

INDIAN HERITAGE SITE NOMINATION

The perhaps most important archaeological site in India is the Bhimbetka complex south of Bhopal. This impressive group of sandstone towers harbours 754 rockshelters, over 500 of which contain rock paintings. In 1990, AURA Editor R. G. Bednarik discovered in its central site, Auditorium Cave, the oldest currently known rock art in the world. After announcing this find (e.g. in *Man and Environment* 18[2]: 33-40), he requested the prestigious Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in New Delhi and other Indian agencies to approach the Indian government with the proposal to nominate Bhimbetka for World Heritage status. As the Convener of the International Federation of Rock Art Organizations (IFRAO), he then enlisted that federation's support for the nomination.

Bhimbetka is a sprawl of imposing rock formations located some 40 kilometres south of Bhopal, central India, on a widely visible hill top. From the distance, the rocks have the appearance of man-made structures, resembling perhaps Stonehenge. The imposing site has attracted the attention of humans since the Early Lower Palaeolithic. The name of the site, and that of several other nearby places derive from the Mahabharata, the great epic of ancient India. The rocks are called the 'seats of Bhima' (or Bhimasena), the hero of the Mahabharata. The spring Banaganga is in the vicinity, having been created by the arrow of Arjuna to

quench the thirst of Bhishma. The area literally oozes with a history of unknown numbers of millennia. Excavated occupation evidence (provided principally by Professors V. S. Wakankar and V. N. Misra) begins with an industry of pebble tools, followed by an early and later Acheulian, Middle Palaeolithic, Upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Chalcolithic and various Historic cultures, i.e. Bhimbetka seems to have been occupied in all pre-Historic phases. The site's painted rockshelters constitute one of the world's greatest concentrations of rock art sites. The first petroglyphs were recognised only in 1990. They have now become the impetus for the nomination of the site complex as a cultural site of world significance. If that nomination were successful it would be a fitting recognition of India's early cultural sophistication, and Bhimbetka would become one of the great cultural shrines of the world.

Bednarik is scheduled to travel to India later this year, to continue field research, develop a site management plan, report to the agencies involved, and promote and assist the heritage nomination bid in every possible way. This will include briefing of the bid's promoter, the Indira Gandhi Centre (particularly Professors Vatsyayan and Saraswati), and other institutions (e.g. the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya in Bhopal, and the Rock Art Society of India), as well as conducting media interviews and other functions. Bednarik's tour and media awareness program is supported by the Australia-India Council (Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade), with the involvement of the Australian High Commission in New Delhi.

As a result of this major commitment by the Editor, it is expected that the November issue of Rock Art Research will appear late, perhaps in January 1995. We apologise to all members and subscribers for this unavoidable delay.

DAMPIER ROCK ART UNDER SIEGE

One of the largest Australian concentrations of rock art is on the Burrup Peninsula, in the Dampier Archipelago of Western Australia. It has to share the peninsula with the industrial town of Dampier, its iron ore pelletising plant and port facilities, and the North West Shelf gas facilities. Your editor was the first European to examine the complex of several hundred petroglyph sites when he re-discovered almost 600 sites in the course of a three-year study in the 1960s, and in 1969 sought to involve the Western Australian Museum in their protection. An occupation site on the western Burrup, close to a major petroglyph concentration, was subsequently dated to the late Pleistocene by Michel Lorblanchet from France. It is highly probable that some of the petroglyphs also date from that period. In part, this was assumed due to the rock varnish covering many of the motifs, which geologist John Clarke thought to relate mainly to Pleistocene formation.

There are very strong competing interests involved on the Burrup, and while the power relationships may be a microcosm of what is happening elsewhere in Australia, the issues are perhaps more acute: not only is the area of the Burrup quite small (just over 100 square kilometres), the 'stakes' are unusually high, on both sides of the controversy. Dampier is the largest tonnage port of Australia, and a key element in the Western Australian economy. On the other hand, the Burrup Peninsula contains the largest concentration of petroglyphs in the world. Lorblanchet suggested that there may be 500 000 motifs on the peninsula, and while Patricia Vinnicombe's findings in the 1980s indicate a somewhat lower figure, it still remains the largest site complex in the world.

The second-largest petroglyph concentration, according to your editor, is in southern Peru, at Toro Muerto on the Rio Majes.

Recently, the conservationist group Friends of the Burrup was formed in Karratha, which campaigns against further expansion of industrial leases on the peninsula. In targeting the present Burrup Peninsula Draft Land Use and Management Plan it has sought the help of your editor. He in turn has involved the International Federation of Rock Art Organizations, and he petitioned three federal ministers on its behalf.

There are no professional rock art conservators employed in Western Australia, even though all formally accredited rock art conservators of the world were trained in Australia. The Burrup Peninsula Management Advisory Board in Karratha has been informed that it has not been advised by knowledgeable people. Even the most 'environmentally friendly' parts of its Draft Management Plan are only concerned about tourists and recreational use of the area, except for the occasional reference to the natural environment. There is a need for much clearer directives concerning the management of the rock art sites. We know from past experience to what destructive practices previous encounters between powerful commercial interests and meek conservationists led on the Burrup, including the wholesale destruction of rock art in several places, and the relocation of engraved boulders and their dumping in an ugly pile within a fenced compound at another sites. A more adequate management plan is required, which should include the following components:

1. Nomination of the Burrup to World Heritage status.
2. The return of all untenanted land to the surviving Aboriginal community (Ngaluma), perhaps with a proviso that they lease part of it as a National Park to the Commonwealth.

3. The permanent installation of a rock art ranger, who should have full jurisdiction over any rock art on leased land, besides assisting the managers of the conservation zone and liaising with traditional custodians.
4. That the perpetual conservation and cultural integrity of this

enormous cultural asset be safeguarded and supervised by a federal government agency of scientific repute, preferably the Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

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Anthropomorphic petroglyphs at Watering Cove, Burrup Peninsula, Western Australia. This photograph was taken in 1968, at the time of the site's European 'discovery'.

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