TARA'S RECOMMENDED 'CODE OF CONDUCT'

BACKGROUND

Visits to rock art sites in remote areas of Africa, such as in the central Sahara - Niger, Algeria, Libya and Chad, and in Southern Africa e.g. Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, are becoming popular. Tourist numbers are increasing and will continue to do so. For the art this has both good and bad aspects. On the good side, properly conducted tourism achieves wider public knowledge and appreciation of the art. This is clearly important as the art will then stand a better chance of being valued and protected for the benefit of future generations. On the other hand, poorly conducted tourism can lead to the destruction of paintings and engravings which are part of Africa’s unique cultural heritage. This pamphlet offers brief guidelines to tourists when visiting rock art sites. We hope it will be helpful.
THE STATE OF ROCK ART TODAY

African rock art includes paintings and engravings, both of which can be very old. Some Sahara engravings were made well over 10,000 years ago and a few paintings may be just as old, although many date between about 6,000 and 4,000 years ago and some are much younger. During all these millennia, the art has survived heat, cold, blown sand, wind and rain, even if some paintings are today faded and pieces of engravings eroded away. The art may look strong, but it isn’t; it is fragile and easily damaged.

VISITING ROCK ART SITES

If possible, read about rock art before setting out, this will immeasurably enhance your understanding and, thus, your enjoyment. Before visiting sites, discuss these with your tour operator and make certain sufficient time is allowed in your schedule to view the art properly. Often tour operators are in a hurry because of time constraints and try to cut visits short.

Engravings are best viewed in morning or evening light when the sun rakes across them creating shadows in their engraved lines. Paintings are usually best seen when shaded as bright sunlight can obscure faded colours causing them to almost disappear.

Be aware of details in the art; clothes, jewellery, fingers and hooves, association between peoples and that between people and animals. Spending a few minutes trying to understand what you are looking at can make a huge difference to your understanding of the art. Finally, don’t take things for granted; because your foreign eyes see a giraffe carved into the rock you think ‘giraffe’; but did the artist intend a giraffe or is the giraffe a symbol for something else, e.g. is it perhaps a spirit person in giraffe form?
HOW TO AVOID DAMAGING THE ART AND THE SITE

Nobody likes being told not to do this or that but conservation calls for rules and discipline given the fact that the art and sites themselves are easily damaged, so please follow these guidelines:

1. Liquids thrown or sponged over paintings to enhance visibility cause incredible damage. Even touching a painting leaves sweat on rock speeding up fading. Never touch rock art or put liquids on it.

2. Drawing with chalk in engraved lines to make images photogenic can destroy later possibilities of scientifically dating their desert varnish.

3. Walking over engravings eventually leaves ugly scars in the rock varnish and seriously damages fragile images by breaking bits off engraved surfaces. Climbing slopes and cliffs can dislodge or break off loose rocks also causing damage to engravings. It is better to view engravings from a distance rather than to climb up to or over them.

4. Walking immediately in front of or around rocks with art on them leaves footprints in the sand, spoiling the art’s environment for others, particularly for photographers.

5. Discarding litter - cigarette stubs, matches, wrapping paper, tissues, bottle-tops, cans and plastic - causes a mess which someone else must later clean up and remove. Carry a plastic bag with you and put your litter into it for later disposal. There are no refuse removal services in the wilderness!
6. If you intend camping at a site, make certain the camp is erected more than a hundred metres from the art; other tourists hate to arrive and find visitors already camped next to the art, spoiling its environment both for viewing and for photography.

7. If used at all, radios and cassette players should be tuned as low as possible so that they do not create a nuisance for other visitors. If you need to relieve yourself, find a secluded place where others are unlikely to go, BURN any paper you use and bury anything else.

8. Always leave sites and camping areas clean. This includes limiting the number of vehicle tracks left in the sand. Dozens of wheel tracks scarring the sand look horrible and, with the low rainfall, last for years. It is best to drive in the tracks of previous visitors so that no new scars are left.

9. These sites and all you find at them are the national heritage of the country in which you are a guest so please respect them. You may find archaeological artefacts - arrowheads, other stone tools, beads, and so on lying on the ground. By all means pick them up and photograph them but, when you go, leave them where you find them.

We hope this pamphlet helps you to enjoy your visit; if you abide by its guidelines you will help ensure the art's survival and that it will be there for others to enjoy in centuries to come.
This brochure is sponsored by the Trust for African Rock Art, TARA, an Africa-based organisation dedicated to the conservation of Africa's rock art heritage.

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