

Management Plan: Noka rock art site
Noka Camp
Lapalala Wilderness
Limpopo Province
South Africa

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Management Plan: Noka rock art site

1. Introduction

1.1 Location and Description of site

Noka rock art site is on DOORNLEEGTE 594 LR in the Lapalala Wilderness, in Limpopo Province, about 390 km north of Johannesburg, Gauteng. It is part of the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve in the Waterberg plateau (Figure 1).

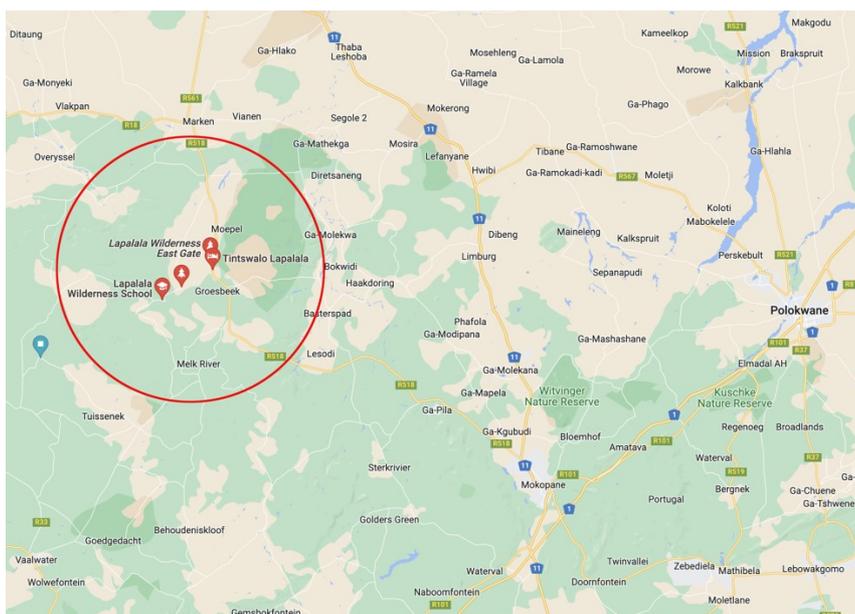


Figure 1. Lapalala Wilderness (circled in red), Limpopo Province

Noka rock art site is a Later Stone Age (LSA) rock painting site located in an east-facing slanted overhang that overlooks the Lephhalala River (Figure 2, Figure 3). The overhang is at the foot of a cliff about 15 m high and is most easily accessed from above, by climbing down from the clifftop.

The overhang is about 12 m wide and 5 m deep. There are at least 50 paintings at the site although there are many fragmentary images, and it is difficult to count every one. The site has other archaeological features, including a few ceramic sherds and flakes of cryptocrystalline silica stone on the surface of the deposit.

The co-ordinates of the site are:

S: -23.90858 (Digital) 23° 54' 30.888" (DMS)

E: 28.34185 (Digital) 28° 20' 30.66" (DMS)

Altitude: 1099 m asl

The paintings can be divided into two main areas (see Addendum B for a detailed description of the rock art):

Area 1

Area 1 has 5 clusters or panels of paintings (Panels A to E) spread across 10 m. Area 1 has the most prominent rock paintings at the site.

Area 2

Area 2 is a small 1 m high overhang at the right-hand (northern) side of the overhang. Two paintings (Panel F) are located on the back wall.

1.2 Ownership and responsibility for the site

The site is on land within the Lapalala Wilderness that is owned and managed by Lepogo Lodges, who have established a 12-bed lodge, Noka Camp, on the land.

1.3 Statement of site significance

The Lapalala Wilderness, located in the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve, is rich in archaeological resources that date back to the past 1000 years (Van der Ryst 1998; Boeyens et al. 2016). Human occupation of the greater Waterberg plateau goes back hundreds of

thousands of years (Wadley 2020). The archaeology within the Lapalala Wilderness indicates that the area was occupied by Later Stone Age (LSA) hunter-gatherers (ancestors of the San/Bushmen) and, later, by different groups of Late Iron Age Bantu-speaking farmers who settled on Melora Hill and Melora Saddle early in the nineteenth century (Boeyens et al. 2016: 3-4, 20-21, 22-29).

Noka rock art site is an LSA rock art site: the paintings were made by LSA hunter-gatherer people (known historically as ‘Bushmen/San’). According to Boeyens et al (2016: 19) the Rock Art Research Institute recorded thirteen rock art sites in the Lapalala Wilderness. Boeyens et al also describe one rock art site that has Later Stone age paintings and Bantu speaking farmer rock art (Site 10 in Boeyens et al. 2016: 63-64, fig. 44).

The rock paintings at Noka rock art site were cultural productions of LSA image-makers. The rock paintings thus have research value, and the archaeological deposit has the potential to provide information about the movements and activities of groups of people who lived in the area before recorded history.

The rock art also has aesthetic value because of the beauty and power of the paintings and the skills and techniques required to create the images on the rock.

The rock art also has educational and touristic value because it is part of southern Africa’s past and gives people insight into the long history of the subcontinent.

1.4 Objectives for opening site to the public

Opening the rock art site to visitors provides an opportunity to inform and educate them about the archaeology of the area. The targeted categories of visitors to the site include guests at the 12-bed Noka Camp as well as other groups of visitors who might visit the site from time to time for educational and training purposes under the auspices of the Lapalala Wilderness Foundation.

The expected number of visitors to the rock art site depends on the occupancy rate of the Noka Camp and the educational activities conducted at Lapalala Wilderness Schools.

1.5 Objectives of management plan

This management plan has been developed to enable visitors to the Noka rock art site to visit the site in a controlled manner and thus protect the site from damage and consequent loss of its significance, cultural value and research potential.

1.6 Revision of Plan

Management at Lapalala Wilderness and Lepogo Lodges have made a commitment to employ a rock art specialist to review and revise this management plan at least every five years.

1.7 Potential impact on rock art and archaeological resources of opening site to public

The opening of the site to the public brings with it the potential for human damage to the rock paintings and the other archaeological contexts, i.e. the deposit at the site. There is the risk of people damaging the rock paintings by touching, wetting or drawing on them. People could disturb the archaeological deposit by picking up and removing artefacts from the site.

This management plan is intended to set up a structure and establish procedures to prevent any damage to the site by regulating and controlling visitation.

2 Recording & Research

2.1 Objectives of recording and research

The aim of recording and researching the Noka archaeological site is to establish a baseline of data and information for monitoring the site against changes in future. Recording includes documentation and assessment of the weathering processes (mechanical and chemical) at the

site. This includes the deposit in the ground and the rock paintings on the rocks. The rock art was extensively recorded (Addenda B & C).

Preliminary research on the rock art was also carried out (see Addenda B & C)

2.2 Recording of rock art

The rock art at Noka was recorded in November 2018 by an accredited rock art specialist, Jeremy Hollmann. The documentation includes comprehensive and detailed photographs of the rock paintings, including enhancements as well as a detailed condition assessment (Addenda B & C). The results of the recording are presented in a January 2019 report commissioned by NuLeaf Planning & Environmental and entitled *Guide to the rock art of Noka rock art site*.

Photographic monitoring of the rock art must be carried out once a year by a trained guide and by a specialist every two years. The monitoring photographs should be taken in RAW format with a high-resolution digital camera (each photo should be about 20 mb in size and about 5616 x 3744 pixels) mounted on a tripod. The camera operator must replicate each of the following photographs contained in Addendum B: i.e. figures 14, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 35, 38 & 39. Lepogo Lodges must store the digital photographs on a labelled external hard drive. The hard drive and the photographs on it must be kept in a safe place that is administered by Lapalala Wilderness.

2.3 Research into the archaeology of the rock art site

A literature search turned up no published research on the Noka rock art site. This finding is supported by Boeyens et al (2016: 49) who state that “No archaeological excavations have been done at the site”. Rock art researchers Bert Woodhouse and Neil Lee visited the site in 1982 and referred to it as *Doornleegte*. The Rock Art Research Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand has visited the site periodically since 1986 (Site number RSA DOO1).

The site is mentioned in a Cultural Heritage Assessment by Boeyens et al. (2016: Site 1, pp. 49-50) who note that the flat sandy floor “most probably still contains substantial Later Stone Age deposits” that have not been excavated. The floor of the site seems stable and does not appear to be threatened by any natural factors, such as the action of water that would disturb the deposit by causing it to erode. There are fragments of ceramics in the deposit, none of which had features that would enable them to be further identified. The ceramics could be associated with various groups of people including hunter-gatherers and members of later farming communities.

There are flakes of cryptocrystalline silica (CCS) material lightly scattered along the dripline. These were probably carried into the site and used as tools such as scrapers, most likely by LSA hunter-gatherers.

In my opinion, the deposit would not be threatened by supervised visitation as the underlying archaeological strata are capped by the uppermost layer of naturally occurring sand and gravel.

The condition of the deposit should be monitored for any signs of disturbance or damage. If any threats are detected the site should be closed to visitation immediately and an accredited archaeologist should inspect the damage and to make recommendations as to what to do about the problem.

2.4 Research into history and indigenous knowledge of the site

There is no literature or local (indigenous) knowledge about the site specifically. However, the Waterberg area has been inhabited over hundreds of thousands of years (Wadley 2020). There are traces of Early stone Age (ESA), Middle Stone Age (MSA) and Later Stone Age (LSA) in the area. There are several other LSA rock art sites in the Lapalala Wilderness some

of which can be viewed on the African Rock art Digital Archive (Boeyens et al. 2016: 19; <http://www.sarada.co.za/#/library/Lapalala/images/>).

3 Site Management

3.1 Objectives of site management

The main objective is to enable site visitation while preserving the archaeological context (the rock paintings and the deposit).

3.2 Site vegetation and firebreak

The site is bordered by small shrubs, succulents and aloes, but these plants are at least 2 metres from the painted surfaces and pose no threat. There are no other natural threats present at the site. Therefore, no further action needs to be taken to avoid damage to the site by vegetation and fires.

3.3 Site infrastructure – existing infrastructure and that required for accessing the site:

3.3.1 *Existing infrastructure*

There is no infrastructure at the site.

3.3.2 *Access*

Noka rock art site is currently closed to visitors. If the site is opened to visitation an adequately trained and responsible employee of Noka Camp would accompany any visitors to the rock art site. The site is an overhang at the foot of a 15 m cliff. It cannot be seen from above. It is unlikely that a visitor would be able to find the site without a guide.

3.3.3 *Visitor control infrastructure*

Visitors can only gain access to the site from the Noka Camp as the lodge itself is located on top of the cliffs above the rock art site. Access to the site from below is extremely difficult because the steep terrain and the dense, thorny vegetation.

Lepogo Lodges has complete control over visitor access. Only guests and approved visitors would be granted access to the rock art site. It is recommended that a maximum of five visitors and one custodian be inside the rock art site at a time. This limit is to protect the integrity of the deposit from the impact of human foot traffic which can disturb the deposit and also raise dust, which settles on the paintings and forms a permanent opaque layer over them. The restriction of visitor numbers prevents crowding and the possibility of accidents and accidental damage to the site.

It is proposed that visitors access the site from Noka Camp. There is a pathway from the camp to the cliff top above the Noka rock art site. Visitors would descend from the cliff top down to the head of the gully south of the Noka rock art site by means of a spiral staircase (see Addendum A). From the base of the staircase visitors follow a 30 m long stepped path with a gradient of approximately 1:3 downhill to the southern edge of the site.

The proposed spiral staircase is about 30 m uphill and around the corner from the site (see Addendum A). The infrastructure is thus invisible once inside the site. The path ends at a tumble of rocks at the side of the shelter and is therefore not part of the site itself (Figure 8).

The overhang floor is mostly level but closer to the paintings there are small boulders embedded in the ground. These act as a physical and psychological barrier to keep visitors at a safe distance from the rock art. At this point there seems to be no need to cover the deposit to prevent disturbance by visitors and to prevent damage to the rock art by dust raised by visitors.

In keeping with the ethos of Lapalala Wilderness a low-key approach is favoured so there would be no signage or other infrastructure at the site. Information would be made available in other ways (see Education infrastructure, below).

Toilet facilities are available at Noka Camp.

3.3.4 *Education infrastructure*

As part of this understated approach no educational material would be displayed in the form of storyboards, etc. at the site. Displays would intrude on visitors' experience of a wellpreserved and untouched rock art site. Instead, a detailed analysis of the paintings at the site could be provided in the form of a booklet and display at Noka Camp.

Visitors to the site would be informed verbally of the etiquette to be followed at the site before undertaking the visit.

Management at Noka Camp is responsible for keeping a visitors' book to record the particulars of each visit to the site. This record would include the names and addresses of the visitors and the date of their visit. It would also provide visitors with the opportunity to write down their comments about their visit to the site.

3.3.5 *Maintenance of site infrastructure*

There is no infrastructure planned for the site itself. The spiral staircase and path down to the site are outside the site. Both the staircase and the stepped pathway would require periodic maintenance by Lepogo Lodges to remove weeds and to trim or remove other vegetation, weathering, erosion, and to ensure visitor safety.

3.3.6 *Permit requirements*

The access measures planned for the rock art site include a spiral staircase that would enable visitors to negotiate the 3 m drop from the top of the cliff to the head of the gully south of the Noka rock art site. From the bottom of the staircase a 30 m long pathway down to the site is planned. These developments are not at the site itself, nor do they impact on the view into or out of the site. Nevertheless, SAHRA has requested a permit in terms of Section 35 of the proposed developments (the spiral staircase and path) will require a permit from SAHRA.

3.4 *Training of staff*

Currently, three guides at Lapalala Wilderness have been trained to accompany visitors to Mdoni rock art site. The training comprises observing the etiquette to be followed by visitors:

- Do not touch the art with your hands or any object (e.g. a stick). The fats and oils in your hands and other parts of your body hasten the decay of the art and contaminate it for any dating techniques and chemical analysis.
- Never throw water or any other liquid over the images. It rapidly destroys the art and it is illegal.
- Avoid stirring up dust from the shelter floor. This dust settles on the art and bonds with water and other substances to form an opaque crust over the paintings.
- Never remove any stone tools or other artefacts from rock art sites. You may think that no one would miss a single artefact but if many people do the same, the sites would be destroyed. Removing artefacts without a permit is illegal in terms of Section 35 of the NHRA.
- Follow the wilderness motto of "Leave nothing but your footsteps behind".
- Damaging the rock art is illegal in terms of Section 35 of the NHRA. If you see people damaging the art, intervene. If they persist then contact management or the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA).

Acknowledgement: Lewis-Williams and Blundell (1998).

Further training includes reading, understanding and recounting the images and ideas contained in Addendum B *Guide to the Noka Rock art, Lapalala Wilderness*. Management have compiled a shorter, five-page brochure for visitors that is based on Addendum B, entitled *Guide to The Rock Art at Lapalala* (Addendum D).

3.5 Consultation with neighbours

Lapalala Wilderness liaises and consults extensively with neighbouring communities, reserves and other landowners. The opening of Noka rock art site to visitors is an internal development that would not have any impact on its neighbours.

3.6 Conservation requirements/interventions

Weathering of the rock art by non-human processes such as mechanical and chemical weathering are complex and largely beyond human control. Beyond these processes there are no other, specific problems regarding the rock paintings at Noka. The site is free of graffiti.

4 Monitoring

4.1 Objectives of monitoring

Monitoring of the condition of the *rock paintings* needs to be carried out to detect weathering and any human impact such as graffiti.

Monitoring of the *archaeological deposit* needs to be carried out for water and wind erosion and by human disturbance.

4.2 Monitoring site maintenance

There is no infrastructure at the site. Lepogo Lodges is responsible for managing and maintaining the proposed infrastructure i.e. the proposed spiral staircase and the pathway to the rock art site.

4.3 Monitoring visitor experience

Lepogo Lodges is responsible for keeping the sites and adjacent infrastructure safe and clean so that visitors can enjoy the site in an unspoilt condition.

Visitor experiences must be monitored by reading the visitors book and the comments that visitors have made.

4.4 Monitoring impact of visitors on archaeological and rock art resources

The state of conservation of archaeological and rock art resources must be monitored. A baseline condition assessment carried out in 2018 by Jeremy Hollmann (Addendum B; Hollmann 2019). A follow up photographic assessment needs to be carried out in 2023

On-the-spot monitoring can be carried out on every visit by the custodian who is accompanying visitors to the site.

Specialist monitoring by a rock art specialist is required to check on weathering and documentation of the paintings every two years, preferably in conjunction with the Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority.

Should the condition of the site remain stable the requirement for specialist monitoring could be changed to one specialist visit every 5 years. However, the management of Noka Camp should immediately inform Lapalala Wilderness, SAHRA and the Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority and bring in specialist assistance in the event of any sudden changes to the paintings, the deposit or the rock surfaces.

Lepogo Lodge is responsible for maintaining a visitor's book for the rock art site in which the names, addresses and comments of visitors is recorded. Lepogo Lodges must share this

information with SAHRA and the management of Lapalala Wilderness, who would then pass this on to the Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority.

5 Visitor experience & Interpretation

5.1 Objectives for visitor experience and interpretation

The primary objective is for visitors to experience, appreciate and understand the rock art at the Noka rock art site.

5.2 Viewing opportunities

Guests at the Noka Camp would be offered the opportunity to undertake a supervised visit to the Noka rock art site;

Attendees of the Lapalala Wilderness School would also have the opportunity to visit the Noka rock art site;

On the invitation of Lapalala Wilderness or Noka Camp management, other groups of interested parties, e.g. archaeology (and other) students would be able to visit the Noka rock art site.

5.3 Interpretation and application of rock art and archaeological assessments

An in-depth discussion and interpretation of the Noka rock art was compiled by an accredited rock art specialist, Dr Jeremy Hollmann in 2018 (Addenda B & C). This document forms the basis of the pamphlet produced by Lepogo Lodges (Addendum D).

5.4 Education and Awareness – interpretive material

Interpretive material is made available to staff and guests in the form of an illustrated pamphlet/booklet (see 5.3, Addendum D).

5.5 Guides

Guides at Lapalala Wilderness are provided with training in the custodial responsibilities required to control visitor behaviour and activities at the rock art site and on the walk to and from the site. They are also trained in interpretation based on the information given in Addendum D *Guide to the rock art of Lapalala*. For special interest groups a rock art specialist could be engaged for the group's visit to the site.

6 Maintenance & Management budget

Lepogo Lodges is responsible for budgeting for monitoring, maintenance and management activities concerned with the Noka rock art site. Lepogo Lodges will provide and maintain the infrastructure, i.e. the spiral staircase and the pathway to the rock art site.

References

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Addendum A: Report on Access Routes to Noka Rock Art Site, Lapalala Wilderness

Introduction

Jeremy Hollmann was appointed by Glenn Phillips, Chief Executive Officer of Lapalala Wilderness to recommend access routes to two rock art sites in the Lapalala Wilderness, Noka and Mdoni. Fieldwork was carried out at the two sites on 23 February 2022. The recommendations presented in this report follow the precepts of South African heritage legislation, especially those of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) Act 25 of 1999. This legislation lays down general principles for heritage resources management in the country and establishes an integrated system for the management of these resources.

1. Scope of the Study

The aim of the study is to identify and access routes for visitors to Noka rock art site at Noka Camp, in the Lapalala Wilderness, Limpopo Province.

1.1 Legislative Context

The identification, evaluation and assessment of any cultural heritage site, artefact or find in the South African context is required and governed by National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) Act 25 of 1999. The NHRA stipulates that cultural heritage resources may not be disturbed without authorization from the relevant heritage authority.

1.2 Terminology and Abbreviations

1.2.1 Archaeological resources

These include:

- i. material remains resulting from human activity which are in a state of disuse and are in or on land and which are older than 100 years including artefacts, human and hominid remains and artificial features and structures (NHRA s2(ii)(a));
- ii. rock art, being any form of painting, engraving or other graphic representation on a fixed rock surface or loose rock or stone, which was executed by human agency and which is older than 100 years, including any area within 10m of such representation (NHRA s2(ii)(b));
- iii. wrecks, being any vessel or aircraft, or any part thereof which was wrecked in South Africa, whether on land, in the internal waters, the territorial waters or in the maritime culture zone of the republic as defined in the Maritimes Zones Act, and any cargo, debris or artefacts found or associated therewith, which is older than 60 years or which SAHRA considers to be worthy of conservation (NHRA s2(ii)(c));
- iv. features, structures and artefacts associated with military history which are older than 75 years and the site on which they are found (NHRA s2(ii)(d)).

1.2.2 Cultural significance

This means aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, linguistic or technological value or significance (NHRA s2(vi)).

1.2.3 Development

This means any physical intervention, excavation, or action, other than those caused by natural forces, which may in the opinion of the heritage authority in any way result in a change to the nature, appearance or physical nature of a place or influence its stability and future well-being, including:

- i. construction, alteration, demolition, removal or change in use of a place or a structure at a place (NHRA s2(viii)(a));
- ii. carrying out any works on or over or under a place (NHRA s2(viii)(b));

- iii. subdivision or consolidation of land comprising a place, including the structures or airspace of a place (NHRA s2(viii)(c));
- iv. constructing or putting up for display signs or boards (NHRA s2(viii)(d));
- v. any change to the natural or existing condition or topography of land (NHRA s2(viii)(e)); and
- vi. any removal or destruction of trees, or removal of vegetation or topsoil (NHRA s2(viii)(f)).

1.2.4 Heritage

That which is inherited and forms part of the National Estate (Historical places, objects, fossils as defined by the National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999 Section 2 (i-xviii)).

2 Technical details of the project

2.1 Site Location

Noka rock art site is in the Lapalala Wilderness, part of the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve in Limpopo Province, about 390 km north of Johannesburg, Gauteng.

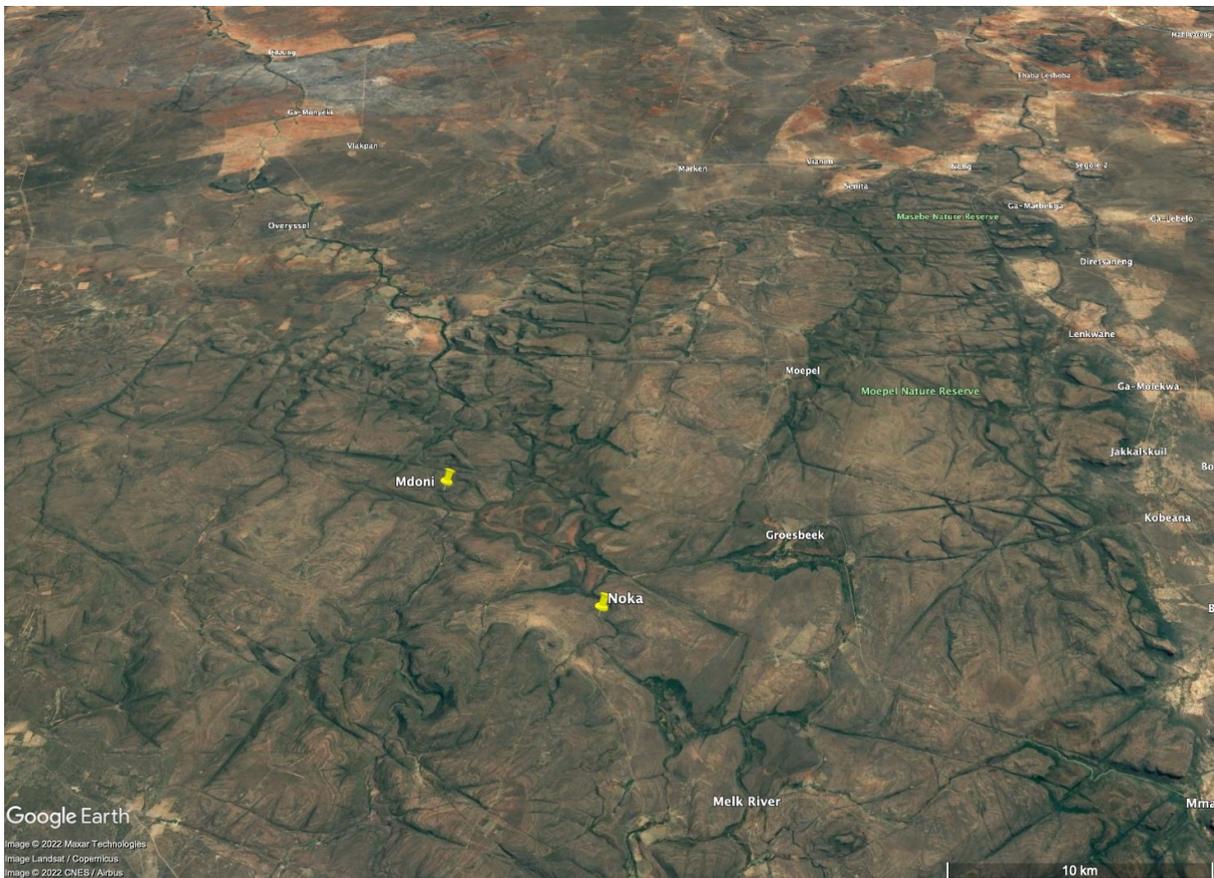


Figure 2. Noka and Mdoni rock art sites in the Lapalala Wilderness, Limpopo Province

2.1.1 Noka rock art site

S -23.90858

E 28.34185

Altitude: 1099 m asl

Noka rock art site is located at the foot of a 15 m cliff that overlooks the Lephalala River. The Noka Camp is situated on the plateau about 15 m above the rock art site and about 10 m west of the rock art site.

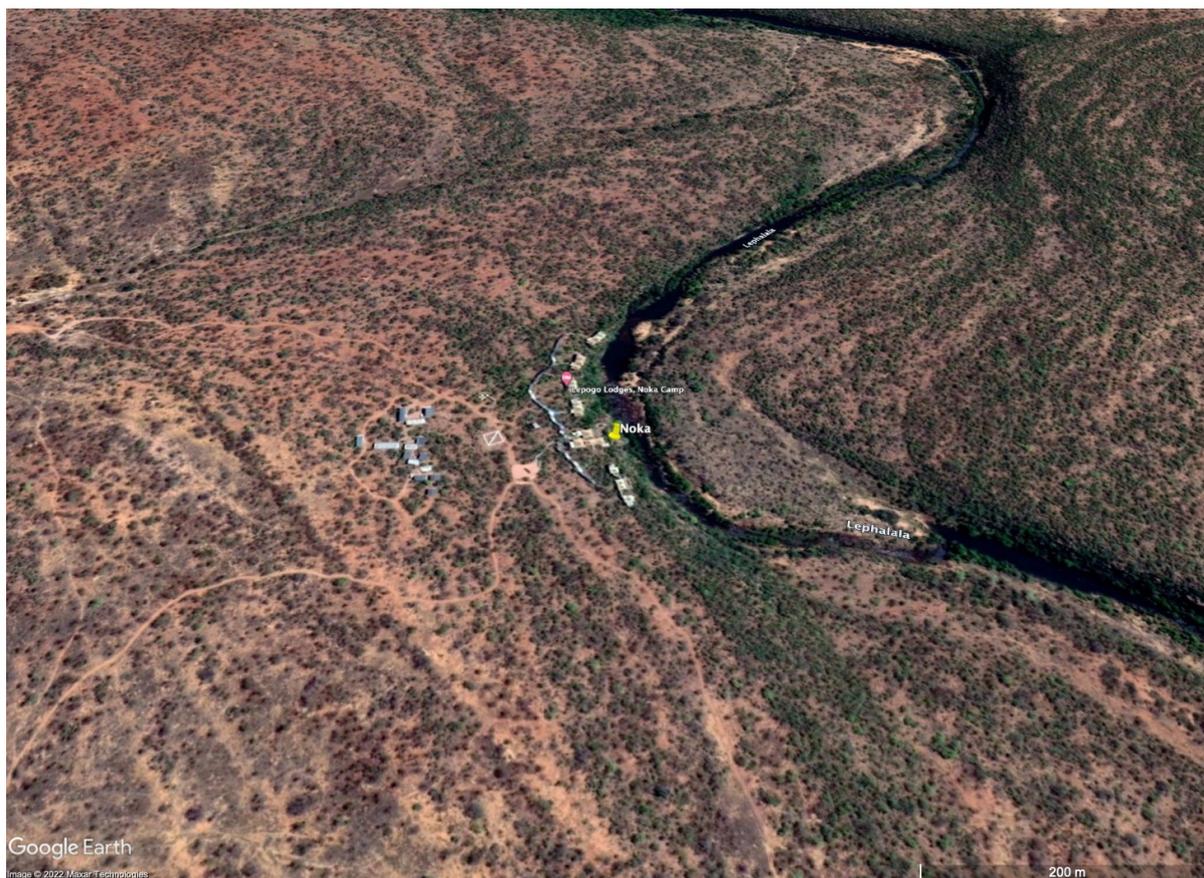


Figure 3. Noka rock art site (yellow pin) is an overhang at the base of an east-facing cliff. Noka Camp (red marker) is immediately to the west of the rock art site

Jeremy Hollmann visited Noka rock art site on 23 February 2022. He was accompanied by Hendrie Cloete, Head Guide at Noka Camp

The task was to identify a route to each of the sites that would take into consideration: i.

visitor safety;

ii. integrity and preservation of the rock art and environment;

iii. compliance with heritage legislation;

iv. harmony with the values of wilderness.

3 Suggested access routes

3.1 Route to Noka rock art site

Noka rock art site is at the foot of a cliff about 15 m below Noka Camp. Access can be gained in two ways.

1. One can descend to the level of the rock art site by means of a steep (between 60-70°) path through a thicket that is between 10 -20 m north of the overhang, and then proceed southwards along a narrow path towards the overhang. The way down the slope is steep and difficult and the walk along the narrow path could pose a hazard to some visitors as it is narrow and on the edge of a steep drop. For this reason, no further consideration is given to this option.
2. The second access route can be gained by descending into the head of the gully immediately south of Noka rock art site. This option is preferred as it is the most direct and safest route. Nevertheless, because it involves a steep descent

(approximately 1:3 gradient) the proposed route would not be suitable for people with disabilities, those whose sense of balance is weak or impaired, and those who have a strong fear of heights.

The proposed route down to the site begins on the southern side of the dining room at Noka Camp and, from there, out onto the edge of the plateau above the Lephalala River. Noka rock art site is immediately below the edge of the cliff.

From the plateau on top of the cliff the route proceeds for about 10 m in a westerly direction to the head of a gulley on the southern end of the rock art site. The proposed route to descend from the cliff top and to access Noka rock art site is via this gulley (Figure 4, Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8).

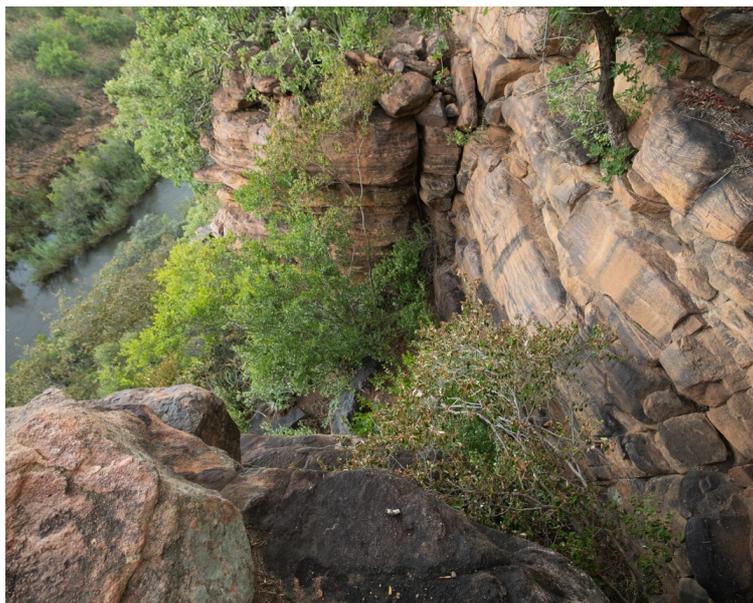


Figure 4. View from the plateau down into the gulley that affords access to the Noka rock art site. The bush at bottom right of the photograph marks the approximate location for the proposed spiral staircase down into the gulley below (the green bushes in the centre). Noka rock art site is not visible here. It is 25 metres around the corner at the bottom left of the photograph



Figure 5. The gulley in which it is suggested that the proposed spiral staircase be placed. The drop down into the gulley from the top of the cliff is about 3 m. The small tree/bush (Croton gratissimus) would need to be removed



*Figure 6. Looking back at the gulley in the previous photograph and to the cliff top above. This photograph shows where the proposed spiral staircase would be installed to allow visitors to descend from the cliff top down into the gulley below. The small tree/bush in the foreground (*Combretum apiculatum*) would need to be removed*



*Figure 7. Having dropped down into the gulley the proposed 30 m long stepped path with a gradient of about 1:3 would descend to the rock art site. The small tree/bush (*Combretum apiculatum*) in the middle of the picture would need to be removed. the site is not visible in this photograph. It is about 20 metres to the left of the lefthand side of the photograph*



*Figure 8. View of the proposed route for the path from within the Noka rock art site. The path up the gulley to the cliff top would begin at the rocks at the bottom centre of the picture and then continue upwards to the left of the scale indicator in the photograph. The small tree/bush (*Combretum apiculatum*) and shrub above the aloe would need to be removed*

It is proposed that a spiral staircase be positioned here to enable visitors to descend the approximately 3 m to the head of the gulley (Figure 9; Figure 10). The structure should be made from materials that are not visually intrusive. The structure should be removable against a possible time in the future when access is no longer required. Lepogo Lodges must budget for annual service and maintenance of the staircase.



Figure 9. Architect's impression of the proposed spiral staircase that would convey visitors to Noka rock art site from the top of the cliff to the head of the gully below. Design for Noka Camp by Black Sable Architects

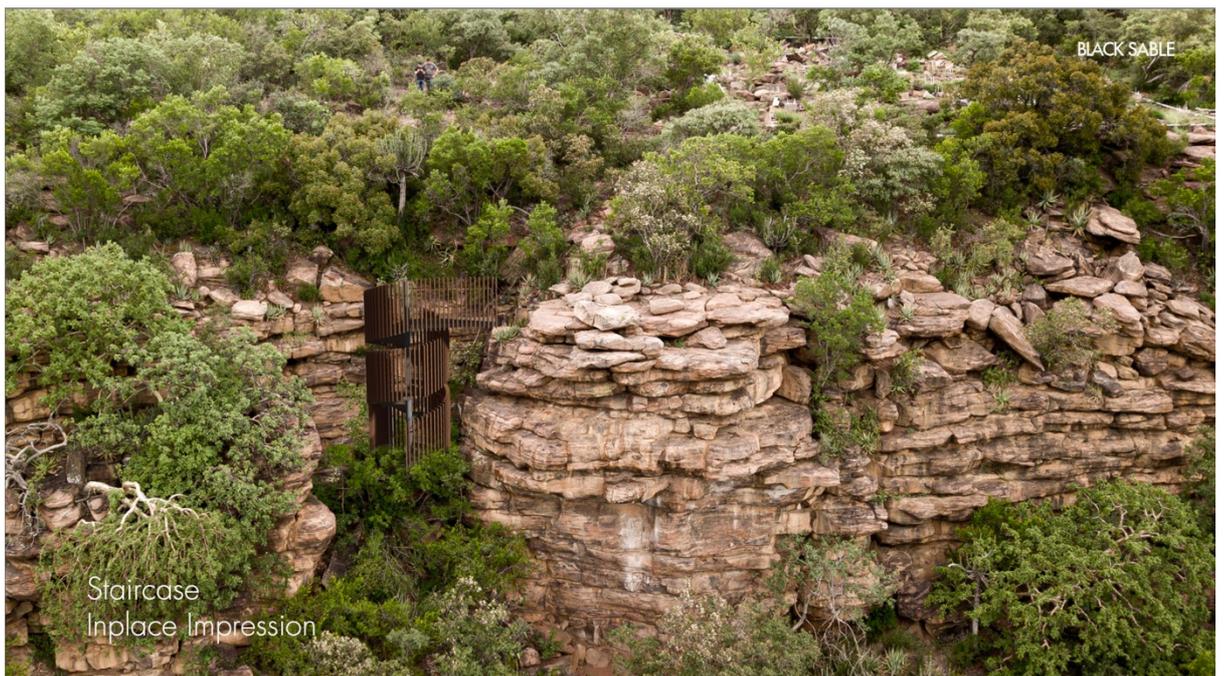


Figure 10. Architect's impression of the proposed spiral staircase at the head of the 30 m gulley south of Noka rock art. Noka rock art site is in the bottom centre of the picture below the large white stain on the cliff. This recreated drone's eye view shows that when inside the site the staircase and proposed path down to the rock art site are not visible. Black Sable Architects



Figure 11. Perspective impression drawing showing the reception and dining areas at Noka Camp and the proposed pathway (outlined in black) leading down from the camp to the top of the cliff above Noka rock art site.

This path is not discussed in this report as it falls outside its purview. Black Sable Architects

From the foot of the proposed spiral staircase the proposed path would lead down from the head of the gully to Noka rock art site (Figure 7; Figure 9; Figure 10). The path would be approximately 30 m long. It would be fairly steep, a gradient of about 1:3. The path would be stepped.

The last 3 m of the path involves negotiating the way over a series of rocks that form a natural 'stairway' (Figure 8). The texture of the boulders is rough so visitors' feet would not slip. Visitors would however need to have an average sense of balance to descend and ascend the steps.

This path would require the removal of some bushes (3 x *Combretum apiculatum*, 1 x *Croton gratissimus*) (see Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8) and one shrub, but none of these are threatened species and they are very common in the area. There is thus no threat to biodiversity or conservation.

4 Recommendations

In order to adhere to heritage legislation and the spirit of the law, and in harmony with the values of wilderness, intervention has been kept to the minimum. The spiral staircase is 30 m around the corner from Noka rock art site and is not visible from inside the site. Its location at the head of the gully makes it very unobtrusive. The cylindrical shape of the staircase softens the edges, and the wooden cladding blends the structure with the surroundings. The spiral staircase structure would be bolted into the rock. The entire structure can be dismantled and removed if necessary. Traces of the holes drilled into the rock would remain after removal, but these could be filled and disguised.

The proposed developments (the spiral staircase and path) will require a permit from the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA).

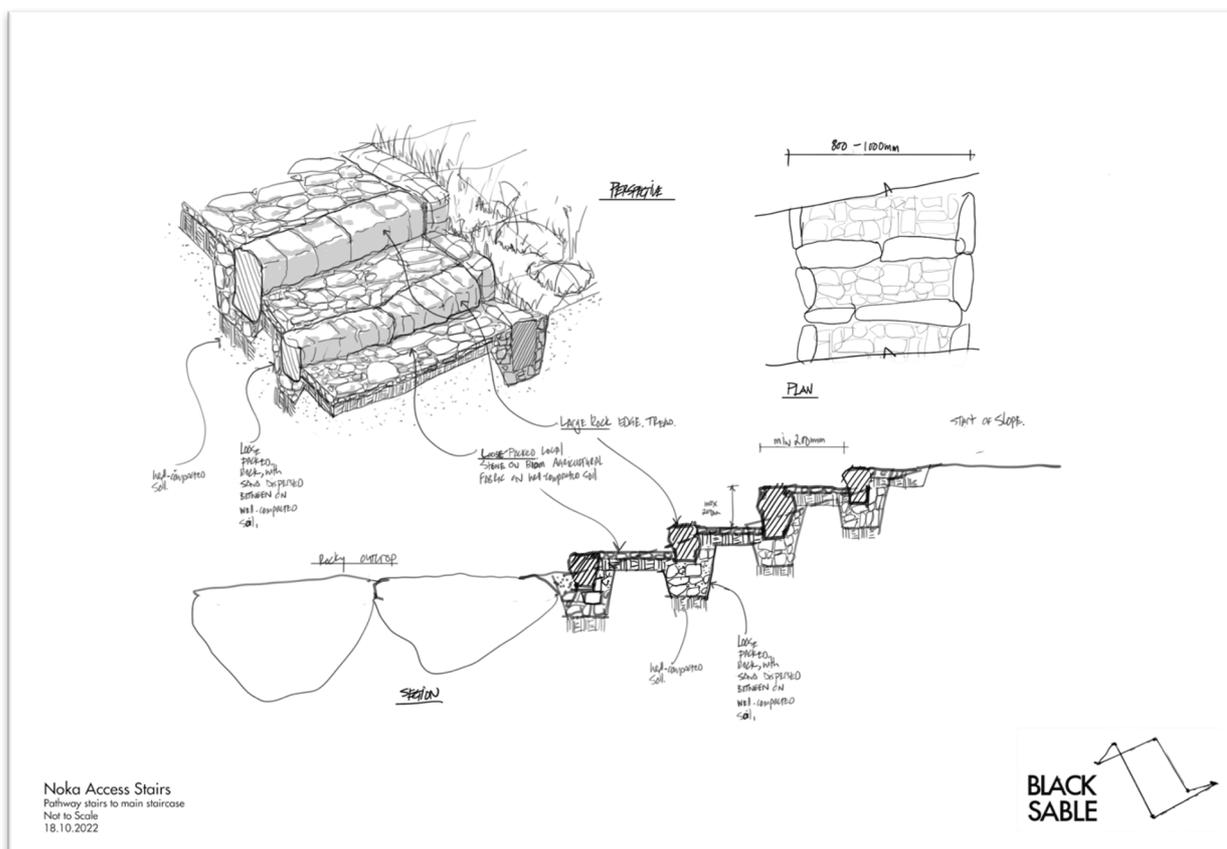


Figure 12. Concept design for the footpath leading from the foot of the 30 m long stepped path down the gully to within 3 m of the Noka rock art site. The stairs in this design would be local stone placed on compacted soil. Naturally occurring rocks would be incorporated into the path. Gaps between the stones would be filled with sand. Banisters and guard rails are not recommended as these would need to be dug in and possibly cemented. This construction work would have a more noticeable impact on the wilderness aesthetic. Design by Black Sable Architects

Naturally occurring rocks would be incorporated into the path. The footpath surfacing at Noka would make use of existing locally occurring stone. The stairs in the proposed design (Figure 12) would comprise local stone placed on compacted soil. Gaps between the stones would be filled with sand. Banisters and guard rails are not recommended as these would need to be dug in and possibly cemented. The footpath would be easy to remove and would leave little or no trace behind.

In terms of heritage legislation (the NHRA s.35(iv)(a)) ‘No person may, without a permit issued by the responsible heritage resources authority...destroy, damage, excavate, alter, deface or otherwise disturb any archaeological or palaeontological site or any meteorite.’

The question as to whether these proposed developments (the spiral staircase and path) would require a permit in terms of this legislation would be decided by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) on the basis of this management plan.

Addendum B: Guide to the rock art of Noka rock art site

Rock art etiquette: Please read before you enter a rock art site!

1. Do not touch the art with your hands or any object (e.g. a stick). The fats and oils in your hands and other parts of your body hasten the decay of the art and contaminate it for any dating techniques and chemical analysis.

2. Never throw water or any other liquid over the images. It rapidly destroys the art and it is illegal.
3. Avoid stirring up dust from the shelter floor. This dust settles on the art and bonds with water and other substances to form an opaque crust over the paintings.
4. Never remove any stone tools or other artefacts from rock art sites. You may think that no one would miss a single artefact but if many people do the same, the sites would be destroyed. Removing artefacts without a permit is illegal in terms of Section 35 of the NHRA.
5. Always get permission from the landowner or relevant officials before visiting a rock art site.
6. Follow the wilderness motto of "Leave nothing but your footsteps behind".
7. Damaging the rock art is illegal in terms of Section 35 of the NHRA. If you see other people damaging the art, intervene. If they persist then contact management or the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA).

1 Introduction

Jeremy Hollmann was appointed by NuLeaf Planning & Environmental to compile a report on the Noka and the Mdoni rock art sites in Lapalala Wilderness (Hollmann 2019). Fieldwork was carried out at the two sites in November 2018.

1.1 Understanding hunter-gatherer rock art

The creators of the rock art in the Lapalala Wilderness were Later Stone Age (LSA) hunter-gatherer people, the ancestors of the people that today we call 'San' or 'Bushman'. The words 'San' and 'Bushman' have negative associations but there are currently no better alternative terms. We intend no disrespect by using these terms.

Our knowledge about San/Bushman beliefs comes from nineteenth and early 20th century San/Bushmen who told European scholars and explorers about their beliefs and way of life (Digital Bleek & Lloyd; Bleek & Lloyd 1911; Hollmann 2022; How 1962; Orpen 1874; Stow 1905; Arbousset & Daumas 1968, and many others). In addition, anthropologists in the 20th century have conducted thousands of interviews with contemporary San/Bushman people who live in the Kalahari and in Namibia (e.g. Biesele 1993; Katz 1982; Lee 1968, 2013; Marshall 1999 and many others). These beliefs provide the foundation for rock art interpretation (e.g. Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004).

Hunter-gatherer rock art differs from Western art in several ways. Hunter-gatherer art is made in a specific place, on a rugged rock surface, not on a smooth, portable canvas. Rock art is not a complete, framed work of art made by one person but rather a kaleidoscope of images created by different painters. This is why rock art may appear to a first-time viewer as a jumble of randomly placed images. Although the hunter-gatherers sometimes did paint 'scenes' in which figures take part in a common action, such as a dance, or a herd of animals, often the painters would place images next to each other because they were powerful (or potent) (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2009: 54).

Based on San/Bushman beliefs, researchers think that the hunter-gatherers regarded the paintings as 'strong things' (i.e. potent, or powerful) (e.g. Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004: 104-105). Even the paint used by the painters was considered to be powerful stuff, as it was made from ingredients such as ochre, blood and fat, which are all 'strong' substances (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989: 36). The deliberate placing of one image or part of an image on top of another may have been done in the belief that the potency of the top image was reinforcing and strengthening the potency of the image below it (Lewis-Williams 1974; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2009: 55).

Research carried out at many rock art sites over many years strongly suggests that the rock paintings are not a simple record of everyday life (Vinnicombe 1976: 347-350). Most researchers agree that the making and viewing of rock art was first and foremost a religious or spiritual practice.

In addition to paintings of human figures the larger game animals were painted because of their special, powerful status in the world view of hunter-gatherers (Guenther 1988). Unlike the meat of smaller game and gathered plants, the meat and fat of these large animals is shared amongst the entire group and therefore has a special significance. Dance rhythms used at healing dances are named after these animals (e.g. the Giraffe Dance) (Biesele 1993: 74). The Kalahari San/Bushmen believe that the strength (potency) of these animals allows ritual practitioners to enter the spirit realm (Biesele 1993: 89). Without this background knowledge one could mistakenly assume that a realistic-looking painting of an animal or a human figure is *only* that – a beautiful painting. However, for the hunter-gatherers those images could depict spirit animals and people in the spirit world. The particular significance of the rock paintings at Noka are discussed in greater detail below.

1.2 Dating rock art

No dating procedures have been carried out on any rock art in Limpopo Province. Elsewhere, southern African hunter-gatherer rock art has a very wide age range. The Apollo 11 painted stone from Namibia was dated to around 27 500 years ago (Wendt 1976). In the southern Drakensberg, KwaZulu-Natal paintings of cattle raiders on horseback are as recent as the 1860s (Manhire et al. 1986: 27).

Rock art can be radiocarbon dated but it is difficult to get uncontaminated carbon from paint samples. Indirect dating of rock art that has flaked off and become incorporated into the archaeological deposit can be done by analysing charcoal in the same occupation layer as the rock art fragment (e.g. Wendt 1976). The result would give the age range during which the rock flake dropped onto the floor. The rock art itself can give an indication of age – examples include paintings of horses, soldiers, and domesticated animals.

The hunter-gatherer rock art in the Lapalala was probably made between 1000 and 150 years ago (Laue 2000a: 4, citing Van der Ryst 1998). This time frame is based on dating carried out at archaeological excavations elsewhere on the Waterberg plateau.

2 Noka rock art

Noka rock art site is in an east-facing overhang that overlooks the Lephalala River. The shelter created by the overhang is about 5 m deep and comprises a flat, sandy floor that probably contains "substantial Later Stone Age deposits" (Boeyens et al. 2016: 49) that have not been excavated. *Site visitors may not disturb the floor of the shelter by digging in it or by picking up any artefacts* (see Section 35 of the NHRA).

There are paintings in two main areas. The first is about 10 m wide and can be divided into 5 clusters of paintings, or panels (A-E). The second (Panel F) is much smaller and on the back wall of a low overhang (about 1 m high) located at northern end (i.e. right-hand side) of the site). The classification of the paintings into panels is done in order to document and discuss the images.

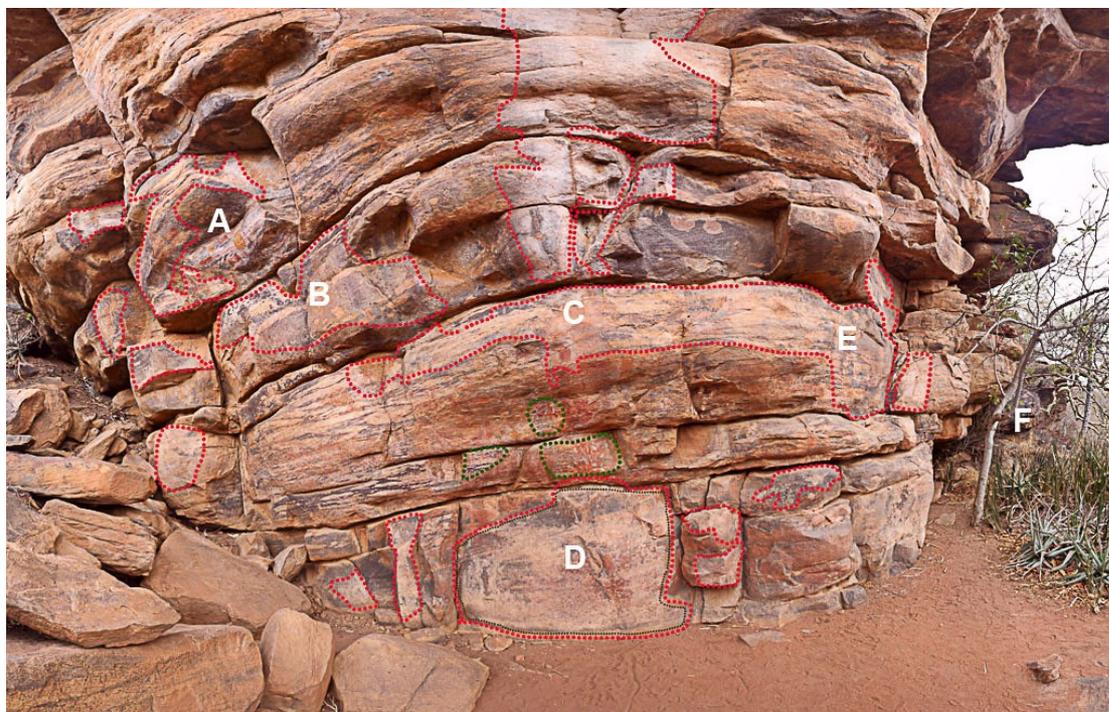


Figure 13. Rock paintings at Noka rock art site occur in six areas, labelled A to F.

2.1 Panel A

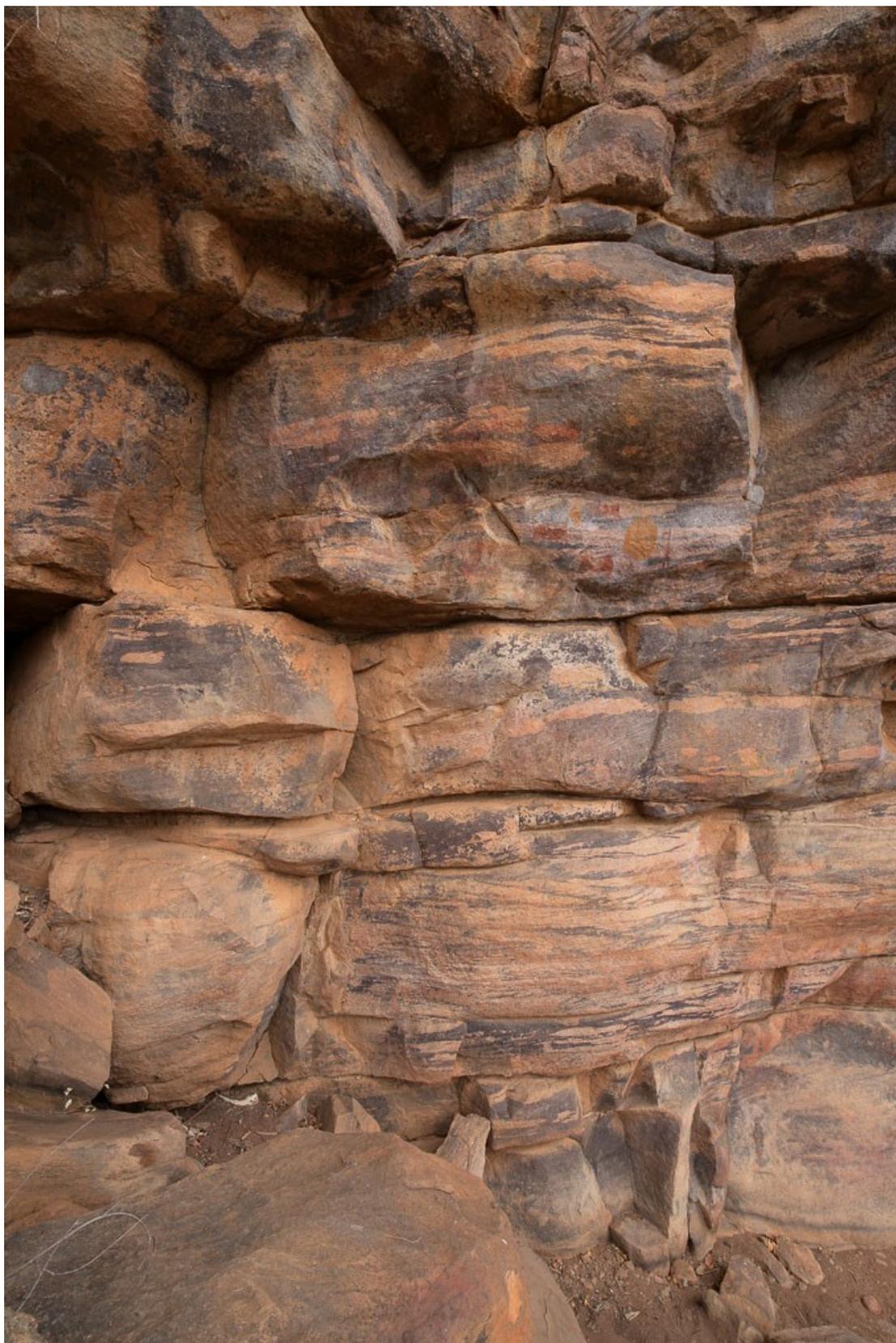


Figure 14. Panel A. These images are at the left-hand side (southern end) of the overhang, on a protruding rock about 2,4 m above ground level. Unless the floor level at the site has changed since the paintings were made, the painters would have needed to find a way of reaching this height in order to make the paintings. They might have sat on somebody's shoulders or devised a ladder or some other kind of support to get access to the surface.



Figure 15. Well preserved rock art. There are three animal bodies painted in red, with short legs and no heads. There is a figure, also painted red, facing to the left holding a bow with an arrow. Amongst the red-painted images are paintings in yellow. A large circular patch of yellow paint partly overlies the tip of the bowman's arrow

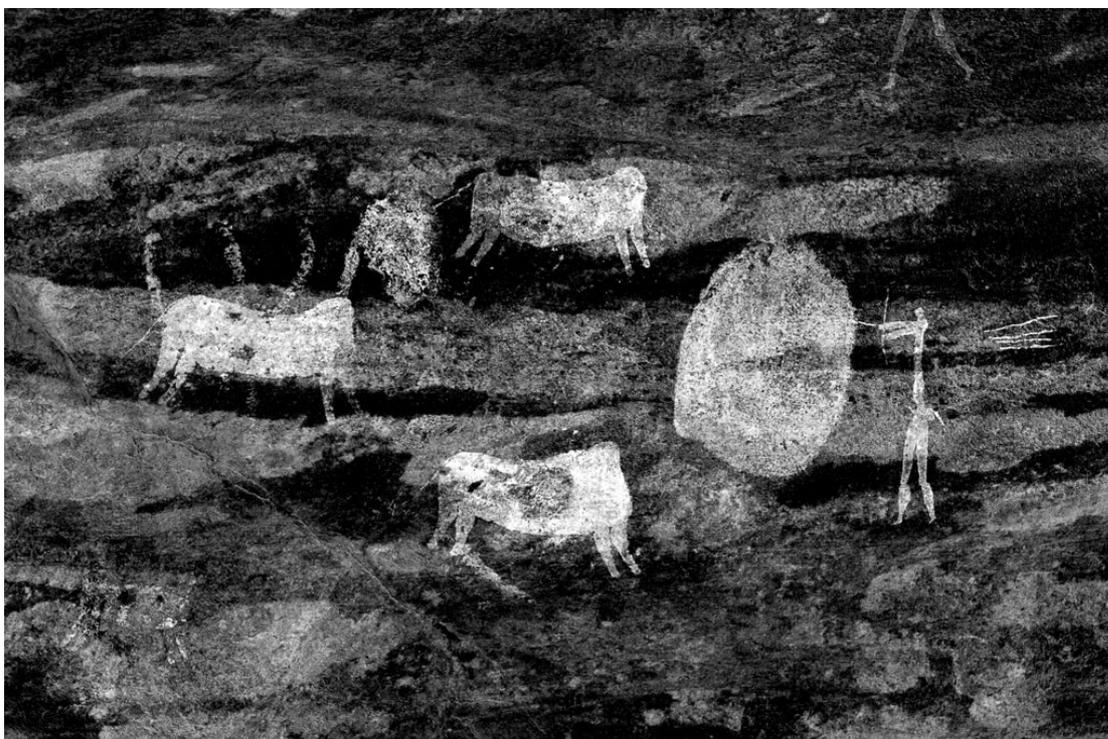


Figure 16. Grayscale image of previous picture (Figure 15)



Figure 17 The three large red shapes are the remnants of animals. To judge by the hump at the shoulder (the right-hand side of each of the red shapes), the shape of the rump, and their tails, these are eland that are facing to the right. The lower legs and the heads of these images were originally painted in white, which has now weathered away



Figure 18. An grayscale enhancement of the previous picture (Figure 17) that shows the bodies of the eland more clearly

On the left hand side (i.e. the southern end) of Panel A there are remnants of paintings in red pigment. The clearest images are at the bottom right-hand side of the rock in red and yellow. Three headless animal bodies with stumpy legs, and a figure facing to the left holding a bow with an arrow are

painted in red (Figure 17; Figure 18). To judge by the shape of the animal bodies and the presence of a hump at the shoulder and the shape of the rump, these depict eland. The lower half of the legs and the heads were probably painted white, which has now disappeared: only the large bodies remain. This is a common occurrence in the hunter-gatherer art of southern Africa because white paint does not remain visible as long as red paint.

In the midst of the red-painted images are paintings in yellow. Most prominent is the large circular patch of yellow paint that seems to have been painted over the tip of the bowman's arrow (Figure 19; Figure 20). There is a much smaller yellow shape to the left, between two of the animal bodies. To the left are finger strokes made in yellow, over one of the animal bodies. Because portions of the yellow paint are on top of the red paintings one may conclude that the yellow paintings and finger strokes were made after the red paintings, although by whom and how long afterwards is not known.



Figure 19. Eland hunting A hunter (immediately to the right of the circular shape painted in yellow, at left) takes aim at one of three eland. There are another two bowmen that are not in this picture. The yellow patch was painted after the hunter because it overlaps the tip of the hunter's arrow. The yellow patch may therefore not have anything directly to do with the 'hunting scene'

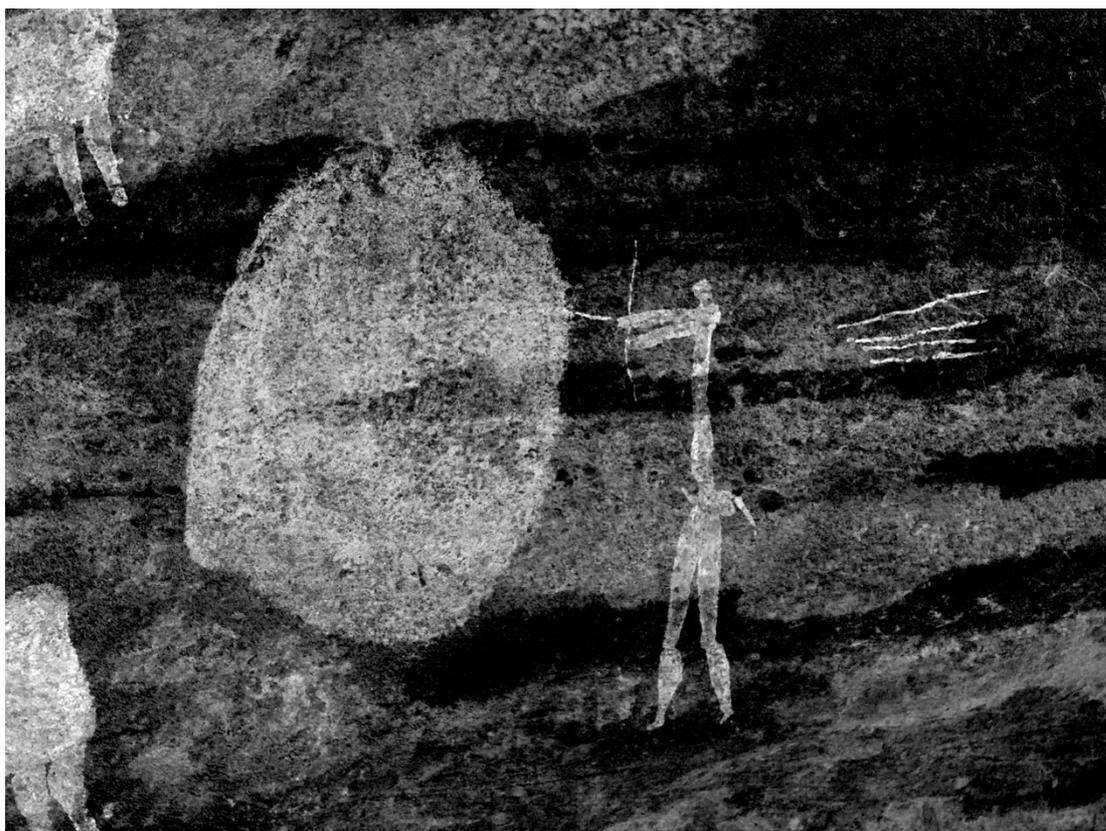


Figure 20. Grayscale enhancement of previous picture (Figure 19)

Immediately to the right of the figure with the bow and arrow are four horizontal thin lines (Figure 19; Figure 20). These probably represent arrows. The figure is depicted with a penis and has a short, curved line just above its buttocks: this probably depicts the back portion of a loincloth that would have covered the buttocks. This figure, together with similar paintings of two other hunters seems to be hunting the eland.

Paintings of arrows and of humans holding bows and arrows are not merely depictions of Later Stone Age technology and hunting activity. They also symbolise more complex cosmological ideas that form part of the hunter-gatherer way of life. For example, hunting in hunter-gatherer societies has a metaphysical component. The /xam San/Bushmen believed that the deity they called /Kaggen (also called Mantis) protected the large game animals and that a hunter would only be successful in the hunt if he had behaved in a 'respectful' way towards /Kaggen and the animal. Otherwise, /Kaggen would command the wounded animal to get up and eat (e.g. Hollmann 2007).

In addition, the concept of 'hunting' was not just concerned with the hunting of animals in the everyday world. Large game animals, such as eland, hartebeest/tsessebe, kudu, giraffe and elephant are all 'strong' animals. Not only did these animals provide abundant fat and meat, they were also 'enablers' (Biesele 1993: 89). Their power and strength played a vital role in ceremonies, such as initiation, healing, and out of body travel.

The paintings of arrows also have a deeper meaning and a wider significance than simply being weapons (Deacon 1992; Snow 2020). Hunters used poisoned arrows to kill animals, but there are also San/Bushman beliefs about invisible arrows of potency. The San/Bushmen believe that both sickness and health and success are the result of being shot with invisible arrows of sickness and/or potency by spirits of the dead and by evil and good living healers (Deacon 1992; Snow 2020). Paintings of hunters with arrows are hunters both of animals and of power.

2.2 Panel B



Figure 21. Panel B comprises only one faint red image that is visible in the centre of the picture



Figure 22. Grayscale enhancement of Panel B

Panel B is about 0,25 m below Panel A on a surface about 1,6 m wide and 1 m high (Figure 21; Figure 22). The panel comprises a single human figure painted in much the same style and size as the other two in Panel A (Figure 23; Figure 24). All three of these figures (i.e. those in Panels A *and* B)

face in the same direction and they should probably be interpreted as a coherent group of figures that may well have been painted at the same time by the same people.



Figure 23. Panel B: A single figure in red obscured by a naturally occurring white deposit



Figure 24. Panel B: Grayscale enhancement of previous picture (Figure 23)

The figure in Panel B also has a penis and holds two stick-like objects in its hand. These are almost certainly arrows as one of them has a tapered arrowhead. This figure is not as well preserved as the other two and so further details, such as the absence/presence of a loincloth, cannot be distinguished.

2.3 Panel C



Figure 25. Panel C is the most densely painted area in the site and has many interesting details



Figure 26. Panel C: Grayscale enhancement of the previous picture (Figure 25)

Panel C is about 0,25 m below Panel B and is about 2,8 m wide and 0,75 m high (Figure 25; Figure 26). This is the most densely painted area in the site and has many interesting details. The paintings on the left-hand side (i.e. southern end) of the painted surface are quite obscured and it not easy to see details of the paintings. The right-hand side is clearer.



Figure 27. Panel C: Handprints made in red paint. Note the red circular shape above the handprints. Below the handprints is the painting of a dancing figure.



Figure 28. Grayscale enhancement of previous picture (Figure 27)

There are five handprints in light red (Figure 27; Figure 28). Handprints were made at several sites in the Waterberg (e.g. Willcox 1959: 292). They were probably made by covering the palm of the hand with pigment then pressing the hand onto the rock face using a rolling action to make a full imprint of

the hand (Willcox 1959: 292). It is not known why people made handprints. Research suggests that the handprints are of smaller people, perhaps juvenile members of the community (Manhire 1998: 98). One possibility is that initiates made handprints as part of initiation rituals. At rock art sites where paintings and handprints are superimposed, the handprints are made over the paintings, not the other way round. This suggests that the handprints could be a later form of rock art, perhaps with a different significance. However, little has been written about who painted the handprints and what they could mean. Here two of the handprints have been made over the body of a large animal without head or legs (probably an eland).



Figure 29. Panel C: Painting of eland without a head located within a small alcove in the rock



Figure 30. Panel C: Grayscale enhancement of the previous picture (Figure 29)

To the left of and immediately above the handprints is a painting of an incomplete eland (Figure 29; Figure 30). There are still minute traces of the white paint that was used to outline the body. Interestingly, the painter deliberately chose to make this image in a small alcove in the rock. The practice of painting figures in alcoves and entering and leaving cracks in the rock is a widespread

convention in the art of the southern African hunter-gatherers (e.g. Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990; Woodhouse 1990).



Figure 31. Panel C: An arrangement of several shapes parts of which might have been smudged. These might be what researchers call a 'formling'



Figure 32. Panel C: Grayscale enhancement of the oblong shapes in the previous picture (Figure 31)

Just below the handprints, at the lower edge of the rock is an arrangement of several shapes, including some that are roughly triangular. Some of the other shapes might have been smudged (Figure 31;

Figure 32). Researcher Bert Woodhouse called them 'amorphous shapes' (1987:7). He has since interpreted them as 'maps' of hunter-gatherer territory.

Recent research suggests that the shapes at Noka (and at Mdoni, as well as other sites in the area) resemble what researchers call 'formlings', a kind of painting that occurs in Limpopo Province (including three sites in the Lapalala Wilderness) as well as Zimbabwe and, possibly, in Namibia. It must be added that the Noka examples are not very clear and are not a good example of how most formlings look.

Researcher Siyakha Mguni suggests that these formlings are modelled on the nests of social insects especially termite and bees' nests (Mguni 2015). These nests are not only of economic importance to hunter-gatherers as sources of fat-rich termite alites and honey. They probably also played an important role in their beliefs. Bees (and honey) especially were believed to have metaphysical power, while termites and their underground nests may also have been seen as sources of such power (see Siyakha Mguni's 2015 book *Termites of the Gods* for detailed discussion). Formlings are currently interpreted as the basis for painters' visions of these 'storehouses' of metaphysical power.

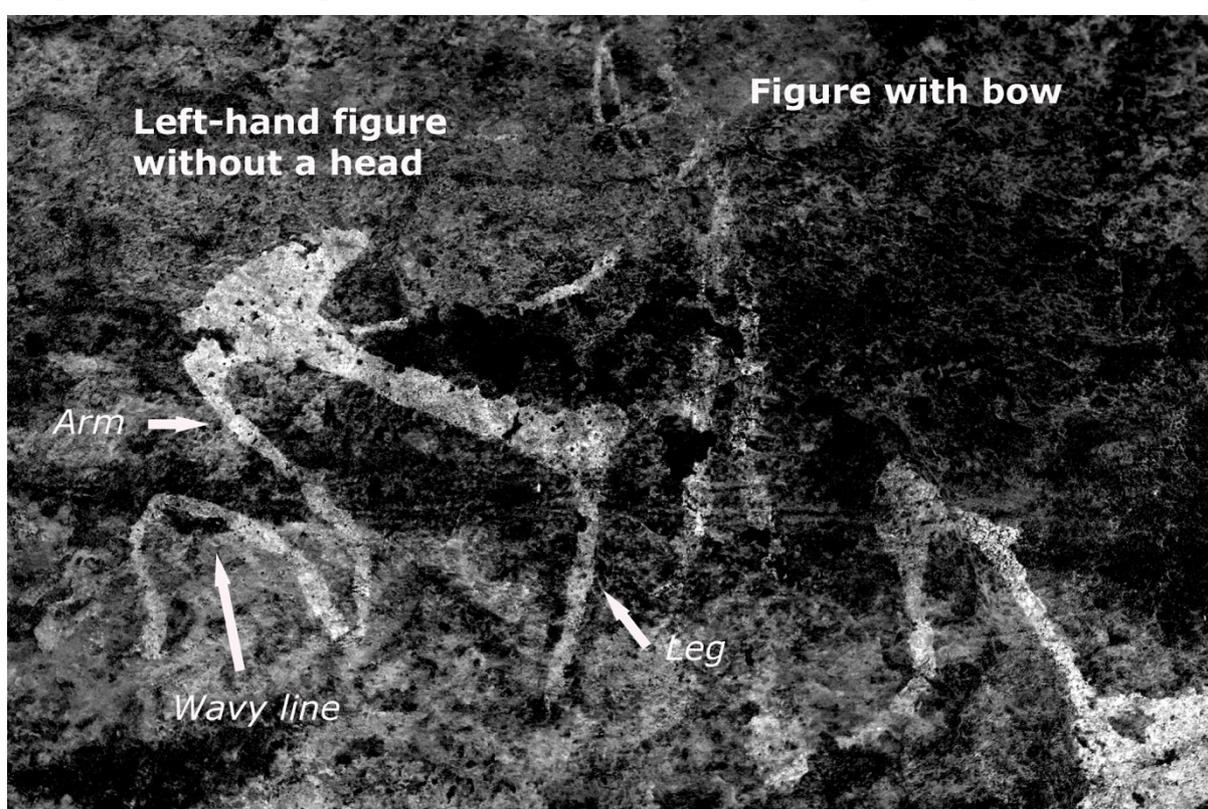


Figure 33. Panel C: At left is a possible schematised human figure. It is bending forward to the left. It has a single leg (at right). One of the arms holds on to a thin wavy line (bottom left of the picture). The figure has no head. Immediately to the right of this figure, in the middle of the picture, is a much fainter image of a person with a bow, facing the figure bending forward

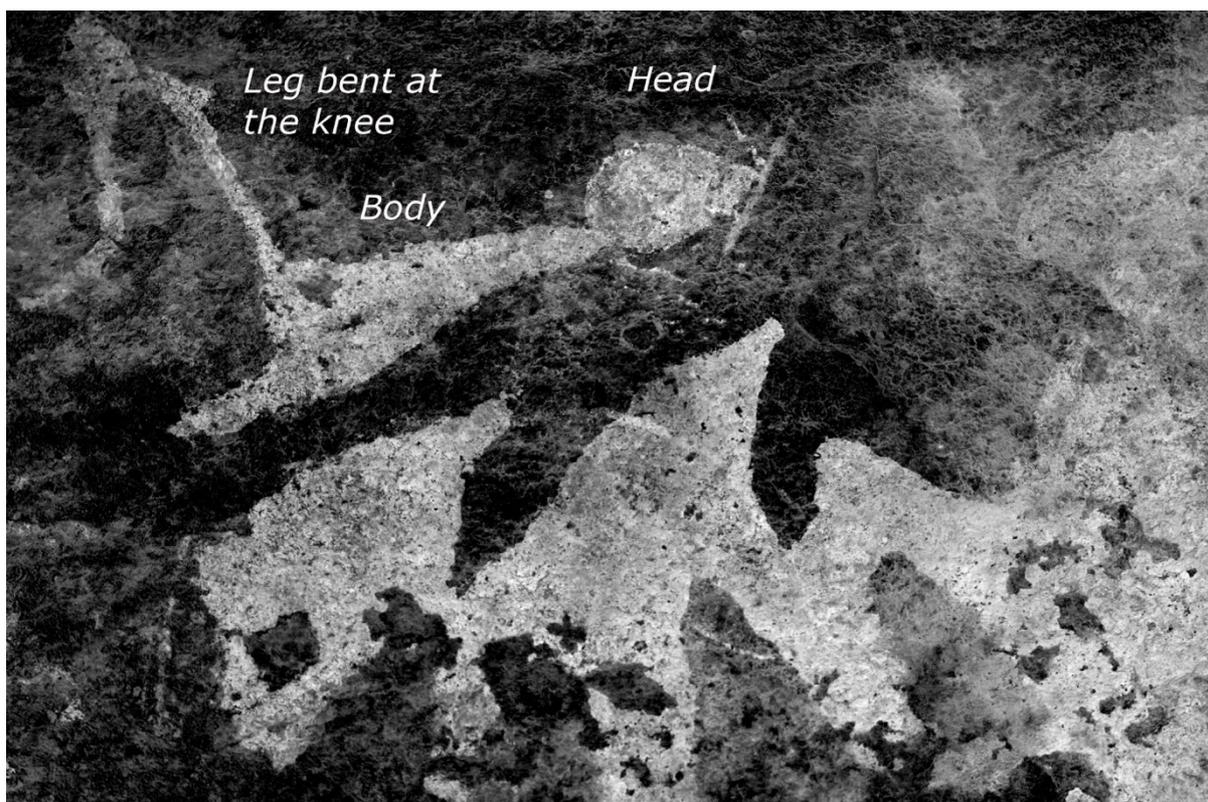


Figure 34. Panel C: The figure at the top of the picture might depict the distorted body of a figure that is lying on its back with a single raised leg that is bent at the knee. Parts of the 'formling' are painted immediately below this figure

To the left and possibly connected to the oblong shapes is a short, roughly zigzag shape that includes two triangular shapes (Figure 34). Above the zigzag are two figures (one visible in Figure 33; the other Figure 34) that may depict distorted human figures. The left-hand figure (Figure 33) is bending forward to the left and has a single leg (at right). One of the arms holds on to a thin wavy line. The other arm is bent at the elbow. The figure has no head.

To the right is another possibly distorted figure. It seems to be lying on its back with a single raised that is bent at the knee (at left). It has a large balloon-shaped head (at right).

These weirdly distorted figures could be shamans who have journeyed into the spirit realm to get power from the formling in order to protect and help people in the community.



Figure 35. Panel C: A figure with arms raised, possibly dancing

On the right-hand side of the oblong shapes and below the handprints is a human figure with penis and arms raised and bent at the elbow in what is possibly a dance posture (Figure 35).

2.4 *Panel D (not illustrated)*

This panel is immediately below Panel C, at ground level. Portions of the rock surface are stained red and could therefore have been painted. Use of enhancement techniques, however, suggests there are no longer any paintings visible on this surface.

2.5 *Panel E*

Panel E is immediately to the right of Panel D and about 1,5 m above the ground level. The rock surface on which the paintings were made is flaking off and there is also a white deposit that obscures the remaining rock art.



Figure 36. Panel E is 1,5 m above ground level and has several paintings, but they have become obscured by weathering of the rock and the accumulation of dust

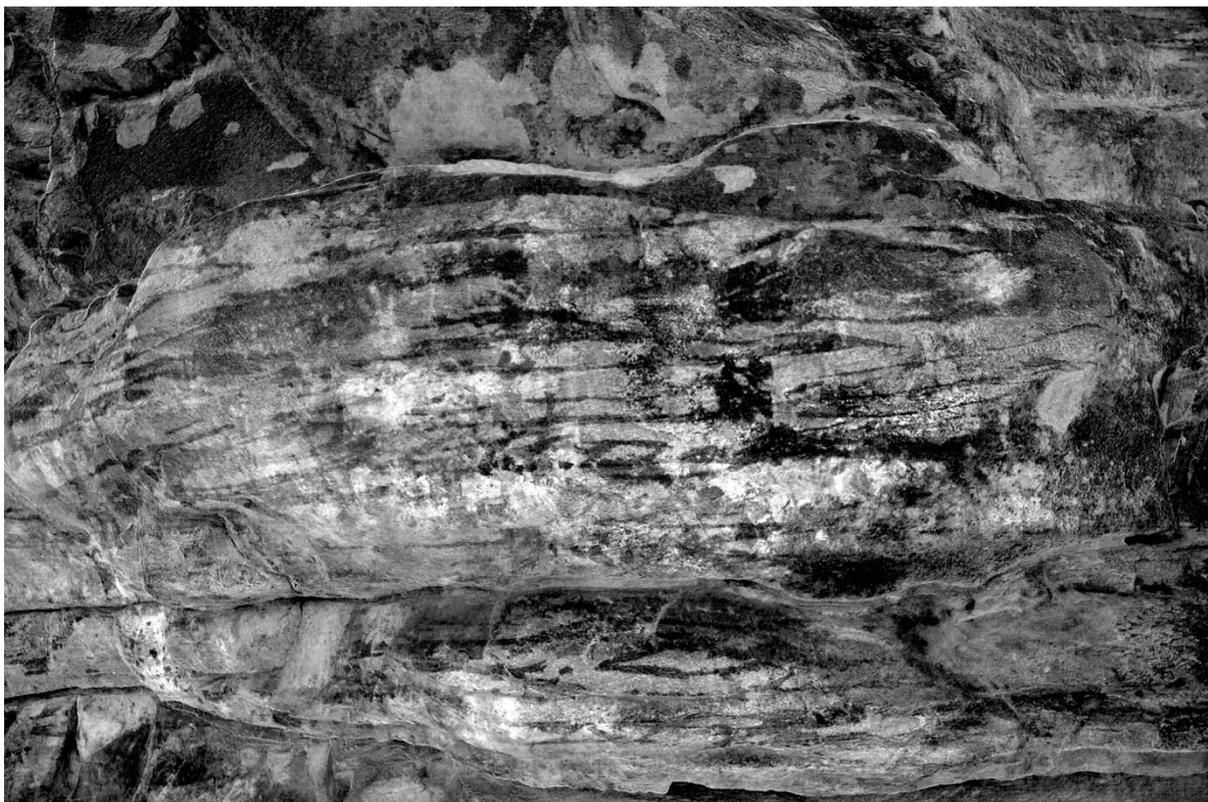


Figure 37. Panel E: Grayscale enhancement of previous picture (Figure 36)

Very little detail is visible. Enhancement reveals that this area was densely painted.

2.6 Panel F



Figure 38. Panel F: Paintings in a small corner at the right-hand (northern) end of the rock art site

These paintings are located on the back wall of a 1 m high overhang at the right-hand end (i.e. the northern end) of the site, as one enters the overhang (Figure 38). The rock on which the images are painted is about 0,5 m high and 1,3 m long.



Figure 39: Panel F: Paintings of two animals, a wildebeest and a small antelope



Figure 40. Panel F: Grayscale enhancement

Two images are painted here (Figure 39; Figure 40). At the right is an image of a small antelope species with spindly legs, a bulky body, and a short tail (Figure 41; Figure 42). The antelope painting has ears but no horns. There may be a stroke of paint in front of the antelope's muzzle or perhaps some of the paint in this area has weathered.



Figure 41. Panel F: painting of a small antelope



Figure 42. Panel F: Grayscale enhancement



Figure 43. Panel F: painting that has been obscured by a layer of dust



Figure 44. Panel F: Grayscale enhancement shows a painting of a wildebeest

A few centimetres to the left of this antelope image is a smaller animal image (Figure 43) that is not as easy to see as the antelope. Enhancement shows that this is a wildebeest facing to the left (Figure 44). The image has the horns and the tail that are characteristic of this species.

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Addendum C: Condition report for Noka rock art site

Introduction

Jeremy Hollmann was appointed by NuLeaf Planning & Environmental to compile a report on the Noka and the Mdoni rock art sites in Lapalala Wilderness (Hollmann 2019). This condition report is part of the 2019 report.

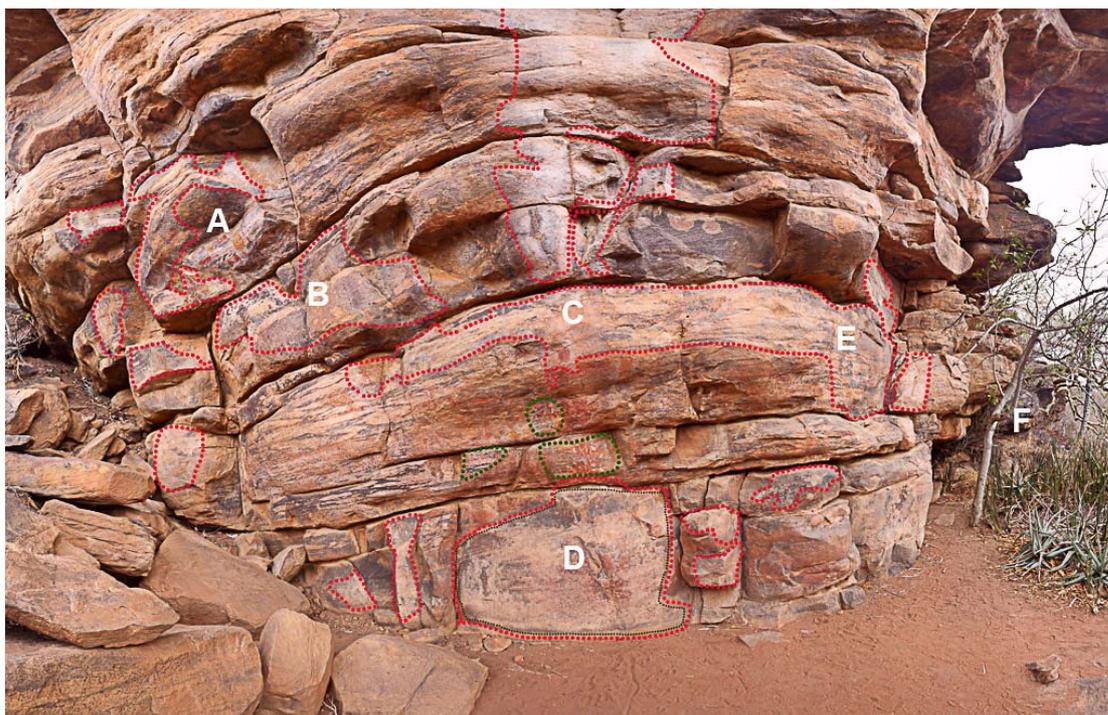


Figure 45. Diagram of physical conditions at Noka Shelter. Red = white deposits; Green = rock flaking; Brown = dust. Panel numbers are in white.

Layers of a white deposit (probably mineral salts) cover much of the rock face at this site. The density of the white deposit varies across the rock face and there are facets of the rock that have escaped the deposition process entirely. These facets have very slight overhangs that may protect them from the flow of mineral-rich water.

In certain areas, the surface of the rock has flaked off (exfoliated) including areas that have paintings on them.

There is also seems to be dust settling on the rock surface at the bottom, just above ground level. The dust has settled on the white deposit and the dust has become incorporated into this white deposit.

Comparison with photographs taken by members of the Rock Art Research Institute (University of the Witwatersrand) in 1986, 1999, and again in 2001, shows that there has been no (or very little) deterioration in the images in 32 years.

1.1 Panel A

A white deposit (probably mineral salts) has obscured the left-hand side of this area. The deposit has not covered the right-hand side, which is in a concave area of rock directly below a slight outcrop; these are the clearest and best-preserved images at the site.

1.2 Panel B

There is a white deposit on the rock surface and a portion of the painting is on a dark section of rock. Both of these factors may account for the low contrast between the red of the painting and the rock background.

1.3 Panel C

A white deposit covers the topmost half of the rock surface, which bulges out and creates a shallow overhang that seems to have protected the lower part of the rock from this deposition. There is a small area of this lower surface on which some images are comparatively well preserved. However, elsewhere on this lower surface, rock is flaking off (exfoliating) along with parts of the paintings.

1.4 Panel D

This area has deteriorated considerably. A large area of rock surface has flaked off and in places the rock surface is covered with dust that seems to have bonded with the rock.

1.5 Panel E

A bulge on the upper half of the rock seems to have protected some images below them but considerable flaking has occurred in this lower section and most of the images are now severely fragmented.

1.6 Panel F

The paint used to make these images is very dark, almost black in colour. This could be the original colour of the pigment, but it might also be the colour of lichens feeding on the paint. The rock surface has two colours: a light brown background and areas of a darker reddish colour that seems to be on top of the light brown background. It is not clear if this reddish overlay is part of the rock or if it is perhaps a living organism growing on the rock (e.g. lichen). Small areas of the rock surface are flaking off in some places.

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Addendum D: Guide to the Noka Shelter rock art

Guide to The Rock Art at Lapalala



A portion of the Noka rock art, photo taken by Jeremy Hollmann

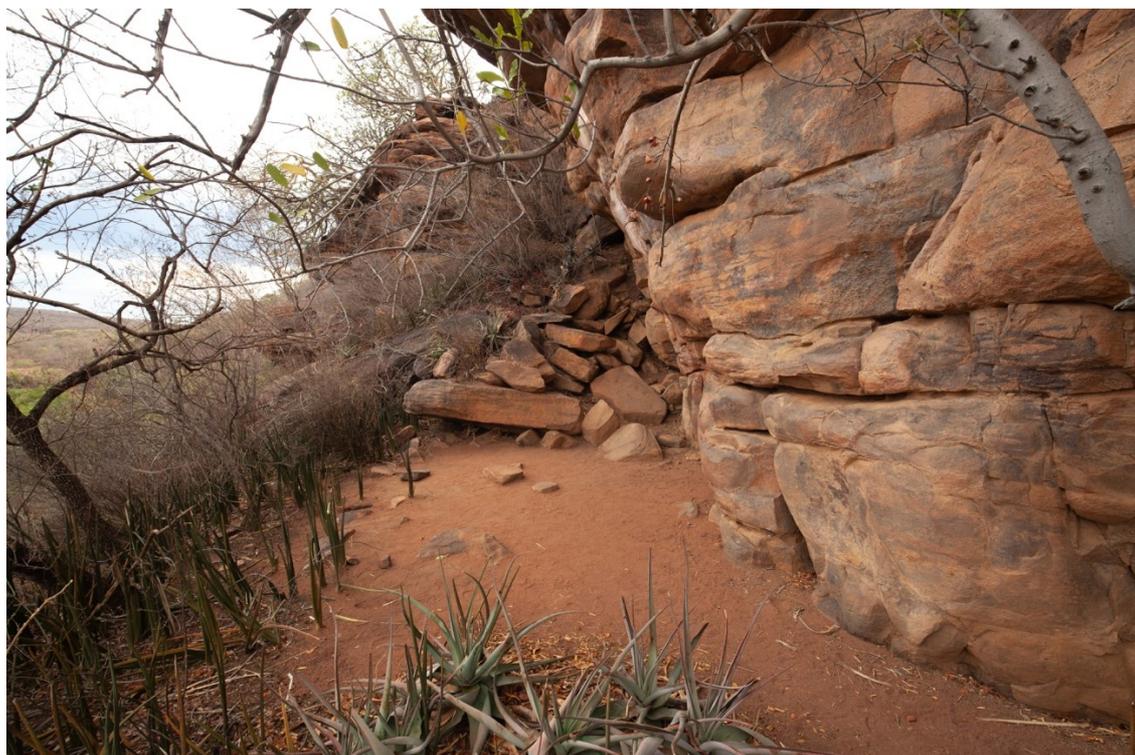
Noka Shelter Rock Art

The San people are the earliest hunter-gatherers in southern Africa. They called this area home thousands of years before the arrival of the Bantu-speaking people and Europeans. There is evidence of their cave paintings found in Namibia dated to just over 27,000 years ago.

Lapalala is host to 13 known archaeologically valuable sites of various ages with many more probably yet to be discovered. One of the most spectacular of these is the Noka shelter rock art, found less than

one hundred meters from where you are currently reading this. Another renowned historic location found within in the reserve is the Melora Hill iron age site, if you would like to visit this please let your guide know.

The paintings contained within sites are of huge importance, not only culturally but also from a conservation perspective. Images of black rhino occur in four sites within the northern Waterberg, declaring that this was within their historic range; with no 19th century written records attaining to this, these paintings are the only evidence we have of their historic presence.



View into Noka Shelter

Understanding Hunter-Gatherer Rock Art

Our knowledge about San people beliefs comes mostly from people who lived in the nineteenth century and who told European scholars about their beliefs and way of life. In addition, anthropologists have conducted thousands of interviews with contemporary San people who live in the Kalahari and in Namibia. These indigenous beliefs provide the foundation for rock art interpretation.

Hunter-gatherer rock art differs from other forms of art in several ways. Hunter-gatherer art is made in a specific place, on a rugged rock surface, not on a smooth portable canvas. Rock art is not a complete, framed work of art made by one person but rather a kaleidoscope of images created by different painters usually throughout a long time period.

This is why rock art may appear to a first-time viewer as a jumble of randomly placed images. Although the hunter-gatherers sometimes did paint 'scenes' in which figures take part in a common action, such as a dance, or a herd of animals, often the painters would place images next to each other because they were related in terms of their strength (potency) they had rather than the content of the image.

Based on San beliefs, researchers think that the hunter-gatherers regarded the paintings as 'strong things'. Even the paint used by the painters was considered powerful stuff, as it was made from ingredients such as ochre, blood and fat, which are all 'strong' substances. The deliberate placing of one image or part of an image on top of another may have been done in the belief that the potency of the top image was reinforcing and strengthening the potency of the image below it.



Eland hunting A hunter (immediately to the right of the circular shape painted in yellow, at left) takes aim at one of three eland.

Many people assume that the art is simply a record of everyday life, but research at many sites over many years has shown that this view does not fit the facts; many researchers now argue that the making and viewing of rock art was first and foremost a religious or spiritual practice.

In addition to paintings of human figures the larger game animals were painted because of their special, powerful status in the world view of hunter-gatherers. Unlike the meat of smaller game and gathered plants, the meat and fat of these large animals could be used by the entire group and therefore has a special significance. These large animals played such an important role in San life even dance rhythms used at healing dances are named after them. The Kalahari San believe that the strength of these animals allows ritual practitioners to enter the spirit realm. Without this background knowledge an outsider could mistakenly assume that a realistic looking painting of an animal or a human figure is only that - a beautiful painting. However, for the hunter-gatherers those images could depict spirit animals and people in the spirit world, more like a modern-day painting at the Sistine Chapel than a Mona Lisa.



Handprints and a small dancing figure

Dating Rock Art

A survey of the literature found that no dating has been carried out any rock art in Limpopo Province although there are plans to do this in the near future. Elsewhere, southern African hunter-gatherer rock art has a very wide age range. The Apollo 11 painted stone from Namibia was dated to around 27 500 years ago. In the southern Drakensberg, KwaZulu-Natal paintings of cattle raiders on horseback are as recent as the 1860s.

Rock art can be radiocarbon dated but it is difficult to get uncontaminated carbon from paint samples. Indirect dating of rock art that has flaked off and become incorporated into the archaeological deposit can be done by analysing charcoal in the same occupation layer as the rock art fragment. The result will give the age range during which the rock flake dropped onto the floor.

The rock art itself can give an indication of age; for example, images depicting horses or soldiers would be painted after the arrival of foreign powers (Early 1800's).

The Noka rock art and all the other hunter-gatherer rock art all others in the Lapalala reserve was probably made between 1000 and 150 years ago and was almost certainly added to by multiple generations of San peoples. As the rock art ages, it naturally degrades, and some images are already hard to make out. It is our honour to be able to help protect the site and become part of this artefacts story. If you would like to visit the Noka rock art please contact a member of staff, we would ask you to follow the rules on the next page so we can protect this treasure for future generations.



Information modified from “Guide to The Rock Art of Noka Shelter” written by rock art specialist Jeremy Hollmann, the full document can be found in the lodge library.



Please follow these rules when visiting any rock art site

- Damaging the rock art is illegal in terms of Section 35 of the National Heritage Resources Act. Do not touch the art with your hands or any object (e.g. a stick). The fats and oils in your hands and other parts of your body hasten the decay of the art and make it impossible to successfully date it at a later time.
- No matter how tempting, never throw water or any other liquid over the images. Not only is this illegal, but the practice rapidly destroys the art.
- Avoid stirring up dust from the shelter floor. This dust settles on the art and bonds with water and other substances to form an opaque crust over the paintings.
- Never remove any stone tools or other artefacts from rock art sites. You may think that no one will miss a single artefact but if many people do the same, the sites will be destroyed.

- Follow the wilderness motto of "Leave nothing but your footsteps behind".