

Stop 1/5. Il'inka

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Situated on the northeastern outskirts of the eponymous village (Belyaevka district, Odessa region), the karst cave in the mouth of short deep girder on the right bank of Kuyalnik Liman was discovered by Gritsay and A. Roschin (Gritsay, 1939). It is an archaeological as well as paleontological location, the most striking feature of which being its connection with cave bears procurement and worship. It was the subject of repeated studies in the middle of the 20th century (Zamyatnin, 1950; Boriskovsky and Kraskovsky, 1961; Kraskovsky, 1978), which have been renewed through the collaboration of the Paleontological Museum of Odessa I.I. Mechnikov National University with the University of Vienna, Austria.

Many animal bones dominated by cave bear but with the slight presence of horse, bison, deer, roe deer, saiga, lion, and wolf have been discovered together with about 50 stone artifacts. Attribution of the latter as Early Paleolithic was widely discussed in Soviet archaeology. Efimenko (1953) was sure of their pre-Mousterian age, having defined Il'inka as a seasonal camp of cave bear, while Borziak (1982) denied such a possibility; Bibikov (1977) and Boriskovsky (1961, 1964) confirmed the identification of the recovered artifacts as Early Paleolithic and supposed that they had gotten into the cave incidentally and could not be connected with a human presence there. Of special attention was the discovery by Dobrovolsky (1915) of a probable ritual place of cave bear hunters connected with a totemic animal cult. It consisted of about a dozen cave bear skulls, which presumably were deliberately placed along the cave's southern wall, two of them surrounded by pieces of chalkstone. This part of the cave contains relatively more animal bones than the others. Chipped flint artifacts and chalkstone slabs used for cave bear hunting were also found there.

The paleontological collection is stored in the Paleontological Museum of Odessa I.I. Mechnikov National University. The archaeological assemblage is stored in the Odessa Archaeological Museum of the National Academy of Science of Ukraine.

Human habitation around Kuyalnitsky Liman next to the contemporary village of Il'inka is not limited to the earliest phases of human history. On the western slope of the estuary, a Late Bronze Age settlement, a site of the 1st-2nd centuries AD, and a Chernyakhiv settlement have been traced.