

THE GENEROSA CAVE CALLED ALSO BEAR CAVE

We are located on the Italian side of Monte Generoso, near the Swiss border. Here a cave was discovered in 1988 where many fossil remains of "Ursus speleaeus", the so-called "cave bear", were found.

The discovery was made by two Ticino speleologists from the Swiss Speleological Association, who, traveling through the area in the summer, identified its opening.

The hole to access the cave was very small and for this reason it was enlarged over time, both to allow the passage of researchers, who since then came to this place to study the fauna that lived in these places 60000 years ago, and to favor the access of visitors who over time became more and more numerous.

The Generosa Cave at the time of discovery consisted of a narrow initial tunnel, about 25 meters long, through which you entered a first room (called "Little Room"), from which, through a narrow and difficult siphon, you reached after about 70 meters in a larger room (called "Final Room") in which the first evidences of the cave bear - Ursus spelaeus - were found, which gave the decisive impetus for the execution of the first paleontological excavations that began in the 90s and continue today.

The first studies relating to cave bear finds collected on the surface took place in 1989. Some bones, found on the floor, were dated with the Carbon 14 method by the University of Zurich providing an age of about 39000 years. Unfortunately, these first findings were collected without respecting any scientific criteria so as to make it impossible to further in-depth analyses necessary to better understand the deposition environment and to obtain all the information on these animals that lived in the distant past. In 1991 the Department of Earth Sciences of the University of Milan made some excavation tests to verify the consistency of the deposit and therefore the possibility of carrying out continuous excavations. Given the positive outcome of these investigations, in the following years some excavation campaigns were conducted, which continue today, with the logistical support of the Monte Generoso S.A. Railway.

A few years later, the execution of some tests carried out in the initial gallery revealed the presence of fossil finds in depth even long before the classical excavation area. So in the autumn of 1998, thanks to the financial support of the Monte Generoso S.A. Railway, also in view of the possibility of making the excavations open to visitors, an excavation was carried out that involved the cavity from the entrance to the beginning of the "Final Room". As expected, the deposit turned out to be abundantly fossiliferous from the first meters, allowing to recover interesting finds relating to different time intervals and in different state of conservation.

Given the stability and safety of the cave, tourists from Monte Generoso are allowed to visit the cavity to have the exceptional opportunity to see a live fossil deposit and to be able to directly observe the methods of excavation and recovery of the fossils of animals that they once lived in this same area. The lighting is guaranteed by a pair of generators and a double system that covers the entire path and the excavation area.

In total, 40000 cave bear fossil remains and other rare mammalian remains dating back 60000 years have been extracted in this cave. In addition, some flint tools associated with Neanderthal Man were found, the oldest evidence of the presence of man in Lombardy.

In-depth studies on micro-mammals have allowed the reconstruction of the environments that have occurred in the last 60000 years with two glacial phases. Scientific research is managed by the Department of Earth Sciences of the University of Milan which also takes care of the preparation of the guides.