

# SPAIN

## Altamira Cave

### Brief description

This prehistoric site in the province of Santander was inhabited in the Aurignacian period and then in the Solutrean and Magdalenian periods. Most of the stone implements and, in particular, the famous paintings in the great chamber (in ochre, red and black and depicting a variety of wild animals such as bison, horses, fawns and wild boar) date from this latter period.

### 1. Introduction

**Year of Inscription** 1985

#### Agency responsible for site management

- Museo Nacional y Centro de Investigación de Altamira

### 2. Statement of Significance

**Inscription Criteria** C (i), (iii)

#### Justification provided by the State Party

Undoubtedly, the cave of Altamira has a value of its own, as one of the paramount (if not unique) expressions of Palaeolithic art in the world. The whole of the Sala de los Polícromos is, no doubt, the most important and the best known example of cave paintings of that period.

Apart from its artistic value, the cave stands out because of its historical importance. The discovery of the cave, even if not the first in its kind, raised on an international scale the problem of true scientific appreciation of cave paintings.

In short, Altamira has often been called "The Sistine Chapel" of Cuaternarian Art.

#### As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

In a unique and limited space (the largest room measures roughly 18 x 9 meters), the cave of Altamira provides a gripping synopsis of the best of Magdalenian painting, as it can also be admired in the decorated caves of the Vezère valley (which were included on the World Heritage List in 1979) or in Asturian sites such as San Roman de Candamo.

ICOMOS recommends the inclusion of the cave of Altamira on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria (i) and (iii).

Criterion (i). From the standpoint of its aesthetic quality, Altamira, "the Sistine Chapel of Prehistory", represents a unique artistic achievement for this period.

Criterion (iii). Altamira bears exceptional testimony to the Magdalenian civilizations of southern Europe.

#### Committee Decision

The Committee made no statement.

- Statement of Significance does not adequately define the outstanding universal value of the site
- Proposal for text has been made by State Party
- UNESCO official description of site should be changed; State Party has provided suggestion

#### Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: adequate

#### Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

### 3. Protection

#### Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- Decree 1924 declaring Architectural-Artistic Monument, Law 1924 Monumento Arquitectónico-Artístico, Royal Decree 1977, Ministerial Order 1979, 1985 for creating Altamira National Museum and Research Centre, Spanish Historical Heritage Act 1985, Law 1998 on the Cultural Heritage of Cantabria, Resolution 2004 approving the Municipal Master Plan and the Special Plan for the Protection of the Historical Complex of Santillana del Mar
- The protection arrangements are considered highly effective

### 4. Management

#### Use of site/property

- Visitor attraction

#### Management /Administrative Body

- Legal steering group since 01/1979
- Coordinator on full-time basis

- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national
- The current management system is highly effective, etc.

### 5. *Management Plan*

- Management plan is being implemented
- Implementation commenced: 07/2001
- Very effective
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: The Ministry of Culture, to which the Altamira National Museum and Research Centre belongs

### 6. *Financial Resources*

#### **Financial situation**

- Funding shared by Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Finance, Regional Government of Cantabria, Santillana del Mar Town Government -European Union (FEDER Funds) -Marcelino Botín Foundation (private institution)
- All the above made up the Consortium for Altamira that was created to carry out the Plan
- Sufficient

### 7. *Staffing Levels*

- Number of staff: 60

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Good: conservation, management, promotion, interpretation, education, visitor management

### 8. *Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques*

- Conservation of the Altamira Cave is the direct responsibility of the museum itself. Additionally, the Directorate General for Fine Arts and Cultural Assets of the Ministry of Culture relies on the Spanish Historic Heritage Institute and has also relied, through agreement, on the High Council for Scientific Research (Ministry of Education and Science)

### 9. *Visitor Management*

- Visitor statistics: 275,000 in 2004

- Visitor facilities: Signs, new access roadway to the Museum from the nearest town, walking (and bicycle) path, parking facilities, full handicapped-accessibility, all museum and exhibit information in Spanish and English, guided tours, advance ticket sales, reservations and Group Visits Department, workshops for children and in experimental archaeology for youths and adults', visitor park including a park designed with musicological criteria referring to the Altamira's Palaeolithic environment ; new museum facilities, cafeteria

### 10. *Scientific Studies*

- Monitoring exercises, condition surveys, archaeological surveys, studies used for management of site, visitor management
- Collaboration agreement between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education and Science for comprehensive scientific study including a review of the continuous monitoring of the conservation parameters of the cave and the Palaeolithic art, as well as of public accessibility

### 11. *Education, Information and Awareness Building*

- Not enough signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem not used on publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: local communities, local authorities
- Education programme for schools and new museum facilities
- Website: [www.museodealtamira.mcu.es](http://www.museodealtamira.mcu.es)
- Local participation through the Altamira Project and Museum, awareness building and job creation

### 12. *Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)*

#### **Reactive monitoring reports**

- N/A

#### **Conservation interventions**

- Conservation; restoration works since 1979
- Present state of conservation: Good

#### **Threats and Risks to site**

- None presently

### **13. Monitoring**

- Formal monitoring programme since 1982, automated monitoring of high resolution environmental parameter data has taken place. The system uses a combination of sensing devices within the cave together with electronic and computer support for data recording and storage at pre-set intervals

### **14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions**

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, social, economic, management
- Weakness of management: its natural fragility

#### **Future actions:**

- Ongoing monitoring of its state of conservation and the preventive conservation program underway at present