

REPORTS**REPORT ON THE FIFTH SOUTHERN AFRICAN
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and

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The Rock Art Department at the National Museum, Bloemfontein, recently hosted the fifth rock art colloquium at the Modderpoort Conference Centre near Ladybrand in the eastern Orange Free State. Twenty nine delegates attended the colloquium which lasted three days (Monday 14 to Wednesday 16 September 1992). Thereafter, twelve delegates stayed on to participate in a two-day practical workshop on graffiti removal (Thursday 17 and Friday 18 September). We were well looked after at the conference centre, a former mission school, where basic accommodation and three square meals, plus teas, cost an unbeatable R40 per person per day, and can recommend it as a venue.

THE COLLOQUIUM

The colloquium comprised three sessions of informal presentations, one general discussion period and a one-day visit to painted shelters north of Ladybrand. Posters, showing various ways of recording paintings and engravings from all over southern Africa, were on display in the lecture hall and we had the opportunity to see videos on rock art, ethnography and conservation in the evenings after supper, and to visit various local bars in Ladybrand and at the Lesotho border.

The early session on Monday mainly concerned theory and practice. Two of the first papers were by Professor Meg Conkey, visiting from the Department of Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley, and by Professor David Lewis-Williams of the Rock Art Research Unit at the University of the Witwatersrand. They had been asked to summarize the main issues in current rock art research in Europe and southern Africa and did this task well, highlighting the need to put theory into practice.

The papers presented during the rest of the day summarized current rock art research projects in South

Africa, ranging from ethnographic support for trance among pastoralists (Frans Prins) and recent ethnographic information on rock paintings in the Transkei (Pieter Jolly), to engravings of Nguni settlements in Natal (Tim Maggs), Koranna rock paintings in the central Orange Free State (Geoff Blundell) and the symbolic significance of rhino engravings on a hill in Bophutatswana (Sven Ouzman), to chronological issues concerning engravings along the Riet River (David Morris), the potential of gender studies in rock paintings (Anne Solomon) and the application of theory drawn from art history (Ansie Batchelor).

On Tuesday morning most of the papers dealt with the deterioration, conservation, management and curation of rock art. Papers ranged from the monitoring of deterioration mechanisms in the Natal Drakensberg (Ian Meiklejohn), to the management of Cederberg sites (Steve Bassett), the northern Cape (David Morris) and the curation of rock art in museums (Jannie Loubser and Peter Jolly). Leon Jacobson raised the controversial ethical issue of repainting damaged sites and Janette Deacon presented draft guidelines for recording rock paintings and engravings that could be distributed to interested members of the public. The session closed with a discussion introduced by Peter Jolly, with support from Frans Prins and David Lewis-Williams, on the interviews conducted with 'M' in Transkei in the 1980s, confirming their authenticity and the reliability of the information obtained.

In the final session on the Tuesday afternoon, Ingrid Coetzee and Janette Deacon presented proposals for the organization of Environment Week in 1994 for which rock art conservation has been proposed as a theme. Although they had hoped to establish a steering committee, this was not possible as some lively debate arose over two main issues. The first was the perception that political problems could ensue if the rock art



Delegates to the fifth southern African rock art colloquium.

conservation programme was funded by government. The second raised doubts about the desirability of linking rock art with a programme that usually promotes environmental issues because the public could perceive rock art as an environmental rather than as a cultural phenomenon. In response, it was pointed out that the Environment Conservation Act specifically includes the man-made environment and that archaeologists were already making full use of the Act in archaeological impact assessments. The purpose of choosing rock art as a theme for Environment Week was to promote the view that people are an integral part of the environment in which they live.

As no clear conclusion could be reached before supper, the delegates met again the following morning before breakfast. Ingrid Coetzee and Janette Deacon volunteered to gauge opinion by networking with non-government agencies on (a) whether rock art conservation as a theme for Environment Week would de-emphasize the cultural character of the art in the public eye; and (b) whether a significant section of the South African population would not wish to be involved in the campaign because of its government base. The results would be conveyed to delegates and if they were satisfied that these issues were resolved, we should proceed with the campaign and emphasize public outreach, particularly with non-governmental organizations.

Participants spent Wednesday visiting rock art sites in the vicinity of Ladybrand. The first was the Plantation Site where the Ladybrand Municipality erected a wire fence around the site some years ago to prevent people from getting too close to the paintings. As a result they

are relatively well preserved. We stopped off at the Ladybrand Museum to see copies the Abbé Breuil made of paintings from Rose Cottage Cave in the 1940s. Those of us who had not seen the site previously quickly went to Rose Cottage. The next stop was Tandjiesberg. This painted rock shelter was declared a national monument towards the end of October 1992, the tenth rock art site in South Africa to receive this honour. The landowner, Mr Angelo Liguori, erected a sturdy wire fence in the 1970s and the National Monuments Council and the National Museum financed the building of a boardwalk to direct the flow of pedestrians in the shelter. We had a picnic lunch and then sat for a group photograph on the 'Abbé Rock' where the Abbé Breuil lunched in the 1940s. Another site behind Mr Liguori's farmhouse, Tripolitania, is known for its paintings of women with digging sticks. The last stop was Orange Springs, another well-known site where Helen Tongue made tracings at the turn of the century.

THE WORKSHOP

During an introductory session at the rock shelter behind the Modderpoort Conference Centre, declared a national monument on account of its paintings in the 1930s, Jannie explained the principles of graffiti removal and stressed that it should be done only under supervision of qualified and experienced specialists. It is also necessary to have a permit from the National Monuments Council to remove graffiti from a rock art site. We spent most of Thursday morning recording the paintings, the graffiti and their location on the shelter walls, both by tracing

and photography. Next, we proceeded with removing charcoal signatures and experimenting with techniques to reduce incised graffiti. We are currently preparing a more thorough account of this exercise which had some interesting consequences.

Proceedings came to an end on Friday at noon, after a few die-hard graffiti busters spent a morning experimenting with different techniques to remove enamel paint from sandstone. This was at the St Assisi Mission, now a maternity home, where a painter had idly

cleaned the excess off his brushes and painted over some rock paintings on the walls of a boulder next to the mission buildings.

In summary, the colloquium and workshop were enjoyed by all and we succeeded in providing a forum for detailed discussion on rock art research and demonstrating the care and expertise needed to remove graffiti from painted sites. We recommend this kind of informal colloquium to stimulate the exchange of ideas amongst specialists.