

# Niaux Revisited

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We are privileged to add a codicil to the story of the Niaux Cavern that appeared in the November 1998 issue of the Old World Archaeologist.

No modern lighting has ever been installed in the huge cavern, but carbide lamps have been replaced by electric torches. Eleven groups per day are admitted at intervals of forty-five minutes. The number of visitors in each group is limited to twenty.

Many decorated caves are closed to visitors. Lascaux (Scott 1204) has been closed since 1963. Admission to Altamira is tightly restricted (Scott 1452). Only a few prehistorians risk swimming the flooded passage to the Cosquer Cave. Chauvet has never been open to the public.

Several splendid caverns may still be visited. Rouffignac, Pech-Merle, and there had to be a way to get into the cave at this end. This entrance has not yet been found.

Searchers of each generation bring different perspectives and apply new methods and techniques. The study of decorated caves never ends.

## Parc de l'Art Préhistorique

Since the discovery of the Réseau Clastres, an elaborate theme park, the Parc Pyrénéen de l'Art Préhistorique, has been established in Tarascon-sur-Ariège.

A self-guided tour in the covered grand atelier leads to exhibits copied from objects in the two great caverns. Visitors are aided by brochures, headsets, films, models, and dioramas. The tour first passes a large sand dune covered with footprints. The trail continues to the pictures reproduced from the four paintings in the Réseau Clastres. A scale model covering more than twenty-five square meters shows the galleries which the Salon Noir and the Réseau Clastres may be reached.

Signs in black and in red on the rock walls offer one of prehistory's great mysteries. What do these signs mean? A short distance beyond, the outlines of several animals have been engraved in the hard ground.

The most exciting of all the displays is the Salon Noir with copies of many of the original paintings. The pictures are shown at their clearest by a sophisticated play of light. The headsets offer no comment until the wearer arrives in the center of the rotunda and can grasp the entire scene.

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Within the spacious park are lakes, waterfalls, woods, picnic grounds, and a children's playground. The gift shop, Les Bisons and the bar-restaurant, Le Bouquetin (the ibex), offer greatly appreciated services.

The Parc logo that appears on the cancellation is a copy of the head of a bison on panel four of the Salon Noir.

Entrance fee for adults is 55 francs (about \$10) and for children 35 francs (about \$7). For times of visits, it would be advisable to consult the Michelin Green Guide, "Pyrénées", or check with the Office de Tourisme, 09400 Tarascon-sur-Ariège.

Other caves have already been duplicated. Lascaux 2 contains copies of paintings in the Hall of Bulls and the adjacent axial Gallery in that inaccessible cavern (Scott 1376). An Altamira Museum showing a replica of the "Sistine Chapel of Prehistory" is under construction. Tourists unable to get into Altamira may visit the new installation after its completion planned for mid-1999.

Facsimiles of great caves are popular with tourists and students but none is so rewarding educationally and recreationally as the Parc Pyrénéen de l'Art Préhistorique.

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