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More than 300 prehistoric cave paintings found in south France

PARIS (AP) — Archaeologists inching through a cave suddenly found themselves amid a stunning art show — 300 glacial-era wall paintings of animals, a 20,000-year old display that experts say eclipses the cave art of Lascaux.

The paintings, discovered Dec. 24 in caves of the Ardeche River canyon in southern France, depict horses, lions, bison, bears, panthers, mammoths, owls, wild oxen, wild goats and woolly rhinoceroses.

"We have there a selection of animals infinitely more varied than the other sites and with exceptional features," said Genevieve Martin, a specialist for the Archaeological Service of the Rhone-Alpes region.

The paintings show standing or galloping groups of animals about 15 inches high. Some rhinoceroses were shown fighting.

The Culture Ministry, announcing the find Wednesday, called it "the only totally intact and ornate network of caves from the Paleolithic era."

The caves near Combe d'Arc are about 1,500 feet deep in the Ardeche, known for its grottos and subterranean rivers. It is 260 miles south of Paris.

The discovery was not announced until Wednesday so the site could be protected. The caves, yet to be named, were quickly protected by a heavy door and TV surveillance.

They "will not be opened to the public so that the extremely fragile and precious relics can be studied," Culture Minister Jacques Toubon said. "Preservation is our priority at the moment."

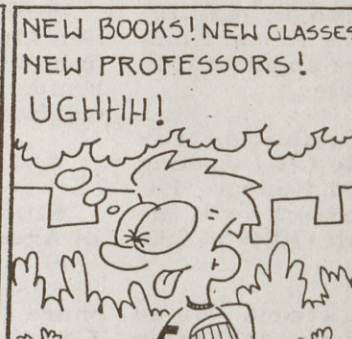
The ministry said it plans to show the paintings to the public using video, CD-ROM or other multimedia techniques.

The caves of Lascaux in France's southwest Dordogne region are open only to a handful of experts each day; a re-creation in a similar cave is open to the general public.

"What was done at Lascaux is superb," said Nick Ashton, a researcher at the British Museum's Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities. "You're reducing the risk of damage to the paintings from the humidity brought in by human breath."

Jean-Marie Chauvet, guardian of about 15 caves in the same area that have prehistoric artifacts, stumbled upon the art with two assistants during an inspection tour, the Culture Ministry said. The caves also contained the bones of about 100 bears still in their hibernation nests, as well as hearths, flints and torches. Archaeologists found bits of clay, iron oxide and manganese that were excavated to make paint.

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By Alvaro

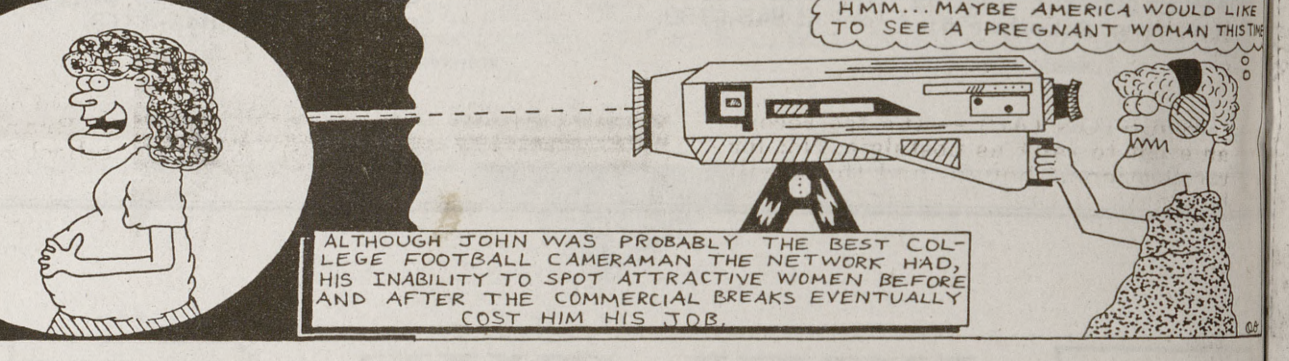
THE INKWELL By BRAD



ADVENTURES IN AGGIELAND By GREG



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WEATHER Today: Sunny, highs in the 60s. Tonight: Mostly clear, lows in the 30s. Friday: Partly cloudy, highs in the 60s. Friday Night: Clear with low near 50s. Saturday: Mostly cloudy and cool, low near 40, highs in the 50s to near 60.

IT IS THAT TIME AGAIN. IT IS TIME TO EXPOSE YOURSELF AT THE MSC OPEN HOUSE. OPEN HOUSE WILL BE ON JANUARY 22, 1995 FROM 2 PM - 6 PM. THERE WILL BE DOOR PRIZES, ENTERTAINMENT AND A LIVE BROADCAST BY MIX 104.7. OPEN HOUSE IS A GREAT PLACE TO INFORM YOURSELVES ABOUT VARIOUS CAMPUS ORGANIZATIONS. SPONSORED BY MSC PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE.

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A + TUTORING 260-2660 Table with columns for days (Mon, Tues, Wed, Thur) and times (5-7 pm, 7-9 pm, 9-11 pm, 11pm-1am) listing subjects like CHEM 101, PHYS 202, PHYS 218, PHYS 201, PHYS 208, PHYS 219, FINC 341, BANA 303.

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