

Drakensberg (South Africa)

No 985

Identification

Nomination Drakensberg Park (oKhahlamba Park)

Location KwaZulu-Natal

State Party Republic of South Africa

Date 30 June 1999

Justification by State Party

Notes

1. This property is nominated as a *mixed site*, under the natural and the cultural criteria. This evaluation will deal solely with the cultural values, and the natural values will be covered in the IUCN evaluation.
2. The text below is an abridged version of the justification in the nomination dossier.

The uniqueness of the Drakensberg as a rock-art region consists in an exceptional combination of:

- The quantity of sites and paintings;
- The diversity of sites and painting locations;
- The undisturbed harmony between the art and the environment;
- The preservation of the art's cultural context and the fact that the images come from a single artistic tradition;
- The remarkable state of preservation of the art.

The Drakensberg region is the most densely painted and largest area on the African continent: hardly any inhabitable shelter lacks paintings. The number of sites is estimated as 600 and the number of individual images on those sites probably exceeds 35,000. This density of paintings is, in part, a function of the remarkably wide spectrum of types of site available to the San artists.

The ecological integrity of the area has been preserved intact since the time when the last artists were living there near the end of the 19th century. The climate, vegetation, and fauna have not changed and, in most areas, an absence of roads and the mountainous terrain have prevented any significant human impact. Uniquely, it is possible to turn from rock paintings of eland, rhebok, and other animals to look out over pristine valleys and to see those very species feeding, resting, or moving about.

The rock art of the whole region represents a unique coherent artistic tradition. In other parts of the world, rock art in a given geographical area comprises a number of periods or styles, though the allocation of individual images to these

styles is often highly problematic. Although some development through time has been detected in the Drakensberg art, it is for the most part the product of a single tradition and therefore embodies the beliefs and cosmology of a single people, the San, and their contacts with other peoples. There are, however, paintings done in the 19th and 20th centuries attributable to Bantu-speaking people.

The Drakensberg region is unique in that the rock art is far better preserved than in any other region south of the Sahara. This degree of preservation is remarkable because, unlike the Sahara, Namibia, and some other areas in Africa, the conditions are wetter and so it might have been expected that these would not have favoured preservation of the rock paintings. However, the paintings were executed for the most part on absorbent sandstone of the Clarens Formation: the paint soaked into the rock face, permitting a certain amount of weathering before the images are lost.

There is some justification for considering the Drakensberg to be a cultural landscape. The cultures of the African peoples seldom include great walls, monumental buildings, or intricate irrigation systems. Instead, the landscape is imbued with religious and ritual meaning which grows in significance the longer people live there. There are some indications that these mountains represent a cultural landscape with special qualities.

In their placement and their subject matter, the paintings show a strong link between myth, ritual, and the natural landscape and its resources. For example, the eland was highly valued in San conceptual thought: it was believed to enable the shaman to enter the spirit world. Nearly every shelter has at least one eland painting, and some have many.

At a later period, interaction between the San, Bantu-speaking peoples, and European colonists affected the pattern of land settlement. The British created buffer zones between themselves and the San, settling Zulu and Sotho farmers there; as a result these areas remained undeveloped.

Criteria i, iii, and vi

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*. It may also be considered to be a *cultural landscape* as defined in paragraph 39 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

History and Description

History

The Drakensberg region is one of the most important archaeological areas in southern Africa. Archaeological sites from the Early, Middle, and Late Stones Ages and the Late Iron Age indicate that human occupation in this mountain region may extend over the last 1 million years.

The earliest recorded occupation of the Drakensberg Park is from the Mesolithic period, at least 20,000 BP (*Note* Early dates resulting from scientific dating techniques are expressed as "years BP" – ie years before the conventional date of 1950 on which all radiocarbon dating is based.) It was, however, the Neolithic settlers who arrived around 8000 years BP that were the ancestors of the San. They were

hunter-gatherers, often living in caves or rock-shelters. There were probably never more than a thousand people living in the area of the modern Park, and so they left no traces on the landscape beyond their rock-art.

Iron Age farmers moved into the foothills to the east of the main escarpment in the 13th century CE, or perhaps a little earlier, bringing domesticated cattle and sheep into the region. By the late 16th century there were cattle-herding people, the Zizi to the north and the Tholo to the south, living in permanent settlements in areas adjacent to the northern and central Drakensberg region. At first their relationships with the San were peaceable, but from the early 19th century with the rise of Zulu power to the south, under the leadership of Shaka, successive waves of people were forced to migrate northwards into the Drakensberg.

Large areas in the foothills of the Drakensberg were settled by the Voortrekkers from 1837 onwards. They farmed cattle and later sheep on the good grazing lands until the 1930s, and also hunted the game animals of the region remorselessly, bringing them into conflict with the San. To protect their flocks and herds against San raids, the Natal Government settled Bantu-speaking farmers in order to seal off the San raiders. Punitive raids during the 1860s and 1870s led to the eventual destruction of the San communities, upsetting the balance that had existed for thousands of years between the indigenous people and their sustainable use of the natural resources of the region.

Description

Paintings are to be found in diverse sites, ranging from large rock-shelters containing over a thousand individual images to small rock overhangs with only a few paintings and the vertical sides of boulders strewn along the steep valley slopes. They occur not only on prominent rock faces that can be viewed from all parts of the shelter but also on the comparatively hidden surfaces of fallen and broken rocks. Many of the latter were executed after the rocks had fallen and so these sites must have been chosen intentionally. Superimposed paintings indicate that San artists visited sites repeatedly over long periods of time.

Radiocarbon dating of pigments and charcoal from occupation layers indicate that the earliest paintings date to *c* 3800 BP, although the earliest date from a site within the Park is *c* 2400 BP. At the other end of the time-scale historical records and the subject matter of paintings indicate that the San were still producing rock art at the end of the 19th century.

A 1976 study of 150 rock-art sites in the central and southern Drakensberg showed that many of them displayed painted scenes of hunting, dancing, fighting, food gathering, and ritual or trance scenes of hunting or rainmaking. Of the 8578 images recorded in this survey, 53% were of human figures, 43% of animals, and 4% depicted inanimate and abstract subjects. Only animal paintings were recorded in 21 shelters, whilst eight contained only human figures.

The predominant colour for all subjects was red (40%), whereas white, orange, and yellow were used more frequently on animal figures. Other colours used were black and, rarely, brown. Most were between 100mm and 250mm in size, with extremes ranging from 13mm to 2430mm. Some 64% of the images were monochrome and 22% bichrome, but both polychrome and shaded polychrome images were

present. Superimposed paintings were recorded in 51% of the rock shelters.

Antelopes comprised 77% of the animal images, eland (35%) and rhebok (18%) being the most frequently recorded species. Most of the eland paintings show groups of animals, painted in elaborate detail. Other antelope species include hartebeest, reedbuck, oribi, grey rhebok, black wildebeest, bushbuck, and roan antelope.

Other indigenous species that occur less frequently include baboon, snakes, birds, shoals of fish, small carnivores, leopard, hyaena, buffalo, bushpig, warthog, aardvark, elephant, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, jackal, hare, lizard, and mongoose. Domestic animals are also depicted, cattle and horses being most common.

Most of the human subjects were depicted naked (58%), but the sex was indeterminate for most of them. Dressed figures were clad in a variety of garments, in some cases of European type. Many bear weapons or implements, including bows, arrows, sticks, digging sticks, assegais, bags, fly switches, and shields. The heads are treated in different ways – round, concave, hooked, or animal (therioanthropic). Parts of the body are decorated in some cases.

The non-representational paintings include intentional finger smears, often in pairs, crossed lines in rectangles, and rope-like and feathery lines attached to animal or therioanthropic figures.

A survey carried out on 17 shelters in the 5.5km Didima Gorge, within the Cathedral Peak State Forest, which is probably the richest rock-art area in South Africa produced comparable results. However, some 5% of the images were of man-made structures, bees' nests, and various forms of equipment. The researcher drew attention to the fact that the animals were more colourful and more elaborately depicted.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The Drakensberg (oKhahlamba) Park was established by the 1997 KwaZulu Nature Conservation Management Act and the 1998 Republic of South Africa National Forests Act. The Park is composed of six reserves: Giant's Castle Game Reserve, Kamberg Nature Reserve, Loteni Nature Reserve, Royal Natal National Park, Rugged Glen Nature Reserve, and Vergelen Nature Reserve. There are six State Forests: Cathedral Peak, Cobham, Garden Castle, Highmoor, Mkhomazi, and Monk's Cowl.

In addition, certain natural resources are protected under the provisions of the 1956 Water Act as amended and the 1989 Environment Conservation Act as amended.

Management

The 1997 KwaZulu Nature Conservation Management Act provides for the institutional structures for nature conservation in the province and the establishment of control and monitoring bodies and mechanisms. The decision-making body is the KwaZulu Nature Conservation Board, which is responsible for overall policy-making and management. Under the terms of the Act, local protected area boards are being set up to provide a statutory basis for the direct involvement of communities living in the area in decision-making.

Direct management is delegated to the KwaZulu Nature Conservation Service, under the direction of its Chief Executive Officer. He is accountable to the provincial Minister of Traditional and Environmental Affairs. There are three branches in the Service, covering conservation, scientific services, and administration respectively. The total staff is more than 600, at all grades.

The framework for the management of the Park is the statement of vision and policies. There is at present no master management plan, but one is under active preparation. There are, however, management plans in force for three of the reserves and one state forest.

The Cultural Resource Management Plan (CURE) for the Drakensberg Park was approved by the Board in November 1998. Its mission statement is "to promote the conservation and public appreciation of archaeological and historical resources in the Drakensberg Park, in accordance with conservation, tourism, and wilderness management objectives." The Plan goes on to identify a series of objectives and defines a strategy with three components: implementation and maintenance of conservation measures to curb the natural and unnatural deterioration of sites; promotion of an appreciation of cultural resources in the Park; and promotion of research opportunities, site recording and monitoring, and the establishment and maintenance of databases.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The earliest steps taken to protect the Drakensberg were taken by the Natal Colonial Government in 1903, when a game reserve was created in the Giant's Castle area. This began a process which continued throughout the 20th century, always relating to nature protection.

Archaeological research has been continuous throughout the past half-century, and this led to the implementation of additional measures to protect the rock art. Four important sites (Battle Cave, Main Caves, Game Pass 1, and Kanti 1) have been declared national monuments under the provisions of the 1969 National Monuments Act. A number of conservation programmes aimed at providing better protection for the rock-art sites are now in force, involving controlled entry to the Park, awareness creation, guided access to selected sites, keeping the locations of other sites confidential, and prohibition of camping or lighting fires in caves or shelters containing rock paintings. These are consolidated in the Cultural Resource Management Plan.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the Drakensberg rock art is unimpeachable.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the property in January 2000. ICOMOS also consulted its International Scientific Committee on Rock Art.

Qualities

The rock art of the Drakensberg is exceptional in that it represents the artistic expression of a single people, the San, over a period of more than 4000 years. It is also the largest and most densely distributed rock-art group in Africa.

Comparative analysis

Other concentrations of San rock art are to be found in southern Africa, at Cederberg in the south-western part of Cape Province and the Matopo Hills in Zimbabwe. However, none of these is comparable with the Drakensberg in terms of its density and diversity. It is also the best preserved group south of the Sahara because of the physical properties of the rock on which it was painted.

ICOMOS comments and recommendations for future action

ICOMOS is not convinced that the Drakensberg qualifies as a cultural landscape, as defined in paragraph 39 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. It is difficult to argue that the long San occupation has significantly modified the natural landscape. Inscription as a mixed site is therefore more appropriate in this case.

The Drakensberg National Park is defined on the west by the frontier with Lesotho. It seems certain that there will be other San rock-art sites on the territory of that country (which is not yet a State Party to the Convention). It is understood that discussions have been initiated with Lesotho to explore the possibility of extending any eventual inscription of the Drakensberg Park to include similar sites in the neighbouring country.

ICOMOS is concerned that the different management plans have not yet been harmonized by means of a master plan. It is very important that the objectives and policies of the Cultural Resource Management Plan are properly integrated with those relating to the natural heritage, so as to avoid any possible conflicts.

The staff of the Nature Conservation Service is exclusively related to the natural heritage. ICOMOS strongly recommends that a cultural heritage unit be established within the Service. The UK National Parks have benefited considerably since the appointment of archaeological or heritage conservation officers in most of them over the past two decades.

Brief description

The spectacular natural landscape of the Drakensberg Park contains many caves and rock-shelters with a wealth of paintings made by the San people over a period of 4000 years. They depict animals and human beings, and represent the spiritual life of this people, now no longer living in their original homeland.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *cultural criteria i and iii*:

Criterion i The rock art of the Drakensberg is the largest and most concentrated group of rock paintings in Africa south of the Sahara and is outstanding both in quality and diversity of subject.

Criterion iii The San people lived in the mountainous Drakensberg area for more than four millennia, leaving behind them a corpus of outstanding rock art which throws much light on their way of life and their beliefs.

ICOMOS, September 2000