

Unesco's World Heritage List and Rock Art

Each year at the beginning of the summer, the representatives of the countries members of UNESCO that are signatories of the World Heritage Convention meet -each time in a different city in the world. They examine the proposals submitted by various countries to put sites considered as having an « Outstanding Universal Value » on the prestigious World Heritage List and then they vote on each proposal. The results of the proceedings attract worldwide attention and put the chosen sites into the limelight.

The World Heritage List

The List is established under the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage that was adopted by UNESCO in November 1972. Any one of the countries that adhered to the Convention may nominate places within their borders for inclusion in the World Heritage List. Each nomination is assessed by one of the Advisory Bodies specified in the Convention, ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites) assesses cultural sites, and IUCN (Union for Nature) assesses natural sites. During its annual meeting the World Heritage Committee makes the final decision on whether a site should be included in the List. There are currently 185 countries that are signatories to the Convention and 878 sites (or groups of sites) from 145 member states that are now on the List (2008).

The sites proposed must meet at least one of ten selection criteria which are:

- i to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- ii to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a

cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;

- iii to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;

- iv to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;

- v to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

- vi to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Com-

mittee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);

vii to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;

viii to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;

ix to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;

x to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

The protection, management, authenticity and integrity of the properties proposed for the List are also important considerations.

Rock art sites on the World Heritage List and on the Tentative List

In 2007, two rock art sites were thus approved at the Christchurch (New- Zealand) meeting, one in Namibia (the petroglyphs of Twyfelfontein) (Fig. 1) and the other in Azerbaijan (Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape). In 2008, at the Quebec (Canada) meeting, no new rock art site was selected but the recognition of Altamira (Spain), acquired in 1985, was extended to 17 other Spanish caves strung out along the Atlantic Ocean under the name of "Cave of Altamira and Paleolithic Cave Art of Northern Spain".

These caves are: *Asturias*: La Peña de Candamo, Tito Bustillo, Covaciella, Llonín, El Pindal (Fig. 2), Chufín. *Cantabria* : Hornos de la Peña, El Castillo, Las Monedas, La Pasiega,

Las Chimeneas (Fig. 3), El Pendo, La Garma, Covalanas. *Basque Country*: Santimamiñe, Ekain (Fig. 4), Altxerri.

Now the **World Heritage List** includes the following rock art sites, 23 in all, summarily indicated according to the continents and countries where they are located and with the date when they were put on the List:

Africa (8): Algeria (Tassili), 1982; Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (Tadrart Acacus), 1985; South Africa (Drakensberg), 2000; Botswana (Tsodilo), 2001; Zimbabwe (Matobo) (Fig. 5), 2003; Malawi (Chongoni), 2006; Namibia (Twyfelfontein) (Fig. 1), 2007; Tanzania (Kondoa), 2006;

Americas (4): Brazil (Serra da Capivara) (Fig. 6), 1991; Mexico (Sierra de San Francisco), 1993; Peru (Nasca), 1994; Argentina (Cueva de las Manos), 1999;

Asia (3): India (Bhimbetka) (Fig. 7) , 2003 ; Kazakhstan (Tamgaly), 2004; Azerbaijan (Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape), 2007;

Europe (7): France (Vallée de la Vézère), 1979; Italy (Valcamonica), 1979; Spain (2) (Altamira, 1985 and extension 2008; Rock Art of the Mediterranean Basin on the Iberian Peninsula, Figs. 2, 3, 4), 1998; Norway (Alta) (Fig. 8), 1985; Sweden (Tanum), 1994; Portugal (Foz Côa) (Fig. 9), 1998;

Oceania (1): Australia (Kakadu) (Fig. 10), 1981-1992.

We can also add 20 other sites which include rock art but which were put on the List for other reasons:

Africa (3): South Africa (Mapungubwe); Mali (Bandiagara); Niger (Air and Ténéré) (Fig. 11);

Americas (15): two sites are located in North America and the other 13 in Central or South America: United States (2) (Grand Canyon; Chaco); Argentina (3) (Ischigualasto/Talampaya Park; Valdés Peninsula; Quebrada de Humahuaca); Bolivia (Samaipata); Chile (Rapa Nui); Columbia (San Agustín); Costa Rica (2) (Cocos Island; Guanacaste); Costa Rica/Panama (La Amistad); Guatemala (Tikal); Honduras (2) (Copán ; Río Plátano); Panama (Darien);

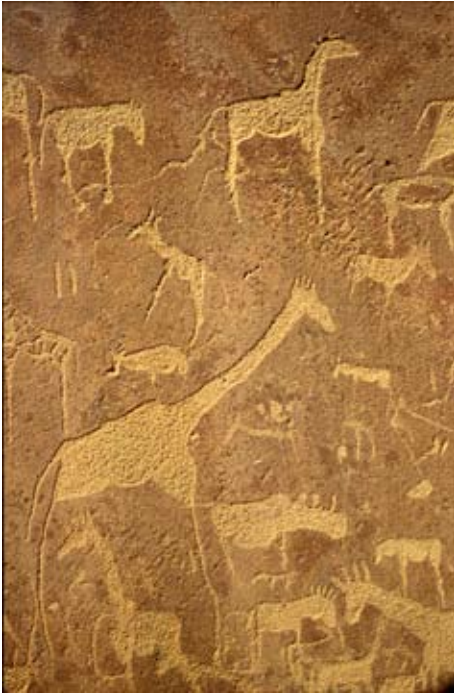


Fig. 2. Red paintings in Pindal cave in Asturias (Spain). A doe and geometric signs. On the WHL in 2008.

Fig. 1. (Left) Giraffes, rhinoceroses and other animals engraved at Twyfelfontein (Namibia), one of the two sites put on the World Heritage List in 2007. Photo Jean Clottes (all the photos in this paper are by the author, except when specified otherwise).



Fig. 3. Two deer facing each other in Las Chimeneas cave of Monte Castillo (Cantabria, Spain). On the WHL in 2008.



Fig. 4. Two bears in the cave of Ekain in the Basque Country (Spain). On the WHL in 2008. Photo: Jesus Altuna.

Oceania (2): Australia (2) (Uluru; Blue Mountains, Fig. 12).

We can see that a total of 43 rock art sites or groups of sites are present on the List for one reason or another, i.e. either for their rock art itself or because of an outstanding cultural and/or natural environment that happens to include rock art.

In addition, it is interesting to take into account what is called the Tentative List. That List provides a forecast of the properties that a State Party may decide to submit to UNESCO for inscription in the next five to ten years and which may be updated at any time. It is an important step since the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO can-



Fig. 5. Silozwane shelter in the Matobo Hills of Zimbabwe. Numerous persons on the painted panel, including -on the right- a woman touching the back of a person sitting. Photo Louis de Seilhe.



Fig. 6. A rare scene of a woman giving birth (left) painted in the Pedra Furada shelter in the Serra da Capivara (Piaui, Brazil).



Fig. 7. Warriors depicted in one of the Bhimbetka shelters of Madhya Pradesh (India).



Fig. 8. A complex scene at Alta (Norway). Engravings painted over to make them visible and protect them.

Fig. 9. Ibex engraved at Foz Côa (Portugal).



Fig. 10. Kakadu National Park (Northern Australia). This figure represents a malevolent spirit called Nabalwinjbulwinj that will eat women after having struck them with a yam.





Fig. 11. Giraffes and men engraved at Anakom in the Air (Niger).

not consider a nomination for inscription on the World Heritage List unless the property has already been included on the State Party's Tentative List.

The Tentative List only includes 24 rock art sites. Even though this is not much, it is interesting to see that rock art is not the prime reason for the proposal in four cases only (China: Hua Shan Scenic Area; Egypt: Desert wadis; Mali: La Boucle du Baoulé; Bolivia: Sajama National Park). In addition, a site already on the WHL as a natural site will be proposed as a mixed site because of its rock art (Niger: La réserve naturelle de l'Air et du Ténéré). The 19 other sites where rock art is valued *per se* -as one can see from some of their titles- are:

Africa (7): Burkina-Faso (The petroglyphs of Pobe Mengao); Mozambique (Vumba rock paintings); Namibia (1) (Brandberg National Monument Area); Central African Republic (The petroglyphs of Lengou); Chad (2) (Rock art paintings and engravings of the Ennedi

and Tibesti; The Archei region: the natural and cultural landscape and its rock art); Zambia (Mwela and adjacent areas rock art sites -rock paintings);

Americas (6): Bolivia: Sajama National Park; Brazil (2) (Rio Peruaçu Canyon, Minas Gerais and Cavernas do Peruaçu Federal Environment Protection Area); Chile (Ruprestrian art of Patagonia); Guatemala (Naj Tunich Cave); Uruguay (Chamangá: a Rock Paintings Area);

Asia (8) : China (HuaShan Scenic Area); Federation of Russia (Petroglyphs of Sikachi-Alyan); Kazakhstan (2) (Petroglyphs of Arpa-Uzen; Petroglyphs of Eshkiolmes); Kyrgyzstan (Saimaly-Tash Petroglyphs); Mongolia (2) (Khoit tsenkher cave rock paintings; Tsagaan salaa rock paintings); Myanmar (Badah-lin and associated caves);

Europe (3) : Finland (The Rock paintings of Astuvansalmi at Ristina); France (2) (Le massif forestier de Fontainebleau ; Mercantour: Alpes Maritimes).



Fig. 12. White hand stencils in Swinton's Cave, in the Blue Mountains (Australia).



Fig. 13. Women following each other in the so-called Girl School Shelter in the Brandberg (Namibia).

Fig. 15. (Right) Tens of thousands of Chalcolithic petroglyphs were made near Mont Bego in what is now the Mercantour Park (Alpes-Maritimes, France)

Fig. 14. Mostly geometric motifs are painted in the shelters of the Peruaçu area in the state of Minas Gerais (Brazil) as here in the Disenhos shelter.



For more details, see: www.worldheritagesite.org

Learning from the Lists

In order to assess the importance of rock art on the World Heritage List and on the Tentative List, we must consider the number of rock art sites that exist in the world, even if we are faced with two obvious difficulties.

The first difficulty is defining what "a site" is. Those on the List may range from one cave

(eg. Altamira) to a whole extensive area (eg. Kakadu or Rock Art of the Mediterranean Basin on the Iberian Peninsula, each with hundreds of painted shelters).

The second difficulty is that nobody knows exactly or even approximately how many rock art sites still exist on the planet. From the various available accounts, we might say probably more than 400,000. Despite the –perhaps gross- inaccuracies inherent in such very tentative evaluations, they still provide

a rough scale of sizes with which we can compare the number of sites on the List.

In *Europe*, the famed Palaeolithic art numbers no more than 370 sites, from the Iberian Peninsula to the Urals in Russia. At least 20,000 more belong to the five later traditions: the Levante art in shelters across the east of Spain; schematic art also in Spain, along the Mediterranean and the Atlantic coasts, including the British Isles; the Fontainebleau Forest art near Paris; the very important Alpine art in France and Italy; the many thousands of engraved rocks in Scandinavian countries

Africa is certainly the continent with most sites, possibly 200,000. They are particularly numerous in two huge areas: in the Sahara and the regions next to it (Collective 2007) and in southern Africa. In the centre of the continent, rock art exists in a number of places but in far lesser numbers.

Asia is still not very well known. One can distinguish six main areas with rock art: the Middle East, Central Asia, India, South-East Asia, China and Indonesia. On that vast continent there may be more than 50,000 sites.

In the *Americas*, research has intensified in the past decades. Thousands of sites exist from Canada to the south of Patagonia, including more than 15,000 in Central and South America alone (Collective 2006) and perhaps as many or more in North America. They are very varied, from the gigantic ghostly figures of the Barrier Canyon Style in the American South-West to the vivid scenes with minute humans in the Serra da Capivara in Brazil.

Paintings and petroglyphs are all over *Oceania*, with hundreds of sites in Hawaii and on Easter Island (Rapa Nui). The most important country in the world for rock art, however, is Australia. The Cape York Peninsula, Arnhem Land, the Kimberleys, the Pilbara are immense regions with innumerable and often spectacular paintings and engravings. The importance of Australian rock art is not only due to the number of painted or engraved sites, 100,000 or more, but also to the facts that Australia is the place with the longest uninterrupted rock art tradition -since perhaps 50,000 years BP until the present- and that, in many places,

aboriginal beliefs and stories about the art have been passed down until modern times (see Fig. 10).

This brief overview (Clottes 2002, 2005) shows that rock art, one of the major forms of our cultural heritage and certainly the most ancient, helplessly exposed to the degradations and destructions of Nature and of humans (Clottes 2008), is obviously not represented as it should be on the Lists, since the number of rock art sites that were put on the WHL on their own merits are just 23, i.e. 2.6% of the total of natural and/or cultural sites present on the WHL (878 in 2008). With the 20 other sites with rock art that were put on the list for other reasons the percentage rises to 4.8%, which still does not correspond at all to the global importance of rock art in relation to other cultural resources.

Another discrepancy is obvious: the distribution of listed rock art per continent as compared with the number of sites on each continent, even when taking into account the 20 rock art sites put on the List for other reasons.

In *Oceania*, the ratio of the sites on the List compared to a conservative estimate of the number of rock art sites is very low: 1 for about 33,300 sites (3 for at least 100,000 in total). Then comes *Africa*: 1 for about 18,000 sites (11 for 200,000) and *Asia*: 1 for about 16,600 sites (3 for 50,000). *Europe* and the *Americas* are in a much better position. *Europe*: 1 for about 2800 sites (7 for 20,000) and *America*: 1 for about 1600 sites (19 for 30,000).

A closer look shows huge discrepancies for each of the latter two continents. In *Europe*, three Palaeolithic sites (Altamira, Foz Côa, Lascaux) are on the List for about 370 in all (i.e. 1 for 123), to be compared with European Holocene art (4 for about 20,000 sites, i.e. 1 for about 5000). In the *Americas*, Northern America can only boast 3 sites on the List (1 for about 5,000), while -with perhaps about the same number of sites- South America has 17 (i.e. about 1 for 900).

Despite the admitted tentativeness of the numbers of sites we can thus see that South America and European Palaeolithic art come up on top, while North America (the USA and

The ship and the two men with the shield painted to make them visible. The rest of the figures are not painted. Tanum (Sweden) on the WHL 1994. Photo: Gerhard Milstreu.



Canada), Oceania and particularly Australia could do much better.

To assess the policy of UNESCO and more generally world interest in rock art, we should consider the evolution of the List over the past two decades. Out of the 23 WHL sites chosen for their rock art, there were a pitiful 7 before 1990 (4 in Europe, 2 in North Africa, 1 in Australia); 7 others were elected between 1990 and 1999 (3 in Europe, 4 in Latin America); and finally 9 between 2000 and 2008 included (6 in Southern and Eastern Africa, 3 in Asia). The progress is obvious.

Those tendencies are quite encouraging because they show that the number of rock art sites chosen for the List is increasing. They also show that the new nominations are slowly compensating for the previous unbalance and now work in favour of Asia, of Central/South America and of Africa.

The 24 rock art sites on the Tentative List confirm the latter tendency: 3 –all for Holocene art– are in Europe; 7 are in Africa, 8 in Asia and 6 in Latin America. None is on the Tentative List for the USA, Canada and Australia, which is all the more to be regretted as those countries have an enormous potential considering the number and the quality of their sites.

In order to facilitate a better knowledge and evaluation of rock art in the world, as

well as the selection of further sites for the List and their protection against the numerous threats of degradation and/or destruction, ICOMOS has launched a project of Thematic Studies for huge areas. So far, two have been completed: one for Latin America and the Caribbean (Collective 2006) and the other for the Sahara and North Africa (Collective 2007). A third one is being prepared for Central Asia.

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