

MANAGING A NEW ROCK ART SITE

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In a world where we frequently believe we have found all there is to be found, new places and sites are discovered daily. Rock art sites like Chauvet Cave in France and the Côa valley sites in Portugal are among these new discoveries. When significant sites are found, it is important for us to be prepared to manage them appropriately. Unfortunately very little research has been devoted to rock art site management and although models for rock art site preservation and site management are in place in many parts of the world, the effectiveness of these systems has not been extensively evaluated. A review of the current literature makes it clear that the French and the Australians are the leaders in rock art site management (Lambert 1989, Rosenfeld 1988, Vidal 1991, Pearson and Swartz 1991). Work has been done in the United States by Georgia Lee (Lee 1991), Daniel McCarthy and Peter J. Pilles of the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Joseph Labadie of the United States Department of Interior National Park Service, the Australian Rock Art Research Association (Pearson and Swartz 1991) and the American Rock Art Research Association (ARARA 1988, Crotty 1989) among others.

Whereas other countries of the world have recognized the importance of their sites, giving them prominent status and the highest levels of governmental protection, in the United States there is only a single National Park that is dedicated solely to rock art. Petroglyph National Monument, partially in the city of Albuquerque, New Mexico, was created to protect and interpret a large group of petroglyphs and provide for visitor use. The site is found on a 27 kilometer long basalt escarpment encompassing an area of 5142 hectares (Southwest Regional Office, National Park Service (SWRO, NPS) 1988:7). The petroglyphs on the site, often referred to as West Mesa, have been known for a long time and through the decades various efforts toward recording them have taken place. Colonel James

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G. Bain recorded with a volunteer group in the 1960's. Matthew F. Schmader worked there in the 1980's (Schmader 1986 and 1987). In 1972 portions of the area were set aside as a State park. During the 1970's and 1980's the City of Albuquerque bought additional lands as open space (United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service [USDI, NPS] 1996:114-115). Even with this protection, however, the growing urban development within Albuquerque threatened major portions of the site and groups of citizens formed an organization to protect the petroglyphs and propose it for national park status. In 1987 a feasibility study was undertaken to evaluate the site's cultural and natural significance and to suggest alternative management plans (SWRO, NPS 1988:7) and in 1990, legislation was passed by the United States Congress establishing Petroglyph National Monument (United States Department of the Interior 1996:451). The legislation indicated that the following should be considered in planning for the development of the new national monument:

- the number of visitors and the types of public use that can be accommodated while protecting the monument resources;
- a resource protection program;
- a general interpretive program;
- a plan to implement the American Indian Religious Freedom Act;
- a general development plan, including proposals for a visitor center and the estimated cost thereof;
- a plan for a petroglyph research center (Petroglyph National Monument 1996:3).

In recent communication with me, Larry Beal the planner for Petroglyph National Monument discussed the necessary considerations for preparation and maintenance of a national park dedicated to rock art. He emphasized the use of cautionary and careful methods. The overriding principles by which a site should be managed must be understood by creating a mission statement that is agreed to by all concerned. These principles should help day to day managers address the priorities and conflicts of levels of visitor use and protection. Following the approval of the mission statement, a survey and inventory should be undertaken to assess the area, the varieties and amounts of rock art images, and any other significant resources. Emergency actions to protect and preserve any threatened rock art should be immediately taken in this initial stage of development.

Once the initial threats to the site have been mitigated or eliminated, a planning process, based on the mission statement, should proceed. Plans with goals for recommended future conditions need to be set within variable time

frames such as both five and twenty years. Early on in the process, the Park boundaries need to be reevaluated to determine if they fulfill the needs of the Park, the rock art and its protection, access, and appreciation. Local people, adjacent landowners, elected officials at all levels of government, academia, private organizations and others connected to the land must be included in the planning process in a way that they can express their needs and concerns.

Various parts of the park should be examined and decisions reached as to which areas should be open, closed or restricted for tourists. The requirements for parking and access need to be defined as well as the numbers of visitors. Whether the visitors should always be on guided tours or if self guided tours can also help visitors to appreciate the area must be considered. Areas are managed to provide a range of opportunities so that the needs of the many different types of visitors can be addressed and they can be taught to appreciate the value of protecting rock art sites. Clear explanations and the expectation of proper conduct for site visitation must be delineated (Bock and Lee 1992:23). With the visitation other aspects of the site's management are needed such as educational priorities and whether the rock art should be interpreted through signs, a visitor center, or a museum. Often a variety of interpretive approaches allows the messages to be understood by a variety of people. A clear and concise interpretive message about the rock art should be generated and the dissemination of this message should be uniform throughout the interpretive program. This is not to suggest that new ideas should be discouraged, but the accepted explanations should be offered by all the guides and this same information should be presented in the visitor center and museum. Outreach beyond the immediate site is also necessary to the public and professional communities through press releases, meetings and focus groups. The addition of traveling exhibits can bring examples of the treasures to schools and civic organizations.

There is no single, preferred method for managing a rock art site. However, everyone associated with the site management must agree on the important principles to manage the site or the program will fail. Constant monitoring for necessary changes must exist with continuous refinement and adjustment to the ever changing situations and to the knowledge of experience. (Lawrence Beal, personal communication 1997).

Perhaps the greatest error made in rock art site management is the rush to open it to the public. This can result in allowing irreversible changes to occur without fully understanding the impacts. Paving or constructing trails too close to rock art panels can make it too easy for visitors to touch and accelerate the deterioration or damage of the resources. Governmental authorities who manage sites are often inclined to develop sites for tourism or other economic reasons before they have been adequately studied. It is essential that detailed

documentation of the site take place prior to opening it to the public. The study of rock art sites should include “state of the art” recording techniques and an assessment of the site for conservation purposes. Each and every element including modern graffiti and natural damage should be carefully recorded. Recorders should attempt to abstain from interpretation as much as is possible. Notes should be taken on each aspect with explanations of their purposes for the clear understanding of the future researcher. This recordation should include various complementary and completely non — intrusive techniques to insure accuracy and comprehensive coverage. The recording methods will vary according to the particular characteristics of a site and the resources available and because rock art recording is in its infancy, methods continue to change and expand. Many are experimental and should be noted as such. Most methods can have validity as long as they neither touch, nor alter, nor impact the images, the rocks, the rock surfaces, and their immediate surroundings. Recording techniques with proven reliability are preferable.

Conservation and protection procedures can be recommended based on the detailed documentation. These measures may range from hiding fragile panels to physically removing graffiti or stabilizing boulders. They should be based on both the natural and the human impact of the past, present and future. Monitoring systems need to be established to assist in tracking problems and problematic areas. Educational programs should include underlying protective messages.

Even though it is frequently overlooked or treated in a casual way, the management of the records of the site may be the most important part of rock art site management (Loendorf 1997). The records for rock art sites present some particular problems, such as the storage of large drawings that need to be kept flat or the maintenance of the thousands of photographs which accumulate over the years. At the outset of the planning process, all data should be gathered that pertain to the site in all its aspects and from as far back in recorded history as possible. Judgements regarding the importance of the materials should be kept at a minimum as error on the side of “keeping it all” is more appropriate than discarding things. Site materials should be curated to provide easy accessibility. Archival quality storage should be provided with temperature and humidity controls to insure the safe maintenance of the collections. Copies and backups of the extremely significant materials should be maintained in an auxiliary facility. Funds need to be appropriated for all these tasks.

As more data are amassed, provisions for entering it into the records should be considered. Often it is worthwhile to assign a specific worker to this task. Research using the collected records and reports should be encouraged within adequate storage and study facilities. Continuous record keeping should include information on every contact with the site.

In the Final General Management Plan for Petroglyph National Monument the following items are delineated for cultural resource management: (1) inventorying, evaluating, and monitoring, (2) direct preservation, protection, maintenance, and stabilization actions, (3) protecting the cultural landscape, (4) research, (5) directing visitor use/designing and locating facilities, (6) law enforcement, and (7) educational and interpretive programs.... The petroglyph research center/ function would be an integral part of managing the cultural resources. No petroglyphs would be located or repositioned (SWRO, NPS 1996:31).

More emphasis must be placed on number four and the complete detailed documentation which frequently tends to be downplayed by the bureaucrats.

Provisions must be made for ongoing monitoring, for changing site and visitor needs, and adaptation to new educational or technological advancements. Both the adjoining and widespread public should be involved in the park projects as "protective part owners and educators". Dedicated and informed staff personnel should allow an open quality of conversation between all interested and affected persons to both protect the integrity of the site and provide for the needs of the public. Volunteer programs are a way to involve adjacent communities in the management of the site and to supplement park staff.

Rock art is a precious part of the world's heritage, and it should be treated as such. If we are privileged, through some fortunate circumstance, to be part of the discovery of a significant new site, we are obligated to treat it correctly. The site needs to be maintained and displayed in its optimum condition, with respect, and sensitivity.

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