

Archaeological team theorizes early Celts left mark in Colorado

By **BOB DIDDLEBOCK**

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Cave markings and writings found over the last few years in southeastern Colorado may make Christopher Columbus a bit player in American history.

That, at least, is the hope of a doughty band of amateur archaeologists trying to prove their theory that Celts or other European adventurers left the markings long before Columbus landed on American shores.

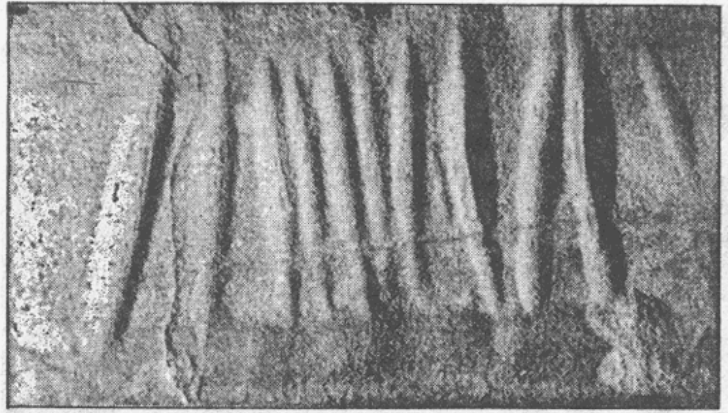
The markings have been uncovered at about 50 sites along a 100-mile corridor in Colorado's southeastern corner and in the Oklahoma Panhandle — the region drained by the Arkansas and Cimarron rivers.

Among the discoveries: compasses

etched on cave walls, sun dials, messages to travelers, imprints of ancient ships and animals and information about the sites' latitude, the earth's movement and equinoxes.

"It tells us that civilization has been a one-world proposition since the Ice Age," says Rollin Gillespie, a retired NASA astronomer who now lives in Bellingham, Wash. "We talk of the Old World and the New World and different civilizations back then, but it was really like the kind of worldwide civilization we have today with people traveling all over the world."

Indians, of course, may be responsible for some of the etchings. But Gillespie and his colleagues believe they've found enough to sustain theories that travelers, settlers and wanderers moved through the area's waterways perhaps as far



The letters G-R-N in "Ogam," an ancient Celtic language.

back as 200 B.C.

The key evidence, Gillespie says, is the use of "Ogam," an ancient Celtic language that has been traced as far back as 2000 B.C. on the Iberian Peninsula, England and Scotland. Gillespie and his fellow researchers say many of the Colorado cave markings spell out words in that language.

For example, one inscription reads, "This is a shelter rock for travelers and can be used by whomsoever in general." Another has been translated to say "Fail," which was an ancient term used for Ireland.

"It's a big puzzle for us and we don't really know what they are, but most of us are convinced that Asians and western Europeans and Africans traveled across the oceans," Gillespie says.

For example, he says there's evidence that Irish monks were in Iceland, Mexico and the Peruvian Andes as far back as 990 A.D. — long before Columbus landed in the Americas in 1492. Who's to say those monks didn't pass through this region? Gillespie asks.

If they didn't come overland, Gillespie says, they may have been blown across the North Atlantic during severe storms, hit the Gulf of Mexico and sailed up the Mississippi River to America's heartland.

"We haven't found a good clue why these people were there, but we do think they may have been there for some

time," Gillespie says.

He says one Ogam inscription found an hour's drive southwest of Las Animas is the world's largest. It's a kind of calendar that tells when corn must be planted.

Similar writings, Gillespie says, have been found along the Montana-Canadian border, in an area west of Denver and in the southern part of West Virginia.

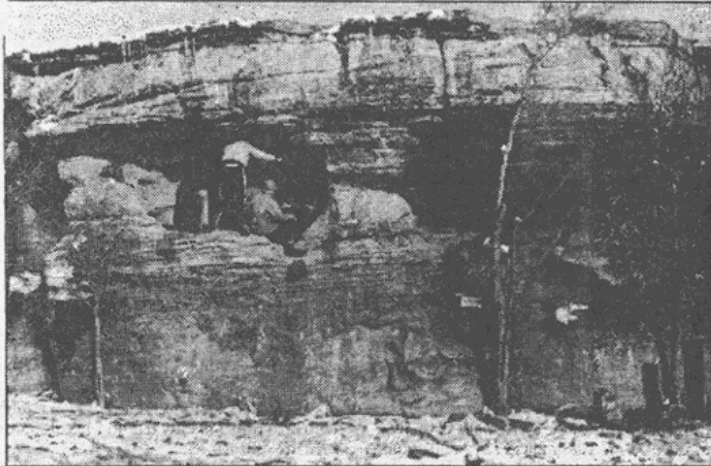
So far, the scholarly archaeological establishment has paid little attention to the cave discoveries. Professionals who have commented theorize that the marks may have been made by tool sharpening or erosion — not by ancient mariners.

"I share the skepticism that this is evidence of Celtic wanderers," says Leslie Wildesen, who's Colorado's state archaeologist. "It seems to be the most complicated explanation of what's been found."

Responds Gillespie: "We're all amateurs, but not necessarily dumb bunnies or a bunch of kooks," noting that his sidekicks include a Harvard professor of marine biology who also translates ancient languages, a retired industrial chemist from New Mexico and a Utah biologist.

Wildesen says there are no plans to extensively excavate any of the sites.

Gillespie, however, says several certified archaeologists have agreed to tour the sites in September, which he says, may change some attitudes.



A group of amateur archaeologists works a site in Oklahoma.