

ARARA Guidelines for Managers of Rock Art Sites on Public Lands:

Public Access

February 4, 2001

Prepared for ARARA Conservation and Protection Committee
by Leigh Marymor

The goal of the ARARA¹ Public Access Guidelines is to offer context, support and guidance to those land managers who are charged with stewardship responsibilities for cultural resources on public lands², and who must make complex decisions about rock art site management, especially the decision of how and when to promote public access to rock art sites.

Rationale: Increased public exposure to rock art imagery, in publications, on the Internet, and in popular culture (witness the popularity of the Kokopelli image on t-shirts, coffee mugs and bolo ties, for example), has fueled a growing demand from the public to gain access to rock art sites on public lands. At odds with the public's desire for open access to rock art sites is their inherent fragility – in many instances the visiting public has literally “loved” these sites to death by virtue of overwhelming numbers, carelessness and negligence. Open public access may also be at odds with contemporary Native American sentiments. Rock art sites are often held to be sacred, and although resting on public lands, may be claimed by Native Americans as intellectual cultural properties. Public Land Managers stand squarely in the center of multiple claims and views, and it is their challenge to bring the many stakeholders together in the decision of whether or not to develop and promote a particular site for public access.

There are several reasons why developing certain rock art sites on public lands for public visitation is a desirable thing. Foremost among these is our hope that an informed and educated public will develop an enhanced appreciation for Native American heritage and cultural resources and that the public will act in a responsible manner when visiting fragile rock art sites. With an increased sense of stewardship, we anticipate that visitors will behave in ways to increase the care and protection for these sites. Promotion of rock art sites can contribute to the building of a more “vocal constituency that urges land management agencies to place a higher priority on preservation, protection and study of these sites.”³

Dennis Slifer, author of a recently published rock art site guidebook⁴, has argued that the policy of withholding directions to some rock art sites on public lands as a method of protecting them from damage or looting actually increases their vulnerability. In this rationale, an increased public presence is thought to be a deterrent to vandals who may otherwise think that their actions are likely to go unobserved. Russ Kaldenberg, California State Archaeologist for the Bureau of Land Management has been quoted as saying, “. . . the simple presence of responsible and informed visitors, especially at remote sites, will serve as a deterrent to vandals who may intentionally or inadvertently harm the art.”⁵ In contradistinction to these views, Chad Smith, Tribal Archaeologist and Cultural Resource Manager for the AhaMaKav Cultural Society, Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, has argued that, “Once locations are divulged, looters and vandals will not be far behind the avocationalists and tourists, with unexpurgated reports and topographic maps in

¹ American Rock Art Research Association

² We distinguish here between public and tribal lands. We note that tribal lands, in general, are not available to the public for exploration, photography, or other forms of visitation without the informed consent of the affected tribal government. It is always required to obtain tribal permission for accessing or making any use of rock art sites or other resources on tribal lands.

³ Whitley, David S. 1996, A Guide to Rock Art Sites. Southern California and Nevada, Mountain Press Publishing Company, Missoula, xiii.

⁴ Slifer, Dennis. 2000, Guide to Rock Art of the Utah Region. Sites with Public Access, Ancient City Press, Sante Fe, viii.

⁵ Whitley, David S. 1996, Ibid.

hand”.⁶

L.G.A Smits has proposed that the protection of rock art sites and their development for cultural tourism are not contradictory. He proposes that “with economic development the capacity to protect rock art improves” and “with the development of tourism the incentive to protect it increases. . . . The contrast is therefore not between protection and development but between states and organizations who are willing and able to protect and those who are not”.⁷

Petroglyphs, rock paintings and the landscapes in which they occur are fragile by their nature. Once damaged, many of these cultural resources are irreparably lost. Unfortunately, there is no research to date that would indicate that promoting or increasing visitation to rock art sites through the publication of specific directions to these sites, with or without accompanying educational materials, *by itself*, contributes to a decrease in incidents of vandalism, or to a decrease in damage to the rock art and adjacent landscapes brought about by increased pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Guidelines: The ARARA guidelines attempt to assist land managers in balancing the public’s increasing demand for access to rock art sites on public lands with the land manager’s responsibility to protect these same sites from damage by vandals and from unintentional damage caused by the pressures of increased visitation.

1. Significance of Rock Art Sites. Rock art sites are natural, historical, and cultural monuments, and they are often revered as holy places by descendant native communities. They often preserve the only known records created by our human predecessors in the landscape. Gradually we learn to understand a bit more of what their makers intended, and even when we do not yet understand their meaning, we can appreciate them, and protect them for those in the future who may understand more.
2. Conservation Policy. Conservation policy should, at a minimum, provide rock art site documentation and development of a Cultural Resource Management Plan, and its implementation, complete with follow up evaluation protocols, prior to promoting rock art sites for public visitation.
3. Public Comment. Cultural Resource Managers should reach out to include public comment in the planning process. The planning body should be representative of the local community, and should be inclusive in its nature and composition. Cultural Resource Managers should always consult with the most likely descendants of those who left the cultural resources in the management planning process. Native American communities have an inherent cultural interest in rock art sites, many of which have important historical and contemporary spiritual values to these communities. Examples of community groups to be contacted for comment might include: school groups, professional and avocational archaeological associations, rock art advocacy groups, local museums, historical societies, and recreational users who might be impacted by a change in site usage (hikers, bikers, climbers, etc.).

⁶ Smith, Chad, December 20, 2000, Personal Correspondence,

⁷ Smits, L.G.A. 1978, “Rock Art: Protection and Development” in Conservation of Rock Art, Proceedings of the International Workshop on the Conservation of Rock Art, Perth, September 1977, Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material, 99-101.

4. Site Documentation. Assuming that with implementation of even the best protection efforts rock art sites will ultimately remain vulnerable to the vagaries of natural forces and to the unpredictable occurrence of random vandalism, it is the first responsibility of site management to fully survey and document these cultural resources. Documentation should begin with the most vulnerable resources, but should also include a complete inventory, mapping, and descriptive record of the remaining sites. Conservation and protection measures can be recommended based on the detailed documentation. There is no one-size-fits-all plan for rock art site management, each site must be individually evaluated and the best plan devised for it.

5. Determination of the Appropriate Type and Level of Visitation. Critical to the development of the management plan, baseline data should be collected, systematically and over time, on the existing levels of public visitation to sites, and of the existing level of visitor impacts observed.⁸ Pertinent data to be collected includes: a determination of which sites are being visited, the nature and scale of the visitation, (by individuals, tour groups, seasonally, total numbers of visits), identification and documentation of the greatest threats to the resource, the extent of any existing management structures in place, the nature of any existing interpretive materials available, the level of Native American involvement in management and interpretation, and the extent of published and unpublished documentation on the site(s).

Sites that already attract visitors and that have a high intrinsic value, and sites that are already being adversely impacted by human activities should be protected through active management.

Not all sites are appropriate for visitation. Those which should be considered for closure include sites which are extremely fragile, those where the rock art elements are not readily visible (due to extreme fading, or inaccessibility), and those that are likely to suffer increased vandalism due to increased visitation. Decisions to promote visitation to rock art sites must be sensitive to contemporary Native American cultural values, spiritual values, and potential ongoing Native American use/reuse of some sites.

6. Conservation Efforts. Where rock art sites already show damage or deterioration due to natural or human impacts, conservation efforts may be appropriate. A well maintained site is less likely to be vandalized. Graffiti should be removed quickly. Where damage directly impacts rock art panels or elements, examination and mitigation by a professional Rock Art Conservator is appropriate. Because efforts to mitigate damage to rock art elements may in and of themselves cause further damage, it is highly advised that care, caution, and consultation with a qualified conservator be undertaken. In some instances, the most likely Native American descendants may object to interventions that directly impact the rock art or surfaces on which it occurs, therefore consultation is necessary.

7. Development of Appropriate Facilities. Physical improvements placed at rock art sites will affect the behavior of visitors. Trails, fences, interpretive signs, and guest log books are some examples of physical improvements which have been incorporated into

⁸ See Franklin, Natalie 01/2000, "Management Conservation and Presentation of Indigenous Rock Art in Queensland, Australia" in Pictogram 11(2):1-5.

site management plans. Obtrusive barriers may antagonize visitors thereby encouraging increased vandalism. Unobtrusive barriers which blend tastefully with the natural setting can suggest a "psychological" buffer zone where inside (restricted) and outside (authorized) spaces are communicated to the visitor without antagonism. All site improvements should be visitor friendly, blend with the natural beauty of the site, and communicate a sense of approach to, and participation in, a unique place of intrinsic and cultural value.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation protocols should be established in order to assist managers in periodic review of the management plan. Documentation of newly observed impacts to the site, both natural and human, including recurring vandalism, will allow managers to evaluate the relative success of the actions undertaken, and to alter resource management practices to conform to changing site requirements as they arise.

9. Public Volunteerism. Public volunteerism is a potent resource which can add value to the Cultural Resource Management Plan. There are many examples of successful volunteer "Site Steward" programs involved in rock art site monitoring and protection. Volunteer Site Stewards have been successfully trained to monitor visitor behavior at remote sites and to report acts of vandalism to the appropriate managing agency or law enforcement official. Volunteers, acting as responsible role models for the visiting public, put a positive face on policies for managing visitation and for encouraging site protection.

10. Interpretation. "Visitors are less likely to damage rock art sites if they are aware of their value".⁹ By revealing the past we can make it a focus of education in schools and in scholastic curricula. Only through knowledge can we obtain the understanding of universal value, and therefore, the understanding and respect for different cultures of all times, of all ethnic groups, and of the natural inborn dignity of every person, who must be able to transmit and elaborate their culture for each new generation.¹⁰

Interpretive texts should be sensitive to the archaeological record and to Native American worldviews, which are often at odds with each other. Interpretive texts, when presenting explanations related to the meaning of the images, should always be provisional in nature, and should reflect the tentative nature of our knowledge. John R. Welch, Historic Preservation Officer, White Mountain Apache Heritage Program emphasizes that, ". . . those managers and researchers of rock art who fail to consult and incorporate tribal perspectives into their work are missing out on opportunities to acquire unique information and to broaden and deepen ties between rock art and the communities most intrinsically interested in rock art conservation."¹¹

Finally, educational and interpretive materials should include underlying protective messages which reference appropriate visitor behavior at a rock art site and the

⁹ Natalie Franklin (ibid) quoting J.M. Jacobs and F. Gale, 1994, *Tourism and the Protection of Aboriginal Cultural Sites*, Special Australian Heritage Publication No. 10, Canberra, Australia, Australian Government Publishing Service

¹⁰ After Dario Seglie, 1999, "Save Rock Art" in *Ripon 99: Proceedings of the ARARA International Rock Art Congress*, Ripon, May 1999, in press.

¹¹ John R. Welch, december 11, 2000, Personal communication

appropriate State and Federal laws which protect archaeological resources on public lands.

Acknowledgments: It has been the intent of the ARARA Public Access Guidelines project, from its inception, to seek a broad consensus from as many voices within the community of rock art site conservation and protection advocates as possible. In this spirit, the author consulted the *Rock Art Studies*¹² database to search over 8600 citations to the rock art literature in search of publications which specifically deal with the issues presented here. Dialogue on this topic was pursued during the Spring and Summer of 2000 via the Internet on the *Rock Art Newsgroup* (Rock-Art@ASU.edu, hosted by the Deer Valley Rock Art Center, Arizona State University). Copies of the working draft of this document were mailed with a request for comments to eighty Native American Cultural Resource Officers and Public Lands Managers. Appreciation is due to all of those who participated in the discussions, to those who reviewed this document, and especially to those who offered their written comments. I would especially like to thank: Lloyd Anderson, Robert Bednarik, Carl Bjork, Jim Blazik, Todd Bostwick, Gary Curtis, Claudia Cunha, John Clegg, Claire Dean, Carol Diaz-Granados, Bill Drake, John Foster, Jeff Gonor, Bill Grether, Mark Henderson, Bill Hyder, Tom Jones, Jane Kolber, William Layman, Robert Mark, Sandra Marymor, Anne McConnell, Kaye McPherson, Yann Montelle, David Morris, Linda Olson, Antoinette Padgett, Peter Pilles, Domingo Sanchez P., Ron Sanders, Dario Seglie, Chad Smith, Kay Sutherland, Michelle Berg Vogel, Sue Wade, Robert Wallis, John R. Welch, Peter Welsh, and Alanah Woody,

¹² M. Leigh Marymor, 2000, Rock Art Studies: A Bibliographic Database, Berkeley, CA. A bibliographic computer database containing over 8600 citations to the primarily English language rock art literature.

Appendix A: Rock Art Site Etiquette – A Visitor’s Guide*

The most important thing to do is to show respect for the site, its history, and the people it represents. This is easily done if we try to follow some simple rules.

} Don’t touch the rock art. Natural oils and acids on your skin will harm the images. Remember that you are not the only visitor to the site. The oils and acids soon accumulate to cause staining and other damage. Touching the images also simply wears them away over time.

} Don’t move or remove any artifacts you may find at a site. Any objects associated with the site are pieces of the same puzzle that tells us that the site and surrounding landscape- including all the associated plants and animals - are an important part of the site.

} Don’t add graffiti or otherwise deface the images or the site. Rock art is not “ancient graffiti”. Even if others have been thoughtless enough to add their names or a message to the images, please don’t condone their actions by adding your own. Remember that on public lands, defacing the site is actually illegal.

} Don’t walk or climb across rock art to get to get closer to other images, or simply to explore, or to take a shortcut to another place. Unauthorized trails are easily established and with repeated use they erode and can irreparably damage sites.

} Don’t make rubbings of petroglyphs. Rubbings cause damage to images by abrading them and sometimes by leaving behind residues of the materials used to make the rubbings.

} Don’t use chalk or other materials to outline images. This is vandalism, besides which it is unsightly and can cause permanent damage to the rock art.

} Do learn more about the site and about rock art in general. There are a great many books available that not only tell you about rock art, but often contain spectacular photographs of sites that are hard for most people to find and visit.

} Do report any vandalism or defacement to the agency responsible for the preservation of the land where the site is located. Examples of such organizations are the National Park Service, National Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, or the relevant state parks department.

} Do take only photographs, drawings and memories. Remember, do not highlight images by using chalk, water, or other materials. Remember, touching images in any way damages them.

} Do take your trash home with you and help by also carrying out trash that others have carelessly dropped.

} Do take time to appreciate the site and hear and see its story and that of the people who created it.

* excerpted from Please - Respect, Protect and Enjoy Rock Art, prepared by J. Claire Dean and the Conservation and Preservation Committee, American Rock Art Research Association, Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona, May 1999.

Appendix B: Conservation Basic Reading List

Prepared by J. Claire Dean and Leigh Marymor

American Rock Art Research Association
Conservation and Preservation Committee

CONSERVATION GUIDELINES OF THE AMERICAN ROCK ART RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

1988 American Rock Art Research Association.
American Rock Art Research Association, San Miguel, California.

VANDALISM OF ROCK-ART FOR ENHANCED PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIES IN CONSERVATION

1994 Chaffee, S. D., M. Hyman and M. W. Rowe.
ETUDES DE CONSERVATION (39)3:161-168

IMAGES PAST, IMAGES PRESENT: THE CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION OF ROCK ART

1999 Dean, J. Claire, ed.
Proceedings from the Rock Art Preservation and Conservation Symposium, International Rock art Congress, Flagstaff, Arizona, 1994.
American Rock Art Research Association, Tucson, Arizona.

PRESERVING OUR ROCK ART HERITAGE. PROCEEDINGS FROM THE SYMPOSIUM ON ROCK ART CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION. 14TH ANNUAL ARARA CONFERENCE

1989 Crotty, Helen K.
Occasional Publication #1:
American Rock Art Research Association, San Miguel, California

MANAGING A NEW ROCK ART SITE

1997 Kolber, Jane.
Trabalhos de Antropologia e Etnologia. Vol.37:3-4, 6
Sociedade Portuguesa de Antropologia e Ethnologia, Porto, Portugal.

CONSERVING AUSTRALIAN ROCK ART: A MANUAL FOR SITE MANAGERS

1989 Lambert, David.
Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, Australia.

ROCK ART AND CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

1991 Lee, Georgia.
Wormwood Press, Calabasas, California.

ROCK ART CONSERVATION IN AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION, SPECIAL PUBLICATIONS SERIES
1988 Rosenfeld, Andree.
Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra, Australia.

THE ROLE OF CONSERVATION TECHNIQUES IN ROCK ART PRESERVATION

1985 Schwartzbaum, Paul M.
Rock Art Research (2)1:65-70
Australian Rock Art Research Association, Melbourne, Australia.

ROCK ART CONSERVATION IN THE UNITED STATES: WISH OR REALITY

1989 Silver, Constance.
Preserving Our Rock Art Heritage, ARARA Occasional Publication.1:3-15,
American Rock Art Research Association, San Miguel, California.

WHAT MAKES A CONSERVATION TREATMENT ACCEPTABLE OT NOT?

1989 Stanley Price, Nicholas.

Preserving Our rock art Heritage, ARARA Occasional Publication.1:17-22
American Rock Art Research Association, San Miguel, California.

PRESERVATION OF ROCK ART

1996 Thorn, Andrew, and Jacques Brunet, editors.

Occasional AURA Publication No. 9 Proceedings of the International Congress of the Australian Rock Art Research Association, Cairns, 1992.

Australian Rock Art Research Association, Melbourne, Australia.

RETOUCH: MAINTENANCE AND CONSERVATION OF ABORIGINAL ROCK IMAGERY

1992 Ward, Graeme K.

Occasional AURA Publication 5:1-7. The Retouch Symposium of the First Aura Congress, Darwin.

Australian Rock Art Research Association, Melbourne, Australia.

MANAGEMENT OF ROCK ART IMAGERY

1996 Ward, Graeme K. and Lucina A. Ward, editors.

Occasional AURA Publication No. 9. Proceedings of Management of Rock Art Imagery Symposium, Second International Congress on the Australian Rock Art Research Association, Cairns, 1992.

Australian Rock Art Research Association, Melbourne, Australia.

WHAT ARE SILICA SKINS AND HOW ARE THEY IMPORTANT IN ROCK ART CONSERVATION?

1990 Watchman, Alan.

Australian Aboriginal Studies, 1:21-29, Canberra, Australia.

TOURISM AND THE PROTECTION OF ABORIGINAL CULTURAL SITES

1994 Jacobs, Jane M. and Gale, F.

Australian Heritage Commission Special Publication Series No. 10

LOOKING AFTER HERITAGE PLACES. THE BASICS OF PLANNING FOR MANAGERS, LANDOWNERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

1995 Pearson, M. and Sullivan, S.

Melbourne University Press