

# BEARS AND NEANDERTHALS

## Reconstructing uncommon behaviors from zooarchaeological evidence in Southern Europe

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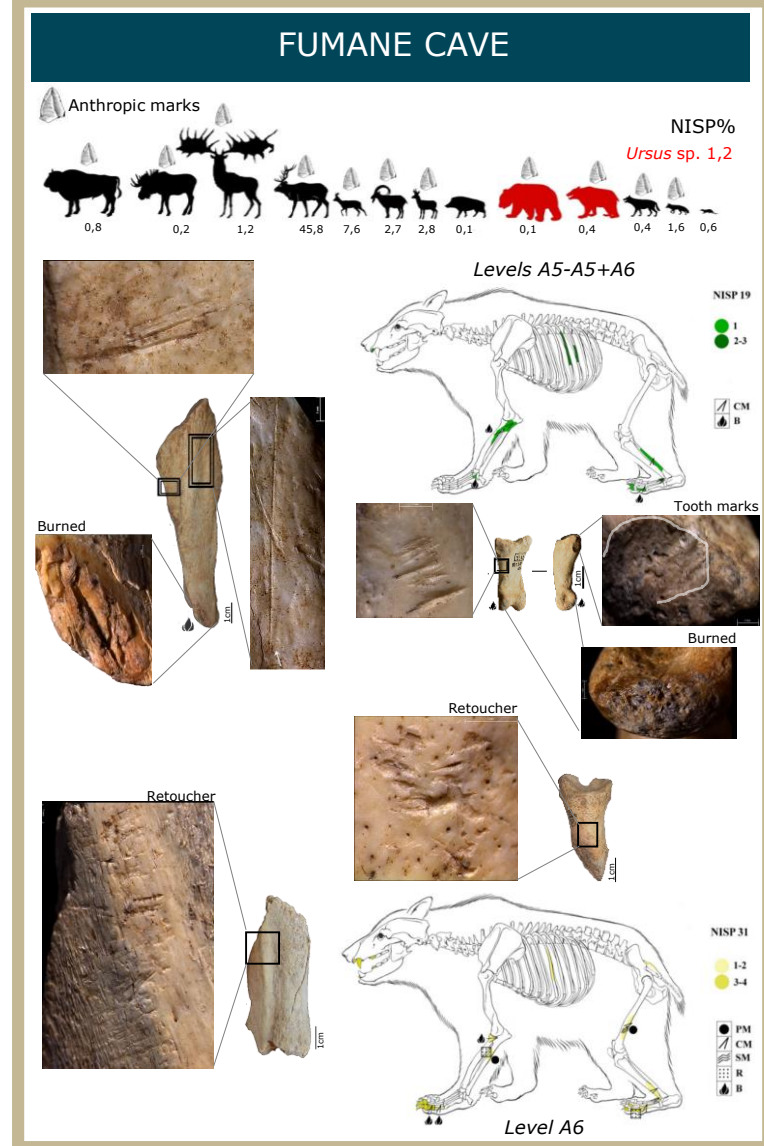
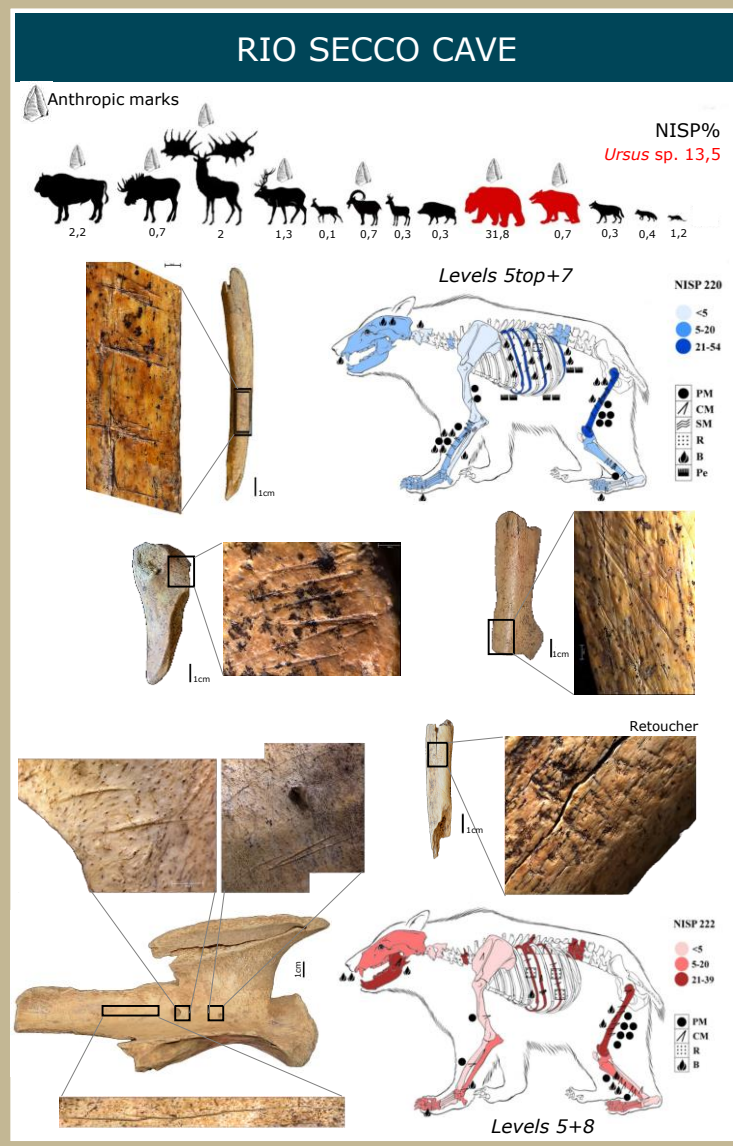
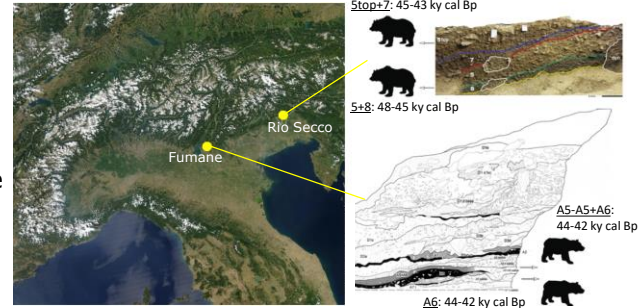
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Cave bear (*Ursus spelaeus*), brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), and Neanderthals were potential competitors for environmental resources (shelters and food) in Europe. In order to reinforce this view and contribute to the ongoing debate on late Neanderthal behavior, we present evidence from zooarchaeological and taphonomic analyses of bear bone remains discovered at Rio Secco Cave and Fumane Cave in the Italian Alps. This contexts provide several distinct Neanderthal frequentations, dated to 49-42 ky cal. BP, that attest to the systematic and consolidated exploitations of bears.



The data presented demonstrate clear evidence for interactions between Neanderthals and cave and brown bears, which were targeted for the acquisition of fur, meat, bones, and possibly other materials that were considered plantigrade resources. However, as also demonstrated by the carnivore to herbivore ratios at both the sites, respectively 1:0.27 (Rio Secco) and 1:23 (Fumane), much of the variability between these caves can be contextualized in terms of the ways and the rhythms of bear exploitation. Examples of Neanderthal bear exploitation are extremely sporadic in Europe, and Grotta Rio Secco and Grotta Fumane can be considered rare cases of remain accumulations generated by the human predation of bears of varied age classes during or near the end of hibernation. All of this evidence suggests that bears had a strategic role in the nomadic economy of Neanderthal hunting groups.

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