

# Wendel and the Photo Dokumentation of Ice Age Cave Art



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The documentation of images is a paramount goal in the study of Ice Age cave art. Due to technical advances in the past decades the demands for precision in such documentations have increased. In the beginning one used to be content with interpretative drawings. Today every little scratch gets copied with microscopic accuracy. By contrast, the conditions for photographic documentations have remained largely unaltered. As such the Wendel Collection is an unanticipated treasure for archaeology. To conduct similarly extensive work at so many sites would today no longer be possible.

### The Tools

Heinrich Wendel only used material of high quality. Kodak chrome served as film material and he used a variable lens reflex camera manufactured by the Leica company. He decided against zoom lenses, which especially in narrow galleries, are easier to use. He did not want to trade in for lower quality.

It takes a lot of patience and effort to take a meaningful photograph in extremely narrow chambers and concealed corners. Heinrich Wendel made this effort. He did not shy away from taking pictures of hard-to-light engravings. Here he showed his extraordinary talent, finding the optimal spot for the motif's lighting in the shortest time.

### The Oeuvre

Heinrich Wendel created a photographic documentation of over 50 caves in France and Spain. 40 of them are presented here. He aimed to cover all the major caves of his time. With the exception of Tito Bustillo and Lascaux he accomplished his goal. Today approximately 300 caves with cave art are known of in Europe. Thus Wendel's archive merely encompasses 17% of the presently known of locations. They are however amongst the most important caves so that the Wendel Collection is comprised of a representative cross section.

A special quality of the pictures taken by Heinrich Wendel lies in the representation of space and the approach towards the motifs through pictures sequences. He regarded cave art as one component of a complex composition, of which the cave's spatial dimension forms a part. Through this approach it becomes possible to acquire an impression of the spatial proportions. In this regard Wendel was ahead of his time, for the spatial context of cave art only became of greater interest to researchers during the last couple of years.

### State of Preservation

Approximately 30 to 40 years lie between Wendel's pictures and the present time. Examples such as Altamira, Lascaux, Font-de-Gaume and Marsoulas indicate the susceptibility of paintings to changes in the caves' climate. A widening of the cave entrances alone can change the circulation and exchange of air with dramatic consequences for the preservation of the art. Climatic changes due to the continuing presence of groups of humans can be equally dramatic. Humidity and temperature rise; bacteria and fungi settle on the paintings. The Wendel Collection thus documents the state of preservation of cave art in the 1960's and 1970's.

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