



Kents Cavern Ltd, Cavern House, 91 Ilsham Road, Torquay, TQ1 2JF
Tel: 01803 215136 Fax: 01803 211034 E-mail: caves@kents-cavern.co.uk

PRESS RELEASE

Archaeologists to seek Ice Age 'cave art' at Kents Cavern

(Monday 10th to Wednesday 12th July)

Art – 1

8 July 2006

Members of the group of specialist Palaeolithic archaeologists who found the first examples of Ice Age 'cave art' in Britain are visiting Torquay next week looking for evidence of similar man-made art within Kents Cavern, the oldest known home in Britain. **(See Notes to News Desk for details).**

Using cutting-edge scientific techniques, the three-strong team from Sheffield University will carry out a systematic search of the cave walls very similar to the one which led to the discovery of 14,000-year-old 'cave art' at Creswell Crags in the Midlands during 2003.

Ice Age experts Paul Pettitt, Senior Lecturer in Palaeolithic Archaeology at Sheffield University, and well-known archaeology writer and 'cave art' specialist Paul Bahn -- who have both visited Kents Cavern before -- will be joined by Rob Dinnis, a doctoral researcher at Sheffield University investigating British Ice Age humans.

The team are hopeful of finding some early 'cave art' in Kents Cavern simply because Ice Age art was prolific across Western Europe and the Stone Age people living in the Torquay caves were all part of the same cultural zone.

Paul Pettitt comments: ***"Cave art from the Ice Age is well known in southern France and northern Spain. Some of the most impressive examples are the wonderful paintings from Lascaux and Altamira, but most are simple engravings of shallow lines.*** More follows

Art – 2

“These images are often almost impossible to see without specialist techniques, and this may help explain why none have been found in Kents Cavern to date.

“The British cave art finds are simple engravings of animals, such as wild cattle and deer, and date to around 14,000 years ago.

“During the later stages of the Ice Age, human populations were rarely present in Britain due to the severity of the climate.

“Before 14,000 years ago, visits were very sporadic but, at this time for up to one thousand years, groups of human hunter-gatherers were exploiting much of the UK.

“The techniques we use have revealed Ice Age art invisible to the naked eye in other caves in Spain and France and, since Kents Cavern is one of the richest sites for this time period, it may well contain examples of Ice Age cave art.”

Kents Cavern owner Nick Powe added: ***“Scientific research like this further emphasises the great importance of Kents Cavern to the Stone Age cultural heritage of Britain.***

“The possibility of Paul and his team finding evidence of Ice Age art here in Torbay is not only tremendously exciting for us here but also very timely with National Archaeology Weekend taking place the following Saturday & Sunday.

“Over that weekend, one of the country’s leading prehistoric technology experts Karl Lee will be demonstrating how cavemen made weapons from flint. He will also show our visitors how prehistoric people made fire.

“The sounds of flint knapping underground in the caves are truly amazing and have not been heard in the caves for thousands of years.”

Another historical theme for National Archaeology Weekend on Saturday 15th & Sunday 16th July will be ‘Hunt Your Ancestors’ when the Devon Family History Society will be at Kents Cavern giving visitors an opportunity to trace their Devon ancestors using computer records.

Kents Cavern Operations Manager James Hull adds: ***“Many people who visit the caves are interested in our prehistory ancestry. Devon’s Family History Society can’t go back that far, but they can research your Devon ancestors back to 1832.***

More follows

Art - 3

“National Archaeology Weekend is organised by the Council for British Archaeology and its Young Archaeologists’ Club with the express aim of generating interest in archaeology by people of all ages.

“There is no better place in Britain than Kents Cavern to trigger a life-long interest in archaeology, and children interested in joining the Kents Cavern branch of the Young Archaeology Club (YAC) can get information here on the day.”

Another unusual feature of National Archaeology Weekend at Kents Cavern on 16 & 17 July will be an underground slide show projected onto the cave walls featuring images of dancers photographed in South West landscapes called ‘DanceSCAPES’.

The photographs were taken by Kenton-based photographer Kevin Clifford who works with dancers and the arts communities. ‘DanceSCAPES’ is part of a nationwide Arts Council project called the ‘Big Dance’ which aims to increase the profile of dance within the community from 15th - 23rd July. ‘DanceSCAPES’ will also be projected at Carn Glaze caverns in Cornwall on 22nd July.

NOTES TO NEWS/PICTURE DESK

- 1) For further information and for interview or photography/filming requests at Kents Cavern, please contact Nick Powe or James Hull on (01803) 215136 or e-mail: nickpowe@kents-cavern.co.uk
- 2) Paul Pettit and other members of the group of specialist Palaeolithic archaeologists visiting Kents Cavern from Monday 10th to Wednesday 12 July are available for interview on the morning of Tuesday 11th or Wednesday 12th. Please contact Nick Powe or James Hull for details.
- 3) A digital photo of ‘Prehistoric Technologist’ Karl Lee who is visiting Kents Cavern for National Archaeology weekend to demonstrate Stone Age flint knapping and fire-making is attached.
- 4) For further information about the DanceSCAPES project, please contact Kevin Clifford on (01626) 899119, mobile 07921 829044.

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Press release issued on behalf of Kents Cavern

**By Dick Wood of RA|W Communications,
Tel (01884) 35453, mobile 07711 552947,
e-mail: DickWood@rawcomms.demon.co.uk**