

Serra Capivara

Pre-historic American immigration
history needs to be re-written



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Deep in the Brazilian hinterland in a province which name you have never heard before lies an isolated mountain range with tall cliffs and numerous overhangs called Serra Capivara.

Today it is an uninhabited area but 30,000 years ago it was a lush landscape with enough water and flora to feed various large mammals including the in South America dominant water pig called capivara. Which gave the area its name - see picture below.

Pre-historic Climate

This region was a very green and fertile landscape until 10,000 years ago when climate changed. We know that pre-historic men lived near water resources where they could best hunt animals congregating here to drink.

And the hanging cliffs with their numerous overhangs and ideal rock shelters including caves offered a perfect hide away for our pre-historic ancestors.

Incredible Age

What surprises is the enormous age of skillfully crafted rock paintings and the huge number thereof as well as the wide variety of human and animal motifs they left behind.



American Pre-history Needs to be Re-written

So far US archeologists kept praying their so-called Clovis First theory like a mantra. This theory maintains that the Americas were immigrated via Alaska around 15,000 years ago. Recent research from Serra Capivara proves them wrong in both facts, first the pass of immigration and finally the time line.

What we can say today is that the immigration of America might have come via Alaska in several waves. And possibly also via the Atlantic from Africa and took place as early as 30,000 years ago or even before.

Further South American Sites

And Serra Capivara is not the only archeological site showing such early human activity dating. In the Chilean Andes in the Atacama Desert at an altitude of 4,000 meters mummy bundles were dated to be 28,000 years old.

First Discovery

The Serra Capivara rock paintings were discovered by local archeologists already in the 1960 ties. But their publication did not really create any scientific sensation at the time as the expertise of local

experts was questioned.

UNESCO Site

Only later the enormous value of these amazing pre-historic works of rock art was recognized and in 1991 Serra Capivara became an UNESCO world heritage site.

National Park

A huge National Park with an extension of 130,000 hectares was created situated in remote northeastern Brazil close to the village of Sao Raimundo Nonato.

Many Interesting Sites

The different rock art sites are wide spread and prove that various communities lived here. The most important sites are called Pedra Furada, second in importance is Sitio do Meio and other major sites are named Toca da Tira Peia, Toca da Pena, Baxao de Esperanca and Lapa do Boquete.

Huge Concentration

Serra Capivara is the largest and oldest concentration of pre-historic rock art images known in Southern America so far.

Over 1,300 rock art sites are wide spread in this isolated canon area. In total over 40,000 images were created over a long period of time. We can distinguish them by style and patina. Superimpositions are also present. Which means that older work was over painted with newer images.

Complex Compositions

Amazing is the fact that long rock surfaces were

covered with more than 50 images. These complex compositions give us an interesting insight into social interaction and daily life.

Huge Variety

These images show a huge variety of unbelievable scenes of daily life, revealing social interaction and various religious rituals of our pre-historic ancestors.

Unknown Meaning

But still their precise meaning is a mystery to us today, despite very advanced archeological technologies we have developed lately. Much is still left to our imagination and interpretation.

Little Knowledge

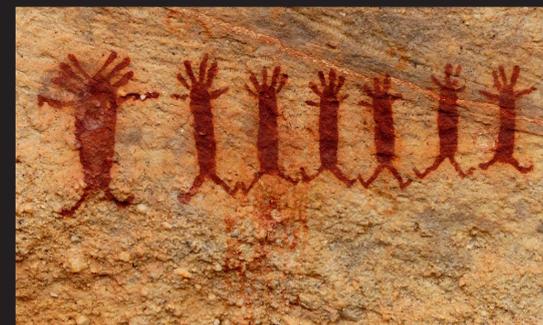
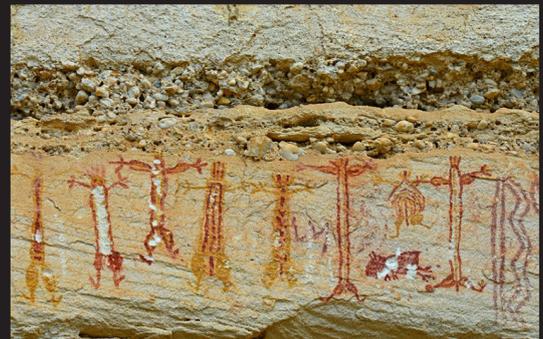
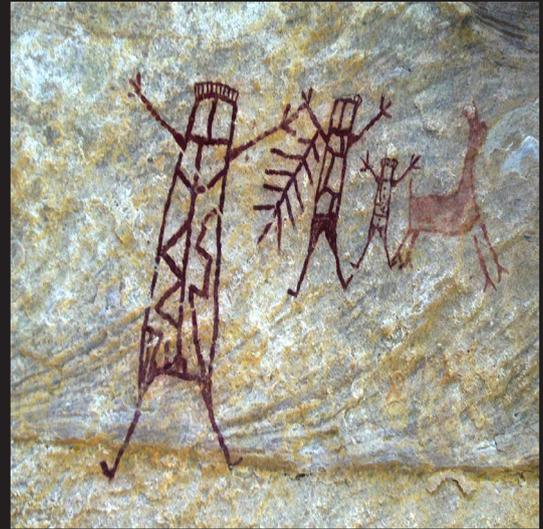
The main reason is that we still know little about the beliefs and culture of these pre-historic communities. Therefore all interpretations are more on the side of assumptions and less scientifically proven conclusions. As is unfortunately true for all Paleolithic rock art images across the world.

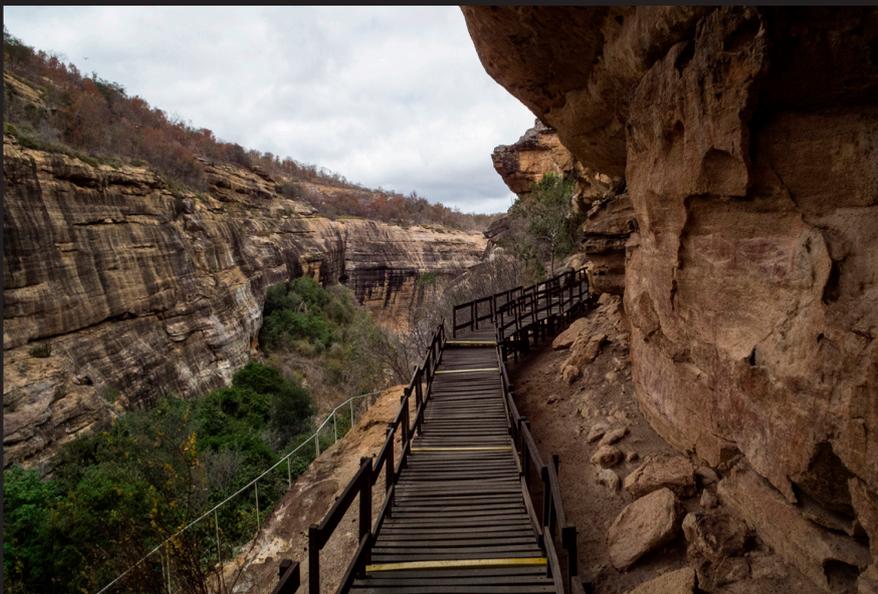
Similarities Worldwide

The most fascinating to me are the similarities I have seen at rock art sites in various continents. The way humans depict themselves is intriguing. I will refer to this in more detail later on.

Alphabets Came Later

Unfortunately first alphabets and writing were only developed about 5,000 years ago. And with their help younger pre-historic





which many exist in this amazing canon and cliff area. This is also true for other rock art sites worldwide.

Various Colors

Colors used were mainly red, ochre and dark red all produced skillfully from natural material such as certain fibers and colored stone types. Their creators already possessed some knowledge about basic chemical processes to produce natural colors which stick and do not fade over years. They also produced white colors as well as blue. The latter is very rarely used for rock paintings worldwide. That we find blue paintings here is an indication of their creativity and developed art of expression.

Humans & Animals

The images include humans

messages became better understandable for us. This included also the systematic pictogram language of the Maya for example.

San People & Aboriginals

Only two surviving ethnic groups worldwide could tell us some stories passed on over generations from parents to children. This helped us a little more to understand the rock paintings of their ancestors. These were the San people in Namibia and South Africa and the Aboriginals in Australia.

50,000 or 30,000 Years Old?

Now let's look a bit closer at the intriguing Serra Capivara sites. Possibly men lived here already 50,000 years ago. Recently discovered rock carvings might be that old. Ongoing excavations and further research might prove this assumption.

First Fire Places

What we know is that excavated stone tools have a dating of around 30,000 years. New tests also prove that human fire places used over long periods of time go back as far as 22,000 years. Remember that humans knew how to handle fire for

cooking and heating purposes since 500,000 years.

Interestingly these fire places were lit over generations exactly at the same place. This is prove that the site was permanently inhabited for a long time. This surprising fact give archeologists a very telling time capsule of human activity. We are looking forward to their further research results.

Oldest American Rock Art

And the oldest rock art images here could be given an age of 28,000 years. Rock paintings were created in large rock shelters and overhangs of





in various forms and colors, animals such as capivara, sable teeth tiger, deer and ape are most common. Less comon are birds, lizards, snakes and crab. As size is not always precise some lizards might even be crocodiles.



group sex. Looking at other rock art sites worldwide this could also indicate a human fertility dance ritual.

Huge Mammals

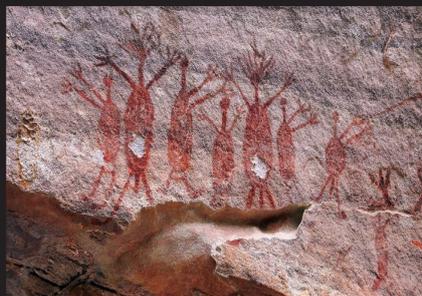
In addition we see many extinct huge animals like mastrodon an elephant type weighing about nine tons as well as toxodon living in rivers, plus the giant sloth reaching a heights of six meters and the simlodon or sable toothed tiger.



Ritual Group Dance

A ritual group dance around a tree seems to have a specific importance at Serra Capivara as it was found in various places here. Dancing was an important social interaction in pre-historic times. It created clan bonding and was used to solve problems.

All became extinct around 10,000 years ago, which shows that climate drastically changed at the time. This change must have had an enormous impact too on men living here.



But its most important reason was really that of ritual practices to pray for either hunting luck or human fertility. The so-called adorant depiction with raised hands is found at most rock art sites worldwide. It is very dominant at Serra Capivarra. And it has been described by many experts as a praying position.

Intriguing Human Images

Amazing images which we also can see here are various rituals and dances including human violence, sex and birth scenes. These include humans holding hands and the so-called first kiss image as well as possible



Large Groups

It did not surprise me to see large groups of humans painted here either dancing or just lined up. Large groups indicate a well established population or the congregation of various



clans for rituals and religious ceremonies

Large groups of humans I have seen at various other sites worldwide. But the large number of humans surprised me nevertheless. Because only in Namibia, South Africa and Saudi Arabia such large numbers are found.

Only in Saudi Arabia their size is larger and I mean not in numbers but measured in centimeters. Here you can see the largest human depictions in life size measuring up to two meters. Normally human rock art images measure only up to 40 centimeters.

Different Human Depictions

Let's look at the way humans were painted at Serra Capivara. We find them painted in various ways. First there are the balloon body type. Secondly the elongated type and finally the stick figure type.

If we try to adopt our knowledge from some sites overseas than stick figures are the youngest and most realistic images of humans the oldest.

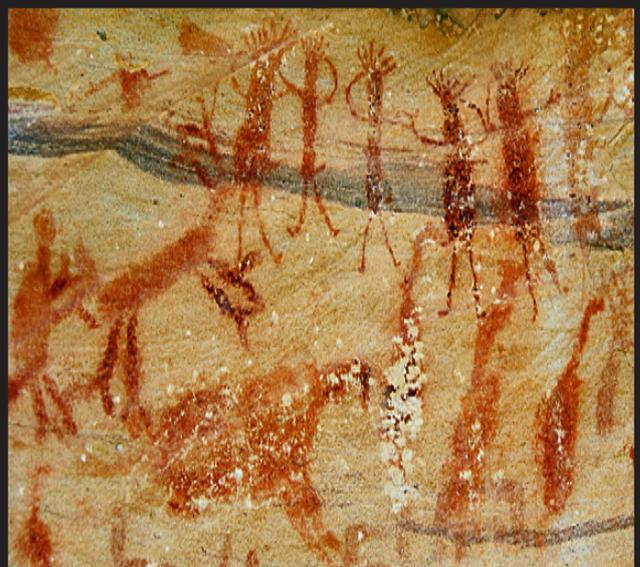
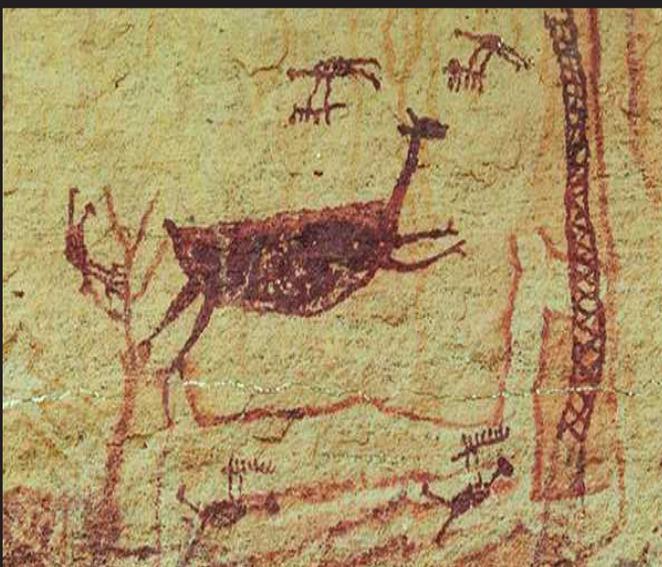
Elongated bodies might indicate trance dances. Their box like bodies with line decorations might show costumes of shamans. One looks like wearing even a mask.

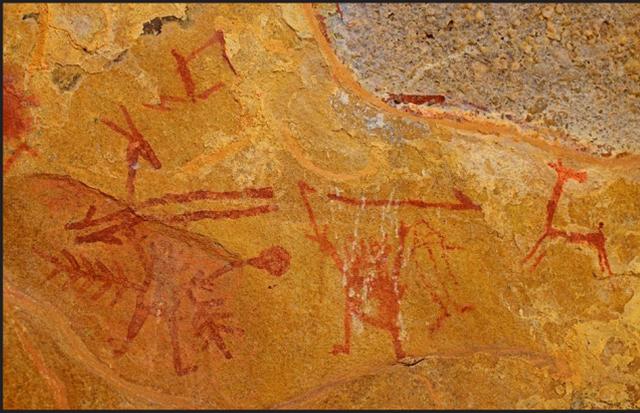
And the dancing bodies with thrown back heads and hanging hair might also point to trance dances. You see all these assumptions can be right or wrong.

Hunting Scenes & Techniques

Naturally hunting scenes are common including organized group hunts. Common hunting arms we can see here are spears and the use of nets. But possibly also stone throwing slings were used.

One of the net hunting scenes is interesting. It shows five men around a





deer all with the same rattle like stick in their hands chasing the deer towards the net. Another image shows a deer pierced by two spears.

One image intrigues me specifically. It shows a deer with a leach around it's neck. It does not look as the spears we see in other images. Was it a throwing string with stone balls at its ends? This might be indicated by the two balls being thrown up in the air by one person in the same image?

Developed Human Interaction

These images indicate an already highly developed planned human interaction and communication at that early stage in time. We can assume that the Serra Capivara people were able to stage a highly organized hunt.

Let's look at the way they painted animal bodies. Rarely they just painted the outline and left the inner portion blank. Some figures were completely filled, but most were decorated with lines or crossed. Some of the lines had elaborated patterns and others dots or partial patterns. This shows their artistic skill and initiative of free expression.

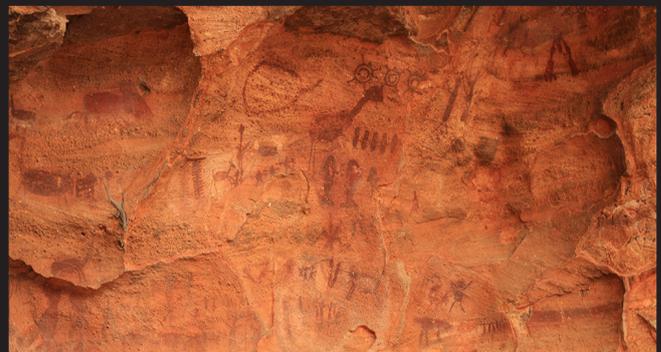
Rare Boat Image

A very rare boat image was discovered with sail or human on board. Both interpretations are possible but do not change the significance of this telling image.

African Immigration?

This might support the African immigration theory via the Atlantic. The recent discovery of human remains with a typical African parasite not found anywhere else in South America makes one think if this immigration theory is more fact than theory.

But there is a question still to be answered.



These remains are only 8,500 years old. But the extinction of major mammals based on an important climatic change is dated 1,500 years earlier. And it is assumed that most inhabitants of the Serra Capivara left the area at the same time due to lack of food resources.

Stone Tools

Many different stone tools were found here and experts established that they were produced and used on site. The necessary materials were sufficiently available here.

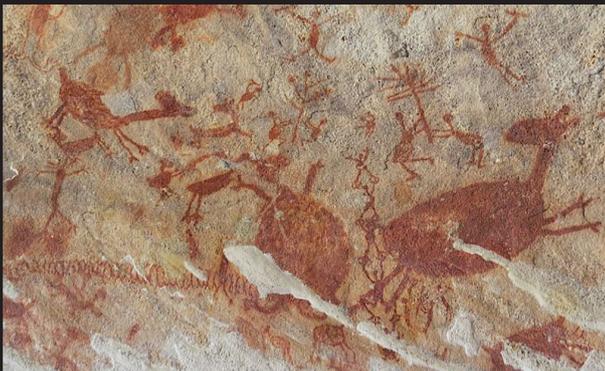
Tooth Used as Tools

Most interesting is the discovery of a giant sloth tooth which was crafted into an effective cutting tool. This needs a developed mind with imagination and artisan skill to produce such a useful tool.

We are interested to learn which sophisticated tools will be discovered here in future and further prove the social and cultural sophistication of our pre-historic ancestors in South America.

Human Burials

That human burials were placed here in embryonal position is a sign of developed spiritual practices and religious beliefs.



Conclusion

Human immigration of the American continent has been disputed for long as US archeologists closed their eyes and went on praying the Clovis First theory for a long time.

But new scientifically well founded dating research by European experts using various new techniques came to the same conclusion and proved that Serra Capivara dates certainly are going back to 30,000 years if not older.

In addition pre-historic burials with mummy bundles from the Atacama Desert in the Chilean Andes also date back to 28,000 years. Which is very close to Serra Capivara. But we have to remember that they are situated on the other side of the over 6,000 meter high Andean Cordillera.

Very interesting are the results of recent research proving the discovery of human remains at Serra Capivara dated 8,500 BP and these show they contained parasites only existing in Africa.

This opens up a totally new view on the possibility of a pre-historical transatlantic crossing theory, which technically is very much possible based in the transatlantic Benguela Stream and seasonal circular winds blowing rafts easily across the ocean within few weeks.

It is not surprising that further rock art sites do exist in Brazil. 800 kilometer south in Bahia Province a site called Chapara Diamantina offers similar rock art images.

In addition we have heard from rock art sites in Bolivia, Peru, Chile and Argentina. They might also exist in Ecuador, Columbia and possibly Venezuela.

We are going to investigate this and hopefully have a short article available on the Chapara Diamantina site for you soon.

Travel Tips

Travelling to Serra Capivara is not easy and can only be done in three legs taking 2-3 days. Either you fly to Rio or Salvador de Bahia. From there you can fly to the closest airport Petrolina. A 5 hour road trip takes you to the village of Sao Raimundo Nonato where you can stay at a simple hotel. From here all tours start.

I recommend to spend 2-3 full days in Serra Capivara to have enough time to visit the most interesting rock art sites. Best travel time is the dry season between June to December. I recommend also visiting the small local American Man Museum in Sao Raimundo Nonato. The best basic information on Serra Capivara you will find on wikipedia.org

Picture Credits

We thank the Serra Capivara National Park and excavating archeologists for making available some of their pictures.