ANNUAL REPORT: COVA GRAN 2017 FIELD SCHOOL

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Cova Gran 2017: discussing fieldwork strategy before start to work

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Cova Gran: a field/lab work complementary strategy

Since 2012, collaboration with Institute of Field Research (IFR) has been essential to develop this project. From June 25th to July 29th, two students from Institute Field Research (IFR) and 4 staff members composed the archaeological group. Although general orientation of the 2017 field season has not varied substantially over previous years, the specific objectives had to adapt due to the size of the group, more than half of participants who usually participate in the fieldwork.

Cova Gran fieldwork aims to provide skills related to methods and techniques, underlying the excavation and cataloging the archaeological record. This emphasis to increase general understanding of the fieldwork practice is focused on pointing out how methodological decisions affect the archeological interpretation.

This program develops standards applied in Paleolithic sites, interested to obtain detailed contextual information of the archaeological record and Cova Gran is an excellent place to familiarize the participants with fieldwork and laboratory activities. However, complex formation process of Cova Gran difficult digging, and field and lab data needed to be checked every day to understand the evolution of the excavation.

2017 fieldwork was focused in the Ramp area, that it contains an important Middle Paleolithic sequence, during this year a new area containing an unknown chrono-cultural sequence has been detected. This new area implied the reorganization of the fieldwork to explore relationship between the both sectors. Preliminary data suggest correspond a new chrono-cultural phase around 15-10 Ka, period during hunter-gatherer lifestyle, poorly known in the southern Pyrenees.

The small number of participants forced to change the fieldwork goals. The IFR participants worked exclusively in sector S, centered in the Middle Paleolithic layers. This challenging area includes the succession of S1D, S1E, S1F levels identified by stratified hearths and separated by less than 5 cm thick, difficult to dig even for experienced participants. Participants had no experience using excavation tools, or following irregular layers, neither to find a comfortable position. Although, acquiring these skills implies a slow and patient apprenticeship, participants understood rapidly how to excavate and it was successful excavated by 16 m^2, a large area for a Paleolithic site. Continuous supervision by the staff allows the participants to acquire excellent expertise level and they were included like staff members.

Laboratory activities are essential for the correct development of the excavation. These tasks involve washing, labelling, initial classification of artifacts and database work. The archaeological material recovered was daily updated in the database to have accurate information about the fieldwork progress. This information is basic to take fieldwork decisions and if necessary to rectify them. To implement this systematic process is essential the inclusion of participants and this season their commitment was fully accomplished. Small conferences about lab work and tool classification were given and focused on the classification of tools and the identification of contexts. Within a few days, students were able to discuss on object identification, function and use. They acquired excavation skills, participated in digging, selecting artifacts while screening, cleaning material, data base input.

Considering fieldwork and laboratory activities as feedback activities is the best option to investigate a site such as Cova Gran (Martinez-Moreno et al., 2015), and this objective has been adequately performed during the 2017 season.

Research dissemination

The axes of research that are currently being developed around the excavation of Cova Gran are very wide. The interest aroused allows the acceptance of restricted workshop presentations, and these contributions will be published in coming months. During this year, it should be mentioned for their special relevance the following invited contributions:

- Rien sans les montagnes L'établissement Moustérien a la basse montagne des Aspres de la Noguera (Prépyrénées de Lleida). *La conquête de la montagne: premières occupations humaines à l'anthropisation du milieu.* Université de Pau, April 2017.
- A small bunch of refits: Depicting technological attributes of 497D "blade" assemblage in Cova Gran. *The big puzzle 30 years after: a shared multidisciplinary Paleolithic perspective*. Marie-Curie Program. Wenner Gren Found. IPHES. Tarragona May 2017.
- Multi-approach analysis of short-term occupations: Middle Paleolithic levels S1D, S1E and S1F of Cova Gran (Iberia). *Intra-site spatial analysis workshop*. Centro Nacional Evolucion Humana. Burgos, November 2017.

The research group will participate June 2018 in the next UISPP International Congress. The results obtained last years in Cova Gran will be exposed in different workshops.

Collaboration with the IFR has led to the publication of a series of articles on Cova Gran in international journals, which can be consulted in ORCID (www.orcid.org/0000-0002-6326-7058) and SCOPUS (Scopus Author ID: 23470273200). In 2017, there were published the following articles:

- Mora, R. et al. 2017. Contextual, technological and chronometric data from Cova Gran: Their contribution to discussion of the Middle-to-Upper Paleolithic transition in northeastern Iberia. Quaternary International. doi.org/10.1016/j.quaint.2016.05.017
- Mora, R. et al. (2017). Cova Gran: a home for humans 50,000 years. Current World Archaeology 84: 22-25. www.world-archaeology.com