

ENCOURAGING ROCK ART TOURISM IN THE DRAKENSBERG

Celeste Rossouw and Michelle Dye

Long-term conservation of heritage sites in South Africa includes the sustainable use of such sites as prescribed by the National Heritage Resources Act No. 25 of 1999. This aim can only be achieved through a marriage between long-term rock art conservation practices and the management of tourism strategies at these sites. Specific rock art sites in KwaZulu-Natal can only be opened to public visitors if the site has a management plan and accredited custodians in place. To ensure that the integrity of such sites is not compromised by illegal visits, Amafa's Access Policy stipulates that no one may go to a site without being accompanied by an Amafa accredited custodian.

Visitors have complained about not having a central hub where they can establish which sites are open and where they can find a custodian. It was therefore decided to create an elaborate 3D Google-Earth web-page with all the relevant information. This will ensure compliance and promote rock art sites that form a niche in the tourism market.

The first section of this article will cover practicalities related to the development of a Google-Earth web-page that is dedicated to officially open rock art sites; the benefits of such a web-page for the general public and the main stakeholders; and the content of the programme. The second section will provide a summary of the significance of rock art destinations in the Maloti Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site and its buffer zone. Some of the more significant rock art sites that include rare images and features will receive attention, and an explanation of how the rock art differs in the northern, central and southern sub-regions of the Drakensberg will be discussed.

Practicalities

The creation of low-impact tourism strategies and the marketing of rock art destinations within the MDP are not the core functions of either of the two main managerial stakeholders, Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal and Amafa aKwaZulu-Natali. Ezemvelo, the legal owner of the park, focuses on the conservation of natural resources, and the marketing it is involved in is concerned mainly with bio-diversity, scenic landscapes and eco-tourism.

Amafa, the provincial heritage resources agency, manages the cultural heritage resources in the park on behalf of Ezemvelo, which does not employ its own

dedicated cultural heritage manager. The agency focuses on legal and compliance issues linked to preventative care and direct interventions at rock art sites, drawing up management plans for sites that are threatened or are officially open to the public. It also trains rock art custodians.

The rock art custodian project was initiated as research has shown that 25 per cent of damage to rock paintings is caused either unintentionally or intentionally by visitors (Topp 2009). Unacceptable actions include the touching of rock paintings and throwing water over the art to take better photos, or purposeful vindictiveness, such as vandalism and even attempting to chip paintings off the rock face.

A second reason for initiating the rock art custodian project was to empower local communities living in proximity to the park. Training by Amafa ensures that local people are able to act as rock art custodians. This involves accompanying guests to a shelter, relating the code of conduct at the rock art site and supervising the guests' behaviour. This promotes an entrepreneurial spirit among locals that leads to the development of opportunities for economic benefit.

So far Amafa has trained more than 60 rock art custodians to ensure both the sustainable usage of heritage sites, as stipulated in the National Heritage Resources Act No. 25 of 1999, and the long-term conservation of these fragile resources. KwaZulu-Natal is the only province where the provincial heritage resources agency tries to make local communities more aware of the value of rock art, and encourages management partnerships for such sites.

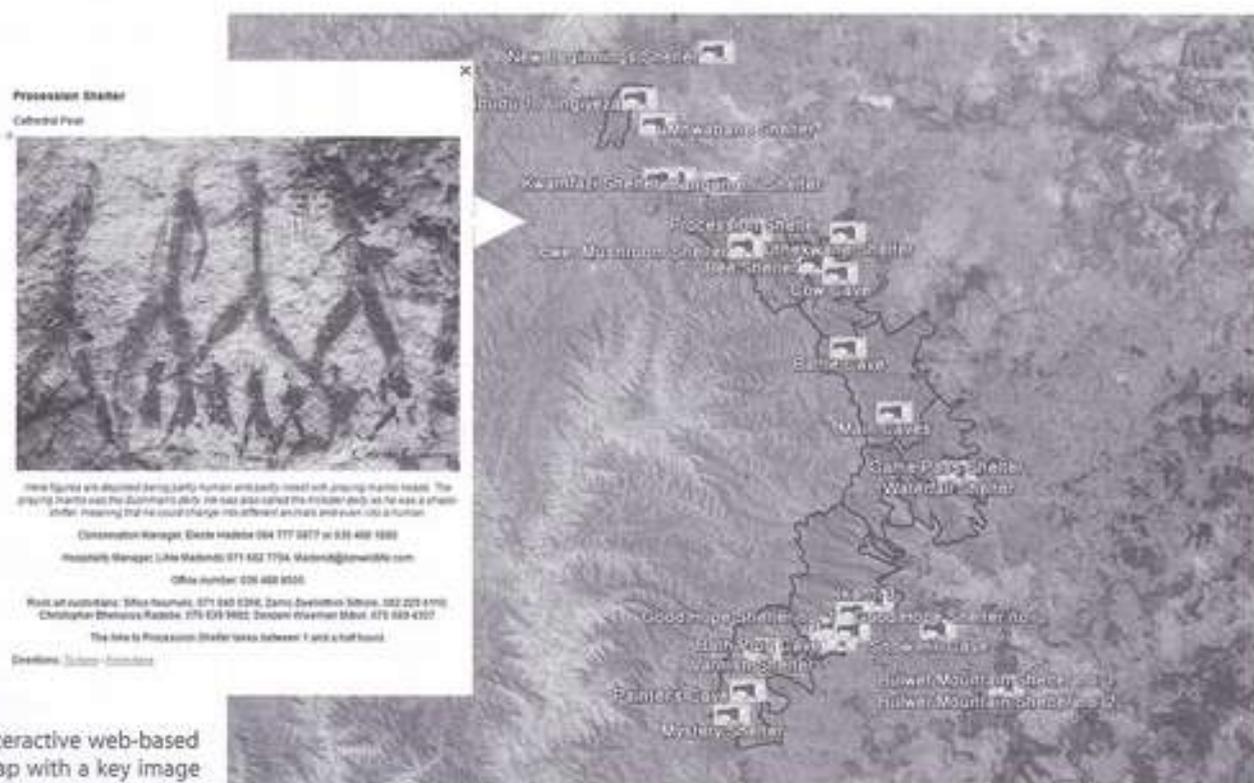
However, the generation of tourism is not the main deliverable of either Amafa or Ezemvelo, and guests have complained that the list of open sites on Amafa's webpage at www.heritagekzn.co.za is not helpful in accessing the sites. As a result, Amafa, in consultation with the African Conservation Trust, decided to develop a dedicated webpage with more information on the open rock art sites in the MDP and buffer zones, including in community areas, on private resort land and on farms.

Benefits and content of the webpage

For the webpage to be useful, it had to include the following data: name and locality of the site, name(s) of rock art custodian(s) trained for and working at that specific site with their contact details, a photo and a statement of significance of the key panel or image, site visiting times and at times the cost of visiting a site. It was decided to include those rock art sites where access control is well managed and central booking systems are in place.

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Interactive web-based map with a key image

The interactive web-based map shows 33 rock art sites that are open to the public, and allows people to take a virtual tour of the sites. The user can zoom in to see detail of the surrounding landscape and can view the key image, a description of the paintings and contact information for booking a guided tour.

How the webpage was created

The GIS specialist of the African Conservation Trust, Michelle Dye, assisted the rock art officer of Amafa, Celeste Rossouw, to develop an easily accessible Google webpage with links to the webpages of Ezemvelo, Amafa, Tourism KwaZulu-Natal, and the Mnweni and AmaZizi Rock Art Custodians and Monitors. Mrs Meridy Pfothenauer, community liaison officer of the latter group, edited this article, and Dr Janette Deacon edited the content of the webpage.

The map was created using freeware programmes and provides the public with detailed information about specific sites conveniently summarised on one page. The GPS coordinates of each site were marked in Google Earth and simple coding was used to customise the pop-up windows. The key site photographs were uploaded to Picasa web albums and linked to the pop-up windows. The Google Earth map was then embedded into the website for easy access.

The map is a useful tool that will boost tourism by informing people of the cultural heritage treasures that exist in and around the park. To view the map visit www.maloti-drakensberg.co.za/rockart/.

Significance of the art

The Maloti-Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site is one of only 25 world heritage sites that were declared

for both their natural and cultural significance. The biodiversity and pristine natural landscape are important for the park's natural significance, but the legacy of rock paintings by early San hunter-gatherers lent considerable weight to the park's bid for a combined World Heritage status. Studies have recorded about 600 painted sites containing 40 000 images (Derwent 2006).

The rock art of the Drakensberg region is globally significant for its use of the shaded polychrome technique in which human figures, eland and other animals are represented through the use of more than two colours delicately graded into one other. Compared to other rock art images in South Africa, Drakensberg San rock art images are small and intricate, and it is this minute detail that impresses researchers across the world. An eland, for example, may be represented as a 35 cm tall image not only with clearly indicated eyes, mouth and ears, but will have a mane of individually painted hairs no more than 1.5 mm long. Animals are not only shown side-on, walking and running, but also lying down, leaping and looking back over their shoulders. They are also painted from the front and the rear. Human figures are depicted in sophisticated positions (Derwent 2006: 86).

Rock art in the Didima Special Conservation Area in Cathedral Peak is of exceptional value, taking into consideration that this limited area, including a 5.5 km long gorge, contains the highest concentration of rock art in Africa: more than 17 sites that include 3 909 individual images (Sycolt 2002:68).

Rock art in the southern part of the Drakensberg is more interpretative/representative or narrative, depic-

ting, for instance, men on horses, guns, people in European clothes, ox-wagons and people with knobkieries, shields and Nguni cattle. In the central and-northern sub-regions rock art is more abstract or non-interpretive, for example shamanistic or hallucinatory art (Mazel 1981).

The Rosetta Panel

Research in the Drakensberg, and more specifically at Kamberg's Game Pass Shelter, by Prof. David-Lewis Williams of the Rock Art Research Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, allowed researchers to 'break the code' concerning symbolism in San rock art. The Rosetta Panel at Game Pass Shelter displays a dying eland, stumbling, with his head lowered and the hairs on his body standing erect. Behind the dying eland is a shaman or therianthrope (the figure has an eland head and hoofs, but the body of a human) copying the posture of the eland – the therianthrope is also stumbling, is bent forward by stomach spasms and the hair on his body is raised. Ethnographic research has concluded that there is a relationship between the dying eland and the therianthrope: by entering trance, a shaman 'dies' to the natural world and 'enters' the spiritual world. The transition into trance is very painful, and when the shaman falls unconscious, he is difficult to waken.

Therianthropes or images containing both animal and human features, for instance an image with an eland or rhebuck head and a human body, are the physical representation of a bridge between the natural and supernatural world to allow the shaman to cross into the spiritual sphere to obtain supernatural potency. This potency is needed to cure the sick, to bring rain and to ensure a successful hunt. Images of humans with either wings or fins are also linked to the trance experience, since the experience during altered states of consciousness are similar when one is "under the water or 'flying': one experiences blurred vision, lack of oxygen and a feeling of weightlessness.

The Secret San

The living heritage value and the fact that many of the rock art sites are still being used by San descendants as ritual destinations, add to the significance of rock art in the Drakensberg. Based on a genetic investigation, Prof. Himla Soodyal of the University of the Witwatersrand discovered that about 400 'Secret San' still live in the central and southern buffer zones of the Drakensberg. These are Zulu people whose ancestors intermarried with the San and have knowledge of their painting traditions, songs and rituals that were carried out at rock art sites. They refer to themselves as 'Secret San' because, their ancestors were intimidated by both blacks and whites who, because of the migratory nature of the San, the fact that they were hunter-gatherers and had no permanent abodes, led to the perception that they were vagabonds (Derwent 2005). Researchers like Frans Prins and Ndukuyakhe Ndlovu are investigating the spiritual

use of San painting sites by local, indigenous people.

Varied rock art traditions

Another characteristic that adds to the value of rock paintings in the MDP is the presence of more than one rock art tradition. The park contains San, Khoekhoen and Late White or White Daubing traditions from different cultural groups or societies and/or times. San paintings are the most abundant, while Khoekhoen finger paintings are extremely rare. Many rock art sites contain both San and Late White paintings. The latter is a tradition of finger painting initiated by indigenous Bantu-speaking farming communities in South Africa. Because this tradition was first researched in the Limpopo province, where paintings were executed in white, they were called Late White paintings. In the province of KwaZulu-Natal the paint is mainly red in colour, and less skilful and aesthetically pleasing than San rock art. It was perhaps created on the spur of the moment.

Ethnographic research has indicated that finger smears in red paint functioned to 'neutralise' the 'heat' or 'dangerous potency' of a rock art site where Zulu ancestors wanted to carry out initiation rituals (Prins 2008). According to Prins, it was necessary to create a delicate balance at a rock art site chosen by the Zulu since the paintings had been executed mainly by powerful San shamans and the red paintings may have contained the blood and fat of the San god's favourite animal, the eland. The site was therefore spiritually charged with supernatural potency. This was a necessary element for the ritual of the new users to be successful, but it was also dangerous and had to be 'neutralised'.

Some significant rock art sites

To experience the rock art fully, and to cater for families and people that may not be able to walk too far, some reserves within the MDP developed interpretation centres, such as the San open-air museum at Main Cave at Giant's Castle and the San museum and audio-visual centre at Didima, Cathedral Peak.

Main Cave is marketed very well and receives between 600 to 800 guests a month. The outing includes a short, 40-minute walk to the cave, which features two main rock art destinations. The southern section of the cave deals mainly with narrative and contact-type art, for example cattle, men on horses and people running with knobkieries. The northern section has more abstract art featuring therianthropes. A spectacular rain-making ritual can be viewed here with shamans swimming along the inkhanyamba, a mythological creature with an antelope head, a mane and a snake body that is believed to be able to control rain: soft 'female' rain for those who live morally correct lives and hard 'male' rain for those that do not. The custodian at the site, Thandeka Mlaba, is one of Amafa's best custodians and guests will enjoy her lively interpretation.

The Didima Museum includes an interpretative centre focusing on both the archaeology and rock art of the central Drakensberg, and the history of the researchers of the area. Guests can combine their visit to the museum with outings to one or more of the officially open rock art sites on Cathedral Peak property. The famous Lower Mushroom Shelter and Procession Shelters can also be visited. These rock art destinations include some very rare panels.

At Lower Mushroom, guests can view an example of polymelia, a therianthrope painted with six fingers on one of his hands. This links with experiences during altered states of consciousness when people 'feel' as if they are 'growing extra' fingers or limbs, or even wings or fins. What is also interesting here is what was originally thought to be 'war paint' in the form of zigzags on the leg of one of the therianthropes. However, David-Lewis Williams has described this as being entoptic: the zigzags travel from the figure's leg into the air. Entoptics are zigzags, nested u-shapes, sunbursts, dots, crosses and grid patterns that all people experience during the first stage of trance. These images are derived from our nervous system (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999). It is clear that these images are in essence also shamanistic.

At Procession Shelter images of therianthropes with praying mantis heads that walk on two groups of smaller therianthropes can be viewed. Many exciting outings to rock art sites can be enjoyed at Cathedral Peak – most are not too far to get to and fit visitors may even be able to see three sites on one day.

While the southern sub-region is not as developed as the central and northern sub-regions, it is home to backpackers that are dedicated hikers. Sipongweni Cave in Cobham Reserve is one of five rock art sites that was declared a national site under the National Monuments Council. It contains both narrative and abstract art, as well as a very rare but faded fishing scene as well as dancing rabbit therianthropes. Most likely, this is a depiction of 'transformed' shamans dancing during a trance. The presence of a bull therianthrope shows that cattle became even more important than eland during historical times and that domesticated animals could have replaced game as the latter became scarcer because of the improved hunting techniques of whites.

In Bushman's Nek Reserve, within a semi-primitive wilderness area, one can hike to Painter's Cave and Mystery Shelter. The latter is one of a small number of shelters where elaborate super-positioning occurs (several layers of paintings, one layer covering another).

The buffer zones

Several sites are located on hotel property or private farms where custodians have been trained and access is controlled. Of importance here are two groups of rock art monitors and custodians working in the traditional authority areas of AmaNgwane and AmaZizi, which together have more than 130 rock art

sites. Three are officially open for visiting in the AmaNgwane area and two in the AmaZizi area. The custodians monitor and carry out preventative care that does not require a permit, such as removing dead wood that poses a fire threat and trimming vegetation that rubs against the art. Depending on the availability of funding, an outreach is made to local schools and activities are implemented to raise community awareness. These are two areas where a marriage between conservation principals and low-impact tourism strategies have been successful.

Overnight facilities are available at the Mnweni Hiking Centre in the Amangwane area. The centre includes a curio shop and the guides specialise in both natural and cultural tours. The AmaZizi monitors also have an arts and craft centre called the Thandanani Centre, which lies on the way to Royal Natal. Amafa recently assisted this group to obtain an exhibition to orientate guests about the eBusingatha (Mghwabane) Shelter. The exhibition can be visited at Thandanani before eBusingatha, which is a short walk from a local homestead.

Conclusion

If rock art destinations are to be conserved, visitors need to have a deep appreciation of the value of the art and the fact that it is irreplaceable. This will ensure that everyone will act as the custodian of an exceptional resource, a true reflection of the creative genius of the San people.

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