

“During the months of May and June 1932, I carried out excavations in an existing prehistoric settlement in Carenque. No tradition existed about it, but I was led to look for it because of the abundance of tombs in the region: artificial caves in Vila Chã, ossuary in Serra das Bautas, dolmen in Alto de Belas, etc.”

(Manuel Heleno, 1932, Notebook n.º4, p.2, MNA Archive)



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Nearby, we know several settlements from this period, such as the prehistoric settlements of Espargueira-Serra das Éguas, Moinhos do Penedo and Baútas, and we know that there were other similar funerary spaces, however disappeared, such as the Necropolis of Baútas, the *Tholos* of Conchadas and the *Tholos* of Pedreira do Campo.

Outside the county, but very close to this necropolis, you can visit the Dolmens of Monte Abraão, Estria and Pedra dos Mouros, with a different architecture, but intended for the same purpose.

# Carenque Necropolis nucleus museum

Nacional Monument

Artificial Caves at the end  
of the 4th and beginning  
of the 3rd millennium BC

**Adress:**

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**Opening times:**

Summer – Saturdays from 2:00 pm to 6:00 pm and Sundays from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm  
Winter – Saturdays from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm and Sundays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm  
(closed on December 25th, January 1st and Easter Sunday)



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“In this place, called Serra do Tojal or simply Tojal, I discovered on March 11, 1931 [sic] an artificial cave whose skylight had a small part of the chamber uncovered.  
On March 13th I discovered two more in the same place completely \sub/ buried. All have skylights.”

(Manuel Heleno, Notebook N<sup>o</sup>. 2, 1932, MNA Archive)

## Carenque Necropolis (end of IV and beginning of III millennium BC)

Discovered in 1932 by archaeologist Manuel Heleno, director of the then Ethnological Museum of Dr. Leite de Vasconcelos, currently designated the National Museum of Archeology, the Necropolis of Carenque consists of three artificial caves excavated in limestone (numbered from east to west, from I to III). It was a funerary space used by the Late Neolithic communities that lived in this territory. Since 1936, the Necropolis of Carenque has been a National Monument.

“I started the excavation through the cave that had part of the chamber already uncovered and which is to the east side \cave I/. The excavation began in the chamber and in it we found in deposits that seem to me to have been partly disturbed: Ashes; in the centre, with many bones, a vase, a limestone cylinder and a knife. Next to the vase is a small [...] that are complete with a half moon.”

(Manuel Heleno, Notebook N<sup>o</sup>. 2, 1932, MNA Archive)

The caves have a common architecture: they are excavated in the rock and have a corridor, which communicates with a funerary chamber, through a small entrance. The chamber is subcircular and has an opening at its top, a skylight. The corridor and skylight were covered with limestone slabs that closed off the structure. These slabs were raised to allow successive burials over the years.



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Shale plate



Anthropomorph Idol



Rabbit Zoomorph



Bowl

The interior of the tombs revealed several archaeological remains and artefacts. Dozens of skeletons and ceramic pieces were found, objects made of flint, limestone, bone and copper characteristic of human agro-pastoral communities from the end of the IV/beginning of the III millennium BC.

These objects were part of the funeral ritual and the offerings that accompanied the dead during burials inside the caves.

The use of the caves was collective.

“Bones had many. And then there were some little objects that Mr. Dr. said they were idols, it was in a round stitch, round, this length more or less, other shorter, it was knives that he said were the knives they used, a small stone pot also appeared there, this size, this large and round, very beautiful, very well made. Mr. Dr. that day gave me ten bucks of tip.”

(José Domingos de Oliveira, worker at the Necropolis of Carenque, interview conducted by the Municipal Museum in 2003)