

evidence is the artistic legacy of our Prehistoric forefathers, a legacy including stylized and abstract figures of a symbolic nature: the *ideomorphs*.

A few yards from the current entrance at a smooth slant on the left wall as one comes in, there is a horsehead painted in red outline (fig. 48).

After about another six hundred fifty feet, and this time to the right, there is the start of a large panel with a profusion of engravings and paintings. Its location on the map is at the area shown as number 1. Illustration number 49 can give an idea of the full decoration of this wall area, which is to our back and right of us as we are coming in (fig. 49).

Its repertoire begins with abstract stylizations painted in red lines: two scutiforms or shield-shapes, one identifiable as a vulvar sign; another sign in the shape of a crook and another that could be the head of an elephant (fig. 50). Lower and to the left, there is an engraving of part of a horse (fig. 51). About six feet away, continuing along the panel, painted with broad, dull red strokes, there is the figure of a wild boar, with what appears to be a lance head pointing at it (fig. 52). A few centimeters higher there is an engraved figure of a bison that is also painted with touches of color on the head and chest, plus three red points put in around the shoulders (fig. 53). To the left of the bison there is a partial engraving of an animal with a thick, shaggy coat; the

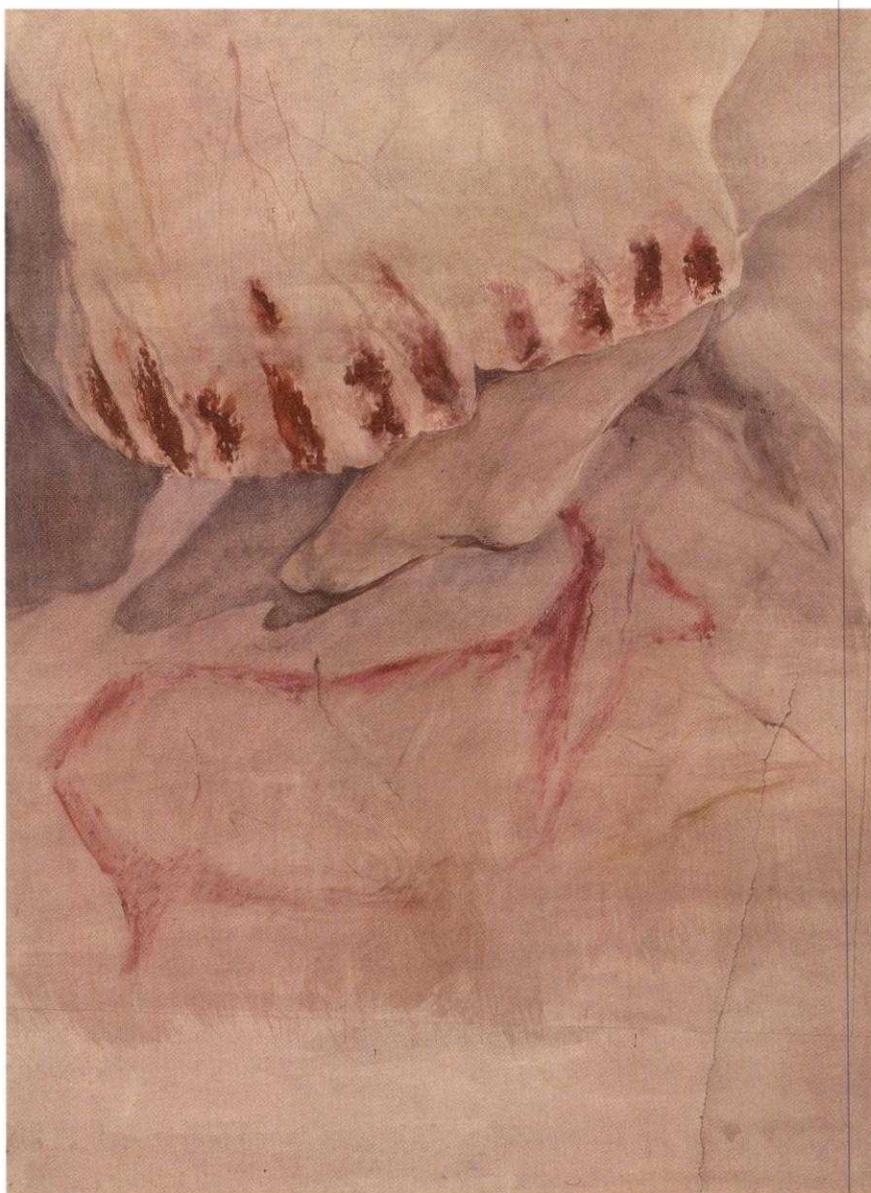


Fig. 60.— El Pindal Cave. Painting of the doe with the rock outcrop also decorated in red.  
Fig. 60.— El Pindal. Pintura de cierva. El crestón de la piedra también esta decorado.

shag spills over the face, thus making recognition of the species impossible; nevertheless, it does have some features of a wild boar (fig. 54). Under this there is a horsehead painted with the same features as the first mentioned wild boar (fig. 52) and across from the horse, there

is another engraved and painted representation of a bison, which has on its body what appears to be a stylized lance tip painted in red. Under this figure there are six long shapes painted in red, five of which have a protuberance two thirds of the way up; the sixth is represented by



Fig. 61.— El Pindal Cave. Horsehead engraved and tinted in red.

Fig. 61.— El Pindal. Cabeza de caballo grabada y entintada de rojo.

making the line thickness gradually smaller on the way down, ending in a sharp bottom. Next there is a long series of dots also in red (fig. 55). Above, a figure of a horse is depicted in engraving, appearing to be a mare, that has three dots painted in black in

the area of the muzzle and various red spots on the surface of the body. One of these has an elongated shape and comes out of the chest, with the appearance of showing a javelin piercing it; under the stomach there is a handprint in red paint, in positive (fig. 56). At the same height and a few centimeters to the left, there is an engraving of a horsehead with the muzzle bound with ties and under this, some lines looking like small grass stems, which would appear to suggest that the horse is caught in some sort of a trap (fig. 57). Below, another engraved figure of a bison, with red spots on the surface of its body and groups of dots, also red, under the stomach and under one of the back feet. To the left of this figure there are

two claviforms or club shapes and other lines, and a bit to the left, two very incomplete bison figures. On one of these there are two series of dots and under the stomach, some club shaped signs. Just to the left there is an incomplete figure of a horse, lacking the four feet and stomach, having a longitudinal axis perpendicular to the ground (fig. 58).

A bit to the left and painted in red, there is a magnificent figure of a doe and in a vertical line with this, but at a lower height, is a depiction of a good sized bison, engraved and having touches of color, also having three red spots on the body and an engraving of two laurel leaf shaped tips that are typical of the early Solutrean under the lower jaw (figs. 59, 60). Going further along to the left, we find an engraving of two bisons facing each other, one of these with a line of dots on the surface of its body and another on the outside line of the nape of the neck. Going along, at a lower level, there is another very incomplete engraved figure appearing to be a bovine. To the left there are some loose engraved lines that are probably the remains of other figures. Then there is another wall surface some 17 feet long without any figures at all and after this, another bison painted in red line with outlining similar to the figures of the wild boar and horsehead we have mentioned before. Another undecorated wall surface follows, about six and a half feet wide, after which there appears a small



Fig. 62.— El Pindal Cave. Large size engraving of a bison, with what appears to be an axe painted in red over the right shoulder.

Fig. 62.— El Pindal. Grabado de bisonte con un «hacha» (?) pintada en rojo sobre la paletilla derecha.

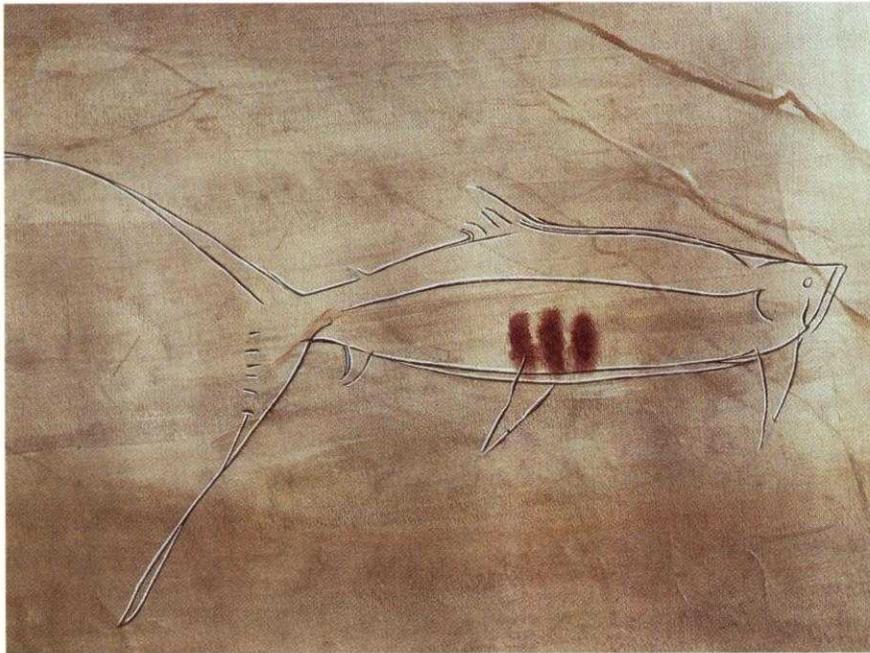


Fig. 63.— El Pindal Cave. Engraving showing a fish with three red spots inside.  
Fig. 63.— El Pindal. Pez grabado con tres manchas rojas inscritas en el cuerpo.

engraved horsehead by itself that is partially colored in red (fig. 61). After this, another eight feet without decoration and then a new large figure of a bison lacking head and neck; at the shoulder it has a sort of axe painted in red that appears to be piercing the body (fig. 62). Immediately above this figure there is an engraved pattern of a fish with three uniform red spots on the stomach area, that could have been made by a man with his fingertips (fig. 63). Above, at a higher level, there is also another series of comma shaped red spots.

For the next one hundred and fifteen feet or so there are no new figures. After that there is a depiction of an elephant painted in red line that has a red heart-shaped spot over its left shoulder (fig. 64). Over to the left of the

elephant there are two bunches of painted lines and finally three dots.

This whole wall surface is under a rock overhang, no doubt the result of erosion produced underneath it by water, certainly before the panel was painted. It is like a sort of natural canopy, with its outcroppings marked by the application of red paint in the form of spots, mostly in elongated shapes, with another sign in the shape of a crook being noted among these at the start of this decoration. This rock overhang protecting the paintings underneath seems as though it was made to enhance the importance of the panel, displayed with a sort of theatrical entrance (figs. 65 & 49).

In this decoration we have just described, there are a few

details we need to pay attention to. One of these is that a lot of the naturalistic figures represented have spots on their bodies as though they were meant to show wounds, and others are represented as weapons. The three dots deserve special attention, either on or near the body of the animal that is drawn. We should also point out the two laurel leaf shaped tips, which if they had been done at the same time as the bison, would give us an approximate dating of the figure: early Solutrean, which also corresponds to the subject of the drawing and its technique.

We also have the series of punctuations. Only in one case are these punctuations in a large, separate group (fig. 65). What do these mean? This is the question asked immediately by anyone looking at them. Even today it is not possible to give any halfway reasonable answer.

Nor is there any answer for the club shapes; we could think of a stylization of female figures, and five of the six drawings in red having a protuberance at chest level could also be the same thing, and we could guess that the sixth drawing, the one lacking this widening (fig. 55), may represent the figure of a man, and along the road of hypothesis, we might possibly think that this could depict a ritual dance. There are other stylizations that may be maces, boomerangs or shield handles. We must point out the painting of the doe, made in very lively



Fig. 64.— El Pindal Cave. Elephant painted in red with a spot in the same color on the left shoulder.

Fig. 64.— El Pindal. Elefante pintado en línea roja con una mancha del mismo color sobre la paletilla izquierda.

and summarized stain, with a quite expressive result.

We shall go now to the figure of the elephant that is hardly represented at all in Cantabrian Art, for we are only aware of one example in the *El Castillo* cave

(Cantabria) and the one here from *El Pindal*. The interesting thing about this one from *El Pindal* is that its shape is the same as that of the *Elephas antiquus*, according to a reconstruction made at the University of London

by Miss M. Maitland Howard under the guidance of Prof. Zeuner. This coincidence gives it a date before the Solutrean, perhaps before the late Aurignacian, if we also consider the simplicity of the drawing, in which only



Fig. 65.— El Pindal Cave. Photograph of a fragment of the main panel with paintings and engravings.

Fig. 65.— El Pindal. Fragmento del panel principal con pinturas y grabados.

one foot from each pair is represented. We would maybe place these figures of the wild boar, horsehead and bison depicted on the panel with red paint at a nearby stage, Aurignacian-Solutrean, from their crudeness and the fact that they are drawn with only two feet. Perhaps the majority of these *ideofoms* may also be Aurignacian work.

The engravings are no doubt works belonging to the Middle Solutrean and Solutrean-Magdalenian transitional stage.

To the left of the gallery as we keep going inside, on a huge dislodged block of stone almost across from the elephant painting, there are also some black line paintings and engravings. These are two incomplete doe figures and two horses that are

also incomplete. I think that both these paintings and engravings are from a stage in the recent Magdalenian (fig. 66).

Going to the left wall, on some pockets located more or less across from the block where the above figures are, there is a branch shape and a short wavy line crossed by several lines perpendicularly. Both motifs are painted in black line. The branch shape is very similar to another one painted in the *El Castillo* cave (Cantabria). I believe that these two paintings belong to the *ideomorphs* made toward the end of the Magdalenian and perhaps already into the Azilian (figs. 67 & 68).

As on so many other occasions, we observe that the wall decorations spread out from the

main panel toward other hidden places, which maybe were searched out at different stages.

The small horsehead painted in red line (fig. 48), located a few yards from the current entrance, may have been part of an outside *sanctuary*. If this were so, it would be showing us that the old entrance may be covered up nearby and along with it, a deposit that has not yet been found to date.

There are several signs along with these zoomorphic figures that I would like to emphasize, such as shapeless red spots on the surface of the bodies of some of the animals depicted, that could be interpreted as wounds. There are red spots with shapes appearing to be weapons, painted with a direct relationship to the surface of the bodies of the animals depicted: a lance tip pointed at the head of a wild boar; (fig. 52), a lance tip piercing a bison; an axe piercing around the left shoulder area of the large engraved bison; (fig. 62) a red heart-shaped spot on the left shoulder of the elephant (fig. 64).

The intention of showing that these animals are wounded is set forth explicitly. The example of this cave is not unique and we shall see it displayed on the walls of other caverns. Without a doubt, this is one of the ritual formulas of Prehistoric magical-religious ceremonies, and it is much richer and more complicated than we often suppose.

Now, one would ask if this is really an attempt to directly



Fig. 66.— El Pindal Cave. Painting in black showing two bucks and engraving of two horses.

Fig. 66.— El Pindal. Pintura en negro representando dos ciervos y dos caballos; los últimos, parcialmente grabados.

show the substance of the act of hunting, or whether after giving this appearance, it becomes disguised or indirectly expresses a more subtle message, though it may also be related to the *magic of the hunt*.

Concerning the punctuations, we find that these are of three kinds: One in red on the body of a bison; one near the muzzle of a mare; another on the body of the fish, and there is even another in which they appear engraved.

We also find these three spots or dots making up an isolated unit in another Asturian cave, but not inscribed on or near zoomorphic figures. Their intent is totally unknown, the same as the series of multiple punctuations that placed either on the bodies of the animals or by themselves, appear represented on the panel in this

and many other caves. Could this be a number of kills made or a number that is being asked for?

Finally, there remains the positive imprint of the supposed hand. Many times I considered the possibility that this type of manifestation, relatively frequent, either in positive or negative, for both systems are used, may have been an expression of variety of egotism. It is a kind of infantile boasting to leave a record of one's presence at supposedly significant acts or deeds that do not involve any material rewards.

So let this list of unanswered questions brought forth by this Art specimen remain in the mist. The adventure of mankind is there, surrounded by that ancient, cosmic silence. It is there in his artistic renditions, that are capable of bringing the

reality of his live presence to us over thousands of years.

In drawing, the art of *El Pindal* includes magnificent specimens of the best stages of the Solutrean cycle, but until now, it has given us nothing else besides its great wall Art. We are hoping that the secret of the deposit will be discovered some day, and we will have a chance to recover some samples of their portable Art.

### **A Cave at Peñamellera**

#### **Baja: La Loja**

The *La Loja* cave is located in a place called El Mazo, belonging to the district of Peñamellera Baja. Even though it only offers one relatively interesting specimen, I feel that it deserves mention.

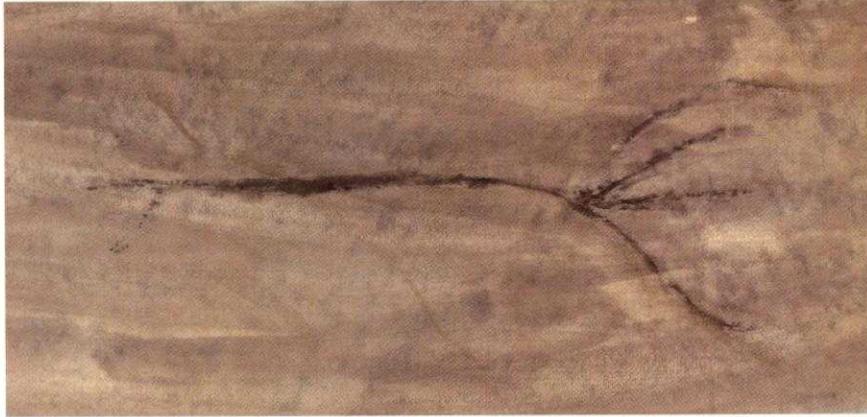


Fig. 67.- El Pindal Cave. Ideomorphic painting, showing a branch shape.  
Fig. 67.- El Pindal. Pintura ideomórfica, representando un ramiforme.

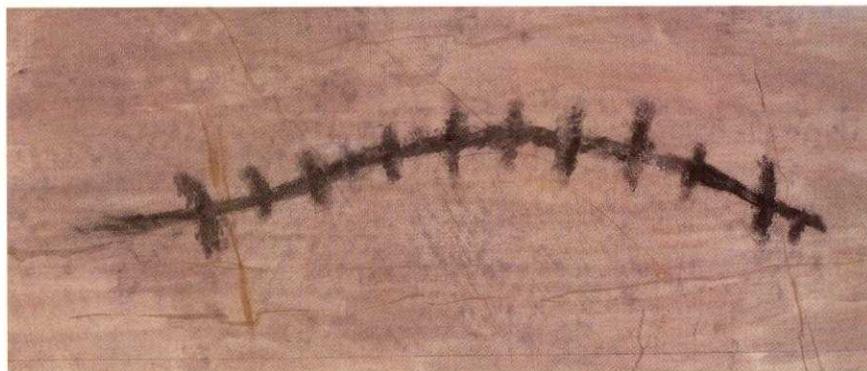


Fig. 68.- El Pindal Cave. Ideomorphic painting.  
Fig. 68.- El Pindal. Pintura ideomórfica.

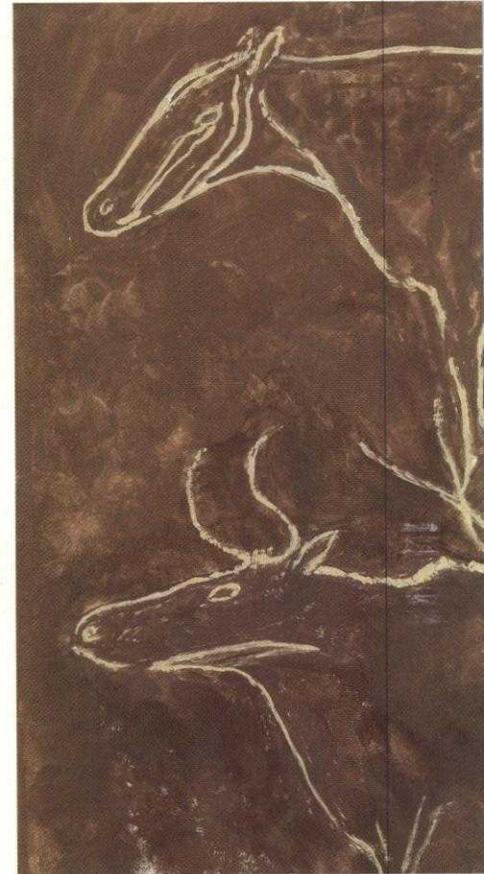


Fig. 69.- La Loja Cave. Panel of engravings.  
Fig. 69.- Cueva de La Loja. Panel de los grabados.

Hermilio Alcalde del Río was also the one who revealed it in 1908 and wrote about it years later in the work co-authored by Abbé Breuil and L. Sierra in the book already mentioned. Since then, there have been many publications on the group of engravings in this cave. We shall make reference to the work of Manuel Pérez Pérez, (Revista Ensidesa N° 132, Avilés, 1969) where among other things, a clarification is made that one of the figures generally interpreted as a bovine is really a horse.

This group of engravings was later studied again by J.M. Gómez Tabanera (BIDEA N° 93-94,

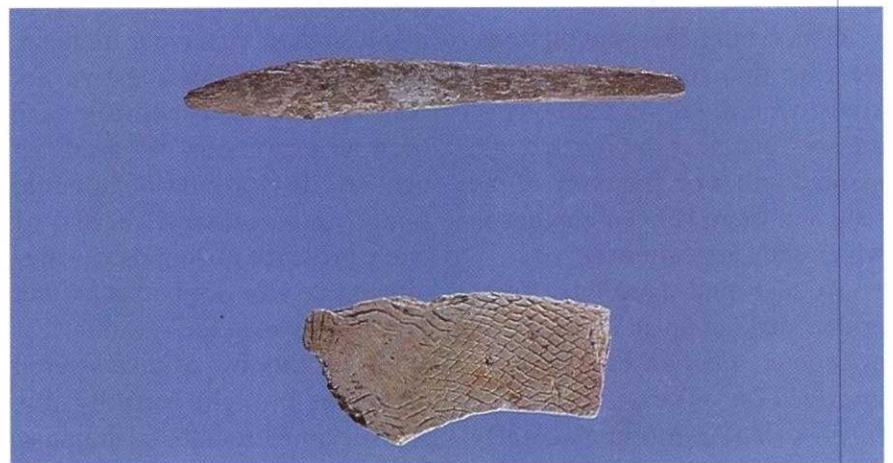
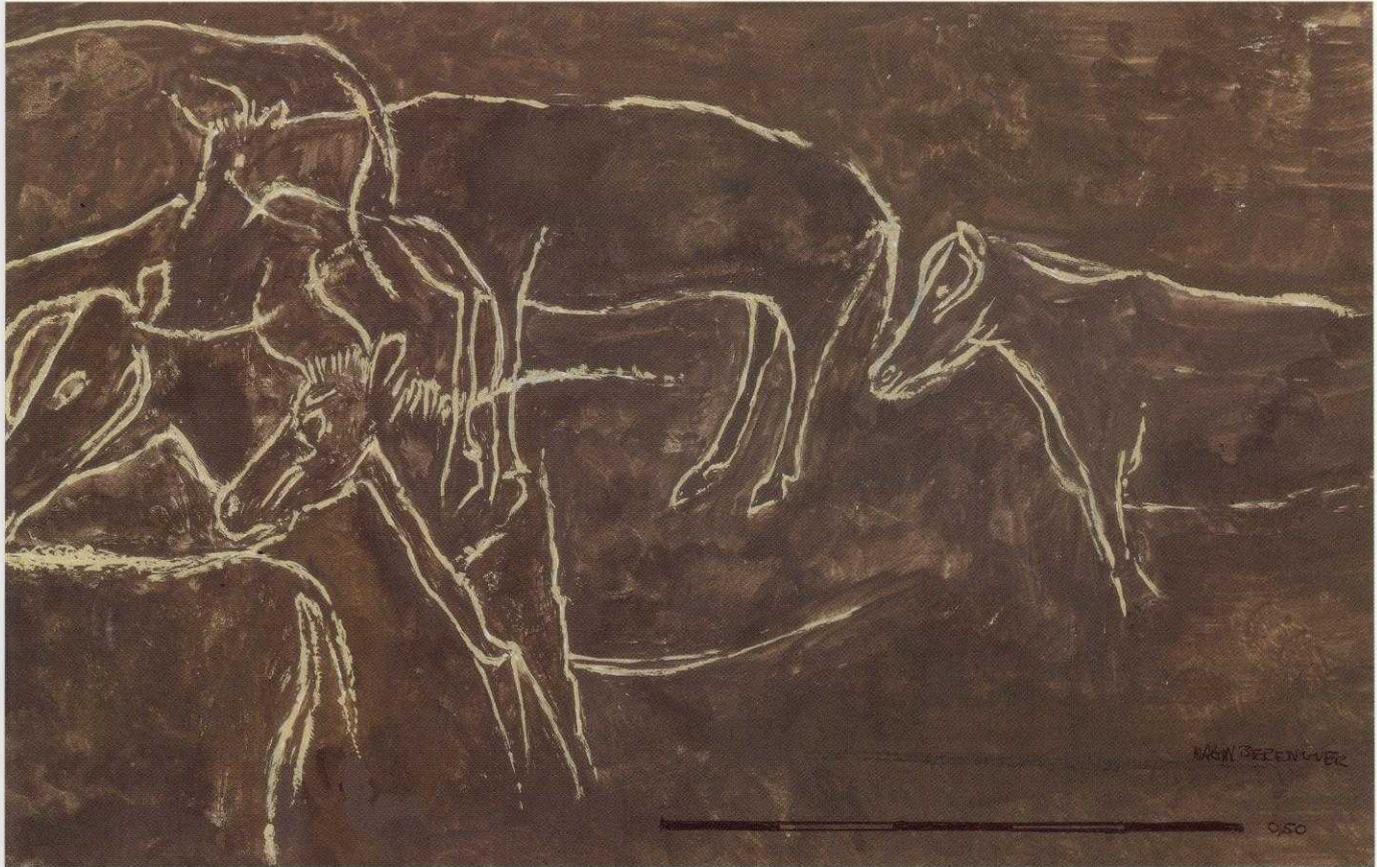


Fig. 70.- Cueto de la Mina shelter. Magdalenian engraved assegai and bone.  
Fig. 70.- Abrigo de Cueto de la Mina. Azagaya y hueso magdalenenses.

Oviedo, 1978) where he establishes the relationship between the

Altxerri (Guipúzcoa) group and other French caves.



The engravings represent four bovines, a horse and another four legged animal of doubtful identification. The drawing of this group is crude, with evident lack of proportions and using a cutting technique that is rather uncharacteristic, with different treatments even within the same figure (fig. 69). Its location is about one hundred an sixty five feet from the entrance and twenty feet high on the right wall as one is going in. The figures measure between twenty and thirty two inches long.

Its deposit has not given us any mobiliary Art objects at all.



Fig. 71.— La Riera Cave. Magdalenian lances with ideomorphic line engraving.

Fig. 71.— Cueva de La Riera. Azagayas magdalenenses con grabados lineales ideomórficos.

## CHAPTER VI

### CAVES OF THE DISTRICT OF LLANES

Although they have provided extremely valuable materials for the study of Asturian Prehistory in the area of Art, insofar as what they have to offer in craft and creative spark is concerned, the contributions of this numerous group of caves under Llanes are really poor.

However, so the reader will have some knowledge of the most outstanding things that have been discovered to date, I will sort out the ones that provided the most interesting Art material from among this numerous and valuable group of Llanes caves.

#### El Abrigo

#### de Cueto de la Mina

This was discovered and excavated in 1914 by Count de la Vega del Sella, to whom the scientific world owes so much in knowledge of Asturian Prehistory. This is perhaps the one cave that has rewarded the patient search of the diggers with the most portable art: Magdalenian spears and bones with *ideomorphic* drawings engraved, sometimes with the deep line technique (fig 70). We can show the beauty of some Solutrean tips that unintentionally show evident sensitivity in their sculptural treatment, for their



Fig. 72.— Coímbre Cave. Magdalenian assegai.  
Fig. 72.— Cueva de Coímbre. Azagayas magdalenenses.



Fig. 73.— Llonín Cave. Wide, deep cut engraving of unknown meaning.  
Fig. 73.— Cueva de Llonín. Grabado de incisión profunda y significado desconocido.

purpose was to be used as weapons (fig. 34).

#### Quintanal Cave

Hermilio Alcalde del Río, in that wonderful year for archeological prospecting, 1908, in which the *El Pindal*, *La Loja* and other caves were found, also made discoveries at the *El Quintanal* cave. On a clay background on the wall which was quite plastic in Paleolithic times but is now fully hardened, Prehistoric man traced an ambiguous type of drawing with his fingers that was first interpreted as the figure of a wild boar. The confused description over the location of this cave gave rise to a clarifying work by M. González Morales and Ma. Carmen Márquez Uría (Bol. 81 I.D.E.A.), which we recommend to anyone who is thinking of visiting this cave. In this work they are also inclined to identify this confusing stylization as a bison, and they mention another engraving also done with the finger technique.

#### The La Riera Cave

Revealed by Count de la Vega del Sella in 1915, and excavated by him between 1917 and 1918, the former data was a year of

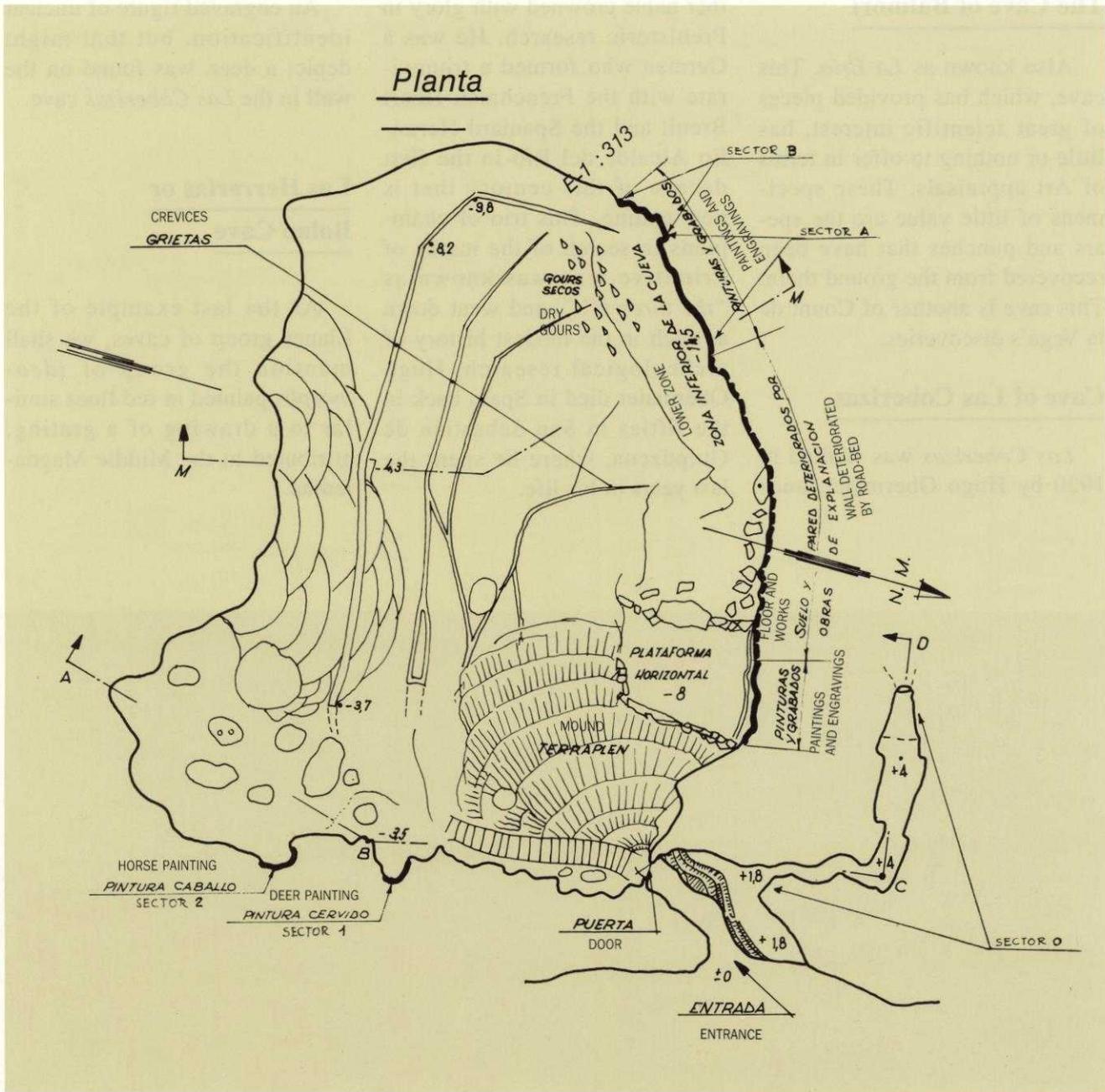


Fig. 74.- Llonín Cave, layout map.

Fig. 74.- Cueva de Llonín. Plano de la planta.

magnificent achievements for the Count, especially in the contribution of the *El Buxu* cave which I shall describe below. Excavations in La Riera during the '70s provided materials that

brought about certain controversies concerning cultural patterns and their chronology in the Prehistory of the Cantabrian coast. That is not our subject, so we shall therefore refer to their

mobiiliary Art, in which specimens of Magdalenian spears with *ideomorphic* background line engravings were recovered as the most outstanding pieces (fig. 71).

### The Cave of Balmori

Also known as *La Ería*. This cave, which has provided pieces of great scientific interest, has little or nothing to offer in terms of Art appraisals. These specimens of little value are the spears and punches that have been recovered from the ground there. This cave is another of Count de la Vega's discoveries.

### Cave of Las Coberizas

*Las Coberizas* was studied in 1920 by Hugo Obermaier, ano-

ther name crowned with glory in Prehistoric research. He was a German who formed a triumvirate with the Frenchman Henri Breuil and the Spaniard Hermilio Alcalde del Río in the first decade of this century that is now ending. This trio of champions in search of the marks of Primitive man was known as "*the three H's*", and went down as such in the modest history of archeological research. Hugo Obermaier died in Spain back in the fifties in San Sebastián de Guipúzcoa, where he spent the last years of his life.

An engraved figure of unclear identification, but that might depict a deer, was found on the wall in the *Las Coberizas* cave.

### Las Herrerías or Bolao Cave

As the last example of the Llanes group of caves, we shall mention the group of *ideomorphs* painted in red lines similar to a drawing of a grating, attributed to the Middle Magdalenian.



Fig. 76.- Llonín Cave. Decoration in red paint.  
Fig. 76.- Cueva de Llonín. La decoración de la pintura roja.

## CHAPTER VII

# TWO CAVES AT PEÑAMELLERA ALTA

### The Cave of Coímbre

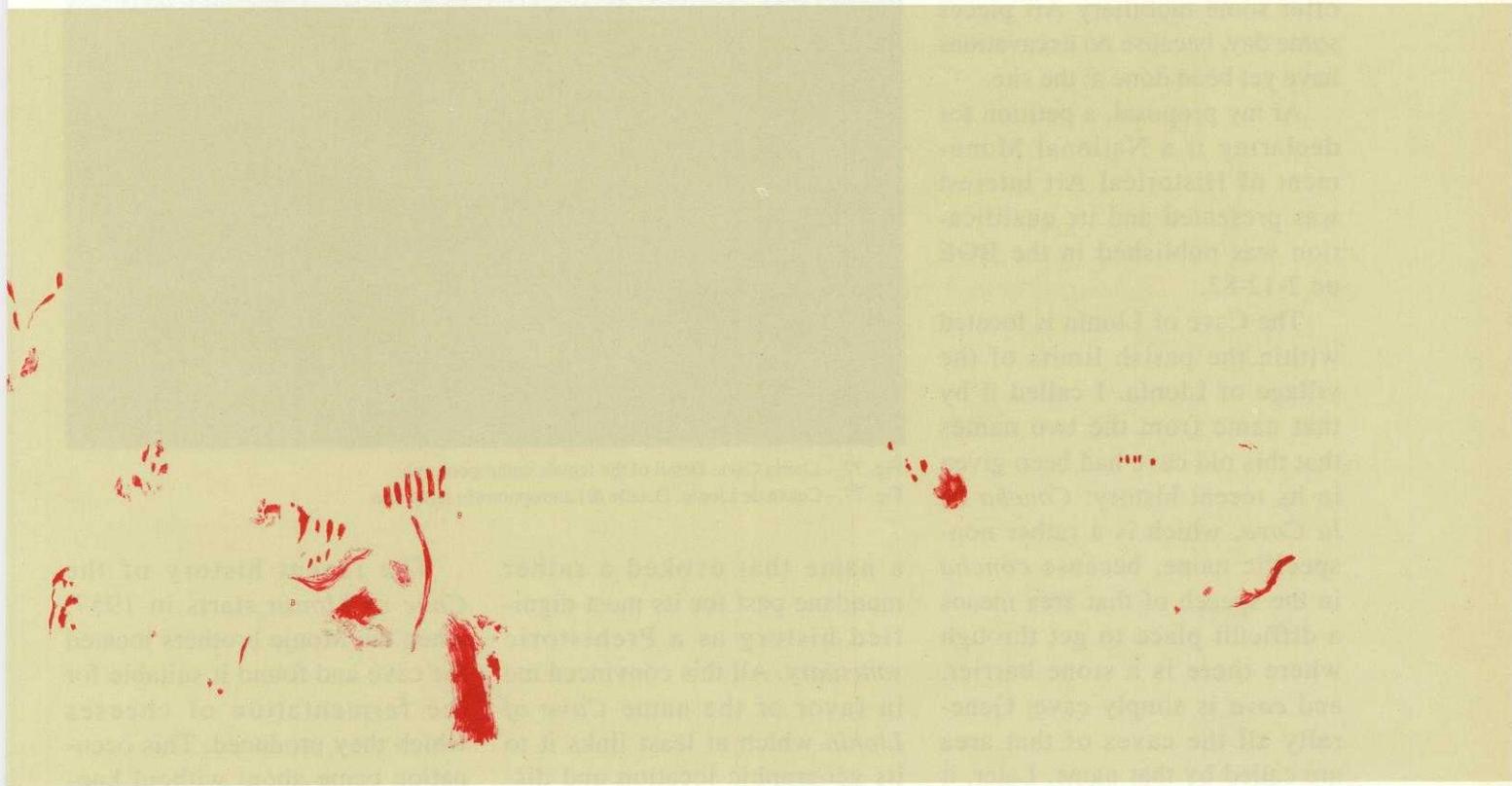
In recent years the district of Peñamellera Alta has provided two caves with Prehistoric wall Art. One of these, called the *Cave of Coímbre*, close to Alles, the district seat, provided a good archeological deposit in which one piece of exceptional interest should be emphasized. This is a Magdalenian spear of semicircular section and beveled at its base, starting on the end with a

surface with four lines of scales alternating in opposite directions. In addition, this cave also has several specimens of wall Art (fig. 72).

In 1972, its prospectors were Alfonso Moure Romanillo and Gregorio Gil Alvarez, and together they published a work on their first attempts in *Boletín I.D.E.A. N° 82* for 1974. In this work, they mention some of the engraved figures with special emphasis on the figure of a bison

a little over four feet long, drawn with one single deep, wide stroke with good art and steadiness. The rest of the engravings are small in size and drawn with weak, broken strokes, and quite poor in their drawing formulas.

This cave was explored by me in May of 1971 with several members of the Asturian Underground Exploration Group including its President and a good friend of mine, José Manuel Suárez D. Estébanez. Though I



held the magnificent drawing of the bison in great estimation, I also felt great reservations about the complete authenticity of some of the small engravings.

### The Cave of Llonín

The other cavern of Peñame-llera Alta is the *Cave of Llonín*, with wall decorations of great artistic and also great scientific value. I had the satisfaction of making the initial appraisal and study of it, which to date is unique. The first on the day of its discovery some twenty years ago and the second after two years of work which I made public in 1978. We do not know if it will offer some mobiliary Art pieces some day, because no excavations have yet been done at the site.

At my proposal, a petition for declaring it a National Monument of Historical Art interest was presented and its qualification was published in the BOE on 2-12-82.

The Cave of Llonín is located within the parish limits of the village of Llonín. I called it by that name from the two names that this old cave had been given in its recent history: *Concha de la Cova*, which is a rather non-specific name, because *concha* in the speech of that area means a difficult place to get through where there is a stone barrier, and *cova* is simply cave. Generally all the caves of that area are called by that name. Later, it was known for many years as *Cueva del Queso* (Cheese Cave),



Fig. 77.— Llonín Cave. Detail of the female anthropomorph.

Fig. 77.— Cueva de Llonín. Detalle del antropomorfo femenino.

a name that evoked a rather mundane past for its most dignified history as a Prehistoric *sanctuary*. All this convinced me in favor of the name *Cave of Llonín* which at least links it to its geographic location and distinguishes it; besides phonetically it is easy to remember.

The recent history of the *Cave of Llonín* starts in 1957, when the Monje brothers located the cave and found it suitable for the fermentation of cheeses which they produced. This occupation came about without knowing that it could have been inhabited in Prehistoric times,

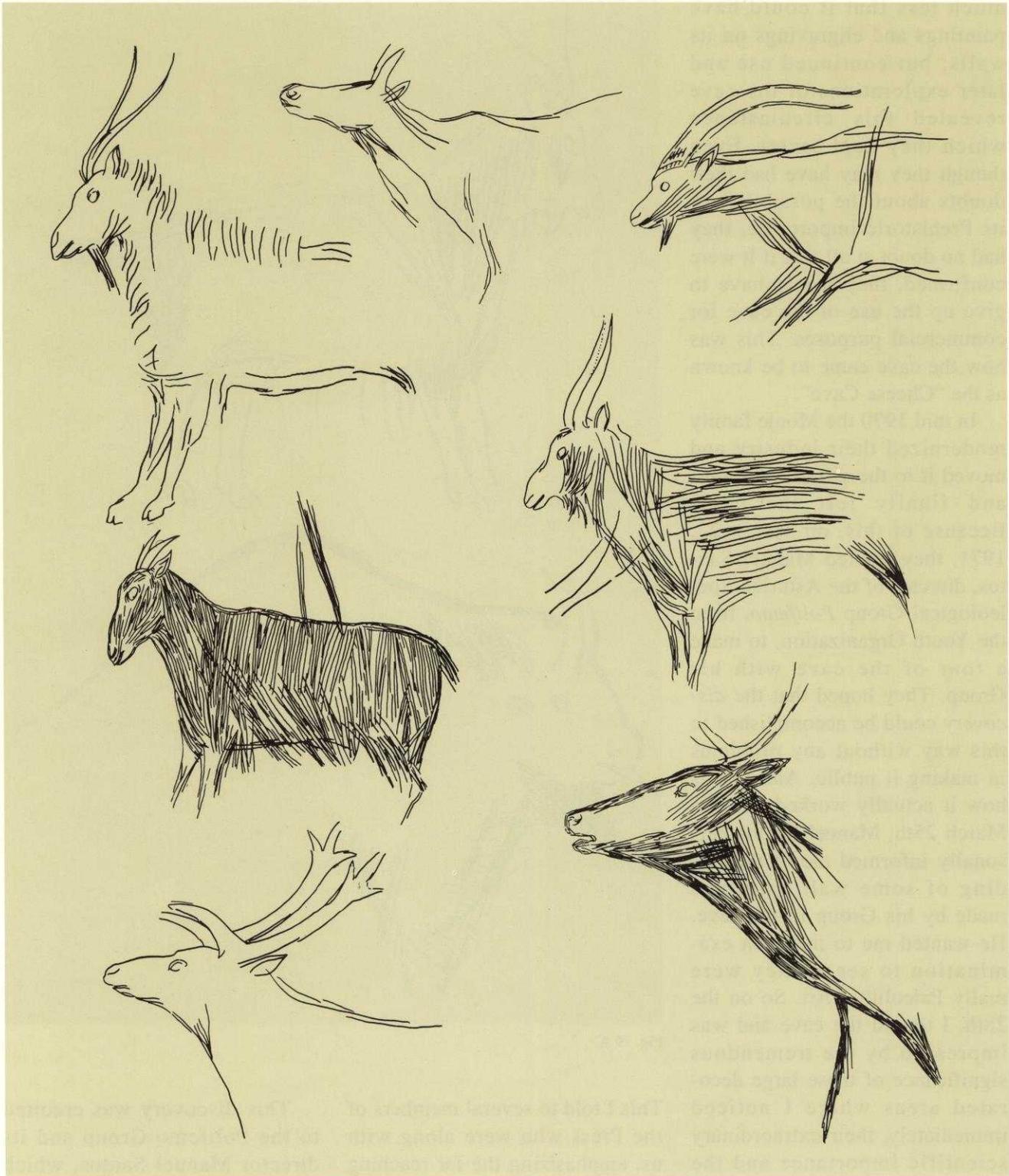


Fig. 78, 79A, 79B.- Llonín Cave. Some of the engraved figures, drawn flat to be better able to see their details.

Fig. 78, 79A, 79B.- Cueva de Llonín. Algunas de las figuras grabadas, dibujadas exentas para apreciar mejor sus detalles.

much less that it could have paintings and engravings on its walls; but continued use and later explorations of the cave revealed this circumstance which they kept secret. Even though they may have had their doubts about the possibility of its Prehistoric importance, they had no doubt at all that if it were confirmed, they would have to give up the use of the cave for commercial purposes. This was how the cave came to be known as the "Cheese Cave".

In mid 1970 the Monje family modernized their industry and moved it to the village of Panes, and finally left the cave. Because of this, on March 22, 1971, they invited Manuel Santos, director of the Asturian Speleological Group *Polifemo*, from the Youth Organization, to make a tour of the cave with his Group. They hoped that the *discovery* could be accomplished in this way without any problems in making it public. And that is how it actually worked out. On March 25th, Manuel Santos personally informed me of the finding of some wall paintings made by his Group in the cave. He wanted me to make an examination to see if they were really Paleolithic Art. So on the 28th, I toured the cave and was impressed by the tremendous significance of these large decorated areas where I noticed immediately, their extraordinary scientific importance and the good Art that was shown in these naturalistic zoomorphic figures.

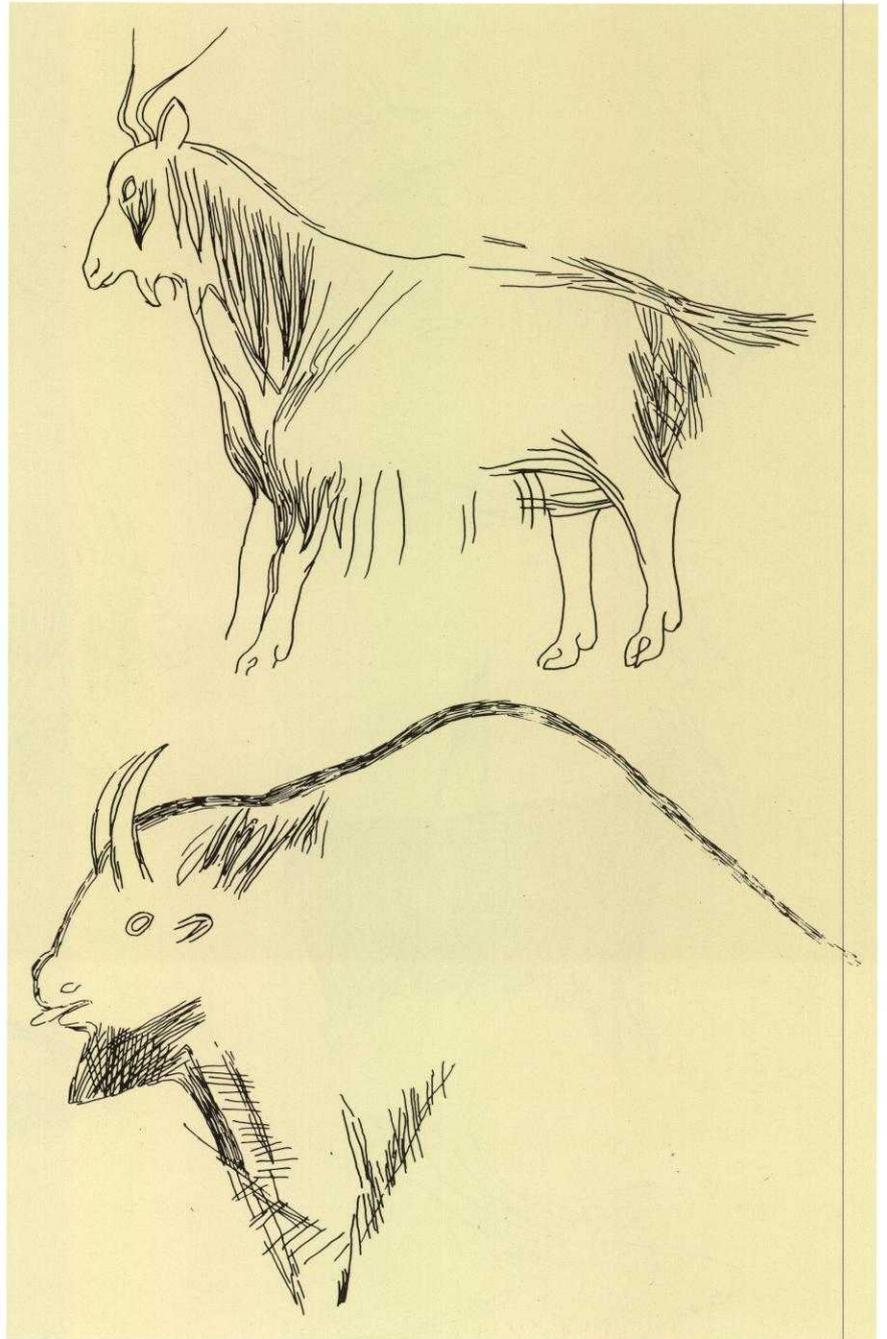


Fig. 79 A.

This I told to several members of the Press who were along with us, emphasizing the far reaching significance of that finding due to its Prehistoric authenticity.

This discovery was credited to the Polifemo Group and its director Manuel Santos, which they immediately reported to the Provincial Counselor of the







