



GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
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PRESS RELEASE

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Prehistoric Environment outside Gorham's Cave equated to present-day Doñana

A paper published yesterday online in the prestigious scientific peer-reviewed journal *Quaternary Science Reviews* reveals that the coastal environments outside Gorham's Cave on the east side of the Rock were, for much of the last 100 thousand years, similar to present-day Doñana National Park. The study, headed by Geraldine and Clive Finlayson of the Gibraltar Museum, involved a long-term study of climate, vegetation, bird and mammal communities in Doñana and compared it to the fossil record from Gibraltar. Climate over the period in question was generally cooler than today and sea level dropped by up to 120 metres, exposing a huge continental platform on the east side of the Rock.

This platform was a sand dune system that was very similar to the Doñana of today. In fact nearly all the vertebrate species that live in the National Park today have been identified in Gorham's and Vanguard Caves - they not only include birds and mammals but also amphibians and reptiles too. The exceptions are species (such as the wolf, brown bear, leopard and spotted hyaena) that have disappeared from Doñana because of human activity. Even the emblematic Iberian Lynx, the flagship of Doñana, has been found on the Rock.

A second paper in the same journal, also by the Gibraltar team in conjunction with Professor José Carrión of the University of Murcia and others, provides a detailed analysis of the vegetation outside the caves and how this changed in response to climate. The reconstructions were based on detailed analyses of fossil charcoal and pollen collected from the caves themselves. Overall, the authors show that the climate and environment outside the cave was surprisingly stable in spite of the major changes in northern Europe related to the onset of the Ice Ages. It strengthens the view that Gibraltar was a major climatic refugium for animals and plants that had become extinct elsewhere.

Note to Editors: For further information please contact Marie Mosquera at the Gibraltar Museum on 200 74289. Alternatively, email: museumpr@gibraltar.gi