

Bhimbetka Rock Shelters

On land | India | from about 100,000 years ago | Grades 3-5

Name _____ Date _____

Bhimbetka has some of the oldest traces of human life in India, and paintings made over thousands of years.

Read the story

Bhimbetka is a group of more than 700 rock shelters in the hills of Madhya Pradesh. People have used these shelters for a very, very long time, from the Old Stone Age, possibly over 100,000 years ago, through to more recent history.

The shelters are covered with paintings. The oldest ones may be about 10,000 years old. They show hunters chasing bison, tigers and deer, people dancing in lines, honey collectors, and later, riders on horses and elephants. The artists used red and white colors made from minerals.

Archaeologist V. S. Wakankar spotted the rocks from a train in 1957 and thought they looked like places in Europe with cave art. He explored them and revealed their treasures to the world.

How it ended

Bhimbetka was never destroyed. People kept visiting and using the shelters over time, and local villagers knew of them. The world learned about them after Wakankar's discovery in 1957.

Key words

- rock shelter: a shallow cave or overhang that protects people from weather
- Paleolithic: the Old Stone Age, when people used simple stone tools
- pigment: a colored powder used to make paint

Wow facts

- Some paintings are about 10,000 years old.
- A geologist-archaeologist spotted the rocks from a train window.
- Some shelters have tiny cup-shaped marks in the rock that may be among the oldest rock art in the world.

Talk about it

1. What would you paint on a wall to show your daily life?

2. Why are paintings like these important when there is no writing?

Try this

Draw a map of Bhimbetka Rock Shelters as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. What do many Bhimbetka paintings show?

- A. Hunters, dancers and animals
- B. Cars and trains
- C. Castles
- D. Spaceships

2. How did Wakankar spot Bhimbetka?

- A. From a train
- B. From a plane
- C. In a book
- D. In a dream

3. In which country is Bhimbetka?

- A. India
- B. Spain
- C. Egypt
- D. Mexico

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/bhimbetka-rock-shelters/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. They show hunting, dancing and animals.
2. A. He saw the rocks from a train in 1957.
3. A. Bhimbetka is in Madhya Pradesh, India.