

NOTES

DISMANTLING A POWERFUL PLACE: THE SALVAGE OF ROCK ENGRAVINGS NEAR WARRENTON, NORTHERN CAPE

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INTRODUCTION

More than a century of recording of Southern Africa's vast rock art heritage has resulted in an impressive array of surveys, inventories and detailed regional studies embracing almost every corner of the sub-continent. Despite this, previously unknown rock art sites are continually being found and brought to researchers' attention. Unfortunately, the circumstances leading to the finding of these sites - often involving development or mining - are not always the most propitious.

The engraving site reported here (Dowson n.d.; Morris 1992; National Monuments Council 1992) is a case in point. Found by chance during upgrading of the Vaal-Harts irrigation scheme, the options were limited: salvage or destroy. The Department of Water Affairs was engaged in the construction of a new, larger, canal some 50 m up the bank from the existing one, which runs tens of kilometres westwards from the Vaal-Harts Weir. In February 1991 Water Affairs personnel found a few rock engravings at Fourteen Streams that lay directly in the path of the canal a mere 40 to 50 m ahead of blasting operations at the working face (Figs 1 & 2).

Water Affairs personnel had noticed the engravings following a feature on rock art conservation on the SATV programme "50/50" and reported them to the Rock Art Research Unit, University of the Witwatersrand. The Unit in turn contacted the McGregor Museum in Kimberley. Following preliminary on-site investigations by both institutions and the issue of a permit for their

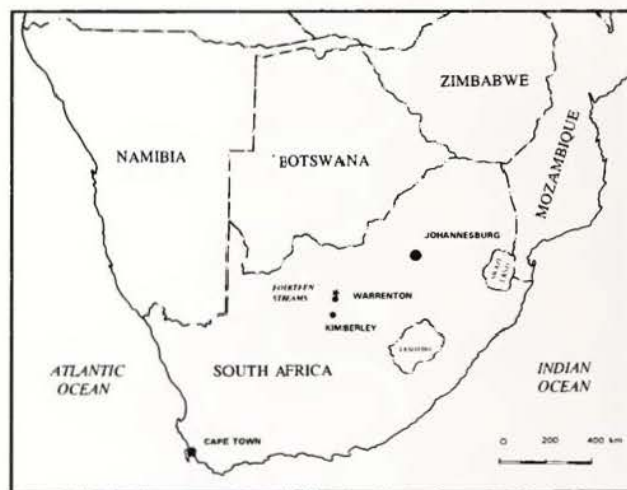


Fig. 1. Location of Fourteen Streams.

salvage to the McGregor Museum, the authors met at the site on 11 March 1991. Both institutions plotted and recorded the engravings *in situ*; their total number was determined to be ten images on eight andesite blocks. The dismantling of the site followed under supervision of McGregor Museum staff and with generous help from Water Affairs personnel who also supplied equipment and transport.

Small as the site was, it was not without interest. The engravings occurred in two clusters, the one comprising

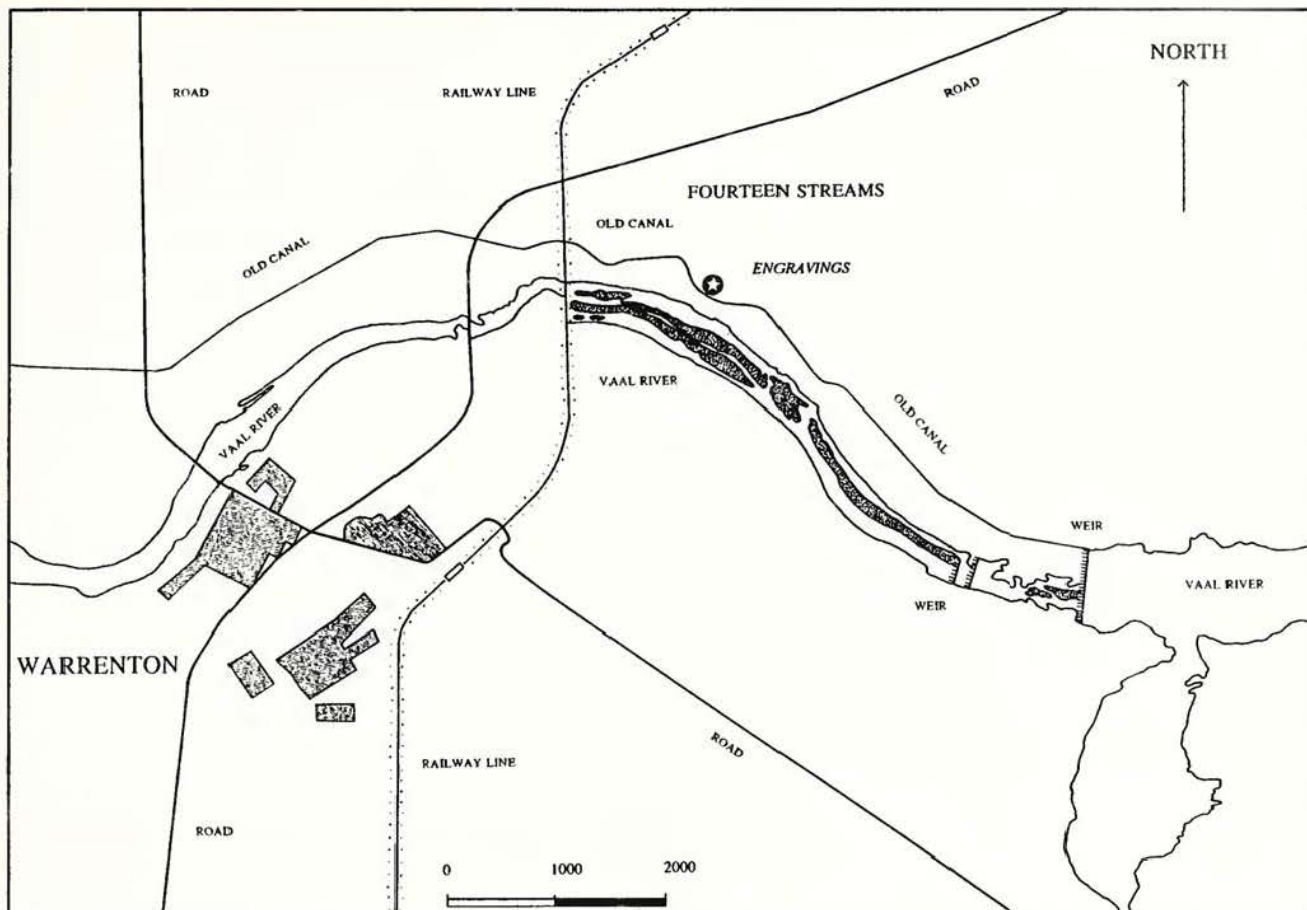


Fig. 2. Location of engravings, 50 m north of the old canal and directly in the path of canal construction.



Fig. 3. Eland with exaggerated dewlap.

an eland and an eland with human figure; the other an impressive image of a giraffe with large disproportionate head, an ostrich, an elephant, a lion, an indeterminate animal with a man holding a bow and a therianthrope. The absence of geometric motifs was intriguing.

ENGRAVINGS

In both engravings of eland, the dewlap is emphasized, one of them having a particularly exaggerated convolution below its neck (Fig. 3). Significantly, this part of the eland anatomy - often pronounced in both paintings and engravings - is composed chiefly of fatty tissue. Given that animal fat is associated with potency in San beliefs, this is clearly one of the features that lent to eland pre-eminence in San cosmology (Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams 1981). It is therefore of great interest at this site to find an ostrich (Fig. 4) that has a convolution under its breast that almost identically mimics the dewlap of the one eland (there may be numerous small 'peckings' below the convolution, but it is difficult to be sure whether these are human-made or a natural feature of the rock surface). A line emerging from the base of the neck of the giraffe (Fig. 5) towards its mouth may be an elaboration of this same motif which, one can but speculate, might have had some especial local significance and that may have imputed to these other animal images something of the aura of eland. Similarly 'dewlapped' ostriches occur at Eilandshoek and Rapids, downstream along the Vaal River from Warrenton (Fock and Fock 1989) and have, moreover, been noted as far afield as the Magaliesburg (Fig. 6).

The Human figure (Fig. 7) and therianthrope (Fig. 8)



Fig. 4. Ostrich with convolution under breast.



Fig. 5. Giraffe with line joining the base of the neck to the mouth.

at this site are shown in front elevation, with none in the more common side or twisted elevation. Engravings similar to these are to be found at Nazareth and Rapids, not far from Fourteen streams.

All of the other images also feature at other sites in the vicinity, namely Nazareth (which has a total of 319 engravings), Schoolplaats (544 engravings), Dundas (28), Middelpaas (23) and Warrenton Escom Station (28) (Pöch 1909; Wilman 1933; Fock & Fock 1989; Morris 1990). The Fourteen Streams site, with its total of only ten engravings, was a small one in comparison with these others; but such small sites are not uncommon in the region (McGregor Museum records). There was no clear evidence that any engravings had been removed, despite earlier construction close to the site. Other sites in the area have been robbed, however, and engravings are built into the walls of at least one house in Warrenton

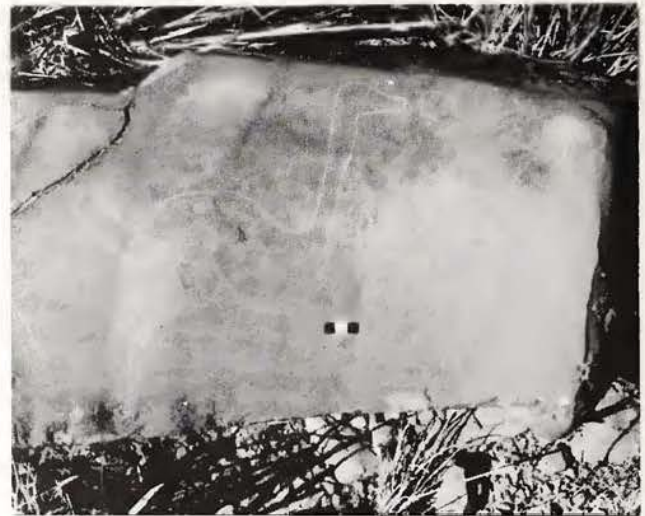


Fig. 6. Ostriches with exaggerated 'dewlaps', Magaliesberg region.

(Fock 1973).

The absence of geometric images from Fourteen Streams is a point of similarity between this site and three smaller nearby sites - Dundas, Middelpaas and Warrenton Escom Station. In contrast, quite substantial percentages of geometric motifs occur at the larger sites of Schoolplaats (20%) and Nazareth (26%). Differences such as this between sites are as yet poorly understood, but it might be significant that the two larger sites are immediately next to the river whereas the others, including the salvaged Fourteen Streams site, are all at least several hundred metres up the bank. Temporal (i.e. historical) factors might also pertain (Butzer et al 1979; Morris 1988).

A diffuse surface scatter of Later Stone Age lithic artefacts extended over a wide area and even beyond the engraving site and the path of the canal. Sampling of it was considered unwarranted, there being no compelling indication of any direct association between the artefacts and the engravings.

PRESERVATION

Lichen and exfoliation had damaged almost all the engravings. In some cases it was probably the actual act of engraving that weakened the rock surface and thus led to the subsequent breaking up of the adjacent crust (*cf.* Wilman 1933:50). None of the engravings had been damaged by major rock fractures, but a crack had formed through one of the eland engravings. Following salvage, each of these features is being monitored.

SALVAGE

Removal of rock art from a site is never embarked upon lightly. Engravings appear to hold meaning not only individually but also collectively, as well as in their situation as potent or powerful places in the landscape (Deacon 1988). Extracting them - however carefully and

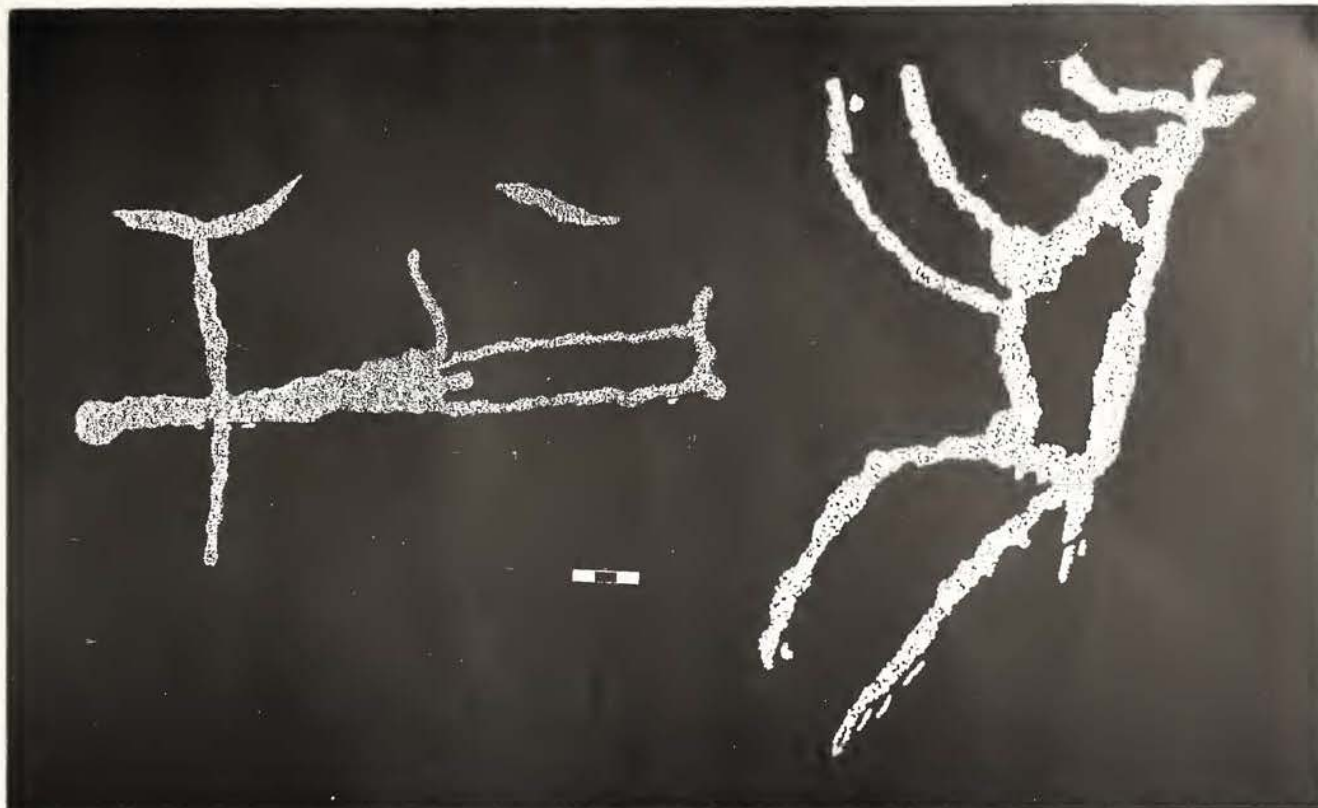


Fig. 7. Human figure, with bow and exaggerated penis, in front elevation and indeterminate animal.

however full the documentation might be - decontextualises both art and site. In this instance, owing to late discovery (there had been no Environmental Impact Assessment) re-routing of the canal was not an option. The site was directly threatened with complete destruction. Immediate salvage was the only course left.

The site was mapped, and the engravings were recorded in detail by means of photography and polythene tracings before removal. Thereafter cautious dislodgement of the eight large andesite blocks took several hours (Figs 10 & 11). Each was then hoisted by mobile crane onto a bed of sand in an awaiting Water Affairs truck, which took them to Kimberley (Figs 12 & 13).

EXHIBITION AND INTERPRETATION

Efforts are being made to heighten public awareness of rock art and to emphasize the need to conserve it throughout the Northern Cape, *inter alia* through local museum exhibits and the provision of interpretative material on selected, adequately controlled sites. In terms of the permit, the Fourteen Streams engravings were to be officially lodged and catalogued at the McGregor Museum, Kimberley - which houses the archaeological archive for the Northern Cape - but provision was also made for their being lent to other institutions for display and educational purposes.

The Vaalharts Museum at Jan Kempdorp - which exhibits historical material relating to the area from which the engravings came - expressed an interest in

some of the engravings for a display. It was agreed that six of the eight engravings should be sent there on loan, renewable annually, and that suitable interpretative material be supplied for captions and a brochure. The remaining two engravings, which were too indistinct for display purposes, have been retained in Kimberley. Visits are occasionally scheduled to inspect the engravings at Jan Kempdorp.

CONCLUSION

Regrettable as removal of rock art from its context is, the Fourteen Streams engravings would have been destroyed had they not been recognized and salvaged. The dismantling of this powerful place was conducted only after the site was thoroughly documented. By being placed on display at Jan Kempdorp, the engravings should help to enlighten people about rock art. The salvage was covered by the local press and received a follow-up mention on the SATV programme "50/50". That the original finding and reporting of the site followed a television feature on rock art conservation shows that such efforts to educate are efficacious.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank personnel of the Department of Water Affairs and Kimberley Municipality without whose co-operation, equipment and hard work this salvage would not have been possible. We are also grateful for assistance given by colleagues at the National Monuments Council and the



Fig. 8. Therianthrope.



Fig. 9. Dislodgement of engravings under the guidance of David Morris and Sephai Mngqolo (left) of the McGregor Museum.



Fig. 10. Hoisting of engravings onto a bed of sand on the back of the truck for removal to Kimberley. Crane driver Piet Molekwe with Water Affairs personnel and Kimberley Municipal staff contributed greatly to the success of the salvage.



Fig. 11. The approximate position of the site at Fourteen Streams some months after the salvage of the engravings.

Vaalharts Museum, Jan Kempdorp. Professor David Lewis-Williams, Mrs Elizabeth Voigt and Mr Leon Jacobson provided useful comments on the paper.

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Southern African Field Archaeology 3:63-64. 1995

REPORTS

AMERICAN ROCK ART RESEARCH ASSOCIATION: INTERNATIONAL ART CONGRESS 1994

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During the period 27 May - 3 June 1994 an international rock art congress was held at the Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff under the auspices of the American Rock Art Research Association (ARARA). ARARA is a member of the International Federation of Rock Art Organisations (IFRAO) which represents 20 organisations world-wide including the South African Rock Art Research Association (SARARA). Every year one of the organisations affiliated with IFRAO hosts an international rock art congress - the venue for the 1995 congress, for instance, will be at Torino in Italy under the auspices of the Centro Studi E Museo D'Arte Preistorica, Pinerolo.

Although delegates to this congress were mostly Americans, speakers from other nationalities were also represented and included countries as diverse as Australia, Macedonia, Britain, Norway, Holland, Germany, France, Mexico, Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Namibia, Portugal, Canada and South Africa. In addition the organisers of the conference extended invitations to representatives of American Indian groups who are presently living in areas containing Indian rock art. South African delegates to this congress included Thomas Dowson, David Lewis-Williams, Tony Manhire and Frans Prins. The ARARA Congress was attended by well over a thousand people making this one of the

largest international rock art congresses ever held.

The variety of papers presented were dealt with in twenty separate sessions. These included general sessions as well as those dealing with more specific topics such as The Shamanistic Interpretation of Rock art, Serpent Motif, Arizona Rock art, Ecology of Rock Art, Rock Art and Religion, Oceania, Preservation and Conservation, Archaeometry, Recording and Early Rock Art in the Americas. The session dealing with the shamanistic interpretation of rock art was well attended - not surprising as many American researchers favour the shamanistic approach.

Thomas Dowson presented a paper on Shamanism and rock art - an historical overview. In this paper he showed that shamanistic interpretations have been applied since the 1890's and that some of these early interpretations were applied in American rock art. David Lewis-Williams presented a paper entitled Dying to the world: shamanistic metaphor and animal behaviour in southern African rock art. This paper investigated some of the animal related concepts of the "death" metaphor as it was used by San shamans and artists. Tony Manhire presented a paper on the motifs and metaphors in the rock art of the south-western Cape. He argued that the rock art imagery of the south-western Cape carries symbolic and metaphoric meaning as well as literal