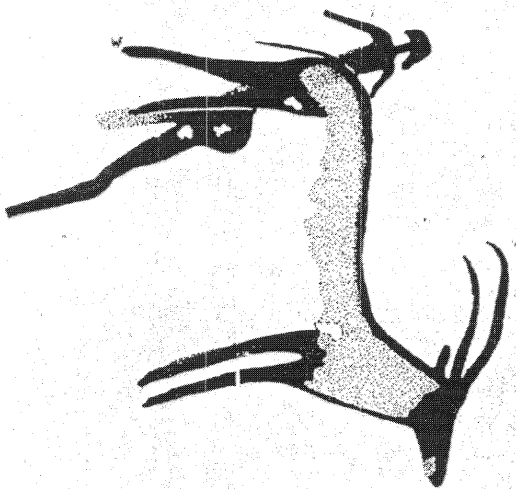


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THE ROCK PAINTINGS OF
WITVINGER NATURE RESERVE



Compiled for:

Northern Province Heritage Services &
Department of Environmental Affairs
(Nature Conservation Division)

by

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February 2001

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THE ROCK PAINTINGS OF WITVINGER NATURE RESERVE

A report prepared for Northern Province Heritage Services and Department of
Environmental Affairs, Nature Conservation Division.

Compiled by Edward B. Eastwood

Palaeo-Art Field Services, PO Box 168, Louis Trichardt 0920

February 2001

Summary

In June 2000 Dirk de Wit of the Northern Provinces Heritage Services asked Palaeo-Art Field Services to document the rock art of Witvinger Nature Reserve. The Witvinger project was carried out between 30 January and 2 February 2001. The single known site, WB/HL/1, was recorded by photography and selective tracing. Location, dimensions of site, archaeological data and painting descriptions were placed on the University of the Witwatersrand's Rock Art Research Institute database. In the first part of this report an archaeological and historical background of the Waterberg region and description of its rock art traditions is provided. In the second part, the site and paintings are described with brief interpretive notes; recommendations are given to serve as guidelines for future management action, provided that tourist developments are envisaged for Witvinger Nature Reserve. In addition, it is suggested that Witvinger Nature Reserve be methodically surveyed by a team of specialists from the Rock Art Research Institute.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Director, Northern Province Heritage Services for providing funds to facilitate this project. I thank Dirk de Wit of Northern Province Heritage Services for his support of this project. Riam Visagie, manager of the Percy Fyfe Nature Reserve, provided enthusiastic support and help in the field.

THE WATERBERG: IT'S PEOPLES AND ROCK ART

Benjamin W Smith, Rock Art Research Institute

The Peopling of the Waterberg

Our knowledge of the early inhabitants of the Waterberg is hampered by the lack of archaeological work in the area. A handful of large sites have been excavated and our knowledge derives almost entirely from these sites. We take these sites as representative of the area as a whole, but we cannot be certain of this. Further studies in new sites may therefore change our current perception of the prehistory of the Waterberg.

Early Hominids

To date there have been no finds of early hominid material within the Waterberg but the important early hominid site of Makapansgat lies just a few kilometres from the edge of the berg. Given this proximity we can be sure that the Waterberg would have been frequented by early hominids. Large, heavy hand-axes and cleavers, the kinds of tools made by Homo Erectus, were found at Makapansgat in the Cave of Hearths. These tools were dated to between 500,000 and 200,000 years before present.

The Middle and Later Stone Age

Excavations at Makapansgat in the Cave of Hearths provide extensive evidence of Middle Stone Age (MSA) occupation. The timing of this occupation was estimated by Reviel Mason to lie between 100,000 and 50,000 years before present. Additional MSA occupation was also found by Mason at Olieboompoort in the north western corner of the Waterberg. At these sites and at another to the north in the Makgabeng, only very thin lenses of the subsequent Late Stone Age (LSA) material were discovered. Dates from Olieboompoort and Makgabeng provided evidence of LSA occupation during the last thousand years only.

Mason argues that although this part of Northern Province had been a centre of cultural evolution in

the Early and Middle Stone Age, it had become a marginal region by the time of the Late Stone Age. During the LSA Northern Province was very sparsely occupied by comparison with the Free State and Cape Coastal regions. The reason for this remains uncertain. The LSA occupants were almost certainly people ancestral to the modern San (Bushmen).

Schoonraad and Beaumont's excavation of a small shelter on Goudrivier in 1965 complements the findings of Mason. Two periods of occupation were discovered. The lower level (& much the largest) contained Middle Stone Age tools and was dated to 25,000 years ago. We know now that this date is a substantial underestimation. The upper layer belonged to the Later Stone Age and was dated to between AD 900 and AD 1100. (I did not identify the exact site of the excavation, but it is somewhere within the site complex. It is known to Maria Van der Ryst of UNISA, as she re-excavated the place (unaware at the time that it had been previously excavated) and found the earlier trenches.)

The excavations of Maria Van der Ryst at Goergap (+ other sites) seem further to confirm this surprising picture of limited and late occupation by LSA hunter-gatherers in and around the Waterberg. All the LSA dates recovered by Van der Ryst at Goergap fell within the last millennium. Van der Ryst continues to excavate at a number of sites in the Waterberg. She informs me that her most recent unpublished dates push LSA occupation back far into the first millennium AD. Future research by Van der Ryst seems likely to yield important new findings and may substantially alter our perception of the first LSA occupation. Her youngest MSA dates seem to be bringing the end of MSA in the Waterberg closer to 35,000 BP.

If the sites so far excavated are representative of the true picture, there was a long period between the MSA and the LSA when the Waterberg remained unoccupied. San activity within the Waterberg only starts to show up within ground deposits at the time of the arrival of farming communities to the plains around the Waterberg. The implication of this is that either San groups were living in the plains around the Waterberg and were pushed into the hills when farmer settlement intensified, or that San groups moved to the area so as to be near to farmer settlements, perhaps so as to trade for pottery, iron, domestic produce etc. Research in the Limpopo Valley by Simon Hall is now attempting to answer which of these models is correct.

We do not believe that people in the Middle Stone Age made rock art. Rock art was first made during the Late Stone Age. The excavated evidence for LSA occupation in the Waterberg (or lack of it) seems to imply that most, or all the San rock in the Waterberg was made within the last thousand years. While this is possible, I am somewhat hesitant to accept this. There is such a large quantity of San art

in the area and much gives the impression of considerable age. If we accept Nick Walker's dates of 8000+ for some Matopos rock paintings, we should, at the very least, think in terms of a few thousand years for some of the Waterberg paintings. My own feeling is that further excavation in the Waterberg will uncover LSA material stretching some millennia further back into the past. That evidence which we have at present demonstrates that early LSA occupation, if there at all, was not extensive.

The Passing of Herder Groups

Prior to the arrival of fully fledged agro-pastoralist communities it appears that groups of Khoekhoe herders may have moved through or past the Waterberg. The exact timing and nature of their movements is still hotly debated. It is widely agreed that the Khoekhoe language came from northern Botswana or Angola. Archaeologists have found evidence for two lines of movement by herders into South Africa: one down the coast of Namibia into the Northern Cape and the other around the eastern edge of the Kalahari and into Northern Province. When descendants of these people were encountered by early settlers at the Cape they were called Hottentot. Some archaeologists (myself included) believe that these groups brought with them the first pottery, a special thin walled type known as Bamбата ware (after the type site in the Matopos).

Aukema and Boyens found a few sherds of pottery that resemble Bamбата ware in an excavation at Ongelukskraal. The sherds came from a layer dating to around AD 233. Similar pottery was found further to the south by Lyn Wadley in excavations at Jubilee Shelter in the Magaliesberg. These were dated to around AD 225. These dates fit well with linguistic and archaeological projections as to the timing of herder movements through Northern Province. Recent unpublished excavations by Maria Van der Ryst at Olieboompoort have yielded a large quantity of similar pottery. The dates for this excavation have not yet been released but I would expect them to fall within a century or so of the existing dates. Herders can only have remained in the Waterberg for a short period of time as just a few centuries later we find them already moving through the Free State into the Western Cape.

The Arrival of the First Farmers (Early Iron Age)

A series of excavations by Jan Aukema (UNISA) in the 1980s provide the bulk of our knowledge of the early farmer settlement of the Waterberg area. Unfortunately, because of Aukema's tragic death in a motor accident in 1989, many of his important findings have not been published.

Aukema found the first evidence of farmer activity in the sweetveld at the base of the Waterberg. The oldest farmer settlement, Diamant, dates to about AD 570. The pottery from the site suggests that its inhabitants were related to those first farmer groups whose settlements have been found in other parts

of Northern Province dating from the 3rd century AD onwards. These sites all have a distinctive form of pottery known as Happy Rest pottery (the name coming from the type site).

At the time of the Happy Rest period settlement the lowveld was somewhat wetter than it is today and was characterised by open tree savanna vegetation. The early farmers brought cattle and sheep to the area along with domesticated crops such as sorghum and millet. Cattle and sheep remains were found at Diamant alongside the bones of wild animals such as hartebeest, wildebeest, zebra and buffalo.

Hunting seems to have remained of great importance throughout the period of early farmer settlement. The early farmers also brought with them the knowledge of pottery and iron working. Evidence of early iron smelting is relatively common, but evidence of early iron mine working is rare. One large mining complex at Phalaborwa is known to date from earlier than the 8th century.

The first farmers to settle on the Waterberg plateau did so around the end of the first millennium AD. These people used a different form of pottery, a type that we call Eiland pottery (after the type site). Eiland pottery has a characteristic herring-bone decoration and has been dated from sites between the 11th and 13th centuries. Eiland period settlement sites have been found in a number of the more open parts of the Waterberg plateau river systems.

The reason for the shift to upland and poorer land is still debated. As Tom Huffman has stated, it seems unlikely that it was due to defensive considerations because there were no other Iron Age peoples in the area at that time. Drought can be discounted because the drought sensitive Limpopo Flats to the north remained intensively occupied throughout this period. Aukema believed that the domestic stock of the early farmers had degraded the veld to such an extent that the land became overgrown with pioneer bush and therefore became susceptible to infestation with tsetse flies. The Waterberg, because of its altitude, would always have remained tsetse free.

The Coming of the Northern Sotho (Late Iron Age)

With the appearance of Moloko pottery towards the middle of the second millennium AD the focus of farmer settlement once again shifted back to the lowveld. Archaeologists associate the appearance of Moloko pottery with the arrival of the ancestors of the Northern Sotho and Tswana. A number of settlements dating to the 16th and 17th centuries were found by Aukema on red loam patches near the Mochabatsi river.

From this same period are a number of walled settlements on the Waterberg itself. These are defensive sites, often along cliff edges and surrounded by perimeter walls. One from Buffelsfontein dates to around AD 1550 and another at Malore Hill on Lapalala dates to around 1700. At Buffelsfontein Aukema found beehive-shaped huts near the back of the residential area. This unusual feature, together with particular types of undecorated pottery suggest that the residents of these defensive settlements were Nguni speakers. These sites probably mark the coming of the ancestors of the Transvaal Ndebele. These groups then moved out of the Waterberg in the 17th and 18th centuries and settled on the Pietersberg Plateau where they rapidly became enculturated with local Northern Sotho settlement and pottery traditions.

In the 1700s the group of Northern Sotho known today as the Pedi grew to dominate the region under a powerful Maroteng paramount chieftaincy (the Maroteng were an off-shoot of the Kgatla). Pedi power reached its peak during the time of Thulare who reigned from about 1790 until about 1820. The paramouncy was based in the Steelpoort river area. At this time large areas of the Transvaal were conquered by military conquests reaching as far south as the Vaal river and as far west as Fokeng near Rustenberg. Peter Delius argues that Pedi strength came from control of key trade networks.

The Difagane

After the death of Thulare the *difagane* (Zulu dispersal) came to bring disruption and dislocation to all sectors of Northern Sotho and Tswana society. In 1822 the Zimbabwean Ndebele (the Marabele) under Mzilikazi moved into Pedi territory on their flight from Zululand and the wrath of the Zulu leader Shaka. They attacked and defeated the Pedi. Although they only remained in Pedi territory for about a year, their presence severely depleted local supplies of food and stock. Mzilikazi's Ndebele continued to raid Northern Sotho and Tswana areas for more than a decade until, in 1837, they were eventually pushed north into modern Zimbabwe by a combined Tswana – Boer force.

The disruption did not stop with the exodus of the Ndebele. The late 1830s saw the first major Swazi raid against the Pedi which was successfully repulsed. Thereafter followed a number of minor raids and then a second major attack in 1869. Again this was eventually defeated.

Successive raiding wreaked havoc with rural settlements and many people, at this time, fled to hill areas for security. A number of these 19th century refuge sites are known from the Waterberg, one on Malore Hill in Lapalala is dated to around 1830.

White Settlement

The first white settlement in Northern Sotho territory came in the 1840s when a trekker community settled east of the Steelpoort River at a place later called Ohngstad. Their leader Potgieter negotiated a and rights agreement with the Pedi paramount Sekwati in 1845. Relations between the Boers and the Pedi rapidly soured and in 1852 a commando under Potgieter attacked the Pedi stronghold at Phiring. The siege failed but the Boers made off with a large quantity of Pedi cattle and goats. The following year Sekwati moved his capital away from the Boers to another mountain fortress, Thaba Mosego. An uneasy peace was maintained until Sekwati's death in 1861.

Under the leadership of Sekwati's eldest son, Sekhukhune, the Pedi people found themselves in an almost perpetual state of war. First there was a series of succession disputes and then war with the white government. Peter Delius has argued that the growing and threatening power of the Pedi paramourcy, combined with the need for land and labour, created a strong desire within the government of the South African Republic to smash Pedi independence. In 1876 the Republic attacked the Pedi with a force of some 5000 men. Assaults on the Pedi mountain fortresses were generally unsuccessful but the Pedi suffered heavy losses of cattle in commando raids. The war ended in stalemate and a peace treaty was signed in 1877. When the British annexed the Transvaal in the same year, the Pedi still had their independence.

The British proved no more sympathetic towards the idea of Pedi autonomy. An attack was made by imperial forces in 1878, but had to be withdrawn because of horse sickness. In the following year a force of more than 12,000 returned. This force inflicted a decisive defeat against the Pedi and with massive loss of life. Sekhukhune was captured and imprisoned. The following year he was released, but was assassinated by his half-brother, Mampuru, who had assumed the paramourcy. Mampuru was then hanged by the newly independent Transvaal government. With the Pedi leadership smashed, the government set about resettling the remaining dislocated Pedi groups into consolidated settlements. In his way large pieces of land, including the greater part of the Waterberg, were cleared for white settlement.

The Waterberg was one of the last areas in the Transvaal to be settled by whites. Early travellers and Voortrekkers entered the area in the 1850s but there was no major permanent settlement until the beginning of the twentieth century. Rousseau estimates that there were less than 200 white residents in the Waterberg in 1900.

The Rock Artists of the Waterberg

San Hunter-gatherers

All over the Waterberg one finds reminders of the old occupants of this upland area: the San (or Bushmen) who moved occasionally through the area practising their lifestyle of hunting and gathering. In the second millennium AD, as the farmer occupation intensified in the plains around the Waterberg, greater numbers of San entered this secluded hill area. The remarkable rock art of these people, perhaps the finest of all the world's rock arts, provides a lasting testament to the richness and complexity of their culture.

The San art of the Waterberg has its own special and distinctive features. Many of these we recognise as representations of ceremonies and beliefs that survive amongst San groups still living in the Kalahari in modern Botswana and Namibia. Many elements of these ceremonies and beliefs were also recorded in the late 1800s amongst some of the last South African San. These Kalahari and South African San ethnographies hold the key that can unlock the meaning of the San rock art of the Waterberg.

A common feature of Waterberg rock art is a line of men and women with their arms raised. These portray the circular dances that the San used in their major ceremonies such as their healing and rain-making rituals. Sometimes at the end of these groups one sees a dancer bent over at the waist; these are dancers assuming the posture of a person about to collapse into a trance-like state. It is in this trance-like state that the San believe they travel to the spirit world. The Kalahari San still greatly value their experiences of the spirit world and recount their trance journeys at great length. The San inhabitants of the Waterberg seem to have used rock art to capture a complex collage of images of this world rituals and other world visions and experiences.

Unlike in other parts of South Africa the eland is not numerically predominant in the Waterberg, but rather the hartebeest. Eland and hartebeest are said by the San to be special animals in the eyes of their God. Both are filled with exceptional spiritual power or potency. The San believe that their religious specialists can harness this potency during their ceremonial dances and that they are able to activate the potency for the benefit of the group. Many painting sites contain images of men who have taken on the features of a hartebeest. Close observation shows that many figures, although having the head and posture of a hartebeest, have front legs that are too short or thin and thighs that are closer to human than animal. Sometimes the legs flex outwards at the knee, echoing the human joint rather than turning inwards like the hartebeest. These part-human/part-hartebeest figures are the religious specialists who have succeeded in harnessing hartebeest potency.

A particularly characteristic feature of Waterberg rock art is a male figure in the arms raised dancing posture, but who is also carrying a bow and arrows. These men are almost never depicted shooting animals and we do not believe that they are hunting – at least they are not hunting meat. The work of Edward Eastwood has shown that these are dancers carefully controlling the level of potency being harnessed. The San say that when potency enters the body it is like being shot with an arrow. One feels tabbing pains in the chest and then, if the potency is sufficient, one will ultimately collapse. Many San groups use the same word for collapsing in trance as for dying, only that in trance death one hopes later to return to life. Too much potency, however, can lead to full death and in this case the dancer will never recover consciousness. Dancers are therefore always negotiating a dangerous balance with their level of potency. They wish to take on enough potency to project their spirit far into the other world, but they do not wish to take on so much potency that they do not return. We believe that the Waterberg dancers are holding arrows because the artists wanted to show them controlling their level of potency; usually the figures hold three or four arrows of potency, just enough to carry one to the spirit world but not so much that one will never come back.

The Waterberg is an area where San rock art remains little studied. New sites are coming to light all the time and though we recognise many features, there remain intriguing painted details that we still do not fully understand. Fortunately we do not have to guess at the meaning of these details – if we did we would almost certainly be proven wrong. The answers lie in deeper study of San beliefs and practices. A major project is now being initiated by the Rock Art Research Institute and the Waterberg International Biosphere project which aims to record and analyse rock art from throughout the Waterberg. Our work at Goudrivier forms part of this project.

The Rock Art of Herders

A small number of sites in the Waterberg have a distinctive kind of rock art that we believe was made by the Khoekhoe herders who moved through the area nearly two thousand years ago. Unlike the human and animal forms of San art, this is an art of simple geometric forms such as circles, rayed circles, oblongs and parallel lines. It is executed by finger in contrast with the fine brush-work of San art. At certain sites it is clear that handprints were a part of the herder art tradition, because they are found intricately associated with finger painted geometric designs. At other sites handprints occur without this association, and alongside San art. These handprints might still have been made by herders but it hard to be confident of this. I feel more confident in saying that handprints were made as part of the process of San – Herder interaction; whether one or both sides of this interaction made the handprints has still to be adequately demonstrated.

Research into herder rock art is still in its infancy. It is one of my current topics for research. We have limited knowledge at present as to what the art depicts and why it was made. There is a strong association between herder rock art and water. I suspect that the key to unlocking herder art lies in that association, along with study of art in the area from which herder art originated – central Africa. Though I have not yet argued this in press, I believe that the art relates to initiation.

The Rock Art of Iron Age farmers

As well as the celebrated rock art of the San, the Northern Province is also unusually rich in rock art belonging to farmer peoples. Farmer art is confined to the more remote hill areas of the province. The Waterberg is one of the main areas in which one can view this spectacular later rock art. Its painters were the ancestors of the Pedi and other groups of Northern Sotho-speakers who, in the past, shared a common cultural heritage.

The farmer rock art is easily distinguished from San art both by its colour and by its form. It is predominantly white and was applied by finger (in contrast to the brushwork paintings of the San). The choice of colour has led to the art becoming known popularly as 'late white' rock art.

Farmer art falls into an earlier and a later period. The early art depicts a range of wild animals but is dominated by images of giraffe. My recent research has demonstrated a link between this art and traditional initiation practices. It seems that this art has been practised for nearly a thousand years. Included hill areas such as the Waterberg provided perfect venues for the lengthy and secretive initiation ceremonies of farmer groups in the pre-contact period.

With the difaqane and then the coming of whites farmers to the lands around the Waterberg in the nineteenth century, life changed dramatically for the Northern Sotho. Taxes, wars and land clearances left many homeless and destitute. At this time whole communities fled to hill areas like the Waterberg for safety. Many of the old initiation sites became refuge houses at this time. The rock art reflects these changes.

The later art is dominated by depictions of steam trains, soldiers, settlers and guns. The images capture people's tragedy, but they were intended to be more than a mere historical record. They poke fun at the troublesome new intruders and, through this pointed humour, they served to overcome some of the unbearable stresses of the times. The art marks the very origins of protest art in South Africa – ordinary people protesting their right to land and self-determination, fighting the destruction of their traditional structures and cultural values.

igments

an art and herder art is principally executed in a range of red and orange tones. These pigments were produced by grinding different colours of naturally occurring ochre. Ochre deposits occur in many parts of the Waterberg. The San would have known the best places to find different coloured ochre, and at times they would have dug to uncover deeper deposits of the best quality pigments. Small ochre liggings can be found around Melkriver. Once collected the ochre would have been finely ground and mixed with a binding agent such as blood, dassie urine, alumen or tree sap. This process created a fine pigment that was able to penetrate and bond within the fabric of the Waterberg sandstones. Observing with a microscope, one can see how the paint has fused so as to become part of the rock-face itself. In this way the pigment has been able to survive over hundreds of years, sometimes in quite exposed situations.

The San also, on occasion, used white and black. The white comes from natural riverine clays and/or white ash. This white pigment survives far less well than the red and yellows. Often one finds a mere void where white pigment used to be. Arrows for example sometimes have a base shaft and tip in red, but the long white neck shaft that once joined them has now gone. The white pigment fails to bond as effectively to the rock-surface and is more easily dissolved by water. Black pigment is most often made from charcoal; this can be even more fugitive than white.

Northern Sotho art is made solely in thick white pigment from riverine clay. The same pigment was used in the past, and in a few places is still used today, to whitewash houses. This pigment is not found as finely by the Northern Sotho as it was by the San and is not mixed with the same complex binding media. Water is the most common binding agent used. Northern Sotho art is therefore the most easily removed of the three painting traditions. It smudges when touched and it washes off rapidly when exposed to direct or seeping water. Even though this is the youngest of the art traditions, this may be the first one that we will lose.

onservation

It is crucial that rock art specialists and land owners work together to ensure the long-term conservation of the Waterberg's rock art heritage.

Every rock art site in South Africa is automatically protected by law. Any act that damages, detaches, alters or destroys rock art is a criminal offence and can carry a fine of up to one million rands and/or three years in prison. This is a fine legislative framework for protecting rock art but, alas, this means little in the absence of any means of enforcement. With more than 15,000 rock art sites across South

frica it is impossible effectively to guard each one; by the time damage is noticed the culprit is usually long gone. In practice, therefore, it is almost entirely up to landowners to see that the rock art on their land is protected. This seems likely to remain the situation for the foreseeable future. Thankfully most landowners recognise this great responsibility; in general, sites on private land are better managed than public sites.

The Rock Art Research Institute and the organisation ROCUSTOS are dedicated to helping landowners to conserve rock art by offering advice and assistance where it is needed. In our experience the best rock art management policy is almost always that which involves the least interference to both the art and the site.

The most common cause of damage is by visitors. People touch the art (in many cases unwittingly), scratch it, sometimes they throw water over it or write graffiti upon it. Experience has shown that even the most educated of visitors may willfully damage rock art. Indeed it is so difficult to judge the way people will behave at rock art sites, that we now recommend that managers always send a guide with visitors and that the guide keeps the full visiting group with him/her at all times. It also seems that the more information people are given about rock art, the more they appreciate it, and the less likely they are to damage it.

Natural threats are generally more easy to control. Animals, especially cows, may use rock surface (including painted one) as rubbing places. This can have rapid and devastating effects upon rock art. Fires can also cause massive rock flaking within a shelter. It is best not to allow fires in any painted shelter. Veld fires should, if at all possible, be kept out of painted shelters by controlling vegetation growth around the shelter. The activities of mud wasps, termites, the creeping roots of fig trees, roosting birds and urinating dassies may on occasion also need to be controlled.

With more complex conservation problems such as removing old graffiti, controlling flaking, controlling water or salt damage, repairing fire damage and so on, a rock art conservation specialist should be called in. The Rock Art Research Institute has a field team dedicated to the recording and conservation of rock art. The team is permanently on call to advise and assist landowners in all provinces, be it with new finds, serious conservation problems, or questions of interpretation and how to manage visitor access.

THE ROCK PAINTINGS OF WITVINGER NATURE RESERVE

Edward B. Eastwood, Palaeo-Art Field Services

The Study Area

Witvinger Nature Reserve consists of five properties or portions thereof: Holmesleigh, Bultfontein, Aroonfontein, Rietfontein and Doringfontein (Figure 1). It lies in the southern African Savanna Biome and is categorised as Waterberg Moist Mountain Bushveld (Low & Rebelo 1998:22). The topography of the reserve is rugged and formed by high granite intrusions.

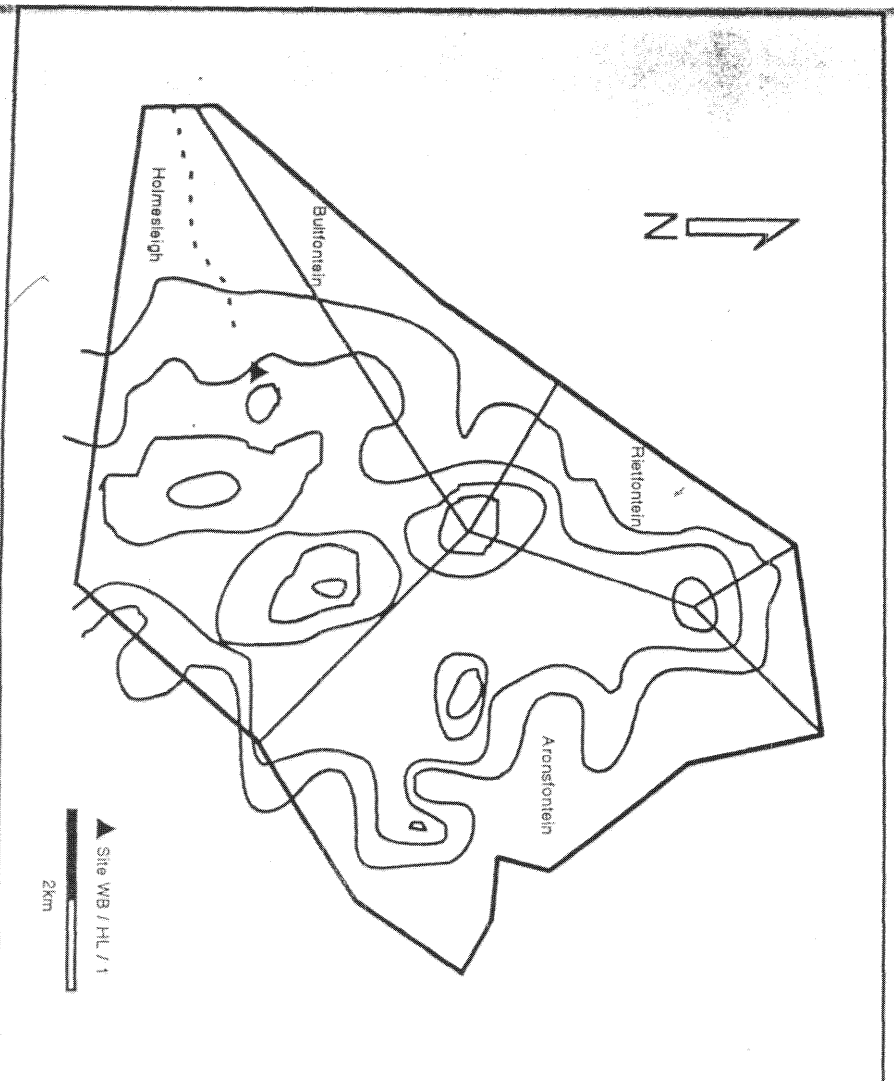


Figure 1. Sketch map of Witvinger Nature Reserve showing position of Site WB:HL/1

Vivinger 1 (Site WB/HL/1)

ite WB/HL/1 is situated in the southern part of the reserve high up below a prominent krantz (Figure). It is surrounded by thick vegetation consisting of *Commiphora marlothii*, *Ficus thomningi*, *Croton ratisimus*, *Urea tenax*, *Grewia* spp. *Pappaea capensis*, *Euphorbia ingens* and *Kirkia wilmsii*.

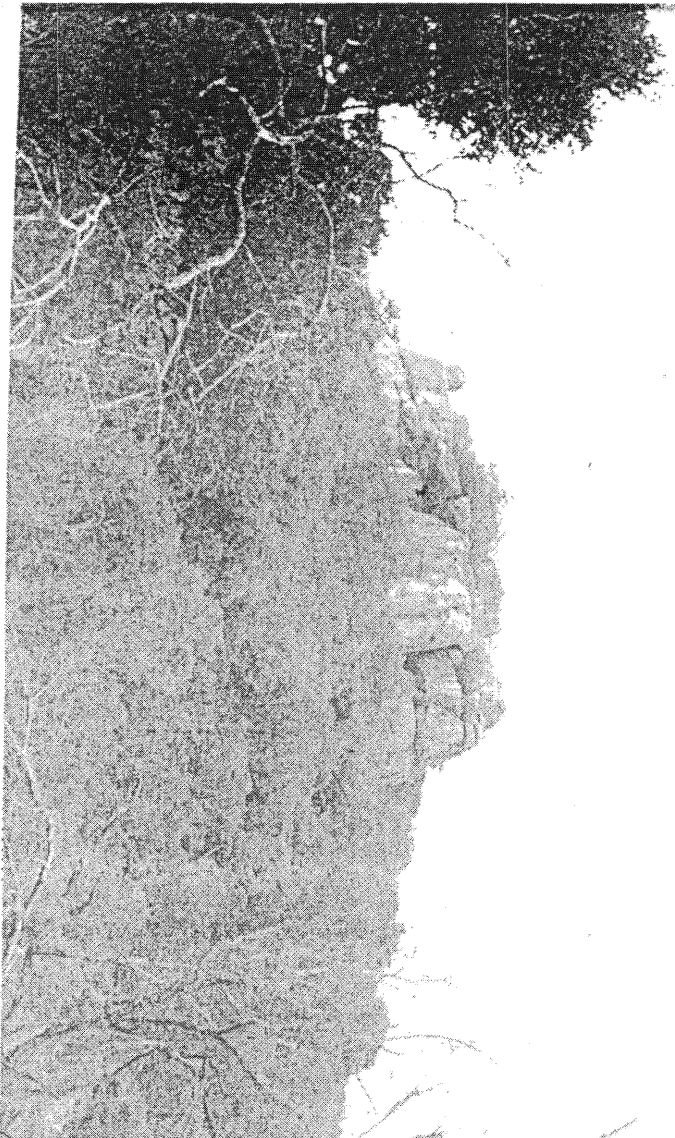


Figure 2. Photograph of Site WB/HL/1

Recording Methods

The site location was noted using a GPS and was marked on a 1:50 000 topographical survey map.

The first objective was to trace selected paintings where this was possible. Groups of images were located panel numbers to facilitate a methodical approach to the task of recording (see Figure 3). Fifty micron, clear plastic film was then placed over the paintings and they were traced using fine-tipped, indelible marking pens. These tracings were annotated with remarks on colour, fading out, panel number, cluster number, date of recording and other relevant information needed to produce accurate redrawings.

After each panel was traced, all the images and whole panels were photographed with a Pentax MX camera. Prints were taken using Fujicolor 100 ISO. In addition, the site was photographed from a distance.

Redrawings were done on architects drawing film. A standard centimetre scale and an archival stamp was affixed to each. Redrawings were completed in the offices of Palaeo-Art Field Services.

Photographic prints were used while redrawing to check details such as fading, colour etc.

When on-site recording had been completed, standard Palaeo-Art Field Services data forms were filled. These forms include such information as site type, orientation, surface artefacts, nature of archaeological deposit, number of paintings and descriptions of colour, painting techniques, context and associations between paintings, type of environmental agents causing damage and human impact. The data were filed in a computerised database. The data has also been passed on to the Rock Art Research Institute where they keep records of rock art sites in the Waterberg region.

Abbreviated Data Sheet

Site name:	Witvinger 1
Reference number:	WB/HL/1
GPS reading (Garmin 12):	24.01.557S, 029.00.528E
Altitude:	1438 m
Property:	Holmesleigh
Site Type:	Shelter
Aspect:	South
Dimensions:	Length: 36 m
	Depth: 15 m
	Height: 7 m
Environmental damage:	Seepage, water runoff, exfoliation, salt deposits
Human impact:	None
Deposit:	Shallow
Surface artefacts:	LSA microliths - cores and flakes; indeterminate pot sherds; red ochre crayon
Rock Art Paintings:	
Humans:	Indeterminate: 62
	Males: 1
Animals:	Indeterminate: 17
	Antelope: indeterminate: 10
	Sable/roan: 1
	Elephant: 2
	Wavy lines: 6
Techniques:	Monochromes, superposition
Pigment colours:	Yellow, red, black, white
Date:	January/February 2001
Recorded by:	Palaeo-Art Field Services

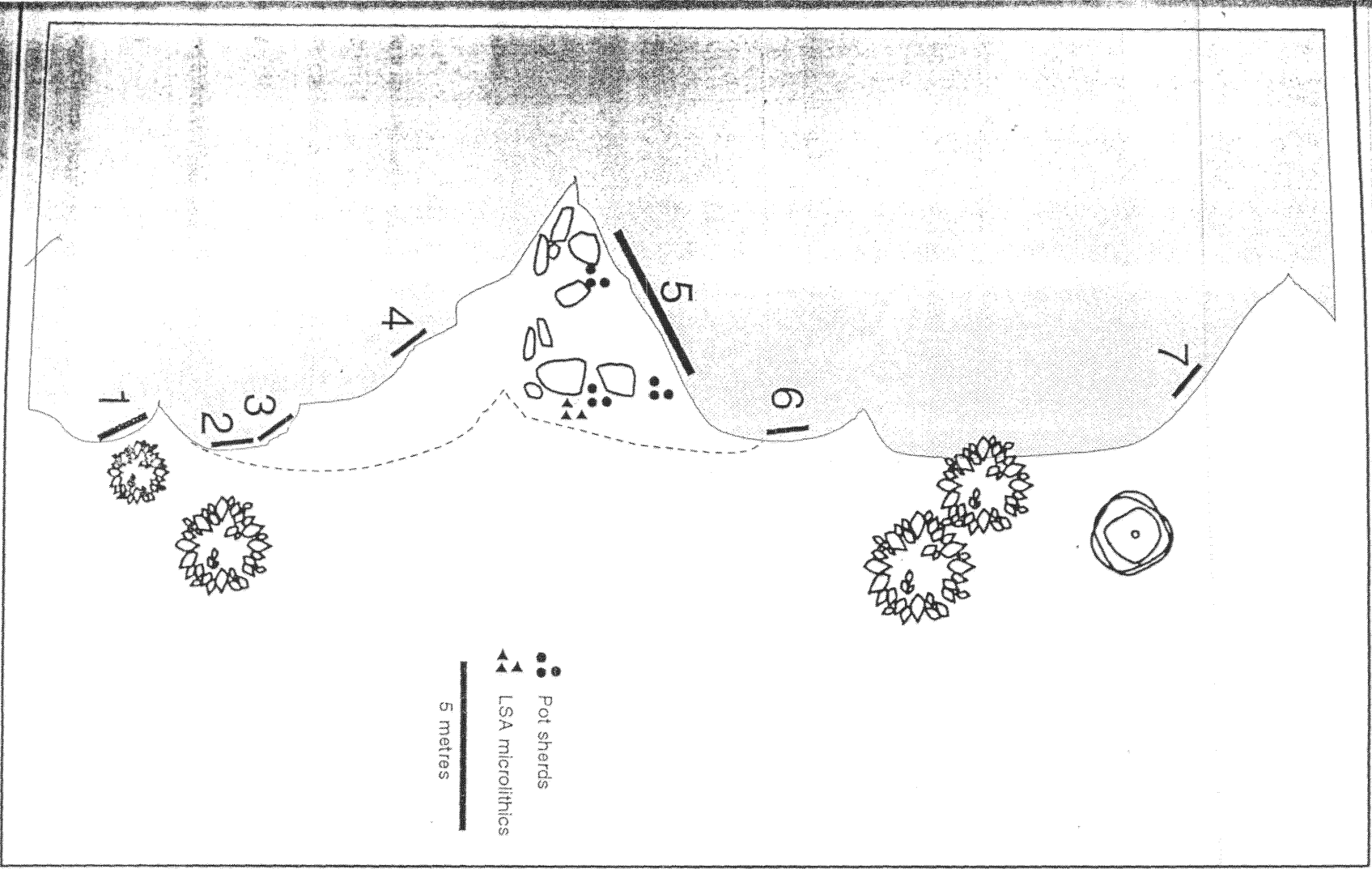


Figure 3. Sketch plan of Site WB/HL/1 showing panel positions

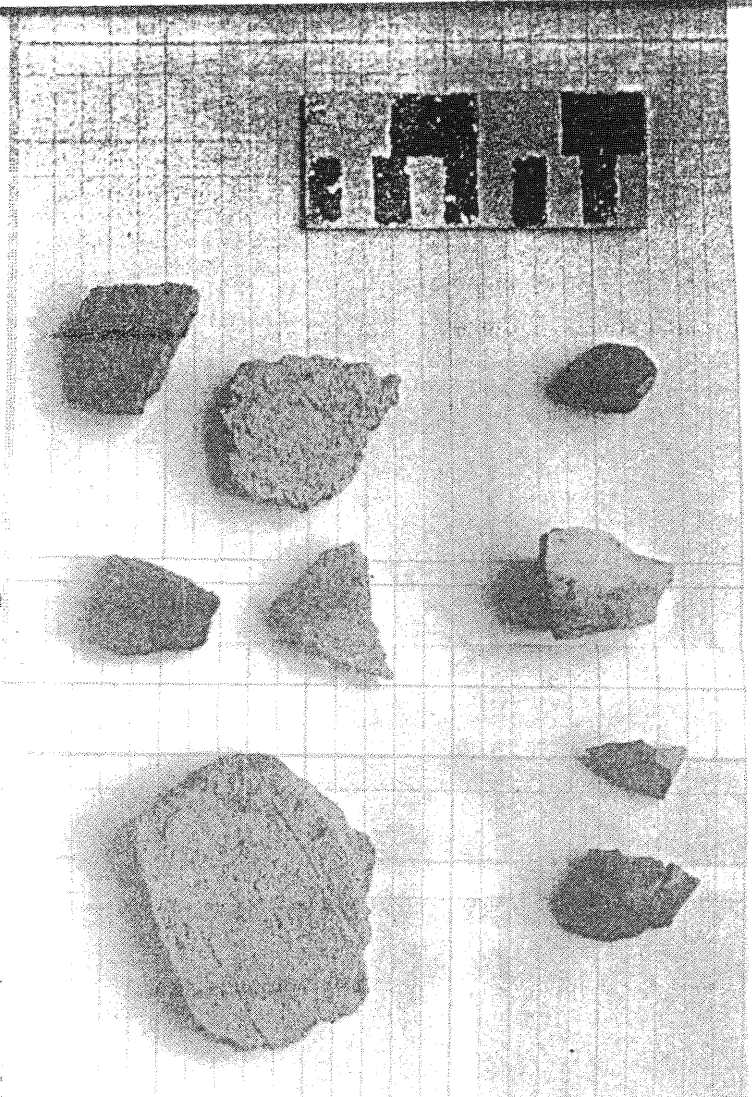


Figure 4. Surface artefacts: clay pot sherds, Late Stone Age microlithic debris and a piece of red ochre

Paintings

panels shown in Figure 3 contain the following breakdown of imagery and episodes. An episode refers to a specific set or cluster of paintings made at a particular time. When one episode is superimposed upon another the 'styles' of painting and subject matter are usually different, and it is therefore possible to determine a sequence of painted episodes.

panel 1

By one indeterminate animal in red pigment is depicted here.

panel 2

this significant cluster of paintings there are 12 indeterminate human figures, an indeterminate animal and a sable or roan antelope. The sable/roan depiction once had a white belly but the pigment is since faded. In this panel there are 2 episodes of painting.



Figure 5. Redrawing of sable/roan antelope, indeterminate animal and human figures.

The stippled figures belong to an earlier episode than the other paintings.

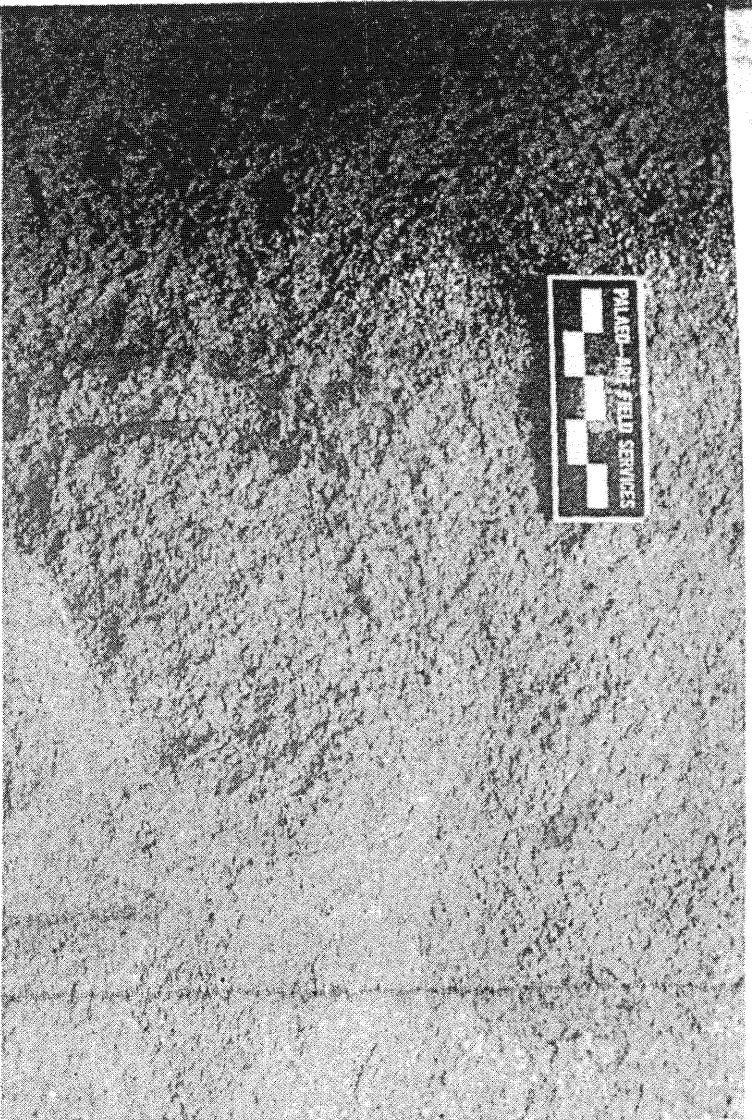


Figure 6. Outline indeterminate antelope in Panel 3.

panel 3

This panel also has two episodes: darker red older paintings and later light red powdery pigmented paintings. The paintings consist of 8 indeterminate humans, an indeterminate animal and 3 indeterminate antelope (for example, see Figure 6).

panel 4

Here, there is a very faint and water-washed earlier episode covered by light red paintings in powdery pigments corresponding to the second episode in Panel 3. Paintings consist of 3 indeterminate humans, an indeterminate animal, and 2 indeterminate antelope. One of the antelope was painted with yellow pigment.

Panel 5

This is a very large and complex panel consisting of at least three episodes. The first episode is very faded and the pigments have run into each other from water runoff. This episode consists of 11 human figures and 5 indeterminate animals in red pigments. The second episode paintings were made with red and brown pigments and consist of 10 human figures (several of the human figures are very large; figure 8), 4 indeterminate animals and an indeterminate antelope. The third and most recent episode consists of 17 human figures, 4 indeterminate figures and an antelope. All the figures were painted in black pigment. A single human figure is portrayed in a bending forward posture which will be discussed under Preliminary interpretations.

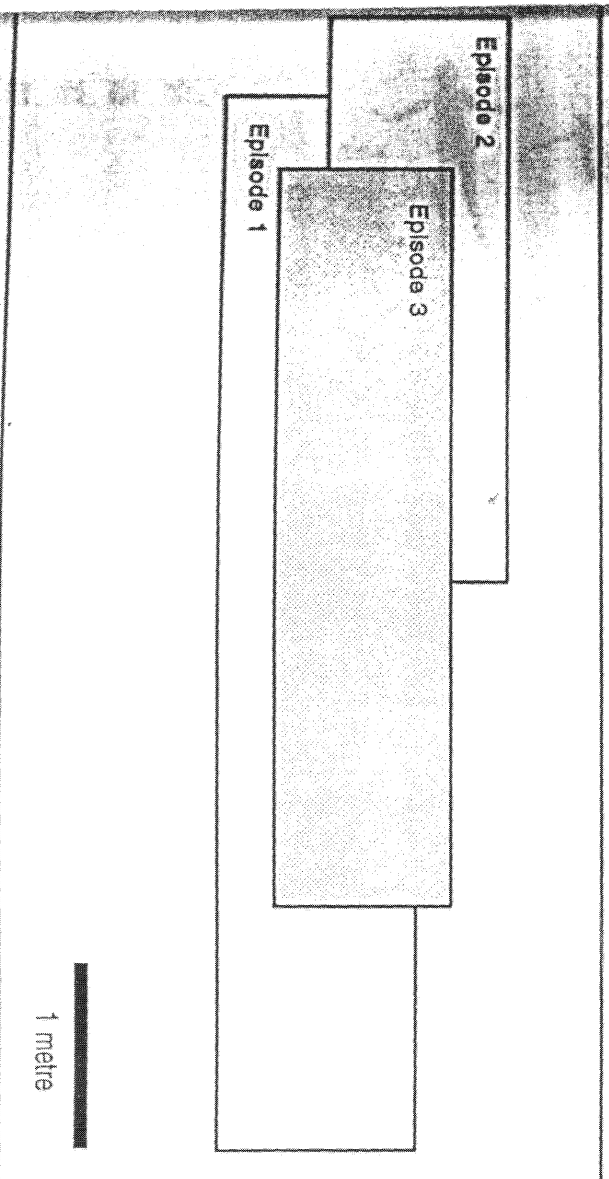


Figure 7. Diagram showing the episodes in Panel 5

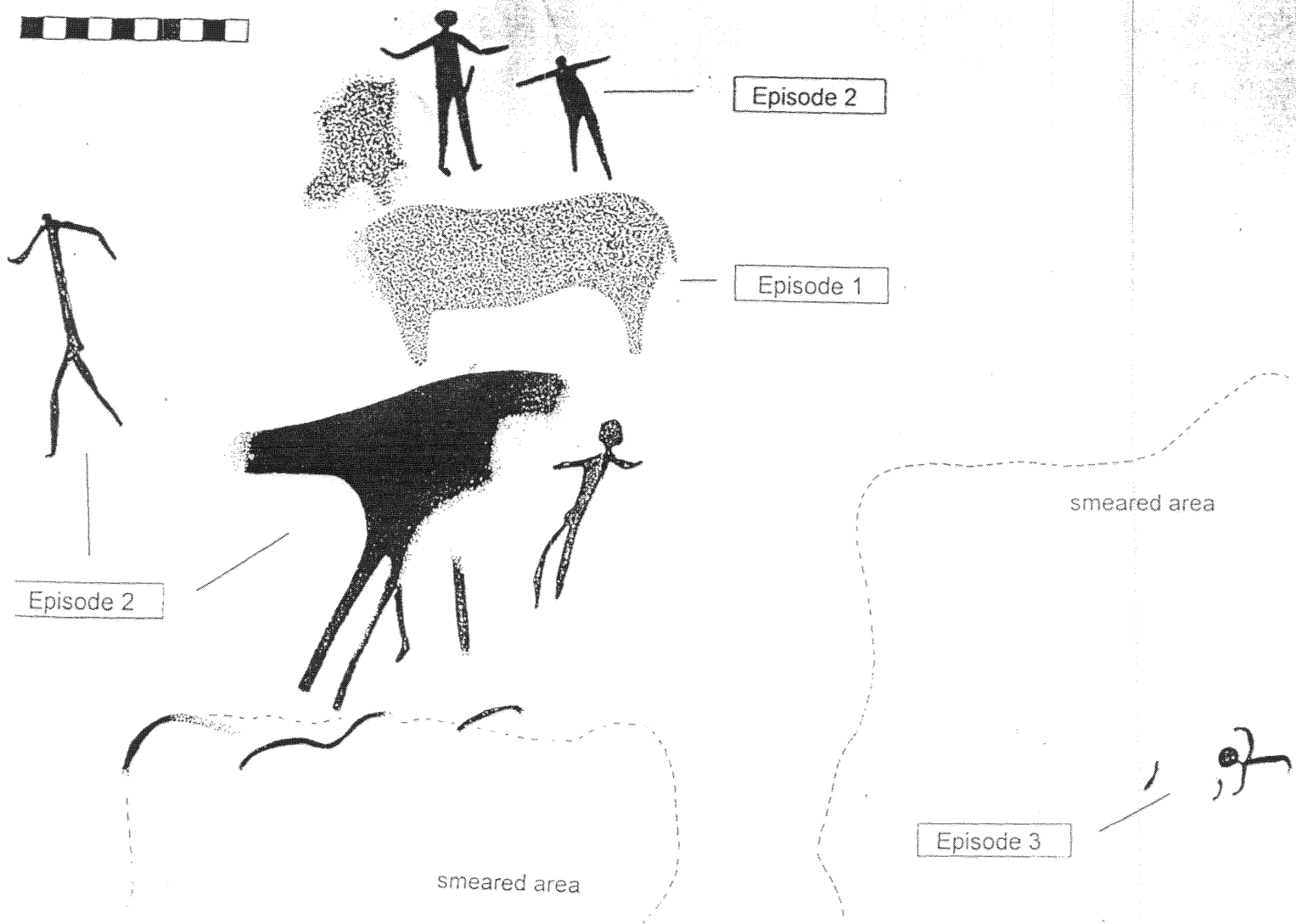


Figure 8. Detail from Panel 5 showing all three episodes. The human figure on lower right is in a bending-forward posture.

panel 6

This isolated panel consists of a single, red indeterminate antelope.

panel 7

This panel consists of two red elephants each with a darker red dorsal line, a human figure holding a bow and arrow, a wavy line which may be the dorsal line of a third elephant, and a white indeterminate antelope. The white painting is a later episode which is superimposed upon the older red paintings.

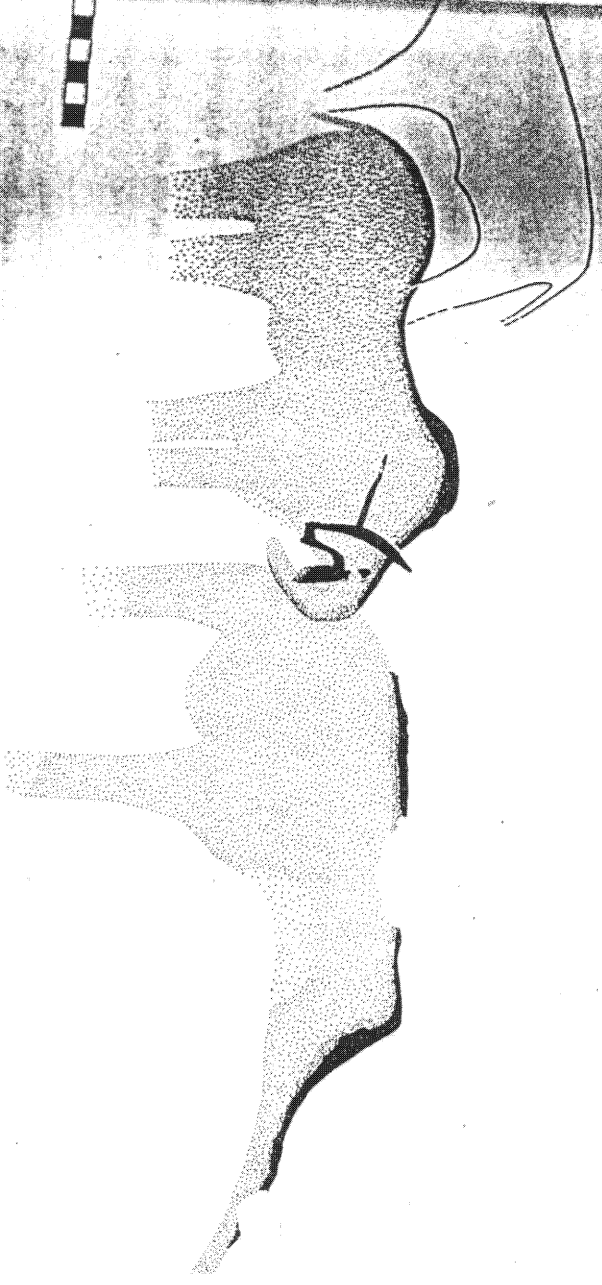


Figure 9. Two elephants with red dorsal lines, a human figure with bow and arrow, and a white indeterminate antelope

Liminary Interpretations

men or San hunter-gatherers once occupied most of southern Africa, and only a few thousand still in their traditional way of life in the most arid and remote areas of Namibia and Botswana. Their art history has been one of dispossession, enslavement, marginalisation and even genocide. In th Africa their art - one of the greatest Stone Age art traditions in the world - is the best reminder have of these aboriginal owners of the land.

rock paintings extend throughout southern and south-central Africa in a great horseshoe arc which ows the mountainous escarpments and rocky outcrops at the edges of the interior where suitable lers for painting are found. Engravings, on the other hand, were either pecked or incised on rocks he central plateaux of South Africa. The painting tradition goes back at least 26 000 years, but most he images you shall see are probably only the recent remnants of this ancient tradition. Some of the ings in the Matopos of Zimbabwe are certainly older than 5 000 years, and some of the Limpopo ley paintings are thought to be well over 1 000 years old. Precise dating techniques have not yet n developed.

ARTISTS

: Bushmen or San lived by gathering veld foods and hunting large game animals or trapping smaller s. Though gender roles were strictly defined they lived in an egalitarian society where men and men had equal status and shared decision-making and child-raising activities.

Women gathered roots, tubers, berries and fruits, a chore often shared by the men. The main role he men was hunting. For this they used small bows and poison-tipped arrows. Animals as large as giraffe could be hunted in this way. An animal was carefully tracked, stalked and shot from close ge with a delicate but carefully-crafted arrow whose shaft was made of a sturdy grass stalk. The son was made either from the juices of various toxic plants, snake venom or from the pupae of the en Lunar Moth. The animal may have been tracked for a whole day before it was disabled and lapsed. It was then dispatched with a spear or assegai. After butchering, the meat was shared ording to certain conventions with all members of the band.

It was an economy that required an intimate knowledge of the bush, and of its animal inhabitants. The people lived so close to nature that they considered animals as kindred beings. Their mythology and folklore reflected their close inter-relationships with the animal domain. Their religion, which was fluid and non-standardised, reflected this interaction between humanity, nature and the supernatural. They also believed in a great God who lived in the eastern sky, and a lesser God in the western sky. Rock paintings and engravings reflect the deepest religious thoughts and ideologies of the Bushmen. Generally, the art was concerned with religious concepts and ritual, rather than with folklore and mythology. The rock art of the Northern Province is very distinctive, with the emphasis on images of people and certain animals.

The Meaning of the Art

Explanations of the meaning of the art have ranged from hunting magic to "art for art's sake" to more complex approaches - that draw on San beliefs - in the last few decades. Studies of the rock paintings, coupled with anthropological knowledge of existing bands of Kalahari hunter-gatherers and historical records of the now extinct Southern San, have enabled scholars to partially decipher the art.

Some of the painted images may tell us about various aspects of the daily life of the San: hunting, gathering, dancing, fishing and so on. They also portray dress, personal adornment, hunting equipment etc., but this does not explain the function or meaning of the depictions.

The art cannot be understood without reference to the culture of the Bush peoples. Although there are many languages and dialects spoken by these hunter-gatherers, and their customs and beliefs vary through time and space, there are common threads. Some of the paintings reflect existing Bushman ideas and beliefs about animals, the rain, gender roles and the trance journeys of shamans.

One of the central themes of the art is that of the medicine or trance dance. This dance facilitates contact between the human and the spirit world, and is substantially the same among different

Bushman groups. Intimately connected to this dance is the idea of supernatural potency. Potency is believed to be present in many animals, in medicine songs and in humans, to whom it was given by the great God. San people say that it resides at the base of the spine and in the lower abdomen where it lies latent until activated by the rhythmic dancing and the singing of medicine songs at a trance-dance. The activated potency is said to 'boil' and rise up the spine to the base of the head inducing deep trance.

During trance the shamans are believed to be able to travel to other realms, cure the sick, control animal herds and bring rain. The importance of this ritual in the past is borne out by explicit rock paintings all over southern Africa.

San attitudes of respect toward animals are evident in the belief that certain animals are powerful carriers of potency. This potency can be harnessed from particular animals by people who can then use it to cure the sick, to contact supernatural powers, to bring game into the range of their poisoned arrows or to fend off dangerous predators like lions. By invoking the potency of the natural forces around them they can transcend their own human limitations. It is respect for the natural domain which informs their artistic tradition. Wherever one looks the panels of rock paintings depict an endless array of potency-filled humans and animals.

Interpreting the paintings of Witvinger 1

A brief interpretative overview has already been provided for the Waterberg region in the introductory section of this report. Only about 100 sites are known in the Waterberg rock art region and until the San images are fully recorded, analysed and interpreted it is difficult to provide a definitive account of Witvinger's San paintings. Despite the deterioration of the paintings there are two features which can be interpreted, namely the human figure bending forward and the elephants with red dorsal lines.

- *The bending-forward posture*

The single painting of a human figure in this posture indicates that the medicine dance is suggested. During the medicine dance participants may bend forward while asking God to give them more potency (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989). The figure depicted in Panel 5 has its arms above its head. In this case it is likely to depict a trancer whose potency is boiling up the spine. When this happens, the pain in the abdomen of the dancer becomes so great that the person is forced to bend over to alleviate the pain (Katz 1982).

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- *Elephants with red dorsal lines*

The Kalahari San say that an elephant has the meat of many different animals - "[t]heres human meat there, and gemsbok meat, carnivores' meat, eland meat, every kind of meat, red, black, and white. It's very fat" (Biesele 1993). All these animals bear supernatural potency, so the elephant itself is an extremely potent being. Fat is also believed to contain potency. The San believe that the elephant resembles a human being, it has breasts like a woman's, they 'bury' their dead under branches, and 'when they run, elephants really get into the swing of it and begin to dance, just like people.' But unlike people, they say, it has two backbones (ibid).

Whether or not the 'two backbones' have anything to do with the red dorsal lines is uncertain, but the paintings do suggest the elephant as a beast of great potency, and in some cases stood for shamans, the 'owners of potency'. Images of elephant are frequent in the Soupansberg and Limpopo-Shashi Confluence Area rock art. They usually have a distinct dorsal stripe which may represent the movement of supernatural energy moving up the spine of trancing shamans (Eastwood 1999). Paintings of elephants in Zimbabwe are considered to represent powerful shamans (Garlake 1989).

The preliminary interpretations thus suggest that the paintings only represent elements of the medicine dance and aspects of supernatural potency. However, when more interpretive data is available from more detailed studies of Waterberg San art, it is possible that the emphases and nuances of interpretation may change.

Recommendations

Although the Wirvinger paintings are scientifically valuable, *at present* it is not recommended that the site be opened to the public for the following reasons:

- There is no tourist infrastructure on Wirvinger Nature Reserve. In other words there are no roads, lodges, laid-out network of walking trails or other tourist facilities. This lack of infrastructure implies that the rock art may be at risk due to lack of on-site supervision. With the lack of facilities there is no staff complement to provide guidance for tourists. This lack of supervision would not bode well for protection of the site.

- Lack of funding for development of nature reserves under management of the Nature Conservation Division means that it is unlikely that development of Wirvinger Nature Reserve will take place at the present time.
- In the meantime, *all* casual visitors to the site should be accompanied by a Nature Conservation official in the interests of protecting the paintings.

However, with this in mind I recommend the following:

- A full survey should be undertaken to determine whether there are other, more suitable rock art sites on the reserve. Such a survey should be undertaken by the Rock Art Research Institute. This institute has its own sources of funding and can supply the manpower to make a thorough and methodical search of the area. I have already contacted the director who will survey the area on request. Contact details are:

Dr Benjamin Smith, Director

Rock Art Research Institute (RARI)

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3

WITS 2050

Tel: 011 717 6044 or 6056

- Should development of the reserve be envisaged, RARI and Northern Province Heritage Services must be consulted on opening Wirvinger rock art site(s) to the public. This will entail securing and protecting site(s), management assessments, impact studies, drawing up a visitor and site management programme, training of guide(s), and monitoring the management programme and monitoring site deterioration over time.

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