



GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
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PRESS RELEASE

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Gibraltar Neanderthals in the world news

In a BBC News Online end-of-year viewpoint headed "Has 'one species' idea been put to bed?", Professor Clive Finlayson of the Gibraltar Museum reviewed 2011's major discoveries in the field of human evolution. The article which was published online on the 30th December, and which is accessible on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-16339313>, was one of the headlines at the end of the year. In discussing the various advances, Professor Finlayson drew attention to the way in which the hard scientific facts were increasingly reaching a wide, and interested, public. As a result, our ideas of the Neanderthals were gradually changing. Gibraltar came to the fore as a leader in this approach. The Gibraltar Museum has been actively involved in a new network of key European prehistoric sites that tell the story of European people in the Ice Ages. It was represented at a meeting held in the Neanderthal Museum, Germany, when the basis of the network was discussed.

But Gibraltar has been leading in the field of Neanderthal interpretation for some time. Professor Finlayson wrote a popular science book – The Humans who went Extinct – which was published in 2009 by Oxford University Press and which has now been published in paperback edition and has been translated into Spanish. The excavations in Gorham's Cave have been brought to the wider public in Gibraltar and a successful education programme has been developed by the Gibraltar Museum in conjunction with the Education Department.

The article makes reference to Government plans, as detailed in its election manifesto, to develop the Forbes' Quarry site into a location worthy of its significant history as the site of the 1848 Neanderthal skull discovery. And the article also revealed that plans were being prepared that would show off the Rock as a unique thematic "Neanderthal Park", the first of its kind in the world.

Commenting on the article, Heritage Minister Steven Linares spoke of the global importance of Gibraltar in the story of the Neanderthals. "We have in Gibraltar a unique opportunity. We have a special place where we can commemorate the lives of humans who lived here on the Rock for tens of thousands of years." Environment Minister Dr John Cortes also expressed his delight at the project: "The work that has been carried out so far in our caves, particularly Gorham's Cave, is revealing intimate

details about the lives of the Neanderthals and of the ecology of the Rock in the past. We can link this wealth of information with ideas that GONHS have been promoting for years regarding the re-introduction of species that once lived on the Rock. We have a chance to make a real impact.”

The Government of Gibraltar is keen to promote research in this field and, more widely, in heritage. The results of such work will form the basis of projects that will diversify Gibraltar’s tourism product, offering high quality to an increasingly sophisticated and informed audience. “Heritage can make a real contribution to the Gibraltar economy and it can also place us in the global picture, as the BBC News article shows” added Steven Linares. “In order to maximise this potential I am pleased to announce that the Chief Minister has created an inter-ministerial committee involving heritage, environment and tourism. The committee will be tasked with maximising the potential of our heritage product over the next four years. In this respect we will rely heavily on the advice of our local professionals and Professor Finlayson and his team will be working with this committee directly. We expect to do our work in consultation with all stakeholders. This will include the Gibraltar Heritage Trust, GONHS and professionals in the tourism sector among others.”

And while all this gets under way, plans to nominate the Gorham’s Cave complex are getting off the ground. A Gibraltar Museum delegation travels to London for a briefing meeting in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport next Monday. Professor Finlayson will be delivering a key note lecture at a conference on human prehistory at the University of Oxford later that same week and the world’s specialists in the field of human evolution will be gathering in Gibraltar this September to discuss the latest developments in this important field. “Gibraltar is set to become a Centre of Excellence in this field and our local professionals will have the full backing of the Gibraltar Government in achieving this aim” added Dr Cortes.