The goals of TARA are to create a permanent visual archive of Africa’s rock art before it is too late, share this priceless archive with the world community, and, to the extent possible, preserve today’s most threatened rock art sites, however remote, across the African continent. TARA believes an important way to realize the value of rock art in Africa for present and future generations is to promote awareness of its richness, antiquity and importance.

Based in Nairobi, Kenya, TARA is the world’s only organization dedicated to this cultural imperative. TARA’s work has been endorsed by Nelson Mandela, who encourages national governments and local communities throughout Africa to contribute their time and resources to the challenge of preserving and protecting Africa’s rock art.

TARA has also received support and recognition from the Ford Foundation, the Andrew Mellon Foundation and the National Geographic Society, amongst others. TARA’s singular contributions have also been widely acclaimed in the scientific and popular media.

TARA’s chairman, international photographer David Coulson, has made it his life’s work to photograph and document rock art in over 20 different African countries. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in a statement to TARA in 2005, called on African leaders to take a new and more active role, and on private businesses, foundations and individuals to contribute their expertise and resources.

All photos © David Coulson / TARA unless credited otherwise.

Create greater global awareness of the importance and endangered state of African rock art; survey sites; monitor status; be an information resource and archive; and promote and support rock art conservation measures.
AFRICA’S ROCK ART HERITAGE: A COMMUNIQUE TO AFRICA’S GOVERNMENTS

At a gathering in New York City on 24th May 2005, hosted by Algeria, the permanent representatives to the United Nations in attendance endorsed the following joint statement by Ambassador Baali and TARA, and agreed to communicate to their respective governments this message of common commitment to the preservation of Africa’s rock art heritage:

We are pleased and honoured to join Secretary-General Kofi Annan and former President of South Africa Nelson Mandela in their outspoken concern for the preservation of a priceless cultural treasure – the rock art of Africa – one of the oldest and most extensive records on earth of human thought and the emergence of artistic expression.

We concur wholeheartedly with Nelson Mandela: “Africa’s rock art is the common heritage of all Africans, but it is more than that. It is the common heritage of humanity. Yet, as populations increase and vandalism and theft of Africa’s rock art are on the rise, this irreplaceable resource is highly threatened.”

Further, we embrace the view of Secretary-General Annan that – to preserve Africa’s rock art – the education of Africa’s children and the involvement of local communities wherever rock art exists are essential goals for government and non-government organizations alike.

Finally, we pledge to assist the Secretary-General by delivering to our respective governments his call to action: “It is time for Africa’s leaders to take a new and more active role. We must save this cultural heritage before it is too late.”

In May 2005, Algeria’s ambassador to the UN Abdallah Baali, hosted a meeting of UN ambassadors of African rock art nations. The meeting, held at the Algerian Mission in New York and attended by 30 ambassadors, unanimously endorsed a statement calling on their respective governments to preserve Africa’s rock art heritage. In addition to the 30 ambassadors the event was also attended by Wilmot James of the Ford Foundation and by Tom Nygren of the Mellon Foundation and Aluka.
TARA’s latest museum exhibition was co-hosted by the House of Culture National Museum Dar es Salaam and the Department of Antiquites of Tanzania and ran for 100 days between April and July 2005. Over 20,000 people were able to view the exhibition. Teachers and adult visitors to the exhibition received a copy of the Tanzania edition of the rock art guidebook, which was sponsored by Vodacom Tanzania Limited, who were also lead sponsors of the exhibition overall. 3000 copies of this Tanzania edition were given out, plus another 1000 or so of the general East Africa guide book. All children received a one-page flier on African rock art.

The exhibition opens in Kampala, Uganda, on September 15 2005 and will run for three months.
LUCKY ESCAPE

At the beginning of August TARA’s senior driver Romulus Khagavo (Rom) was driving north from Dar es Salaam on his way back to Nairobi.

Our exhibition at the National Museum had just closed and Rom was bringing back some of the remaining materials accompanied by another staff member, Zipporah Sangilu. Unfortunately half way to Arusha Rom was forced to swerve violently to avoid a man who came onto the road on a bike. As a result the vehicle rolled, injuring Zipporah as well as causing major damage to TARA’s Toyota Landcruiser. Rom himself was fortunately uninjured.

Although the vehicle was looted by nearby locals, while Rom tried to assist Zipporah, Zipporah was eventually taken to hospital, first to Muheza District Hospital near the scene of the accident and from there to the Aga Khan Hospital in Dar es Salaam. X-Rays showed that she had fractured vertebrae and ribs and it was decided to bring her back to Kenya to recuperate near her family and friends as soon as possible. Special thanks are due to Achilles Mmujunangoma who coordinated the emergency arrangements in Dar es Salaam, Dr Paul Msemwa and museum attendants and staff who looked after Zipporah in Dar es Salaam. We are indebted to Bim Theobald of Chalbora, who sent a driver to rescue Zip from her first hospital and at the same time sent a truck to pick up the landcruiser. Jim Heather-Hayes and Benoit Wangermez of AMREF (Flying Doctors) went out of their way to help us evacuate Zipporah back to Nairobi - thanks go to them as well.

We all wish Zipporah the best for her recovery.

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We all wish Zipporah the best for her recovery.

Timeline of African Rock Art to be displayed at museums around Africa

The timeline of African rock art, one of the most popular exhibits of TARA’s temporary museum exhibitions, is to be displayed at various museums around Africa including the Cameroon Museum, the Arusha Museum and the Abasuba Community Peace Museum.

CNN coverage

CNN ran a story on TARA and African rock art that was aired on Inside Africa in June 2005. A short piece also ran on CNN World News.

tara produces a guide to east african rock art

In April 2005, TARA published a short guide to rock art in East Africa in two editions: one for East Africa generally and one with a focus on Tanzania. The Tanzania version of the guidebook was sponsored by Vodacom Tanzania Limited and 3000 copies were handed out to teachers and adult visitors at the Dar es Salaam Museum exhibition. The East Africa guidebook is being distributed to government departments, universities, art institutes, heritage organizations, museums, libraries and schools in East Africa, especially those near rock art sites.
Project launch:
MFANGANO ISLAND
AND KAKAPEL

August 31st, TARA hosted the official launch of the rock art conservation and tourism project in Kenya. TARA is working with the National Museums of Kenya, the Kenya Tourist Board and local community organizations at several rock art sites across the country. The launch of the first of these sites, at the Mawanga cave on Mfangano Island in Lake Victoria, represented the first rock art site in Kenya to be open to the public.

By working through local communities, the project aims to ensure the long-term survival of the sites as the communities realize and become invested in their importance. Developing responsible tourism is one key way of ensuring that communities see financial benefits from the sites; other benefits include increased pride and knowledge of the heritage locally, nationally and internationally; educational and cultural exchanges; and spin-off industries related to tourism. As tourism is one of Kenya’s most important national industries, the project has attracted the support of the Kenya Tourist Board.

The project was officially opened by the Minister for National Heritage, Hon Najib Balala, at a colourful ceremony at Mawanga led by Jack Obonyo, curator of the Abasuba Community Peace Museum, the community organization managing heritage sites in Suba district. In his speech, the Minister mentioned the booklet Rock Art and Other Attractions of Suba District, which had come off the TARA press the previous day as one of the first products of the project, and pledged the continued support of the Ministry and the National Museums.

David Coulson signed documents at Mawanga with US Ambassador to Kenya, William Bellamy, as the project is supported by a grant from the US Department of State through the Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation. Ambassador Bellamy also gave an inspiring speech about the role of rock art and related tourism in cultural, educational and economic development of the region.

The Kenya Tourist Board had organized for a planeload of journalists to attend the project launch, and its Chairman, Jake Grieves-Cook, mentioned in his speech that the project also...
fits in with efforts to promote the western part of Kenya for domestic and international tourism.

After the morning ceremony at Mfangano Island, the group proceeded to Kakapel, one of Kenya’s most important rock art sites, which is also being developed for tourism under the project. The National Museums of Kenya regional curator, John Mitsanze, showed the visitors around the site, and they planted 3 trees to commemorate the occasion.

Specific rock art sites have been supported by the Safaricom Foundation (Kakapel) and Governor’s Camp (rock art sites in Suba District). Additional donors and contributors to the project are being sought.

Clockwise from top: Minister greets the crowd at Mfangano; David Coulson signs the grant documents, looking on (from left) are Minister Najib Balala, US Ambassador William Bellamy, US Cultural Attaché Aruna Amrithnarayagan, KTB Chairman Jake Gieves-Cook, Abasuba Museum Curator Jack Obonyo; Rock art at Mawanga; Warm welcome at Kakapel; Entertainment by school children at Kakapel. Above from left: Minister Najib Balala with Suba Chief and George Abungu; Guests arrive at Mawanga by boat.
In February 1995 I read in Time Magazine about the discovery of an exciting new Palaeolithic cave in southern France - the Chauvet Cave - featuring exquisite paintings of rhinos, lions, mammoths and aurochs. Some of these paintings are thought to be a staggering 32,000 years old. Dr Jean Clottes, who heads up the scientific team studying the Chauvet Cave, has described it as one of the most valuable archaeological sites on earth. The cave will never be open to the public, unlike Altamira and Lascaux, where so much priceless information from the past was trampled by tens of thousands of visitors and lost forever. You can imagine my enormous surprise and delight, therefore, when last year Jean invited Alec Campbell, myself and our wives to visit the Chauvet Cave.

On June 3rd this year, Alec, myself and our wives, Judy and Deborah arrived at Vallon Pont d’Arc in the Ardeche, where the Chauvet Cave is located. Reaching the cave involved a stiff climb up some 1000 feet above a river flowing at the base of a deep gorge. The original entrance to the cave was blocked by a rock fall some 25,000 years ago. The current entrance is a very low profile, tiny opening sealed with a 4-foot metal door not far from the original entrance. Kitted out in overalls, helmets with headlamps, harnesses and special rubber shoes to guard against contamination, we began our descent single file, down through a dark and narrow tunnel, then continuing down a ladder about 25 feet to the base of the cave. Here Jean flicked a switch and lights came on revealing a cave of incredible beauty, with large areas of the roof being covered by veils or curtains of pure white and reddish streaked...
stalactites. The effect was as if we were entering an extraordinary cathedral, filled with a sacred presence - perhaps of souls or spirits. The skulls and bones of ancient animals lay everywhere. The silence was total with every sound we made accentuated, but then within the silence, a thousand distant voices like the sound of the stars in the midnight sky. The atmosphere should have been spooky, but instead it was intimate.

We moved from chamber to chamber through the 500 meter depth of the cave, at times through narrow passages, and at times crawling through tunnels, with our torches illuminating gallery after gallery of the most extraordinarily beautiful paintings. The initial galleries revealed red paintings of bears and a spotted leopard, as well as dots, hand prints and strange geometrics. Engraved images followed of horses, aurochs (the prehistoric ox which finally became extinct about 6000 years ago) and rhinos, as well as an owl on a stalactite, and lions. These cave lions were twice the size of lions we know today. Our torch beams revealed heads of bison and other animals drawn some 25,000 years before the great Pyramids, and one chamber depicted a Megalaceros, or Giant Deer with 12 foot long antlers - the biggest deer that ever lived.

Jean led us to a chamber featuring what looked like a sort of altar, on top of which was a skull which must have belonged to a huge cave bear. The scene sent prickles up my spine as I learned that the skull had been carefully placed there by the Aurignaceans. The scientific team had found evidence of a fire having been made (with the charcoal dated around 32,000 years ago) and it was hard to escape the conclusion that some form of ceremony or perhaps sacrifice had taken place. Had a shaman deliberately placed the skull on the rock for ritual purposes?

Moving back to join the main ‘passarelle’ we approached the major, big panels of paintings. On my left in an alcove, I saw the most exquisite drawing of a female rhino with a long curved horn. This was followed almost immediately by powerful images drawn mainly in black, of life-size heads of horses, so strong and life-like that they stood out in 3D from the wall. The rest of this wonderful panel featured a turbulent mass of horses, reindeer, aurochs, and two fighting rhinos, all caught in perpetual movement. In the next chamber a pride of huge cave lions was skillfully drawn, using only a few adeptly placed lines to convey the power and strength of these beasts.

The final chamber, the inner sanctum, was dominated by a panel about 25 feet wide featuring a mass of spectacular images that included mammoths, rhinos and lions all powerfully on the move. The centre of the panel featured a small alcove at the back of which was a beautiful horse. Had someone, perhaps a great shaman, perhaps generations of shamans, once sat in this alcove as Master of Ceremonies?

Jean told us about one chamber containing a child’s footprint, perfectly preserved in the mud for 30,000 years ago. What, I wondered, had a child been doing right at the back of this immense cave? The paintings were clearly not made purely for art’s sake, and the positioning of the greatest number of images at the furthest end of the cave suggests a ritual or deep spiritual purpose. Almost certainly these paintings must have been made by shamans, who would have occupied a special status in society. Meanwhile they must also have been some of the greatest artists of their day, which would suggest that the art had a special significance and the caves were important destinations, to which perhaps people travelled from long distances.

One of the tantalizing questions for me was what relationship may have existed between the artists and the animals represented? Just as the San of southern Africa revered the eland for its magical powers, so the Aurignaceans revered the cave lions, bears and rhinos. Looking at these paintings I thought of all the precious mythologies that have disappeared through time, and yet one priceless legacy had survived: this remarkable art.
ANIMALS AND THE ANCIENT MIND by Alec Campbell

What do images of animals found in African rock art tell us about species’ past distribution and even about the minds of the people who created the art? The length of Africa, animals and human figures dominate the art, background details are absent and modern ideas of perspective rarely recognised. Much of the earlier art features large animals, particularly the greater antelope and giraffe, elephant, rhino, hippopotamus and ostrich and, to a lesser extent, larger predators such as lions and crocodiles, together with zebra and ground-walking birds. Animals and people dominate the art to the exclusion of almost everything else.

Why were animals so important to the artists? In the Sahara, engraved images of Bubalus, an extinct species of wild buffalo as well as aurochs, also extinct, are common. Mythical animals also occur such as a dinosaur-like animal in Mauritania and a huge imaginary bird in Algeria. In southern Africa paintings of large unidentifiable animals have been recognized as mythical bringers of rain.

Clearly, prehistoric peoples who were living subsistence lifestyles may have recognized wild animals as members of their own society, in some way akin to themselves. Hunting is rarely pictured in the art; rather, scenes tend to portray people and animals in unidentifiable unions. In the central Sahara, engravings depict dog-headed men with immeasurable strength lifting with ease, carrying or dragging a rhinoceros. Tiny men holding sticks confront massive elephants, a huge man apparently copulates with a giraffe and a man with a spear holds the muzzle of a life-size giraffe.

At the other end of the Continent, an antelope-headed man holds the tail of a dying eland; another man lies under a large antelope aiming his bow and arrow up at it; other figures lead a rain-animal by a rope; and a large group holding...
but not brandishing bows, arrows and fly-whisks surrounds an elephant and calf.

Such images tell us that in greener times, these large animals, elephant, rhino, giraffe, eland and even roan antelope, once roamed the Sahara, while hippo and crocodile occupied its lake systems.

A life-size painting of a bear in southern Algeria and a similar engraving in Libya suggest that Europe’s archaic bears may once have extended into North Africa. Engravings of wild asses in the Tassili n’Ajjer are evidence of the formerly wider spread of an animal now almost extinct, an ancestor of our modern donkeys.

Images of animals, sometimes 8,000 or more years old, tell us about the former distribution of species whose wide ranges have been narrowed or even destroyed. If rock art gives us immediate answers – crocodile once infested these dried-up lakebeds, excavations may one day uncover bones that confirm bears did, or did not, inhabit the Sahara’s mountains. And if they didn’t, then why are bears depicted on its rocks?

This leads to far more interesting questions for which art may have the only answers; why did the ancients create these incredible images and how did they see these animals in their minds? What purpose lay behind the enormous work of carving, with only sharp stones as tools, a frieze of 15 giraffes, three of them over eight metres long/tall? Rock art archaeologists are just starting to see into the minds of the ancients and to recognize that, thousands of years ago, their imaginations soared and their skills of depiction were as great as ours today.

TARA is always interested to hear from rock art enthusiasts and particularly to learn what they believe lies behind some of these fascinating images. If you have seen puzzling pictures and have ideas about their meaning, please share these with us; you may open new channels of exploration into the ancient artists’ minds.
In June/July 2005, TARA mounted an expedition to the Lake Victoria region to survey rock art sites in Kenya and Uganda that we had not previously seen. In Kenya, we were hosted by the Abasuba Community Peace Museum and visited sites at Mfangano and Rusinga Islands and the nearby mainland. We saw a painting site at Mawanga, close to the lake shore, as well as several cupule sites and a rock gong.

TARA is working with the Abasuba Community Peace Museum to make some of these sites available to tourists. Those interested in visiting, please contact TARA or Jack Obonyo (curator) on +254-723898406.

In Uganda we visited a number of cupule sites on the hilltops near the lake shore in Mukono district. In addition to a great number of often-eroded cupules, there were also grinding holes. We also saw strange enigmatic figures incised into the rock on a hillside close to Kampala. Finally, we visited Dindo’s Rock, which is maintained as a shrine of the first Kakaba.

The trip was led by David Coulson, and included Amolo Ng’weno (TARA), Hoseah Wanderi (National Museums of Kenya), Remigious Kigongo (Uganda Museum), Fred Odede (Maseno University) and Catherine Gombe (Kyambogo University). The group was also joined by Jack Obonyo (Abasuba Community Peace Museum) who hosted the Kenya part of the expedition, Fleur Ng’weno (Nature Kenya) who did a natural history survey in Suba District, and Peter Bisaso (Uganda Museum) who guided us in Uganda.

Peter Bisaso
Peter Bisaso, who led us on our trip in southern Uganda, died July 8 in Kampala. A talented archaeologist and conservator, he was well known to museum practitioners from around the region. It was during his work on pre-colonial ironworking in Mukono district that he had noticed cupules and rock art on the grassy hilltops of the forested regions near the lake shore. We will all remember his joy and excitement as he showed us the enigmatic incised graphics near Kampala and his enthusiasm, humour and interest for his subject.

ongoing uses of rock art in the lake victoria region

Many rock art sites in the Lake Victoria region remain in use for ceremonial and religious purposes. An example is Dindo’s Rock, near Kampala, which features a rock gong and several naturally-occurring rock formations that are thought to represent the palace and artefacts of the first kabaka (king) of the Buganda kindom. The gong is still in use for spirit communication and the shamans at the site also use a "bao game" for divination. Although this "bao game" appears to be natural, it provides hints as to the purpose and origin of the cupules we often see in similar arrangements.
TARA is planning exciting and ground-breaking scientific expeditions in the coming year and would like to invite partners to join us. We are asking each partner to contribute 6000 UK pounds to the cost of the expedition, which will include all your in-country costs (but not airfare from your home country). If you are interested, please contact us in good time as space is limited!

Please note these trips are scientific and not tourist safaris. Accommodation is basic and you might be asked to assist with technical work and generally to contribute to the work of the expedition.

angola 2006
Join a team from TARA, including David Coulson and Alec Campbell, on their first survey trip to Angola. The trip will visit rock art sites in Angola’s southern and central provinces and record them for TARA’s archive and publication. In southern Angola, we expect to find engravings similar to those in northern Namibia, probably of Bushman origin. Further north, we may encounter Late White paintings or Twa-style paintings. The trip is expected to take about 3 weeks.

libya laser recording february 2006
TARA is pioneering the use of new technology to record engravings thousands of years old. TARA will visit southern Libya in February 2006 along with Dr Savino di Lernia, eminent Italian archaeologist, and UK archeologist Dr Tertia Barnett. Dr Barnett will head up a special 3-D laser recording team. Sites to be recorded include the Fighting Cats (left) now in serious danger of crumbling having stood for perhaps 10,000 years. The expedition should spend about 10 days in the field.
In July 2004 a special friend of TARA’s John Millard died at the age of 93. Soon after his death I was told that he had left TARA a legacy of $38,000.

I first met John about 30 years ago and was immediately drawn to him. He had a great sense of humour and had led an exceptionally interesting and exciting life which included fighting at both Arnhem and D-Day as well as in Abyssinia during World War II.

In the 1930’s, at the suggestion of Louis Leakey under whom he studied at Cambridge University, John joined an expedition to Lake Rudolf (now Turkana) in order to explore and map this remote but huge area. The expedition was led by Bunny (late Sir Vivien) Fuchs of subsequent Antarctic fame. Two members of this 6-man expedition were lost on this trip, presumed eaten by giant crocodiles. John was the expedition archaeologist and in this capacity surveyed 2000 year-old rock engravings in the Surima Lugga in 1934. Many years later he gave me his original negatives of these for TARA’s archive and in 1996 I found the site he had visited and photographed the same engravings.

Another thing that brought John and me together was the fact that coincidentally I myself knew and had visited many of the places where John had lived and worked and explored – Kalahari desert, Mt Kilimanjaro, Ethiopia (formerly Abyssinia) and Lake Turkana. I also knew the Leakey family who had played such an important part in John’s life, especially Mary Leakey who was the first person to encourage me to start TARA.

In the last years of his life John, who lived quite close to TARA’s offices, was a frequent visitor here, whether for lunch or for a cup of tea, and we had a rule that whatever I was doing I always would stop work and chat with John.

TARA is using John’s bequest to restore graffiti damage at Kenya’s premier rock art site in Kakapel. The legacy is more than financial, and we at TARA are grateful for the time we spent with him.
helpers and acknowledgements

donors 2005

TARA acknowledges with great gratitude the continued support of the Ford Foundation, the Robert H and Ann Lurie Foundation and the Andrew Mellon Foundation. Without the major support of these donors, TARA’s important work in many different areas would not be possible.

TARA thanks the Safaricom Foundation for its support for the rock art project at Kakapel. TARA is grateful for a grant received from the US State Department through the Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation for rock art conservation in Kenya. TARA would also like to thank project partners, the Kenya Tourist Board and Governor’s Camp.

TARA would like to thank the Algerian Embassy in New York for its support in organising the African Rock Art Nations Committee meeting in New York; the Algerian Embassy in Kenya and the World Deserts Foundation (WDF) for sponsoring TARA’s attendance at the WDF meeting in Dubai.

TARA also thanks Vodacom Tanzania and Holiday Inn Tanzania for supporting the Dar es Salaam Museum exhibition.

Thanks to MuseumDepot.org for setting up a rock art database model that TARA will adopt.

TARA would like to recognise the French Embassy in Niger for funding a 3-year project to map rock art in the Air Mountains. This funding has gone directly to Anigourone, a local rock art conservation organisation that is also supported by TARA.

Grateful thanks for personal donations from Linda Tuero, Bob and Maria-Jose Friedlander, Pamela Roberts, Julia Maynard and Robert Mark.

special thanks

TARA would particularly like to mention our gratitude to the National Museums of Kenya, the Uganda Museum and the House of Culture National Museum Dar es Salaam for their ongoing support and strong collaboration.

TARA would like to thank our museum attendants at the exhibitions in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam for the excellent job they have done in presenting rock art to the public.

helpers 2005


Tanzania: Donatius Kamamba, Jane Kessy, Fabian Lijimo, Audax Mabulla, Costantime Magavilla, Robert Mboori, Paul Msemwa, Amini Mturi, Achiles Mujunangoma, Junaid Munshi, Mary Natema, Bimb Theobald.

Uganda: the late Peter Bisaso, Catherine Gombe, Samwiri Kakembo, Ephrahim Kamuhangire, Joshua Kyallo, Hrishikesa Madhvani, Remigius Mugenwa, Rose Mwanga.

Niger: Sidi Mohammed Illies.

South Africa: Rosemary Renton, Jane and Hugh Patrickson.

France: Jean Clottes, Alain Danet, Anne-Marie Pugin-Bron.

Italy: Savino di Lernia.

UK: Tertia Barnet, Carol Beckwith, Mary-Clare Boyd, Doug Cox, Angela Fisher, Sandie Hague, Richard Nightingale, Sarah Sheehan, Sam Walsh, Barney Wan.

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A boxed set of six notecards, featuring African rock art images. Enveloped and available in two choices: close up or view.

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