

# Kondoa

## World Heritage Rock Painting Site



*Looking East over the Rift Valley from one of the many rock shelters in Kondoa. Note white paintings on left.*

The Irangi-Kondoa Rock Painting Sites of central Tanzania were originally nominated as a World Heritage Site in 2006 on account of their outstanding universal value: the sites are a testimony to the lives of hunter-gatherers and agriculturalists who have lived in the area over several millennia, and are still used by some local communities for ritual activities such as rain-making, divining and healing.

### Background

The existence of rock paintings in a 40 000 sq km area of central Tanzania has been known to Westerners for almost a hundred years. Louis Leakey noted many sites in the area in the 1920s (Bwasiri, 2008). Early surveys were made by Ludwig Kohl-Larsen who traced images in at least 76 shelters in 1935, (Kohl-Larsen, 1958, Henry Fosbrooke, 1950), Mary and Louis Leakey in 1935 and 1951 who traced over 1 600 painted images at 186 sites in a small area north of Kondoa (Leakey, 1983); Fidelis Masao who surveyed 68 rock paintings sites and excavated four of them (Masao, 1979), and in 1981-1983 Emmanuel Anati who recorded 200 sites in Kondoa (Anati, 1986). Other researchers in the general area include Eric ten Raa, (1971 and 1974), David Lewis-Williams (1986) Imogene Lim (1992) and Emmanuel Bwasiri (2008, 2011).

In 1957, the Colonial government established the Antiquities Department. However, until promulgation of the Colonial Monuments Preservation Order of 1937 and 1949, rock paintings sites in Tanzania

received protection only by those communities who still made use of them (Bwasiri, 2008); they lacked legal protection. The Ordinance was replaced in 1964 by the Antiquities Act under which some of Kondoa paintings were declared National Monuments.

In the 1960s, graffiti and other human-inflicted damage to paintings emerged as serious threats resulting in the Department of Antiquities erecting cages in front of the art at a few sites. However, local people, who still used at least some sites for ritual purposes, gradually removed the cages and used them for building materials (Bwasiri, 2008). Also in the 1960s, a headquarters building was constructed in the nearby village of Kolo and two custodians appointed.

In 2000, as a signatory to the World Heritage Convention, Tanzania sought nomination to the World Heritage List for a concentration of some 200 rock art sites north and east of Kolo village; and in 2006, an area of 2 336 sq km in the Kondoa-Irangi

Fig 1. Landscape near Pahi and Kolo showing granite outcrop where sites are located. Beyond is the edge of the Rift Valley.



region was inscribed on the World Heritage List. The sites include those recorded by Mary Leakey and many examined by Masao, Anati and Bwasiri. The area does not however include numerous other important sites lying to their west, some of them recorded by these authors.

### **The World Heritage area, its human history and its rock art sites**

The heritage area lies on the eastern, lower slopes of the Maasai Steppe bordering the Great Rift Valley. Fragmenting rift faults and some fallen boulders have created numerous granite shelters. (Fig 1) Today, bordering valley areas have been mostly cleared of the natural *Brachestygia* (Mimbo) woodland and are occupied by farmers. Similar deforestation has also occurred within the World Heritage site itself.

Hunter-gatherers were the earlier inhabitants dating back many thousands of years, among them ancestors of modern Sandawe who speak a click language and once occupied the Heritage area but have now moved south and west. About 3 000 years ago, pastoralists began to filter into the area from the north bringing with them cattle, while iron-working farmers only arrived after about AD 1700. Early pastoral-

ists may have been Cushitic ancestors of modern Iraqw, followed later by ancestors of Maasai. The farmers were and are mainly Warangi who now dominate the area (Sutton, 1968).

Numerous shelters stretch for some 18 km along the escarpment, most being fairly shallow, eroded out of the Precambrian granite mantle and comprising partially-protected rock faces leaning outwards over what may once have been small living areas. Shelter-faces can be large with surfaces sometimes stained by water-seepage and damaged by exfoliation. Not all shelters, even if suitable, contain rock paintings. A few shelters have been professionally excavated by Inskeep (1972, and recorded in Leakey, 1983), Masao (1979) and others. At the same time, many shelters have been seriously damaged by people digging in living floors seeking gold, said (although mistakenly) to have been buried in a painted rock shelter by Germans at termination of the 1914-1918 War. Other damage is still being inflicted (but see below).

### **The paintings**

Most researchers have divided the paintings into three general groups: Hunter-Gatherer (often known as 'Sandawe'), Pastoral, and



Fig 2 (b) – White giraffes west of Kondoa painted on top of fine-line red Sandawe paintings. Note human figures, rhino and antbear (?) bottom.

Fig 2 (a) – Red in-filled giraffe paintings at Pahi probably made by Twa hunter gatherers.

Late Whites (Fig 2a & Fig 2b). Often Hunter-Gatherer and Late White paintings are found in the same shelters, and in a few shelters all three groups may occur. Paint-

ings often superimposed each other, one layer upon another with several layers still visible. (Fig 3). Earlier researchers have tried to define styles of painting: In her book,

Fig 3. Bull from the Pastoral Period and white animals from Late White Period next to red Sandawe paintings. Roof Panel, Pahi.





Fig 4 – Reproduction by Mary Leakey (1950's) of a Sandawe painting at Kolo. (Made from her tracing) – entitled "The Bathers". Courtesy of the Leakey family.

Leakey describes nine styles (Mary Leakey, 1983) (Fig 4) , Masao four styles (Masao, 1979) and Anati four periods (Anati, 1996). Layers of superimposed paintings and styles do not actually help to provide a good chronology.

**Hunter-gatherer** paintings are often extremely well drawn using implements such as brushes, are sometimes very beautiful and are known as fine-line paintings (Fig

Fig 6 – Fine-line geometric painting in the Bubu River valley incorporating the outline of an animal facing left (Note two front legs).



Fig 5 – Fine-line Sandawe painting depicting group of women holding hands (dancing?) west of Kondoa. Red dots emanating from their heads could represent sound?

5). These are the earliest paintings. Images include animals, human figures (Fig 6), a few doubtful trees, handprints and designs, the later often circular. Animals make up 53 per cent of Kondoa paintings (Leakey, 1985) and include mainly large species such as giraffe, elephant, rhinoceros, antelope and carnivores, plus a few birds and reptiles, possible bees (Fig 7) and dogs. Most animal

Fig 7 – Painting of a seated figure (Thawi) whose hair or headdress is surrounded by flying insects, probably bees.

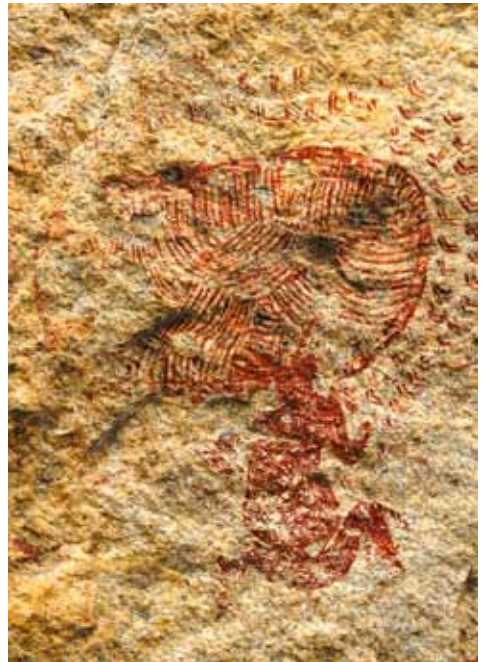




Fig 8 – Fine-line Sandawe painting depicting two elephants back to back, in what looks like an “enclosure”. Also within the “enclosure” are 3 bush-like objects which could be humans disguised as bushes?



Fig 9 – Kolo painting of 3 figures in headdresses.

paintings are depicted in profile, in dark red outline sometimes in-filled with a coloured wash or parallel lines, and sometimes in red silhouette (Fig 8). There are scenes, all lacking background details to provide modern perspective, composed of groups of animals, and animals with people. There are a few red animal tracks, cloven hoofs, porcupine and antbear.

Fig 10 - Looking out of a Pahi shelter with “Late White” paintings on the roof.





Fig 11 – Late White geometric paintings, Pahi.

Human figures, numbering 43 per cent of all images (Leakey, 1985), are usually painted in dark red although some occur in black, yellow and white, are often thin and elongated, sometimes with animal heads or large hair-styles (Fig 9), occasionally bent at the waist and almost always in groups or pairs. A few men are armed with bows and occur with animals, but it

is uncertain whether such scenes reflect hunting. Women are very scarce and there are no children. A few handprints have been painted rather than made by pressing painted hands on the rock. Most circular designs are concentric circles, sometimes with elaborate rays, and occasional rectangles and finger-dots.

Fig 12 – Paintings of large white eland (antelope) outlined in red, with red human figures. These should be some of the oldest paintings in Kondoa.



Fig 13 – Painting of a red cow at one of the Thawi sites. (color strengthened).





Fig 14 – Portrait of a Sandawe woman pictured west of Kondoa.

## Age of the paintings

No paintings have yet been scientifically dated. Nor have excavations below paintings disclosed any real evidence that can be firmly attached to the art. Reliance for more recent dates has been placed on the advent, first of domestic stock, and then of iron-working, Bantu-speaking farmers.

Inskeep (1962) excavated a painted shelter, recovering pieces of ochre in levels dated to about 29 000 BP (before the present). The ochre pieces had scrape marks perhaps made by humans suggesting an early use of colour; but whether the ochre was used for drawing on rock or for skin or body colouring remains unknown.

Researchers have postulated earliest dates for the art: Anati (1996) possibly 40 000 BP; Leakey (1985) quotes Inskeep; Coulson and Campbell (2001) 10 000 BP; and Masao (1979) 3000 BP. Accurate dates must wait for scientific dating, but are unlikely to pre-date 10 000 years ago since at most sites paintings are exposed to the weather (Fig 12).

Pastoral paintings of cattle and other domestic stock cannot predate the arrival of these species in the area (Fig 13). The first pastoralists, Cushitic herders coming from the Ethiopian region, arrived about 3 000 BP and were followed by Nilotic peoples including ancestors of Maasai. The first Bantu-speaking iron-workers also came from the north (and northwest), finally settling in Kondoa area about 300 years ago (Sutton, 1968) or even 500 years ago (J. Kesby, 1981, A.A. Mturi, 1998 and E.T. Kessy, 2005 in Bwasiri, 2011). As we will see, Bantu-speakers claim the Late White paintings for their ancestors suggesting that 500 BP must be the earliest date for those paintings.

## The artists

First, it is important to note that although the Sandawe are very distantly, ancestrally/genetically linked with the Southern African Bushmen (tens of thousands of years ago), Tanzania's Hunter-Gatherer art and Bushman Paintings (San Paintings) are not

**Pastoral** paintings are few and reflect mainly profile views of cattle, possible sheep and/or goats, a few dogs and people holding sticks and bows. Paintings are sometimes in white and otherwise in black, although the colour of many images has now faded to a dirty grey.

**Late White** paintings dominate many of the shelters. Images are usually crude, drawn with the finger and hand, and often superimpose earlier images (Fig 10). Most common are designs and symbols, circles, concentric circles, circles with rays, patterns of dots, grids within outlines, stick figures with heads and multiple arms, handprints and so on (Fig 11). Animals include giraffe, elephant, antelope, carnivores, snakes, spread-eagle 'reptiles', baboons and domestic species. Less common are human figures, but notably men, sometimes holding weapons, but more commonly facing forwards and often with hands on hips.



Fig 15 – Sandawe painting of an antelope facing left at the main Kolo site.

Fig 16 – Paintings of Kudu (antelope) and human figures on a boulder in the Bubu River valley. Note line of tiny animal tracks (porcupine?) along the bottom.



Fig 17(a) – Painting of a tall Pipe Player next to a dancer at one of the Pahi sites (Color has been slightly manipulated to show legs. Ref also drawing in 17b).

Fig 17(b) – Drawing of the two figures (Pipe Player and dancer), by Alec Campbell.

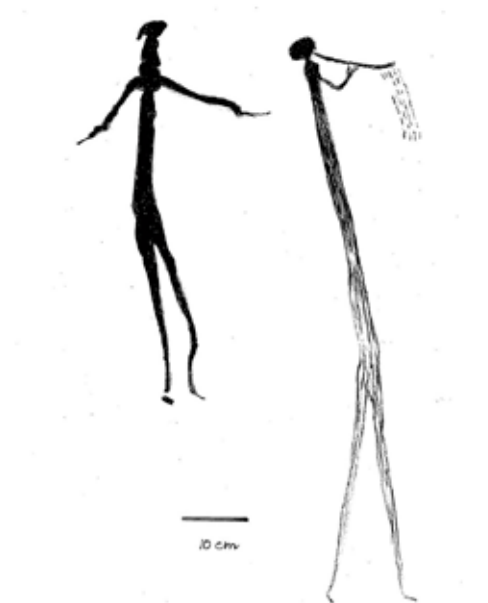






Fig 18 – Exceptional painting of an animal with a long thin horn (rhino?) facing left, Thawi.

directly related, even if subject matter of both arts tends to be similar: large animals, human figures and a few designs, and that all the artists are believed to have spoken click languages somewhat similar to those spoken by modern Sandawe and Bushman (but even in the Kalahari different Bushman clans have different click languages, of which no two are mutually understandable) (Fig 14). Lewis-Williams has clearly illustrated the dissimilarities between the two art forms: in Sandawe paintings, *Head-types, compositions, amount of detail, use of polychrome techniques and other features all differ considerably* as opposed to the same subjects in Bushman Paintings (Lewis-Williams, 1986) (Fig 15). However, the authors recognize similarities between the Sandawe paintings of Kondoa and the Bushman paintings found in areas of Northern Zimbabwe.

The identity of the artists of the earliest Hunter-Gatherer paintings remains doubtful. Ten thousand years ago, hunter-gatherers occupying eastern and southern Africa probably had a variety of cultures de-

pending on their environments (dry, forest, savannah, riverine, etc) and spoke different languages. Sandawe claim more recent paintings for themselves and their ancestors and it is quite possible that their distant ancestors were also the artists of the earliest existing paintings (Fig 16).

Ancestors of Iraqw, and possibly Maasai, must have been the artists who painted the pastoral images of cattle, and Warangi farmers claim the White Paintings.

### Interpreting the art

In the 1960s, Sandawe described to Ten Raa (1971 and 1974) two categories for paintings they claim: magic and ritual (Fig 17a & Fig 17b). Ten Raa watched a man paint a giraffe before going to hunt and recognised that the painting was made to ensure success. He also learned that such paintings together with a sacrifice of a domestic animal were made after a hunt if something had gone wrong – a failed hunt, breaking of taboo while hunting was in progress, healing and so on. Magic included paintings

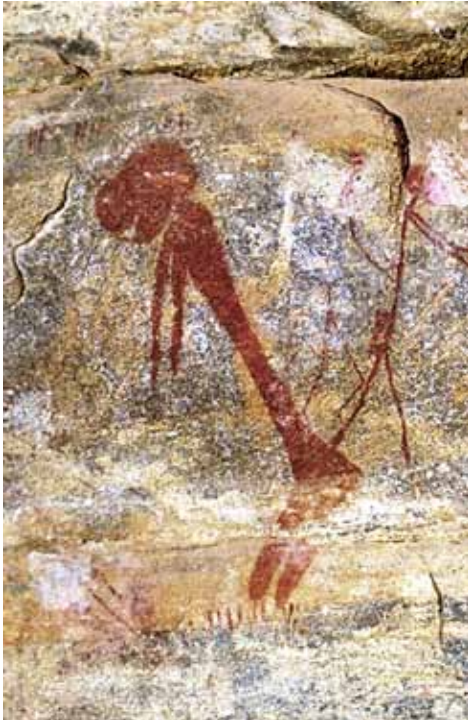


Fig 19 – Bare bent-over figure at main Kolo site reminiscent of South Africa's bushman paintings of people in trance.



Fig 20 – Pahi painting of a woman with lines emerging from her mouth suggesting she might be singing?

combined with inductive rites to ensure success in an enterprise; and sacrifice involved supplicants at a site, shouting prayers for help (rain, health and community well-being) to their clan ancestors, dancing to achieve a trance state (*simbo*), turning into a lion with power to counteract evil spirits, sacrificing an animal and sometimes painting the sacrificial animal and the painter on the rock (Fig 18).

Lim (1992) used a site-oriented approach to understanding rock paintings. She learned that **Sandawe** view certain shelters and baobab trees as wombs, places were all life began, invested with supernatural powers. Only some sites hold such power and not all of these sites contain rock art. Lim also noted the importance of another trance dance (*iyari*) performed at these places by women when seeking to ensure rain and health in the land. Lim writes: ‘

... *the meaning and potency of the place is reproduced through ritual, that is, the meaning is in the doing (=process), not in the object (= the painted figure)*’.

Lewis-Williams (1986) quotes and agrees with Ten Raa, ‘... the meaning of the art does not lie in the art itself but in the system of beliefs which lies behind it’. He compares the forms of animals (particularly predators) and human figures in Sandawe art to southern Africa’s Bushman Paintings, figures dancing and bent at the waist (a sign of trance states and shamanism), with animal heads and so on (Fig 19 & Fig 20). He concludes that, while there are differences in style between the two art forms, the artists were all hunter-gatherers and spoke click-languages suggesting a common world view and generally similar belief systems, although no immediate connection.



Fig 21 – Thawi landscape showing recent destruction of woodland near sites.

Thus, it appears that it was sites that were important rather than the paintings, and that the enactment of ritual beliefs that led to creation of paintings was more important than the paintings themselves.

Today, **Iraqw** peoples, who were originally pastoralists, make up less than five per cent of the Kondoa population. They do not actually claim any of the paintings for their ancestors, but they do claim to have utilised rock shelters for living and for rain-making.

**Warangi** claim Late White paintings for their ancestors. Warangi say the paintings sites were used during boys and girls initiation ceremonies when initiates went into the hills to be taught how to behave as adults, as husbands or wives, as parents and as members of a clan. The Tanzania government prohibited initiation ceremonies in the 1980s (Bwasiri, 2008) and the practice ceased. However, some sites, particularly *Mongomi wa Kolo* and its two neighbouring painted shelters are still used by a local Rangi clan for ritual purposes (Bwasiri,

2011). This involves brewing beer with sacred water, sacrificing an animal at the site, eating the meat and throwing blood and stomach contents on the rock face to ensure rain, fertility, good crops and human health (Bwasiri, 2008, 2011). The Department of Antiquities has tried to stop this practice fearing damage to the paintings, but the use of sites continues in secret (Bwasiri, 2008).

### Management Plan and current damage

The Management Plan, prepared for the nomination application to UNESCO, lists conservation requirements including, *inter alia*, locating and fully recording all sites within the World Heritage area, consolidating existing records, involving local communities in site management, appointing adequate custodial and conservation staff, monitoring status, preventing damage, providing tourist facilities and upgrading displays in the Kolo museum.



*Fig 22 – Piles of granite chips from illegal quarrying activities. In the backyard is an important painting site (see Fig 23). Bubu River valley.*

Up until now only limited progress has been made with these conservation requirements. Following the signature, of an MoU between the Department of Antiquities and TARA (Trust for African Rock Art) in 2009, a project was organised to implement the recommendations of the Management Plan at the Kolo and Pahi sites. These include the best known of the sites published by Mary Leakey and the most accessible to visitors. Thanks to a grant from the US Embassy (AFCP) in Dar es Salaam, a first community engagement workshop was held in 2009 and a second in 2011 at which the conservation challenges were discussed and solutions proposed. Meanwhile, in accordance with the plan, signage has been installed at Kolo and Pahi, covering sites currently open to visitors, but still only a tiny fraction of the 200 sites involved. The Department of Antiquities are now talking to community leaders at Thawi. So far the project has only been able to focus on the Kolo/Pahi area and further support is now needed in order

to engage and sensitize the other communities affected (e.g. Thawi.)

This progress has been encouraging but much more needs to be done. TARA and Antiquities also conducted a survey at Kolo and Pahi in August 2011, recording several important sites whose exact locations had been lost. Meanwhile at Pahi, the team noted instances of granite-quarrying, illegal gold-digging, deforestation and charcoal burning close to a number of important sites. The team also recorded sites west of Kolo and Pahi where almost all the woodland had been stripped since Kondoia was nominated. In some instances, granite-quarrying is taking place within metres of published sites.

Local communities inevitably put sites under pressure by their activities. Generally, people are poor and must rely on natural resources, while population expansion requires more homes and agricultural fields. People fell trees near sites for building



Fig 23 – Sandawe painting of a woman in a long dress with an “Afro” hairstyle. Bubu River valley.

timber and fencing poles and burn charcoal close to paintings (Fig 21). A hillside near Thawi with rock art sites has been partially stripped of trees for brick-burning and charcoal burning pits have been found close to several sites. Local people quarry granite next to sites breaking the granite into chips to sell for use in construction (Fig 22 & Fig 23). Fields are encroaching into the buffer zone. New graffiti continues to appear at painted sites. Treasure hunters

have obtained official permits to dig at rock art sites throughout the Heritage area, and dynamite has in some cases been used to try and find the German gold they believe lies buried below the paintings. In some cases it is now not possible to approach the paintings due to these illegal excavations and in all instances it destroys the possibility of future archeological research.

### **Tourist facilities**

In 2011, tourist facilities at the World Heritage site remained fairly minimal. Headquarters are in Kolo village on the main, gravel road from Babati to Kondoa. *Mongomi wa Kolo* and adjacent sites open to the public are above a parking place about 5 km north of Kolo. During the last decade, about 300 tourists have visited annually. The road south from Babati to Kolo is currently under construction and when this is finished it may be possible to even make day visits to Kolo from Arusha.

Tourists book into the Heritage site at Kolo. The Headquarters museum contains cases displaying stone tools, iron-working, and some information about the rock art. Here, tourists collect a guide before entering the WHS.

Tourists can stay in basic hotel accommodation in the nearby towns of Kondoa and Babati, or at the community campsite south east of Kolo on the way to the Kolo sites - the 'Mary Leakey camp site', which is highly recommended. The camp is fully functional with a shower, kitchen, toilets, blankets, mattresses and utensils. In addition, there is also a private campsite in the area.

### **Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to the United States Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation which, through its 2011 grant, has made the recent community project and survey work possible.

We are also grateful to the Trust for African Rock Art which financed several visits to

Kondoa Rock Paintings Site and for use of the Trust's images and other resources.

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**I am sad to announce** that since this article was written, my co-author, colleague and old friend, Alec Campbell has died (24th Nov 2012) after suffering from Leukemia. Alec was a founding trustee of TARA and we have

traveled thousands of miles together across Africa together in the last 20 years. He and I were co-authors of "African Rock Art", (Harry Abrams 2001). We have published a fuller tribute in our 2012 Newsletter, issue no 14 which will be available on our website: [www.africanrockart.org](http://www.africanrockart.org).

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