Dear visitors

The Madeleine is a memorial site; in this respect the guide that has been confided to you must be shared. Don’t scrunch it, don’t roll it, don’t take it home, please put it back at the reception desk at the end of your visit.

Thank you,

The Team from the Madeleine, great Site.
The visit follows a circuit broken down into 12 sectors which will allow you to discover the evolution of the site. Simply turn the pages during the course of the visit.
Situated in the commune of TURSAC, the Madeleine is a vast under rock shelter opening on the right bank of the Vézère. It borders a loop in the river. South facing, the shelter is 250 meters long, at the foot of a cliff 45 metres high.

Lower level: alluvial terrace and prehistoric deposit
Intermediate level: troglodyte village, we can clearly distinguish the village Chap- pel on the overhang of the cliff.
Above on the plateau: mixed forestation and the ruins of the castle.

(The Madeleine is situated on the right bank of the Vézère, at the end of a meander)

Meanders are formed mainly from the alternating phases of erosion and incision. The largest meanders are situated at the confluence of the Dordogne and Vézère rivers.
Some 120 000 000 years ago the sea covered Aquitaine to a depth of approximately 60m. During this period, there was an abundance of marine mammals and molluscs (ammonites, belemnites, shellfish). On land, equally, there was a predominance of reptiles, birds and mammals.

"Secondary “Mesozoic” era"

At the beginning of the Tertiary era 65 000 000 years ago, a period that we call “Cretaceous”, the alternation of hot and cold climatic phases is globally associated with the gradual retreat of this sea and also for the phenomena of erosion and incision (valleys), giving way to the current calcareous massif. This site is essentially sandstone covered with a coating of clay and sand of variable thickness.

The prehistoric deposit and its under rock shelters with its geological and archaeological layers are in a way responsible for Périgord being so well known. These shelters result from a combination of factors; the cold, the nature of the rock and the surrounding humidity. These shelters are always aligned along the valleys.
The period which interests us is the Upper Palaeolithic (-17 000 years B.C). This period dedicates itself to the peak of prehistory and in particular to the civilisation who lived in this place and that one calls “Magdalenian”.

In 1863, two “archaeologists” Edouard LARTET and Henry CHRISTY, after prospecting in the Vézère valley, discovered a vast under rock shelter on the left bank of the river. This discovery, followed by numerous excavations, reveals an abundance of tools (harpoon tips, chisels, blades etc) and a number of engraved objects, amongst which are a mammoth on an ivory plaque and a bison on the antler of a reindeer.

They also found bracelets, pendants and necklaces. These discoveries testify of a period where the producing of art attains a real quality and this is true of all human productions (tools, paintings, engravings, weapons, sculptures, jewellery etc).

The chapel situated above the deposit is dedicated to Saint Madeleine, protector of lakes and streams. Her name is given to a deposit of reference, a period and a civilisation.

THE MAGDALENIAN: The Madeleine becomes a titled site.

Two discoveries, two symbols. 1864 – Mammoth on an ivory plaque. Statuette of a Bison, with head turned, on the antler of a reindeer.
**In 1913:**
The bank was situated less than 30 metres from the cliff and the hillside was bare.

**In 2014:**
The bank is less than 2.5 metres from the cliff and a forest now grows there.
What are the vital concerns of the Magdalenian man?

- **SHELTER**
  In a rigorous glacial climate (glaciation of Würm), he is forced to protect himself from the cold. For this reason the shelters of the Madeleine south facing and close to water form an ideal refuge.
  The Magdalenian man also used the rock walls against which he added partitions and basic roofs.

- **WARMTH**
  We estimate between 350 000 and 200 000 years ago was the discovery of fire.
  This protects from predators, opens up opportunities for food and permits the resistance of the rigors of the climate.
  Realising the excavations of the Madeleine has permitted the exhumation of oil lamps and the remaining homes, showing evidence of a large number of groups.
  It is around the fire that the life of the Magdalenian hunter improves, the fire which gives light, warmth, and enables the boiling of water and roasting of meats.

- **FOOD**
  Everything from the reindeer is useful; the magdalenian consume the meat, the fat; the marrow of the bones, (after having first broken them down with flints).
  From 1868 to 1910, each excavation carried out on The Madeleine site uncovered a large quantity of reindeer bones and also a smaller quantity of horse, hare and ibex bones.
  The reindeer is the providential animal of prehistory.
  The Vézère, rich in salmon, is an interesting fish pond; however, it is difficult to calculate the number of fossils due to the rapid disintegration of the cartilages.

- **HUNTING**
  The propellant is a small revolution of the Magdalenian period; this enables the launching of weapons with increased speed, force and in a direct line.
  On the Madeleine site we have found fine examples of propellants, often sculptured from the wood of animals of the cervid family, for example, the reindeer.
  There were also different versions of harpoons found on the site.
  The flint, the n°1 material is always present in the life of the hunter gatherer of the Madeleine; he masters the size and production of this material.
The cutting of this rock is likened to a real industry: starting with a block of flint, he cuts long blades with which he will produce points for arrows, scrapers, assegai spears, chisels...).
Hundreds of examples of these tools and weapons will be exhumed from the site.

- 5 - PRODUCTION
Magdalenian art is expressed through a variety of themes and symbols of different objects.
For domestic objects, the working of bone, horn or ivory tends to replace the working of flint.
Assegai spears, harpoons, arrow heads and needles are the main form of production for the Magdalenian.
“Decorative” pieces: numerous elements of decorative pieces were found on the site, as well as whole items of jewellery (necklaces, bracelets, pendants) made up of shells, pearls of ivory or minerals.
A number of pierced teeth were also found.
“Engraving”: it is a technique which was largely used on the walls of The Madeleine and on the supports such as reindeer’s antlers (Bison) and ivory (Mammoth).
Not forgetting the paintings and its universal references (Lascaux – Pechmerle).

- 6 - DEATH
In 1926, Denis PEYRON, in the course of excavating the Madeleine site discovered the grave of a child, 2,60 metres from the wall.
The place of burial and the condition of the skeleton testify of the respect and worship of the dead. In effect, the corpse was resting in a fitted out hollow. The remains were especially surrounded with rich decorations of shells and pierced teeth (necklaces, bracelets).
The skeleton was also sprinkled with ochre (embalming?).
The child of the Madeleine was approximately 4 years old.
**Genesis of a habitat**

From the beginning, the Magdalenian man took advantage of the opportunity that the environment provided:
- The exposure of the cliff: south facing
- The height: 45 meters
- The situation: on the loop of the Vézère.

Finally, it has many dug out shelters, securely located in the cliff face, providing a natural refuge for himself and his clan.

It is also offers a superb vantage point across the valley.

靡 It’s a dripstone. It prevents the rain water from penetrating into the home by bringing it down directly below the cliff.

At the end of the shelter, alongside the wall, is the continuation of the main access road to the village.

General view of the east shelter

The apparent chaos (collapse of the ceiling)

Remains of walls from the eighteen century.

Remains of the village oven

Steps giving access to the river.
- SECTOR 3 - The guard post

You are at the ancient guard post that protected the entrance of the village. Originally a massive door mounted on hinges, anchored in the rock, barred the entrance. In addition, the narrowness of the road rendered it difficult to access the village in large numbers.

Traces of anchoring of the defensive door. (note the thickness of the wall)

- SECTOR 4 - Overhang

« The art of falling »

The threat of a painful slide down this steep cliff side would discourage potential aggressors. It has now been filled in and an easier pathway ensures your safe crossing.

The construction of the Troglodyte caves is renowned for its expansion in the Middle Ages. They were known for providing protection against the barbarians, Normans and during religious wars.
« From a spontaneous shelter to a constructed housing environment »

In the Middle Ages the mastering of stone work and metal work marks the passage of an occupation of opportunity to an active occupation of land utilisation. This structured shelter has a “mezzanine” floor, which served as the bedroom. A step cut in the rock allows access to this floor.

The main street serves the whole village.
It is the route of communication and drainage (presence of channels).

This was originally protected with a wooden surround.

Holes for “Boulins”
The alignment of holes chiselled out of the wall allowing the insertion of joists called “Boulins”.
The purpose of these sections is to support the beams or boulins (floor, framework, roof).
A ring in the side of the wall
This served to either suspend or move containers, materials etc..

Interior staircase
It serves the “mezzanine”.
Note the thickness of the floor “insulation” 100% limestone.

The Cattle Pen
Life is organised on two levels, on the ground floor we can identify the arrangements for the cattle (goats, pigs, poultry). You will notice throughout the visit that most of the houses are endowed with mangers, troughs, and drinking troughs, with water flowing directly from the dug out rock.
The Madeleine is an impressive illustration of the area and of the degree of development that this Troglodytic group represents.

In this regard, this shelter is a faithful translation of the Monolithic:

- Levelling of vaults,
- Digging out of bays,
- Differentiation of the interior space by means of partitions,
- Specialisation of activity (here: the home, the bread oven).

Facade of the “medieval home”
Note the perfect joining of the built wall and the steep rocky slope, as well as the dripstone which runs along the wall.

The exterior duct of the fireplace.
During the Middle Ages, the home was situated at ground level; later the requirement to live in relative comfort determined the installation of interior fireplaces endowed with smoke evacuation ducts. Fireplaces that you will observe date from the eighteenth century, France at that time, as in the Middle Ages, is essentially rural.

**The fireplace (eighteenth century)**
Note the lintel
In the fireplace fish, meats and soups were cooked.

**The bread oven**
Community life is very important for passing on their heritage.
Here the baker bakes the bread for the community.

**Interior of the “medieval home”**
The post holes in the ground are puzzling (subdivision for storage of silo?)

**On the ceiling**
A well proportioned ring.
On The Madeleine site we have listed approximately one hundred.
**SECTOR 7 - The shelter of the «weaver» and the tunnel (1/2)**

**“Learning the trade”**

During the visit, the housing environment evolves, the notion of comfort is clearly perceptible and the organisation of the space is divided according to the needs and the functions, also:
- First floor: dormitory and living area,
- The ground floor: animals, niches or cupboards for tools and equipment.

**“From the non religious to the sacred”**

Tunnels, as with all things underground, attract and fascinate, with their highly symbolic function. They have a beginning and an end always opening onto a place which is the answer to the enigma which they carry.

Closer view
The Roman arch rests on a stone on the left. At the top of the arch two stones make a keystone
Interior view
As in the «medieval home», we find:
- Openings
- Fireplace
- Evenness of the ceiling

Mysterious holes in the ground
What are these parallel, aligned holes? The accepted explanation was the presence of a loom, giving the shelter its name.

Another fireplace

A comfortable seat, isolated from the ground
Of modest dimensions and sitting on Roman foundations the chapel, dedicated to Saint Madeleine, is audaciously hanging on the cliff. Constructed between the 12th and 15th centuries, its proportions are a small masterpiece of architectural balance on a cliff peak.
Altar
It is facing east towards Jerusalem. The stained glass window allows in the divine light, a symbol of the presence of God. Sometimes, the stained glass window is replace by an oculus (eye).

Detail of the ceiling
We can clearly distinguish the keystone. The invention of the cross vault permitted the elevation of buildings which allowed light to enter.

Entrance and cross vault
Of simple design, the cross vault allows the mechanical distribution of the roof load.

Damp course
These are small lime stones placed vertically to stop the humidity rising. We are above the water, it is dry! This is also found in the Châteaux, stables and old roads.
As previously, the houses are attached one to the other. We find them here in large quantities: the same imprints on the wall and in the cavities, as well as the developments of the two levels.

**On the wall, we find:**
- Dripstones,
- Holes from wooden equipment,
- Rebates,
- Rings,
- Chimney ducts,
- Niches, cupboards,
- Door and partition hinges.

**Ground Floor:**
- Mangers,
- Troughs,
- Post holes,
- Evacuation channels,
- Evidence of water flow.

A few questions arise:

Where does each house finish?  
Where does the neighbouring house begin?

In fact, the cross-checking of niches and walls with both earthen and wooden hinges testifies of modifications, the explanation of which escapes us.

The difficulties arise equally when attempting to analyze and interpret the structures between the ground and the elevation and to understand the relation between the two.
Above: holes for beams, niches
Ground floor: niches, cupboards, Cowsheds, troughs, mangers

Exterior chimney duct

Anchoring of the beams

Projecting ring

Intermittent source

Ring
SECTEUR 9 - The center of the village ans its place (3/3)

«The art of arranging»
Niches and cupboards

The turning hole (function of the bolt)

Anchor of the door (rebate)
“The ancestors of the Roman keep”

The Cluzeau is situated at the end of the street, high up in the wall.
The Cluzeau is typical of a medieval troglodyte site, it is an artificial shelter built by man into the rock.
Like a medieval keep, it has a defensive function.
These “Cluzeaux” are installed all along the Vézère River, and perhaps represent the first line of communication between the villages.

The section beyond the barrier is a prehistoric deposit and is closed to visitors.
Further information can be found in the museum by the reception.
We are now going to turn back and head towards the castle.
The visit of the château begins in the vegetable-garden.
The walled kitchen garden assured the independence of the village population as they cultivated vegetables and medicinal plants here.
« This illustrates the trilogy: those who work, those who pray, those who fight »

The château was built by the Sireuil family in the 13th century. It was a point of conflict during the One Hundred Years War with the English and the families of Périgord. In the year 1400, the family of Beynac of Tayac took the château and occupied it until 1623, when it was burnt down. The château was then abandoned.

Saint Martin's tower

West Facade: a crow

Note the thickness of the walls: approximately 80 cm

Murderers Cross
The end of the visit…

We hope you enjoyed visiting the site. Know that in our team, every “Magdalanian” participates in the conservation and the development of this place. Our wish is to make sure you can fully appreciate its beauty.

Each one of us, like our ancestors, has the will to pass on our heritage.

To participate in this approach don’t hesitate to give us your feedback.

The whole Madeleine team thanks you for your visit and wishes you an excellent day.

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