye. Going along the chest line, the outline of the breasts is seen clearly, with the stomach and some free lines showing the legs farther down. The back line comes directly down from the head without any definition of the neck, curving slightly outward along the back line and going back in around the kidneys, then going down and slightly emphasizing the prominence of the buttocks. The entire surface within these lines is unpainted except for the space between the stomach and the buttocks. There is a vertical line on this surface that is wider in the middle, which seems to indicate the vulva. (fig. 77)

No doubt what is intended is to arrive at a pictorial representation of a woman. However, though sculpture had already reached a high level of perfection with the rumpy Aurignacian *Venuses*, in contrast, stylized representations on flat surfaces during this stage were very low level and when they are actually attempted, the result is no more than a crude half sign and half natural imitation, such as we may observe in the cave at *Llonín*. Nonetheless, it is a symbol with a meaning we can figure out. Both the small female sculptures and the signs that are indirectly related to sex, often dra-

wings of the vulva or phallic emblems, are an expression of one of Paleolithic man's concerns: the reproduction of the species. These are allusions to that steady common denominator of fertility, which is so evident and so common even in much later historic societies, in which female infertility was a stigma.

The group of engravings of the *Llonín* cave contains some outstanding artistic values. These are all of the stylized kind. Deer, goats, two bison and two horses are on the list of animals drawn on the main panel. (fig. 80)

As we have indicated before, all these engravings are made on top of the red paint and their formulas of expression have nothing to do with it, for the red paint is an *ideomorphic* sign, and the engravings are stylizations imitating nature. Here we may clearly see two techniques: the ones that are done with weak, multiple and interrupted lines, both in outlines and the inside surface of the figures, and those that were done with just one deep stroke on the outline, or else with strokes that may not be single, but nevertheless have the same firmness and simplicity with an emphasis of some detail of the figures. Those that are made with many strokes are superimposed upon others, and this multiple, weak stroke technique is used with most of the deer pictured and on a goat. The other group has the rest of the

goats, two male deer, a bison, a horsehead and a very incomplete bison. Concerning the first group, its multiple, weak lining is an attempt at a drawing technique with shading and even shows the figure's body parts. This attempt was emphasized in 1957 by Dr. Jordá who made general reference to specimens of this kind in the Quaternary.

The great muscular strength of these artists and their mastery of drawing is impressive, for them to be able to handle such difficult instruments for the execution of a drawing with sensitive lines on such a hard surface with great skill and ease with their hands. The Prehistoric artist handles a chisel on hard rock with the same ease as anyone using a soft pencil on a piece of paper. The curves of the eyes, horns, nostrils, expression of the mouth, etc. where a mistake of even a millimeter would change the desired effect in depicting reality, are accomplished with complete confidence and skill, showing us that the man who did them was certainly young, had amazing physical strength, and must have also gone through a long apprenticeship which may have even started from infancy (figs. 78 & 79 A & B).

Without a doubt we can classify the artistic and chronological position of the execution of these engravings and the above mentioned technique within the same style and period of time of the engravings on the famous shoulders of the *El Castillo* cave

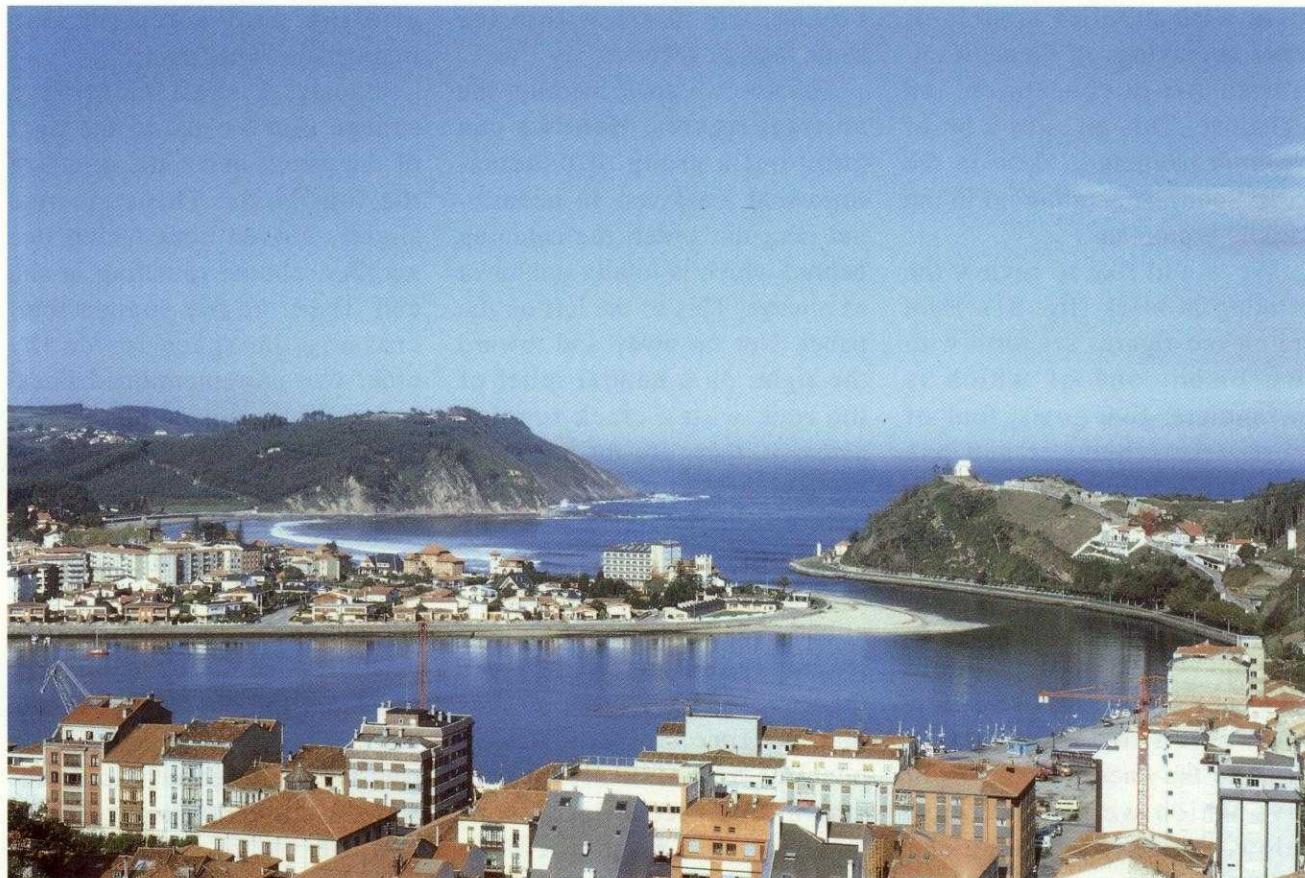


Fig. 82.— The Sella River where it empties into the sea, and the town of Ribadesella.

Fig. 82.— El río Sella desembocando en el mar. Bordeándolo, la villa de Ribadesella.

(Cantabria), which are not only from the same school, but also deal with the same subjects. These latter engravings are not the only ones like the ones from the *Llonín Cave*. There were also engraved bones found in the *Altamira* cave with a drawing style and technique that are also fully identified with the ones from *Llonín* and *El Castillo*. It is known that the bones from *Altamira* were from Upper Solutrean strata, or late Cantabrian Solutrean. The walls of *El Castillo* and *Altamira* provide us with further parallels to this school of

engraving in addition to what is provided by mobiliary Art.

We shall not go on explaining other kinds of comparative types. The interesting thing is to be able to define the time of execution of these engravings with multiple weak, interrupted strokes at the cave of *Llonín* from the above mentioned examples, as being within the late Cantabrian Solutrean. If we wish, we can connect them to the Lower Magdalenian, because even though in its day the Altamiran was thought to have belonged to the late Solutrean,

*El Castillo* was Cantabrian Lower Magdalenian.

Concerning the rest of the engravings that were made with a single, deep cut, their interpretation of nature is much stricter, lacking the imaginative liberties taken in the above engravings. They are also attempting a conception tending toward pictorial, something that is not present in the ones we are now observing, that depend entirely on line, and use only for maintaining strictness in execution. This is in agreement with the best Solutrean tradition, if we compare

them with parallel models of other engravings in French-Can- tabrian Art in conception and technique. This gives us a bit of freedom to include them in the early Solutrean, ending up in the Middle Solutrean.

We would like to review the painting in black (fig. 81). Here are eleven figures set forth with two bison, one of which is incomplete; five goats, four of these very schematic and one very richly painted with engraving at the feet; a deer head that is also very schematic; another figure that is hard to identify because it has partially disappeared, but which perhaps could have been a depiction of a fallow deer, given the similarity in shape to the ones at the *El Buxu* cave which we shall discuss below. There is a bovine and also another figure that is hard to identify because it is incomplete, but which could have some similarity to the likeness of a dog.

In this stylized art in black, the figures of the bison and non-schematic goat have a relationship in style. They are the ones having the greatest sensitivity, the best proportions in size and similar technical formulas; because these three, except for the spot of color, have engraving emphasizing certain parts of the drawing. The supposed dog and fallow deer also have some relationship with one another. Their Art is not as good as that of the preceding figures. The third group would be made up of the schematic goats, the deer and the

bovine, which are within the same kind of scheme.

Finally, we shall mention the abstract figures. Here we can point out a group of punctuations that are given an intentional irregular order, the meaning behind which is totally unknown as always. This to the left on the panel. Not far away and toward the right, on a natural relief of the rock with a crack running across it, there are three parallel vertical strokes of equal length painted on the surface of the upper half. On the lower surface there are five parallel strokes inscribed at an angle and of varying length, and to the left of these there are another three strokes that this time are vertical, also parallel and also of varying length. The special location of these lines on a rough part of the rock shows that they were put there on purpose, but as in so many other cases, this cannot be interpreted. If we just go by its appearance in looking at it, it could have a shape similar to that of some ceremonial masks; but this consideration, which is no more than a suggestion of mine, does not mean I am convinced of it.

Another of the motifs consists of two parallel lines crossed by small arcs inside. Judging from the amount of remains that are on the wall, this must have been a favorite subject. It gives the impression of having been drawn through some contrived means; what occurs to me is the possibility that it may have involved

printing with a reptile skin impregnated with paint.

Lastly, I shall mention a strange sign located to the right of the panel, under the group of the four goats. These are two slightly curved lines facing one another, almost touching at the end. There are two straight lines crossing the space inside the other two aforementioned lines. In its shape, this could suggest devices that were used for walking on snow.

As we have already stated, these black paint designs are superimposed on top of stylized engravings in places where both exist. This shows us at the very least that the engravings of the figures were done before the painting; but if we put this together with the very distant artistic idea between one and the other, we must come to the conclusion that they were done at different times.

There is a comparative example of the bison in the cave of Le Portel (Ariège, France) and the similarity is so great, that I have no doubt that these two paintings are from the same stage of Art and even from the same school. But we also have local examples such as a bison from the *El Buxu* cave (Cangas de Onís), (fig. 134) and also the bison from *Santimamiñe* (Vizcaya). These above mentioned examples were classified in the Middle Magdalenian through studies of the paintings. Given the similarity of this observation, we must agree that these two bison figures from

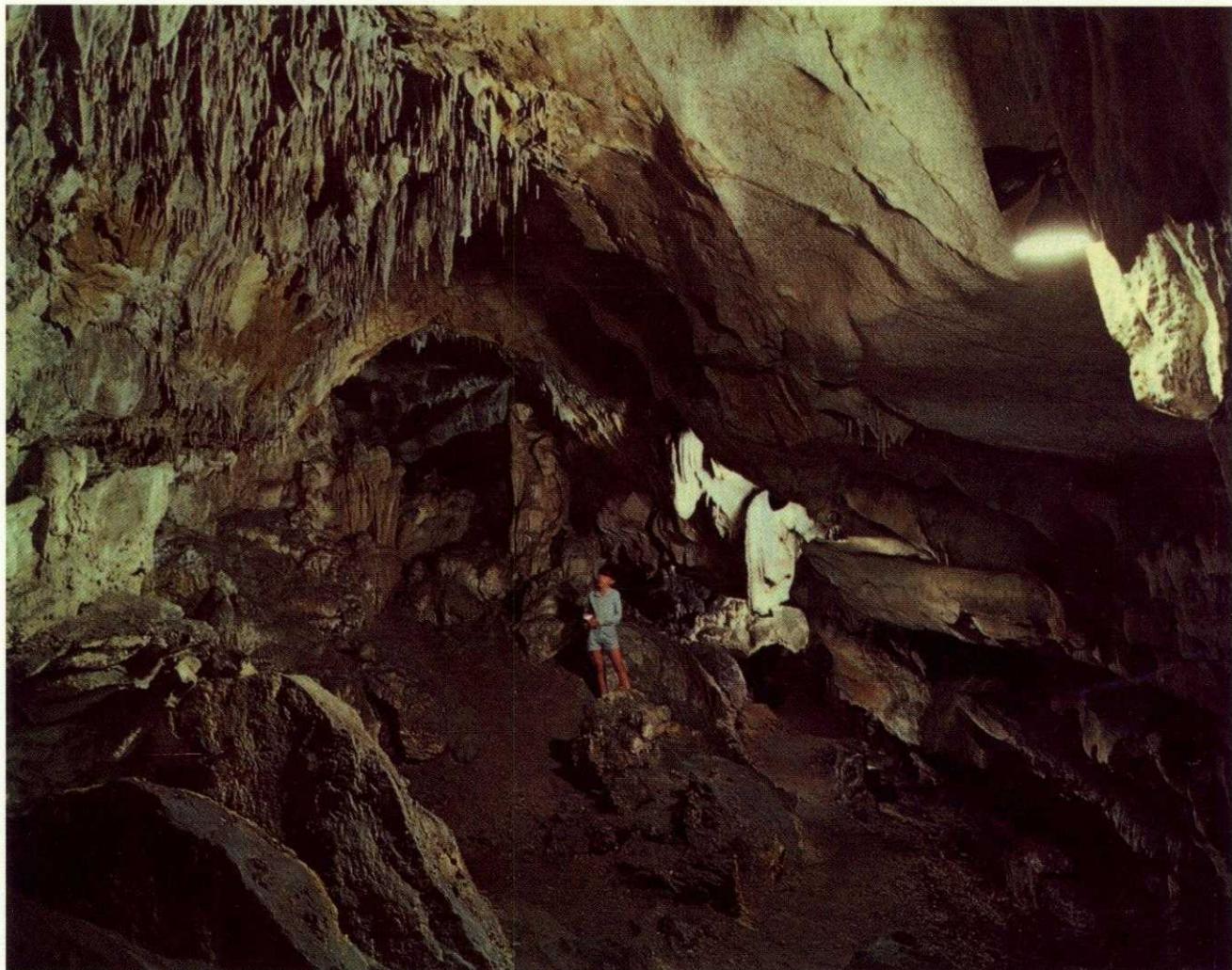


Fig. 83—Cave of Les Pedroses, inside the cave.  
Fig. 83—Cueva de Les Pedroses. Interior de la cueva.

The *Cave of Llonín* also belong to the same stage; not only that, we would also include in that same time, the magnificent figure of the billygoat that we made reference to in praise of its fine artistic qualities.

The rest of the stylized representations are very simplistic in execution due to lack of attention to detail, or else they did not know how to do them properly. We are now faced with Art in

degeneration, which instead of true joy with nature, is merely for putting down a summarized version of the figures. There are local examples of this way of doing things, such as the small deer of *El Buxu*, (fig. 125), the goat at *Peña de Candamo* (fig. 150) and in Cantabria, several more; for example, the female reindeer at *Las Monedas*, two deer at *Las Chimeneas*, a goat at *La Pasiega*, three does at *Cova-*

*lanas*, etc. This entire group of comparative types is in the late Magdalenian which I find very appropriate for classifying these figures from the *Llonín* Cave.

Engraving has its summit in the early and middle Solutrean, and painting comes forth with its best examples at the time of transition between the Solutrean and Magdalenian flourishing during the early stages of the Magdalenian. Decadence sets in

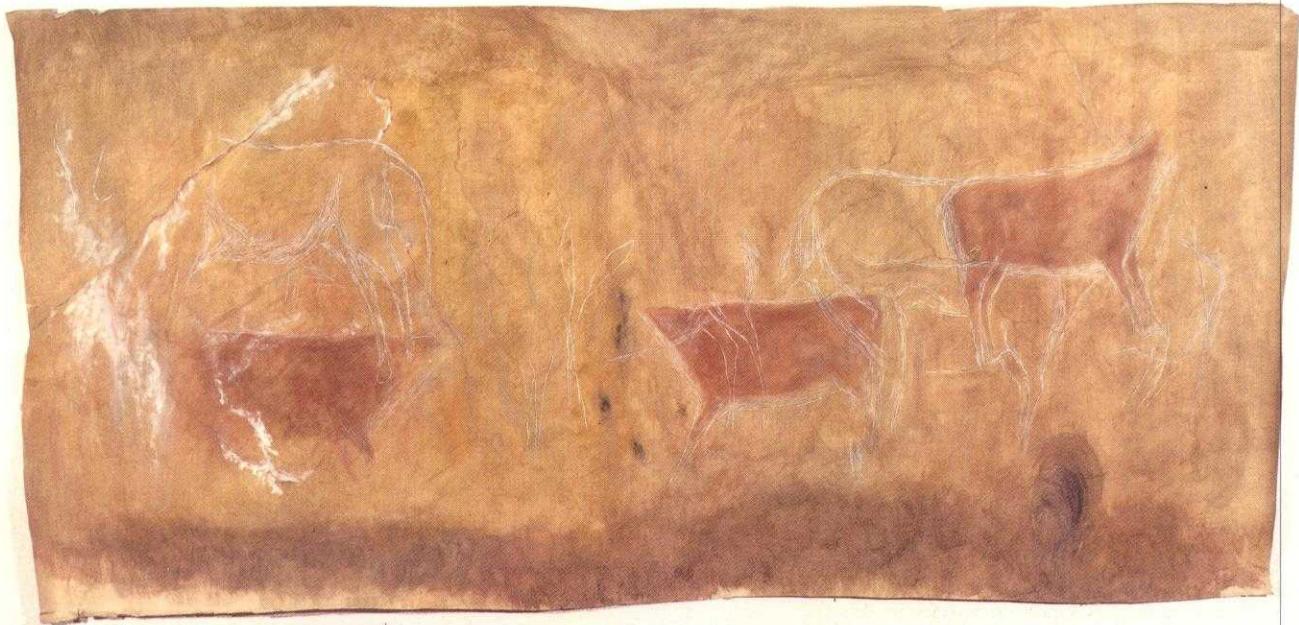


Fig. 84.—Cave of Les Pedroses. Decorated wall.

Fig. 84.—Cueva de Les Pedroses. El parietal decorado.

after a good part of the middle Magdalenian has gone by, with somewhat of a return to the sign philosophy of abstract models done with black paint during the last gasp of this great Magdalenian stage, when the beginnings of the Azilian are already being felt. I believe that the black abstract paintings of the *Cave of Llonín* may be classified there. In an attempt to summarize this long chronological and stylistic process of explanation I have subjected you to, dear reader, taking advantage of your patient disposition and desire to become acquainted with the Art that was created by our Prehistoric ancestors, and to enable you to see the trees through so much forest, I would say that the abstract stylized

zations in red paint at the *Llonín Cave* would fall within the Aurignacian cycle with a prolongation of the Aurignacian-Gravettian.

The stylized engravings would fall into the Solutrean and Solutrean-Magdalenian; and the stylized black paintings would be within the Magdalenian way past the middle, with more and more schematic models toward the end, and at the very end, the sign motifs we have mentioned.

The contribution made by *Llonín Cave* is so significant that I would not hesitate in calling it sensational, at least in my way of thinking. The way it reinforces and provides new means of support to hypotheses that have

been maintained on the evolution of Prehistoric Art for some time, is quite comforting.

Its variety of symbolic and abstract wall Art is diverse and abundant, and it offers new things that may help us in clearing the road some day, so we can get to that translation code that may give us access to better knowledge about the hopes and concerns of our ancestors.

On the other hand, the good art sense shown in most of the examples of stylization of nature is a real pleasure for the viewer, and it fills us once more with deep admiration by evidencing the great sensitivity of these Paleolithic men who were capable of creating works of such beauty.

## CHAPTER VIII

# THE CAVES OF THE TOWNSHIP OF RIBADESELLA

### Location

If we make another zig-zag along our road in search of Prehistoric Art, we shall return back to the coast to enter the Ribadesella area, where the waters of the Sella river also provide the name: Ribera del Sella or Bank of the Sella.

Insofar as the Sella is concerned, we can say that this is a salmon river and indeed one of the best, and among the best in other respects as well. Ever since the beginning, at the dawn of time, it gave life and encouraged vegetation with water as clean as

a block of ice, with the boiling silver of salmon vaulting through the air.

It is so completely entwined in the geophysical innards of Asturias, that the Eastern part of Asturias would not really be itself without the Sella. It becomes Asturian from Puerto del Pontón onward, and the headwaters of its childhood go rushing down six miles toward the South. It then enters adolescence to pit itself against the Asturian mountains in harsh lessons in preparation for adulthood. It finally becomes a celebrity once it comes into the valley, with wan-

dering meanders in search of its most comfortable route after having taken on the waters of tributaries such as the Piloña and becoming a significant river. And it is significant, because as I said before, the inviting shores of its banks, the banks of the great Sella, brought forth life long time ago (fig. 82).

Thousands of years ago, the Ribadesella area must have been something like London; a Prehistoric London. I say this because within a relatively small area, there is a whole series of caverns that were inhabited by Quaternary man: The caves of *San Antonio, del Río, La Moría, Tito Bustillo, La Cuevona, Cova Rosa, El Cierro and Les Pedroses*. These are the ones that have been explored, providing an abundance of material. There may be more, but as yet they have not been discovered.

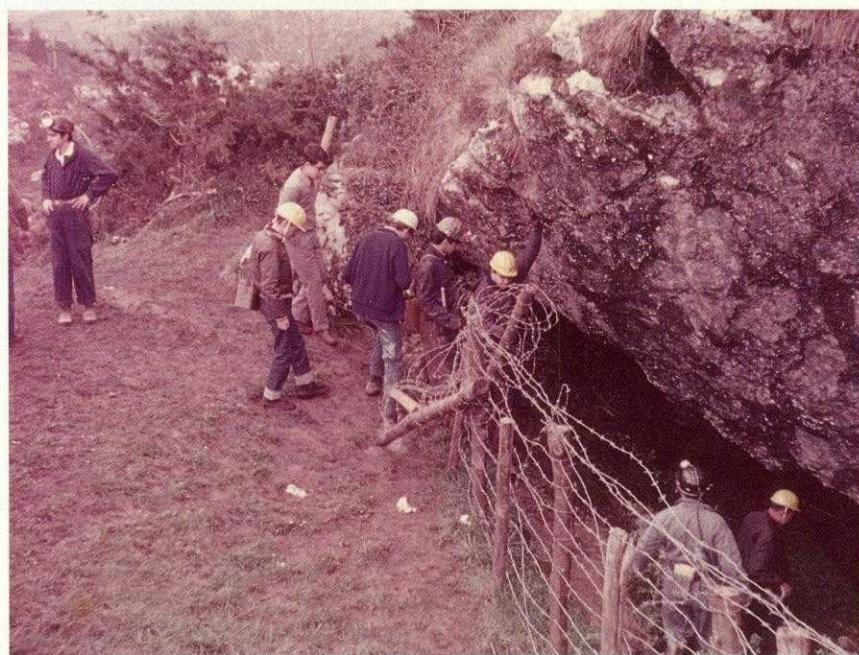


Fig. 85.— Tito Bustillo Cave. Exploration Group, ready to make one of their first descents into the cave.

Fig. 85.— Cueva Tito Bustillo. Grupo para exploraciones comenzando uno de los descensos.

### La Cuevona

*La Cuevona* is located on the left bank of the estuary. Here is where the San Miguel river takes its first steps underground, and also gets involved in the recesses of the neighboring *Tito Bustillo* cave. The San Miguel river is not very significant as such today, but when the rains come, it becomes considerably larger

and wider. Most of the above mentioned caves are nestled at its edge except for one, the San Antonio cave.

The main hall of *La Cuevona* is an enormous cone with a base measuring some two hundred fifty feet in diameter and a height close to two hundred. From its wrinkled walls project stalactites hanging down as though their petrified paralysis may have come about at the moment of a convulsion. The human figure is dwarfed and made totally insignificant by outcroppings rising from the floor, and by the great height of the peak. At the peak, to set off this whole fantastic vision, there is an opening letting in filtered light from outside that slithers down the walls, revealing the wrinkles of this tortured throat.

*La Cuevona* has no paintings nor engravings, and in digs that were made several decades ago, objects were picked up that were classified as Mousterian, though none of these specimens showed any hint of artistic talent. Therefore, the only reason for our visit here is to view its outstanding and unusual natural beauty, and to mention its probable link with the *Tito Bustillo* cave nearby. This link is almost certain even though it may have been closed off by a slide. I have followed these speculations down the tortuous road leading off from the main hall, until I arrived at places that were no longer accessible to me due to the abundance of water and lowness of the ceiling.

## El Cierro

The *El Cierro* cave does not have any wall Art either, and insofar as objects are concerned, it has only the usual poor quality of Asturian findings to offer. There are some bones carved with thin geometric cuts of a Magdalenian type. Its first explorer was Jordá in 1954. The significant findings of material are valuable and very interesting from a scientific point of view to fill in the missing pages of the book of Prehistory (fig. 38).

## Cova Rosa

In Art, *Cova Rosa* follows the same pattern. Prof. Jordá himself started excavation there and work still continues. There is no wall Art. It has yielded early Cantabrian Solutrean and Solutrean-Magdalenian tools with some engraved pieces from that era; the outstanding one is a wheat-spike drawing on a flattened bone shaft (fig. 36).

## La Lloseta

This name was given by Jordá; it used to be called *La Moría*. Right now there are some studies that are attempting to identify it with the so called *del Río* cave from prospecting during the last 70 years. Jordá did a methodical excavation in 1955 and the fruit of this work was a magnificent study published in 1958. It has no wall Art either. During the tours made by the

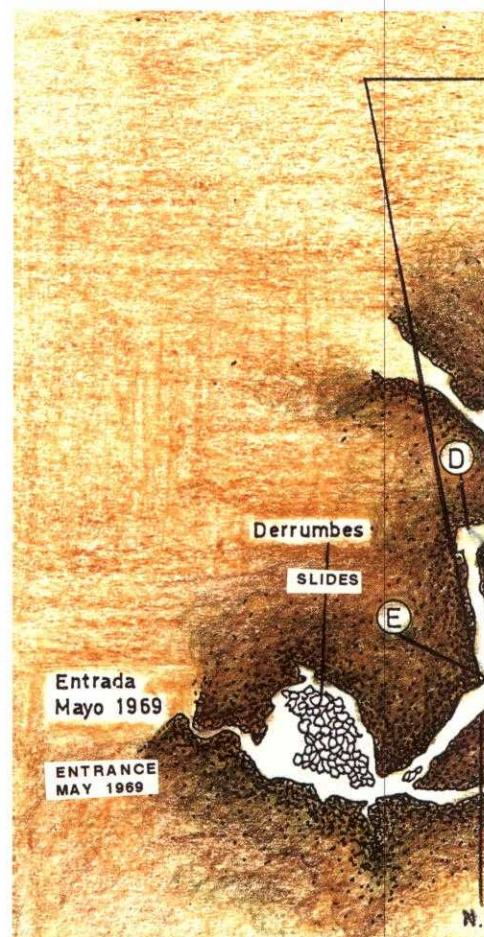
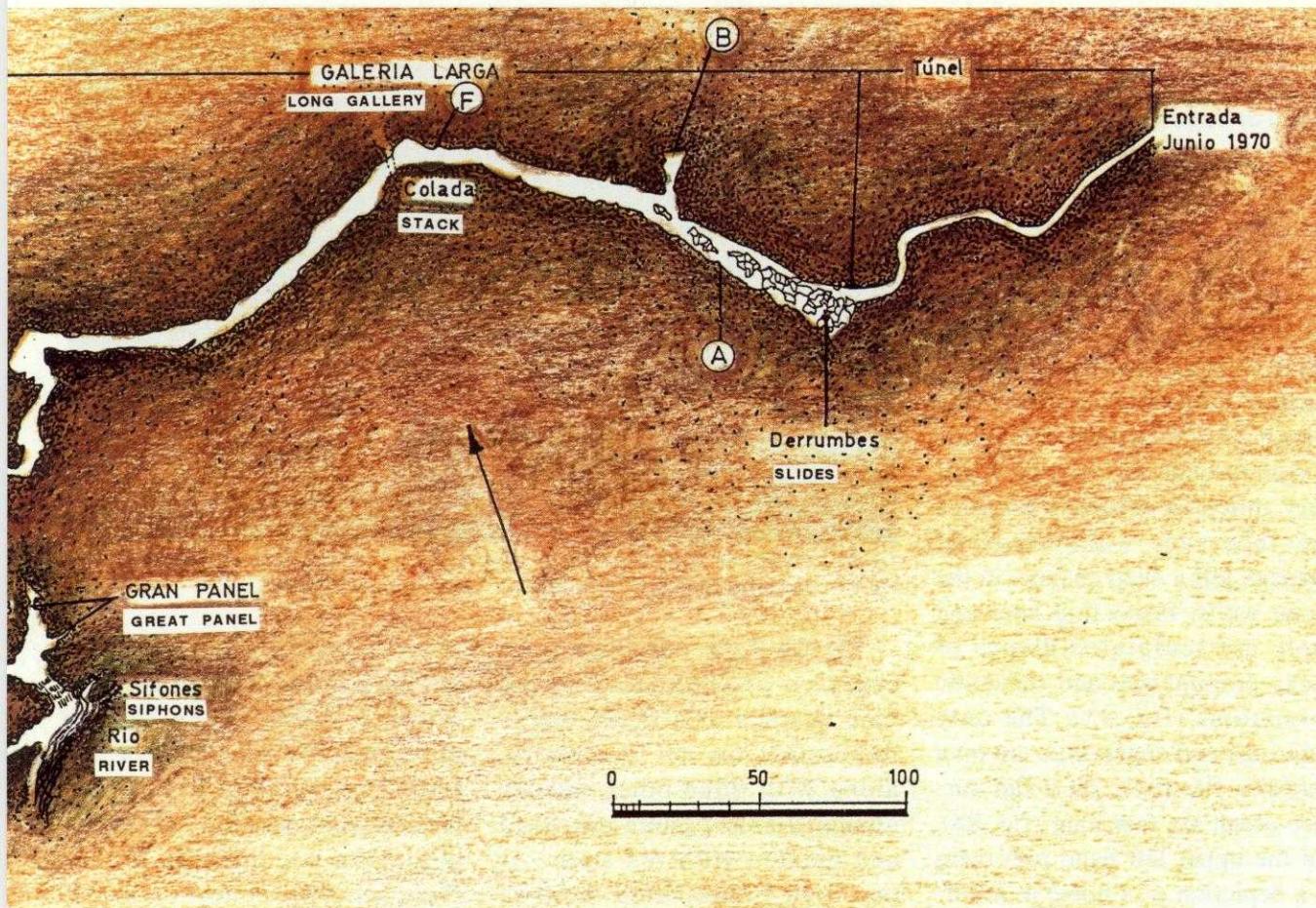


Fig. 86.- Tito Bustillo Cave. Map of the cave.  
Fig. 86.- Cueva Tito Bustillo. Plano de la cueva.

Asturian Group for Underground Explorations, a possible link was discovered between this cave and Tito Bustillo cave. Though this link may be attempted in a perilous descent from La Lloseta, it cannot be accomplished the other way around; therefore, this link could have never been used as such by Prehistoric man, and it should be understood that habitation of these two caves was never connected. For these reasons, when we talk about the paintings at the Tito Bustillo cave, we also include the ones at the end of the



path of descent mentioned before, already quite close to the gallery of this latter cave.

In mobiliary Art, there are several Magdalenian bones with simple decorations with series of lines crossed by other series, or isolated lines.

### San Antonio

The *San Antonio* cave, explored by Hugo Obermaier in 1913, shows a modest wall depiction of a horse, crude and of simple line, painted in black.

### Les Pedroses

Significant wall decorations in Ribadesellan caves begin at the *Les Pedroses* caves. These were explored by Prof. Jordá in 1956. I made a reproduction of their Art works that same year.

This cavern is located at the town of El Carmen, which is some four miles from the local seat of government, Ribadesella.

After going over such a meandering crazy road, anyone who would think that he would also find an equally strange village of

ramshackle houses jumbled with abandon all over this mountainous geography is wrong, because the houses of El Carmen are lined up along the edge of the highway with orderly civility. But this is an order in which here and there, we find gardens surrounded by iron rail fences surrounding a mansion. Here, from these gardens, now and then we see the long neck of a palm tree emerge. It is so strange that in so many towns in Asturias, we see the exotic figure of the palm contrasted with the

flora and spaciousness of this geography, which denotes the property of an immigrant from Spanish America, that nostalgic other world of Asturias, and here, a remembrance of lands abroad.

*Les Pedroses* is a cramped cavern without too many mazes, but the floor is very jumbled from rushing waters with very marked variations in level. The stamp of the waters that once rushed through this cavern is still very much in evidence because the incessant wanderings of currents left a deep channel in the stone walls. Projecting here and there are sculptured domes of rocky prominences and stalactitic formations (fig. 83). The only paintings and engravings are on a partially flat rock, on a flat surface about six feet long (fig. 84). On the upper left hand part there is a depiction of a horse in multiple dashed line engraving with shading at the chest and stomach area. The drawing of the neck and most of the head has been lost, but part of the nose and mouth may still be seen. Lower and to the right there is another engraving with similar technical characteristics showing a fragment of a deer with the front feet, stomach line, flanks and hind feet. To the right of this figure there is another engraving that also seems to be a deer. Higher than the latter and partially superimposed upon it, there is also an engraving of what could be the hind quarters of another deer. Though they are nothing spectacular at all from the standpoint

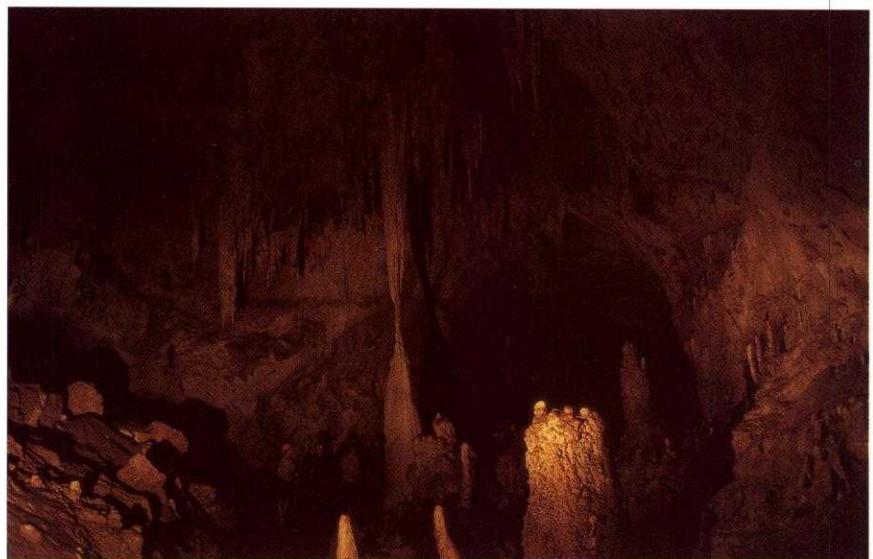


Fig. 87.- Tito Bustillo Cave. End of the tunnel and beginning of the "Long Gallery".  
Fig. 87.- Cueva Tito Bustillo. El final del túnel y comienzo de la «Galería Larga».

On the right side there is an engraved drawing showing the hind quarters of a figure that is impossible for me to identify, along with three other equally unidentifiable figures engraved and painted with red stain. At one time I interpreted these as bovines but now prefer not to, due to the obscure definition of the drawing. The figures are small in size, ranging between 16 and 20 inches.

There are still free lines engraved along this panel which may have belonged to other zoomorphic depictions that unfortunately have almost completely disappeared.

The truly amazing thing about the figures at the *Les Pedroses* cave is that with the exception of the horse described at the beginning, all the rest have been shown without a head. Though they are nothing spectacular at all from the standpoint

of artistic quality, they definitely are from the standpoint of these missing heads. Even though there are a few examples of isolated figures shown with this feature, until now the only group depiction we have is at *Les Pedroses*. This collection provides us with one of those very clear examples of richness and variety of ritual formulas within the magical-religious orientation that pervaded the development of Prehistoric Art. We do not know what these headless animals might have meant, but they do show us that they were a result of a situation involving new, far reaching dictates and not just any mere whim.

Because of its smooth, superficial multiple line technique that actually looks more like a pen drawing, these could have been made during the Magdalenian cycle, perhaps at a stage somewhat past its midpoint.

## Tito Bustillo Cave

This unique cavern enclave in Ribadesella where man came to his mysterious encounter with the supernatural, setting forth the unknown code of his *ideomorphs* and the naturalistic stylization of the varied animal world living with him, enriched the Prehistoric Art treasure one April back in 1968 by contributing one of the most beautiful collections of paintings in the world, deserving of being in the same room with the Cantabrian paintings at *Altamira* or the French paintings at *Lascaux*.

On April 12, 1968, a group of young explorers of the innards of the Earth took their first steps in an enormous cavern whose toothy

mouth yawned over a high plain, at the end of a limestone knob shot through with streaks like Gruyère cheese (fig. 85). Close to here was the town of Ardines, part of the suburban belt of Ribadesella, the local seat of government. The small hills dotting this area would give it an almost moon-like appearance were it not for the green grass that thrives against all logic, shooting right out of the stone itself.

These underground explorers arrived at an entrance platform and there they discovered a partially hidden crack inviting them into a strange, dark route going straight down toward the traditional road to hell. In back of them was the blue sky of a warm springtime; the vast luminous

plane of the sea; the murmur of the Sella worn down from its long and difficult voyage; the belt of mountains that crowd up against each other to look over the Cantabrian sea and the glory of the bright, young dynamic sunshine, which was more appropriate to this youthful, energetic group than this strange, dark shaft.

This speleological group was called *Torreblanca* and was associated with the Asturian Underground Exploration Federation (GESCA). On that day, April 12, 1968, they were making one of the descents required for eligibility for membership in the federation. However, along with this, they also succeeded in enriching the catalogue of caves that had been

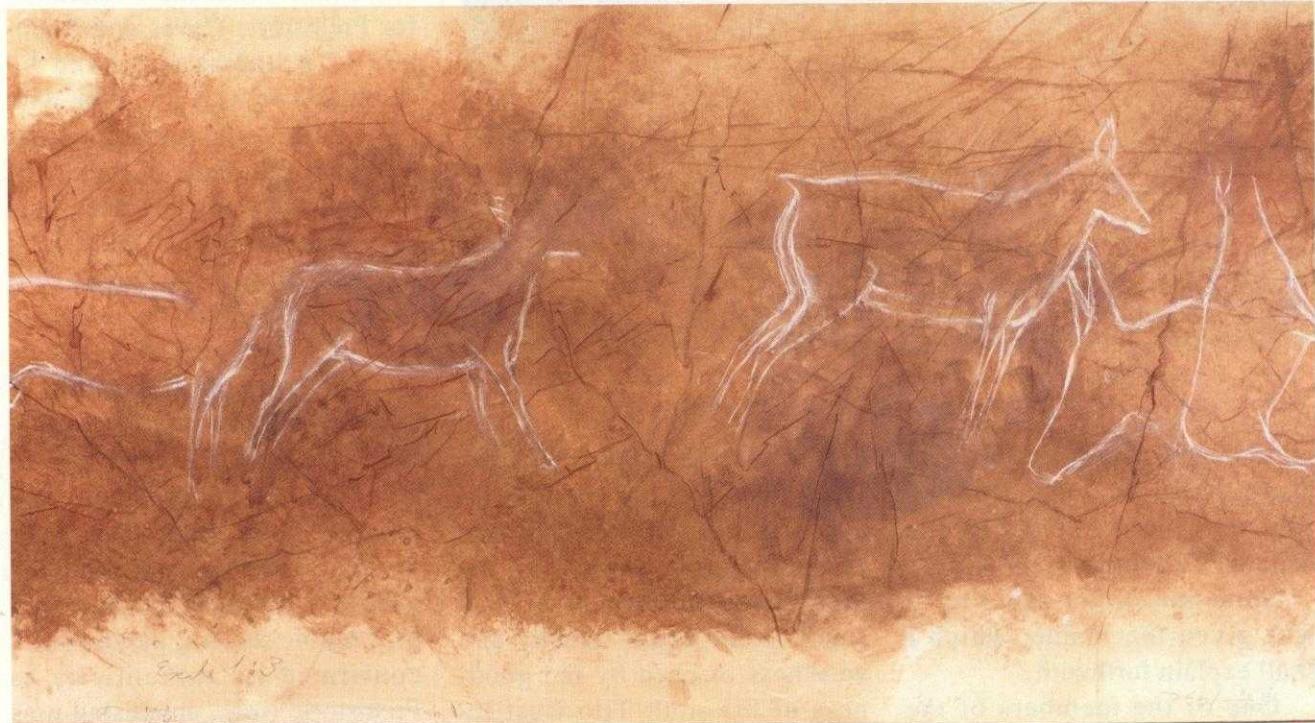


Fig. 88.—Tito Bustillo Cave. Engraved does and bovine.

Fig. 88.—Cueva Tito Bustillo. Ciervas y bóvido grabados.



Fig. 89.—Tito Bustillo Cave. Signs painted in red and partially engraved.  
Fig. 89.—Cueva Tito Bustillo. Signos pintados en rojo y parcialmente grabados.

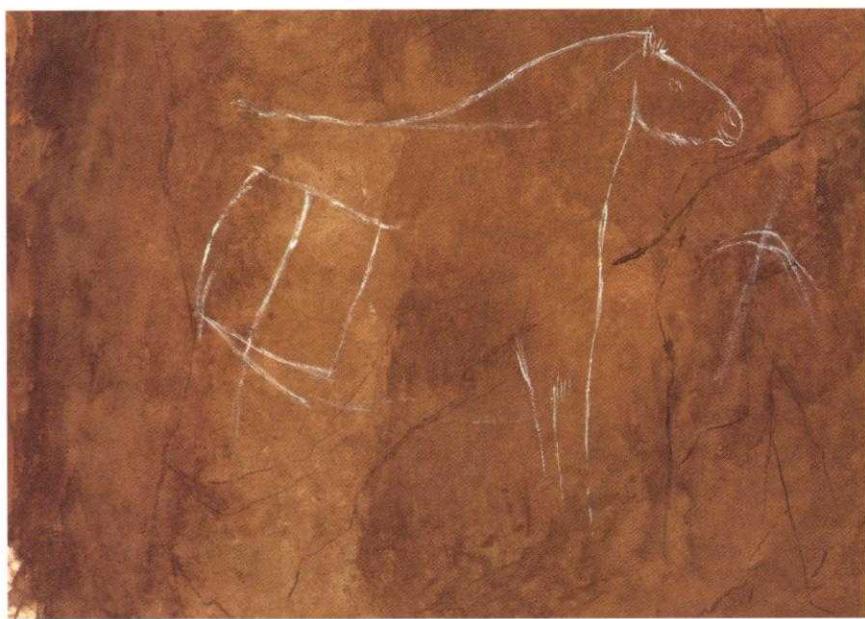


Fig. 90.—Tito Bustillo Cave. Engraving depicting a horse and an ideomorphic sign inscribed on it.  
Fig. 90.—Cueva Tito Bustillo. Grabados de un caballo y de un signo inscrito en aquél.

inhabited in Ribadesella's Prehistoric past, with this contribution that would be given the name of *Tito Bustillo*.

Someone might ask why it was given that name, which I shall explain forthwith.

One of the members of the group was Celestino Fernández Bustillo, called Tito Bustillo by

his friends. And he, his eighteen years filled with generosity, was a true example of nobleness and companionship; always on the alert for problems large and small, so he could remedy any weakness or need by the goodness of his soul. Tito Bustillo went down into the bowels of the cave that warm spring day

and the light of his carbide lamp by chance illuminated these art messages sent by ancestors thousands of years before in time, and the entire Group, with the real world yet before them, still wondered if what they were seeing was actually real.

Nineteen days later, on another part of Asturian ground, at Agüeras in Quirós, Tito Bustillo emerged from one of these dark holes to return to the varied, brilliant landscape with his eyes gazing upon it in contemplation; but all of a sudden, under his feet there was the sound of shifting rocks with a message of death for this very dear friend.

Therefore, in his memory and upon my urging, this cave was given his nickname; a posthumous honor that the Foundation for Prehistoric Caves and Deposits of Asturias approved by resolution on May 17, 1968 with the blessing and support of the General Directorate of Fine Arts.

Until then, that entrance hole of unknown length had been called *Cave of the Cerezal*, because to one side on open land there was a cherry tree, and its mutilated stump still remains.

So on that day April 12, 1968, the Torreblanca Group ventured into this intriguing cavern and nine days later, on Sunday, April 21, this writer descended into the gallery to finish off the discovery of a whole artistic panorama. I confirmed its authenticity as Prehistoric work, appraising it as one of the most significant and beautiful specimens of wall Art

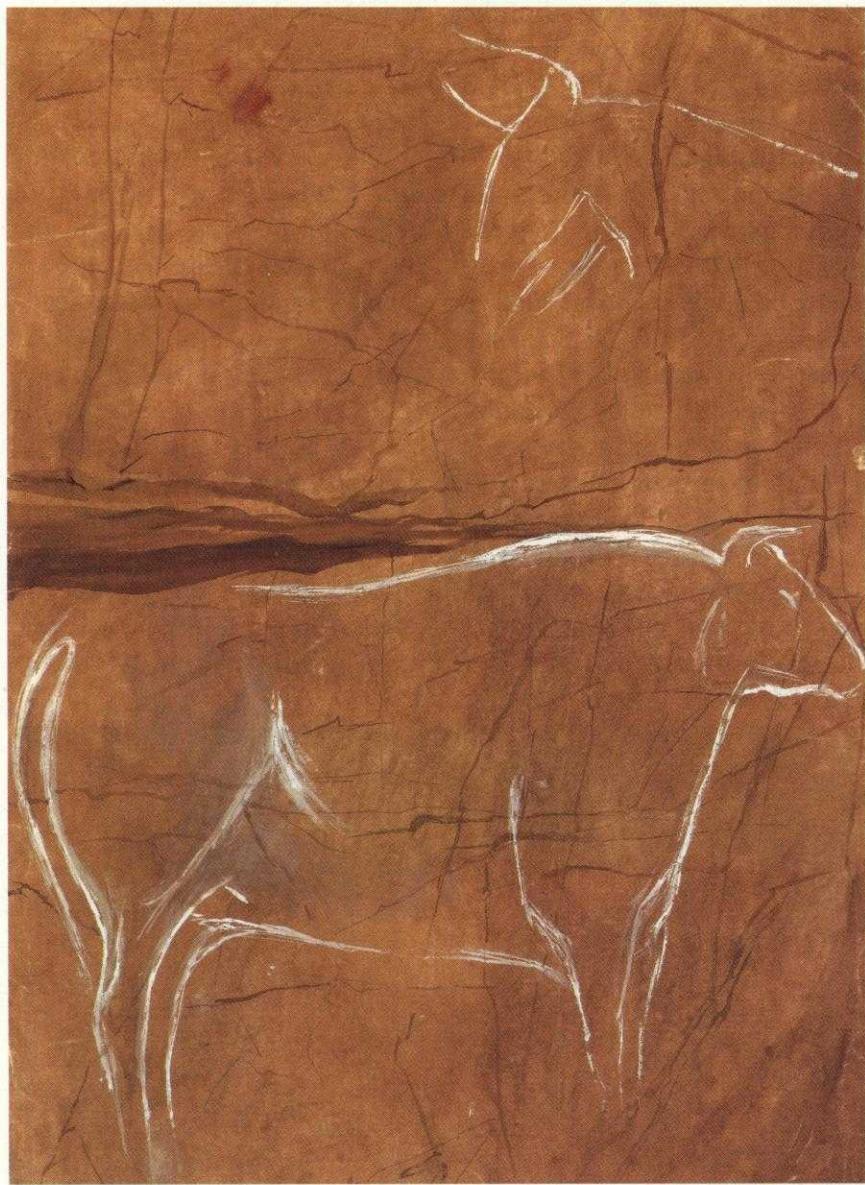


Fig. 91.—Tito Bustillo Cave. One complete bovine engraving and another partial one.

Fig. 91.—Cueva Tito Bustillo. Grabado de bóvido completo y parcial de otro.

in Europe. In this first descent of mine, the *Long Gallery* was explored and the deposit area and access used by Paleolithic man were discovered. This access had been shut off by the collapse of a stone overhang that had watched over the entrance, which was a frequent happening, perhaps in

response to the last climatic change with the emergence of comfortable temperatures causing wide thaws and much water penetration. The rock outside, being subject to rapid change of climate and less support on the overhangs over the entrance, could have responded to this by

causing these slides, though fortunately by that time, man had already started living in the fields outside.

On April 24, 1968 I sent the first report to the General Directorate of Fine Arts on what would no doubt be a great event in the field of Prehistory. The following June, I published a paper on this subject in *Ribadesella 1968* magazine, and on September 15, a reference in *La Estafeta Literaria*.

Later descents into the gallery over the months enabled me to do studies and make reproductions and photos of the paintings so I could classify them by their scientific and art value, and complete a graphically documented work published as a monograph by the Royal Academy of History in January, 1969 and in its Bulletin for the first quarter of that year.

If I have digressed in these details it is because this news concerning the cave, given the spectacularity of its discovery, was given wide publicity through a number of agencies both domestic and international, and prompted the arrival of a large number of persons wishing to view this famous Prehistoric legacy. Such visits were not allowed back then due to the many risks of its precarious access. Therefore, the Caves Board agreed to re-open the ancient entrance, which was opened to the public in August of 1969. Studies continued into the winter to facilitate this entrance that is now being used.

On recalling these dates, I also evoke the names of Tito Bustillo and the members of the Torreblanca Group and other friends who were at my side in the first descents and helped out in the first explorations, including: José Manuel Suárez D. Estébanez, then president of G.E.S.A. and Marino Fernández Canga who mapped the cave (fig. 86).

The difficult, accidental first route of descent has been shut off and now access is through a 540 foot tunnel. At its entrance there is an engraved stone showing the date of discovery and the name of the Torreblanca Group responsible for it. This access route has

been opened up at the end of the cave opposite from the one that was used by Prehistoric man. It opens up directly into what I have called the *Long Gallery*. To the left on entering there is an enormous washout going all the way up to the ceiling that presumably could have cut off linkage with the next cave, *La Cuevona*. At least this seems to be indicated on the one hand by the explorations that have been made which I have mentioned in earlier pages and on the other hand, by the peculiarity of the wall paintings that we find only at the start of our tour of this gallery of the *Tito Bustillo* cave. Upon their

arrival inside, visitors are surely impressed by the imposing scenery contrasting with the dark sobriety of the tunnel (fig. 87).

We have barely begun our tour when we find an engraved depiction of three does on the left wall. They are in a group, running in single file after each other. The stroke of the drawing is in wide line, mixed also with scraping and multiple tracings. To the right of the first doe, there is also a drawing of a doe's head, but larger than the rest; also, there is a bull in single stroke, with its lengthwise axis parallel to the floor and just one foot shown per pair. This sug-

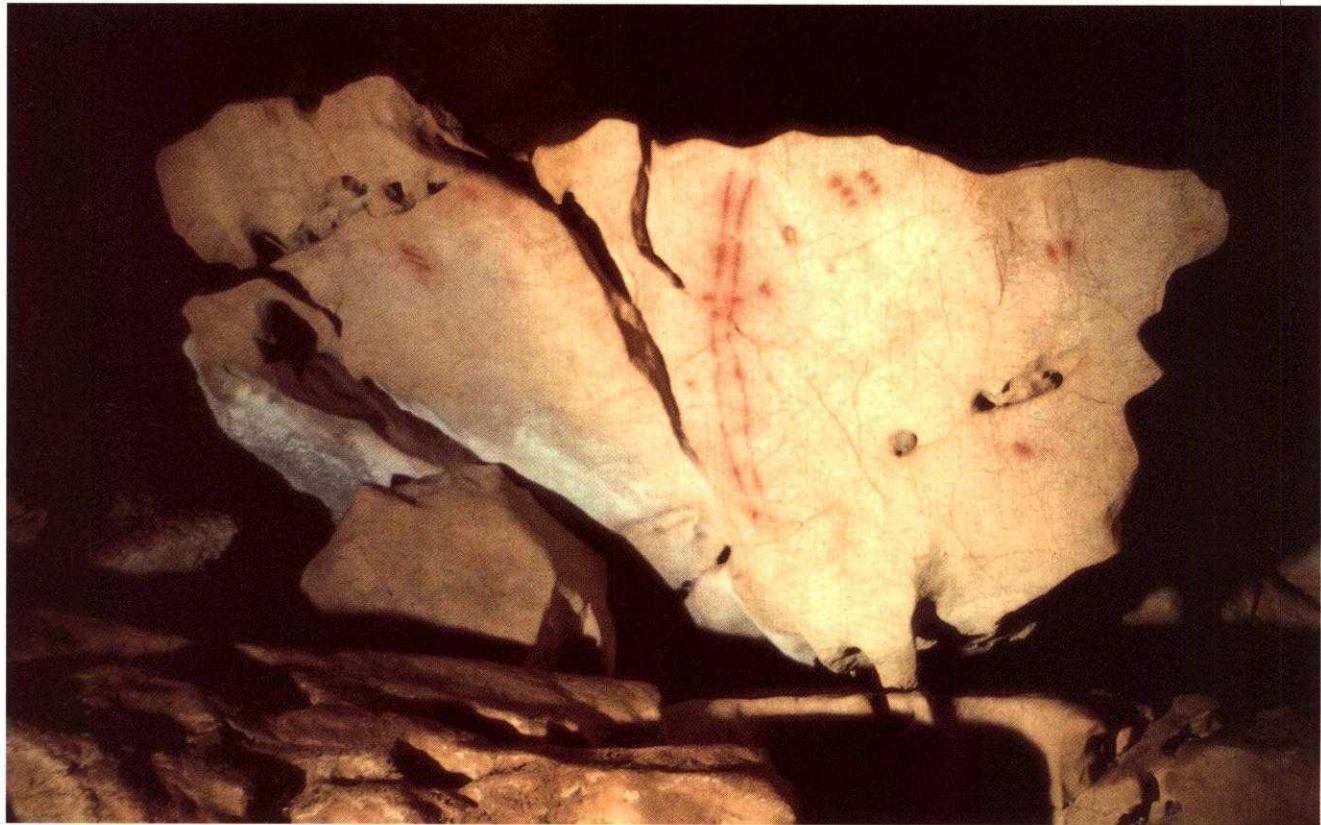


Fig. 92.—Tito Bustillo Cave. Red painting of signs.  
Fig. 92.—Cueva Tito Bustillo. Pintura roja de carácter signífero.

gests to me the possibility that these last two engravings may have been made before the engravings of the does (fig. 88, *part A of the map*).

On a lower area of the wall and a short distance from the above figures, there are two signs of equal size in the shape of an H with the outline in engraving, filling the inside of the three main lines making up the figure with a red pigment (fig. 89). Lastly, on the same wall and close to the latter, there are three engravings. One of these is of a horse with a four-sided sign divided in two by a vertical line inscribed on it, and to the right, the remains of a drawing that is also of a sign type (fig. 90) outside the figure. There is a marvelous drawing of a bovine below. This is a very complete figure, and the only part of it that has been lost is part of the hooves. There is also an engraving of another incomplete bovine figure (fig. 91).

Almost opposite this part of the wall there are two large rocks in the middle of the path with signs painted on them in red composed of short little lines, some of which are crossed diagonally and others vertically and few horizontally. There are also two lines drawn in an open arc with some small protruding spots (fig. 92). Under the rock with this last *ideomorph*, there is a sinkhole also having elongated red spots in different places.

Following the path through the gallery and a bit farther inside, there are some edges of outcrops



Fig. 93.—Tito Bustillo Cave. Vulvar signs painted in red.

Fig. 93.—Cueva Tito Bustillo. Signos vulvares pintados en rojo.

tinted in red on the wall to the right, and just a few steps from these is the beginning of a rough ramp some 33 feet long sloping up, which allows us to enter a small hollow with five shield-shaped signs also painted in ochre among elongated red spots and punctuations, that can no doubt be identified as vulvar symbols. It is quite possible that this series of signs may be a magical invocation of fertility. This small hollow extends out tortuously in a short, narrow cat hole also having red spots on the walls (fig. 93, *part B of the drawing*).

We continue our tour of the *Long Gallery* along a path exuding heat and humidity, flanked by a fantastic spectacle of the playful games of Nature. Bunches of stalactites hang down like the pipes of an impossible organ, full of rich variations of color taken from water filtered

through different minerals such as limestone, sandstone, manganese, iron; and here and there, once more the artificial marks of mankind in new signed messages along the wall to the right, in the form of dots, commas or whip shapes (fig. 94).

But it would be good to stop and ponder a consideration on these abstract shapes painted with ochre that we have found all along our walk through the *Long Gallery*. Their most spectacular manifestation is found at the *Hollow of the Vulvas*. These are all along the first few feet of the tour, and there are no more with the same features in the rest of the cave.

The engravings we have reviewed in this section are stylized, and they are naturally not a product of the same cult interests as the red signs. They are evidently due to the fitness of this

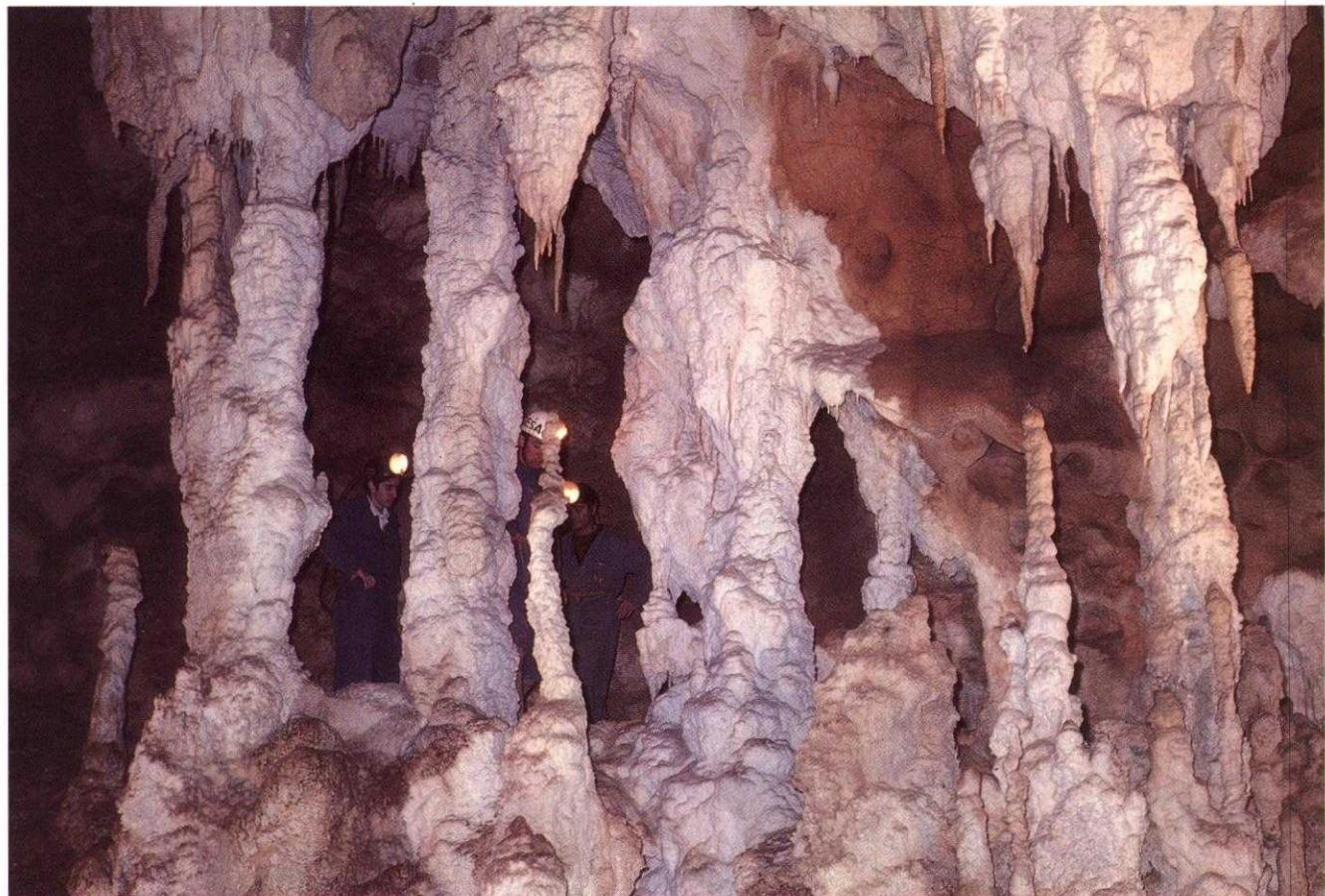


Fig. 94.- Tito Bustillo Cave. A view of the "Long Gallery".  
 Fig. 94.- Cueva Tito Bustillo. Un aspecto de la «Galería Larga».

part of the cave for habitation during the Aurignacian era, which probably enjoyed the assumed access from *La Cuevona*, which is now cut off by the slide I mentioned above. I will not pursue the cause of this Aurignacian classification for reasons of brevity, and because it not only coincides with my personal judgement set forth already in other writings, but it is also in agreement with the judgements of Professors Jordá and Beltrán Martínez.

The engravings are something else again, and we shall

deal with them at the proper time.

About 110 yards from the *Hollow of the Vulvas* there is a vertical shaft several yards long that links up with the *La Moría* or *La Lloseta* cave. It is not a practical way to get there from *Tito Bustillo* and on the way back, coming down can just barely be accomplished, because these twenty or more basically vertical yards of sharp, narrow confines require an extreme amount of skill. However, a few yards from the start of a supposed ascent from the *Tito*

*Bustillo* cavern, man also left some Art specimens. There are two small heads painted here in red; one appears to be a deer and the other is of a goat. We shall describe one of these very rare graphic documents on paintings of this kind. They are rough portrayals in thick red lines and not very explicit in detail, so therefore it may be possible that their zoomorphic identification may not be entirely accurate. (figs. 95 & 96, section C of the drawing).

Following the road down the *Long Gallery*, there are four engravings a few yards away on

the wall to our left in a small hollow, three of which are of abstract figures that are hard to interpret and the fourth could be held to be the depiction of a goat. In these four, that are small in size, the engraving technique is the same and they appear to have been made with a serrated spatula type of instrument because the flutings of the engraving are very regularly parallel. Coming or going is the same, and so we now get moving again to go back to the right wall of the *Long Gallery*. Here in this place there is a narrow, hard to find crack opening up into a small hollow with a very low ceiling. Several drawings were engraved here with great artistry depicting horses, a bovine and a deer atop a block of stone, the last of which was drawn without a head (fig. 97, section D of the drawing).

Though I did not reveal this panel in its entirety until 1985, in 1970 I had already given notice of this finding to the Press (*La Voz de Asturias*, 12-4-1970) along with publication of a photograph including part of this group of very interesting drawings; so interesting due to their magnificent workmanship with mastery and artistic value equal to that of the depictions on the *Great Panel* that we shall describe below. Among these, I would like to point out the figure of a mare where a crack in a rock is used for placing the drawing of the head. The entire character of this figure is shown with perfection and extreme sen-



Fig. 95.—Tito Bustillo Cave. Deer head.

Fig. 95.—Cueva Tito Bustillo. Cabeza de cérvido.



Fig. 96.—Tito Bustillo Cave. Goat head.

Fig. 96.—Cueva Tito Bustillo. Cabeza de cabra.

sitivity; with its neck curving down toward the ground line, it puts its head down as though to look for grass. Inscribed on its body is the erect head of a colt, with open, hopeful eyes and rounded features still far from the angularity of maturity. On the wall opposite this decorated boulder there are two more engravings of cruder style, one of which can be identified as another horse.

Going back along our return road, from right to left, on the

wall and at some height above the floor level of the cave, we find another hollow, this time more spacious both in its entrance and ceiling height. Here on the left wall as one goes in, there is a sizeable engraving of a rather strange shape that some experts have identified as a depiction of a fish. I myself have very serious doubts about the identification of this figure. Under this and in small size, there is a depiction of a goat in single cut engraving. On the wall opposite there is a very numerous group of marks that were drawn with fingers on soft clay, which today is fully hardened. These marks go from top to bottom, and within this up and down pattern they trace a slightly winding and crossing pattern that seems at times to be an attempt to define some sort of figure; but despite my good intentions and efforts, I have not yet been able to identify it.

After having gone about a third of a mile, the *Long Gallery* comes to an end and we find ourselves in a wide, high-ceiling square with a floor of fine sand that we decided to call *The Great Hall* on April 21, 1968 (Part E of the map, fig. 98). This is where the three galleries comprising the cavern area come together. One of these we have just described; the other is the one going from *The Great Hall* to the entrance used by Prehistoric man where he left a rich deposit of utensils and kitchen hearths in the vestibule. A small

part of this site was first excavated by Miguel Angel García Guinea and later by Moure Romaniello. The most ancient strata have not yet been reached, but it has already provided very interesting material from different Magdalenian ages with outstanding artistic examples that I shall mention at the proper time. There are still many cubic yards remaining without excavation, some lying under gigantic blocks of stone from an equally gigantic slide. Personally, I have always had the idea that this deposit would be able to provide us with Solutrean material, with the wall Art specimens serving as my basis in this. Also, if the abstract depictions at the beginning of the *Long Gallery* were the work of the same men who used this site, then of course Aurignacian material would be found. But is not very probable that the latter will happen, because these artists who did the abstracts could have used the entrance that was blocked off by the slide and supposedly was linked to *La Cuevona*.

These boulders from this huge slide have remains of broken engravings; that is, very probably done before they were dislodged. There is also a painted figure of a bovine, which though poorly preserved, shows evidence of a possible *outside sanctuary*.

Very close to the excavated area of this deposit there is a human skeleton stretched out on the ground under the rocks from the slide at the entrance which no doubt trapped this

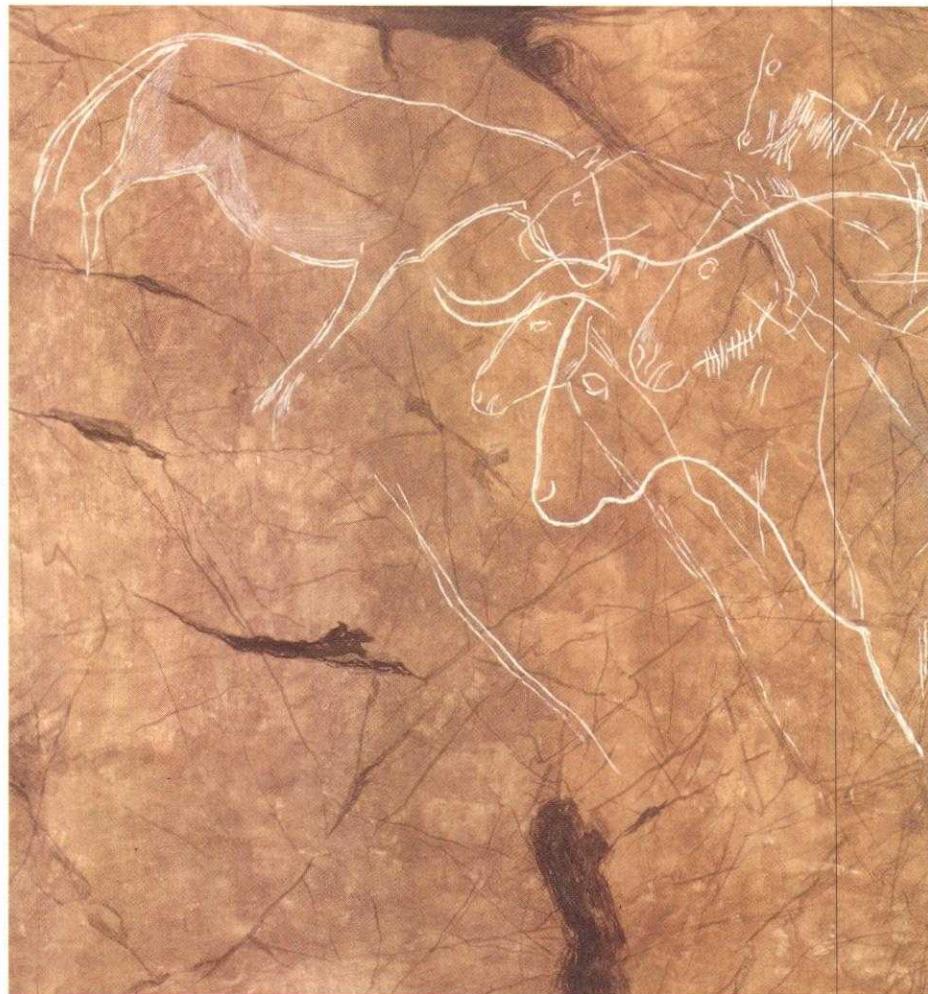


Fig. 97.—Tito Bustillo Cave. Engravings representing horses and a bovine inscribed in a hollow of the "Long Gallery".

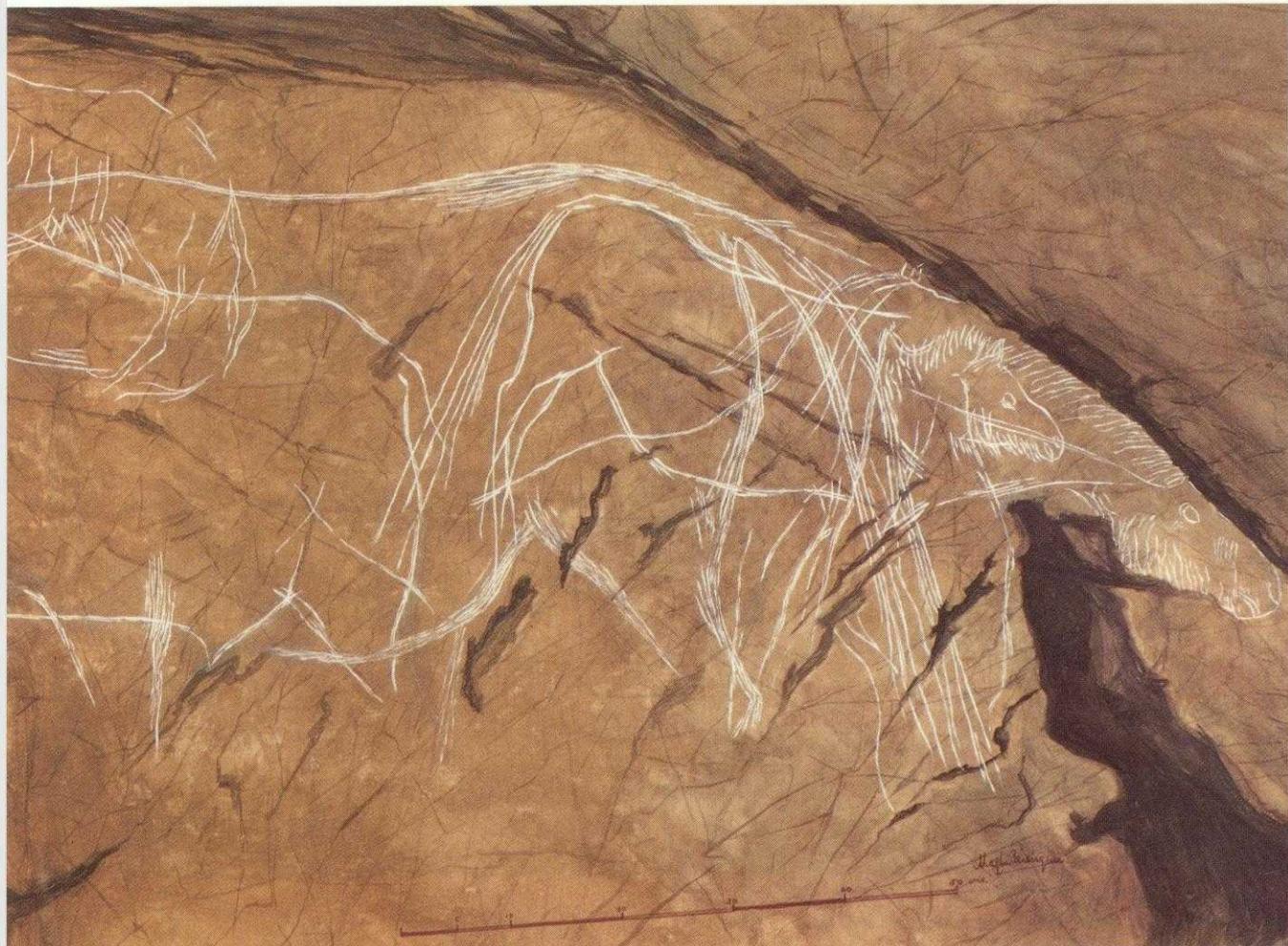
Fig. 97.—Cueva Tito Bustillo. Grabados representando caballos y un bóvido inscritos en una covacha de la «Galería Larga».

individual to whom the remains belonged, which by first examination appear to be much later than the age when this cave was occupied.

But we still need to say that about halfway along this arm of the gallery going from *The Great Hall* to the deposit, is the opening of a shaft enabling accidental access to the cave. It is very probable that the same convulsion that blocked its natural

entrances was the one that caused this underground break through which we went sliding dangerously for over a year.

The *Great Hall* is where the first large size figure is found. This shows a horse painted in very dark carmine stain, almost purple, which defines the draping of the skin with the stone left blank in the stomach area. It measures 5' 5" from muzzle to tail. The bottoms of the feet are at



the outlines soft, some white, red, and others of a yellowish hue.

At the entrance to the Great Hall, on the floor level. Water has surely run over the painting several times, destroying its details, for the mane and tail are hard to distinguish because they are blurry. The outline is very sensitive and well drawn and this, along with the other details mentioned, is evidence of the excellent art skills with which it was done (fig. 99).

On this same wall and a few yards toward the gallery leading to the main *sanctuary*, which is

above, there are several more paintings, but they are not as good as the one in the Great Hall.

On the wall of the third gallery coming into the Great Hall, there is a sign painted in red with its rectangular shape defined by small, short spots laid out in a regular fashion rather than by lines.

Along the way to the most important group of paintings in the cavern, there is a gorge over to our right some forty feet deep where the San Miguel river runs. It winks up once again to the sky in greeting and then empties out

into the Sella through several channels, one of which runs parallel to the entrance tunnel. But the San Miguel, which is no more than a small tributary, makes an awful roar as it goes

rushing through the confines of the cave. Some ten yards or so from this gorge we come to a wall that will present us with several yards of a fantastic continuous technicolor panorama of Prehistoric works of Art that



Fig. 98.- Tito Bustillo Cave. A view of the "Great Hall".  
 Fig. 98.- Cueva Tito Bustillo. Un aspecto de la «Gran Sala».

have made this cave the queen of Asturian caves. But these artistic specimens begin with the most modest, so admiration and surprise may start to grip our soul slowly and gradually.

This is like a preview of what we used to call the *Great Panel*. It was made where the gallery widens into a larger room, though still small, with just a hint recalling the domed architecture of a Romanesque chapel. It gives us this absurd impression due to the colorfulness and tones of the paintings and stone, as though after so many centu-

ries they might have been absorbed into one of the apocalyptic murals done by the master from Taull (fig. 100).

The floor is of fine sand, built up in large amounts by water currents that must have rushed through this place time and again after mankind made these decorations. Maybe they were never completely covered by water, because only the bottom of the composition shows a clear definition of one of the levels; but it is evident that water did go through there and flowed into the channel of the San Miguel River not once

but many times. The sinkholes it went through may be seen at the base of this decorated wall, draining the flooded floor. The road from the *Great Hall* and the entrance to the *Great Panel*, which is slightly sloped, confirms this course taken by the currents, which at times must have been quite turbulent, because the floor is covered with several layers of loose slate carried in by currents.

Fig. 100.- Tito Bustillo Cave. General vision "Great Panel" paintings.  
 Fig. 100.- Cueva Tito Bustillo. Vista general del «Gran Panel» decorado.



Fig. 99.— Tito Bustillo Cave. Horse painted with dark carmine-violet stain.

Fig. 99.— Cueva Tito Bustillo. Equido pintado en mancha de carmín-violáceo oscuro.

These are made up of tiny fossils and petrifications deposited along the slight slope of the ramp because they were heavier than the sand.

A few yards away from the last painting of this extraordinary Art collection, this arm of the gallery starts narrowing gradually until it ends in a dead end where the waters bounced back looking for an easier way out through the sinkholes.

Buried in the floor of the *Great Panel* area under a layer of sand about a foot and a half deep over another sand layer of unknown depth, was a deposit of utensils.

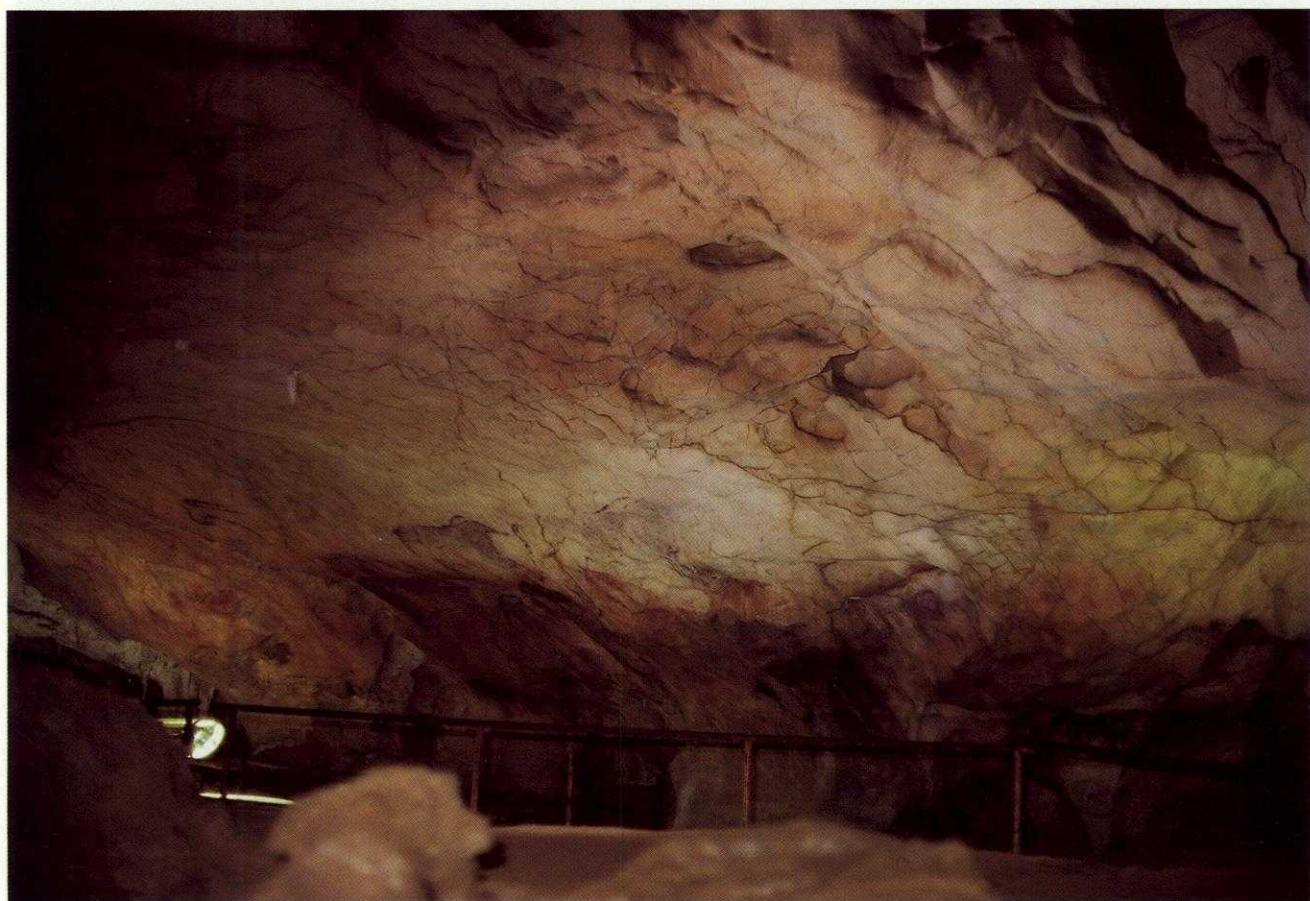




Fig. 101.— Tito Bustillo Cave. Tools deposits found at the foot of the mural.  
Fig. 101.— Cueva Tito Bustillo. Depósito de útiles hallados en la excavación al pie del mural.

This is all together at the same level, no thicker than an inch or an inch and a half, which I located after meticulous soundings and no less a meticulous excavation directed by García Guinea. It revealed a small but varied collection of utensils: flint blades, scrapers, knives, punches and oyster shells with remains of colors in the bottom that may have been used by



Fig. 102.— Tito Bustillo Cave. Deer (?) painted in black line, first figures of the "Great Wall".  
Fig. 102.— Cueva Tito Bustillo. Cérvidos (?) en línea negra, primeras figuras del «Gran Panel».

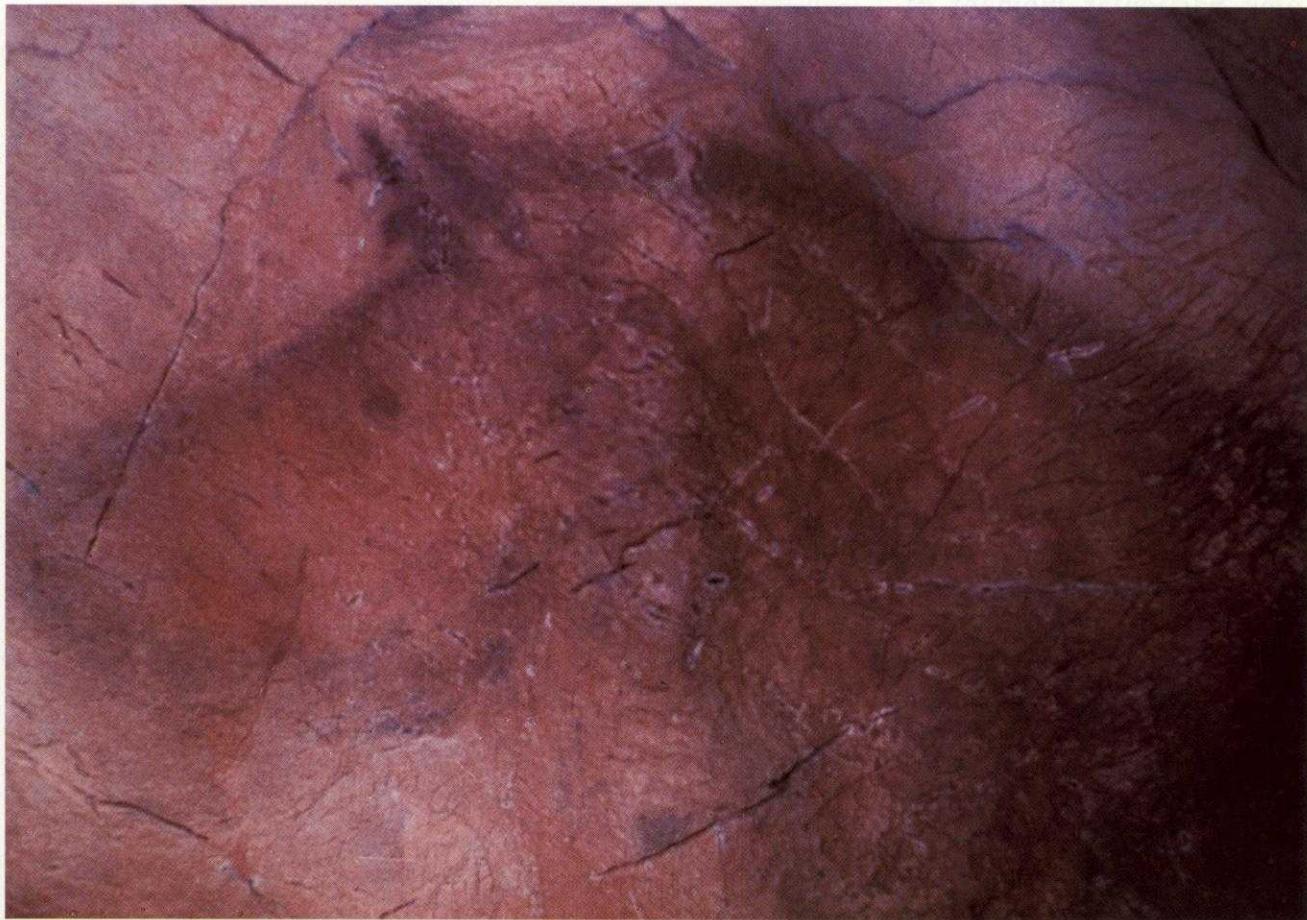
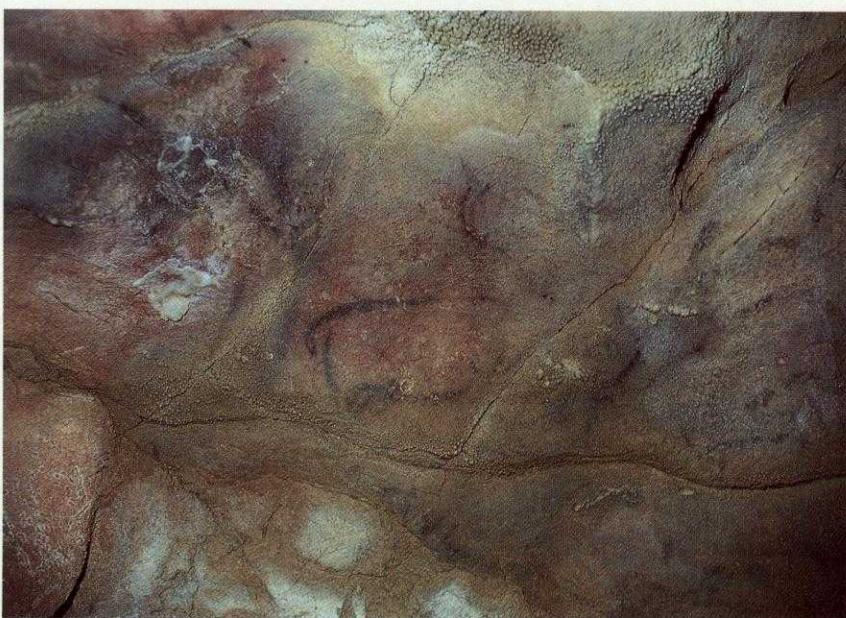


Fig. 103.—Tito Bustillo Cave. Head of "Fat Horse".

Fig. 103.—Cueva Tito Bustillo. Cabeza del «caballo robusto».



painters as paint containers. There were even some small snail shells found, with a hole in them so they could be worn on a necklace or some other object of adornment. All this material can be dated within the Middle Cantabrian Magdalenian period (fig. 101). There is one doubt concerning the location. Could this have come from some other part of the cave and been carried here by the water, or does it belong to

Fig. 104.—Tito Bustillo Cave. Small reindeer figure.

Fig. 104.—Cueva Tito Bustillo. Figura de reno.

some particular moment of man's presence in this decorated area, probably belonging to the very artists who made some of the paintings? What is very clear is that the depth of this deposit is quite shallow and it can only belong to one particular moment at this site, probably the last one. On much of the floor there are remains of black and violet-purple colors, and as I have already mentioned, some oyster shells containing remains of colors. Other earlier deposits could have been carried down by the water through sinkholes leading to the San Miguel River. What I mean by this is that the deposit we find today at the foot of the decorated wall cannot in any way show the chronology of all these paintings, since its shallowness shows just one brief stay, and the compositions on the *Great Panel*, with their varied technique and style, show us that this work was accomplished in different stages. Results of Carbon 14 tests made on samples from this deposit give it an approximate age of 14,500 years.

Before the start of this wonderful stylistic composition, there are some bright red stains upon an outcropping of rock that stand out as a colorful prologue. The surface of the *Great Panel* also has a red-tinged primer coat and I suppose that this sort of

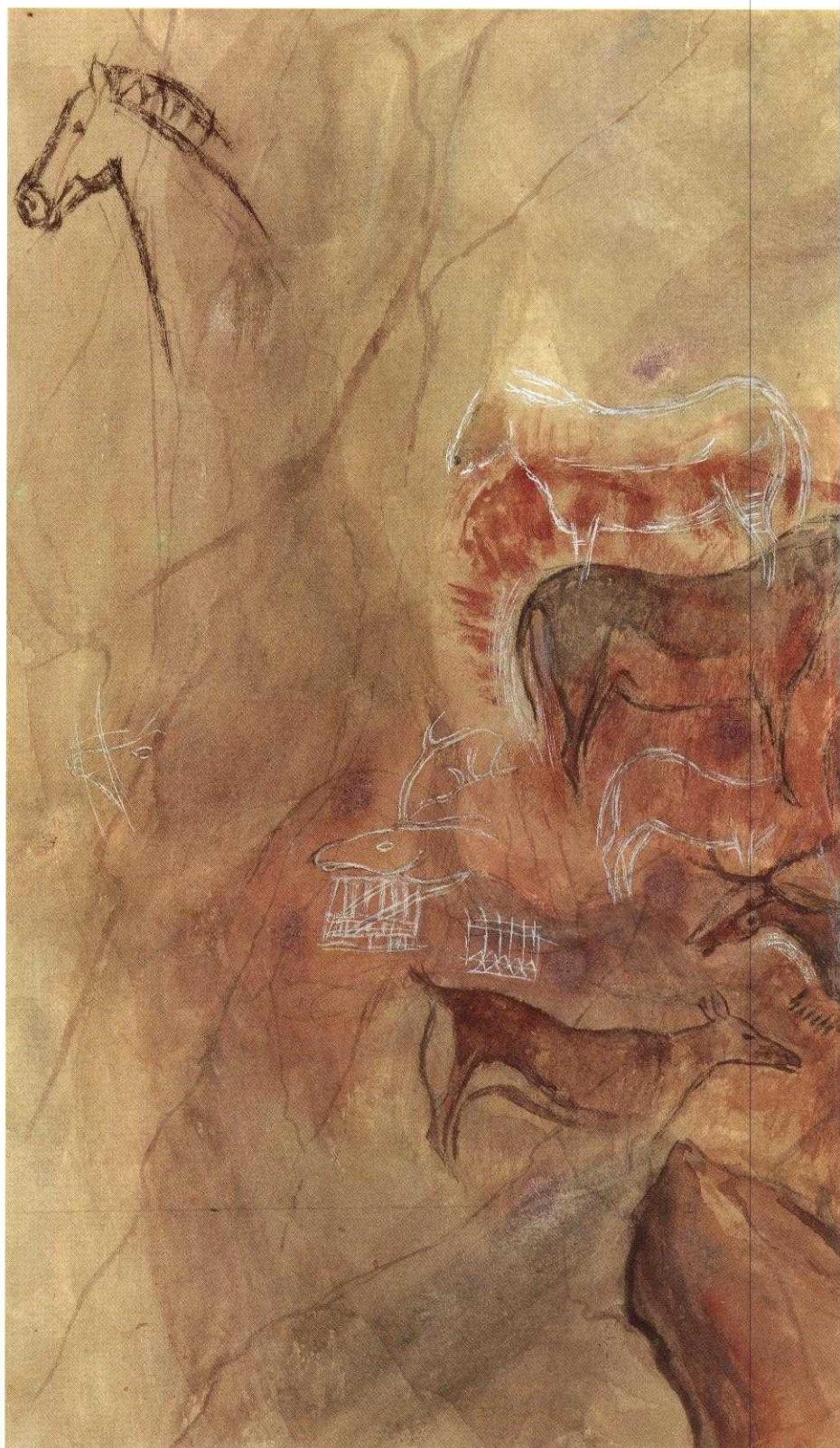


Fig. 105.— Tito Bustillo Cave. Paintings on the "Great Panel".

Fig. 105.— Cueva Tito Bustillo. Pinturas del "Gran panel".

CHAPTER VIII. THE CAVES OF THE TOWNSHIP OF RIBADESELLA

