TRUST FOR AFRICAN ROCK ART
NEWSLETTER
January 2014

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About TARA
TARA, the Trust for African Rock Art, was founded in 1996 by photographer David Coulson under the patronage of renowned archaeologist, Mary Leakey, and author/conservationist, Laurens van der Post.

Based in Nairobi, Kenya, TARA is committed to recording the rich rock art heritage of the entire African continent, to making this information widely available and accessible and, to the extent possible, safeguarding those sites most threatened by both humans and nature, no matter how remote.

TARA achieves this through survey and conservation work, documentation, exhibitions, publications and community projects. TARA has documented rock art in 19 African countries and digitised over 20,000 images, many of which are available online. It is estimated that over one million people have visited TARA’s exhibitions. The organisation also works closely with communities in areas where rock art is found, in order to raise awareness of rock art as a fragile heritage resource, and to improve the lives of people in those communities.

Mission
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.

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Cover:
Small boy standing at the foot of a cliff with multiple bas-relief engravings featuring stylized cattle at a major site in southern Ethiopia.

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN

2013 has been a remarkable year, one that has seen the beginning of our joint project with the British Museum, funded by the Arcadia Fund. As a result of this support TARA’s unique digital collections of African rock art images and data from across the continent will now be preserved in perpetuity. They will also become accessible (Open Access) as part of the British Museum’s global digital collections. This year also saw TARA organizing a rock art exhibition and symposium in Addis Ababa in May (AU@50) in collaboration with CBAAc as well as me participating in an international rock art conference in western China. In addition TARA co-hosted the SOIMA (Safeguarding Sound and Image Collections Course) Conference in Nairobi in association with ICCROM and the National Museums of Kenya.

When I started documenting Africa’s rock art over 20 years ago I was a one man band using 35mm analogue equipment in the form of Nikon cameras and roll film. This was a relatively hit and miss process in that I could be out in the desert for weeks not knowing whether or not I had got the shot! There was no way of telling til you got home. Cameras would stop working when sand got into the workings and light meters would give faulty readings. And if you came back with under or overexposed images there was no Photoshop to rectify the results. Either you had succeeded or you had failed. In the glaring African daylight one of the most challenging things was getting your fill in flash properly balanced.

Back in Nairobi I would deliver my film to the processing labs and occasionally there would be disasters when the lab had not renewed the chemicals and there would be a color cast over all the film rendering it unusable. In the office I would go through the processed sheets of images and select and mount the best slides. I would caption these on the slide mounts and store them in storage sheets which I would keep in manilla folders in the early days, late in filing cabinets. Many hours of editing over a light box followed and the Firsts and Seconds were protected in special selenophane pockets called javerettes to guard against scratching. I cleaned the slides either with a blowor brush to remove dust or with a compressed air cannister or with a soft selvyt cloth. The slides were then allocated a compressed air cannister or with a soft selvyt cloth. The slides were then allocated a compressed air cannister or with a soft selvyt cloth. The slides were then allocated a compressed air cannister or with a soft selvyt cloth. The slides were then allocated a compressed air cannister or with a soft selvyt cloth. The slides were then allocated

Although I started using small digital cameras (low resolution) in the early 2000s for promotional images I did not switch over completely to digital photography (born-digital) until 2009 when I went on an expedition to Libya. Prior to that I continued to take slides which were scanned on special scanners (120 Mgbf files -300 dpi) provided by the Andrew Mellon Foundation in New York who had funded our original digital archival equipment/capacity. Meanwhile since 2009 I have used exclusively Nikon digital cameras producing high resolution images. Most of the metadata generation for these images was done by my friend and colleague, the late Alec Campbell, and the rest be me. Today our digital collections are stored in 3 ten-terabyte hard drives.
TARA’s Collection at the British Museum

Database launch in 2014

At the end of 2012, TARA signed an agreement with the British Museum in London whereby the Museum acquired a digital copy of TARA’s photographic archive of images and metadata from 20 African countries in order to ensure that this unique collection be preserved in perpetuity and made widely available as part of the Museum’s global digital collections. The TARA Collection is a powerful statement concerning the immense value of this heritage.

The project will register the images in geographic order, starting with North Africa. Significant progress has already been made, with Egypt and Sudan scheduled to be online in February 2014. These images consist largely of rock paintings from Gilf Kebir plateau in South West Egypt and the Jebel Uweinat massif which straddles the borders of Egypt, Libya and Sudan. Most images depict rock paintings, probably dating from between fourth and second millennia BCE, although there are some engravings that may be older. The engravings are mainly figurative images of large mammals, particularly giraffes and antelope, while the paintings are overwhelmingly of domestic cattle.

The images from Egypt and Sudan are a fascinating resource for investigating the little-known period of early pastoralists in the pre-desert Sahara, when species like giraffe co-existed with people and their herds in a locale that remains a subject of great interest to scholars. Both mountain ranges were entirely unknown to academia prior to the twentieth century and remain quite inaccessible. This in itself adds great interest to the collection: the discovery and exploration of these sites was undertaken with some public attention in the pre-war years. This was conducted by celebrated figures such as the explorer Ralph Bagnold, the polymath Abbé Breuil, and László Almásy, the titular English Patient from the book and film, which features one of the most renowned sites documented in the TARA collection, the so-called ‘Cave of Swimmers’.

The partnership between TARA, the Arcadia Fund and the British Museum will establish this significant archive as a high-profile academic resource as well as preserve Africa’s endangered rock art and visual anthropology for future generations. The five-year project will include research by British Museum staff, on-going conversation and interaction with TARA, and outreach to local and African communities. By incorporating this collection within the British Museum, scholarly and wider audiences will be able to both contribute to and learn from the collection.
TARA’s Work Continues

By David Coulson

As the main photographer and creator of this archive over a 25 year period, the British Museum’s decision to acquire a copy of the archive, and Arcadia’s decision to fund this acquisition, was of great importance to me. Unless “in the right hands” an archive can never truly be termed safe, yet now I am able to say with relief and gratitude that my life’s work is not only safe but is, or will soon be, globally accessible by researchers and a thousand different types of users worldwide. It is also important to point out that TARA and I are still very much alive. This is not a bequest but an ongoing project! We are still actively planning and implementing rock art survey trips across the African continent. So far we have only worked in 20 countries. People often ask me questions like “Do you think you have now recorded most of Africa’s rock art?” I reply that we have probably only scratched the surface! The Sahara is roughly the same size as the United States. It may take life-times to fully record all the art. All considered, we have made a good start.

By Idle Omar Farah PhD, Director General, National Museums of Kenya

I was delighted to hear at the beginning of 2013 of the British Museum’s decision to acquire a digital copy of TARA’s African Rock Art Archive, thanks to the generosity of Arcadia. I understand that this collection will soon be presented through the British Museum’s collection online and will become one of the most complete searchable databases on African rock art worldwide. Africa’s rock painting tradition is believed to date back at least 50,000 years while abstract engravings in the Cape, South Africa have been dated back to 77,000 years. Highlights from this collection include images of sites across the Fezzan of southwest Libya with dates ranging from 10,000 BC to 100 AD.

TARA and the National Museums of Kenya have worked within the framework of a Memorandum of Understanding in heritage management and conservation of Kenya’s rock art for over a decade. As part of this collaboration TARA has recorded many new rock art sites in Kenya, especially in the west and in the north of the country. These are of great importance to understanding our past since rock art is believed to be the earliest form of expression by humankind. Moreover, TARA has over the years held important exhibitions of African Rock Art in order to increase local awareness. There is still widespread ignorance about this heritage in Africa and therefore the British Museum’s initiative will make a major contribution to increasing this awareness throughout the continent and around the world.
In July 2013 TARA Chairman, David Coulson, visited China where he represented Africa at an international workshop organized by the Rock Art Association of China (RARAC), based in Beijing at the Minzu University of China. The Conference which was sponsored by the Mandala Tibetan Architecture and Culture Society of Qinghai took place mainly in Xining not far from the Qinghai/Tibetan plateau in western China. Coulson and his colleagues representing China, North America, Australia and Europe were taken to see rock engravings at 4000m on the Tibetan plateau and later to rock art sites in Inner Mongolia some of which date from the time of Genghis Khan in the twelfth century.

Safeguarding Sound & Image Collections (SOIMA) 2013

TARA was pleased to partner with ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property) in organizing the 4th edition of the SOIMA course in September 2013, in Nairobi. It was the first time the course was held in Africa. Other partners and cooperating institutions included National Museums of Kenya; Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service; Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, the Netherlands National Film and Sound Archive, Australia; Baltic Audiovisual Archival Council; Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, Belgium.

The SOIMA course was designed to meet the challenges to the preservation and access of sound and image records in everyday practice. It brought together 16 professionals from 14 countries.

Archiving moving image and sound documents is not a simple task. While the historical, educational, cultural, and at times monetary value of audiovisual records makes them priceless heritage documents, the rapid rate of both their creation and their deterioration makes them an enormous challenge to preserve. Additionally, the obsolescence of recording and playback media, the pace of which has been exponentially increasing since the invention of video, and the intellectual property rights that are an inherent aspect of nearly all creative endeavors, has made providing access to audiovisual documents a delicate task.

The course was officially opened by the Cabinet Secretary for Sports, Culture and Arts, Dr Hassan Wario. The international teaching team featured four former trainees and with participation by Kenya experts including Chief Legal Counsel Edward Sigei (Kenya Copyright Board), Deputy Director Francis Githua Mwangi (Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service), Research and Communication Officer Salome Mshai Mwangola (African Peace-building Network), and Project Director Daudi Were (Ushahidi).
**Ethiopian Heritage Exchange with Kenya**

In November 2013, TARA hosted 11 Ethiopian cultural heritage practitioners on a study tour of its community rock art projects in Kenya. The composition of the Ethiopian participants was quite interesting because they had come from diverse backgrounds (cultural heritage and nature conservation, research, administration) including the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH), the Ankober Museum and Ankober Lodge, the Konso Cultural Centre and the Gedeo Cultural Landscape. The activity was funded by the Christensen Fund, represented by Dr Wolde Tadesse who accompanied the group. The aim of the tour was to encourage dialogue between Kenyan and Ethiopian communities about approaches to management and valorization of heritage.

Prior to embarking on the tour, TARA hosted a round-table on conservation at its Nairobi headquarters featuring David Western, a well known author and conservationist, who has championed the role of communities in wildlife conservation.

The participants visited communities on Mfangano Island, Lake Victoria and in Kakapel, western Kenya where TARA has implemented projects to conserve vulnerable rock art and the landscapes in which they are found by identifying and leveraging social and economic benefit. A safari through the Maasai Mara Nature Reserve presented the group with an opportunity to hear more about wildlife conservation in Kenya.

In addition to visiting the rock art sites, the group met with members of the Abasuba Community and visited the Mwanga Rock Art School which was established from proceeds of tourism at the site. At the Abasuba Community Peace Museum they engaged in dialogue with the Abasuba Community Council of Elders. At Kakapel, the group was entertained by traditional dancers and held discussions with local committee stakeholders.

The visitors commented that Ethiopians could learn a lot from this Kenyan approach. The weaving together of spirituality, local history and tradition, the rock art appears to serve as a foundation and medium onto which local pride, tradition and history can hold onto.

Throughout the tour, the dialogue was stimulated by the diversity of backgrounds and experiences. Some of the participants related the oral traditions narrated by the communities visited to their own communities.

**Ethiopian experiences and thoughts for the future**

“With support from TARA and others, the local communities have come to appreciate the values of their own cultural properties and engage themselves in the whole exercise of running the management of these delicate cultural properties.”

“The group was united in their desire to make a contribution to the preservation of cultural heritage; be it through rock art, sacred sites, medicinal plants and ritual, eco-tourism, forest and ecosystem conservation, intercultural festivals, the indulgence of our indigenous foods, restorative farming practices and our traditions as a whole.”

“We must endeavour to consolidate and share our Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Culture between Ethiopia and Kenya so as to inform ourselves with greater knowledge, diverse experiences and mutual understanding.”

“On my side I have visited some 70 countries in the last 55 years… I probably have been to Kenya some 20 times or more. And yet I found the program very enriching. I had never been exposed to Rock Arts. Most importantly I truly appreciated the contact with the village elders where I noted that they were respected and taken as an authority on the history and artifacts of their respective areas. I salute the Kenyans on this aspect of recognition of the role of their elders. We in Ethiopia could learn a lot from that.”

TARA and the Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC) based in Lagos, Nigeria organized a colloquium and exhibition on African Rock Art and the Pan-African Renaissance in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 21-24 May 2013. The colloquium was timed to coincide with the African Union’s 50th Anniversary Celebrations. Presentations focused on the current situation of rock art in several countries with examinations of rock art contributing to the Pan-African ideals of shared heritage, development and unity. The participants were drawn from Egypt, Gabon, Kenya, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. There were representatives from the African Union, UNESCO and PANAFSTRAG (Pan-African Strategic and Policy Research Group). The Hon. Minister, Nigeria Federal Ministry of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation, High Chief Edem Duke officially opened the colloquium and called for a greater understanding of Africa’s past and its role in shaping African identities. TARA would like to recognize CBAAC and the Government of Nigeria for their efforts in making this event possible and looks forward to further collaboration.

Historical background

The Rock Art and Pan-African Renaissance project is focused on the reconstruction of Black and African peoples’ history. It signifies the renaissance of historic pictorial coverage of some unique rock paintings across Africa. A landmark platform on research findings on African heritage in line with CBAAC’s Pan-African mandate took off at the African Rock Art meeting in Nairobi, Kenya in 2006. The second phase of the project was held in 2007 in Nairobi, Kenya. A two-day workshop was later held in 2008 in Niamey, Niger Republic.

These platforms provided opportunities for experts to discuss the best strategies and approaches to study and better understand methods for the identification, safeguarding, interpretation and promotion of African rock art to the benefit of Africa and Africans.

Moderated discussions included:

- Rock Art and Memory of the African people.
- Rock Art as instruments for Africa and African Diaspora Integration.
- Rock Art, Trans-border Ethnic Groups and Continental Integration.
- Rock Art and the Reconstruction of African Diasporic Identities.
- Rock Art as elements for the promotion of economic growth.
- Rock Art, Documentation and Community Intervention.

CBAAC’s CEO, Prof. Tunde Babawale, executive assistant, Ibraheem Muheeb and the director of Exhibitions and Museums, Lady Gloria Onuma-Ibe in Nairobi, who were instrumental in organizing this event.
I Love Rock Art

By Diana Loubser

Community Outreach

TARA’s mission is to create greater global awareness of the importance and endangered state of African rock art; survey and monitor rock art sites; serve as an information resource and archive; as well as promote and support rock art conservation measures. To achieve its mission, TARA has worked closely with communities in order to educate them about these ancient treasures.

TARA’s ‘Dawn of Imagination’ exhibition hosted at the Nairobi Museum in 2009 culminated in the design and implementation of a ‘Rock Art Studios’ education and outreach program that taught primary school learners about rock art and how to protect it. Since then, over one million people of all ages have visited TARA’s exhibitions in 12 different countries.

To its awareness activities, TARA has added a special focus on community education of peoples living in close proximity to rock art sites. The sites are managed by the community through the local clan system. Proceeds from entry fees are invested in community development interventions such as education, and administration as agreed between community members.

Connections between old and new

Panoramas of hunting and war, enigmatic symbols, graceful images of animals loping across the savanna, ghostly handprints of people who lived long ago-ancient artists daubed millions of images like these across Africa, recording the world as they saw it. Today, it is common practice to generate income from visitors to cover the costs of site protection. Sustainable tourism and capacity building have become accepted strategies in the current rock art conservation paradigm. Sustainability is more than economics, however. It includes social dynamics that involve all of the relevant people in decision making, as well as the development of appropriate conservation methods. The investment in people rather than in infrastructure, with the expectation that if enough people are aware of the fragility, meaning, and heritage values of the art, and are trained in the management and interpretation of rock art sites, it will be easier to ensure that best practice methods are implemented. The fact is that people will only care about the conservation of heritage places if they are aware of them.

Due to Africa’s extraordinary wealth of rock art heritage being at grave risk, TARA wishes to engineer proactive educational change. Every year more sites are damaged or lost due to development, vandalism, and natural causes. This is a concern because part of the record of human occupation, way of life, and belief systems is being expunged.

TARA’s next steps

The launch of the new TARA website in February 2014 is intended to facilitate conservation awareness and act as a delivery vehicle offering website users a variety of resources from photographs, information on African rock art heritage to promotion of community projects and educational resources for teachers and learners.

Development of African rock art educational resource packs for teacher use in community schools under the auspices of TARA is planned from mid-2014 through 2015. Support of teachers and learners in schools close to rock art sites is envisaged through the running of cultural heritage programs. Youth are our future. The use of Pinterest, for example, a new type of image-based social media that allows organizations such as TARA to easily share rock art interests and items that others may find interesting on the internet, TARA actively posts news on Facebook, Twitter and will be building its organization profile on LinkedIn in upcoming months. Through these communication channels, TARA hopes to expand its audience and publicize its core business and global awareness campaigns.

TARA favours interactive rock art initiatives promoted by museums.

Local children from Lokori, Turkana County, seated on a boulder with geometric rock engraving at Namoratunga, Southern Turkana.

Gethemane school pupils visiting Abasuba Community Peace Museum.


Upper primary pupils from Riara Primary fill in their worksheets during TARA’s Dawn of Imagination rock art exhibition at the Nairobi National Museum 2008.

Terry interacting with students from Thawi schools, Kondoa, Tanzania.
Kakapel, Western Kenya

Kakapel is Kenya’s premier rock art site uniting a variety of styles in one shelter. TARA has been involved at Kakapel since the site was recorded in 1997, but even more so since 2002 when the site was damaged by graffiti.

In July 2013, TARA joined the people of Kakapel for a cultural celebration at the Kakapel Community Cultural Center. The community showcased their cultural artifacts, cuisine, song and dance, poetry, drama and traditional medicine. The event was based on five themes: rock art, environmental conservation, Iteso cuisine, song and dance and traditional governance systems. Four schools participated in the event with the aim of promoting transfer of cultural knowledge to the younger generation. In attendance were the Busia County Government officials and a representative from the National Museums of Kenya who reiterated their commitment to the promotion of Teso district’s natural and cultural attractions. The festival was a culmination of the project ‘Transforming the Kakapel Cultural Center into a hub for education and resource generation’ with the funding support of the Australian High Commission. The project activities also included infrastructural improvements, signage production, rebranding of the cultural center and administrative training. The Kakapel stakeholders committee supervised the implementation of all the project activities.

On the 26 December 2013, the Iteso community from Kenya and Uganda came together at the Kakapel Community Cultural Centre to celebrate their cultural heritage. The main aim of this festival is to rejuvenate and perpetuate the fading traditional practices and to enhance unity of the Kingdom. It offers an opportunity to the community members to showcase their cultural practices; traditional song and dance, wrestling, traditional cuisine, traditional medicine and artifacts. The county leadership used the occasion to call upon the youth to take a leading role in embracing and preserving their culture and environment. The community also used the occasion to sell different products to the public. TARA’s participation in this event is key to ensuring that the rock art is not left out as a cultural product and resource in the region.

In April 2013, a team from TARA conducted a follow-up activity in Kisii to the community engagers’ workshop held in 2012 in the framework of the project ‘Safeguarding Kisii Rock Art Heritage’. Participants reported that the community members were very receptive of the conservation message but there was general consensus that the rock art needs to contribute to the local economy. Some of the proposed solutions include integrating rock art designs into soapstone products, negotiating with the land owners to ensure long-term preservation of the sites and further engagement with the community and the county government. The project was supported by the Prince Claus Fund.

Kisii, Kenya

In August 2013, the Tanzanian Department of Antiquities and TARA organized activities for elementary students and community leaders in Thawi, a village located in central Tanzania and within the Kondoa UNESCO World Heritage Rock Art Site. The overall goal of this project is to engage communities in defining strategies for long-term conservation of the rock art sites which are severely threatened by human encroachment (cultivation, deforestation, illegal excavations, granite mining). Over 130 primary school students (Thawi Juu and Thawi Chini) competed for prizes in quizzes about rock art; both schools received 245 text books for their efforts. A stakeholders meeting brought together 63 community members to initiate beekeeping and forestry projects aimed at providing alternative sources of income. Stakeholders also discussed a reforestation campaign that will see 10,000 trees planted in the Kondoa conservation area. Group activities were engaging and benefited from involvement of Kondoa District’s Divisions of Education and Forestry. Neighbours from the Kolo village who have been involved in previous conservation activities shared their experiences on entrepreneurship and tourism.
Alec Campbell Bequest

By Diana Loubser

Valuable TARA support

During his lifetime, Alec Campbell wrote numerous contributions for the TARA Newsletter, the last of which was his piece on laser scanning during the mission to the Libyan Sahara in November 2008. During the many survey trips across Africa conducted by TARA between 1995 and 2011, Alec accompanied David Coulson on almost every trip. In addition to recording all the site data he also made on the spot sketches of many of the paintings and engravings in his sketch books which included all sorts of valuable observations. Back at home he used some of these as well as David’s photographs in order to make beautiful line drawings which are also extremely valuable as records of the art. Many of these drawings were reproduced in David and Alec’s book, African Rock Art: Paintings and Engravings on Stone published in 2001.

Contribution to the TARA Metadata base Archive

Alec Campbell was the major figure in assembling the database that is now TARA’s core asset: 20,000 photographs, nearly all of them taken by David Coulson, along with metadata and site reports.

He also conducted archaeological surveys of his own, covering hundreds of kilometres on foot, and promoted archaeology’s role in education, ensuring that new archaeological findings were published. His extensive research and development in the areas of archaeology, history, national monuments, anthropology and the environment allowed Campbell to collaborate with a diverse range of qualified professionals, journalists, photographers and film crews, as well as, field guides. Alec’s History of Botswana is the text book used in all the schools in Botswana today.

Alec Campbell who died in 2012 is remembered as a man who lived an extraordinary and fulfilling life. He was a family man, an environmentalist and an avid anthropological explorer. His generosity, devotion to others in his work, his passion for discovery and literary contribution have been phenomenal.

Alec Campbell sketching rock engravings at a site in North Eastern Chad in 1996.

His Bequest

Alec’s wife Judy has generously donated all Alec’s sketch books to the archive and Alec himself gave TARA copies of many of his rock art and rock art-related drawings as well as other related materials from the field. His wife also gave TARA some of Alec’s rock art books for the TARA library. TARA is deeply grateful for this invaluable contribution to its archive and to its history.