The goals of TARA are to create a permanent visual archive of Africa’s rock art before it is too late, to 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 that an important way to realise the value of rock art in Africa for present and future generations is to promote awareness of its importance and richness.

Based in Nairobi, Kenya, TARA is the world’s only organisation 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’s founder and Chairman, 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.

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TARA is registered in the United States as a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation. TARA is a member of the International Federation of Rock Art Organizations.
It has been another exciting year. Highlights include the opening of a major new exhibition, “The Dawn of Imagination” in April 2008 at the refurbished Nairobi Museum, the construction and opening of the new Abasuba Community Peace Museum on Mfangano Island in October 2008 and several survey trips including a Laser Scanning expedition to the Libyan Sahara in March 2008.

Our archive project has continued to occupy centre stage and several of our images are now accessible on the Aluka/JSTOR web site. Meanwhile I have been adding images from new survey trips on an ongoing basis.

After many months of research and design, TARA’s updated web site went online on November 1st. The new site is meant to be THE resource for African rock art for both professionals and the general public. Some sections, including the Online Gallery and Gift Shop, will be available in the coming months.

Our surveys this past year included a trip to the Erongo Mountains in Namibia in Dec. 2007 and an expedition to Libya in March 2008. This second trip saw Alec Campbell, Victoria Waldock and me taking two high-tech scanning experts from London to the Libyan Sahara where they scanned six very important engravings using the latest 3-D laser technology. Later, Campbell, Waldock and I visited a number of little known areas in south western Libya recording many remarkable new sites for our archive.

The opening of “The Dawn of Imagination” was attended by over 400 people including several Ministers and Ambassadors. Meanwhile the opening of the Abasuba Community Peace Museum attracted nearly a thousand people who gathered to hear the opening speeches against a beautiful backdrop of green trees and Africa’s mightiest lake, Victoria. After the speeches there was dancing as the people celebrated the birth of their new museum and community centre.

David Coulson

News from the Headquarters

In 2008, TARA benefited from the presence of a number of interns. Sabrina Krewin, from the USA was first exposed to rock art during her undergraduate studies, working as a designer at the UCLA Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Rock Art Archive. She was with TARA for six months and her main contribution was conceptualisation and design of “The Dawn of Imagination” exhibition at the Nairobi National Museum. Samuel Yemane, an archaeologist from the National Museum of Eritrea, spent three months at TARA assisting in content development for the new web site and providing input in the area of conservation and management of rock art in Eritrea. Emmanuel Nyangw from Kenya has provided support in the design of TARA promotional materials and merchandise. Carolyne Mbaabu, Esther Kahinga and Evan Maina, also from Kenya, have worked with research for TARA publications, database and organisation of institutional records.

The US Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, through its Cultural Programs Division, sponsored Robert Bangiola’s six-week stay with TARA as a Cultural Envoy. With an emphasis on international cultural exchange, the Cultural Programs Division supports the arts and humanities in the US and around the world by regularly offering grants to US non-profit organisations and to individual cultural representatives. Robert, an arts manager from New York City, participated in a number of TARA activities and provided valuable advice to the organisation on how to generate and manage earned income – a key to TARA’s sustainability.
**TARA’s travelling exhibition, “Window on Africa’s Past”, was officially opened at the Franco - Namibian Cultural Centre, Windhoek, in November 2007, by the French Ambassador to Namibia, and was attended by David Coulson and Alec Campbell. Following the launch, David gave a talk about TARA and its activities, while Alec spoke about TARA’s recording programmes in Namibia. After the opening, Dr John Kinahan gave a lecture on ‘Rock Art in Namibia: Tourism and Conservation’.

The multifaceted exhibition on Africa’s unique rock art heritage was originally launched in conjunction with the Alliance Française of Nairobi, in February 2007. This exhibition has continued its Pan-African tour to Alliance Française establishments in 9 countries, having toured Namibia and Sudan in 2007, and travelled to Malawi, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Eritrea, Djibouti, Tanzania and Madagascar in 2008. The exhibition will make its final scheduled stop in Swaziland in January 2009.

After almost three years, the Nairobi National Museum re-opened its doors to an eager public on 31st March 2008. TARA’s rock art exhibition, “The Dawn of Imagination” is one of the highlights of a visit to the new museum. This exhibition gives visitors an exciting opportunity to see, feel and understand rock art as the very beginning of human imagination. It explores six themes: What is rock art; Where is rock art in Africa; Who are the artists; What does the art mean; and Conservation. There is also an interactive game, the Wheel of Knowledge, which encourages visitors to test their knowledge about rock art.

This exhibition has already been seen by over 20,000 tourists and local visitors and over 63,000 school children within the first seven months. TARA has engaged a team of 10 volunteer attendants who guide visitors, answer questions and lead the interactive section of the exhibition. These attendants have done a wonderful job and were given a “thumbs up” in a Kenyan daily in August this year.

In September 2008, TARA received a grant of US$ 35,000 from EPA, the School of African Heritage in Benin, to enhance interactivity, improve the exhibits as well as to conduct school activities in 2009. Inside the gallery is also TARA’s Rock Art Shop, with rock art branded shirts, caps, mugs, tyre covers, place mats, key chains and more. If you are looking for a unique gift, the Rock Art Shop is definitely the place to go! The new Nairobi National Museum is open daily (including Sundays and public holidays) from 9 to 6.

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In June 2008, Terry Little, Gladys Nyasuna-Wanga and Gloria Borona from TARA travelled to Loiyangalani, on the shore of Lake Turkana for the official opening of the Desert Museum, one of the newest regional museums of the National Museums of Kenya. The official opening was presided over by the Minister for National Heritage and Culture, Hon. William Ole Ntimama. Prior to the opening, the TARA team led an excursion to the nearby Marti Rock Art Site.

The Desert Museum construction was funded by the Italian Embassy, while the exhibition on rock art and other natural and cultural heritage of northern Kenya was developed by TARA, with assistance from the National Museums of Kenya, through a grant from the German Embassy. TARA has also published a guide, Treasures of Northern Kenya, under the same grant. Preceding the opening of the Desert Museum was a colourful Cultural Festival, organised by the German Embassy. Communities living around Loiyangalani (the Rendille, Samburu, El Molo and Turkana) performed songs and dances, and re-enacted traditional ceremonies.

LIBYA LASER RECORDING

The long-planned recording visit to Libya finally took place in February-March. Sponsored by National Geographic Society and the Arcadia Fund, its main aim was to laser-scan some magnificent Early Hunter Period engravings in the Messak of southwest Libya. The engravings, carved into friable sandstone 6,000 to 10,000 years ago, are now threatened, not just by natural forces, but also by oil prospecting and mining activities: bulldozers cutting survey lines close to engravings and heavy vehicles shaking the ground as they rumble past.TARA is aiming to raise the funds needed to create life-size replicas from the laser data so that future generations, long after the originals have disappeared, may enjoy some of the world’s earliest art created long before writing was invented.

Using a Tuareg safari company and guided by Pier Paolo Rossi, the TARA team of David Coulson, Victoria Waldock and Alec Campbell, accompanied by an Archaeologist, David Walton and a British laser-scanning team, Kathy Devlin and Mark Pupilli, from Goldsmith University in London drove south into Sezzan in south western Libya.

At the request of Dr Giuma Anag, Chairman of Libya’s Department of Antiquities, we went first to Wadi Beddis, a security area within an oil-mining concession, and scanned an almost life-size elephant engraving with a bulldozed track beside it and now cracked from top to bottom. We moved to Mathendous where the team scanned four engravings including the famous ‘Fighting Cats’ and a crocodile, both severely cracked and the latter splitting apart.
TARA's Archive continues its work to achieve the goal of being the world’s premier information and image resource for African rock art. David Coulson, TARA’s Executive Chairman, and Board member, Alec Campbell, are determined to ensure that this priceless information resource is developed in the best possible way, and they have been working tirelessly to generate metadata for thousands of images. To date the database has over 11,000 images complete with metadata out of a digital collection of just over 16,000. Alec’s line drawings from selected sites have also been digitised. Rock art from 624 sites in 16 African countries has now been documented.

The 2008 Libya survey was very successful and over 2,000 digital pictures from this trip were delivered to the Archive for preparation and entry into the database. The northern Kenya and southern Africa trips in the past one year contributed an additional 1,000 digital images. Because of the risk associated with digital archiving, TARA has employed the necessary backup mechanisms to guard against data loss, and over 80% of the digital images have been backed up remotely.

TARA continues to receive requests for rock art-related information from researchers, journalists, tour companies and students. This is a source of pride and shows that we are meeting the needs of our target audience. Thanks to an improved online presence and TARA’s partnership with JSTOR’s Aluka initiative (www.aluka.org) that link our database to millions of users worldwide, we anticipate an increasing number of requests for images and information. In addition to its ongoing digitisation work, the Archive is also the hub of TARA’s in-house design of publications, exhibitions and publicity material.

TARA’s Archive has digitised and created a database of 1,171 images from the African Ceremonies collection for access on the Aluka website. The collection brings together works by acclaimed photographers Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher. We hope that the partnerships with Aluka and African Ceremonies will continue through the coming years so that we can digitally capture a substantial portion of this unique record of African heritage and make it available to a wider audience through the Internet.

BOOK REVIEW  by Alec Campbell and David Coulson

CAVE ART


Cave Art is a magnificent, beautifully produced tome, a ‘must’ for art historians and a fascinating exposition of prehistoric art for anyone with an interest in art’s roots and the earliest known remains of human visual communication. The book brings together Europe’s Ice Age or Palaeolithic art, mainly parietal paintings and engravings found in caves and rock shelters, and touches on a few of the most important examples of contemporaneous portable art carved on stone, bone and antler. Clottes describes his book as, ‘... a kind of museum, a collection of prehistoric imagery that builds a general understanding of European Upper Palaeolithic Art’, and that is exactly what it is and does.

Jean Clottes, President of the International Federation of Rock Art Organizations, is a leading authority on world rock art. Cave Art is the first comprehensive publication that brings together Europe’s prehistoric rock art, lays bare its incredible beauty and mystery, relates it to the rock faces on which it occurs and discusses its creation and possible purposes in terms all of us can easily follow. It is highly recommended.
An in-depth series of research – including surveys and statistics analysis – to determine the impact and efficacy of TARA’s web site was carried out between 2007 and 2008 by Lorna Abungu, the Creative Director of Okello Abungu Heritage Consultants. The user needs analysis, done through print and online surveys, was especially useful, and involved TARA’s stakeholders throughout the process.

Gagan Dadalya (Wildebeest Productions, a Nairobi-based company) worked with Lorna to develop an entirely new look that is more attractive and user-friendly. The new site provides rock art enthusiasts with important information about TARA, its activities and its resources – as well as information about African rock art and related activities around the world. You can now download TARA publications, report new sites or vandalism, and find information about African rock art sites on UNESCO’s World Heritage List or the World Monuments Watch.

A few sections are still under development, including the Online Gallery and Gift Shop, which will be available in the coming months.

Visit www.africanrockart.org TODAY!

TARA is pleased to announce a new addition to its family of small publications: Treasures of Northern Kenya, a 32-page full-colour booklet that highlights the beautiful landscape from Lake Bogoria to the Kenya-Ethiopia border, and westwards to Turkwell Gorge. The rich culture of the people and their lifestyle, and the rock art heritage are described in detail. The publication was made possible through a grant from the German Embassy. Another popular booklet was updated and republished this year, The Rock Art and Other Attractions of Suba District. To view a complete list of TARA’s resources and download your copies, visit: www.africanrockart.org/resources/main.html
Diversity of Africa’s Rock Art

Africa has the greatest variety and some of the oldest rock art on earth. Africa also has more rock art than any other continent. Over 30 countries in Africa are known to have rock art with an estimated 10 to 20 million images.

Rock art offers tantalising glimpses of early cultures and beliefs as well as early evidence of morality and the development of imaginative abilities. The art features numerous techniques and styles. Much of it is magnificent and is comparable with the work of modern artists in the last 150 years. As such, it is irreplaceable.

It has proven difficult to establish accurate dates for rock art. Scientists use radiometric techniques to date organic components such as charcoal, and binders such as blood, egg white and urine. In some parts of Africa, experts have been able to develop chronologies based upon the existence of ancient species such as the crocodile, now extinct in the Sahara, or the introduction of exotic new species like the horse, camel or dog.

Because Africa’s rock art was created in exposed places, much has now disappeared, but major concentrations of rock art occur in the Sahara and Southern Africa. What we see today was probably created during the last 12,000 years, while much of it is less than 6,000 years old. Researchers believe however that Africa’s now-vanished art may have been contemporary with Europe’s great Palaeolithic cave art – between 15,000 and 33,000 years ago.
NORTHERN AFRICA

1. A Tuareg nomad looks out from the Air Mountains over the Sahara Desert, Niger.
2. Life size engraving of two giraffe in northern Niger, 6,000 years old.
3. Bi-chrome painting of concentric red and white circles at Aioun, Mauritania.
4. Painting of a negative hand print in Egypt’s White Desert.
5. Tuareg man and his son are seen travelling through northern Niger dwarfed by immense dunes.
6. Red painting of a camel with an armed rider in eastern Chad.
7. Part of a frieze of thirty giraffe from Messak, Libya.
8. Painting of a two horse - chariot driven by a man, southern Algeria.
EASTERN AFRICA

1. Lake Turkana, scene of many rock engraving sites in northern Kenya’s Great Rift Valley.
2. Tall rock, with faded paintings, standing on a granite outcrop in eastern Uganda.
3. Late White paintings of giraffe, Tanzania.
4. Scene with people and long-horned cattle in northern Sudan.
6. Phallic and anthropomorphic Monoliths in a cemetery at Tutafela, Ethiopia.
SOUTHERN AFRICA

1. Namibia's Brandberg Massif, believed to have hundreds if not thousands of Bushman (San) paintings, some of which are believed to be 1,000 years old.
2. Engravings of a bull eland and of animals in the Northern Cape, South Africa.
4. San painting of an 'oval' or beehive structure from which a swarm of tiny bees (?) are pouring in the presence of a white human figure with red wings.
5. Small engravings of antelope and zebra at Twyfelfontein, a Namibian World Heritage Site.
Following the Laser Scanning Mission in Mathendous the scanning team returned to Tripoli and Europe while the rest of the TARA team headed south to explore areas of the Messak we had never been to.

Here we recorded some remarkable Early Hunter sites as well as a number of Pastoral Period sites with cattle, wild animals, herdsmen and animal tracks carved into the sandstone. In the western Messak Mellet we found an amazing Early Stone Age site next to a scatter of Neolithic potsherds; superb hand-axes lay in profusion on the sand.

Heading west, and leaving the Messak behind, we now entered the Akākus Mountains, a World Heritage site which we had last visited in 1998. Here we recorded a further 20 sites, many (in the south), with faded, yet still magnificent, Round Head Period paintings dating to well over 7,000 years old. In the more accessible northern Akākus we noticed a large increase in tourism since our last visit and saw how the Department of Archaeology had been forced to construct fences at some sites to prevent the art’s defacement.

On our return to Tripoli we reported to the Chairman of the Department of Archaeology, Dr Anag, on the successful completion of the exercise - laser-scanning of six endangered engravings, recording of 40 sites, and the addition of 4,000 photographs to TARA’s archive.

The next step in this project is to find the funds to create the replicas, no easy task given that each one may cost over $30,000.
KERIO VALLEY, SOUTHERN TURKANA

In August, a TARA team of David Coulson, Terry Little and George Abungu (Board member) travelled with Purity Kiura, Head of Archaeology at the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) to Lokori in Kerio Valley, Southern Turkana. Here they met up with Emmanuel Ndiema (NMK/Rutgers University) who had earlier in the year made a survey trip to this area funded by TARA, the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA), and Rutgers University, USA. On that trip, he had successfully recorded several new rock art engraving sites, which he wanted to show the TARA/NMK group.

The group went first to the best-known site in the area, Namoratunga South, where grave circles had been excavated in the 1970s by American professors B.M. Lynch and L.H. Robbins (Lynch and Robbins 1978). The archaeologists recorded hundreds of engraved symbols carved onto upright stones that mark the graves and nearby rocks and boulders. These carvings were dated to around 2,300 years before present. Another archaeologist, Robert Soper, made another fascinating discovery here in the 1980s. He pointed out that the small pillars that mark the graves have been positioned in a manner such that they appear to align to points on the horizon where seven stars or cluster-stars rise on a particular day of the year. The Borana, who claim to have once lived here, still use these same stars to measure a 29 or 30-day twelve month calendar calculating changes in the Earth’s rotation. The TARA group recorded the grave circles at the main site (Namoratunga South) as well as a large number of engravings on neighbouring rocks, which David Coulson and Alec Campbell had visited a few years back.

In the late afternoon Emmanuel took the group to another site he had recently found further west. This was a hill covered in small rocks and boulders carrying numerous engravings, especially circles and spirals. As the sun was setting behind the western mountains all these enigmatic symbols stood out dramatically in the last light.

TARA is looking into the feasibility of setting up a community project here together with the NMK and other organisations, which could help ensure conservation of the area’s rich rock art heritage.
At the end of November 2007, David Coulson and Alec Campbell travelled to Namibia to survey sites in the Erongo Mountains, which were not previously recorded. They stayed at Omaruru for a few days before proceeding to a number of privately-owned farms where the rock art sites are located. Generally, the rock art in this area, with one major exception, consists of well preserved fine-line paintings executed with a brush or feather in red and polychrome pigments, dating within the last 3,000 years. The exception, at a single site, involves a few outline engravings of wild animals and their tracks, and numerous human footprints, the latter probably made by Khoe herders during the last 1,000 years. The recording team also noticed a number of rocks that had clearly been used in the past as gongs.

The team then visited Paula Cave, declared a National Monument in 1951. The cave, high on a granite kopje and open to the public, lies in the Erongo Wilderness Conservancy and is managed by the Erongo Wilderness Lodge. They also visited Ekuta and Omandumbra Farms with fine rock art, which are open to the public. The site on Ekuta Farm is a large shelter with more than 800 individual paintings, mainly of people but also of a variety of animals. There are numerous sites on Omandumbra: Seven have a huge variety of paintings including one shelter with dancing figures waving what may be musical pipes and supported by some 80 bichrome images of running springbok. The team then walked up a narrow stony riverbed to a small gorge where outline engravings of rhino and antelope and large numbers of human footprints (left) chipped and ground into vertical faces were recorded, one of which looked similar to an engraved footprint in Botswana.

There was a huge granite outcrop north of Karibib which was not open to the public, and the team noticed a number of sites including a large shelter with handprints and a polychrome giraffe that had very recently been defaced by a vandal scratching lines through the patterning on its body. Another site, a natural granite arch shaped like a bent sausage, has small panels of painted people and animals at the ends and on the arch. One row of human figures had lost their heads, although the team later found the broken rock with the heads, still intact, in the grass nearby.

Namibia, with its good roads suitable for saloon cars, is an excellent country to see rock art. Apart from the major sites at Twyfelfontein and on the Brandberg, landowners are usually happy to conduct visitors to sites on their land for a small fee.
ROCK GONGS

Rock gongs are common throughout Africa, often in the form of naturally-balanced granite boulders, sometimes in association with nearby paintings or engravings and perhaps themselves decorated with cupules or even engraved images. When struck with hard objects, gongs emit ringing tones. Depending on the type of implement used as a striker and the surface area struck, a single gong can emit a variety of tones. Thus several players using different strikers (sandstone, ironstone, quartz, granite, wood or bone) on a single gong can produce a combination of tones that can form melodies.

TARA has recorded rock gongs in Algeria, Niger, Libya, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. Gongs have also been reported in Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Zambia, and Malawi. It is uncertain when rocks were first used as gongs, but some bear eroded cupules, suggesting use dating back to the Middle Stone Age.

A few gongs are still used by local people. For instance, J.H. Vaughan reported modern use of gongs in Northern Nigeria in pre-marriage rituals. TARA noted a gong below a rock with painted symbols in Eastern Uganda, apparently used until recently for making rain. C. Kleinitz recorded rock gongs in association with cattle engravings on granite islands in the Nubian Nile in Sudan, noted their ‘spontaneous’ playing by local people as she worked, and speculated on their possible past ritual associations with cattle.

In the Oued Djerat in Algeria, the recording team from TARA investigated a rock gong reported by M. Hachid, former Director of the Tassili National Park. The gong consists of a large oblong slab of supported sandstone with a number of cupules ground into its upper surface and two deeply ground depressions at one of its ends. At that time, the team was accompanied by several Tuareg one of whom is a resident of the area. The Tuaregs demonstrated how the gong is still played. As one man rolled a large stone in the deeply ground depressions the other man alternatively rolled a second large stone on top of and tapped the upper surface of the gong with a smaller stone. The resulting sounds created an undulating moaning interspersed with sharper notes that reverberated down the Oued (seasonal river).

One of the guides recounted approximately as follows: ‘Our ancestors found this stone with its cupules perhaps a thousand years ago when they first settled this valley. They knew or learned how to use it and we use it to this day. The stone talks and speaks on behalf of the spirits in the rocks. It speaks mainly of today and foretells the future. It tells us about good times with abundant rains when our livestock prospers, and it warns of bad times, of raids and wars and of droughts and future hardships’. He denied being able to understand what the rock said, but pointed out that women could understand and interpret the sounds emitted and that both adult men and women play the gong.

Rock gongs, with few exceptions, occur in places with open areas where audiences, dancers and other performers could easily be accommodated. How gongs and adjacent rock art are related remains uncertain, but their frequent proximity, sound and possibly touch may be an integral element of the art’s original use. Our experience in the Oued Djerat, as well as those of Brian Fagg and J.H. Vaughan in Nigeria and of Connie Kleinitz in Sudan, indicates the possibility of collecting information, at least about modern use of rock gongs, which could lead to a better understanding of their past purposes and perhaps their association with adjacent rock art.
Conservation

REMOVING GRAFFITI FROM ROCK PAINTINGS IN THE DRAKENSBERG
by Janette Deacon

The Ukhahlamba Drakensberg Park in KwaZulu Natal Province, South Africa, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2000 as a ‘mixed’ site. This designation means that it has outstanding universal value for both its environmental and cultural qualities. The cultural values are primarily embodied in more than 400 caves and rock shelters that were decorated with rock paintings over the past few thousand years by the ancestors of the San or Bushmen. The high level of artistic skill and the detailed portrayal of themes important in their belief system are unparalleled.

The World Heritage Site is managed by the provincial department of nature conservation, Ezemvelo, and the rock art is protected and monitored by the provincial heritage resources authority, Amafa KwaZulu-Natal. The rock art is not confined to the World Heritage Site, however, and numerous other painted rock shelters are found across the border in Lesotho and in the buffer zone and surrounding areas. It is the rock art sites in these neighbouring areas that have lately been most vulnerable to damage from graffiti.

Most of the graffiti appears to be the work of young men and boys from rural Zulu communities who are employed to take cattle and goats into the mountains for grazing. They often sleep in rock shelters with their animals, or sit there during the day for shade. To pass the time, some of them use charcoal to write their names or slogans on the walls, and sometimes even to outline the rock paintings. If the charcoal graffiti is left, it can become a permanent mark as it is gradually fixed to the rock surface by a natural coating of silica.

Over the past decade, an organisation known as Bergwatch (or Mountain Watch), which operates mostly with volunteers who love the spectacular mountains, has been involved in a remarkable series of projects to raise awareness of the need for sustainable development and conservation of the Ukhahlamba/Drakensberg amongst local communities. Meridy Pfotenhauer, a member of Bergwatch, has spent many hours training 20-30 men and women as Rock Art Monitors in the Amangwane Tribal Authority around Bergville (also known as the Mnweni area), which adjoins the buffer zone of the World Heritage Site. Their job is to visit sites regularly, engage with local schools and communities to inform them about the significance of the paintings, guide visitors and report any damage. One of the monitors, Muzi Msimanga, has made several short films about rock art and the ecology of the mountains to show to schools in the area.

At a meeting of community members held in March 2007 with Meridy Pfotenhauer, Jeremy Hollmann from the Natal Museum and officials from Ezemvelo and Amafa, it was decided that removal of graffiti was a priority. As I have had some experience in removing charcoal graffiti from more than 40 sites in the Western Cape Province in South Africa, Jeremy invited me to demonstrate the technique and begin to train the monitors. Permits to do the work were granted by Amafa and two trips were arranged in 2007 and 2008. Celeste Rossouw from Amafa arranged funding for me to participate in the second trip.

Four of the five sites we cleaned are several kilometres from the nearest vehicle access, along steep and narrow cattle paths. We travelled in a party of 10-15 people with sleeping bags, tents, food, cameras and equipment for recording the sites and removing the graffiti, so everyone had a backpack and carried at least one piece of equipment too. Streams had to be crossed and the views from our rest stops were magnificent.

On arrival at a site, the first job was to assess the graffiti and decide on the best method for removal. Then we used measuring tapes to make a plan and section of the shelter on graph paper. Wide masking tape and a thick black koki pen were used to mark off the back wall of the shelter in one or two metre sections, depending on the size of the site and the density of paintings. Two people were assigned to each of the panels to record the graffiti and the paintings. Once all the panels had been recorded, photographs were taken of each panel, taking care to get the numbered masking tape labels on the far left and far right of the frame for each panel.
The next step was to remove the charcoal graffiti. We used a method pioneered in Australia. A small piece of cotton wool is wound around the end of a chopstick like a large earbud. The cotton wool is dipped in de-ionized water and excess water is squeezed off. The damp cotton wool is rolled gently over the offending charcoal and it comes off easily after several applications. Care must be taken to change the cotton wool frequently, not to press hard, and to ensure that dirty water does not run down the rock face. In cases where charcoal is on top of paintings, the surface is carefully assessed and tested to make sure that no damage will be done. Sometimes the charcoal is left in place when the surface is unstable or the pigment had not bonded with the rock. Where graffiti is spread over large surfaces and no paintings are underneath, a 5 cm paintbrush with soft bristles can be used to loosen the charcoal. It is very satisfying to see the graffiti disappear, clean rock surfaces return and the paintings appear in their former beauty.

The majority of the graffiti ‘artists’ simply write their names, often as a group. Other than names, the graffiti subjects are typical of male interests everywhere: political slogans, giant genitalia (often detached with no accompanying body) and, less often, animals, guns, trucks, cars and aeroplanes. At one site, there were crude copies alongside original rock paintings. Paintings were outlined or ‘retouched’ at three of the five sites.

The African Conservation Trust, which works closely with Bergwatch, has provided funding for a rock art education course in the area this year and 20 posters about the graffiti cleaning exercise were distributed to 16 schools in the Bergville District. Muzi Msimanga has made a charming 10-minute film of our graffiti-cleaning trips. It stresses the significance of the rock art and the damage done by graffiti, and by allowing livestock to rub against painted surfaces, lighting fires and cooking close to rock paintings. He has shown the film at local community meetings and at schools, and it is being screened at the Natal Museum as well. It is only one of the ways in which the Rock Art Monitors and their local communities are making an effective contribution towards rock art conservation with a remarkably small budget but a great deal of enthusiasm. It was a pleasure working with them and we have high hopes that the Bergwatch model will be applied in other areas as well.

**DABOUS AND AIR MOUNTAINS, NIGER**

The Aïr Mountains of northern Niger have once again become a “no-go” area including many wonderful rock engraving sites, such as the now famous Dabous Giraffe. We understand that land-mines have been laid in these areas where TARA has spent so much time over the years recording rock engravings. One of the factors that has contributed to this state of affairs is the increase in domestic and political tension following the government’s decision to open more Uranium mines in traditional Tuareg territory, with minimal consultation or compensation. These developments have also caused environmental and health problems in this area. The situation has devastated the tourism industry in the region. The Prince Claus Fund in the Netherlands has provided support to TARA to insure security at the Dabous rock art site through their Cultural Emergency Rescue.

At the same time, our friend and colleague, Sidi Mohamed Ilies, president of the Anigourane Rock Art Association in Niger was seriously injured in a road accident near Agadez earlier this year. We wish him a speedy recovery.
Morocco has some of the most extraordinary rock art in Africa with hundreds of sites especially on the Sahara side of the Atlas Mountains. The art represents different styles from different periods of which the oldest and most exceptional is the Tazina style (3,000-5,000 years old), named after a place in Algeria where this art was first recorded.

As reported in earlier Newsletters this art is under serious threat from thieves and vandals. Local people are plundering sites and selling the art to foreign collectors. Thousands of pieces of art have already left Morocco.

The good news is that the man most associated with the struggle to control and close down the trade, Dr Abdellah Salih, was promoted to the post of Director of Culture in Morocco. Dr Salih is also a member of TARA’s Advisory Board. He and David Coulson have already discussed the possibility of organising a “Theft and Vandalism” conference in Morocco in order to focus attention on the seriousness of the threat.

At the same time TARA is hoping to raise money for a joint community conservation project in the Draa Valley region of southern Morocco, an area particularly affected by the theft problem. David Coulson and Terry Little plan to visit Morocco in the first half of 2009 in order to help move this project forward.

**Partner News**

On 3 September 2008, David Coulson and Francesco Bandarin, Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre finalised a three-year Memorandum of Understanding between TARA and UNESCO for the protection and promotion of African Rock Art. TARA looks forward to cooperating with UNESCO towards the promotion of this “priceless and irreplaceable heritage of Africa” (Kofi Annan). This agreement will go a long way in strengthening TARA’s position in Africa and internationally, and in leveraging new partnerships and opportunities.
The Abasuba Community Peace Museum, on Mfangano Island in Lake Victoria, is among the first community museums in Kenya, thanks to the initiative of its Founding Curator, Jack Obonyo. His desire to protect and promote the unique culture of his people, the Abasuba, led him to build a small community museum in 2000. He began to collect artefacts and carry out research on Abasuba culture and liaised with the elders and youth to encourage the protection of the nearby rock art sites. The museum works very closely with TARA and the National Museums of Kenya to protect and manage the nearby rock art sites. It also serves as a centre for the promotion of traditional methods of peace and conflict resolution.

In 2007, TARA received a grant from the European Development Fund through the Kenyan Tourism Trust Fund (TTF) to increase awareness of rock art, to promote rock art for tourism, and to conserve and develop the sites in a way that will lead to improving the quality of life in Suba District. This is being achieved through training, improved infrastructures, including a new museum and community centre, and sustained, creative marketing. The project also promotes the endangered Suba language and much of the publicity material was also produced in Suba. The project was carried out in collaboration with the Abasuba Community Peace Museum and the local community, and managed by Gloria Borona, a project officer at TARA. A grant from the Safaricom Foundation in October 2008 also supports the museum project.

The design for the new museum complex was done by Phillip Okello of Urban Design Associates (Nairobi). The construction, which began in late January this year, resulted in employment for approximately fifty people from the local community. The new buildings include a community centre (with a restaurant, kitchen, store and seminar room) and a museum/learning centre (housing the galleries, offices and artefact storage). To enrich the visitor experience we created signage along the paths leading to the main sites. Fencing and site amenities have also been developed.

The new Abasuba Community Peace Museum was officially opened on 17 October 2008 by the Assistant Minister for Tourism, Hon Cecily Mbarire. Other dignitaries included the local Member of Parliament Hon Otieno Kajwang (also Minister for Immigration); the Permanent Secretary for Tourism, Rebecca Nabutola; Hon Millie Odhiambo; the Chief Executive Officer of Kenya Tourism Board, Dr Achieng’ Ongong’a; the French Ambassador to Kenya, H.E. Elisabeth Barbier; as well as representatives from the Tourism Trust Fund and the European Union, cultural attachés from the US and French Embassies, and representatives from the Provincial Administration.
The Opening Ceremony was a colourful event that was well attended by hundreds of community members. All TARA staff members and attendants from the TARA exhibition at the National Museums of Kenya were also on hand to lend a hand and witness a culmination of the collective efforts towards the completion of the project. Speakers at the function marvelled at the beauty of the region and pledged their support towards the museum. In Kenya, where museums are mostly government-run, this is a unique initiative in that it is fully managed by the community. The new museum is the gateway to the heritage of the Abasuba people through innovative exhibitions and public programmes. Throughout the process of building, TARA has enjoyed the full collaboration with the Museum Board, the community members, the Provincial Administration and other stakeholders. This has been a very exciting as well as challenging project for TARA and it will no doubt be building upon the experience to initiate community projects in other areas on continent.

On 29th August 2008, TARA and the Kakapel community held a ground-breaking ceremony for the new Kakapel Community Cultural Centre. This event was historic to the Iteso people who inhabit Teso District in Kenya and 10 districts in Uganda because this cultural centre will be the first of its kind in this region. The development of this centre comes under TARA’s Kakapel Rock Art Community Project, which has been supported by a generous grant from the Safaricom Foundation, whose Chairman, Les Baillie, was the chief guest at the groundbreaking. The function was also attended by the Prime Minister of the Iteso Kingdom, George Ochoko; TARA’s Chief Operations Officer, Terry Little; and the Director for Regional Sites and Monuments of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), Dr Mzalendo Kibunja. This Cultural Centre will be a place of great pride for the Teso community to exhibit their rich culture and enhance the experience of visitors to the nearby Kakapel rock art site.

The groundbreaking ceremony was preceded by a 3-day community workshop at which participants brainstormed the activities and management of the proposed cultural centre, as well as identification of other sites of cultural importance with a view of diversifying tourism in the district. The workshop was facilitated by Terry Little and Gladys Nyasuna-Wanga of TARA; assisted by Phoebe Awiti, NMK Education Officer. Logistical support was provided by Eunice Mbindyo, TARA’s Operations Assistant.

Overall, the Kakapel Community Rock Art Project aims to: involve community members in the management of the Kakapel rock art site; ensure its conservation; diversify the tourism products at Kakapel; and increase visitor numbers and generate income for the local community.
TARA has again benefitted from the valuable support and trust of foundations, businesses and individuals to enable it to grow and carry out its mission of documenting and preserving Africa’s rock art and ensuring that local communities and the general public both appreciate and benefit from this heritage.

The Robert H. and Ann Lurie Foundation, the Arcadia Trust (formerly the Lisbet Rausing Charitable Fund) of the U.K. and the Ford Foundation have all contributed generously in 2008 to the institution.

The Safaricom Foundation has supported two of TARA’s Community Projects in Kenya – Kakapel and Suba District – this year.

The Prince Claus Fund in the context of the Cultural Emergency Response programme (CER), has awarded TARA a grant towards the protection of the Dabous Rock Art site in Niger.

TARA continues to enjoy the collaboration of the Alliance Française, the French Embassy and the German Embassy on a variety of projects in Kenya. The Embassy of the United States and the US State Department have provided funding for the six-week collaboration of a Cultural Envoy, Robert Bangiola, in 2008.

We would like to recognise the National Museums of Kenya for their partnership in a number of activities – notably in Kakapel, Suba, Turkana and at the Nairobi National Museum.

The biggest project in 2008 has been the Promotion of Rock Art Tourism in the Suba District with funding from the European Development Fund, provided through the Kenyan Tourism Trust Fund (TTF).

We wish to acknowledge UNESCO for its expressing its trust and confidence in TARA through a three-year Memorandum of Understanding.

Thanks also to the World Monument Fund for its support by listing the Mathendous Rock Art site in Libya on its 2008 List of Most Endangered site and through which TARA is eligible for funding through the Wilson Challenge Grant.

The National Geographic Society has provided funding for the survey work done in Libya this year.
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