EXPLORATION AND EXCAVATION REPORT

Umichipoyil

Location : 12°/15’ & 12°/20’ North Latitude and 75°/10’ & 75°/15’ East Longitude.

Village : Karinthalam,

Panchayath : Kinnanur/ Karinthalam

Taluk : Hosdurg

District : Kasaragod

The site of Umichipoyil [Fig.4] lies between the Chandragiri and Nileshwaram rivers. Situated 23 kilometers away from Nileshwaram, 140 feet above the main sea level it is located on the left bank of the kumblapalli chal a stream, which finally goes and joins the 46-kilometer long Nileshwaram River. The Nileshwaram River has its origin in kumballapalli in Kinnanur. The site lays 2kilometers away from kumblapalli and is on a low-lying laterite formation. [Fig.4.1]. It is located in the Karinthalam village which is an upland region of undulating land with and without scrub, a bit of barren rocky stony waste sheet rock area (Fig.4.2). Here the soil is deep gravel well-drained clay soils with a gentle slope. It falls within the northern zone of Kerala, which is a region consisting of the forest-clad Western Ghats presenting a series of hills intersected by rivers and streams. The region is composed of laterite presumably of the sedimentary marine origin. Karinthalam has 2391 hectares of highland and there is an absence of lowlands and midlands.
Figure 4.2 Landscape of Umichipoyil
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NATURE OF THE SITE

The site and its surrounding area in its immediate vicinity as we see it today is covered with rubber plantations which have sprung up in the recent past and has been extensively an area of slash and burn cultivation. The existence of megalithic structures in its immediate vicinity was known earlier but plantation activities were largely responsible for bringing their existence to light. Paradoxically while reworking the land for plantation purposes has despoiled the site and spoliation robbed the monuments of many essential features and appendages, the original ground surface, and sub soil features, it has also in a large way been responsible in enhancing the visibility of the monuments and subsequently in the discovery of four new ones (Fig. 4.2a) which have been subject to excavation. The monuments so far identified occur in two clusters of big and small and a solitary one away from the clusters. The first cluster at Umichipoyil was reported earlier and was completely despoiled. The second cluster has revealed despoiled ones and newly discovered ones while the solitary one was salvaged after tampering by the locals. The area in and around the clusters was subject to an intensive surface survey and the largest cluster led to the discovery of four caves. This area consisting of 35 cents was subject to further probing to understand the location, size, frequency, distribution, the structural and architectural components of the caves to see how they stand different from similar structures found elsewhere in Kerala. The large cluster with closely packed caves not reported hitherto and the absence of certain frequently occurring components associated in the caves from the Thrissur region is what sets Umichipoyil apart.

Type of Monument

Underground monolithic rock cut caves quarried into the laterite bed occurs in a cluster of seven and lie in close proximity. To the north occurs a cluster of three and further south a solitary one. The Kumblapalli chal is a small stream crossing which the land is upland and undulating in the centre surrounded by streams on all four sides. To the east is the Kumblapalli chal, to the west the karalam chal to the North the Karinthalam chal and to the South the Maiyaganam chal and from all these streams Umichipoyil is a mere Kilometer away. Places within the vicinity of Umichipoyil bear names with Adakkam like umichiadakkam, meladdakam, and ponaaddakam. Interestingly all these areas have similar structures that of subterranean rock cut chambers. While the name Adakkam, which means a flat land, has shown to bear such monuments local traditions, also bear testimony to Umichi and its vicinity as a burial area.

LOCAL TRADITION

Tradition has it that the areas of Umichi and its surrounding regions were not safe to venture after dusk. Anyone who went that way would never be able to find their way back due to the presence of ayambala considered by the locals as the biggest ghost in the group of spirits capable of seizing anyone who dared to venture into the area.

KERALA ROCK CUT CAVES

Any discussion on the rock cut caves of Kerala begins with the ones at Thrissur as they are seen to stand apart in terms of architecture, interior details, and size. They are characterized by a rectangular entrance either a little above the floor level or flush with it and a narrow opening which hardly permits a man to crawl through leading to a chamber inside. The chamber circular, semi circular or rectangular has a vaulted roof with an opening at the top sealed by a capstone. Access to the floor of the outer court sometimes was through a flight of steps or a ramp leading to the entrance of the chamber, which again is sealed, with a capstone. The floor of the interior of the cave is 1 to 2 feet lower than the floor of the outer
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court. Rock cut benches chiseled in laterite is a normal feature of the caves positioned in the side of the interior of the chamber. Varying in height, they sometimes have a single bench, only one side while others have none at all.\(^1\) The ones at Trissur are isolated caves and not in clusters. Similar ones have been reported from other areas and in most cases; discoveries have been accidental devoid of essential or basic details. Occurring profusely in the northern confines of Kerala, fragmentary and sketchy reports lacking precision have resulted in failure to understand their size, interior details, and frequency of occurrence. The structures at Umichipoyil belong to the rock cut variety but throws open to the discerning prehistorian and archaeologist a whole gamut of questions. A detailed description of Umichipoyil is what the researcher will begin with unveiling the empirical reality out there. The monuments at Umichipoyil are megalithic and of the variety known as subterranean caves but a close examination of their location, size, frequency of distribution and interior details reveals not simply an assumed sameness but differences within the site and from ones hitherto reported from other parts of Kerala.

The caves when closely examined and understood shows varying structural elements where the focus cannot be simply looking at them in an evolutionary sequence or from simple to complex but perhaps what the landscape afforded. Each of the eleven caves will be separately described with illustrations and photographs. Their location in a contour map, in the site, nature of their distribution, frequency together with their size and interior details will be described at length.

LOCATION

The contour map (Fig.4.3) shows the location of the caves in three clusters and all the caves lie between contours 140-138. The north cluster of three caves occurs at contours of 138.305, 138.20, and 138.10 respectively. The distance from this cluster to the largest, one of seven caves is 118 meters. The second cluster perhaps the largest one packed close to each other lies in contours of 137.95, 137.50, 138.92, 138.82, 138.85, 139.12, 139.52, and 138.65. The distance from this cluster to the solitary cave is 59 meters. It lies in a contour of 140.35.

Cluster one

They are apparently similar looking but subtle difference in either the interior or their positioning is obvious.

CAVE N1

Key Components: Central pillar with the absence of the porthole and a series of three rectangular doorways. Interestingly in terms of size of the doorways, a difference of 20cms between the first and the second and a difference of 42 cms between the second and the third can be seen. The cave is Oriented southwest (Fig.4.4).

A long passage measuring 480 cms leads to an inner circular chamber sealed with a capstone. The porthole is absent but a central pillar with a crack visible exactly functional distinguishes this cave from the rest in the cluster. Aligned southwest the passage leads to the entrance, which represents the jams of a doorway measuring 102, 60, and 40cms respectively. The width of the entrance measures 99cms and the height 120cms leading to the circular chamber inside measuring 964.6 square cms. The floor of the chamber is flush with the entrance. Faint traces of a circular groove running through the top of the cave as a kind of surface marker is seen. (Fig.4.5).

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Figure 4.3 Contour Map of Utichipayil
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Figure. 4.4 Details of Cave N1
Figure 4.5 Cave N1 in the small Cluster
CAVE N2

Key components: Extremely small, absence of porthole and capstone sealing off the entrance. The cave is oriented southwest (Fig. 4.6).

The smallest of the caves identified it is difficult to ascertain whether it represents a half finished abandoned one or was meant to be deliberately small. Disturbed with no traces of any kind of interments, it has all the usual components akin to a rock cut cave. Curiously, the pathway is long measuring almost 303 cms with a recessed entrance on which are fashioned multiple doorways measuring 96, 81, 60 & 36cms respectively leading to a small interior chamber hardly measuring 227.96 square cms. Northern porthole is conspicuous by its absence and the cave like the pillared one is aligned southwest. The chamber inside is circular and the height of the cave is only 102cms(Fig.4.7).

CAVE N3

Key components: Oriented northwest, not a circular chamber inside, but measures exactly the same in terms of size of the chamber (Fig. 4.8).

Positioned away from the other two its orientation is different. It is northwest. It has a porthole. The width is consistent in its measurement like caves with portholes in the larger cluster. A long passage leads to a chamber, which is not exactly circular. The chamber inside measures the same as the pillared one.

Positioned and aligned differently from the other two in the cluster cave number 3 stands not exactly to the north but the northwest. The northern porthole seems like any other porthole circular measuring 39 cms in width. A wide passage measuring 321 cms leads to the chamber inside which interestingly measures exactly 964.6 square cms identical to the pillared one. The entrance to the chamber has a series of doorways measuring 84, 66, and 45cms respectively. The entrance has a width of 114 cms and the chamber inside is not exactly circular. The height of the cave is 129 cms (Fig.4.9).

A close view of the section drawings of each of these caves shows the basic components are not the same within each of these caves. The cluster represents a half finished or extremely small one, a pillared one without the top opening and one with a top opening aligned differently from the other two (Fig4.10). The porthole occurs in the north. All these caves were completely disturbed and were devoid of any material remains. However, on clearing the debris bone dust and fragments of a lid were found.

The second cluster of seven caves stands apart and is the largest of the cluster positioned centrally with a smaller cluster to the north and a solitary one to the south. Closely packed to each other this cluster when closely examined in terms of structural details or assemblages (as four in this cluster have been subject to excavation) has thrown up surprises in the archaeological record. The porthole was a common component in all the seven caves but variations can be seen in the portholes in terms of shape and the enclosing capstone. The seven caves are not exactly identical though apparently similar looking but again subtle architectural variations sets each cave apart. Interestingly one central cave seems to mark the focal point encompassing which are the other six. Again, a half abandoned half finished one occurs in this cluster (Fig.4.11).

Cave 1

Key Components: Eastern porthole, Grooved porthole (Fig, 4.12), with a capstone neatly fitting into the hole. Crudely finished cave and aligned exactly at 270° from the north.
Figure. 4.6 Details of Cave N2
Figure 4.8 Details of Cave N3
CAVE N2

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Figure 4.9 Cave N3
Figure 4.10 Small Cluster of Caves
Figure 4.11 Big Cluster of Caves
Figure 4.12 Cave 1
In the cluster seems rather crudely finished without any of the finesse exhibited in the other caves. A long narrow passage leads to an entrance sealed by a capstone. A series of two doorways leads to the chamber inside with a top opening and sealed by a capstone chiseled neatly fitting and perfectly into the porthole. Oriented west east it is positioned at an angle of $270^\circ$ from the north (Fig.4.13).

Cave 2

Key Components: Finely fashioned one in comparison to cave one, Eastern porthole sealed with a capstone, aligned exactly at $270^\circ$ from the north. The eastern porthole has a width, which conforms in measurement to the cave in the first cluster, which has a porthole. The series of doorways leading to the inner chamber is not exactly squarish or rectangular but sloping outwards and very neatly chiseled. Circular chamber inside is small (Fig.4.14)

Almost in a straight line separated by a mere 12 meters is cave no 2 but seems a finely chiseled cave. A series of doorways measuring 105,81, 63 cms leads to the inner chamber. The chamber inside is circular and has a vaulted roof with an eastern porthole. The chamber measures 1396.28 sq cms and has a height of 111cms. The eastern porthole is sealed with a capstone. The top opening has a width of 39 cms. The cave is aligned west east and positioned at an angle of 280 degrees from the north (Fig.4.15).

Cave 3

Key Components: Lies at a distance of 24 meters from cave1. Represents a broken cave, which was abandoned. Has a flight of steps, each of which interestingly measures the same 81 cms and aligned, at an angle of $270^\circ$ from the north. Characterized by a series of doorways which again have a certain kind of precision in their measurements (Fig.4.16).

The cave seems interesting in terms of providing clues as to the very technology of fashioning a cave. A half finished, half broken or abandoned half way this cave has a flight of 4 steps curiously each measuring exactly the same 81 cms leading to the chamber, which is broken on the top. A series of doorways measuring 108,78,45 cms respectively leads to the chamber. The passage to the cave measures 264 cms and the entrance has a width of 84 cms and the cave a height of 156 cms. The cave is aligned west east and positioned at an angle of 270 degrees from the north (Fig.4.17).

Cave 4

Key Components: Lies at a distance of 27.20 meters from cave 3. Occupies a central position surrounding which there are four caves with hardly any distance separating them. Stands out because of a circular groove with standing stones within the groove almost like miniature menhirs. Characterized by a series of three doorways whose measurements conform to some kind of a precision, they seem to stand separate unlike the other caves. Marked by a short passage but broad and a space separate the passage and the doorways. Chamber inside has fell fashioned grooves on the left wall. A centrally running wedge cuts through the chamber though not too distinct like the cave directly behind it. The floor of the chamber is higher than the outer court. The chamber has an eastern porthole large sealed with a capstone which is different from the rest but a commonly occurring component in the rock cut caves of Kasaragod but unique to the region (Fig.4.18).

Occupies a pivotal position in the cluster its visibility enhanced by a circular groove running through the cave into which were placed standing
Figure 4.14 Details of Cave 2
Figure 4.15 Cave 2
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Figure 4.16 Details of Cave 3
Figure. 4.18 Details of Cave 4
stones representing miniature menhirs. A broad but well-chiseled passage measuring 342 cms leads to an entrance. The multiple doorways measuring 150, 75 and 60 cms are set apart and a small space between the doorway takes one into the central chamber which has an eastern porthole closed with a capstone. The capstone is not a simple one but different from the rest shaped like a mushroom. The chamber inside has well-fashioned grooves in the far left-hand corner. The top opening measures 42 cms. The floor of the interior of the cave is higher than the outer court. The entrance has a width of 141cms and the chamber inside measures 2081 square cms. A faint wedge dissecting the chamber runs through the centre of the chamber. Aligned west east it has been positioned at an angle of 270 degrees from the north (Fig.4.19).

Cave 5

Key Components: A mere 11.60-meter separates cave four and five. Almost beginning where the circular groove ends of the previous one it is again characterized by a flight of steps, which interestingly shows great precision. The difference in the width of the first four steps is exactly 12cms and the last one is 18cms. A series of doorways again conforms to a certain kind of precision in its measurements and seem separate with a space separating the doorways and the chamber inside. It has a very low entrance and one has to literally crawl inside. A long passage leads to the doorways. The chamber inside has well-fashioned hooks at the far left-hand corner of the chamber wall. A clearly discernible wedge runs through the centre of the chamber. The chamber has an eastern porthole sealed with a capstone. The cave is aligned exactly 270 degrees from the North (Fig.4.19).

Cave 6

Key Components: Positioned in the farthest corner in the entire cluster, a distance of 11.60 meters separates it from the centrally positioned cave. They seem crudely finished unlike the rest. The series of doorways again seem different but interestingly measures exactly the same like the central cave. The chamber inside has an eastern porthole, which measures exactly like the central one, although the chamber is slightly larger and inclined at an angle of 270 degrees from the north (Fig.4.23).

Situated at the extreme southern corner of the cluster and like the one in the extreme northern corner of the same cluster seems crudely finished and lacks the grandiose of the rest. A passage measuring 342 cms leads to an entrance 135 cms in width and 144cms in height. A series of doorways measuring 150, 75, 60 cms respectively leads to the inner chamber with an eastern porthole which has an area of 2355 square cms. The top opening has a width of 42 cms. Oriented west east it is inclined at an angle of 270 degrees from the north (Fig.4.24).
Figure. 4.20 Details of Cave 5
Figure 4.21 Flight of steps in cave 5
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Key Components: A mere 11.60-meter separates cave four and five. Almost beginning where the circular groove ends of the previous one it is again characterized by a flight of steps, which interestingly shows great precision. The difference in the width of the first four steps is exactly 12cms and the last one is 18cms. A series of doorways again conforms to a certain kind of precision in its measurements and seem separate with a space separating the doorways and the chamber inside. It has a very low entrance and one has to literally crawl inside. A long passage leads to the doorways. The chamber inside has well-fashioned hooks at the far left-hand corner of the chamber wall. A clearly discernible wedge runs through the centre of the chamber. The chamber has an eastern porthole sealed with a capstone. The porthole measures 36 cms. The chamber inside has well-fashioned hooks on the far left hand corner of its wall. The cave is aligned exactly 270 degrees from the north (Fig.4.20).

Cave 6

Key Components: Positioned in the farthest corner in the entire cluster, a distance of 11.60 meters separates it from the centrally positioned cave. They seem crudely finished unlike the rest. The series of doorways again seem different but interestingly measures exactly the same like the central cave. The chamber inside has an eastern porthole, which measures exactly like the central one, although the chamber is slightly larger and inclined at an angle of 270 degrees from the north (Fig.4.23).

Situated at the extreme southern corner of the cluster and like the one in the extreme northern corner of the same cluster seems crudely finished and lacks the grandiose of the rest. A passage measuring 342 cms leads to an entrance 135 cms in width and 144cms in height. A series of doorways measuring 150, 75, 60 cms respectively leads to the inner chamber with an eastern porthole which has an area of 2355 square cms. The top opening has a width of 42 cms. Oriented west east it is inclined at an angle of 270 degrees from the north (Fig.4.24).
Figure 4.21(a) Entrance of Cave 5
Figure 4.22 Hooks lining the Wall
Figure 4.23 Details of Cave 6
**Cave 7**

Key Components: Separated from cave 6 by 10.40 meters. Circular groove running through the top. Southern porthole. Inclined at an angle of 250° 30' from the North. A neatly fashioned niche to hold a pot in a space separating the doorways and the inner chamber marks this different from the rest in the entire cluster. It has a centrally running wedge through the chamber and is characterized by a very small passage. The height of the chamber keeps increasing. Porthole is neither circular nor squarish (Fig.4.25).

Positioned in the farthest corner of the cluster its visibility enhanced by the circular groove, which runs through the cave, it stands apart in terms of its structure. A passage hollowed out of the laterite measuring 180cms leads to the entrance with two simple doorways measuring 67 and 54cms respectively. The entrance has a width of 101 cms and a passage separating the doorways and the interior chamber measuring 60cms has a niche right in the centre in which a pot was placed in an inverted position. The circular chamber inside with a southern porthole increases in height and it is almost possible for one to stand upright at the far end of the cave. The height of the cave is almost 169cms. The chamber inside has a centrally running wedge. Interestingly the cave is positioned at an angle of 250 degrees 30' from the north. The top opening measures 32cms in width (Fig.4.26).

**Solitary Cave**

Key Components: Separated from the largest cluster by 59 meters. Aligned like the rest in the big cluster at an angle of 270° from the North. Has an eastern porthole. Porthole conforms in measurement with the others. A series of three doorways can be seen. Porthole sealed with a capstone similar to the central cave in the largest cluster (Fig.4.27).

Situated at a distance of 59m from the large cluster it is positioned west east and has an eastern porthole. A passage measuring 420 cms leads to the entrance, which has a width of 117cms and a series of doorways measuring 99, 84, and 63 respectively. The chamber inside is circular and has a height of 120cms. The eastern porthole has a capstone, which again is different from the rest shaped like a mushroom similar to the capstone of the centrally located cave in the largest cluster. The opening measures 36 cms and the chamber inside 1153.95 square cms (Fig.4.28).

A quick appraisal of the cluster of caves shows that circumventing the laterite interfaced with loose soil where plants would grow seemed ideal places for the constructors to fashion these caves. The designs of the constructors began with what the landscape afforded. If one was to closely observe the largest cluster of closely packed, caves, evident in the first row were two caves devoid of steps. The third row of caves has steps as is evident in the broken one and the one, which occurs almost in a straight line to it. A third, which has been discovered but left untouched, again has steps, and occurs again in a straight line. These steps are absent in the first and the second rows. Initially to work with, the landscape afforded loose soil to hard rock. They were neither too conscious of a threat to the existing caves where the inherent dangers of a cave collapsing could be prevented. Such dangers were secondary is clear from the proximity of the caves in the largest cluster where the third row of caves have distances of 11.60 meters, 13.20 meters, 17.20 metres and 10.40 meters separating the caves from the centrally located one. The differences between them are barely more than 6.8 meters at the maximum level and a mere 1.6 meters at the minimum level. The difference between the cave in the first row and the broken one in the third row is hardly 24 meters. Labour saving too must not have been a primary concern in the mind of the constructors because in that case they would have started from the other end. The
Figure 4.26 Cave7
Figure 4.27 Details of Solitary Cave
Cave 7

Key Components: Separated from cave 6 by 10.40 meters. Circular groove running through the top. Southern porthole. Inclined at an angle of $250^\circ 30'$ from the North. A neatly fashioned niche to hold a pot in a space separating the doorways and the inner chamber marks this different from the rest in the entire cluster. It has a centrally running wedge through the chamber and is characterized by a very small passage. The height of the chamber keeps increasing. Porthole is neither circular nor squarish (Fig.4.25).

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Solitary Cave

Key Components: Separated from the largest cluster by 59 meters. Aligned like the rest in the big cluster at an angle of $270^\circ$ from the North. Has an eastern porthole. Porthole conforms in measurement with the others. A series of three doorways can be seen. Porthole sealed with a capstone similar to the central cave in the largest cluster (Fig.4.27).

Situated at a distance of 59m from the large cluster it is positioned west east and has an eastern porthole. A passage measuring 420 cms leads to the entrance, which has a width of 117cms and a series of doorways measuring 99, 84, and 63 respectively. The chamber inside is circular and has a height of 120cms. The eastern porthole has a capstone, which again is different from the rest shaped like a mushroom similar to the capstone of the centrally located cave in the largest cluster. The opening measures 36 cms and the chamber inside 1153.95 square cms (Fig.4.28).

A quick appraisal of the cluster of caves shows that circumventing the laterite interfaced with loose soil where plants would grow seemed ideal places for the constructors to fashion these caves. The designs of the constructors began with what the landscape afforded. If one was to closely observe the largest cluster of closely packed caves, evident in the first row were two caves devoid of steps. The third row of caves has steps as is evident in the broken one and the one, which occurs almost in a straight line to it. A third, which has been discovered but left untouched, again has steps, and occurs again in a straight line. These steps are absent in the first and the second rows. Initially to work with, the landscape afforded loose soil to hard rock. They were neither too conscious of a threat to the existing caves where the inherent dangers of a cave collapsing could be prevented. Such dangers were secondary is clear from the proximity of the caves in the largest cluster where the third row of caves have distances of 11.60 meters, 13.20 meters, 17.20metres and 10.40 meters separating the caves from the centrally located one. The differences between them are barely more than 6.8 meters at the maximum level and a mere 1.6 meters at the minimum level. The difference between the cave in the first row and the broken one in the third row is hardly 24 meters. Labour saving too must not have been a primary concern in the mind of the constructors because in that case they would have started from the other end. The
Figure 4.28 Solitary Cave
smaller northern cluster also shows the location of caves on a landscape interfaced with soil and rock. Here the half finished cave is a pointer to the inherent difficulty of working with the hardness of the rock bed. There is also an indication of the preference for not too lengthy rock beds on the surface rather place interfaced with soil.

The monuments at Umichipoyil unfold to the archaeologist a body of monumental architecture, which is 'a product of people’s understanding and knowledge of their own world'. Physically situated close to one another each of these is architecturally distinct yet a kind of uniformity in terms of spatial integrity within a small area is not hard to discern. The design techniques may seem simple and if one was to argue that it was not laid down by eye the caves at umichipoyil exhibit a kind of precision. The construction or raising of any structure, which delineates space also, requires the degree of spatial representation to be achieved. To visualize and produce an appropriate form would also mean drawing on cosmological principles. This is what is striking and the most significant aspect of the clusters at Umichipoyil. The porthole a common component in almost all the caves excepting one with the pillar and the two abandoned ones introducing the interesting facet namely its orientation. To begin with, in the largest cluster of closely packed caves the eastern porthole is only too apparent. Interestingly in all these caves excepting one the rest have been set at an angle of 270° from the north. However one in the cluster is aligned differently and the porthole is in the south and is inclined at an angle 250° 30' from the north. The solitary cave away from this cluster has the porthole like the ones in the large cluster and is inclined at an angle of 270° from the north. In the smaller cluster too of the caves have a northern porthole and the other has a porthole aligned differently.

The question of illumination of these structures by the sun or all oblations beginning with offerings to the sun only strengthens the notion of the presence of the port hole as deliberate and the precision in its location. The North West axis of the caves seems to relate to the sun. Portholes were fashioned to facilitate the direct rays of the sun into the centre of the chamber, which was perpetually in darkness and was a means of communicating with the dead. As a spatial representation of a rock cut tomb, a place of the dead the caves at Umichipoyil creates a place of special significance.

One may not try to credit these constructors with principles of formal geometry but going by the dimensional measurements of each of these caves in terms of their internal and external components also makes one believe that such precision was not beyond their skills. One wonders if a high degree of accuracy or precision was immaterial to them, but rather putting up structures that looked satisfying, where there was no kind of a forward planning in terms of the evolution of each monument. Looking at the frequently occurring component that of the porthole, it is hard to dismiss these structures as not determined or planned constructions. The location, size, frequency and architectural grandiose exhibited in the construction and technique sets Umichipoyil apart from rock cut caves discovered in other regions of Kerala. Interestingly the material assemblages in four of the excavated caves are structured in a manner, which again sets Umichipoyil apart not just in the positioning within the chamber but also in pottery types not encountered in any of the megaliths in Kerala. Though the other caves were despoiled and robbed of their

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contents, these four newly discovered caves exhibit uniqueness in the frequency of finds and their presence and absence.

**EXCAVATION**

Cave no 1 at the extreme north of the largest cluster and in the first line was a newly discovered cave, which was excavated after exposing the structure. The narrow pathway leading to the entrance was first exposed after which the entrance sealed with the capstone became visible (Fig.4.29). The top opening with the capstone was exposed immediately after the discovery of the cave. In terms of quantity of pottery, this cave has yielded the minimum amount in comparison to the other three excavated. In its structure and internal components it represents the most crudely finished cave in the entire cluster but stands apart because of its top opening which has a groove neatly circular and a capstone perfectly circular fitting exactly into the opening. Pottery shapes encountered in all the other caves that of the channel spouted vessel is conspicuous by its absence in this cave. Interesting perhaps is the presence of iron in the assemblages and the total absence of the black and red ware among the wares. The assemblages include

(a) Three legged jars in red ware-3 nos.
(b) Bowls in red ware-2 nos.
(c) Hundi type in red ware- 1 no.
(d) A lid in red ware
(e) A shallow vessel in red ware.
(f) Cups in red ware- 2 nos.
(g) One iron chisel
(h) One flattened piece of iron.

Cave no 2 discovered while exploring the area was subject to an excavation. The capstone sealing the entrance was exposed (Fig.4.30). The contents inside the cave were moist and hence retrieving the pottery (Fig.4.31) was impossible. It yielded pottery in black ware, red ware, painted red ware and black and red ware. The shapes included bowls, dishes, and legged jars. The most interesting find was perhaps a stone in granite with visible marks of polishing on it. Among the pottery the channel-spouted vessel typical of the Neolithic in dull red ware were seen. The iron included two chisels placed on either side immediately on entering the cave. A red ware pot yielded a charcoal piece and a small cup at the far end of the chamber yielded some ashes. The stone in granite (Fig.4.32) was placed at the center of the chamber with a knife on the left side.

Cave no 5 in the third row was subject to a systematic excavation and the cave and its contents could be recorded in detail. The flight of steps (Fig.4.33) was first exposed after which the capstone sealing the inner chamber was exposed. The cave yielded 116 potteries, iron, a terracotta bead, and a tiny circular bit of gold. The pottery included

(a) Stands in Black Ware
(b) Lids in Black and Red ware (Fig.4.34)
(c) Big and Small Red Ware pots (Fig.4.35)
(d) Lipped Bowls in Red Ware (Fig 4.36)
(e) Big Pot in Red Slipped Ware
(f) Kooja type in Black and Red Ware (Fig.4.37)
(g) Small lipped bowl in Red Ware
Figure 4.29 Exposing Cave 1 during Excavation
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Figure 4.30 Exposing Cave2 during Excavation
Fig. 4.31 Moist Pottery within the Cave
Figure 4.32 Stone in Granite
Fig. 4.33 Exposing cave 5 during excavation
Figure 4.34 Lids in Black and Red Ware
Figure 4.35 Big and Small Red Ware Pots
Figure 4.36 Lipped Bowl in dull Red Ware
Figure 4.37 Pots in Black and Red ware
This cave in its structure again stands different. The circular groove running through the top was first exposed. The porthole was exposed after which the passage was exposed (Fig.4.42). The passage to the entrance was unlike the other caves in the cluster curved and extremely small with a massive capstone sealing the entrance. When the mud on the capstone was cleared and the capstone removed a series of two doorways were visible but interesting was a huge pot visible right at the doorway even before entering the chamber inside (Fig.4.43). A huge niche could be seen on removing the pot, which was placed in an inverted position. Striking perhaps in the material assemblages is the absence of iron, not even a trace, and no ashes or dust not even charcoal bits seen in the other excavated ones. The pottery shapes encountered here have not been encountered in any of the other caves and the absence of the legged jars but the presence of the black and red ware though minimum is what sets this cave apart from the rest. Unlike the others the placement and positioning of the pottery is again striking. In terms of numbers, the cave has yielded 26 pottery and no other artefacts.

(a) Big pot in red ware, which was hand, made.

(b) Channel spouted vessel in red ware big in size (Fig.4.44)

(c) Small lipped bowls in red ware-3 Nos. (Fig.4.45)

(d) Cups in red ware- 7 nos. (Fig.4.46)

(e) Double spouted functional carinated vessel in red ware (Fig.4.47)

(f) Small Double spouted pot in red ware non functional (fig.4.48)

(g) Wide mouthed bowl in red ware.

(h) Bowls in red ware-4 nos.
Figure 4.38 Legged Jars in Red Ware
Figure 4.39 Bowls and Dishes in Black and Red Ware
Figure 4.40 Pot in Black and Red Ware
Figure 4.41 Iron tools
This cave in its structure again stands different. The circular groove running through the top was first exposed. The porthole was exposed after which the passage was exposed (Fig.4.42). The passage to the entrance was unlike the other caves in the cluster curved and extremely small with a massive capstone sealing the entrance. When the mud on the capstone was cleared and the capstone removed a series of two doorways were visible but interesting was a huge pot visible right at the doorway even before entering the chamber inside (Fig.4.43). A huge niche could be seen on removing the pot, which was placed in an inverted position. Striking perhaps in the material assemblages is the absence of iron, not even a trace, and no ashes or dust not even charcoal bits seen in the other excavated ones. The pottery shapes encountered here have not been encountered in any of the other caves and the absence of the legged jars but the presence of the black and red ware though minimum is what sets this cave apart from the rest. Unlike the others the placement and positioning of the pottery is again striking. In terms of numbers, the cave has yielded 26 pottery and no other artefacts.

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- Small Double spouted pot in red ware non functional (fig.4.48)
- Wide mouthed bowl in red ware.
- Bowls in red ware-4 nos.
Figure 4.42 Exposing Cave 7 during Excavation
Figure 4.43 Huge pot placed at the entrance of Cave 7
Figure 4.44 Channel Spouted Vessel
Figure 4.45 Small lipped Bowls in Red Ware
Figure 4.47 Double Spouted Carinated pot in dull Red Ware
Figure 4.48 Double Spouted pot in Red Ware
(i) Two bowls with lids in red ware-2 nos.
(j) Bowl in black and red ware-1
(k) Pots in black and red ware-2 nos.
(l) Hundi type in red ware-2 nos.
Figure 4.5 Cave N1 in the small Cluster
Figure. 4.8 Details of Cave N3
Figure 4.10 Small Cluster of Caves
Figure 4.11 Big Cluster of Caves
Figure 4.13 Porthole of Cave1
Figure 4.15 Cave 2
Figure 4.19 Centrally Located
Figure 4.21 Flight of steps in cave 5
Figure 4.21(a) Entrance of Cave 5
Figure 4.22 Hooks lining the Wall
Figure. 4.25 Details of Cave 7
Figure 4.26 Cave7
Figure. 4.27 Details of Solitary Cave
Figure 4.28 Solitary Cave
Figure 4.29 Exposing Cave 1 during Excavation
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Figure 5 Pottery in Cave7
Figure 5.2 Spacing of pottery in Solitary Cave
Figure 5.3 Pottery from Cave 7
Figure 5.4 Lipped Bowls in Black and Red Ware