

The floor of the Sacristy is covered with animal prints, and the decision was made not to go to the back of the chamber, so that there are some unexplored areas. It is accessed via a small corridor at the left of the End Chamber, and contains drawings of a beautifully executed horse, rhinoceros, a big feline and a large bison that was both scraped and engraved.

Sacristy

The Belvedere

Belvedere Gallery

The Belvedere Gallery is very difficult to negotiate, and the original humans here had considerable speleological skills to reach its end which is a small hole (the Belvedere, two metres above the floor of the End Chamber) at the end of the End Chamber, from which it is possible to view the whole of the left wall of the End Chamber, if it were suitably lit.

The End Chamber entrance is four metres below the Megaloceros Gallery, at the level of the Panel of the Big Lions and the Panel of the Rhinoceroses. The ceilings are from five metres to 12 metres high, with many rock pendants. It contains some of the finest art in the Chauvet Cave, of big cats, bison, rhinoceroses, and mammoths.

The Hillaire Chamber is about 30 metres in diameter, and although the entrance from the Candle Gallery is low, the ceiling is up to 17 metres in height, and has few concretions. The decorations consist of engravings and finger tracings in the soft walls, often overlapping, and in some cases now preserved under a calcite coating.

The Rouzaud Chamber leads off the Red Panels Gallery, and the floor rises rapidly, so that the visitor cannot stand upright within this chamber. The gallery floor is a succession of gours (calcite rimmed pools), and this is the most humid of the galleries. The prehistoric artists penetrated this gallery, and left an unfinished drawing.

The Cactus Gallery is largely unexplored, in the sense that the only movement permitted is in the path taken by the original explorers. Fragments of every size have fallen from the ceiling, and the area gets its name from a mass of concretions developed on this collapse, which includes an enormous fragment of stalagmitic floor.

At the entrance to this gallery is the first figure discovered at the cave, a small red mammoth on a rock pendant.

Large stalagmitic mass with collapsed blocks.

The modern entry is via a ten metre shaft into the vast and chaotic Brunel Chamber, which is strewn with fallen blocks, columns and rubble.

Access to the Morel Chamber involves an uncomfortable crawl through a narrow passage. It contains evidence of cave bears and ibex, which could not have accessed this chamber by the present entrance. The chamber was originally connected to the outside by another entrance, since closed off.

The low ceiling of the Megaloceros Gallery allows only a single path down the axis leading to the End Chamber. As well as the drawing of the megaloceros, there are several rhinoceroses drawn, notably with a broad black panel in front of the hindquarters, possibly denoting one of the thick skin plates.

Megaloceros Gallery

The Large Collapse, a deep depression in the chamber floor, about ten metres in diameter and four metres deep.

Hillaire Chamber

Candle Gallery

The Candle Gallery marks the beginning of the second part of the cave. The floor is 1.5 metres lower than the Red Panels Gallery. The ceiling is high in places, and low in places. An active stalagmite with sparkling crystals of calcite, which was not in existence in prehistoric times, gives the gallery its name.

Red Panels Gallery

The Red Panels Gallery has a high ceiling at its entrance, but the height decreases towards the back. In addition there is much rubble on the floor as one moves towards the back of the gallery, and this chaos must be crossed in order to explore the farthest galleries of Chauvet Cave.

Many concretions are on the floors and hang from the ceiling. The graphic images of this gallery occur mostly on the eastern wall, as a series of panels.

This 50 metre wide gallery has a perfectly flat floor, attributed to an ancient lake which at times completely filled this chamber.

The ceiling has been sculpted by water into smoothed pockets and pendants, but is flat in one section where the roof has given way and fallen to the floor in large blocks.

The flat floor has hollows dug into the clay by cave bears, and some of the blocks on the floor are polished by their passage.

The bears and other animals that used these chambers navigated in the pitch black conditions by bumping into things and memorizing their paths, and by smell.

Chamber of the Bear Hollows

Brunel Chamber

Entrance Chamber

This is the original entrance chamber, now sealed off from the outside. The floor is covered with scree.

Narrow, un-negotiable entry to the Brunel Chamber

Morel Chamber

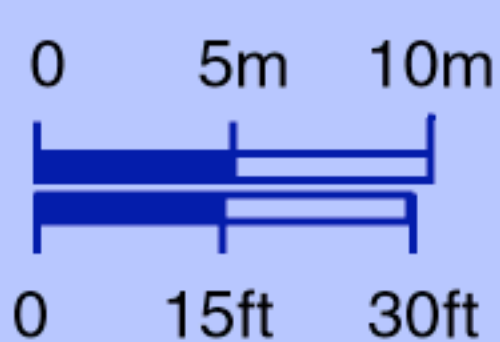
Gallery of the Crosshatching

The Gallery of the Crosshatching has a low ceiling except in the central portion, along which axis it is convenient to walk. At the back of the gallery is a slanted ceiling which is covered with a fine yellow coating of decomposed rock, in which has been drawn with the fingers a large horse.

Skull Chamber

The Skull Chamber ceiling is lower than the Hillaire Chamber, and the floor resembles an amphitheatre, the tiers being formed from banks of grey clay on all sides, created when the floor sank over thousands of years.

It gets its name from a bear skull placed carefully on a stone that had fallen from the ceiling.



Redrawn by Don Hitchcock from "Chauvet Cave - The Art of Earliest Times" Directed by Jean Clottes, translated by Paul G. Bahn This book is essential reading for those interested in Chauvet Cave

Original Legend: Topography Y. Le Guillou and F. Maksud Dedicated to François Rouzaud