TARA - THE TRUST
FOR AFRICAN ROCK ART

TARA, a Nairobi based non-governmental not-for-profit organisation, is committed to promoting the awareness and preservation of Africa’s unique rock art heritage. Its mission is to “create greater global awareness of the importance and endangered state of Africa’s rock art; survey sites; monitor status; be an information resource and archive; and promote and support rock art conservation measures”.

TARA was founded in 1996 by photographer David Coulson, with the support of palaeontologist Mary Leakey. 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. The organisation has received support from the Arcadia Fund, European Union, Ford Foundation, Robert and Ann Lurie Foundation, Mellon Foundation, Safaricom Foundation, Kenya Tourism Trust Fund and the Embassies of France, Germany and the USA. The organisation enjoys close collaboration with Aluka, National Museums of Kenya, UNESCO and the World Monuments Fund.

Since 1996 TARA has recorded rock art in over 16 African countries; created an archive of over 60,000 rock art photographs and produced a major illustrated book, African Rock Art, Paintings and Engravings on Stone, by David Coulson and Alec Campbell. In order to promote awareness and conservation of this unique African heritage, TARA has published articles in The Economist, National Geographic, Time Magazine, USA Today, The Times (London) and other international publications. It has produced exhibitions on African rock art for museums and other cultural institutions in Botswana, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. TARA has worked closely with communities in Kenya, Morocco and Niger to protect and promote their rock art heritage.
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Cover Picture: Lake Turkana and South Island seen from the eastern shore; Background picture: Sunset sky, Samburu National Reserve.

Fig. 1: Giraffe engraving, Kapesse;
Fig. 2: Giraffe engraving, Kalacha;
Fig. 3: Elephant engraving, Turkana.

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MAP OF NORTHERN KENYA AND
OF LAKE TURKANA

Fig. 4: Loiyangalani; Fig. 5: On the road to Marsabit;
Fig. 6: Ewaso Nyiro River; Fig. 7: Ndoto Mts. from Mt. Nyiru.
**Introduction to Northern Kenya**

Although the area covered by this booklet is more than a third of the entire country of Kenya it is remarkably little known both inside and outside of Kenya. It is also one of the wildest and most beautiful bits of country on the entire African continent. Instead of the "Wild West" this is the "Wild North" and until recently motorists entering this region had to ‘sign out’ at a police barrier, even though no one was likely to come looking for them if they did not return.

**The Land**

The arid northwest of Kenya is bounded by Sudan to the north and the Kerio and Turkwell rivers to the west, to the south by Pokot and Samburu country and to the east by Lake Turkana, one of the wonders of the world. It is the world’s largest permanent desert lake, known previously as Lake Rudolf after the 19th century Crown Prince of Austria. Its waters stretch nearly 300 km north and south along the Great Rift Valley and are fed from the Turkwell, Kerio and Omo rivers.
Turkana is the name given to the pastoral people living in the arid and semi-arid range lands of northwestern Kenya. The Turkana refer to themselves as “Ngiturkan” and their land as “Eturkan.” The area occupied by the Turkana people corresponds closely with the current boundaries of Turkana District in Kenya. It encompasses approximately 67,000 km². Eturkan lies entirely within the Gregory Rift Valley and is bordered to the west by the Rift Valley wall, to the north by the mountains and plains occupied by the Taposa of southern Sudan, to the east by the western shoreline of Lake Turkana, and to the south by the plains inhabited by the pastoral Pokot including the hot Suguta Valley.

The climate is very dry and often blisteringly hot, and the minimal annual rainfall of around 250-300 mm prevents any but the hardiest of desert plants from growing: spiny acacia, low thorn bush and seasonal grasses. In any case, rainfall patterns are unreliable and patchy; short rains during April and the long rains from June to early September. The region also features the Chalbi Desert, a small desert south of the Ethiopian border and east of Lake Turkana. The settlement of North Horr is located northwest of the desert. Marsabit is the closest major centre.

Fig. 8: Forested slopes of the Ndotos; Fig. 9: Massed flamingoes on Lake Bogoria; Fig. 10: Flamingoes on Lake Bogoria; Fig. 11: Hot spring at Lake Bogoria.
Although largely consisting of desert and semi-desert country, the north of Kenya possesses a number of very beautiful lakes including one of Africa’s most famous, Lake Turkana, sometimes known as the Jade Sea.

**Lake Bogoria** is a saline, alkaline lake that lies in a volcanic region in a half-graben basin south of Lake Baringo. Just like Lake Nakuru, Lake Elementeita, and Lake Magadi further south in the Rift Valley, and Lake Logipi to the north, it is home at times to one of the world’s largest populations of lesser flamingoes. The lake is a Ramsar site and has been a protected National Reserve since November 29, 1973. Lake Bogoria is shallow (about 10 m depth), and is about 34 km long by 3.5 km wide, with a drainage basin of 700 km. Local features include the Kesubo Swamp to the north and the Siracho Escarpment to the east, both within the National Reserve. The reserve is also famous for its geysers and hot springs.

Its waters originate from inflow from the Sandai and Emsos Rivers, and from about 200 alkaline hot springs that are present at three onshore sites: Loburu, Chemurkeu, and a southern group (Ng’wasis, Koibobei, and Losaramat). Other springs discharge directly from the lake floor.
Lake Bogoria also contains the highest concentration of true geysers in Africa (at least 18 are known). The lake has no surface outlet so the water becomes saline mainly through evaporation, which is high in this semi-arid region. The lake itself is meromictic (stratified) with less dense surface water lying on a denser more saline bottom water. Although hypersaline, the lake is highly productive with abundant cyanobacteria (*Arthrospira fusiformis*) that feed the flamingoes, but few other organisms inhabit the lake.

The lake has not always been saline. Sediment cores from the lake floor have shown that freshwater conditions existed for several periods during the past 10,000 years, and that the lake level was up to 9 metres higher than its present level of about 990 metres above sea-level. At times it might have overflowed northward towards Lake Baringo. At times, during the late Pleistocene it might have been united with a larger precursor of modern Lake Baringo.

Hotel accommodation is available near Loboi village at the north end of the lake. Camping is permitted at the southern end.
**Lake Baringo** is situated just to the north of Lake Bogoria and lies at the threshold of northern Kenya. Freshwaters are an oasis in the arid landscapes and this is one of the most northern lakes excepting Lake Turkana. It has a surface area of about 130 km² and an elevation of about 970 m. The lake is fed by several rivers, El Molo, Perkerra and Ol Arabel, and has no obvious outlet; the waters are assumed to seep through lake sediments into the faulted volcanic bedrock. It is one of the two freshwater lakes in the Rift Valley, the other being Lake Naivasha further south.

It provides an invaluable habitat for seven freshwater fish (*Oreochromis alcalicus baringoensi*’ among other fish species), and is a critical habitat and refuge for more than 500 species of birds (pelicans, cormorants and fish eagles, etc.) and fauna. The lake is also well populated with crocodile. With the ever changing light, this is a beautiful water body, surrounded by volcanic ranges that stretch as far as the eye can see. At the lake's heart is Ol Kokwe Island, an extinct volcanic centre related to Korosi Volcano north of the lake and has several hot springs and fumaroles, some of which have precipitated sulphur deposits. It is a stark, rocky island that is home to Njemps villages and a well appointed tourist camp known as ‘Island Camp’. The island is an excellent base for exploring the lake, with boat trips ideal for bird and hippo spotting. The Tugen Hills, an uplifted fault block of volcanic and metamorphic rocks, lies west of the lake. Water flows into the lake from the Mau and Tugen Hills. Metamorphic rocks lie west of the lake, while the Laikipia Escarpment lies to the east.

**Lake Paradise** is a volcanic crater that attracts game and bird life, and is located in Marsabit National Reserve, about 560 km north of Nairobi. Marsabit elephants come down daily to drink at the shores of Lake Paradise. The most famous elephant to frequent the lake for nearly 63 years was Ahmed, patriarch of the forest who was guarded from poachers by a Presidential decree. With his massive tusks, Ahmed was for a while Africa’s most famous elephant. All elephants in Marsabit are protected, and a replica statue of Ahmed now welcomes visitors to the National Museum in Nairobi.
Lake Turkana, a massive inland sea, the largest desert lake in the world (6,405 km²), this single body of water is over 250 km long, longer than the entire Kenyan coast. It is widely known as the Jade Sea, because of the remarkable, almost incandescent, colours of its waters. After a long journey through the sweltering deserts and lava flows of northern Kenya, the sight of this vast body of bright turquoise water comes as an unearthly, ethereal vision.

The lake is situated in the Great Rift Valley in the northwestern part of Kenya. Volcanic activity was frequent during the creation of the Rift Valley and lavas from the Quaternary and Tertiary ages cover much of the floor of the valley in Kenya. The lavas are mainly of alkaline type, which has important implications for the chemical composition of lakes in this region. In the Lake Turkana basin, Tertiary volcanic rocks are found in the south and along most of the western side of the lake, while a later lava flow (Pleistocene) forms a barrier in the southern end of the lake. Quaternary sediments dominate the western and northern side of the lake.

Lake Turkana is situated in an arid and hot area. The mean annual rainfall in most of the lake surroundings is less than 250 mm. The occurrence of rainfall is very erratic and unpredictable, although the probability of rainfall is highest during the “long rains” from March to May.
The main tributary is the Omo River, which enters the lake from the north and contributes more than 90% of the total water influx. Other rivers are temporary, flooding only during sporadic rains. The second largest river, Turkwell River, is now being dammed for hydroelectric power generation at Turkwell Gorge ca. 150 km west of the lake. The lake has no outlet and loses its water mainly by evaporation.

The lake is a source of life for some of Kenya’s most remote tribes. The Turkana, live a semi-nomadic existence around the lake. One of the country’s smallest tribe, the El Molo is found at the shores of the lake. Lake Turkana has one of the longest living histories on earth. The recent fossil evidence unearthed at Koobi Fora at the heart of Sibiloi National Park has led to the lake being referred to as the “Cradle of Mankind”. Lake Turkana is a natural treasure with the world’s single largest crocodile population.

The lake’s three islands - rather prosaically named North, Central and South - are also of volcanic origin, most obviously Central Island with its three perfectly formed crater lakes. As a result of run-off from the lava flows, the lake’s waters are mildly alkaline, enough to give the water a slightly slimy, soapy feel, but not so much as to prevent life, as fresh water from Ethiopia’s Omo River - the lake’s only perennially-flowing inlet-dilutes the waters.
The north of Kenya only has one or two permanent rivers that flow the whole year round and even these sometimes dry up to mere trickles in the dry season. The best known of these rivers is perhaps the Ewaso Nyiro which flows through the Samburu and Shaba National Reserves eventually terminating in the Lorian Swamps long before reaching the sea. There is also the Kerio and the Turkwell Rivers, which flow north into Lake Turkana and other normally dry rivers or luggas like the Seya and the Milgis in the Mathews and Ndoto Mountain Ranges which join the Ewaso Nyiro.

**Ewaso Nyiro River** dissects the Isiolo District into two. To the north of the river is the Merti Plateau, to the south are the plains that rise to an altitude of 1000 m above sea level with some inselbergs towards the Nyambene Hills. There are four perennial rivers in the district namely Ewaso Nyiro, Isiolo, Kinna and Bisanadi. Ewaso Nyiro River, with its catchment areas in the Aberdares Mountains, drains into the Lorian Swamp. During the dry season it dries up at the lower part of the Isiolo District, while during the wet season it floods the plains. Isiolo River originates from Mt. Kenya and drains into Ewaso Nyiro, while Kinna and Bisanadi Rivers drain into Tana River. Most of the irrigation schemes are found along these rivers. Damming of the rivers is necessary to provide water for irrigation and livestock use during the dry season.
**The Kerio** is one of the longest rivers in Kenya’s Rift Valley Province. It flows northward into Lake Turkana originating from near the equator. In the south, it flows through the Kerio Valley between the Tugen Hills and Elgeyo Escarpment. It starts from Eldama Ravine and ends at Lake Turkana.

**Turkwell River** flows from Mount Elgon in the border of Kenya and Uganda to Lake Turkana. The river is called Suam River from its source to the border with the West Pokot District of Kenya. The name Turkwell is derived from the Turkana name for the river, *Tirkol*, which means “river of many fish”.

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**Fig. 19**: The Seya River in spate; **Fig. 20**: The Milgis River/Lugga between the Mathews and Ndoto Ranges; **Fig. 21**: Ewaso Nyiro River and Mt. Ololokwe, Samburu National Reserve.
One of northern Kenya’s most precious treasures is the cultural diversity of its many different peoples. The remoteness of some of these communities has effectively preserved traditional cultures which have disappeared elsewhere in Kenya or been absorbed by other groups.

The people of the north live in a hot, dry climate often in semi-desert conditions and there are very few roads or modern infrastructure. This is a largely remote wilderness where survival is the main pre-occupation for most inhabitants. People have adapted to the harsh conditions and will often walk huge distances to reach water points, hospitals or schools. Some of them still lead a semi-nomadic lifestyle and many of them are pastoralists. The Somali, Rendille and Turkana are camel herders while the Samburu, like the Maasai, herd cattle and goats. Up until the 1960s Loiyangalani on the eastern shores of Lake Turkana was a tiny settlement next to a Catholic Mission Station where clear waters gushed out of the rocks. Close by were the El Molo who were said to be the smallest tribe in Africa. At that time they only numbered about 100.
Even now their numbers are small and some of the older people still harpoon Nile perch from their palm rafts as they have done for hundreds and perhaps thousands of years. Meanwhile, in the far north along the Ethiopian border people like the Gabbra and Boran move back and forth across the frontier as they have done for centuries.

**Samuru** people live slightly south of Lake Turkana in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya. They have traditionally herded cattle, goats and sheep in an arid region with sparse vegetation. The language of the Samuru people is also called Samuru, a Maa language very close to the Maasai dialects. Marriage is a unique series of elaborate rituals. Great importance is given to the preparation of gifts by the bridegroom (two goatskins, two copper earrings, a container for milk, and a sheep) for the ceremony. The marriage is concluded when a bull enters a hut guarded by the bride’s mother, and is killed. Duties of boys and girls are clearly delineated. Boys herd cattle and goats and learn to hunt, defending the flocks while girls fetch water and firewood and cook. Both boys and girls go through an initiation into adulthood, which involves training in adult responsibilities and circumcision for boys and clitoridectomy for girls. Initiation is done in age grades of about five years, with the new “class” of boys becoming warriors, or morans.

The moran status involves two stages, junior and senior. After serving five years as junior morans, the group goes through a naming ceremony, becoming senior morans for six years. After these eleven years, the senior moran is free to marry and join the married men (junior elders). They love to sing and dance, but traditionally used no instruments, even drums. They have dances for various occasions of life. The men dance with jumping, and high jumping from a standing position is a great sport. Most dances involve the men and women dancing in their separate circles with particular moves for each sex, but coordinating the movements of the two groups.
Their traditional religion is based on acknowledgment of the Creator God, whom they call ‘Nkai’. They think of him as living in the mountains around their land, such as Mount Marsabit. They believe in charms and have traditional rituals for fertility, protection, healing and other needs. But it is common to have prayer directly to ‘Nkai’ in their public gatherings. They also use the term ‘Nkai’ for various spirits related to trees, rocks and springs, and for the spirit of a person. They believe in an evil spirit called ‘Milika’. Diviners (Laibon, plural Laibonok) predict the future and cast spells to affect the future.

**Rendille** cling to a nomadic life, herding camels, goats and cattle. Before 1500 AD, the ancestors of the Rendille were part of the same Somali groups of peoples who spoke the “Somaloid” or proto-Somali language along with the ancestors of the Somali, Sakuye and Gabbra. The Rendille were organised round a complex camel culture at the time. This included an extensive ritual calendar based on dual lunar and solar calendars involving ceremonies for the well-being of camels and humans.

The 16th century Oromo expansion brought great disruption to these Somaloid peoples causing migrations south and westward from their southern Ethiopian and Somalia homes. These peoples were further separated when some groups of them developed ritual kinship arrangements with Oromo (Borana) peoples for protection. The Rendille were the southernmost of these Somaloid peoples and maintained their own culture and language more intact, they consist of nine clans called the white Rendille, plus one clan called Odoola. These clans form 2 to 7 subclans. They live in large semi-permanent villages of married men, women and children and move two to three times each year. A small herd of milk camels is maintained near the settlement, milked by the women for family use.
The main herds of camels are herded by older boys and young men, moving frequently to find good grass and water. Large flocks of sheep and goats are shepherded by the girls and unmarried women. Marriage patterns are exogamous, between subclans or major clans.

The Rendille follow a 14 year generation initiation pattern. Traditionally the Rendille are a very religious people, believing in one omnipresent God. They also practice many magical and animalistic rituals, involving their camels and sheep. For example, the way a certain bull camel approaches a proposed new settlement area is taken as a good or bad omen. The present day Sakuye, live in northeastern Kenya, their name comes from an old name for Marsabit, Saaku. This is believed to be a group of Rendille who moved north from Marsabit and were named Sakuye by the Borana. They are a proto-Somali people who were separated from the Rendille.

Fig. 26: Samburu Manyatta; Fig. 27: Rendille Moran; Fig. 28: Traditional Rendille village; Fig. 29: Rendille man with children and livestock.
The Turkana are a Nilotic people who inhabit the Turkana District in northwest Kenya, a dry and hot region bordering Lake Turkana in the east. South of them live the Pokot, Rendille, and Samburu. The language of the Turkana, an eastern Nilotic language, is also called Turkana; their own name for it is Ng’aturk (w) ana.

The Turkana are noted for raising camels and weaving baskets. In their oral traditions they designate themselves the people of the grey bull, after the Zebu, the domestication of which played an important role in their history.

Traditionally, men and women both wear wraps made of rectangular woven material, but each sex adorns themselves with different objects. Often men wear their wraps similar to tunics, and carry wrist knives made of steel and goat hide. Men also carry stools known as ‘ekicholongs’ and will use these for simple chairs rather than sitting on the hot midday sand. These stools also double as headrests, keeping one’s head elevated from the sand, and protecting any ceremonial head decorations from being damaged. It is also not uncommon for men to carry several staffs; one is used for walking and balance when carrying loads, the other, usually slimmer and longer, is used to prod livestock during herding activities. Women will customarily wear necklaces, and will wear their hair in a style which is often braided and beaded.
**El Molo** is believed to be the smallest tribe in Kenya, and they live in small villages on the southeastern shore of Lake Turkana. The name El Molo came from a Maasai phrase meaning “those who make a living from sources other than cattle”. The Samburu name for El Molo is “loo molo onsikirri” which means “the people who eat fish”.

The El Molo have intermarried with the Turkana and Samburu tribes. They construct their huts from doum palm fronds which are supported using wood from acacia trees. Like their neighbouring counterparts from the Samburu community, the El Molo wear necklaces and bracelets made of coloured beads.

**The Gabbra** live mainly around the northern Chalbi Desert in an area roughly covered by Lake Turkana, Moyale and Marsabit, but extending into the Bula Dera plains east of the Moyale-Marsabit road, and the Mega Escarpment in southern Ethiopia. They share parts of this region with the Borana, Rendille, Samburu, Dassnetch and Turkana. They still roam with their herds across the Kenyan border. They are an eastern Cushite people and are related to the Somali-Rendille in their historical origins in the southern Ethiopian highlands. They speak the Borana language, an Oromo language from the eastern Cushite family.

*Fig. 30: Traditional Turkana dance; Fig. 31: Turkana Chief; Fig. 32: El Molo basket fisherman; Fig. 33: Gabbra village on the move, Chalbi Desert; Fig. 34: Gabbra family, Chalbi Desert; Fig. 35: Gabbra girl, Kalacha Oasis.*
Their culture is entwined with their care of camels. They share the Oromo clan identities with their Borana neighbours, but retain older Somali-Rendille identities. There is a complicated Oromo generational system called “gada” which includes all people born in successive 7-year periods. But all the sons of one man are in one generation set.

They live in round houses of bent pole frames covered with skins and grass mats. Up to 25 houses make up an ‘olla’ (village) of up to 75 people, usually organised in 10 to 15 families. The packing and unpacking of the house at moving time is done by women as the men care for the animals. One elder is appointed as ‘abba-alla’ (father of the village) and is obeyed because of his personal competence, respected by those who democratically chose him. An assembly of elders settles disputes and makes decisions related to community life, new grazing areas and celebrations. Animals belong to the head of each family, but no individual can own land, it belongs to the whole tribe. All have access to wells and springs. The Gabbra goat is known for hardiness and tenderness, a remarkable feat in the rough areas where they live.

Their basic traditional diet is milk and meat. Milk is drunk fresh or curdled. They do not mix milk with blood as do some other herding nomads and use tobacco with soda as snuff. The Gabbra mostly follow the traditional religion and heritage of their ancestors. Gabbra religious beliefs are inseparably linked to their herds. Animals are more than food: they are needed for sacrifice to ensure fertility, health and co-operation from spirits.
Koobi Fora, on the east shore of Lake Turkana, is one of the richest fossil sites on earth. Known from the early 20th century as a source of Neogene Vertebrate fossils, its extraordinary wealth of hominid fossil did not become apparent until systematic studies began in the 1960s. Other hominids found at Koobi Fora include *Australopithecus afarensis*, *A. africanus*, *A. anamensis*, and *A. boisei*, *Paranthropus aethiopicus* and *Kenyanthropus platyopus*.

In the semi-desert of northwest Kenya temperatures can soar to unbearable levels during the day with little change at night. Lake Turkana scarcely lies 1,200 m above sea level, surrounded by barren, inhospitable country and denuded lava hills. Fossilised in the silts are the remains of man’s earliest ancestors - *Australopithecus* spp., *Homo habilis*, and *Homo erectus*.

Turkana District has a long record of human occupation. Four million years ago, the Lake Turkana basin may have been the cradle of mankind. Human and animal remains were trapped and fossilised in the stratified sediments of the Great Rift Valley. Tectonic activity has uplifted many ancient sediments and the constant erosion of them by wind and water exposes new finds every year. Since 1968, teams of international scientists have combed the desiccated fossil-beds and unearthed some of the world’s richest and most important fossils.

The new finds in Turkana have caused experts to revise radically their long-held views on evolution. The discovery of the “Turkana Boy” the oldest and most complete skeleton of *Homo erectus*, dating 1.6 million years, tells us more about early man than was previously known.
Homo rudolfensis was named after the initial discovery of fossils near Lake Rudolf (now Lake Turkana). Around 2-3 million years ago, the lake was larger and the area more fertile, making it a centre for early hominids. Over the years, Dr. Richard Leakey has led numerous anthropological digs in the area which have led to many important discoveries of hominid remains. The 2 million-year-old skull 1470 was found in 1972. It was originally thought to be Homo habilis, but some anthropologists have assigned it to be a new species, Homo rudolfensis. More recently, Dr. Meave Leakey discovered a 3,500,000 year-old skull there, named Kenyanthropus platyopus which means “The Flat-Faced man of Kenya”.

Turkana Boy, also know as Nariokotome Boy, is a nearly complete skeleton discovered in west Turkana in 1984 by Kamoya Kimeu. It is certainly one of the most significant recent finds in paleoanthropology. The skeleton is of a boy, about 9-12 years of age, already more than 5 feet in height at the time of death. It is believed to be a about 1.6 million years old. Turkana Boy’s cranial capacity is measured at 880cc and might have attained an adult cranial capacity of 909 cc; it has slender hips that were better adapted to walking and running over long distances than other hominids. The arm and leg bones were proportioned more like those of modern humans, rather than the shorter legs and longer arms (or more ape-like proportions) of Homo habilis.

Fig. 40: Fossils at Koobi Fora; Fig. 41: Hominid skulls at Koobi Fora; Fig. 42: Samburu paintings, Laikipia; Fig. 43: Rock gong with cupules, Lewa Downs; Fig. 44: Ndorobo paintings near Loldaigas.
The oldest ‘art’ in this region are ‘cupule’ sites which occur in different parts of Laikipia, Lewa and Sera. Cupules are cup-shaped depressions that were carved into rock surfaces perhaps thousands of years ago. Usually they appear in long parallel lines and are sometimes used by rural people to play the traditional African game of ‘bao’, where pebbles are moved from one hole to another on a board. No one knows why cupules were carved but it is probable that they were linked to some form of ritual. Cupules are often associated with ‘rock-gongs’, free-standing rocks or boulders which have a natural resonance and which ‘ring’ when struck by another stone. Rhythmic striking can produce a series of strong notes which can carry over long distances.

Rock-gongs are thought to have been used for divination and communication in the distant past. There is one important gong in the Lewa Downs Conservancy and another in the Sera Group Ranch north of Lewa. The Sera gong is covered in several hundred cupules.
The oldest paintings in the region are the so-called Twa circles and ovals found at Loldaiga, Lewa and Sera. These usually take the form of concentric circles and are attributed to Twa hunter-gatherers. Most of the paintings are thought to have been made between 1,000-4,000 years ago. According to oral legend in Uganda and around Lake Victoria, these paintings were used for rainmaking rituals, and in some places still are. Twa art is found from Gabon and the Congo in the west through central and east Africa down to Zambia and Mozambique where it also includes red animal depictions.

Other hunter-gatherer (Ndorobo) art in this region is found north of DonDol in the Mukgodogo area and at Kipsing. This consists mainly of fairly crude paintings of animals with some stick figures. Also common in this area are Maasai and Samburu meat feasting sites where young warriors have made crude abstract finger paintings, usually in white, red and orange.

**Namoratunga**

Engraved designs resembling lineage symbols have been found on rocks and stones placed on human graves at sites in the Kerio Valley, southwest of Lake Turkana. The symbols at and near Namoratunga are recognised by modern Pokot and Samburu people as lineage markers. The Turkana still use similar symbols to brand their cattle but deny authorship of the rock engravings. Meanwhile, the Boran people say that this was once their land and that the lineage symbols are their ancient symbols. The graves at Namoratunga have been dated to at least 2,300 years of age. Near the main site at Namoratunga, are rocks and boulders with circular engravings as well as a cliff with geometric engravings which could predate the graves.
Lake Turkana & Kalacha

The rock art of this region is found in two main areas. Most of the art is found along the eastern shore of Lake Turkana on hills and on the sides of wadis, while other important engravings are found between Kalacha and the Huri Hills. Images of animals such as giraffe, elephant, antelope, ostrich, camels, human figures and geometric designs have been chipped onto the rock surfaces. Most images are relatively small, about 30 cm in height, and are fairly crudely engraved. Style and content suggest the engravings are an extension of the art found further north in the Sahara Desert. The age of the engravings is not known, although they are believed to be between 500 and 2,000 years old.

The North East

So far, the only rock paintings recorded in this region are several paintings at two sites in the Lesayu area south of Moyale. The sites are found at different locations among a number of massive granite outcrops north of Lesayu. At one site, there is what appears to be a large schematic gazelle, and at the other, a small red giraffe painting next to faded red and white geometric designs. There is also a site, Bute Heil, about 100 km to the east of Lesayu, where a carved hoof print of an equid has been found which is very unusual.
CODE OF CONDUCT FOR VISITORS TO ROCK ART SITES

You can help to conserve the rock engravings at this site by doing the following:

1. Never touch rock art – your fingers leave sweat and oil on the rock that cannot be removed later.
2. Never pour liquids on engravings or paintings. They cause damage that cannot be reversed.
3. Do not outline or fill in engravings with chalk as it can never be removed and destroys later possibilities for dating the varnish.
4. Do not walk on engravings. Your feet and shoes leave ugly scars, damage fragile surfaces and dislodge loose rock.
5. View engravings from a distance so that you do not erode the soil nearby.
6. Remember others are coming after you so take all your litter and rubbish away with you.
7. Do not try to make your own engravings or write your name on the rocks. This destroys the value of the ancient rock art and spoils the experience of other visitors.

These sites and all you find at them are part of our heritage and are protected by the laws of Kenya. Please respect them and the traditions and requirements of the local community. In particular, please ask permission before taking any photos of people.

Fig. 52: Elephants crossing Ewaso Nyiro River, Samburu National Reserve; Fig. 53: Bird of prey near Mt. Ololokwe; Fig. 54: White rhinos at Lewa Downs.
The north of Kenya is one of Africa’s great wilderness regions in a vast area that includes some of this continent’s most beautiful country. Although most wild animals are confined these days to national parks and reserves there are spectacular areas of mountains, forests and deserts to be explored such as; the Mathews Range and Ndoto Mountains north of the Ewaso Nyiro and the Cherangani Mountains west of the Kerio Valley, Mount Nyiro and Mount Kulal near Lake Turkana. The deserts include the Chalbi and Kaisut and the Suguta Valley.

**Lewa Downs Wildlife Conservancy**, formerly a cattle ranch, situated within Lewa Downs is now a 40,000 acre game ranch. It has been home to the Craig family since 1924, and is one of the few private ranches in the world where you can see a wide variety of wildlife including the big five. The snow-capped peaks of Mount Kenya dominate the views to the south, where the southern boundary rises to an altitude of some 2,000 m above sea level. To the north, the terrain drops away with breathtaking views of the Samburu, Ololokwe and the Matthews Range beyond.
The Lewa Downs Conservancy supports a myriad of plains game species, all perfectly adapted for the semi-desert environment. Grevy’s zebra and the reticulated giraffe are common. The swamp has become a sanctuary for the rare and fascinating semi-aquatic sitatunga antelope and its primary predator, the leopard. Birdlife is equally rich with numerous species of bustard, plover, coursers and birds of prey. At night, leopards are frequently encountered along with bush-babies, bat-eared foxes, caracal and various mongooses.

**Samburu National Reserve** is located on the banks of the Ewaso Nyiro river in Kenya; on the other side of the river is the Buffalo Springs National Reserve. It is 104 km² in size and 350 km from Nairobi. Geographically, it is located in Samburu District of the Rift Valley Province. In the middle of the reserve, the Ewaso Nyiro flows through doum palm groves and thick riverine forests that provide water without which the game in the reserve could not survive. Samburu Reserve was one of the two areas in which conservationists George and Joy Adamson raised Elsa the lioness made famous in the best-selling book and award-winning movie, Born Free.

The reserve was established in the 1970s. Once inside the reserve, there are two mountains visible: Koitogor and Oloolokwe. Samburu National Reserve is very peaceful and attracts animals because of Ewaso Nyiro River (meaning “brown water”) that runs through and the mixture of acacia, riverine forest, thorn trees and grassland vegetation. The Ewaso Nyiro flows from the Kenyan highlands and empties into the famous Lorian Swamp. There is a wide variety of animal and bird life at Samburu National Reserve. Several species are considered unique to the region. All three big cats (lion, leopard and cheetah) can be found here, as well as elephant, buffalo and hippo.

**Fig. 55:** Reticulated giraffe next to Ewaso Nyiro River; **Fig. 56:** Crocodile on banks of Ewaso Nyiro River; **Fig. 57:** Magado Crater, east of Shaba, traditional source of minerals and water for local stockholders; **Fig. 58:** Ewaso Nyiro River in the Shaba National Reserve; **Fig. 59:** Grevy’s zebra, Shaba National Reserve; **Fig. 60:** Leopard, Meru National Park.
**Shaba National Reserve** is part of three small adjoining savanna national reserves that lie on either side of the northern Ewaso Nyiro River. They were established in 1948 as the Samburu Isiolo Game Reserve. The reserve consists of a low lying, semi-arid plain on the southern bank of the northern Ewaso Nyiro River. It lies 9 km east of Buffalo Springs National Reserve, from which it is separated by the main road from Isiolo to Marsabit. The reserve was gazetted in 1974. Its northern section includes a 34 km stretch of the Ewaso Nyiro River; here and elsewhere in the reserve are numerous springs and swampy areas. The starkly beautiful landscape is dominated by Shaba Hill to the south, at the foot of which is a rugged area with steep ravines. The sandy soils are volcanic in origin.

The climate is hot and dry; its rainfall averages 250-300 mm per year. The reserve also has a variety of vegetation. Thicket with patches of *Acacia tortilis* woodland; riverine woodland and forest dominated by patches of *Acacia elatior* and doum palm, *Hyphaene coriacea*; bushland and open areas of lava rock with scattered grass and shrubs, dominated by communities of *Commiphora*. With *Ipomoea*, *Grewia*, *Acacia senegal* and *Salvadora*; and *Sporobolus spicatus* alkaline grasslands dotted with springs and swamps.

**Meru National Park**, 35 km east of Maua town, is in the northeastern lowlands below the Nyambene Hills. Meru is part of a complex of protected areas along the Tana River that includes the adjacent Bisananidi and Mwingi National Reserves (to the east and south respectively), Kora National Park and Rahhole National Reserve. The wetter northwestern sector is hilly, with rich volcanic soils. The land flattens towards the east, where grey alluvial volcanic soil appears. As well as the many streams that cross it, the park is bounded by three large rivers: the Tana to the south, the Ura to the southwest and the Rojeweru to the east. There are several prominent inselbergs of basement rock, notably Mughwango and Leopard Rock.

The park has a wide range of animals like elephant, hippo, lion, leopard, cheetah, black rhinoceros and some rare antelopes. It was one of the two areas in which conservationists George and Joy Adamson raised Elsa the lioness.
**Sibiloi National Park** lies on the eastern shores of Lake Turkana and is only 40 km from the Kenya/Ethiopia border. This park covers an area of about 1,570 km² and contains some of the world’s most famous and important palaeontological and archaeological sites. It is also home to a wide variety of wildlife and plant species. The park includes an important offshore zone (Central Island) as well as an unusual combination of interests (wildlife and palaeontological) and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The landscape of Sibiloi is arid and hot but startlingly beautiful and contains several different types of habitats, from lake-shore with water vegetation, hippos, and crocodiles to arid, desert-like lava rock terrain; savanna plains to riverine forest. In addition to the plains, game and carnivores, Sibiloi is also a birders’ paradise with wonderful water birds along the shoreline including pelicans, numerous species of heron, ducks, flamingos, gulls and the african skimmer.

Central Island is an extinct volcano that rises out of the middle of Lake Turkana. It is a scenic and dramatic island, an important breeding ground for migratory and other bird species. The island still provides refuge to breeding crocodiles, although the crocodile population has declined on the island in recent years due to the increased presence of fishermen.

**South Island National Park** is an uninhabited island rising out of the southern part of Lake Turkana roughly opposite Loiyangalani. It is about 15 km long from north to south and features a number of volcanic craters and vents between 300-400 m high. The landscape is surreal and other-worldly with black fields of lava and white boscia trees (Fig. 62).

**Central Island National Park** is an extinct volcano that rises out of the middle of Lake Turkana east of Fergusons Gulf. It is a scenic and dramatic island, some 5 km² in size and has three crater lakes. One of the three crater lakes is home to an endemic subspecies of cichlid (tilapia) fish.
**Other National Reserves in Northern Kenya**

**Kerio Valley National Reserve**, in Kerio Valley is a 1,200 m deep valley with semi-tropical vegetation on the slopes leading down to dry thorn bush at the base, with impressive scenery. The Kerio Valley was made a national reserve in 1983 for its important biodiversity, covering an area of 66 km².

**Bisanadi National Reserve** acts as a wildlife dispersal area for Meru National Park. It is a part of the Meru, Kora, Mwingi and Bisanadi Conservation Area, adjacent to northeast boundary of Meru, covering an area of 606 km².

**Losai National Reserve** which covers an area of 1806 km² is a semi-desert landscape characterized by rocky hills, open plains and riverine woodlands that snake along seasonal rivers.

Fig. 61: Gerenuk, a rare species of antelope in northern Kenya; **Fig. 62**: South Island National Park, Lake Turkana; **Fig. 63**: Central Island, Lake Turkana.