

Hello everyone and welcome. As part of this series of lectures on the development of early humans, today we are looking at rock art: the paintings and drawings produced by prehistoric peoples as they spread across the continents. If you've been lucky enough to look at a piece of rock art close up, you'll know it's an experience that makes you wonder about the passage of time and our own history. But rock art also has a practical value for researchers and let's start by considering why that is. Firstly it provides vital information about the way that people ⁽¹⁾ – information not always easily obtainable from excavated artefacts alone. Secondly, rock art tells us about migration: where people came from and where, perhaps they went next. Rock art is found all over the world and this in itself is not surprising. But what is rather amazing, you might think, is how ⁽²⁾ some images are, whether you're looking at a rock face in South Africa or standing inside a cave in Spain. Let me give you an example. When our ancestors drew humans, they would often draw them as stick figures, but if they drew a face, then the eyes were almost always very ⁽³⁾ – very open and wide. And of course, animals are very common in rock art, but ⁽⁴⁾ which is very interesting to researchers ⁽⁵⁾, because whenever you see a prehistoric painting of one – it's ⁽⁶⁾ either in profile or looking down on it from above. And these drawings are produced by people of totally different cultural backgrounds. Amazing. But how can this be the case – that similar artistic styles exist in such distant locations? In the past archaeologists believed that trade must have brought people together, and that it gave them the opportunity to observe each other's culture, including art styles, but this didn't prove ⁽⁷⁾

Recently researchers have come up with a new theory. They believe that the brains of our ancestors evolved to notice certain images before others and this was important – actually ⁽⁸⁾ because in an environment full of constant danger, it was necessary for survival. So the need to quickly recognise things that could be helpful or harmful could have had a great influence on rock art and explain why some images are more common across cultures than others. Later on, there would have been ⁽⁹⁾ reasons why communities produced art – certainly for spiritual and social ⁽⁹⁾ and no doubt for political ones, too, as different tribes looked for allies and struggled against their enemies.

Well, as I said before, you can find rock art all over the world, but I'd like to focus now on the rock art of the Aboriginal people of Australia. The images that survive in this part of the world span at least 20,000 years. In fact, the Aborigines were still practising this art form in the late 18th century, when the Europeans began to arrive, and certain images point to the contact between them. For ⁽¹⁰⁾, the Aborigines began to draw ships which they would have seen along the coast – it's

hard for us to imagine what they must have thought when these first began to appear. ⁽¹¹⁾ image that is evidence of European arrival is that of horses: an animal that would have been very alien to the Australian landscape. Um, it ⁽¹²⁾ actually known how many sites there are across Australia where rock art can be found – but unfortunately we do know that much of the art is being lost to us. Erosion, of course, is one of the key reasons for its destruction, but ⁽¹³⁾ is also increasingly responsible. Since the 1960s, ⁽¹⁴⁾ alone has destroyed around an estimated 10,000 pieces of art. At this rate, in 50 years, half of all Australian rock art could have disappeared for good. ⁽¹⁵⁾ is sadly another factor. And although most people, I believe, would wish to preserve this art, I'm afraid that tourism is another reason why the art is disappearing. In some cases, the art is damaged when ...