

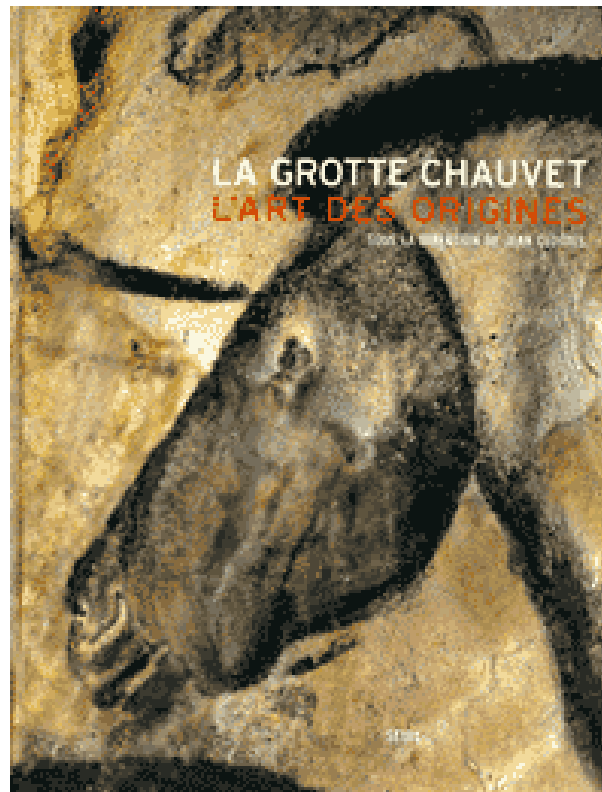
CHAUVET THROUGH THE MIND

October 2001 – second visit to Chauvet

The October of 2001 was hailed as the warmest on record. The cliffs of the Ardèche Canyon shone golden in the late afternoon sunshine as we again drove towards the town of Vallon Pont d'Arc. The car's roof was open so we were able to look straight up into a cloudless sky. It felt like a midsummer day and matched our happy mood to perfection. For a moment I could forget about the horrors of 9/11 and obliterate the image of the Twin Towers from my mind. It was impossible to think that it had happened only 30 days before! Now I was on my way to meet Jean Clottes for my second visit to the Chauvet cave to see glorious pristine art in the cradle of Civilisation.

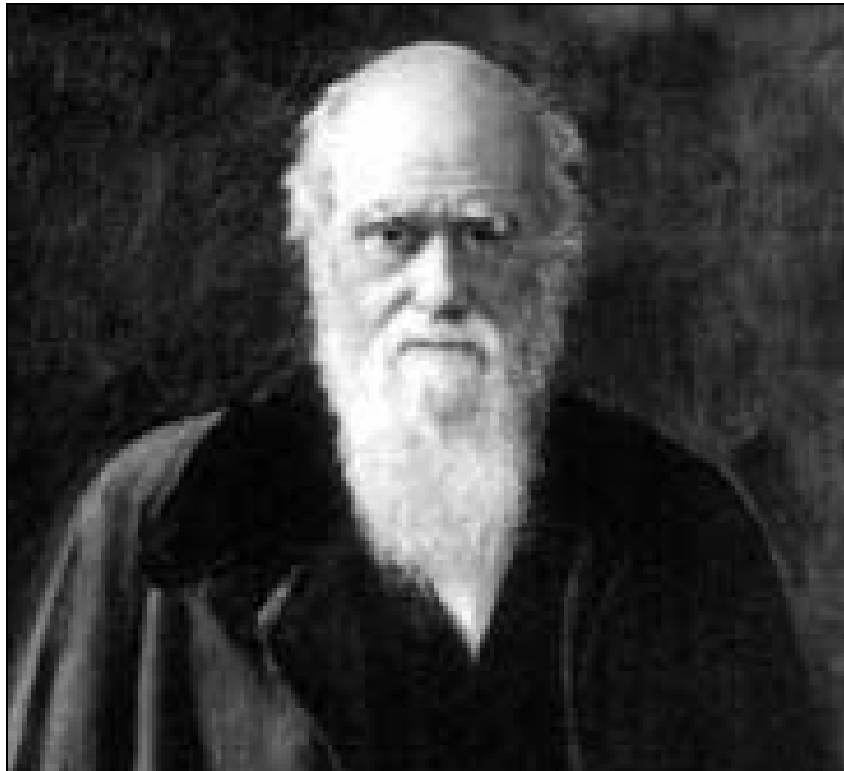
Two years had passed since my first visit to the cave. I had come away from the magic world of Chauvet with impressions that had left me in a state of wonderment. In the interval between then and now not a day had passed without my thinking about what I had seen and felt. The images that had constantly been in my mind's eye since then had left me with many questions that needed answering. On this visit I hoped that I would be able to peer through some of the veils that shrouded the secrets locked inside Chauvet.

The first visit had been one of the greatest experiences of my life and had made an enormous impact on my way of thinking about art. However, over the last two years I had found that it had made an even greater impact on how I thought about 'Man the Artist'. I would make this visit to Chauvet with a completely different mental approach. My keenness to be once again in the cave was now linked more to thinking about the artists than about their art. I knew the adrenaline would once again race through my veins when I saw the drawings, but this time what would my conclusions be about the artists?



Jean, in collaboration with his colleagues, had published a new book in English on the wonderful discoveries and art of the Chauvet cave so I knew much more about the cave than I had on my first visit in 1999.

For me the two most wonderful things in the Universe are, firstly, the *Evolution of Mankind* and, secondly, his *Artistic Creativity*. The fact that Mankind can balance on two feet and walk upright is a miracle. The miracle is possible because a super computer inside our skull interprets the millions of messages that travel every second between our feet and our brains. This super computer, our mind, is also the home of our artistic creativity. Within this super computer lies the power that enables Man, through his creativity, to transcend Darwin's conviction that, *No innate tendency to progressive development exists*.



Charles Darwin

I recently read something that I think illustrates this perfectly. Marcus Aurelius wrote, *You consist of three things only, your body, your life, your mind; only the last is subject wholly to your control. All else is mere smoke*. Art is the pinnacle of human civilisation. I believe that the discovery of the 'Art of Chauvet' is as important as 'Man walking on the Moon'. Sperone Speroni, the Renaissance writer, defined Civilisation as, *the Creation of Wealth and the Patronage of the Arts*. I am sure the Chauvet Bear Clan would have supported their artists by providing food so they could concentrate on their drawing ability that was so important to the well being of the whole tribe. Art is the culmination of Mankind's achievements and the oldest evidence of its existence is in the Chauvet cave.

Jean had suggested that we meet at his Research Headquarters and from there we drove round to the vineyard where the track up to Chauvet starts. On the way we stopped to look at the Pont d'Arc in the morning light. What a sight! The Arch spans the river in a graceful sweep of white limestone. It is one of the most impressive natural phenomena that I have ever seen.



A symbol of magical potency

The water was crystal clear and the glassy surface of the river reflected the arch as the water glided serenely through its vast open mouth. The Bear Clan must have found the arch just as awesome 35,000 years ago as it is today and seen it as a symbol of great magical potency. Was the reason that the Chauvet Cave was the one chosen out of all the many caves in the Ardèche Canyon for these special paintings because it is nearest to the Arch? I had noticed that the Arch looks like a lion leaping across the river from downstream, something I am sure the Bear Clan would have seen as well, and must have added to the Arch's potency, *the spirit of the place*.



View of the terrace that cuts across the face of the cliff

It was time to climb up the track to the cave. The first part of the climb is quite steep and in my hurry to get to the cave I soon ran out of breath and

let Jean take over the lead and set a proper pace! Jean walks the Pyrenees with his wife Renée so he knows how to do it properly!

We came out of the woods and stood looking out over the valley at the beginning of the terrace that cuts across the face of the cliff, admiring the magnificent view down the canyon. This terrace was cut by the Ardèche River as it raced to join the Rhône and the Mediterranean millions of years ago.



Terrace across the cliff

The bears must have walked the terrace to reach the cave for their winter hibernation, as this is the only easy way up to the Chauvet cave. When the Bear Clan had arrived some 35,000 years ago, maybe they followed the bears to their lair up this same path and discovered the cave.

Standing on the edge of the terrace I thought about the forming of the landscape and the fact that the Mediterranean was dry five and half million years ago. It amazes me to think that at that time, while the Rhône was flowing into a shallow lake between Spain and Sardinia, our ape ancestors were just beginning to walk on two feet in Africa!



The Mediterranean 5½ m years ago consisted of four lakes

The Bear Clan would have stood here and gazed out at the same beautiful scenery. They would have watched the herds making their way along the valley as they migrated between their summer and winter grazing. Below would have passed woolly rhinoceros, mammoths and horses as they foraged. Lions could have stalked their prey, watched by hyenas waiting to scavenge the remains of the kill. It would have been just like Africa is today.

While sitting in the dark of the cave two years ago, watching Jean working with a colleague on the *Horse* panel, I had experienced a kind of daydream. Seeing the two men studying the painting with their flashlights had summoned up an image in my mind of cavemen doing the same thing but with burning flares. My imagination had then conjured up a scene of the Bear Clan arriving and a Shaman performing a ceremony in front of the altar before going into the Holy of Holies to confront the *Sorcerer* and the *Fertility Goddess*.

I have been lucky enough to visit other incredible wonders, such as Nefertari's tomb and the Sistine Chapel. In my opinion these two places contain paintings of the highest attainment that Man has ever achieved. I think of these places as the 'Sanctuaries of the Spirit of Art'.

Both of the above are dedicated to future paradises that can only be reached after death. Queen Nefertari's tomb was sealed after her sarcophagus was placed inside some 4,000 years ago, and the wonderful wall paintings were not meant to be seen by anyone except the Ancient Gods.



Nefertari, wife of Ramesses II

The Sistine Chapel is also centred on death and salvation in the Afterlife. The altar wall depicts the Last Judgement of the Souls of the Dead, of those who would attain Heaven or suffer everlasting damnation.

These two places have been joined in my mind by the drawings of Chauvet, so how do I fit the three together? Undoubtedly the cave is another place of worship, where the highest artistic talent has been used to depict animals. I think the art shows that man believed he could communicate with the animal spirit world. My question is, "Did he also think there was a Life after Death?" I believe the Bear Clan did believe just that.



'The Last Judgement', by Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel

I wondered if Chauvet was a cultural stepping stone. Had the Bear Clan people yet arrived at the idea of their possessing souls, which could survive death and then join the Animal Spirit World? Or were they only concerned with their *clan's fertility* and the *hunting of animals for meat, skin, bone and sinew*?

My thoughts turned to the Aborigine Unambal Tribe and their beliefs as recorded by Dr Andreas Lommel in 1938 in Kimberley, north-west Australia. The Unambal were a Stone-Age people who lived a life very similar to those of the Chauvet people 35,000 years ago. The Unambal used stone tools, spears, and believed in the *Spirit World*. Their Medicine Men painted their Wandjina gods and called upon them for help. If the Wet Season was late in coming they would bash the Wandjina on the nose with a rock to make them cry rain.

The Unambal believed that each person had two souls or shadows. After death one of the shadows returned to the Wandjina's waterhole. The second went to the 'Otherworld' where life was carried on much as it had on 'Earth' and it was possible for the tribal Shaman to visit the shadows in the Otherworld, which made him a central figure of paramount importance in the lives of the Australian stone age Aborigines. In 1938 Andreas was able to gather his information by being the first white man to live with the Unambal and to watch their Corroboree dances and listen to their songs.

I believe that the Bear Clan must have been very like the Unambal Tribe. If you replace 'Unambal' with 'Bear Clan' in the following text by Andreas I feel you could have an accurate picture of the people who used Chauvet.

The Medicine Man was at the centre of the community and life among the Unambal Aborigines would come to an end if he dies or he lost his skill. He was the collective soul of the hunting group, and his job was to make good all that was not as it should be.

He was their link with primeval times and the Creation Myth, and without him a complete degeneration of their order and life occurred. Life in the present was only possible through constant contact with primeval times. The mediator between the present and primeval times was the Medicine Man, he not only lived in the present, but also in him the creative forces that were in operation in primeval times were still alive.



Aborigine Unambal Tribe, 1938, photo Andreas Lommel



Wandjina serpents and gods

Through dreams the Shaman could establish contact with primeval forces. When in a state of trance his shadow could leave his body and make journeys to the Otherworld, thus maintaining the link between the living and the ancestors. Before the wet season started the Medicine Man went to the rock painting of the Wandjina to re-establish contact. He is also the only one who can associate safely with the rock spirits that eat the corpses and carry off people's souls. It was the task of the Medicine Man to fill the Wandjina with renewed life, in this way guaranteeing the rain for each year. This same power enables him also to heal sick people, ensure success in the hunt, or even kill people who proved to be a burden to the fellowship of the tribe. The Medicine Men were the poets of the tribal community, and received the Corroboree songs and dances from the Otherworld.

The Aborigines believe the act of procreation was of only slight significance for their entry into life, although they were in no doubt at all about this physical function in the case of animals. In their view, spirit children split off from the Wandjina and then live in the depth of the waterhole with them. Only through a dream process could a man acquire such a spirit child. A further dream process was necessary to transmit the spirit child to the man's wife. The spirit child was about the size of a finger, and when the father found one he could bind it into his hair and carry it around with him for years. The man gives the spirit child to his wife in a dream process. She dreams that she had received the spirit child, which resided in the pit of her collarbone. Later the spirit child changes into a small snake or lizard that enters the woman's body through her vagina.*

A child's sex was known from the moment the spirit child was found, but at the moment of birth its sex could be changed. The Aborigines stick a club upright in the sand beside the woman giving birth if they want a boy or a cleft digging stick if they preferred a girl. After birth the umbilical cord was hung around the child's neck and must not be lost, otherwise the child would die. The child is then washed and fine charcoal dust is rubbed into its skin to make it black. When a person dies the spirit child that is the second soul, returns to the Wandjina's watering place where the father found it in a dream.

I wonder if the water flowing through the Chauvet Lion Arch and from Tuc d'Audoubert, had similar connotations for the Magdalenian people. I saw the *Dreaming a Child* painting in 1955 when PC Buster Thorpe took me on a 700-mile ride over the Leopold Range and we visited Andreas and Katharina.



'Dreaming a Child', Wandjina painting, Kimberley, Australia

* Maybe the finger size is connected to the fact that kangaroos are only two inches long when they are born. After birth they crawl into the mother's pouch and fuse to the nipple for the rest of their gestation.

It was with all these thoughts racing around in my head that I arrived at the door of the Chauvet cave. This time I selected a pair of oversize rubber slippers at the entrance and pulled on two pairs of extra thick woollen socks in case we needed to leave the plastic pathway and walk across the needle-sharp calcite. On my last visit I had only had thin cotton socks and had paid the price. Walking on the calcite was like crossing a fire-pit with bare feet!

Switching on my helmet light I followed Jean down the sloping floor of the rabbit hole tunnel on all fours to the three foot wide wellhead and descended the 30-foot ladder into the depth of the cave. On reaching the bottom of the ladder my immediate reaction was that the cave had grown in size, as everything seemed more spacious than I remembered. Perhaps this was because not quite so much adrenaline was pumping through my veins as on my first visit. I looked around and was amazed by how big the first chamber actually was. It is like stepping into a gigantic cathedral.

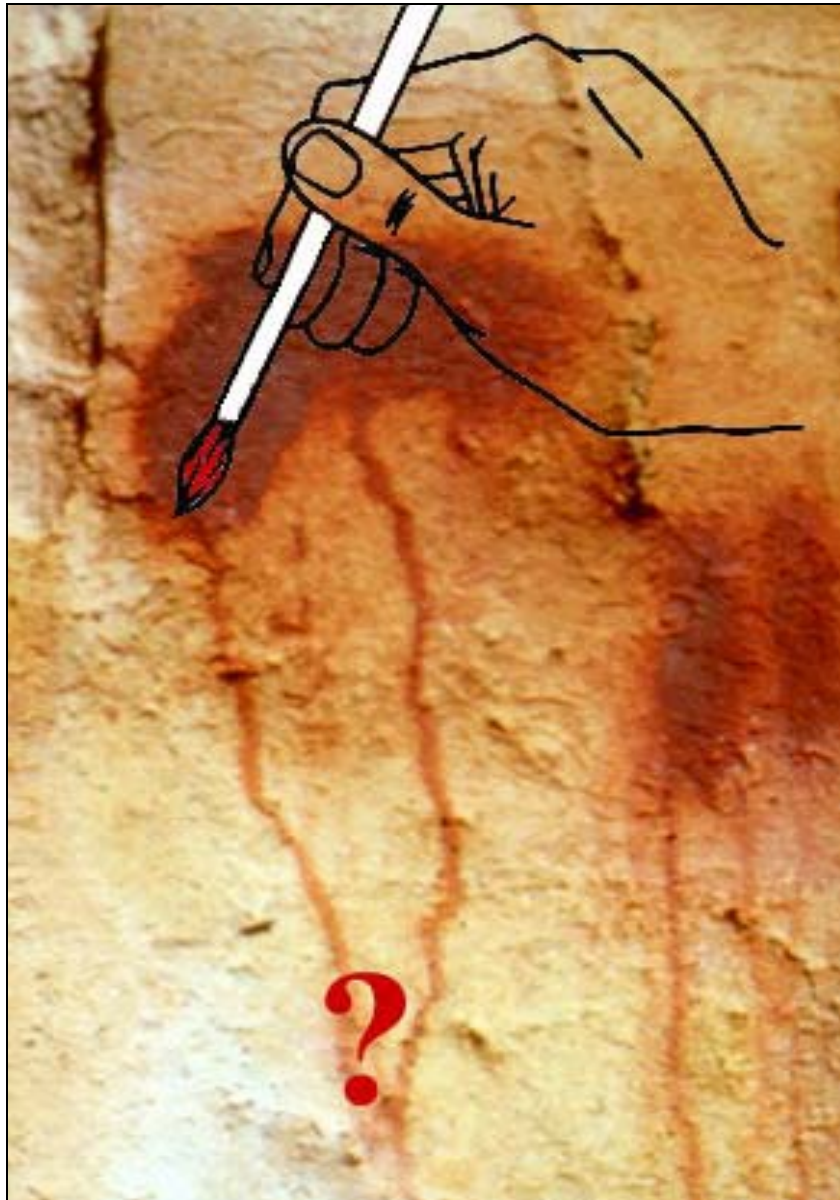
Crouching low we scrambled through the pinch that separated us from the next chamber. There is a two-foot drop down from this passageway into the chamber and the Bear Clan has deliberately placed a large stone step there. The stone hasn't fallen by chance from the ceiling, it had been carefully placed. Did it mark the *Threshold* of the *Sacred Inner Chambers*? I believe it did as from here on every single thing in the cave is incredibly well organised.



The 'Threshold' step made at least 27,000 years ago

We had passed through the large second chamber where there is not a single image on the empty walls, although there are many surfaces suitable for drawings. Why are there no drawings?

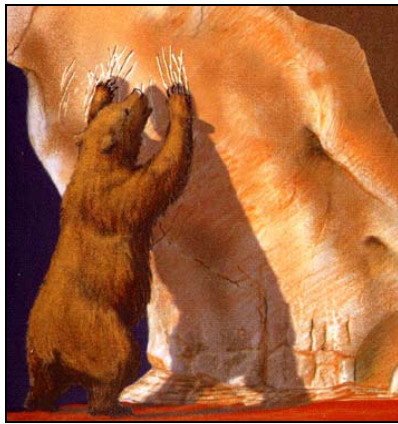
Some of Jean's team were at work in the next chamber and their lights were flickering across the walls of the cave like fireflies. We stopped to look at the painting of the tiny red horse's head, which I had not seen before. It completely fascinated me because I think this is a 'real painting', and not a 'drawing'. What everyone refers to as Chauvet paintings are in fact drawings, done mainly with charcoal and then shaded by hand, or engraved by a tool.



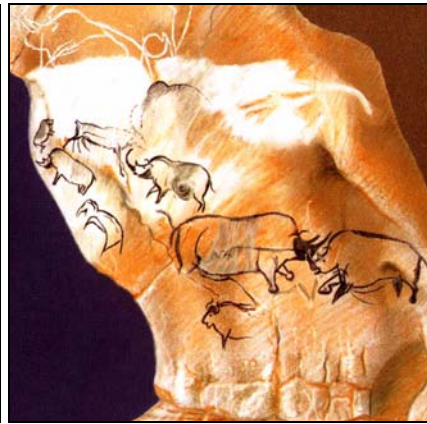
Tiny red horse head

Could this be the oldest example in art of brush work? Whether the brush was a bird's feather or a bunch of hairs bound to a stick, is impossible to tell. I like to believe the Red Horse was done with a *brush loaded with paint* because there are dribbles running down the rock face. The alternative to a brush is a finger which still means it is a painting, but not nearly as romantic!

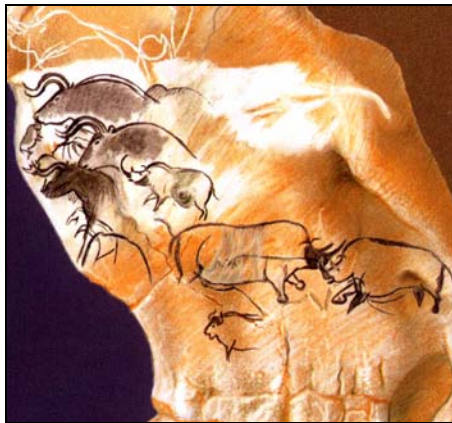
At last we arrived at the *Horse* panel. So much work has been done on this vast panel that it has been possible to map a precise sequence for the execution of the whole composition.



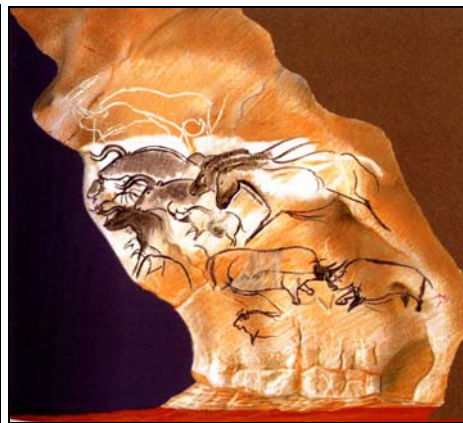
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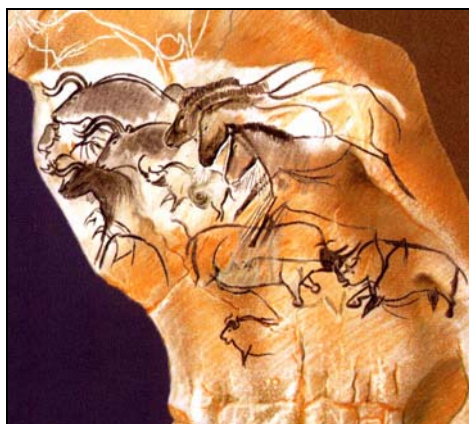
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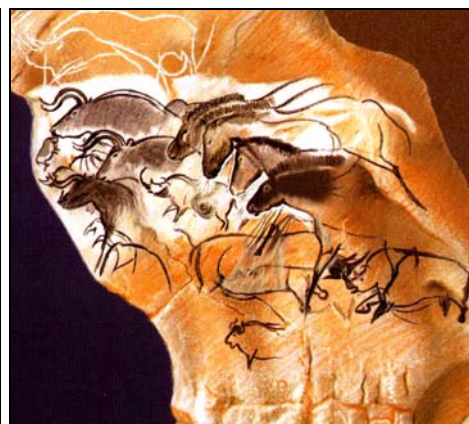
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Showing the sequence in which the drawings were done

The *Horses'* heads had fascinated me ever since I had stood in awe in front of them on my first visit to Chauvet. I had also been lucky enough to see the wonderful horse deep inside the tunnels of Le Portal cave. Always I had thought of these animals as shaggy rugged ponies similar to the ones you see galloping over the moors in Devon. However, quite recently a remarkable discovery has been made on Salisbury Plain where a hearth was unearthed in the course of excavating a cutting for a new road. Around the hearth, which has been dated as being 250,000 years old, the archaeologist found dwarf-horse bones along with innumerable flint tools. The Heidelbergensis fire builders, who roamed Europe long before the Neanderthals arrived on the scene, had been having a barbecue, not Devon pony but an extinct dwarf-horse species!

Just down the road from Agecroft is a smallholding where people graze dwarf horses. We admire them every Sunday as we walk past. I began to wonder after the Salisbury Plain hearth discovery and if the Chauvet horses were in fact the Dwarf variety.

I found a photograph of the dwarf horses and include it here. The more I look at the little horses the more I am inclined to think that the drawings in Chauvet could easily be of dwarf horses. I am sure they would certainly be easier to hunt and kill than Devon ponies that can go like the wind!



Dwarf horses

But to return to the *Horse* panel, was this particular wall chosen because it is at the entrance to the *Bear Skull* altar or is there another reason? There is a possibility that this might be the case as the research team have noticed that after very heavy rains a weird gurgling noise comes from a hole at the base of the panel. The noise continues for a day or so and then water starts to trickle out from the hole and run past the panel out into the altar chamber! Did the Chauvet people believe the sound the water made were signals coming from the *animal spirit world* hidden within the rock?

We took off our rubber shoes and walked across to gaze down at the *Bear Skull* on the altar. Michel Phillippe, the bear expert, told me that it is a four-year-old female. The carbon from the fire that once burnt on the stone beneath the skull has been dated at nearly 30,000 years old! No one can tell if the skull was put there the day after the fire or 5,000 years later. Looking into those empty eye sockets is unbelievably eerie!



The Bear Altar

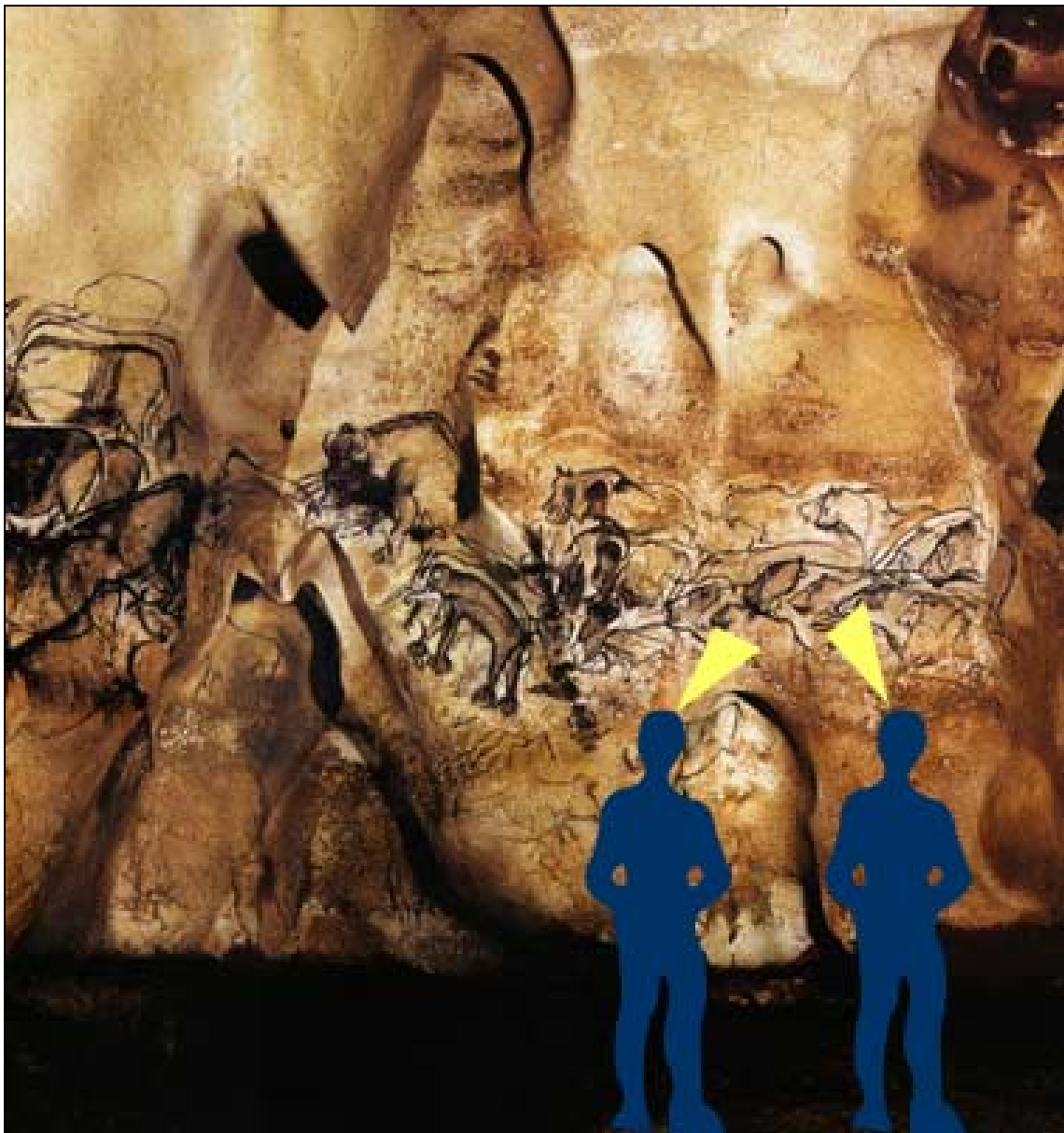
Still blessing my double-thick woollen socks, I followed Jean across the chamber over the needle sharp calcite spikes to see again the footprint left by the Bear Clan child. Looking down at the impressions left all those thousands of years ago sent shivers down my spine.

How often do you think about the artist when you look at a painting? Not until you see some personal object like a pair of spectacles or discarded painting gear do you think of the artist behind the painting. In the same way it was the signs of human occupation, like the paint dribble, the stone step and the footprint, that make the cave come alive for me.

We returned and started down the throat-like tunnel entrance of the Holy of Holies. Immediately inside the entrance are three female pubic triangles; one is drawn the other two engraved. Surely they must indicate that this was the Gateway to the Fertility Goddesses Sanctuary.

Again I was to be surprised by the difference in what I was seeing this time around. The tunnel was even steeper than I remembered, dropping down sharply through seven levels before reaching the *Sorcerer*. By the time you reach the bottom you are a good 20 foot below the chamber's entrance. While we were standing beside the *Sorcerer* a scientist appeared at the top of the tunnel and his light emphasised just how much lower we actually were.

Jean exclaimed when he looked at the instrument that measures the carbon-dioxide level. It was way above the normal of 1.2 high at 3.2. This meant that we would not be able to stay long, but having arrived, there was no way I was going to be hurried as I might never see anything as magnificent again in my whole life. I stared at the wonders before me through my binoculars. The *Lions*, *Rhinoceros*, *Horses* and *Bison* leapt at me from the wall. What a sight! I have imposed some figures on the photograph below to try and give a sense of the size of the chamber, home of the Fertility Goddess and her High Priest, the *Sorcerer*.



Guardian Lions, Hippo and baby Mammoth



Sorcerer's 'Hanging Rock' with the Horse Chapel and Bison



The hidden 'Fertility Goddess'

I looked at the *Sorcerer* crouching over the black female pubic triangle. What potency, what power and what a setting! I then trained the binoculars on the magnificent *Bison* that hides behind the *Sorcerer* on the back wall of the chamber, the final painting on our journey into the Otherworld.



Magnificent great saddle-backed Bison

This is the majestic beast that the *Sorcerer* is disguised as by wearing its skin and horns. The panel shows three great masculine giants, all beautifully drawn. How the artists reached this wall is anyone's guess!

I wondered about the black saddle on the great Bison and the black belt of the Rhinoceros. Were the markings real, or were they examples of artistic licence? I have seen *Belted Galloway* cattle in England and have been told how strong that particular gene is. Could the woolly rhinos have had black belts? I think it is possible as the Chauvet animals in all other respects have been drawn with exact realism by the artists. There is no example of stylisation anywhere in the cave that I could see.

I was beginning to feel a headache coming on so it was time to leave. We started back up the tunnel and stopped at the level just below the entrance to examine the remains of the five fires. The golf ball sized chunks of charcoal looked as though they have only just been burnt. The fires were probably lit at this level, and not lower down, because of the lack of oxygen near the *Sorcerer*. It staggers me to think how incredibly quickly the artists must have had to work in the dim light and because of the foul air.

It was well past lunchtime, but I just had to see the bear paintings on the way out once again so we made our way across to their home in a side cave. I lay down on the steel trolley, pulled myself in along the tracks fixed to the floor and looked up at the red outline of the two bears. They are not only perfect line drawings, but the artist had made them into a relief by using the natural contours on the rock surface to aid his composition. It surely must be a yardstick if you think art gets better every time you see it, and the drawings of Chauvet passes this test with flying colours. I pulled myself out and climbed up the ladder back out into the sunlight, completely humbled.

I ate a French picnic of bread and cheese, washed down with red wine, in the shade of the scrub oaks, looking out over the valley. I wondered if members of the Bear Clan had also sat here chatting while having their lunch. Oh how I wished I could have been a fly on the wall 35,000 years ago and listened to their conversation!

On my last visit I had been interviewed by Pierre for my reactions as we came out of the cave doorway. He had been doing this for two years, but had not yet been allowed into the cave and I could not imagine anything more frustrating. After our lunch he and his film crew were to be allowed in for the first time and would see with their own eyes all the wonders we had been raving about. I watched them as they suited up and then crawled off down the rabbit hole and could imagine just how excited they must have been!

While Jean showed them around the cave I was able to drift away from the group and fall behind. Now from a distance I could see the men faintly illuminated by their helmet lights amongst the beautiful stalagmites and stalactites. They looked like the Bear Clan hunters carrying burning fire sticks!

When we left the cave it was my turn to ask Pierre for his own personal reaction to what he had seen. What had he felt as he stood in front of the Horse Panel? He answered, "I cried!" I completely understood. To see the Chauvet drawings with one's own eyes must be the greatest privilege ever to be bestowed on anyone who appreciates the beauty of creativity.

We trudged down the path in the pouring rain back to the cars and drove into town. The day-long downpour had changed the river into a surging mass of brown waves as they ferociously tumbled through the arch. It was an awesome sight and a complete change from the serenity of the scene only a few hours before on a sunlit morning.

On the way back to the hotel I stopped at the town's museum, which was showing the superb video film made by the original discoverers of the Chauvet cave. I thought it was very good, but somehow completely missed the unique atmosphere of the cave. I don't mean to belittle the film or the museum, but it emphasised just how fortunate I had been to see these wonders with my own eyes and experience the *spirit of the place* thanks to Jean.

That evening he asked Margie and me to dinner at the Research Centre. We had a fascinating time talking with the team of scientists, all experts in their own field. I was able to have a talk with Michel, the bear expert, who told me that he has now recorded 172 bear skulls inside the cave, 53 of which are in the altar chamber, all without the rest of their skeletons!

He explained how as winter began the pregnant bears would have gone into the dark cave to give birth to their tiny cubs, each only eight inches long and weighing about three pounds. The mothers would suckle them through the winter on fat-rich milk as they lay in the pits they had dug that I had seen on the floor of the cave.

Over the winter months the cubs would have grown to about two foot long and weighed around twenty pounds. They would have moved around in the dark cave and, like their mothers, scratched the walls. At the entrance of the *Holy of Holies* Jean had shown me the scratches made by their sharp baby claws. Michel has also found the bones of stillborn cubs.

What was the Bear Clan like and what kind of life did the people lead? Of course we can't see through the veil that hides the past, but we can use our imagination. As I have written I personally believe they thought and acted just like the Unambal, the Australian Aborigine stone-age tribe that Andreas Lommel lived with in 1938.

If this is right the clan would have been about 50 strong. The oldest person was unlikely to be more than 45 years old and was probably the Medicine Man. The best hunter of the clan might have been 35 years old, an alpha male in his prime, the chief. His clan probably consisted of ten men and women aged between 25 and 35, and a younger generation of 20 people between 15 and 25, who were the parents of 20 children. I think a clan of 50 individuals would have been of manageable size, more than able to live off the herds of animals that migrated up and down the Ardèche Canyon between their summer and winter pastures.

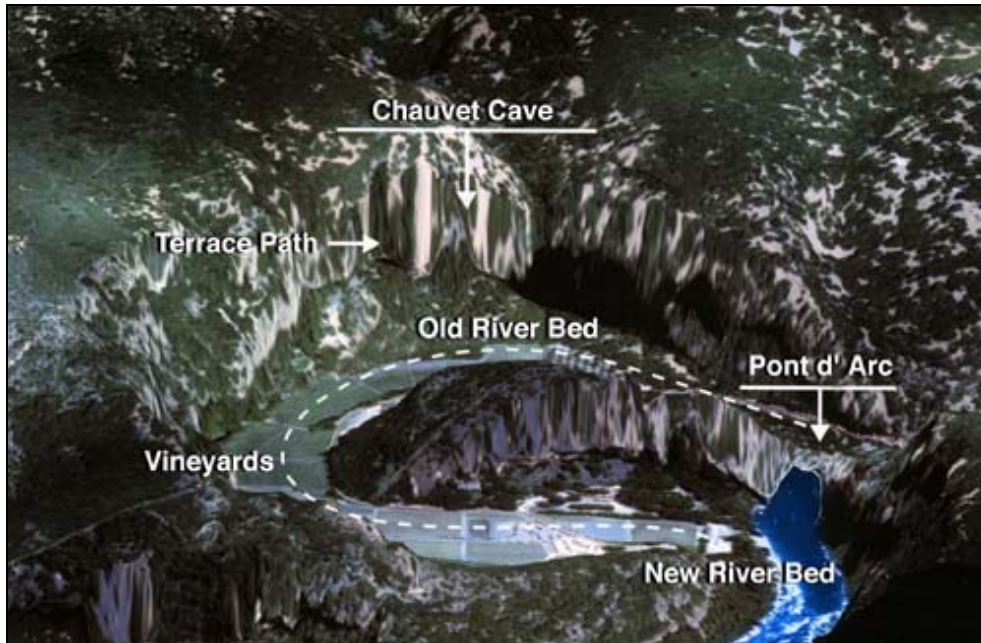
I imagine there must have been several such clans hunting the same area of the Rhône Valley and the Massif Central, following different herds of reindeer, bison and horses. If the migrating herds used the canyon as a main route between their summer and winter grazing, as is probable, all the different clans would have known of the 'Pont d'Arc' and the 'Cave'. Nine rivers have their source within 25 miles, three of which are within a 15-mile radius. On a map the rivers look like the spokes of a bicycle wheel. The arch is such a central and significant landmark that maybe it became a meeting place for all the clans each spring and autumn and the cave a central cathedral.

If this is so, I imagine that it would have been possible for maybe ten clans to have gathered in exactly the same way as the Unambal Tribe used to meet for their annual Corroboree. Up to 500 people would take part in these week long gatherings, dancing and singing new story-songs right throughout the night.

These meetings were socially important to the Aborigines as they provided a place where marriages could be arranged. They were a genetic melting pot of genes for the future generations. The Bear Clan would have needed the same constant input of new blood and the sharing of DNA to build the healthy generations to come.

When you look down on the vineyard from the terrace, it is possible to determine how the landscape was formed long before man came on the scene. The river now cuts through what was a great wall of limestone that once had forced the river around it in a wide loop. When the river wore away the dam and began to flow through the Arch, the loop filled with silt and became the 500 yards wide broad flat valley that is now planted with grape vines.

Not only would the migrating herds have used the valley to bypass the arch but the old river bed would have made a perfect campsite for a Corroboree, a *gathering of the clans*. When looking down on the vineyards it is not hard to imagine a rejoicing party of singing, dancing and matchmaking people gathered around giant fires that burned all night.



These people had minds exactly like our own, so one has to ask the question, did they believe they had souls? Personally I think they would have, because they obviously believed they could communicate with the *animal spirit world*, just as the Unambal Tribe had. I am sure they would both have developed the same kind of mythology.

The human brain has been doing a lot of thinking over the last 100,000 years. Descartes: *I think therefore I am*. From the evidence of the drawings the Bear Clan were definitely 'Thinkers', but had they thought about *Life after death*? I am sure they had, just as the vast majority of people alive today do. One of the mysteries of Chauvet for me is the absence of human bones. What did the Clan do with the bodies of their dead? One of the chief problems that faced Mankind when he started thinking about the existence of a *Life after death* has been how to dispose of corpses.

My thoughts keep returning to what Andreas Lommel recorded when he was living with the Unambal. When a member of an Aborigine tribe died their body was placed in the fork of a tree and allowed to decompose. The skull and the long bones were then collected and rubbed with red ochre before being wrapped in a parcel of tree bark, which looked like a giant Christmas cracker. The man's widow carried the parcel around for a year before she deposited it near the painting of the Wandjina god who was the deceased ancestor. This sacred place was the waterhole where the Wandjina serpent lived that had given a *dream child to his father*. These bark parcels disintegrated over a short period of time, but in 1993 I saw an intact one in a remote cave in Kimberley, possibly only 50 years old, so this practice must still have been in use until very recent times.

At the other ends of the earth, on the Orkney Islands off the northern coast of Scotland, the same practice was being used at the Eagle Tomb. The tomb is situated on the top of a high cliff overlooking the sea and consists of a small tumulus (ossuary chamber) with a platform beside it. The archaeologists say that bodies were exposed on the platform so the Sea Eagles could strip them

of flesh. The long bones and skulls were then collected and stored in the tumulus along with the beaks and claws of Sea Eagles.

The Temples of Malta, the oldest buildings in Europe that predate the Pyramids, are mainly above ground and built on a basic plan that resembles the outline of a very fat Fertility Goddess. Two underground temples mined out of the limestone have been found that follow the same design. Discovered inside these underground temples were thousands of long bones and skulls, the male stored in one section and the female in another.

When the West Kennet burial chamber near Stonehenge was opened, long bones and skulls were found. The same thing occurred in Ireland at tumuli tombs like New Grange. It seems to have been a universal practice that has existed for thousands and thousands of years.

What was the purpose of the *Dabous Giraffe* carvings in Niger? Obviously the site was sacred and must have been visited by many people over a great number of years. Jean Clottes and his team recorded 828 smaller carvings surrounding the main *Giraffe* carvings. Near the site are several tumuli and I wondered what was hidden within them. Skulls and long bones?

When I slept beside the *Giraffe* carvings in 1999 I had the worst nightmares I have ever experienced. People were being killed left, right and centre, and blood was flowing everywhere. If my dreams were any indication the purpose of the Dabous rocks was definitely attached to death so the *Giraffe* carvings could have been used for the exposure of the dead.

In the dead volcanic crater of Arakua, east of the Air Mountains and on the edge of the Sahara Desert, there is a vast tumulus built from football-sized river stones. It covers the area of two tennis courts and is over eight foot high! What is it for? Could it be hiding the skulls and long bones of people that died when the Tenere was the home of thousands of hunter gatherers who lived on the then fertile planes around lakes full of fish? The only purpose I can think of is that the tumulus was slowly built up over a great many years as the skulls and bones of the dead were buried within. Thousands of man-hours must have gone into building such a giant heap of stones.

The Egyptians took the process the next step by believing that the mummified body would be rejuvenated in the *afterlife*. This practice was dropped when man decided we didn't need bodies in the next life. I often wonder if the reason we respect the bodies of the dead could possibly be that we don't want their spirits to come back and haunt us from the *spirit world*!

So what did the Bear Clan do with their dead? I can't help but think that such a sophisticated people must have treated the remains of the bodies with great reverence. Because the Clan would have only passed Chauvet in the spring and autumn, when the migrating herds used the Ardèche Canyon, I doubt if an ossuary will be found near the Arch, but I could be wrong. Perhaps the women behaved like the Unambal ones and carried the bones of their dead until they could leave them at the 'spirit waterhole' of the deceased, or by the Rhône!

Did the Chauvet people solve the problem in the same way as the Eskimos who leave their elderly for the Polar Bears to eat! Did the Bear Clan use the *Lions* and *Bears* in the same way? It is a very tidy way of solving the problem, even if a bit gruesome! I think this highly unlikely because we have the bones of a young man who was ceremonially buried in a shallow grave behind a mammoth's skull *after they had been rubbed with red ochre*. The 29,000 year old bones were discovered in 1826 in a cave on the south coast of Wales!

My thoughts keep returning to the quote from Joseph Bronowski's book, *The Ascent of Man* that I included at the end of the story of my first visit to Chauvet. He wrote: *Man is a puny, slow, awkward, unarmed animal – he had to invent the pebble, a flint, a knife, a spear. But why to these scientific inventions, which were essential to his survival, did he come to caves like these, and make paintings of animals in places that were dark, secret, remote, hidden and inaccessible? I think that the power that we see expressed here for the first time is the power of anticipation: the forward-looking imagination.*

Art and science are both uniquely human actions, outside the range of anything that an animal can do. And here we see that they derive from the same human faculty: the ability to visualise the future, to foresee what might happen and plan to anticipate it, and represent it to ourselves in images that we project and move inside our head. What we call cultural evolution is essentially a constant growing and widening of the human imagination.

The outcome of this *forward-looking imagination* is a belief in the *life hereafter*. I believe that religion evolved in three separate but linked steps. The first step is when an extended troop of humans develops a *set of rules* for their mutual protection against the environment and rivals who were competing for the same resources. In time, these rules naturally evolved into a *Code of Conduct* that became an accepted way of life for the family. Today we call this a *Moral Code*.

The next step is really just an extension of the first one, as the *rules* would need to be enforced on the *troop* by a mutually-respected *leader*. Such a man would have been the strongest and most skilful hunter, a charismatic *Leader*, who most likely was also the sexually dominant male, or what scientists call *Alpha Male*. He would have been replaced continually from the younger ranks of males as the older man's physical strength and sexual potency failed.

The third step was reached when the new leader realised that the wisdom obtained by the man he replaced was needed to maintain his position within the troop and help with his experience in the never-ending struggle to survive in what was then an unbelievably harsh environment.

The old leader could have become a counsellor, a Medicine Man or Shaman, who the troop believed could communicate with the supernatural forces and thus help not only in their present life but also the *Afterlife*. The system evolved into the combination of king and priest that is so familiar to us today, thus imposing a pattern of behaviour on society backed up by ritual song, dance and taboo laws. The *troop* had evolved into a *tribe*.

The above would all have been part of the evolution of Archaic Man, Heidelbergensis and Neanderthal. The great leap made by *Homo sapiens* was the use of his *forward-looking imagination*, the end result of which is *superstition*. The majority of Mankind alive today believe in the *myth of the life hereafter*. We teach our children to believe in myths from Santa Claus to miracles such as an immaculate birth, all totally unsupported by any proof, but implicitly believed.

The discovery of the *Art of Chauvet* is as important as *Man walking on the Moon*. I believe Art is the pinnacle of Civilisation. Sperone Speroni, a Renaissance writer in Florence in the 16th century, defined Civilisation as the *Creation of Wealth and the Patronage of the Arts*. Art is the culmination of Mankind's achievements and its existence in the Chauvet Cave is the positive proof.

I wouldn't mind betting that the hunters of the Bear Clan acted as patrons to their artists. I can just hear them saying, "You stay in the cave today and draw and I will go get some meat for you to eat at my fire tonight!" If they thought that the animal spirits protected the herds and the art could help them

make a kill, they would have made certain that their artists were properly looked after! What a lovely thought!

My personal experience has taught me that the artist must work alone, but it is also essential that he or she has the support of a patron who has faith in the artist and his work. That is how it is today and I am sure it was the same when the Chauvet drawings were done over a continuous period of 8,000 year between 36,000 and 27,000 years ago.

When Jean visited my studio in Somerset he had admired a small bronze called *Bird of Spring* that I had done many years before based on a poem by Alexander Pushkin about a young girl releasing a swallow outside the church after the Easter service. The sculpture makes me think of the *Chauvet spirit world* so I gave him a copy as a 'thank you' for taking me into Chauvet. (p 1111)

Thinking about the Bear Clan and Chauvet has been for me like a trip over Niagara Falls in a barrel. If the earth was to open up and the Chauvet cave was to disappear for ever, I cannot think of a greater loss to Mankind. There is simply nothing else like it in the world. *Chauvet haunts my mind.*

What we call Civilisation is part of Evolution and therefore subject to Darwin's conviction that there is *No innate tendency to progressive development.* However, Civilisation constantly has to adapt to the environment. But I wonder if there is possibly an *innate tendency to destruction* hidden within Modern Man as is shown by our continual destruction of our Earth Island home?

Consider the ancient urban civilisations. Start with the 8,000-year-old urban development of Catal Hüyük in present-day Turkey. Catal was followed by Babylon, Malta, Stonehenge, and the Egyptian, Minoan, Greek and Roman civilisations. They are all stepping stones in the evolutionary fight for survival of Civilisation. One by one they collapsed and were replaced because they proved to be unsustainable. Undoubtedly, our present civilisation will collapse and be replaced when it becomes unsustainable.

Civilisations can fall because of natural catastrophes, such as an Ice Age, flood, super-volcanic eruptions, famine, disease or plague. However they also collapse because of human failure. Success seems to bring about a dilution of the survival instinct in Mankind and turn us into hedonistic monsters, because it leads to overpopulation, diminishing resources and dependency on cheap labour. Man's successes seem to me to weakened our drive to survive.

Without doubt hunter-gatherer societies led the most sustainable existence possible. In Australia *fire-stick farming* Aborigines lived in this way for at least 40,000 years, only ending when Europeans arrived 250 years ago and destroyed the environment the natives had carefully nurtured for so long.

The Australian Aborigines lived in a static state, surviving off the land by following a set of rules that never allowed their population to reach beyond the food supply. If a series of good years raised the population, droughts quickly reduced it again because the women stopped having babies.

Of course every life is precious to the individual family, but it is not precious to the overall society, especially if the added burden is seen to be a danger to the whole. Mankind needs to think about the Earth's *carrying capacity*, something I am sure the Chauvet Bear Clan knew all too well.

The Chauvet Cave was used solely for religious ceremonies over a period of 8,000 years, a greater length of time than between *building of the Pyramids to walking on the Moon!* The Bear Clan was part of a very successful society, as shown by the quality of their art. If the Ice Age had not happened would their

society have eventually collapsed? They were inventive, intuitive, creative, artistic and quite obviously, *forward thinkers*.

Remember Marcus Aurelius: *You consist of three things only, your body, your life, your mind; only the last is subject wholly to your control. All else is mere smoke.*

Reading the thoughts above I am tempted to bin them as they are personal opinions. However, I would like my grandchildren to read and think on these things, so I shall leave them be, as they are all thoughts that have been stimulated by my visits to Chauvet. Without the art the cave is just another hole in the ground. The art inside Chauvet makes it one of our greatest museums, *a wonder of the world*, and the only justification for my being allowed in is to try and share just a little of the miracle of the cave's treasures with those less fortunate who cannot see the wonders for themselves.

Chauvet had one more treat in store for me! Although this didn't take place until 2005, this is probably the perfect place to record a very special event that brought utter joy to my friends and me.

The Bradshaw Foundation's website had reached 12,000,000 hits a year, increasing at a rate of two million a quarter. At this rate by 2010 the site will be giving free education to 100,000,000 viewers every year! This is largely due to the enormous amount of work the editor, son Peter, and graphic-designer, Ben Dickins, have put into the map created Oppenheimer's *Peopling of the World*. The baby had grown into an adult and the site was so large it needed a proper structure so Damon, Robert, Michael Ball and Michael McGuire have created a Registered Trust. Jean Clottes has agreed to be a Trustee, Jill Cook of the British Museum's has joined our Advisory Board to help guide the site's future, and son Peter has become Trustee Coordinator. The completion of the Bradshaw Foundation Trust's charter took place at a meeting near Chauvet on May 1st 2005, three days before my 70th birthday, and Jean had arranged for Robert, Damon, Peter and myself to visit the cave to celebrate the event. The British Museum had not been invited to visit the cave so Jean Clottes kindly agreed to allow Jill Cook could take my place.

As the sun rose on May Day we drove up the Ardèche Canyon, occasionally stopping on the way to admire the fantastic view down into the river. We finally arrived at the downstream side of the Lion Arch. Being still early in the morning, there was not a soul in sight and the peace was tangible. We parked the cars and walked down to the beach on the upstream side of the Arch. Again quite alone, we watched the swallows swooping up into their nests that were glued to the underside of the gigantic arch that spanned the river. There was not a sound but for the gurgle of the shallow rapids behind us.

We returned to the car park, met our official guides and set off up the steep path to the cave. I could sense the mounting anticipation of my friends. I had given Jill a small baked-clay *fertility goddess* to hang around her neck. I had made it from clay stolen from the floor inside Niaux then cooked it in the Agecroft hearth! I hoped she would remember to touch it when she stood in front of the *Fertility Goddess* in the *Holy of Holies* deep inside the cave!

My friends pulled on their overalls and disappeared behind the vault door. They would be gone for nearly three hours. I walked up the path from the cave to gaze at the most meaningful views in the world on account of what I knew lay beneath my feet. I sat in the hot sun and in my mind pictured the gang climbing down the 30-foot ladder into the chambers below, sharing in their reaction to the sight of the beautiful pink and white fairyland.

I walked with them past the *Bears*, under the *Owl*, standing before the *Horse* panel and the *Chagall* drawing, then gazing in awe at the *Bear Skull Altar*. They entered the portal of the *Holy of Holies*, bowed their heads to the *Megaceros* and *Belted Rhino* guardians as they passed between them. Down the slope past the *Three Lions* 'looking inwards' and then standing before the great panel of *Lions, Rhinos, Baby Mammoth* all 'looking outwards', before turning to be 'blasted' by the image of the *Fertility Goddess* and her male *Sorcerer* attendant! I felt so happy for them and hoped Jill remembered to touch her talisman! Did they see my favourite *Chapel Horse*? So much to see and so little time!

I returned to the vault door and soon I heard banging from inside, followed by voices, and the door swung open and out came a string of grinning faces. As we walked back to the storage cave along the wooden gantry, words flooding from four mouths all at the same time. What a joy to see my friends bursting with happiness. Jill gave me a hug and I could see she was close to tears, as I was myself.



Robert, Jean, Damon, Jill and Peter after their 'quantum leap'

Unfortunately Jean had to leave immediately for Foix. We five drove back down the gorge, stopping to gaze down at the Lion Arch, the beach now crowded with happy families and children played in the water. Canoes were being paddled under the vast stone bridge and I felt that this was just how it must have been 35,000 years ago when all the clans joined at the great campsite beneath the cliffs that guarded the cave entrance. I am sure that in those days similar family parties took place on the beach with the children playing in skin coracles rather than plastic canoes. The one thing we modern humans really enjoy is a party, laughing, having fun and I can't imagine it being different then. Maybe learning to laugh and have fun might be the one thing that separates us from Neanderthals! The one all-important mutation that took place 200,000 years ago in Central Africa might have been the gene for a *sense of humour!*

In those days the Lion Arch encampment must have been like a giant Christmas party, Chauvet Cave like a Cathedral, the Fertility Goddess like the Madonna, and the *Sorcerer* like the Pope! An Australian Aborigine Corroboree with music, song, dance, marriage alliances and christenings.

I could not believe my eyes when I saw that the left-hand beach on the river bank had been formed into a *lion's head!*



Lion's head beach



Jill's Talisman



Sealed Chauvet door

Back at the hotel over lunch the excitement produced a conversation that should have been recorded. Wine loosened our tongues releasing a torrent of uninhibited feeling. Robert said that he counted the experience equal to the moment that his schoolboy's eyes had been opened by his mentor, Ray Alf, by being shown *life in a drop of pond water*. Jill said the cave had forced her to re-organise a lifetime's thinking about prehistory. Damon and Peter agreed their lives had taken a *quantum leap*. To share these Chauvet experiences with my friends as we ate, drank and talked so freely in the sun, filled me with joy. It was one of life's very special moments.

The excitement exhausted us all so by four o'clock a siesta was needed! Over dinner that evening our talk turned from image wonder to philosophy. Again I wish the conversation could have been recorded as ideas and reactions spilled out helped by copious amounts of premier claret. But, maybe it is impossible to reiterate that kind of conversation that includes words like *stress, risk, creativity, intuition, forward thinking, organisation, and imagination*. You would have to be a Jung to explain Chauvet's link to our own existence through the *collective unconscious*. What would Jung have had to say if he had shared our luck of experiencing Chauvet? Imagine what Darwin would have had to say! We know what Bronowski thought about cave art as he wrote: *the power that we see expressed here for the first time is the power of anticipation: the forward-looking imagination*.

The organisation so apparent inside the cave, which was used over such a vast length of time (at least 8,000 years), in conjunction with the environment outside of the Arch, campsite and the river, itself a tributary of the Rhône (pathway to the Mediterranean), to me makes Chauvet the most important place in Europe. I believe the foundation stone of Western thinking was set here 35,000 years ago. Was Chauvet a 'collective centre' for all previous thought and inventiveness since Modern Man left Africa only 80,000 years ago. *A crucible for forward-looking imagination. The fons et origo of Western Man.*

What a way to spend the last hours before my 70th birthday! To share with friends something so utterly wonderful was an unbelievable gift. While I imagined them being *flabbergasted* underground I had sat in the sun and talked to Margie on my cellphone so was able to share my joy with her. What a journey Man has taken over the last 35,000 years! Chauvet to cellphone via Walking on the Moon! I thought, *Surely life can't get any better than this!*

Maybe Chauvet Cave was the Cathedral for the whole of Europe 30,000 years ago, but this doesn't mean that all the human activity was centered in France. The oldest Modern Man skeleton found so far was discovered in Britain in the

Paviland Caves on the Gower Peninsula in southern Wales. The bones of the almost complete 'Red Lady' were dyed in red ochre and are dated at 29,000 years old, which is right in the middle of the Chauvet Cave period. *The grave is the oldest ceremonial burial yet discovered in Western Europe.* The shallow grave was found tucked into an alcove deep inside the cave and in front of it was buried a *mammoth skull*. These are the bones I referred to when writing about there being no evidence of what the Chauvet clan did with their dead.

The Paviland skeleton was discovered in 1826 and is Cro-Magnon. The name comes from the five skeletons discovered in the Cro-Magnon rock shelter in the Dordogne in 1868. The Cro-Magnons are the earliest known European examples of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, the subspecies to which we modern humans belong. The name given to the Cro-Magnon culture is Aurignacian and the Upper Palaeolithic dates between 34,000 and 23,000 BP.

Although called the *Red Lady* the skeleton is in fact that of a young man aged 21 years old. He was in good health at the time of his death and the bone protein analysis indicates that he lived on a diet that consisted of between 15% and 20% fish. He must have lived on a balanced diet of other foods such as horse, reindeer, roots, acorns and berries.

In total finds in the Paviland Caves include over 4000 worked flints, necklace bones, stone needles and mammoth-ivory bracelets. Also found buried with the young man were perforated seashell necklaces identical to the 75,000 year old ones discovered at Blombos in South Africa.

The entrance to Paviland cave now looks over the Bristol Channel, but 30,000 years ago the sea level was 250 foot lower so the view was of a richly pastured 70-mile wide plain that was full of grazing animals. The 21 year old *Red Lady* man could have walked from England to France to join in a corroboree by the Lion Arch and taken part in the ceremonies inside the Chauvet Cave. To me this is a very sobering thought indeed!



Paviland Cave, Gower Peninsula, Wales