The re-invigoration of storytelling in academic and public spheres allows rock art to offer opportunities to various publics, of which archaeologists are part. But how exactly this process of archaeology as lifelong learning is to proceed is not always clear, particularly in the United States. Until the last half decade of the twentieth century, rock art as an archaeological research field within U.S. archaeology has had something of a Cinderella status. Perhaps the difficulty in age-determining the imagery has been an impediment. Perhaps the difficulty of excavating rock art has also hindered rock art's academic acceptance. Fortunately, this academic apartheid is waning and rock art is contributing strongly, primarily in terms of theory. Whatever the position of rock art research in the academic context, rock art has always figured prominently in the public imagination. This paper discusses rock art as a contested resource, presents a case study from South Africa, considers rock art and identity, and discusses rock art sites as nodes for tourism. (Contains 25 references and 8 figures.)
Introduction

Rock art is at once a nebulous academic construct (cf. Chippindale 2001) – easier to define what it is not than what it is – and it is a tremendously informed and engaging item of material culture capable of exciting the imagination. Rock art is very much at the sexy end of Archaeology’s public image. In many cases rock art enjoys ethnographic validation enabling rock art imagery and sites loci around which robust narratives can be told. The re-invigoration of ‘storytelling’ in both academic and public spheres (Pluciennik 1999; Joyce 2002) allows rock art to offer opportunities to various publics, of which archaeologists are part. But how exactly this process of Archaeology as life-long learning is to proceed is not always that clear – especially in the USA.

Until the last half decade, rock art as an archaeological research field within US Archaeology has had something of a Cinderella status (Whitley 2001:10-12). Perhaps the difficulty in age-determining the imagery has been an impediment. (but see Keyser 2001; Rowe 2001) Perhaps the difficulty of excavating rock art as also hindered rock art’s academic acceptance. Fortunately, this academic Apartheid is waning and rock art is contributing strongly – especially in terms of theory (Conkey 2001) – to mainstream Archaeology. Indeed, it is debatable whether ‘Rock art’ should continue as a separate branch of specialist enquiry or seek greater integration with excavation-centric Archaeology. Whatever the position of rock art research in the academic context, rock art has always figured prominently in the public imagination.
Rock art as a contested resource

Of course this is a variable and often capricious, multi-membered ‘public’ but they often have strong opinions about the past. These opinions may range from a denigration of the art as ‘primitive’ (cf. Errington 1998) through New Age sensibilities that raise all rock art to divinemysticalsymblicoreligious status (Finn 1997) to those that seek even to utilize rock art as a commodity to be bought and sold (see Arkansas Archaeological Survey http://www.uark.edu/campus-resources/archinfo/current.html). The relationship these people have to rock art is typical of outsiders, because in most cases, they are non-rock art producing peoples – or so they think. The violence of the past 500 years of European colonialism is difficult to comprehend and so people often ignore it (see the ‘Columbian consequences’ volumes of David Hurst Thomas 1989-1993). Many US citizens seem to suffer from a collective amnesia of events of North American history prior to 1492 CE and, as a result, reminders from that period – like Kennewick Man (Thomas 2001) – are often hotly contested. Rock art is often seemingly placed outside of such contestation, being perceived as a somewhat more passive artefact. But this perception is just the result of an inability to understand beyond the outward appearance of the imagery – to get to the contexts that informed particular bodies of rock art’s production. For example, Spanish settlers/invaders were unflatteringly portrayed by Native Americans in the South-West of what is today the USA (Fig. 1). Perhaps the Australian Aboriginal concept of ‘‘inside’ and ‘outside’ story is useful – rather like English literature’s obsession with appearance and meaning. I often think of the Archaeologists as prestidigitator, seemingly magically revealing an embedded meaning of a seemingly simple image on a ‘newspaper rock’. No real magic, just the willingness to treat artifacts as socio-politically produced items. Thus genocide, murder, avarice, intolerance and such like are rock art stories that co-exist with the more socially sought after messages of endurance, persistence, spirituality and so forth. Not so different from life today, you might say. But the challenge remains of how to translate academic understandings into popular idiom. But is this formulation that suggests Archaeologists are the prime purveyors of knowledge about archaeology not perhaps open to some modification? I think it might be and this thread of thought was continually unraveling in the time I spent as an archaeological functionary at the Rock Art Department, National Museum, South Africa.
Working on the principle that you often understand who you are and where you come from better when you consider matters from the outside, I offer a southern African public rock art case study in the hope that it may provide a filter via which to re-encounter apparently familiar problems and potentials of public rock art endeavours in the USA.

Out of the mouths of ministers and babes – a southern African case study

I was not initially or knowingly implicated in public archaeology despite being situated in a museum. I was employed in a research capacity. Accordingly, research-driven fieldwork took Gabriel Tlhapi and I to many parts of southern Africa (Fig 2) and we –somewhat selfishly in retrospect – enjoyed an astonishing variety of rock art, people and landscapes. Through both the fieldwork and at the Museum, there was nonetheless a constant groundswell of public interest in what we were doing; though the interest was mostly unformulated. A few public talks and workshops seemed in order and were well-received. But then, on a fine April day in 1994 South Africa had its first democratic election. Shortly after the euphoria of this remarkable transition to an African democracy, reality hit – funds were short. When applying for research funding a government Minister asked me ‘What is research?’ Of course, I was well-equipped to answer this very basic question – or so I thought. After spluttering and taking several aimless wanderings of logic I was just as confused as the Minister on what research was meant to be. The subtext here was that money was short (when is it not?) and social need was high (ditto); so how is spending money on rock art research justified. Several beers later I could not justify even to myself pure, unapplied research. Gabriel and I then resolved – rather against Museum Management’s wishes – to combine a public programme with our fieldwork and Museum duties. We were unsure what form such a public programme should take but I have for long been inspired by the southern African landscape and the mindscapes at work on it both in ancient and modern times (Ouzman 1998). I believe in radiance – that laminated, embedded quality of a place that is itself difficult to quantify, but an openness to which allows us to perceive the people, places and things around us more clearly.
It was in this somewhat artsy-fartsy headspace that Gabriel and I stopped at Nelspoort in central South Africa. Nelspoort is situated in the Karoo – a stone scrub desert through which most people travel with indecent haste to get to the larger metropolitan centres like Cape Town and Johannesburg. Even rock art archaeologists have tended to eschew this landscape (but see Fock 1979) with its rock engravings in favour of the rock paintings of the mountainous areas that appeal more to a modern aesthetic. Selfishly, this archaeological prejudice means there are potentially rich rewards for those people willing to spend time in the Karoo and its thousands of rock art sites (e.g., Deacon 1988; Morris 1988; Dowson 1992; Ouzman 2001). But this research also needs somehow to benefit this landscape’s people, who are among the poorer members of South African society. Such is the complexity of Southern African colonialism – that extends back 2 000 years and involves Bantu-speaking farmers; Khoekhoen herders and European colonists in addition to the autochthonous gatherer-hunters ancestral to today’s ‘San’ or ‘Bushmen’ that often the communities living closest to a body of rock art are also the furtherest removed from its production. Issues of cultural appropriation and Indigenous intellectual property right (Ouzman 1999a) are not incidental but crucial to rock art custodianship and management. What we found at Nelspoort was a run-down railway community (from 52 trains a week there are now half-a-dozen a day) and a half-forgotten tuberculosis sanatorium. There is also a very good primary school – Restvale – for the areas predominantly ‘coloured’ children (to use the common racial classification). We enquired at the school if there was rock art in the area – in South Africa, prior permission to visits sites is non-negotiable as land is very often contested – we were told there was – lots. Much to their joy, two 12 year-old boys were released from Pythagorean intricacies to accompany us to a site a few kilometers away. While guiding us, these boys – Ashwin and Hendrik – displayed a good knowledge of local succulent plants and their medicinal and other (unmentionable) uses. By the time we got to the rock art sites – the object of our quest and expectation – we had learned a great deal about the landscape. Indeed, though we were able to tell the boys what we thought we knew about the elephant and rhino engraved there (Fig. 3) it became clear that knowledge production was here a partnership venture. On speaking to the school head, Lawrence Rathenham, we learnt that many of the school children were street kids rounded up from the large town of Beaufort
West 50 km away and dumped in Nelspoort to learn ‘lifeskills’. Understandably, Lawrence was at a loss on how, exactly to develop these skills outside of school in a town that makes Fresno seem intellectually gargantuan.

So we decided to train the children as rock art custodians. From being society’s castaways, the children, given a reason to roam the landscape, soon began to find many more sites. Among their finds were an engraving of the extinct giant buffalo *Pelorovis antiquus* that died out ~8000 years ago. (Fig 4). They also came upon a remarkable set of ‘gong rocks’ naturally resonant ironstone boulders used by gatherer-hunters in conjunction with rock engravings to access the Spirit World (Fig. 5). But perhaps most significantly, the children started to speculate about what these prior human landscape markings meant. In particular, the geometric engravings that we now think were not gatherer-hunter shamanistic imagery by Khoekhoen herder initiatory imagery, struck a chord with these ‘coloured’ children.

**Rock art and identity**

They had a notion of who the ‘Bushmen’ were but they wanted to know who the Khoekhoen herders were. Tricky question as colonialism, imperialism and Apartheid have severely dislocated people’s sense of self and history. To be called or call oneself ‘coloured’ implies a people produce from Black-White miscegenation with a sub-text of less time depth on the land and concomitantly less claim to that landscape’s resources. But ‘coloured’ is a fiction. Certainly, there were –and still are - inter-racial, inter-ethnic unions, but they constitute just one part of ‘colouredness’. By far the larger genetic and cultural heritage is from the Khoekhoen herderspeople that moved into southern Africa about 2 000 years ago, making rock art related to initiation and change sin life states. Realising this made the streetchildten realize that they were not a modern and superfluous addition to the landscape – they were part of an ancient tradition; one of the Rainbow Nation is founding members. Similarly in North America, dispossessed native people often find rock art to be a most powerful vector of identity; even to the extent of different Native groups vandalizing each other’s rock art. Unlike South Africa, which has an Indigenous majority, the USA has an easily ignored Indigenous minority. This makes it
tempting to expose as much rock art for public visitation as possible, land managers intent on ‘preservation’ of cultural resources oppose such moves, but even here we must question to what end ‘preservation’ and ‘conservation’ – static, hermetic words, are aimed? An infinite progress of deferral of benefit for ‘future generations’? ‘Management’ is perhaps the best word to use, conferring both agency and responsibility. The practicalities of such management are generally agreed to be a negotiated process, subject to regular review and open to new management possibilities (Loubser 2001). The question of how to present a body of rock art that remains true to the grittiness of history and human life and remains interesting, is perhaps a greater challenge and one Archaeologists alone will not be able to achieve. Fortunately, there does see to a quantity of goodwill when it comes to rock art and we must be careful not to abuse this largesse, though all site developments require of the parties involved the freedom to make mistakes – and then to correct these mistakes. Indeed, many advances are accidental. When one of South Africa’s Rock Art National Monuments – Tandjesberg – was damaged in a bush fire (Fig. 6). Gabriel and I as a power of two with a combined height of 8 feet were not up to this task. But, by mobilizing an irregular army of volunteers, enthusiasts, tour guides needing accreditation, government officials, Indigenous San we offered an accredited guiding course that involved evening lectures and daily slave labour installing visitor management measures and stabilizing the site (Fig. 7). This rock art ‘school’ has become an annual event, moving around the country, leaving behind developed rock art infrastructure and critically, trained custodians (Morris, Ouzman and Tlhapi 2002). These custodians are immensely empowered by the license to share with a wide audience both their knowledge of a site and an academic understanding of that place. Here archaeologists act as glue-like go betweens, connecting spheres of interest, co-ordinating messages and so on – skills that may sound simple but which are indeed hard-won.

**Rock art sites a nodes for tourism, education and contemplation**

Part of any site development should be to make people aware that while they can share in the site, they are there on sufferance of the rock art’s producers, living or otherwise. The old but neglected values of host and guest apply. Thus, in economically depressed places
Heritage tourism is welcome, it is not unconditionally embraced as tourist moods and movements can be very capricious and the site development needs to be layered so that it is on conversation with multiple audiences. A key audience is that of locals – people who live closest to the sites and less fussed by tourist fashions. Practically, it is these locals that are most often the most effective rock art custodians (Ouzman 2001b). In California, for example, many people are ignorant of the plus rock art open to the public. Most Bezerkeley residents know more about Upper Palaeolithic French cave art than they do about Canyonlands Park rock art in adjacent El Cerrito or Indian Rock in Kensington. A critical part of involving locals is to let them tell their stories of place. A great deal of identity is locational – you are where you are and landscapes acquire seeps of knowledge; layers, laminations. Perhaps we can never get to an ‘original’ meaning of a place and its rock art; but we can appreciate the place as an on-going, not necessarily harmonious project. For example, in Botswana the gatherer-hunter ‘Bushman’ rock engraving site of Matsieng has been appropriated by the Tswana – a Bantu-speaking peoples – as their Origin Site. Given that Botswana has a less-than-perfect record of human rights abuses against the Bushmen how does one present such a site that both shows the honour implicit in one nation selecting another nation’s site as their point of origin; and the violence such a move does to the site’s originator community? Finally, rock art sites tend to be located in interesting landscapes and are usually in non-metropole settings. In an age in which there is so much information available yet so little time or skill to parse the knowledge, rock art and related heritage sites, offer the equivalent of a ‘pause’ space. The current museum mania for light and airy displays seems appealing but really serves to privilege a sense of sight above others senses whereas rock art sites tend to be more textural and allow other senses like touch, hearing, smell, electromagnetism and so on come into play. Also, the site is undeniably authentic, unlike dismebedded museum specimens. However, even this apparent site authenticity does mask the fact that most of the rock art making peoples are no longer present or known. It is at this point that I should like to make a plea for all people to take a cultural inventory of what they imagine their culture or ethnicity to be and to see whether it is not, in fact, possible that they to have made or continue to make rock art. For example, in 1999 the advent of the centenary of the Anglo-Boer War in which British Imperialism fought Afrikaner Nationalism in
South Africa, made me adjust my fieldwork gaze. I realised that for years I had been filtering out the names, dates, portraits and so forth that the soldiers made on the rocks of the places at which they encamped, fought, traveled (Ouzman 1999b). Though may 'white' South Africans baulk at being told that they too produce 'rock art' – perhaps making an equation of 'they' produce 'rock' art and 'we' produce 'art' - on reflection, many of these people own that it is possible that they are rock art producers and that the distinction between 'graffiti' ‘art’ and ‘rock art’ is unstable and contingent. Outside of my delightful office at Berkley on the pavement in capital green letters is painted ‘THE FRANKENSTEIN PROJECT' (Fig. 8). My office is in a multimedia lab, so perhaps apt. But in my wanderings of Berkeley I have found 5 other locations for the same person’s words (WE ARE AS WE ARE ALL IN THE SKY' etc). Intriguing. Not just one-off graffiti, but someone with a story to tell. An urban series of rock art sites; something to follow. Thus it is useful to consider not just the site, but the journeys visitors must make to and from it – perhaps like pilgrims (Blundell 1998). These visitors need not dwell on matters archaeological, but the site is a stage top consider who one is and where we imagine we are going. Radiance can be encountered in unexpected places but we can use our life-long learning that proceeds from rock art work to enhance and nuance people’s experience of landscapes they thought they knew.

References


**List of figures**

Figure 1: Native depiction of Spanish colonists. Arizona, USA.

Figure 2: Southern Africa with Nelspoort and Tandjesberg locations.

Figure 3: Elephant and rhino engraved at Nelspoort, South Africa with our guides Ashwin and Hendrik. September 2001.

Figure 4: 99 cm long engraving of extinct giant buffalo *Pelorovis antiquus*.

Figure 5: Nelspoort ‘gong rocks’ within an engraving site.

Figure 6: Fire damage at Tandjesberg rock art national monument, South Africa. August 1998.

Figure 7: The ‘Sandstone 2000’ irregular army and development of Tandjesberg. March 2000.

Figure 8: The Frankenstein project graffiti/rock art. Berkeley, USA.

**Word count**: 2 972.  
**Word target**: 2 500.  
**Date submitted**: 28 March 2003  
**Date revised**: 
I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Rock Art and Radiance: Archaeology in the public domain as life-long learning

Author(s): Sven Ouzman

Corporate Source: Publication Date: 2003

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