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# PROPOSED REHABILITATION AT TELPERION ROCK ART SHELTER

27 January 2023

## 1. BACKGROUND:

• Telperion Shelter exists on Telperion Nature Reserve approximately 80km east of Pretoria in the western area of Mpumalanga province. The reserve is a dynamic landscape of grassland, rocky outcrops, gorges and wetland. The site is approximately 50m from the Saalboomspruit and Wilge River's confluence.

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• The site is reached from a steep slope and is within moderate walking distance from vehicle access in the reserve. It is a flat floored shelter with an opening approximately 20m wide, 4m deep and 8m tall at the highest point.

• Recording at the rock art site took place during three field trips between October 2014 and May 2015. The analysis identified 279 independent motifs represented by four separate traditions. These being fine-lined bushman paintings, finger painted Khoe-Khoe paintings, Sotho-Tswana artwork and historic period graffiti attributed to the Afrikaaner "bitter-einder" community (see Forssman et al 2018).

•The recent graffiti identified by the management of Telperion Nature Reserve depicts letters that read, "WitB....", "Robert" and "WITBOY". The wording appears to have been applied with a soft white material/ chalk or scratched on the rock surface with a sharp object.

•The graffiti relevant to this proposal, appears on a mottled rock face that is densely covered with a variety of painted images, letters, numerals and other marks. From previous experience, only once I am on site and have performed certain tests on the areas in question, will I be able to establish what techniques are applicable.

# 2. INTERVENTION:

<u>Type of intervention</u> - restoration <u>Type of restoration</u> - removal of recent graffiti applied with soft white chalk and/or scratched

# 3. METHODOLOGY:

Due to the changing nature of rock surfaces from site to site, cleaning procedures are site specific. I always begin with the least invasive method when dealing with graffiti and/or extraneous surface deposits.

A golden rule in rock surface rehabilitation is that no intervention is better than ill-conceived intervention. In this regard, I will take decisions on site as to how effectively the area can be cleaned. Naturally I cannot guarantee a positive outcome until I have worked on a specific area of the rock face. In my past experience of cleaning rock art sites, I have been able to remove and/or disguise all, if not 90% of surface graffiti and offending surface deposits at sites.

## Blowing:

Very light blowing using compressed air of between .1 and .5 bar pressure can be used to remove loose particles of dust, charcoal, chalk and other unwanted surface deposits. Should the rock surface appear to be friable or unstable, this procedure would only be used at my discretion.

Brushing:



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Using a soft, dry, synthetic or medium firm hog-hair brush, loose particles of dust, charcoal and chalk can be removed from the rock surface. A flicking wrist action is most effective in this case. Care must be taken not to further imbed charcoal or chalk particles into the rock surface. The light flicking action has the effect of knocking the particles off and away from the rock.

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In cases where charcoal is more stubborn, a shorter haired brush can be used in the same manner by cutting the bristles to the required length with a pair of scissors.

#### Water poulticing:

The rolling poultice is an effective way of removing most charcoal and chalk from the rock surface. Cotton wool is wound around a narrow stick, approximately 20cm in length. A chopstick is ideal. The stick is held in one hand while a piece of cotton wool approximately 6 x 3cm is held between the thumb and forefingers of the other hand. The chopstick is laid on one end of the cotton wool and slowly turned. The light but firm grip of the fingers of the other hand ensures that the cotton wool is picked up and firmly rolled onto the stick (you now have what looks like a giant ear bud in your hand). This poultice is then dipped in water and lightly squeezed, releasing excess water. The poultice is then lightly rolled over the charcoal, drawing it up onto the moist cotton wool. By hydroscopic action the charcoal particles are lifted directly off the rock in a clean and effective manner.

In some instances a fixed poultice can be temporarily/overnight fixed to the rock and used in conjunction with other methods to remove graffiti from the rock surface.

## Chemical poulticing:

In instances where paint has been applied to the rock surface, this might have been sprayed on, applied with a brush or other applicator, the offending painted graffiti has to be softened using a chemical agent. Once the paint has softened, it can be lifted off the rock effectively using the rolling poultice method.

#### Micro Abrasion:

In cases where there is no rock art and graffiti has been applied to the rock surface either with paint or has been engraved into the rock and brushing and poulticing have little effect, it may be necessary to use micro abrasion using compressed air with a 1 to 2mm nozzle diameter to remove the graffiti. The edges of the engraved graffiti are carefully blended into the surrounding rock, thus rendering it virtually impossible to identify or recognize. In this regard, I have found a variety of abrading mediums effective, beginning with ground peach or apricot chips, finely sieved silica, aluminium oxide and garnet, to mention some of the abrading materials.

#### Micro Re-integration:

It is possible to practice, in selected cases, the technique of micro re-integration using natural earth ochres and a natural binder such as gum Arabic. This method enables the technician to lessen the visual impact of intervention by means of a blending process on the surrounding rock using organic and inorganic pigments.

Rock paintings in the vicinity of the area being worked, will be protected with clear film while treatments such as micro abrasion are carried out (should this particular treatment be necessary). Should the writer be required to work over or within millimeters of rock art, this will be done with extreme care. At any stage, should it be deemed necessary to halt or terminate the process in the specific location, due to concerns about the rock art near or underneath the offending graffiti, this will be done.

Good natural light and dry conditions are essential when performing graffiti and/or extraneous surface deposit removal procedures at the rock face.



In certain instances the treated area may remain lighter in colour than the surrounding rock surface. This is a natural result of the treatment procedures. I will however try to mitigate this effect so that the cleaned area will not be obvious to the observer.

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The rock wall will be numbered with meter markers from left to right and comprehensively photographed from left to right, before and after rehabilitation is performed. These meter markers allow the viewer to quickly locate and evaluate the areas that have been worked on.

A comprehensive final report on the site rehabilitation will be compiled and submitted to SAHRA and management at Telperion Nature Reserve. I will keep a third copy for my own records.

## 4. GPS CO-ORDINATES: S -25.7330111, E 28.9894278

Zonation: Private nature reserve

## 7. A MAP OF THE LOCATION:



<u>Left:</u> Map showing site location in Telperion reserve.

<u>Left:</u> Aerial photograph of site location marked with red location pin.

8. PHOTOGRAPHIC MATERIAL:



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• To be supplied with the final report.

# 9. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MITIGATION OF FUTURE DAMAGE:

• Literature on the importance and conservation of rock art must be made available to all visitors to the Telperion Nature Reserve rock art shelter.

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• Ideally, a trained and accredited rock art guide should accompany all visitors to rock art shelters in South Africa. If this is not possible, at the very least, the guide or selected staff member from the reserve should have basic training and knowledge of protocols regarding the behaviour of visitors to the site. For example, no-one including the guide is to touch the paintings with their finger, due to naturally occurring oils and salts on the skin.

No wetting of the paintings with any liquid should be done to try and make them appear clearer. Research has shown that in instances where adults are accompanied by children, the children run ahead of the parents and the guide to the site and unknowingly kick up dust at the shelter, which then is deposited onto the paintings. I always recommend to guides that they themselves use a short piece of grass or a stick to point to detail on the rock face rather than using their finger. I also suggest to visitors that they each use a small piece of grass or a twig to point to images that they might want to share with the others. I have noticed that when people are excited about a particular image and want to explain the shape of the image to a friend, they inadvertently touch the painting with their finger.

• The condition of the site should be monitored on a regular basis and any damage reported immediately to the managing authority. There is no doubt in my mind that a "soon as possible" approach is best when dealing with new graffiti. There is a saying in rock art conservation that, "new graffiti begets more graffiti". In other words, the sooner new graffiti is identified, the sooner it can be dealt with and removed effectively, thus limiting the potential for more human induced damage.

• Charcoal can successfully be removed if it is "fresh" and has not bonded firmly with the rock face either by being drawn into to particular structure of the rock or a silica skin forming over the charcoal. In these cases only organic or mineral abrasion will remove graffiti from the rock surface.

• Psychological or additional physical barriers such as guard rails, fences, board walks, gates etc. should be considered with a "site specific" approach. In other words, every site is different and any kind of physical or psychological intervention or barrier will need to be assessed by management of the property and appropriate decisions made regarding the practicality and aesthetics of such intervention.

• Information boards relating to the geological, botanical, climatic as well as the human history of the site are always interesting for visitors to read. At some sites in South Africa these boards are erected within 2 or 3 meters of the rock face and include line drawings of the sometimes faded images on the rock face. The uninformed visitor often struggles to make out faded images on the rock face and at first might be disappointed when arriving at the rock art site. However if they are able to study a line drawing of the rock art on an information board, that depicts much more clearly the rock art in front of them, they then begin to see the images on the rock that they previously could not identify. This is often an enjoyable exercise for these visitors as they begin to piece together what was previously not apparent to them.

• It has become clear to me that the longer graffiti is left on the rock surface, whether painted, incised or scratched, the more difficult it is to remove. It appears that whatever the nature of the marks made on the rock are, that over



time they bond with the rock surface. In other words a scratch made last week is far easier to remove than a scratch made 2 years ago.

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## 10. CULTURAL SENSITIVITY:

• The writer suggests that a custodianship programme be in place, which would benefit both reserve staff members as well as local communities that may visit the rock art site.

• Previous researchers to The Telperion rock art site identified 279 independent motifs represented by four separate traditions. Some of these images are clear and some are faded. Due to the successive communities that have lived in the shelter over a long period of time, the cross cultural sensitivity of this site is high.

## 11. IDENTIFICATION OF THE TYPE OF HERITAGE SITE:

**Rock Art Site** 

## 12. PREVIOUS SITE REHABILITATION COMPLETED:

The following is a list of sites where I have completed site rehabilitation. In all cases, the results have had a positive outcome. As mentioned previously, the techniques used at each site has varied depending on the type of graffiti and rock art encountered at the site.

DATE	ROCK ART SHELTER	DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT
2015	CDE1 and CDE2	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
	Game Pass Shelter	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
	Waterfall Shelter	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
2014	Esikolweni Shelter	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
2012	Bhendleni Cave	Insertion of drip-line
	Battle Cave	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
2011	Esikolweni Shelter	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
	Painters Cave	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
	Cow Cave	Insertion of drip-line
	Black Ox Shelter	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
	Bushman's River Rock	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal



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2010	Ikanti Rock Boulders I & II,	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
	New Beginnings Cave	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
	Sebaaieni Cave	Insertion of drip-line
2009	Battle Cave	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
	Mpongweni Rock Shelter	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
2008	Lower Mushroom Shelter	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
2003	Rock75	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
2002	Tsodilo Hills	Rock Art workshop & graffiti removal
2000	Sani Pass	Graffiti removal course & training
1994	Leipoldts Grave	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
	Peers Cave	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
1993	De Hagen Cave	Site rehabilitation & graffiti removal
	Cape Town	Development of graffiti buster air pressure system
		Training in graffiti removal with Andrew Thorn.
1991	Gifberg	Australian Conservator and Jeanette Deacon and colleagues

END

