

## Lopé-Okanda (Gabon)

No 1147 rev

*Official name as proposed  
by the State Party:*

Ecosystem and Relict  
Cultural Landscape of Lopé-  
Okanda

*Location:*

Ogoué-Ivindo and Ogoué-  
Lolo provinces

*Brief description:*

Just below the Equator and to the north of Central Africa's dense rain forests, the east-west Middle Ogooué Valley has been an important route for trade, cultural migrations and settlement, since pre-historic times. The river valley, with its hills rising above the vegetation, is now emerging as an important archaeological centre for Central Africa with extensive remains of Neolithic and Iron Age sites and large numbers of petroglyphs, both associated with the spread of Bantu peoples from the southern Sahara into central, east and southern Africa.

The River Ogooué forms the northern boundary of the Lopé-Okanda National Park. Related archaeological sites are found spread along river valleys running north-south in the park.

*Category of property:*

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*. Part of the site can be considered as a *relict cultural landscape*.

[Note: The property is nominated as a mixed property. Its evaluation under the natural criteria is carried out by IUCN].

### 1. BASIC DATA

*Included in the Tentative List:* 18 April 2003

*International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the nomination:* 12 February 2002

*Date received by  
the World Heritage Centre:* 28 January 2003

*Background:*

At the 29<sup>th</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee in Durban, the nomination was referred back to the State Party (Decision 29 COM 8B.17) "to allow it to address the potential of the property as a cultural landscape and to provide:

a) Information on the enlargement of the nominated property to reflect a coherent group of archaeological and rock art sites that extend to both sides of the River Ogooué;

b) an inventory of archaeological and rock art sites; and

c) a map of the archaeological and rock art sites, clarifying appropriate boundaries;

Further requests the State Party to continue to increase management capacity at the property to effectively address integrity requirements, and to confirm the long-term management, planning and staffing arrangements, to ensure the overall sustainable management of the property, including the relationship of its cultural and natural values.

Congratulates the State Party on its efforts to secure international support for the management of Lopé National Park and commends the support provided to date by the European Union, through the ECOFAC (Ecosystèmes forestiers d'Afrique Centrale) programme, and relevant NGOs, in particular the Wildlife Conservation Society;

Welcomes the State Party's development of an improved Tentative List and recommends that, with the assistance of the advisory bodies, the position of the nominated property is confirmed in relation to other potential World Heritage properties in Gabon. In relation to natural values this should include the examination of possibilities for serial and transboundary nominations;

Invites the State Party to submit an international assistance request in relation to support the work required to provide the information requested above."

A revised nomination was submitted on 30 January 2006 together with a Management Plan.

At the 30<sup>th</sup> session in Vilnius, the nomination was again referred back to the State Party to allow it to provide:

a) A smaller area nominated for its cultural value based on a more detailed analysis of archaeological sites and petroglyphs and their relationship with each other and the river corridor;

b) A detailed list of cultural sites, detailing for archaeological sites their type and age, if known, and whether they have been excavated, and for rock art sites the number of images, if known, within each site or if not an approximate number to provide a record of what might be inscribed on the World Heritage List;

c) A detailed map of cultural sites, so that their precise location is known;

d) How archaeological expertise will be provided to take forward the actions in the management plan;"

The World Heritage Committee also considered that any nomination of cultural sites should encompass the River

Ogooue valley and further tributaries if the significances of the archaeological sites can be justified.

A revised nomination was submitted by the State Party in January 2007 together with a revised Management Plan for 2006-2011, a more detailed comparative analysis, and a detailed, descriptive inventory of the archaeological sites together with maps and photographs.

*Consultations:* ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committees on Historic Gardens – Cultural Landscapes, on Archaeological Heritage Management and on Rock Art.

*Literature consulted (selection):*

Dr Richard Oslisly has published extensively in journals since 1987 on his studies of Neolithic and Iron Age archaeology and rock art undertaken in the River Ogooue valley and elsewhere in west-central Africa. A recent summary is in:

Weber, William, White, Lee J. T., Vedder, Amy, and Naughton-Treves, Lisa, *African Rain Forest Ecology and Conservation: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, New Haven and London 2001.

*Technical Evaluation Mission:* A joint ICOMOS/IUCN mission visited the site from 20 September to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2004. This mission visited the National Park which was then the extent of the nominated area.

As at the 30<sup>th</sup> session the nomination was referred back, rather than deferred, it has not been possible for ICOMOS to arrange a mission to the property to view the enlarged area around the River Ogooué to the north which is included in the current nomination. This extended area encompasses the key archaeological sites along the river valley. For these areas, ICOMOS has only been able to undertake a desk evaluation, in consultation with the expert who carried out the previous mission. ICOMOS is not therefore in a position to comment on the adequacy of the boundaries, the conservation of the sites, or their access arrangements.

*Additional information requested and received from the State Party:* None

*Date of ICOMOS approval of this report:* 20 April 07

## 2. THE PROPERTY

### *Description*

Situated 300 km southeast of Libreville, the nominated site covers 511,991 hectares of which 491,291 hectares corresponds with the boundaries of the Parc National de Lopé-Okanda and the remainder covers four historic ensembles, three (Doda, Mokékou and Elarmékora) to the north of the Park, of which two are contiguous with the Park, while the third is detached to the north-west, and the fourth, (Mount Iboundji) is detached from the park to the south-east.

The nomination is thus a serial nomination of three parts. The enlargement proposed in the revised nomination consists of the four historic ensembles

A buffer zone encompasses a band 5 km wider than the Park, and historic ensembles and a corridor to Mount Iboundji.

The National Park is bordered to the north by the River Ogooué, which runs parallel to Equator and falls in a series of rapids towards Libreville, on the Atlantic coast. To the south lies the Chaillu Massif, characterised by dense, evergreen rain forest, rugged terrain and a complex network of watercourses. It extends some 120 km to the south. The Park is bordered to the east and west by two tributaries of the Ogooué River, the Offoué and the Mingoué.

The Ogooué River valley is an island of open savannah and gallery forests that covers about 1,000 sq km. The gentle hills either side of the river rise up above the vegetation and seem since pre-historic times to have provided a way from the coast to the interior, that avoided the dense tropical forests which would have been a hostile environment for pre-historic man. This open landscape appears to be the result of almost uninterrupted human action since the Stone Age: bush fires creating the savannah vegetation that then made the area attractive to further settlers. Even today the main road to the interior follows the ridges along the valley. Waves of peoples have passed through this area, and have left extensive and comparatively well preserved remains of habitation sites around hilltops, caves and shelters, evidence of iron-working and a remarkable collection of some 1,800 petroglyphs. Most of these sites have been discovered in the past twenty-three years. The picture that is emerging from their study is that the middle Ogooué valley, particularly around the confluence of the Mpassa and Lebombi Rivers, was an epicentre for pre-historic trade and migrations, and a crucial passage for Bantu peoples, agriculturalists from just south of the Sahara, who migrated south-east to central, east and southern Africa. Within this valley the three nominated areas encompass the greatest concentration of archaeological and rock art sites

Sub-Saharan Africa is extremely rich in archaeological remains. These include the geological sites in eastern Africa and the rock paintings in east, central and southern Africa. Known sites, and those on the World Heritage and Tentative lists, tend to reflect open or lightly forested landscapes rather than dense forest. Little information has emerged relating to early settlement in the dense rainforest landscapes of Central Africa, long considered to be hostile to early human settlement. The recent work in central Gabon has begun to change that picture and provides considerable evidence to show how early man made use of corridors around the great swamps of the Congo basin and established early settlements of substantial size on hills along the River Ogooué.

The cultural sites in this nomination lie mainly in this band of savannah land along the middle Ogooué River, at the north of the nominated property and also near rivers and streams draining into the River Ogooué from the forests to the south. They consist of:

- Early Stone Age sites
- Middle Stone Age and Late Stone Age sites
- Neolithic sites
- Early Iron Age sites
- Petroglyphs
- Late Iron Age sites
- Mount Iboundji

These are considered separately:

- Early Stone Age sites (400,000-120,000 BP):

The dense evergreen forests are difficult to navigate. Elephants choose to use paths over hills, which give glimpses out of the forest. It seems early man did the same: many of the early remains are found on hilltops, still followed by tracks and roads.

There are numerous early Stone Age sites in the valley including the oldest Stone Age tools in Africa discovered on a terrace of the river at Elarmékora.

- Middle Stone Age (120,000-12,000 BP) and Late Stone Age (12,000-4,500 BP) sites

The Middle Stone Age is not so far represented in the valley. In the Late Stone Age, the climate became warmer and humans began using more sophisticated technology to produce small stone tools from microliths and to hunt with bows and arrows. Remains from this period, reflecting what is called the Tshitolian industry, are plentiful and have also been found along the Congo River on the Teke Plateau, in the Kinshasa plain and in the Niara valley.

In the Ogooué valley, tool workings are found on hilltops and in shelters and caves. On the hilltops large areas of stone fragments, where tools were fashioned, appear as eroded areas and can be picked up from aerial photographs. A site at Lopé has produced some detailed stratigraphy and analysis of the charcoal layers reveal the type of landscape that these Late Stone Age people lived in. Their surroundings were an open landscape of forest savannah mosaic; they chose to live on hilltops, they hunted with bows and arrows, used wood from the high forest for their fires, and are likely to have fed off plants from the nearby high forest.

- Neolithic sites (4,500-2,000 BP)

The Stone Age remains seem to indicate a gradually evolving, sedentary population. By contrast, the remains of cultures that appeared in the Neolithic and Iron Ages reflect a series of waves of migrations through the area, which resulted in comparatively large settlements.

The Upper Holocene period (3,500-2,000 BP) saw a migration of Bantu peoples from the grassy highlands along the Nigeria-Cameroon border. They seem to follow two main routes. The first went directly east towards the Great Lakes of East Africa and then south; the second route was to the southeast and it then split into two. The first followed a narrow band of savannah along the Atlantic coast, while the second made use of the high

ground and savannah of the Ogooué valley to traverse the equatorial forests.

The Neolithic peoples made polished stone axes and pottery. It is possible that the technique evolved in situ but their sudden widespread appearance in 4,500 BP indicates that they were probably brought to the area. The earliest known sites in the valley are in the Massossou mountains. Two Okanda sites are dated to 4,500 and 3,560 BP.

There are many finds of polished axes made from amphibolite, a rock from the middle of the valley. These not only occur locally but in other parts of Gabon, testifying to the extent of trade at this time.

These Neolithic peoples also inhabited the hilltops, living in small settlements and levelling a platform around which rubbish pits were dug. One of these pits at Otoumbi has provided evidence of their way of life. As well as pottery, stone axes, grooved and pitted stones (for cracking nuts), and a pestle, the pit contained charcoal from household fires, bones of small mammals and palm nuts. They probably lived off forest resources: as yet there is no evidence that they practised agriculture.

Neolithic sites are scattered along the valley from Epona and Otoumbi in the west to Ogooué in the east.

- Early Iron Age sites (2,600-1,900 BP)

In west and central Africa, iron working developed in the Mandara Mountains, on the borders of Nigeria and the Cameroon, and in the area around Yaoundé in the south of Cameroon around 2,600 BP.

Iron working appears in the Ogooué valley between 2,600 and 2,500 BP in two sites at Otoumbi and Lopé. Between 2,300 and 2,100 BP it considerably expanded to other sites in the valley at Otoumbi, Okanda and Lindili. The new peoples, with their superior iron tools, seem to have completely displaced the Neolithic peoples.

The Iron Age peoples also lived on hilltops but in much larger settlements, with furnaces nearby, and there were more of them: twenty sites have been found dating from between 2,300 and 1,800 BP. Evidence of grain, *Canarium schweinfurthi*, and nuts including palm nuts have been found, together with evidence of primitive arboriculture in the form of palm oil plantations.

The pottery of these people was completely different from Neolithic pottery: bell-shaped containers, some very large, were decorated with concentric circles below their handles. This decoration is similar to that found on nearby rock engravings and suggests that the two were contemporary.

- Petroglyphs:

Over 1,600 petroglyphs have so far been found along the valley and a few to the south. They are found on ovoid boulders and flat outcrops and were made using iron tools to peck small cup-like depressions in the hard sandstone quartzite rock.

Along the Ogooué valley, the engravings are found in clusters at Doda, Ibombil, Kongo Boumba, Lindili, Epona

and Elarmékora. These sites basically fall into two groups: around Otoumbi in the west and around Lopé-Okanda in the east. The iconography of their images show strong resemblances with the patterns found on Iron Age pottery (and also to body scarification patterns still used today). 67% of the images show circles or concentric circles, while overall 75% depict geometric forms. Only 8% reveal animal images and these are reptiles or small quadrupeds. Large mammals such as elephants and antelopes, which are present in rock art in the Sahara and east and southern Africa, are not found. A very small group of images, 6.4%, show weapons and tools. Of particular relevance are depictions of throwing knives: in central Africa these are weapons associated with Bantu peoples. Such knives are still in use in the National Park.

The sites are near Iron Age settlement sites and, if the two are connected, the engravings would seem to date from between 2,300 and 1,400 BP.

The rock engravings are clustered together in large groups:

- o Elarmékora: 140 images in five groups
  - o Epona: 410 images
  - o Kongo-Boumba: 280 images in 5 groups
  - o Lindili: 20 images
- Late Iron Age sites (1,900-150 BP):

Between 1,900 and 1,800 BP a new wave of people moved into the valley displacing the previous peoples. They stayed for around 400 years before moving on further south. Remains of their furnaces show how they spread out around from Otoumbi along both sides of the valley and onto ridges in the forest to the south. Charcoal deposits reveal the first evidence of slash and burn agriculture in the forest areas.

For reasons not yet known, the valley was abandoned between 1,400 and 800 BP. The 600-year absence of people would doubtless have led to changes in the vegetation of the valley.

Ancestors of the present Okanda population begun to arrive in the valley between the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> centuries BP. Again they lived in hilltop settlements. Carbon dates from their pottery have confirmed historical and linguistic studies. Their Lopé pottery has been found uniformly spread over 1,500 square kilometres of the valley. Perhaps they made use of skills in running the rapids in dugout canoes, as recorded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to traverse their long territory.

Remains have also been found of settlements further south into the forest dating to between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which reflect a different tradition of iron smelting. It seems that during this time, two different cultures co-existed, the Lopé peoples in the savannah and the Lélédi tradition around the Lélédi Valley of the forest.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century villages were moved to the outskirts of the forest alongside the main road and railway along the river Ogooué valley.

- Mount Iboundji

No details are given of the cultural attributes of this site which is described as a sanctuary.

### *History and Development*

Much of the early history has been covered above. Archaeological exploration of the area begun in 1987 and is still continuing.

The savannah belt, which has attracted people in large numbers over the past several millennia, is also where people live today. Several language groups are now present in the area such as Okandais, Simba et Pouvi, Makina, Akélé, Mbahouin, Saké and Massango.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the arrival of colonial rule, settlements were re-grouped from small hamlets for each family into larger villages and towns. In 1967 the Route Nationale 3 was constructed along the valley to aid exploitation of the forests. All the main settlements are now along this road.

In 1976, a railway was constructed by a consortium, Eurotrag, between Libreville on the coast and Franceville in the forest. This was to facilitate the exploitation of manganese and logs. It led to the creation of new settlements around the Ayem and Lopé stations.

Today around 2,000 people live inside the nominated area in six small villages, three along the Ogooué valley: Boléko, (Lopé) Kongoboumba, and Kazamabika, and three to the south along the Offoué tributary of the River, Makoghé, Badondé, and Mikongo, together with two villages Ramba and Massenguélani, of mixed Bantu and Pygmy peoples. The main six villages are designated as development zones – where encouragement will be given to developing markets for local produce and ecotourism.

In the buffer zone is Aschouka. A tourist camp has been developed at Lopé, the station for Boléko.

Lopé-Okanda was designated as a reserve in 1946. In 2002 it was re-designated as a National Park.

### **3. OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE, INTEGRITY AND AUTHENTICITY**

#### *Integrity and Authenticity*

##### *Integrity*

The integrity of the cultural sites lies mainly in their relationship to one another along the River Ogooué Valley - the corridor which facilitated waves of migrations. More of this corridor has been nominated with the 2006 and 2007 revised nominations. Within the National Park, apart from a cluster of sites along the corridor, subsidiary and on the whole later archaeological sites fan out along the lesser river valleys within the forest. These form the edges of the major picture that emerges along the River Ogooué valley. Overall the integrity of the cultural sites can now be discerned, although it would be desirable if at some point in the future that part of the river valley between the north-west corner of the National Park and the historic ensemble

to the north-west could be included so that the river corridor as a whole was protected.

#### *Authenticity*

The authenticity of the archaeological sites and rock art site does not seem to be in doubt. However there is a need for consolidation of the excavated sites to be carried out to ensure that they are not eroded by natural or human processes.

#### *Comparative analysis*

A more detailed comparative analysis has been provided with the latest revised nomination. This compares first of all the nominated archaeological sites along the River Ogooué with other cultural sites in Gabon. This reveals that there are no comparators for the petroglyph sites and that the dates for iron working in the nominated property of around 7<sup>th</sup> century BC are much earlier than other evidence from several sites in Gabon.

Considering comparators with sites in neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo, and Zambia, it is stated that the Late Stone Age finds testify to a significant widening of the Tshitolién culture showing a diffusion of this industry to the north-west of Atlantic Central Africa. The Ogooué sites thus present its most western occurrence. The Maboué site is said to have produced the oldest date for microlithic industry in Central Africa. There is a concentration of Acheulean Stone Age sites in the Ogooué river valley and it is also the case that the River Ogooué iron working dates are much earlier than the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC dates found at sites in neighbouring countries.

For the petroglyphs, comparisons are made with other World Heritage sites in Africa such as in Tsolido (Botswana), Mapungubwe (South Africa), and Tassili Ajjer (Algeria), although no details are given of other sites in the same geo-cultural region such as Bidzar (Cameroon), Calola, Bambala and Capelo in upper Zambezi (Angola), Kwili (Lower Congo); Mpatou, Lengo, Bambali, and Bangassou (Central African Republic) which were all known before the discovery of the petroglyphs in the Ogooué valley in the 1980s.

Although it is stated that Lope is a 'cross-roads' which has seen the passing of several groups of populations, more could have been made of the extraordinary number of substantial Neolithic and Iron Age sites, of the persistence of settlement in one place, and of the strong association of the areas with early Bantu migrations, as well as of the relationship between the rock art and Iron Age settlements.

Finally the comparative analysis considers other cultural World Heritage sites elsewhere in the world alongside the rock art.

In the comparative analysis of natural qualities, it is emphasised that the open savannah of the river valley is a reflection of the use of fire and human control of the vegetation over tens of thousand of years.

In conclusion, the information now provided underlines the significance of the ensemble of sites along the river

valley and the evidence they present for a succession of waves of people, for permanent settlement based on the exploitation of forest resources, for the migration of Bantu peoples and languages, and the creation of a substantial corpus of rock art. This in turn emphasises the need to encompass this river valley passage as a cultural landscape that also reflects the creation of an open grassland landscape through the control of vegetation over many millennia. The boundaries of the site need to reflect this holistic ensemble.

What cannot be sustained is the significance of the whole of the nominated site in cultural terms: the cultural significance is confined to the northern Ogooué valley and does not extend to the whole of the National Park.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the Lopé-Okanda river valley is significant cultural landscape that reflects the impact of successive early phases of settlement, iron-working, agriculture and far-reaching migrations of people to central and southern Africa.

#### *Justification of Outstanding Universal Value*

The State Party justifies the outstanding universal value of the property for the following attributes:

The Lopé-Okanda Park:

- Is as an open-air museum for the evolution of technology and creative expression by the regions' predecessors.
- Displays remarkable evidence for settlement stretching over 400,000 years from the Palaeolithic, through the Neolithic and Iron Age, to the present day Bantu and Pygmy peoples.
- Has a great concentration of archaeological sites suggesting long and intensive human activity
- Provides the oldest dates for the extension of the Tshitolién culture towards the Atlantic.
- Has revealed evidence of the early domestication of plants and animals and the use of forest resources
- Includes in the River Ogooué, one of the principle transportation routes for diffusion of Bantu people and languages to Central and Southern Africa

*Criteria under which this inscription is proposed:*

The property is nominated under criteria iii and iv.

*Criterion iii:* The State Party justifies this criterion for the rich archaeological ensembles of the middle stretches of the River Ogooué Valley which demonstrate 400,000 years of almost continuous history. The archaeological sites have revealed the earliest date for the extension of Tshitolién culture towards the Atlantic, as well as detailed evidence

for the early use of forest produce, cultivation of crops and the domestication of animals.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion is justified, subject to satisfactory definition of boundaries (see below)

*Criterion iv:* The State Party justifies this criterion on the basis that the property is an open-air museum of rock engravings and the overall archaeological sites in the valley of the River Ogooué testify to the succession of many civilisations and could be the witness to the first stages of the diffusion of Bantu people and the dispersion of languages from the north-west towards Angola.

ICOMOS considers that the collection of Neolithic and Iron Age sites together with the rock art remains appear to reflect a major migration route of Bantu and other peoples from West Africa along the River Ogooué valley to the north of the dense evergreen Congo forests and to central east and southern Africa, that has shaped the development of the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. The subsidiary remains within the forest provide evidence for the development of forest communities and their relationship with present day peoples.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion is justified subject to satisfactory definition of boundaries (see below)

ICOMOS considers that Outstanding Universal Value has been justified and that the property as nominated appears to satisfy criterion iii and iv, but both are subject to a satisfactory site assessment of the boundaries.

#### 4. FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROPERTY

##### *Climate change*

The fragile nature of the savannah area around the river valley could be adversely affected by changes in climate that either brought drier or much wetter weather.

##### *Development pressures*

The Lopé-Okanda Park is in a region where the population density is very low. There is pressure from illegal hunting and logging but these do not seem to impact on the archaeological sites.

The biggest threat to the areas is the inability of the local population to make a living from the surrounding forest. The ECOFAC project had as its aim to promote local sustainable development, which would encourage people to live in the area and make a reasonable living out of local resources. This initiative is now being taken forward by the management plan.

##### *Tourism pressures*

Currently the number of visitors is extremely low – less than 10 per year it is said, and there are therefore no visitor pressures on the site. However if visitor numbers were to rise, as is hoped, then there would be a need for some means of controlling access to the very large number of archaeological and rock art sites in order to avoid damage.

This too is being addressed by the management plan. Visitor facilities have already been created at Lopé (a private hotel) as part of the ECOFAC ecotourism initiative.

#### 5. PROTECTION, CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

##### *Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone*

As no mission has been possible to the cultural zones to the north of the National Park, it is not possible for ICOMOS to comment on whether the boundaries are adequate to encompass the archaeological sites along the river valley.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the core and buffer zone in theory appear to be adequate but has not been able to verify this on the ground.

##### *Ownership*

The National Park is in State ownership. The ownership of the cultural zones to the north of the park is not stated.

##### *Protection*

##### *Legal provision*

*La Réserve de la Lopé* was the first protected area in Gabon, designated on 26 September 1946. In 2002 the area was re-designated as the Lopé-Okanda National Park, along with 12 other national parks in Gabon. A Decree of 17 January 2006 defined the limits of Historic Ensembles around the key archaeological and rock art sites outside the national park and also the sanctuary of Mount Iboundji.

ICOMOS considers that the protective measures for the property are adequate to protect the cultural attributes of the landscape

##### *Conservation*

##### *History of Conservation*

Many of the sites have been excavated. What is not detailed is what kind of post-excavation consolidation has been carried out.

##### *Present state of conservation*

The current state of conservation of the archaeological sites is detailed for each of them. The archaeological sites in the savannah are said to be in the open air and most subject to erosion over time. A few with exposed stones are clearly vulnerable to people and animals. In the forest some sites are said to be damaged or overgrown by trees. Many of the rock art sites are away from areas of habitation and little visited. ICOMOS has not been able to visit the sites in the extended areas.

##### *Active Conservation measures*

Currently there are no active conservation measures undertaken on the archaeological sites. Many of the sites are remote and this remoteness is said to provide good

protection. It would appear that over time consolidation and remedial work will be needed.

ICOMOS recommends that preventive conservation measures and remedial work for the archaeological sites should be strengthened when staff are appointed with appropriate training.

### **Management**

#### *Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes*

In 2002 it was announced that a *Conseil national des parcs nationaux* (CNPN) would be created with a permanent secretariat, which would liaise with NGOs. A Law to create a national agency for the national parks is awaiting adoption by the new government which was set up in January 2007. It is anticipated that this will be approved during 2007. The Lopé-Okanda Park does not have a management committee. However, a *Comité scientifique de suivi du site de Lopé-Okanda* and a *Commission du site* are in the process of being established.

Currently the Park comes under the authority of the *Direction de la faune et de la chasse* (DFC), under the *Ministère de l'Économie forestière et de la Pêche*, which is charged with protection of the environment and nature. In practice, day-to-day management is carried out by the *Brigade de faune*, based in Lopé.

In 1992, the ECOFAC (*Conservation et utilisation rationnelle des écosystèmes forestiers en Afrique Centrale*) project was established, funded by European Development funds. This aimed to encourage sustainable development of the local resources and promote ecotourism. It employs 50 people. ECOFAC is part of a wider regional initiative that covers Parks in Congo, Cameroon, Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea.

In 2004 ECOFAC produced a *Plan d'Aménagement de la Lopé*, in order to facilitate the controlled exploitation of forest resources, this plan proposes zones of exploitation around the six villages and around Ayem station (in the west) and Aschouka in the buffer zone. The plan envisages the development of tourist trails around the archaeological sites, the training of archaeological guides, the creation of accommodation for visitors, and the development of an ecomuseum at Lopé.

This plan formed the basis for a National Park Management Plan which was completed in January 2006 after a process of consultation with local communities and key partners, and adopted in August 2006.

The plan sets out a vision for the Park, objectives, constraints and opportunities and actions under the headings of ecology, tourism, cultural resources, community development, infrastructure and administration of the Park and implications for the private sector. Although titled a Park plan, the text covers the historic zones outside the Park.

The fourth phase of the ECOFAC project was launched in 2006.

#### *Resources, including staffing levels, expertise and training*

The Ministry provides 3,000 euros per annum for salaries and ongoing costs. ECOFAC has invested 4.75 million Euros since 1992, which equates to around 450,000 Euros per annum.

For the 4<sup>th</sup> ECOFAC phase it is envisaged that 3.5 million euros will be provided. For the natural side of the Park's work resources are also supplied by the Wildlife Conservation Society and the London Zoological Society which contribute to staffing in the Park. For the cultural landscape and archaeological sites, there are still no trained or specialist staff. However the Ministry of Culture is in talks with the Ministry for Forestry Economics for the assignment of one cultural conservator to work on the cultural sites.

ICOMOS recommends that high priority should be given to putting in place one or more staff with appropriate training for archaeological sites and cultural landscapes.

## **6. MONITORING**

### **Documentation**

A detailed inventory has been provided by the State Party with the latest revision of the nomination. This gives map references and descriptions for all sites and photographs for some. This inventory provides a base-line for future monitoring work on the archaeological and rock art sites.

### **Monitoring**

Periodic monitoring of archaeological sites, based on photographic documentation is envisaged

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

The detailed inventory and comparative analysis provided with the revised nomination allows a much greater understanding and appreciation of the significance of the River Ogooue in Neolithic and Iron Age times for settlement and as a migration route for the spread of people and languages. The enlarged areas to the north of the Park would appear to encompass the main archaeological and rock art sites. As the nomination was referred, ICOMOS has limited time for assessment, and it has not been possible for a mission to visit the sites outside of the National Park, not visited during the first joint mission. The advice of the expert who carried out the last mission is that a further mission of one week would be needed.

Although ICOMOS considers from a desk evaluation that the nominated property could demonstrate outstanding universal value and satisfy the criteria, if the boundaries are satisfactory, it has not been possible to determine whether the boundaries put forward are satisfactory. Nor has it been possible to verify the state of conservation of the archaeological sites and how preventive management and remedial work will be put in place. ICOMOS would like to recommend that it carries out a mission after the 31<sup>st</sup> session of the Committee and reports back to the 32<sup>nd</sup> session.

***Recommendation with respect to inscription***

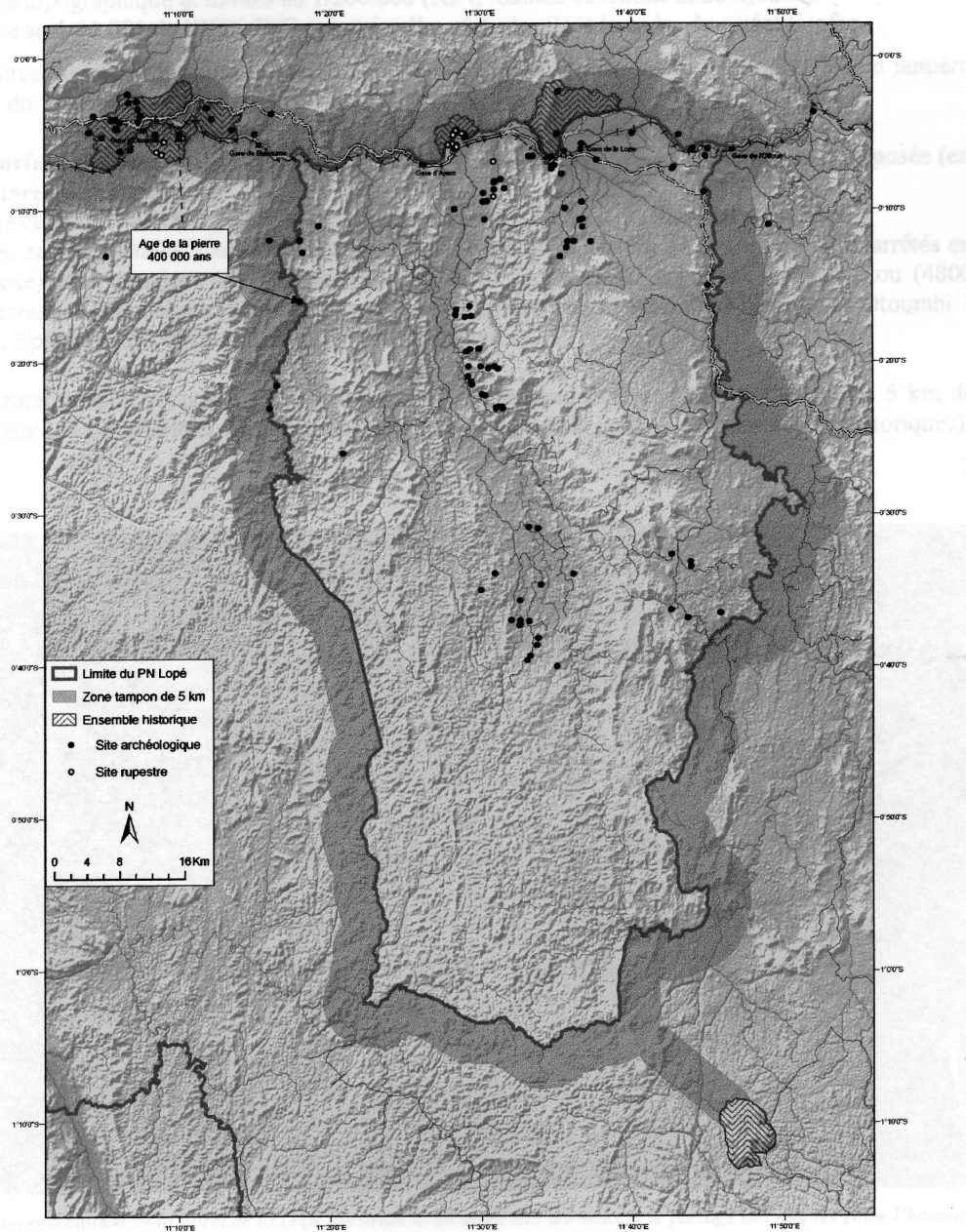
ICOMOS recommends that the nomination of the Ecosystem and Relict Cultural Landscape of Lopé-Okanda, Republic of Gabon, be deferred in order to allow ICOMOS to carry out a mission to the site to consider boundaries and conservation arrangements. Such a deferral would not necessitate the State Party presenting a new nomination in 2008, as the existing nomination could be considered at the 32<sup>nd</sup> session of the Committee, in the light of the findings of the mission.

ICOMOS further recommends that high priority should be given to putting in place one or more staff with appropriate training for archaeological sites and cultural landscapes

ICOMOS also recommends that the preventive conservation measures and remedial work for the archaeological sites should be strengthened when staff are appointed with appropriate training



*Localisation du bien au centre du pays sur la carte générale du Gabon*  
**d. Localisation précise sur la carte et indication des coordonnées géographiques à la seconde près**  
 Latitude : 0° 00' N et 01° 20' S ; Longitude : 11° 05' E et 11° 55' E



**Map showing the revised boundaries of the nominated property**



**Savannah areas bordering the River Ogooue**



**Petroglyphs at Kongo Boumba site**