NATIONAL MONUMENTS COUNCIL

FILE NOTE

F33

REF: 9/2/068/30 **DATE:** 4.10.93

RE: ROCK ART SITE ON FARM OUDE MURAGIE NEAR DE RUST, OUDTSHOORN DISTRICT

At the request of Mr Pieter le Roux and his wife Antoinette of the farm Oude Muragie a few km south-west of De Rust in the Oudtshoorn District (tel. 04439 2562), we visited a site where someone had smeared blood on the walls of the rock shelter, partly covering some rock paintings. This had taken place about three months previously.

We left Cape Town at about 8:00 on Thursday 30 September, arriving at the farm at about 13:15 and after spending the night at the site, left again at about 15:00 on Friday 1 October. After spending that night in Oudtshoorn, we visited the Cango Caves on the Saturday morning to see the rock art there and to discuss the state of conservation at the caves with the manager, Mr Hein Gerstner. The team consisted of Janette Deacon, Peter Farmer, Anthony ~~Hanover~~, Ashley van Dieman and Tania van Dieman.
Hannivel

1. The site is at approximately 33.30.40S, 22.27.13E. It is formed in Enon Conglomerate and has a floor area of about 30 x 6 m. A fresh water spring was active on the western side of the shelter and has been dammed up in recent times to create a small pool. There are clear indications of Later Stone Age occupation of the rock shelter and someone has dug two small holes in the deposit exposing horizontal ashy layers.

2. There are few suitable surfaces for rock painting and those that have been used for this purpose are low down near the floor. This may indicate that they were done at a time when the floor level was lower, but is not necessarily the case. With the exception of two swallows, all the paintings that we could discern were human figures and most of these were very faded. Mr le Roux said that they had been splashed with water in the past to make them clearer and this could have led to their deterioration. In addition to the 'genuine' rock paintings, Mr le Roux pointed out traces of ochre paint that a friend of his had made with ochre and plant juices. Another ochre patch of a head and shoulders and a third with the letters 'Hi' are probably also recent additions.

3. Blood had been smeared by hand onto the shelter wall in 9 patches (see attached site plan). It covered rock paintings in the patches numbered 8 and 9 on the eastern side of the shelter.

4. The blood was removed first from patches that were not associated with paintings. The method used was recommended by Dr Jannie Loubser of the National Museum in Bloemfontein who had consulted experts in Australia on our behalf. The blood was

covered first with a sheet of white paper towel, fixed in place with masking tape. This was covered in turn with cotton wool dampened with Golden Products Super 10, and then with a second layer of paper towel moisted with distilled water. This poultice was covered with plastic cling wrap and sealed with masking tape. The first poultice was left for two hours, but thereafter we removed them after 40-60 minutes.

5. After the poultice was taken off the rock, the remaining blood was dabbed with small poultices that were pressed against the rock by hand. The paper towel was replaced as soon as it became stained. This allowed greater control, particularly where rock paintings underlay the blood smears.

6. To remove all traces of Super 10 from the rock surface, the affected area was covered with a double layer of white paper towel that was moistened with distilled water applied with a soft brush. As the paper dried, the chemical residues were deposited on the paper.

7. Small softened spots of blood that remained in cracks and crevices in the rock were flicked off with the sharp end of a sosatie stick.

8. In the final stage, paper towel and distilled water patches were applied again to ensure that no further residues remained.

9. This process worked well on the majority of the blood patches, but problems were experienced with patches numbered 1 and 6. In the case of patch 1, when the last paper towel patch was removed, it was found that a whitish residue had formed on the surface of the rock. We tried removing it with distilled water and a stiff brush, but this made no noticeable difference. In the case of patch 6, a whitish deposit was left on the right-hand side of the rock and could not be removed. It is possible that there are salt accumulations in these two rocks in the conglomerate that have been brought to the surface by the distilled water.

10. Although we avoided using Super 10 on the rock paintings under patches 8 and 9, the surfaces were affected and the part of the rock on which Super 10 was applied is slightly paler than the surrounding area. However, as all the paintings were badly faded before we began, there is no noticeable effect on the paintings themselves.

11. The work was recorded on video in addition to colour photographs and slides.

RECOMMENDATION

It would be appreciated if Mr le Roux could monitor the results of the exercise and let us know whether the white patches remain, and whether they form later on other treated patches as well.

J Deacon

OUDE MORAGIE ROCK SHELTER, OUDTSHOORN DISTRICT
33.30.40 South, 22.27.13 East
9/2/068/30 30 September - 1 October 1993

Plan of site showing position of patches of blood before removal