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press release

The decorated Cave of Pont-d'Arc inscribed on UNESCO'S World Heritage List

THE CAVERN OF PONT-D'ARC, its replica, will open its doors in the spring of 2015

The World Heritage Committee, currently meeting in Doha (Qatar) at UNESCO's 38th session, has inscribed the Decorated Cave of Pont-d'Arc known as Grotte Chauvet on the World Heritage List of cultural properties. Its replica, the Cavern of Pont-d'Arc, is currently underway in Vallon Pont-d'Arc in the Ardèche. It will be the world's largest replica ever built, and will open in the spring of 2015.

Dating back 36,000 years it is located in Vallon Pont-d'Arc at the entrance to the gorges of the river Ardèche. The inscribed property not only encompasses the entire cavity, but also the natural landscape setting and the groundwater basin with its natural arch of Pont-d'Arc that stretches up 54 m in height.

It is the oldest cultural property to be classified as a World Heritage site by UNESCO.

The inscription is tremendous news for this nominated property that is supported by the Rhône-Alpes Region and the Ardèche General Council, in connection with the French state and the Association for the development of the decorated cave of Pont-d'Arc.

«The inscription of the Cave as a World Heritage site is a wonderful tribute to the first artists in history and rewards the commitment and the mobilization of the Rhône-Alpes and Ardèche territories.» Welcomes Pascal Terrasse, Deputy for the Ardèche and President of the Cavern of Pont-d'Arc Grand Project.

Today, to be listed as a World Heritage site by UNESCO guarantees the conservation of the cave and allows us to understand and explain its significance as heritage. It also helps to enhance the cave, its environment and its cultural context, to participate in the reputation of the project, both nationally and internationally, and to foster the mobilization of the international scientific community for the study of underground environments and parietal art on a global scale.

«Just like the treasure of Atlantis, the Decorated Cave of Pont-d'Arc will remain closed and buried forever in the collective imagination. Nevertheless this unique treasure of the foundation of the first cultural acts shall be known to the widest audience possible through the creation of a unique replica: The Cavern of Pont-d'Arc», continues Pascal Terrasse.

Born from the desire to share this treasure of humanity bequeathed by our ancestors from the Aurignacian period with the greatest number of people as possible, The Cavern of Pont-d'Arc will open its doors to the public in the spring of 2015 in the vicinity of the Decorated Cave, on the heights of Vallon Pont-d'Arc in the Ardèche.

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It will offer to as large a public as possible a singular and moving journey through time. Paintings, etchings and archaeological remains will be reproduced here to a 1:1 scale in surroundings that will be identical to those found in the cave: an underground landscape of which the richness itself is remarkable.

According to Jean-Jack Queyranne, the President of the Rhône-Alpes Région, « ***It is our whole human and artistic history which is summarized in what has been rightly called, the Prehistoric Sistine Chapel. Everything is there: profile, perspective, movement, but also a desire to communicate a message of humanity and creation, which is also that which we bear through our proposal as a World Heritage List nomination or through the creation of The Cavern Pont-d'Arc.*** »

Hervé Saulignac, the President of the General Council of the Ardèche, adds: « ***It is a chance that this treasure of intelligence, sensitivity and human presence is in our area. It is our responsibility and our ambition to preserve this masterpiece. Tomorrow, the replica will allow each one of us to discover this jewel of humanity without damaging the original which is in an area protected for science and for our descendants.*** »

Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière, President of the Association for the Development of the Decorated Cave of Pont-d'Arc, adds: « ***I'm very glad that The decorated Cave of Pont-d'Arc is inscribed on UNESCO'S World Heritage List. This will allow the French people and the entire world to share this treasure bequeathed to us by our Aurignacian ancestors. Let us never forget that our heritage is not only our common good, but also a major asset that provides equality and social cohesion.*** »

THE DECORATED CAVE OF PONT-D'ARC JEWEL OF HUMANITY

36 000 years ago, men and women created in the limestone walls of The Decorated Cave of Pontd'Arc, **unique and overwhelming works frozen for eternity in its green calcite and clay.**

This immense natural cathedral, untouched for tens of millennia, was discovered on 18 December 1994 in Ardèche, Vallon Pont d'Arc by three amateur cavers, Jean-Marie Chauvet, Eliette Brunel and Christian Hilaire. The unique and universal aspect of the cave is undeniable.

This jewel indeed presents three characteristics which are rarely combined: its age, the quality of its conservation and the wealth and abundance of artistic representations: 1,000 drawings of which 425 are animal figures. The bestiary of the cave with 14 different species represented, of which the majority are dangerous animals (cave-bears, woolly rhinoceros, mammoths, and big-cats, etc.), is unprecedented with some representations unique in Palaeolithic cave art (panther, owl, the lower part of the female body).

This cave is a remarkably preserved treasure, an invaluable research subject for scientists worldwide.



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THE CAVERN OF PONT-D'ARC, A REPLICA TO SHARE WITH THE WORLD, THE TREASURE BEQUEATHED BY OUR ANCESTORS **OPENING ON SPRING 2015**

Located on the heights of Vallon-Pont d'Arc on the site of Razal, a wooded area of 29 hectares, The Cavern of Pont-d'Arc is the largest replica ever created. It is the «visible face» of the original cave whose access is denied to the public since its discovery for obvious reasons of conservation.

The creation of The Cavern of Pont-d'Arc is a unique cultural, scientific and technological project in its design and in its dimensions (3 000 m² ground surface area and 8 180 m² of geological features - floors + walls + ceilings). All of the paintings and engravings together with the major geological and archaeological evidence (bones, fireplaces and imprints, etc.) of the cave are represented in full-size from the scanned originals.

As with the real cave, the entire route takes place on a raised walkway and is punctuated by 10 stopping points and observation stations.

The objective is to reproduce the emotions aroused by the original cave and to reveal the invisible!



The Cavern of Pont-d'Arc is under construction on the heights of Vallo Pont d'Arc 2015 © DR

THE CAVERN OF PONT-D'ARC IN BRIEF

- A project supported by the Rhône-Alpes Region and the General Council of the Ardèche, with strong support from the French State and from Europe
- A construction entrusted to a project management consortium involving 35 companies covering construction, industry, crafts and arts
- The biggest replica in the world: 3 000 m² ground area and 8 180 m² surface area of scenery created in total (comprising the ground, walls and ceilings) (10 times the size of the Lascaux replica)
- An investment of €55 million
- Architects: Fabre Speller (Clermont Ferrand) in association with Atelier 3 A from Teil
- Scenography Designer: Agency Scene
- Stimulation of the visitors' senses: hearing, reduced temperature, sensation of humidity...
- 30 months of work
- Opening Spring 2015
- 300 000 to 400 000 visitors per year expected (4 000 people per day in high season)
- Historical site, the basis of a new regional, cultural and heritage polity

LATEST NEWS

A communication unit has been set up at the Vallon Pont-d'Arc town hall to accompany this inscription to UNESCO's list, to explain it and to show all its dynamics and the territorial dimension.

VISITS AND TOOLS

A set of tools including copyright-free photos and videos will be made available to the media and private press visits of the work in progress of the Cavern of Pont-d'Arc will be held throughout the weekend.

Press contact – UNESCO Week-end

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