



Proposal for the initial redisplay of Vela Luka Museum

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Mend
The
Gap



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Introduction

The extensive prehistoric deposits at Vela Spila, close to Vela Luka, are of world significance. It is the most important cave site in the Mediterranean area, with uninterrupted stratigraphy already uncovered from around 25,000 years ago to c4,000 years ago. No other cave can offer this, and there is more to come. While over 10 metres of deposits have already been explored, there is more yet to be studied.

Objects uncovered at the cave during archaeological excavations are held at Vela Luka Museum, but the museum is currently closed. This proposal has one primary purpose: to enable an initial re-display of the archaeological collections of Vela Luka Museum, and thus allow the museum to re-open. It represents a small but important step towards giving Vela Spila, and the information and collections its excavation has uncovered, the public representation they deserve.

The proposal, as it currently stands, outlines broad themes. If the basic themes of the display are approved, the next stage is to populate them with 'stories' that are preferably 'object rich' and together fit the existing gallery layout. The task then is to build lists of potential images and objects under each of the 'stories'. The draft includes a first step in beginning this task.

Objectives

- To put on public display the important prehistoric collections held by Vela Luka Museum.
- To enable the re-opening of Vela Luka Museum.
- To act as a source of local pride for the people of Vela Luka, and add to their understanding of the worldwide significance of the archaeological site at Vela Spila.
- To help tourists to understand the significance of Vela Luka and encourage them to visit Vela Spila itself.
- To provide an important resource for enquiry-based learning by school pupils.
- To achieve all of this at a minimal budget and to a tight deadline.

Audiences

- Local people:** Will be pleased to see the museum re-open, and visit for special events or when friends and family return.
This is an all-year-round audience.
- Schoolchildren:** Will use the museum as an important learning resource, supported by educational resource materials and their committed teachers.
This is an all-year-round audience.
- Tourists:** Will use the museum as part of their exploration of Vela Luka and Korčula.
This is a seasonal audience. The museum has a potential role to play in helping to extend the season. A major re-display would be an essential part of any sustained drive by the town to expand the tourist season.

The tourist audience can be broken into sub-groups with different needs:

1. Hotel guests: high budget
low budget
2. Private accommodation guests: a week or more – families in peak season
short stay – young adults
3. Sailor visits: small boats
small cruise boats in high season (20-30 people)
4. Day trip visitors: independent visitors exploring the island
coach parties from large cruising boats moored at Korčula
5. Hospital audience: independent visitors
6. Those with a specialist knowledge of prehistory: a very small percentage

In general, the tourists who come to Vela Luka will be well-educated and well-travelled professionals and their families. They will expect high standards in every aspect of their visit. Meeting those standards will be essential in the longer term, both for the museum and for the site visit to Vela Spila. The important first step, however, must be to make a start and then learn from visitors.

Immediate needs are:

- To have the museum open
- To cater for children through ‘activity trails’
- To provide trail leaflets to encourage people to explore the town
- To have guides available if requested
- To provide content in different languages
- Preferably, to do things cheaply initially, to test them with audiences before major spending
- If funding became available, and there was a proven coach party market, to provide a filmed introduction in the museum projected on to a wall, so it can be viewed by a whole coach party.

Exhibition proposal

Design approach

Minimal – recognize little budget.

I have sought to break the exhibition into simple themes.

I would suggest we paint the walls of each theme a different colour so people are aware that they have entered a new part of the exhibition.

Each theme will require an introductory text panel:

- a) Done cheaply using an A3 photocopier, then laminated; or
- b) Done as a stand-alone pull-up graphic

The exhibition should be in two languages: Croatian and English – the latter because it is the language most tourists will understand. Other languages could be made available at the ‘Find out More’ point.

Otherwise the display will rely on the re-use of the existing casing, etc. If there is any budget, replace the hessian on the angled panels. **This means structuring the display to the existing gallery layout. The numbering used below relates to the sketch plan of the existing gallery prepared 2nd April 2017.**

1. Title

Located in the corridor as visitors approach the gallery.

Text: Vela Spila: a glimpse of Europe’s beginnings

Image: Cave interior

2. Introduction

Visitors should turn left as they enter the gallery.

Graphics on wall only.

Text: This is the story of Vela Spila – the ‘big cave’.

It was used by people like ourselves from at least 25,000 years ago to about 4000 years ago.

It is unique – no other place has evidence of such continuous use. And there is more to come – archaeologists have not reached the bottom of the deposits yet.

The cave has hundreds of stories to tell, but we have room for just a few.

Images: Location plan showing Vela Luka and Vela Spila
 Whole cave interior
 Stratigraphy

3. Existing ‘map’

Based on the assumption that there is no budget to replace this.

Must be re-annotated to make sense

N.B. If there was a substantial budget, I would recommend a film giving an overview of the story in 5 – 7 minutes. This could be shown either on a large screen digital television or, preferably, be projected on to the end wall, replacing the map, so it can be viewed by a coach party.

4. Excavations at Vela Spila

Again a graphic area with images past and present.

This answers one of the questions I am told that visitors commonly ask.

Can also say here that there is much more to come.

5. How to survive the Ice Age

Text: Our story begins in the last Ice Age, at least 25,000 years ago when small groups of hunters sheltered in the cave and lived off the big game they caught. At that time the sea was over 20km away and the valley below Vela Spila was a passageway for animals to reach the *refugium* of the Adriatic plain.

Images: Extent of ice coverage + location Vela Spila
 The Adriatic Plain – sea level and location
 Movement of game along routes to Adriatic Plain
 Good opportunity for school students to contribute image.

Objects: Flint tools – for hunting, cutting up meat, etc.
 Animal remains – to give sense of range and quantities of animals involved. Especially good if can include some worked bone.

6. Animal figurines – early art

A case and large panel space devoted to these.

Text: In deposits dating to between 15,500 and 17,000 years ago, archaeologists have found the remains of over 30 pottery objects, including fragments of animal figurines. These are 10,000 years older than anywhere else in Europe. They are also the oldest art objects found in this part of the world.

Images: Large image of best figurine on side panel
 Map of other locations and dates for figurines in Europe

Objects: Figurines and other fragments – N.B. SECURITY CONCERNS
 Significant items are held in Zagreb: 3D copies to be obtained.

6a. VOLCANO

I have re-numbered this as the large panel beside case 6.

Text: Around 14,000 years ago a catastrophic volcanic eruption occurred in the Neapolitan bay whose ash covered Europe from Northern Italy, the Czech Republic to Albania. It must have been frightening to the people at the time. They would have seen dark

clouds, red sunsets and then ash would have snowed down on them; eventually covering and killing all vegetation and animals that did not flee. Vela Spila was abandoned for 2000 years and perhaps this was why the technology of using fire to harden clay was forgotten for 10,000 years.

Images: Naples volcano location + image
Volcanic ash at Vela Spila

7. Learning from human remains

Keep mock-up in case

Ambition here, a discussion of what we have learned from human remains at Vela Spila

Text: A number of well-preserved skeletons have been found within the cave, including the remains of a man and several children from the Mesolithic about 9,000 years old. With scientific research we can learn about their diet and health, and perhaps how they died. These two skeletons from the Neolithic, about 6,000 years ago, affectionately called Grandma and Grandpa were excavated in 1985 in a layer containing pottery of the Hvar culture. We now know these to be two females, one aged around 35 and the other 18.

Images: To select

Objects: Existing burial mock-up

8. All Change! The Mesolithic

Text: The climate began to warm about 12,000 years ago – and the sea level rose around 120 metres, turning the Adriatic plain into a sea. Around 11,000 years ago Korčula became an island. There was no longer big game to hunt. In this Mesolithic, or ‘middle stone age’ period, fishing became very important.

Images: The Adriatic Sea and islands
Mock up of tools using microliths
MORE

Objects: Microliths, etc. – the rise of the microlith:
Flint microliths
Bone tools
Perforated seashells (? Jewellery, etc.)
Material from elsewhere - ?trade

9. The mysteries of Mackerel and the shrinking fox

Text: For around 750 years after the climate changed and Korčula became an island, the people of Vela Spila relied heavily on mackerel as their main source of food. We do not know how people fished or why it stopped.

Equally suddenly, mackerel disappeared from the Vela Spila diet, to be replaced with small animals, including foxes (there was no big game living on the island). Fox skeletons show they became smaller over time indicating they were heavily consumed by those using Vela Spila. Sea and land snails were also an important part of the diet.

Images: Mackerel shoal + individual fish
?Mock-up Mesolithic boat

Objects: Some fish skeletons – to talk about no heads + not smoked
Any fish hooks or anything related to Mesolithic fishing?
Sea and land snails – effects of changes in water temperature

Fox skeletons
Mesolithic hunting tools

10. All Change again – the Neolithic

Text: Current sea levels were reached about 8,000 years ago. Along the Dalmatian coast, people began to arrive with or adopted agriculture in what became the Neolithic era, or 'new stone age'. Vela Spila was heavily used by goat and sheep herders.

From the 'layercakes' of light and dark grey dung we believe that sheep and goats were sheltered in Vela Spila during the winter months. Their excrement would have dried and apparently burnt in the autumn before the animals were returned to the cave.

This era also saw the widespread use of pottery for the first time.

Images: Map showing spread of Neolithic in the area.
Layercake of goat dung.

Objects: Neolithic pottery – best examples
Case that gives a sense of the sheer QUANTITY of pottery being used.

11. Temporary exhibition area

A flexible space that provides an opportunity to reveal other collections held by the museum, or to reflect new research, or for others – like the Young Archaeologists Club – to display their work.

12. Find out more

A table and chairs with a large panel behind at which:

- People can find material in other languages
- People can find greater depth of content
- People can write their own thoughts on the site and gallery.

VISIT VELA SPILA large sign on the panel behind table and chairs + directions, opening times, etc.

13. Leaving the Cave

Text: Around 4000 years ago, regular use of caves like Vela Spila for periodic habitation ceased and instead houses were built and defended. There are a number of hillforts in this area, including one at Kopila, which is currently under excavation by archaeologists. Kopila provides a commanding view of trading routes and became more attractive economically and perhaps safer. The village surrounding an acropolis, spills down the hillside with a necropolis below. Finds show clear evidence of continued trade in the area with Greece and Rome, although it is not clear if their accumulation at Kopila was as a result of exchange or of piracy.

Images: Location of Kopila
 Layout of Kopila
 Photographs of the site

Objects: From Kopila

N.B. Temporary exhibition on Kopila at Zadar until late June 2017. Suggest transfer part or all of that exhibition to Vela Luka Museum after that date.

14 & 15. Contact with the wider world ends in disaster

Text: It appears the people of Korčula, the Ilyrians, were well known for their piracy. Such a plague were they on Roman trading vessels, we are told by historian Titus Livius, that a Roman general, Octavius, later to become emperor, oversaw the slaughter of all the people living in the area – just over 30 years before the birth of Christ.

Images: Octavian

Objects: Greek and Roman material from the museum collections.

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