
Sehlabathebe (Lesotho) No 985bis

Official name as proposed by the State Party

Sehlabathebe National Park

Location

Sehlabathebe, District of Qacha's Nek
Kingdom of Lesotho

Brief description

The Sehlabathebe National Park is located in the Maloti Drakensberg mountain range that links Lesotho and South Africa along a 300km border on the Great Escarpment of southern Africa. The property borders the uKhahlamba / Drakensberg mixed World Heritage Site, South Africa, to which it is proposed as an extension. In its distinctive mountain landscape, Sehlabathebe contains at least 65 San rock art sites with paintings, which are said to be examples of the Southern Style of Maloti Drakensberg rock art. These can be found in various settings, including rock shelters containing a large variety of images or small rock overhangs with a few paintings. The age of the drawings is diverse with the oldest dating back to the 2nd millennium BCE and the most recent created in the 1920s.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

[Note: The property is nominated as a mixed cultural and natural site. IUCN will assess the natural significances while ICOMOS assesses the cultural significances.]

1 Basic data

Included in the Tentative List

8 October 2008

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

None

Date received by the World Heritage Centre

27 January 2012

Background

This is an extension to the uKhahlamba / Drakensberg Park in South Africa, inscribed on the World Heritage List at the 24th session of the World Heritage Committee (Cairns, 2000) on the basis of criteria (i), (iii), (vii) and (x).

Consultations

ICOMOS consulted its International Scientific Committee on Rock Art and several independent experts.

Technical Evaluation Mission

A joint ICOMOS/IUCN technical evaluation mission visited the property from 7 to 13 October 2012.

Additional information requested and received from the State Party

ICOMOS sent a letter to the State Party on 9 October 2012 requesting additional information with regard to the identification, exact location and name of the property, the justification for the Outstanding Universal Value, the state of conservation, protection and management of the cultural components of the property and the monitoring system in place. The State Party provided additional information in response to the questions raised on 5 November 2012, which is included under the relevant sections below.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

6 March 2013

2 The property

Description

Sehlabathebe Park is located in the Maloti Mountains in the south-easternmost part of Lesotho and covers an area of 6,500 hectares. The property shares a twelve kilometre border with the World Heritage property uKhahlamba / Drakensberg Park in the Republic of South Africa. Sehlabathebe consists of plateaus at an altitude of about 2,400 meters, which to the east rise towards 2,900 meters in steep basalt mountains, creating a spectacular scenery of rock formations.

The park contains rock paintings of the San people, which are said to be found in high concentration and which represent the Southern Style of Maloti Drakensberg rock art. These rock paintings have been interpreted as documenting the arrival of the Bantu and White settlers to Sehlabathebe, which is highlighted as a specific feature unique to this area. As depictions of the San culture, the rock art conveys scenes of daily life of hunter gatherers but also shows dances and mystical performances. Among the many animals depicted, the eland is by far the most dominant; it was highly valued by the San as a symbol, amongst others, of the power the shamans harnessed to enter the spirit world.

The pigments used for the rock paintings are made from the natural resources of the Sehlabathebe landscape and range from earthen yellows, browns and dark reds to white and, occasionally, black. Both single colour and mixed colour paintings exist, of which those with a combination of colours illustrate higher artistic quality. Most rock art sites show a combination of humans and animals although both are also shown in isolation. The sizes of the individual drawings vary considerably from miniature to close to life-size.

The Sehlabathebe National Park is said to contain 65 documented rock art sites, which were recorded during a survey in the 1980s. Studies suggest that the locations of the rock art sites were selected intentionally and relate to ritual or livelihood centres. The rock paintings have apparently been analysed with radiometric dating (C^{14} techniques) which suggested that the oldest paintings date back around 4,000 years while the newest are likely to be not older than 100 years.

Extension

The Sehlabathebe National Park is nominated as an extension of uKhahlamba / Drakensberg Park in South Africa. From a cultural point of view, the uKhahlamba / Drakensberg Park was recognised as of Outstanding Universal Value for its rock art which represents the largest and most concentrated group of rock paintings in Africa south of the Sahara, and was acknowledged to be outstanding both in quality and diversity of subjects. The rock art was also inscribed as an exceptional testimony, which throws much light on the way of life and beliefs of the San people, who lived in the mountainous area for more than four millennia and left behind this corpus of outstanding rock art.

History and development

In history, Sehlabathebe was almost exclusively inhabited by the San people, who are estimated to have lived in the property from around 8,000 years ago until the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Two authors cited in the nomination dossier even suggest that the area may have been populated from 20,000 years ago, which would be closer to evidence found in South Africa dating back to about 25,000 years ago. However, the South African research specifies that the earliest occupiers were not yet the San people, who are assumed to have arrived around 8,000 years before present.

The history of the San in Sehlabathebe is largely unknown with the exception of the information that can be garnered from the rock paintings. These suggest that there have been hunter gatherer communities here who practiced mystic rituals and dances. The paintings likewise document the arrival of the first white settlers in the 19th century, which were to change the course of the life of the San.

The rock art of Sehlabathebe was first researched in the 1980s when the Analysis of the Rock Art in Lesotho (ARAL) project was conducted by the National University of Lesotho. The results of this project still provide the key inventory and reference document for rock art in Lesotho today. In 1970 Sehlabathebe had already been recognized as a Wild Life Sanctuary and National Park, which created additional interest in the rock art being preserved and presented as part of the overall park concept.

ICOMOS considers that little is known about the history of the San people in the Sehlabathebe National Park, although the San have perhaps lived here well into the 20th century and that an oral history survey may help to

provide more in-depth knowledge of the lifestyle and rituals which are depicted in the rock art paintings. ICOMOS therefore recommends that, along with a general comprehensive survey of rock art in Sehlabathebe, an oral history survey is also initiated, aimed at collecting further information which may assist the understanding and interpretation of San rock art.

3 Justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis names a number of important areas in Southern Africa which contain high concentrations of San rock art, including Cederberg, South Africa, part of the World Heritage property Cape Floral Region Protected Areas (2004, criteria (ix) and (x)), Matobo Hills, Zimbabwe, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2003 (criteria (iii), (v) and (vi)), and Brandberg, Namibia (on the Tentative List). However, these are named rather than compared and are categorically dismissed as not being of comparable size to Sehlabathebe. ICOMOS considers that the size of a rock art area may perhaps not be a relevant factor as high concentrations of rock art sites can occur in very small areas.

Based on the considerations described above, the only detailed comparison which remains is with the rock art in uKhahlamba / Drakensberg Park. It is acknowledged that uKhahlamba / Drakensberg contains the best preserved San rock art and that the almost three-dimensional aspect achieved through foreshortening in some paintings is unique to uKhahlamba / Drakensberg. Yet, it is argued that the Sehlabathebe rock art is an excellent example of the so-called Southern Style, which is then not defined any further. ICOMOS considers that, based on the presently available knowledge and information provided on Sehlabathebe rock art, it is impossible to judge what specific features Sehlabathebe may contribute to the representation of rock art already contained in the uKhahlamba / Drakensberg property.

Since no comparison has been undertaken with rock art sites in other parts of Lesotho, in particular in the area proposed as a buffer zone to the World Heritage property, the analysis cannot illustrate that the rock art in Sehlabathebe has indeed a higher density or different quality than elsewhere. ICOMOS considers that a comparative analysis has to be based on full and comprehensive knowledge of the exact features, locations and distribution of the rock art proposed, which could then be compared against and used to assess different rates of rock art concentrations. Although it may be likely that the Sehlabathebe rock paintings illustrate precise features not yet recognized in uKhahlamba / Drakensberg Park, these features need to be specified and their documentation substantiated.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis does not justify consideration of this extension for the World Heritage List at this stage and needs to be further substantiated.

Justification of Outstanding Universal Value

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- The Sehlabathebe National Park forms the natural extension of the uKhahlamba / Drakensberg Park and, together with it, forms the largest and most concentrated group of rock paintings in Africa south of the Sahara.
- The rock paintings are outstanding in quality and diversity of subjects and characteristically include depictions of the arrival of white settlers in the 19th century.
- People have continuously lived in Sehlabathebe for tens of thousands of years and have illustrated their beliefs and rituals in exceptional rock paintings.

Although the justification presented corresponds to the justification of the initial nomination of uKhahlamba / Drakensberg Park, South Africa, ICOMOS considers that the claim for exceptional density of rock art sites in Sehlabathebe as well as for diversity of motifs and introduction of new image genres, such as the arrival of white settlers, needs to be further documented and substantiated. ICOMOS considers that although it seems likely that Sehlabathebe illustrates exceptional rock art like that found in uKhahlamba / Drakensberg Park, Outstanding Universal Value can only be acknowledged based on exact knowledge of the cultural features of the property. Such knowledge needs to be based on survey data providing detailed descriptions and illustrations of the exceptional rock art paintings as well as cartographic data of rock art in the property and in its surroundings, which highlights the concentration of sites in Sehlabathebe.

ICOMOS further notes that with the more recent expansion of knowledge on the life of the San in Southern Africa, in particular gained through advances in research and documentation of their rock art, scholars have recognized cultural significance beyond the paintings which includes elements of the landscape which equally had ritual significance. In light of the latest research, ICOMOS considers that the rock pools, an important component of the Sehlabathebe landscape, are likely to have been perceived as portals to the supernatural realm by the San people and thus sites like the Tsoelikane Falls may have cultural significance that is not yet fully recognized. ICOMOS therefore recommends exploration of the potential contribution of exceptional landscape features to the cultural significance of the property.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

ICOMOS considers that the information provided in the nomination dossier, including the additional information provided by the State Party at the request of ICOMOS, is not sufficient to judge whether the proposed extension is of adequate size or whether it contains all elements necessary to convey the Outstanding Universal Value proposed. This results from the fact that no detailed map indicating the location of all rock art sites in the property and its surroundings was provided and no inventory or description of features of all individual sites has been made available. Both experts and locals suggested to ICOMOS that the concentration of rock art sites in parts of the buffer zone may be as high or even higher than in Sehlabathebe National Park.

With regard to the third aspect of integrity which relates to potential negative impacts on the property, ICOMOS considers that Sehlabathebe is in a very remote location and the rock art sites in it even more so. Remoteness may be one of the most effective protection mechanisms for rock art sites. The location of rock art sites within the property is largely unknown. The known sites are difficult to access via rough bridle paths and most sites with known locations are reportedly well outside areas of regular human activity. ICOMOS therefore concludes that at present adverse effects from development are very limited.

Authenticity

The synthesis of rock art sites and their natural setting in Sehlabathebe convey a very strong sense of authenticity in setting, location and atmosphere but also material, substance and workmanship. It is a positive factor in this respect that no systematic conservation or consolidation treatment has been attempted, which has left all the rock art sites perhaps more fragile but with the utmost possible degree of authenticity. The sites remain closely integrated with their surrounding landscape and credibly convey the narratives of San life and activity in respect to the harsh climatic conditions of the area and necessary exploitation of natural resources and shelter.

However, the exceptional degree of authenticity and ability of the rock art sites to truthfully convey the life and traditions of the San people is reduced by a tendency towards misrepresentation of San culture in the recently opened Environmental Centre (see chapter 5 of this evaluation).

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity cannot be demonstrated on the basis of the material provided, but that authenticity is met.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (i) and (iii), and natural criteria (vii) and (x).

Criterion (i): represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the uKhahlamba / Drakensberg Park, extended by Sehlabathebe National Park, is one of the largest concentrations of rock art paintings in southern Africa. It is further claimed that the rock art is outstanding in quality and diversity of subjects and this will be diversified further through the 65 new rock art sites added by the Sehlabathebe extension. These are supposed to be an excellent representation of the Southern Style of the San tradition, which is said to not yet be well represented in uKhahlamba / Drakensberg.

ICOMOS considers that the justification is predominantly built on the shared value the extended World Heritage property would have by reiterating the Outstanding Universal Value already acknowledged for uKhahlamba / Drakensberg, rather than highlighting the potential contribution of the Sehlabathebe extension to this criterion. The specific Southern Style, which it is said to represent, would need to be more clearly defined. ICOMOS considers that the general lack of information and documentation of rock art sites in and around Sehlabathebe National Park, including their exact locations, motifs, sizes, physiographic features and materials used, makes it very difficult to confirm that the group of 65 identified rock art sites in Sehlabathebe contributes to a group of rock art sites which can be said to be a masterpiece of human creative genius.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not yet been justified.

Criterion (iii): bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the San people lived in the inland mountainous area for more than four millennia and left behind an exceptional testimony of rock art, which sheds much light on their way of life and beliefs. The State Party adds that the specific contribution of Sehlabathebe rock art to this criterion are the depictions of more overt ritual activity and less hallucinatory imagery, which is said to be present in uKhahlamba / Drakensberg.

ICOMOS considers that as for the above criterion (i) the very restricted knowledge of the motifs and features of the Sehlabathebe rock art and the lack of a comprehensive inventory and imagery make it difficult to judge the contribution of the Sehlabathebe rock art sites to the testimony of the San people in the uKhahlamba / Drakensberg World Heritage property. ICOMOS considers that this criterion has potential to be justified but that knowledge of the attributes which would present such exceptional testimony of the San people needs to be complemented by a comprehensive survey of the existing rock art sites.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not yet been justified.

In conclusion, ICOMOS does not consider that the criteria have been justified at this stage.

4 Factors affecting the property

The cultural aspects of Sehlabathebe National Park are not affected by short- or medium-term development pressures. The remoteness of the property acts as a natural protection in addition to the development regulations established by the park administration, dividing the Park into wilderness, natural environment and service areas. Yet, the complete absence of a management strategy for the rock art sites may eventually lead to development pressures related to the provision of better accessibility.

The most significant factors influencing the property can be summarized under the heading 'environmental pressures'. This includes in particular the effects of the extreme weather conditions, such as heavy snowfalls which sometimes create the need for emergency airlifts for staff and visitors, and occasional wildfires. Especially in the event of fire, no risk preparedness or disaster response plan seems to be in place. ICOMOS recommends that a risk preparedness and disaster response plan should be established as a priority, which should in particular address the lack of knowledge among the emergency response teams as to where the most significant rock art sites are located, as well as specific measures to protect these in the event of fire.

In the past some of the rock art sites had been utilized as shelters by livestock herders, but such practices seem to have been significantly reduced by the park administration through awareness-raising. Although the nomination dossier highlights efforts to completely restrict access to the rock art sites for herders, this seems at present not practicable given the lack of precise knowledge of the rock art locations and a general shortage of staff required to monitor access restrictions. Instances of domestic stock straying into the park occur but their effect on the rock art sites is considered negligible.

Despite precise figures not being available at present, the number of visitors to Sehlabathebe National Park in general and its rock art sites in particular is very low. The park administration estimates that the rock art sites attract no more than 200 visitors per year. In spite of the fragility of some of the rock art, much higher visitor numbers could occur without posing a risk to the rock art as long as acts of vandalism can be prevented.

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are the extreme climatic conditions and wildfires.

5 Protection, conservation and management

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

The boundaries of the area proposed for World Heritage inscription enclose 6,500 hectares, a comparatively large area for cultural heritage sites. It coincides with the area proclaimed as the Sehlabathebe National Park. However, despite its size, in the absence of a comprehensive inventory of rock art sites in the property as well as in the buffer zone and wider surroundings, it is not possible to judge whether the most important sites are enclosed by the proposed boundaries. ICOMOS was given the impression that groups of rock art sites of comparable or even higher significance may be located in the area at present designated as the buffer zone.

The buffer zone does not at present surround the nominated property. Toward the east, a buffer zone is unnecessary as the proposed property borders the South African uKhahlamba / Drakensberg World Heritage Site, at present here buffered by the Sehlabathebe National Park without official buffer zone recognition. To the west and north a proposed buffer zone covers a length of approximately 20 km, but no buffer zone is provided in the south. The likely reason is that the Sehlabathebe National Park borders South Africa along its southern boundaries and a buffer zone would need to be defined within South African territory. ICOMOS received information that an active process to create a formal buffer zone in the South African territories is already underway but needs to be finalized. ICOMOS recommends that in line with the transfrontier cooperation of Maloti Drakensberg, the two State Parties consider providing mutual buffer zones to the west and north of uKhahlamba / Drakensberg located in the territory of Lesotho and in the south of Sehlabathebe located in the territory of South Africa.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated extension cannot be considered adequate on the basis of the information provided and that its buffer zone should ideally extend into South African territory to surround the south of Sehlabathebe.

Ownership

The Sehlabathebe National Park is entirely owned by the Government of Lesotho as gazetted under the Land Act of 1979. Control, management and administration are delegated to the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture.

Protection

Sehlabathebe was declared a Wild Life Sanctuary and a National Park according to the provisions of the Game Preservation Proclamation (No. 55) of 1951. This proclamation was later superseded by the National Parks Act of 1975. In terms of cultural property, the Historical Monuments, Relics, Fauna and Flora Act (No. 41) of 1967 is said to provide the legal framework for the protection of all engravings and paintings that are found in

Sehlabathebe. The Act provides that monuments and relics found, which have been identified for preservation and protection, are listed and publicized by legal notice.

The nomination dossier did not include information on the legal status of the 65 rock art sites and whether they had been gazetted through this mechanism. The additional information provided by the State Party at ICOMOS' request suggests that the sites are considered to be generically protected by the Act – as are any other rock art site discovered in the Kingdom – but that they are not designated as national monuments. It is therefore the remoteness and inaccessibility of the rock art sites that makes the strongest contribution to their protection, rather than their legal status.

The administration of Sehlabathebe National Park cooperates with grazing associations in forms of traditional protection of the property as these regulate access to the pastures and prevent overexploitation. However, there is no indication that these traditional protection mechanisms also cover the rock art sites. ICOMOS recommends that, based on a comprehensive inventory of rock art in Sehlabathebe, all significant rock art sites are designated as national sites through public gazetting.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place should be strengthened through designation of the rock art sites as national monuments.

Conservation

Like the Outstanding Universal Value, integrity and other factors, the state of conservation of the rock art is also difficult to judge on the basis of the material provided and data collected during the technical evaluation mission. The core reason for these difficulties in assessment is the lack of a comprehensive inventory which contains the exact coordinates of rock art sites, their geophysical and artistic features, motifs, materials used, approximate age and level of significance. The only inventory which exists at present was produced during the Analysis of the Rock Art in Lesotho (ARAL) project conducted by the National University of Lesotho in the 1980s. The inventory list provided in the nomination dossier contains a reference number for each site, a site name that was attributed by the surveyors, and the date of the visit, including the name of the person who visited. In response to ICOMOS' request for additional information on the inventory, the State Party also supplied a digital copy of the archaeologist's documentation, including a topographic map with approximate locations of rock art sites, field sketch maps indicating in more detail some of the local settings, and site record forms for 25 of the 65 rock art sites referred to. ICOMOS has no information except the name and reference number for the remaining 40 rock art sites and the available information on the 25 sites does not include baseline assessments of their state of conservation.

ICOMOS recommends more up-to-date and ample research be conducted on rock art in Sehlabathebe National Park and its surroundings, using as the basis the

earlier ARAL surveys, to allow for informed assessments regarding its cultural significance, special characteristics and features but also to consider the state of conservation of the rock art sites and to monitor natural degradation processes.

No conservation activities have so far been undertaken or scheduled for the rock art sites, which is a positive factor that has contributed significantly to the preservation of their authenticity. In ICOMOS' view conservation activities should only be undertaken in exceptional circumstances as well as on the basis of in-depth documentation. ICOMOS recommends that priority is given to the establishment of a full inventory on the basis of a rock art survey, which should also document the state of conservation of the recorded sites.

ICOMOS considers that an inventory of rock art in Sehlabathebe needs to be established on the basis of new comprehensive surveys and the previous ARAL project documentation to enable the establishment of conservation strategies.

Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

The property is currently managed by the Sehlabathebe management staff based at Ha Paulusi (Kouung). The base consists of 11 permanent staff members with qualifications in natural resource management, maintenance, tourism and hospitality. No staff member is trained or responsible for the conservation and inventorying of rock art or other cultural attributes of the property. Temporary staff are occasionally engaged on a seasonal basis for fire management, road maintenance or control of invasive species.

For the cultural heritage context, the management base is said to be in contact with the Department of Culture, which offers expertise in the fields of heritage management, museums and cultural tourism. ICOMOS recommends offering staff from both the Sehlabathebe management bases and the Department of Culture additional training on the identification, documentation and conservation of rock art.

The management base conducts fire prevention measures by constructing and maintaining fire breaks or belts in Sehlabathebe National Park on an annual basis. However no further risk preparedness strategies or emergency response plans are currently in place and the responsible fire fighting agencies are not aware of the specific locations of rock art sites. ICOMOS recommends the development of risk preparedness and emergency response strategies which also recognize the specific needs of the cultural features of the property.

In terms of financing, most resources available seem to be channelled through the transfrontier cooperation project, although in principle rock art sites are supported by a

recurring budget allocation to the Ministry of Environment and Culture. Yet, no specific annual amount has been allocated to Sehlabathebe National Park. A representative of the Ministry of Finance stated at ICOMOS' inquiry during the technical evaluation visit that although no specific budget allocation was available it was in principle possible to designate a specific annual attribution. ICOMOS recommends that a specific and adequate annual budgetary allocation should be defined to allow for medium- and long-term planning in conservation, further inventorying and monitoring.

Policy framework: management plans and arrangements, including visitor management and presentation

The Sehlabathebe National Park is covered by a Joint Management Initiative for the Transfrontier Park (uKhahlamba / Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site / Sehlabathebe National Park). As part of the initiative a five year management plan has been developed which expires in 2012, if not renewed. This plan is said to guide all management decisions and a Joint Management Committee has been established, made up of representatives from both parks.

The objectives of the management plan are adequate and, because of the similarity of the Outstanding Universal Value of the existing uKhahlamba / Drakensberg World Heritage Site and the justification of the proposed extension, can also be said to be addressing the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. However, the progress report included in the nomination is a cause for concern. For example, it reports that the Sehlabathebe National Park has completely achieved one of its management objectives, namely that an inventory of all rock art sites has been established. However, the site inventory referred to is the one conducted in the 1980s and which has evidently not been checked or expanded in the implementation period of the management plan (2008-2012). This implies that while the authors of the management plan have recognized the necessity of comprehensive new surveys of rock art sites in Sehlabathebe, the local authorities have not implemented them.

The interpretation and presentation of rock art provided in the nomination dossier and the Sehlabathebe National Park is scarce and not well-founded. Often it doesn't reflect the current knowledge and state of research in rock art studies in southern Africa. Presentation of rock art in the park hardly exists, with the sole exception of the newly opened Environmental Centre. There the information is broadly culture-historical with a small diorama of the San people located outside the centre beneath an overhanging rock and additional displays inside the Centre. Unfortunately the quality of this diorama is questionable as it seems to create an untenable dichotomy between the San and the BaSotho. The panels inside the Environmental Centre are solely focused on the rise of the BaSotho state from pre-colonial times through colonization and Christianization but do not pay attention to the cultural

traditions of the San people or their rock art. ICOMOS considers that an improved presentation of the rock art sites within the Environmental Centre would be an asset.

Involvement of the local communities

The Sehlabathebe National Park attempts to utilize the limited opportunities for local participation in the tourism accommodation market. Small-scale enterprises offering home stays have been established in the form of traditional village hut accommodation and have become a local speciality. ICOMOS recommends continuation of the involvement of the local communities in the buffer zone and assistance for them in establishing small-scale visitor services to generate direct revenue for the community and counteract the negative perceptions of state-dominated tourism in Sehlabathebe National Park.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that special attention is needed in the extension of the joint management plan to include more prominently the management of rock art sites and other cultural resources identified through a new comprehensive inventory. ICOMOS further recommends that the team at the Sehlabathebe Park Management or the Department of Culture should involve experts in the identification and conservation of rock art, and that a regular annual budget is dedicated for this purpose.

6 Monitoring

The monitoring system present in the nomination dossier includes a single indicator for monitoring of cultural aspects in Sehlabathebe National Park, the state of conservation of rock art sites being based on annual inspection visits of the sites by the Department of Culture. Previous monitoring exercises have not yet taken place and at present the Department of Culture does not seem to have personnel fully capable of assessing the state of conservation of rock art as well as determining necessary actions and priorities for intervention.

The additional information provided by the State Party at the request of ICOMOS specifies that in cases where local expertise is unavailable, South African counterparts would support the monitoring exercise. While this transfrontier exchange is important and commendable, ICOMOS recommends that local experts on rock art are trained during the initial monitoring processes and that more specific monitoring indicators are established based on a new inventory and the specific requirements of the individual rock art sites.

ICOMOS considers that the monitoring indicators need to be further specified based on an updated inventory and data on the present state of conservation of rock art sites.

7 Conclusions

The key challenge of this extension proposal lies in an essential lack of information concerning the cultural elements included in the property. ICOMOS has no information except name, reference number and approximate location for 40 of the proposed 65 rock art sites. The information available on the remaining 25 sites does not include details on the materials used, painting techniques, exact motifs and styles, geographic coordinates or a baseline assessment of the state of conservation. ICOMOS considers that, based on the information available, it is impossible to judge whether the rock art in Sehlabathebe may contribute relevant features to the representation of rock art in the uKhahlamba / Drakensberg property.

ICOMOS notes that, based on a more recent expansion of knowledge on the life of the San, other elements of the landscape have been recognized as carrying ritual and cultural significance comparable to the rock art sites. ICOMOS therefore recommends exploration of the potential outstanding characteristics and features of the wider landscape of Sehlabathebe, in particular the characteristic rock pools. Also, in present scholarly discourses on the San's artistic and ritual expressions, the specific Southern Style, which the property is said to represent, is not clearly defined. ICOMOS considers that the key aspects of this style need to be defined and that the State Party needs to demonstrate how this style differs from the other rock art sites already inscribed. Based on the general lack of knowledge on the above elements, ICOMOS can neither confirm whether Outstanding Universal Value has been justified nor whether the conditions of authenticity or integrity have been met.

The key threats to the property are the extreme climatic conditions and wildfires. ICOMOS considers that therefore a risk preparedness and disaster response plan is critical for the long-term conservation of the property. The property is at present not protected by a buffer zone in all directions, as in the south it meets the international border with South Africa, beyond which no buffer zone is defined. It seems that cooperation between the two states for setting up a buffer zone in South Africa is underway and ICOMOS strongly encourages this process to be finalized.

The management of the site is restricted by the lack of personnel with expertise in rock art identification and conservation. A joint management plan and Committee created by the Transfrontier Park (uKhahlamba / Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site/Sehlabathebe National Park) which was already encouraged by ICOMOS at the time of the inscription of uKhahlamba/ Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site in 2000 has guided the management initiatives since 2006. However, this joint management plan expires in 2012, if not extended and it does not yet give sufficient attention to the cultural elements in both the existing World Heritage property and the proposed extension. ICOMOS considers that special attention is needed to continue the

evaluation and implementation of the joint management plan and to give more prominence to the management of rock art sites and other cultural resources identified on the basis of a new comprehensive inventory. ICOMOS also considers that local experts need to be trained in aspects of rock art identification and conservation and at least one rock art specialist should be included in the management team of Sehlabathebe National Park.

8 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the examination of the extension of uKhahlamba / Drakensberg Park, South Africa to include Sehlabathebe National Park, Lesotho, to the World Heritage List be **deferred** on the basis of cultural criteria in order to allow the State Party, with the advice of ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre, if requested, to:

- Conduct, on the basis of the ARAL project findings, sufficient updated research on rock art in Sehlabathebe National Park and its surroundings to create an inventory, which will allow informed assessment of the property's cultural significance, special characteristics and features;
- Include in this inventory the state of conservation of the documented rock art sites;
- Study the potential cultural contribution of landscape elements, such as rock pools, to the significance of Sehlabathebe;
- Define the characteristics of the Southern Style and demonstrate how the representation of this style in Sehlabathebe differs from the other rock art sites already inscribed;
- Designate on the basis of the revised inventory and the research, the most significant rock art sites as national historic sites through public gazetting;
- Establish and adopt a comprehensive management plan for the cultural elements of Sehlabathebe, including a risk preparedness and disaster response plan;
- Establish more specific monitoring indicators on the new inventory and the specific requirements and conditions of the rock art sites;
- Train staff of the Sehlabathebe management base and the Department of Culture in the documentation and conservation of rock art;
- Allocate a specific and adequate annual budget to allow for medium-term planning in conservation, inventorying and monitoring.

ICOMOS considers that any revised nomination would need to be considered by an expert mission to the site.

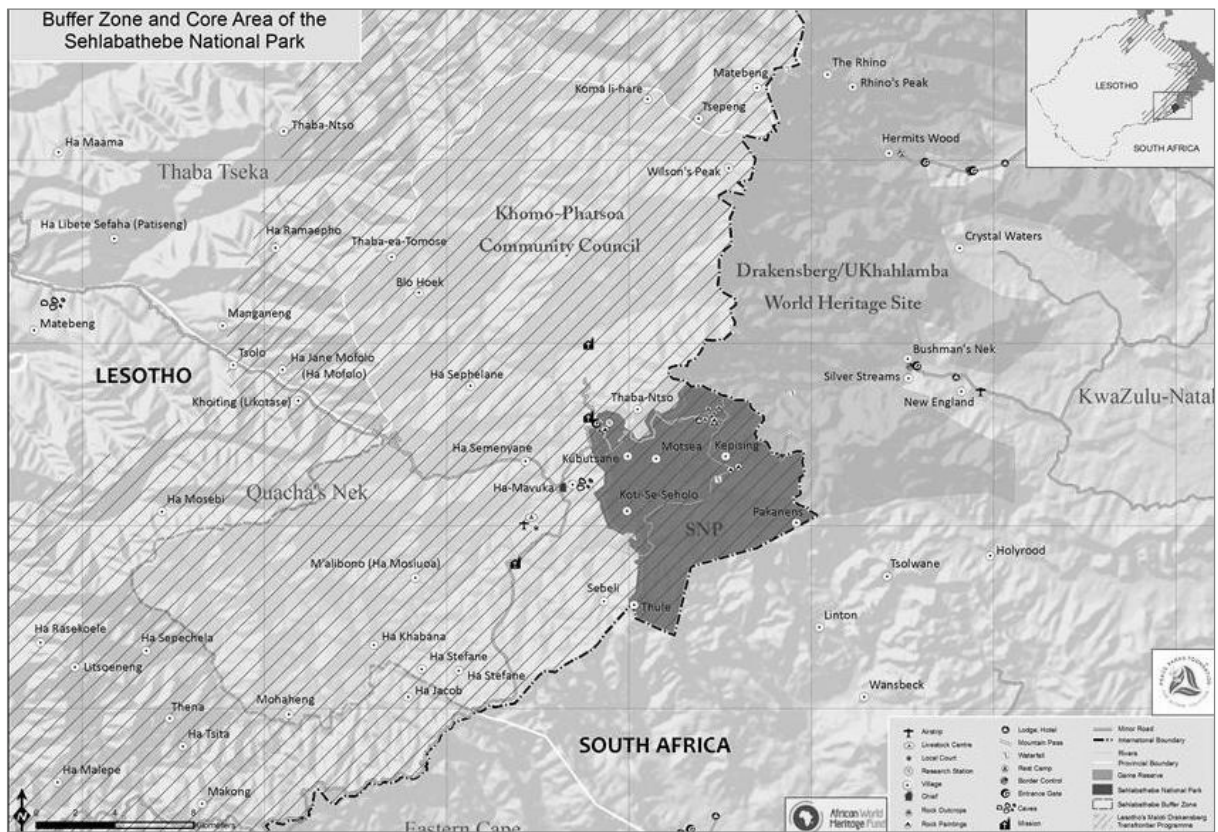
Additional recommendations

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to:

- submitting an International Assistance request to conduct the surveys and studies required to strengthen the justification of Outstanding Universal Value and to prepare the revised nomination dossier;
- conducting an oral history survey aimed at collecting further knowledge to assist the understanding and interpretation of San rock art;
- continuing a cautious approach towards conservation interventions on rock art sites and restrict such interventions to exceptional cases where rock art would otherwise become very fragile and vulnerable;
- improving the presentation of cultural aspects and in particular the rock art sites within the Environmental Centre;
- continuing the involvement of the local communities in the buffer zone and assisting them in establishing small-scale visitor services to generate direct revenues for the community.

ICOMOS further recommends to the two State Parties of Lesotho and South Africa to:

- continue their cooperative attempts towards providing a buffer zone to the south of Sehlabathebe located in the territory of South Africa.



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property



Rock formation



Tsoelikane Falls



Rock painting



Rock painting