



ROAMING IN THE DARK: THE ICHNOLOGICAL RECORD OF THE PEPETXO X CAVE (BASQUE COUNTRY)

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Although it is relatively common to find ichnological remains within the European caves, this kind of record is generally overshadowed by other archaeo-paleontological findings. Here, we report the abundant record of vertebrate traces, impressed by bears and bats, from the Pepetxo X cave (Amoroto, Bizkaia). Pepetxo X was discovered by the ADES Espeleologia Elkarte, who noticed the presence of a human cranium and bear traces. This record still has not a chronological framework. The traces are preserved on the corridors and walls of the cave as autopodial tracks and claw scratches. Autopodial tracks are pentadactyl, measure approximately 15 cm in length and 10 cm in width, and preserve claw traces and both digital and paw pad impressions. The biggest scratch impressions are longitudinal grooves that varies from 2 cm to more than 20 cm long, 1 cm wide, 1-3 cm deep, and have a flat bottom. These traces were probably made by bears while they crossed into the cave by leaning on and climbing the wall. On the other hand, the walls are covered by very fine shallow scratches (less than 1 mm) and about 2-5 cm in length. Two sets of 5 scratches each were also found, with a "v" arrangement between the sets. This kind of traces are generally related to bats and produced by their posterior autopods. The Pepetxo cave presents a very interesting ichnological record with which to delve into the paleoecology and paleobiology of the communities that inhabit the caves.

