

A Deep-Cave Pictograph Site in the Upper Mississippi River Valley, Wisconsin, U.S.A.

George N. Huppert and Robert F. Boszhardt

Department of Geography and Earth Sciences, University of Wisconsin – La Crosse and Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center, UW-L
La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601 U.S.A.

Arnold Cave is located in southwestern Wisconsin in the area known as the “Driftless Area”. The cave is an interstratal cave in the St. Peter Sandstone of lower Ordovician age. It was formed by upward doming as the result of roof collapse of the sandstone into the lower dissolving carbonate unit.

Cavers have been aware of the cave since the late- 1960s, however they did not recognize its archaeological significance. The cave was brought to the attention of the archaeological community in 1998.

The cave extends over 250 meters into the bedrock. The three chambers of the cave contain more than 100 pictographs and several petroglyphs. Pottery fragments, birch bark torches, and a sole of a moccasin have been found on the surface of the cave floor. The dry-sand floor has not been investigated to any depth. Pigment (charcoal) from a pictograph has been dated at 1,200 b.p. (AMS). The moccasin fragment has been 500 b.p. (AMS).

The cave is not only significant because of the amount of artwork but also because that it is the first deep-cave (away from natural light) pictograph site in the upper Mississippi Valley.