



PRESS RELEASE

No. 533/2016

Date: 6th October 2016

The Gibraltar Museum and the Fundacion Atapuerca commence a co-operative network of scientific teams linked to World Heritage sites

The Gibraltar Museum and the Fundacion Atapuerca (an important non-profit organisation set up to support scientific research and excavations in the Sierra de Atapuerca) have agreed to create a co-operative network of scientific research teams on human evolution associated with UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Gorham's Cave was inscribed on the World Heritage List in July of this year and Atapuerca in November 2000. Both the Gibraltar Museum and the Fundacion Atapuerca consider of great importance that scientific teams that research human evolution in sites that are recognised by UNESCO for their World Heritage value should get together to act as a network, given the complementary nature of their research and the similarity of many of the challenges which they face.

In addition as part of this co-operation both entities have signed a framework agreement which provides for teams from both entities to collaborate with each other, through the exchange of expertise and scientists. Members of the Atapuerca team have been participating in the Gorham's Cave excavations for some years now as part of a multidisciplinary effort directed by Professor Clive Finlayson of the Gibraltar Museum. Among the results of this collaborative work was the presentation of evidence of Neanderthal symbolic capabilities which raised great interest in 2014 at the XVII World Congress of the International Union for Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences which was held in Burgos and organized by the Fundacion Atapuerca.

The Gibraltar Museum has also been developing new lines of research in relation to the modelling of ecosystems occupied by Neanderthals and Modern Humans at Gorham's Cave, quantifying the environment and the behaviour of the hominids, and the impact of climate change. These lines of research have the potential of being amplified to other sites. In this regard Atapuerca and other sites of global importance that may join the new international network can become exemplary models to follow in future research that both institutions may develop along this line of ecological research.

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The Gorham's Cave Complex is considered among the last places to have been inhabited by Neanderthals. Evidence of occupation lasting over 125,000 years has been found here, in the context of a climatic refugium. These studies also reveal great similarities in behaviour between the Gibraltarian populations of Neanderthals and Modern Humans.