

# Lascaux Cave Painting

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Looking for a secret tunnel that was famed to lead to treasure, four teenage boys discovered a passage to a cave on September 12, 1940 in southwest France that would forever change their lives. Although they did not unearth treasures of gold, they did find a treasure experts believe had not been seen for over 17,000 years.

Most archaeologists date the Lascaux cave paintings to around 17,000 BCE. Many believe that the images in the cave were not completed over the course of a few years, but argue the collection traverses a few hundred years or longer. Some parts of the cave paintings are low to the ground while others are so high on the ceilings and walls that the painters must have used some sort of scaffolding. The paintings in Lascaux are primarily found at a distance from the cave entrance which means no natural light was used in creating them. Archaeologists believe that the artists of the cave probably used primitive candles made from animal fat. Paintbrushes have also not been found while excavating the cave. The cave artists probably used mosses, sticks, or chunks of natural ingredients such as pigmented clay to paint directly on the walls. To achieve a spray paint effect, they most likely used reeds or horns that had been hollowed out and blew "paint" made from naturally occurring elements such as berries and charcoal. The images found in the cave are painted in reds, yellows, browns, and black.

The cave, with its main cavern and numerous galleries, has almost 1,500 engravings and over 600 paintings of identified animals including horses, oxen, and deer. Horses, out of all of the animals, is the most common animal found in the cave. What makes Lascaux so amazing is the realistic portrayal of the animals and their size. One bull painted in the Cave of the Bulls is 17 feet wide! Although there are so many images of animals, there are almost no images of plants.

The caves were opened to the public in 1948 and an estimated 100,000 people visit and tour the caves each year. The once bright and vivid colors of the Lascaux cave are slowly fading with the introduction of artificial light. The cave has also experienced an invasion of bacteria, algae, mushrooms, and other microorganisms since its opening. To minimize future damage to the Lascaux site, officials have created a partial replica located nearby called Lascaux II and opened it to the public for viewing in 1983.



"Lascaux Cave Paintings (c.17,000 BCE)." *Lascaux Cave Paintings: Prehistoric Rock Art: History, Discovery, Hall of the Bulls, Pictures of Aurochs*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 June 2012. <<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/prehistoric/lascaux-cave-paintings.htm>>.

"Lascaux Grotto." *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 25 Jun. 2012. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/330866/Lascaux-Grotto>>.