



## Namibian Sojourn : a busy rock art idyll



Jeff LaFave

If you love the desert, as so many rock art people do, you will LOVE Namibia. This arid region in southern Africa is especially rich in its own brand of survivors—plants and animals that have adapted perfectly and earned their existences here. These same challenging dry conditions seem to be friendly to the pictographs of Namibia, which are often nearly as vivid and dynamic as the day they were created in millennia past.

In June a group of BARARA members (Amy Marymor, Chris Gralapp, Frank Cox, Rachael Freeman Long, Ellen van Fleet and Jeff LaFave) traveled to Namibia to explore the amazing sites of the Brandberg and the Erongo regions, at the suggestion of Ellen Van Fleet, who had been wanting to revisit places she had toured in the '90's. So, a group of adventure-minded friends gathered to head to Africa. We worked with

African rock art specialist Andras Zboray to create a customized journey into the Namibian desert, with an emphasis on the great painted sites, and also a few days in Etosha National Park to discover the Eden of wild-life that flourishes there. This issue will devote space to our collective experiences and personal impressions of this trip.

We began by landing in Windhoek, Namibia in early June, where Andras welcomed each of us at the airport, and whisked us to town. We were joined by Joana Marques, a Portuguese biologist whose research area is lichens and how they interact with rock art.

Our itinerary investigated a number of sites recorded by the Abbe Breuil between 1947 and 1950, whose travels in the area he described as “the most thrilling years of my research life”. We could understand why when we witnessed the images—so active and dynamic, intense with color and mystery. Andras demurs when asked about the age of the works, but some sources cite a 2000-year time depth for the rock art of the Brandberg Massif in northwest Namibia. The San or Bushmen people are considered the predominant authors of the pictographs.

Subject matter for the paintings is diverse, but certain patterns became clear to us—anthropomorphs in ritualistic dance and hunting behaviors, and the great animals of the southern deserts, amazingly well observed by the artists. The following articles provide impressions by several of our group.

For a complete summary of our Namibian experience, please go to:

[www.fjexpeditions.com/frameset/jun18.htm](http://www.fjexpeditions.com/frameset/jun18.htm)

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- Chris Gralapp, editor -- cgralapp@gmail.com*

## Wonderous: *Namibian pictographs* by Amy Marymor

In a vast landscape, Namibia holds some stunning and complex illustrations of its past in the form of pictographs. As ever, exploring for these images is a treasure hunt—a chance to explore the land and all it holds-- including these artistic vestiges of the past that linger on today. Rock art around the world plays to similar search-and-find (or not-find). I remember once standing in front of a sign planted by the Park Service explaining our cultural resources. We looked everywhere and could not find anything. Until the next day when we returned to try again and found the panel just above the sign. Namibia's rock art plays the same game. What are the hidden figures in Namibia?

In Namibia, paved roads end at city limits so our group travels the country on dirt roads, bouncing our way to the pictographs. In



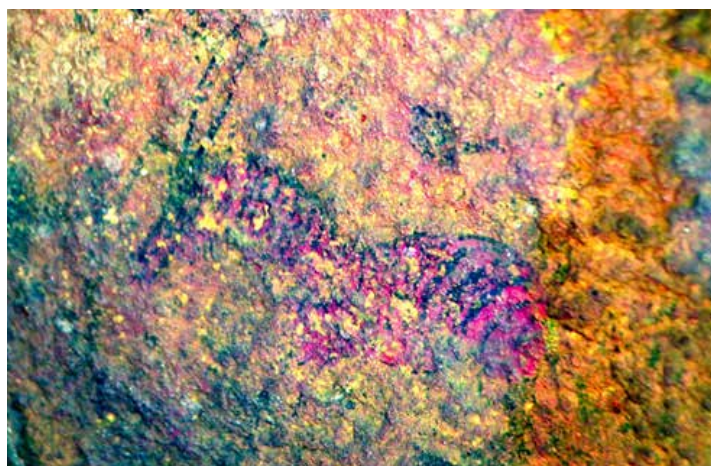
Amy Marymor Dstretch- Ire enhancement



Amy Marymor Dstretch- yrd enhancement

a land of unfamiliar cultures and footprints in the sand, the figures in the rock art are graceful and enthralling. There are detailed human figures—musicians, dancers, warriors, and unexplainable forms. Animals--elephants, kudus, ostriches, zebras, rhinos, lions, eared serpents, and giraffes, lots of giraffes! Plenty to hold the imagination. Sometimes, plants or trees, rain clouds. The paintings are in shelters, on open vertical walls, high and low, near comfortable flat ground or tucked away in a maze of stone. Each is unique.

And so treated with such a wealth of images new to me, still the stand-outs are the surprises. Those that are so finely painted, those that are teased out of the rock to be seen again, those that are situated in a special corner of the landscape or a nook in a shelter, or capture movement in stillness. Those that make me wonder.



Amy Marymor Dstretch - lbk enhancement



## Discovering lively rock art in Namibia *by Rachael Long*



In June, our BARARA group traveled to Namibia to explore the rock art in Southern Africa. This interesting area was once occupied by the San people and predecessors, who were hunters and gatherers, followed by the pastorals, or herders, then the Afrikaans, who farmed, then the Germans, then the English, and now, since 1990, it's an independent country, where most everyone speaks English. Throughout the different cultures, one thing's remained constant, and that is that life revolves around springs in this extreme desert environment. This is where people and animals have gathered and thrived for millennia and where one finds ancient rock art going back thousands of years.

We were lucky to have Andras Zboray as our guide for our 16-day tour. His experience and knowledge of Namibia and his community connections were essential for seeing the rock art in the area. It's there, but often on private land and hidden in rocky outcroppings that required scrambling to get to, and of course, lots of duct tape to patch holes in our pants! The rock art was in a rocky landscape surrounded by open plains and scrubby acacia trees, along with ranchers and gem seekers, all under the watch of troops of baboons.

The rock art was spectacular, not only because it was pretty with intricate drawings of animals and people, but it was so vibrant and alive. We saw paintings of hunting scenes with men tossing spears and shooting arrows at big game, including elephants and giraffes. There were herds of migrating antelope, along with travelers, that is people following them, some carrying belongings in baskets on their heads. We saw baby animals, including a very cute rhinoceros, pregnant women, agile hunters, dancers, human-animal figures, and a priest in a ceremonial robe.

Seeing the rock paintings was like watching a movie. One could feel the fear of the runner being charged by an elephant and another being chased by a swarm of bees. One could imagine the joy in those dancing and the power of love in those holding hands. It was thrilling to see people doing somersaults.

There was comfort in spirituality, energy in the power of magic, and reverence for fertility. There was a feeling of strength and bravery for the men hunting large game, pride in the women with elegant jewelry, glory in clouds, rain, and rippling puddles soaking a parched earth, and relief for the ones standing in the shade of a quiver tree on a hot summer day.

Animals were often as much a part of the physical and emotional scenes as humans in the rock paintings. Elephants raged at hunters and one could almost feel their anger and hear them trumpeting, sounding an alarm that was loud and clear. Hunters ran from elands, proud antelopes who stood their ground, like large bulls about to charge. Giraffes curiously stretched their necks towards people who shied away from these massive animals. Oryx sparred and predators hid behind bushes watching prey, making one want to shout a warning to those standing nearby.

The ability of these early artists to capture personalities of people and animals in simple painted strokes is astonishing. Leonardo da Vinci caused a sensation throughout Europe when he captured motion and emotion in his famous paintings, like *The Last Supper*, in the 1400's. However, there were masters of art thousands of years ago, making art lively and full of feeling, long before his time. This remarkable legacy provides us with a glimpse of a culture in past times that was vibrant and refined.

We enjoyed gathering for sundowners in the evenings, watching beautiful sunsets, and chatting about rock art. We experienced the winter solstice in June, the shortest day of the year down under, saw the Southern Cross, ran down sand dunes, and treasured the wildlife, from the weaver birds with their lovely hanging nests, to the elephants, giraffes, and zebras. We enjoyed our farm stays and meeting wonderful people. Most of all, we loved the beauty of the rock art that revealed a vibrant culture that thrived in the desert. Perhaps we can learn something from these people, that the simplest pleasures in life are the best, including friendship, community, pride in accomplishments, and fun. 🙌



# The Martis Complex: Ancient petroglyph makers of the northern Sierra

by Bill Drake

When most people think of petroglyphs (images carved on stone), they think of the Southwest. Not many people realize that northern California has numerous petroglyph sites, many believed to be several thousand years old.

Archaeological evidence suggests that most of the rock art in this region was created by people who were part of what is called the Martis Complex. Their name comes from Martis Valley, near Truckee, California, where their artifacts were first found

The Martis spent their summers at higher elevations in the Sierra and their winters in the lower elevations, and they reoccupied winter villages and base camps over long periods of time. Their artifacts have been found in western Nevada (including the land around Carson City and Reno) and in northern California (Plumas, Sierra, Nevada, Placer, and El Dorado Counties). They inhabited this region from 5,000 BP (Before Present) to 1,500 BP, sharing the land with eagles, big

horn sheep, grizzly bears, rattlesnakes, mountain lions, and other creatures that most of us today have little or no contact with.



There are over ninety Martis petroglyph sites. With the exception of one or two that are publicly known, their locations are kept confidential because of the danger of vandalism. At some of the Martis sites, contemporary names and initials have been carved in the rock right next to, or on top of, designs that date back to the Egyptian pyramids, degrading an irreplaceable cultural resource for ego gratification.

along Martis Creek by archaeologists Robert Heizer and Albert Elsasser in the early 1950s. It would not be technically correct to refer to these people as a tribe or as the “Martis Indians,” since they tended to travel in loose-knit groups without the characteristics of a tribe.

The Martis are identified by certain traits, including the preference for basalt for their stone tools and the use of mortars and pestles. They hunted with spears and atlatls. The atlatl came to America over 10,000 years ago. This ingenious tool was in use before the invention of the bow and arrow. It consisted of a stick with a crook on the end which was used to propel a spear-like dart with considerable force. The dart traveled as fast as 100 miles per hour.

These prehistoric people were what archaeologists call “hunters and gatherers.” Former Tahoe National Forest archaeologist Hank Meals has pointed out the inadequacy of this term, since it can connote human beings of questionable intelligence who wander around the land eating berries and killing game. “Hunters and gatherers” were very intelligent and highly adaptable people who knew far more about their environment, including the use of plants, and the behavior of animals, than people in our modern world will ever know.

The rock art designs found at these sites attributed to the Martis were categorized as “Style 7: High Sierra Abstract-Representational” by archaeologist Louis



Payen in his unpublished masters thesis in 1966. Most of them are abstract. The images include circles, spirals, wavy lines, sun-like designs, serpent-like images, and figures resembling bear and deer tracks. Hard stones were used to peck out the shape of the images. A lighter color just beneath the surface of the rock



often helped the forms stand out.

The art is frequently found in locations that afforded a view of the surrounding mountains and valleys, places that allowed the Indians to observe game or other Indians from a distance, and that were of great scenic beauty. Horizontal or gently sloping bedrock was preferred for the designs, unlike the vertical surfaces most often used in the Southwest. The Martis are not known to have made pictographs, or images painted on rock.

It is not possible to know what the individual images meant to the ancient petroglyph makers, even in the case of the few designs that we can make some association with, such as images of rattlesnakes and deer tracks. Since the Indians saw a world that was permeated by Spirit, everything they did, including creating rock art, probably had some sort of spiritual meaning or relationship.

The overall purpose of the northern Sierra's ancient rock art is also a mystery. Archaeologists believe that most cultures that created rock art did so for a variety of reasons, such as to create hunting magic (to have success in hunting); define territory; record events and stories; depict family and clan totems; monitor the position of the sun or other heavenly bodies; and

create images related to spiritual life or shamanic activity.

People who study rock art believe that it was created for a purpose and was not the result of random "doodling." It also was not created as "art" per se. In fact, the term "rock art" is very inadequate. As author Malcolm Margolin has pointed out, native people tended to do everything with a sense of "art," even when making baskets for cooking or arrows for hunting. In general, they did not have a separate area of their life that was "art" and therefore totally different from other areas, just as they did not segment only a part of their life as pertaining to the spiritual realms.

Archaeologists believe that 1500 years ago the Martis concentrated their population to the eastern end of their territory, near the Reno and Carson City areas, and became the ancestors of the Washoe Indians.

Although the Martis have not lived in the northern Sierra for centuries, the images on stone that they left behind, hidden among forests and mountains, remind us of a time when human lives were much more intertwined with nature than our own.

For information on the designation of a "Martis Complex," see "Some Archaeological Sites and Cultures of the Central Sierra Nevada," Robert Heizer and Albert Elsasser, Reports of the University of California, Archaeological Survey, No. 21, April 20, 1953. For information on the association of a Martis Complex and Style 7 rock art, see "The Association of Style 7 Rock Art and the Martis Complex in the Northern Sierra Nevada of California,"

Daniel Foster, John Betts and Linda Sandelin, Proceedings of the Society for California Archaeology, Vol. 15, pp.66-93, 2002.



**About the Author:** Bill Drake lives in Nevada City, California. He has been interested in Native Americans for over fifty years, since he was eighteen. In the 1970s he taught high school classes related to Native American history, culture, religion, and politics. In 1991, he co-founded Friends of Sierra Rock Art to protect the ancient petroglyph sites in the northern Sierra. It is the first non-professional organization to have received the Society for California Archaeology's

Helen C. Smith award for contributions to California archaeology. Drake has studied rock art and Native American cultures throughout the western United States. He has done numerous presentations related to rock art and native cultures for state park docents, school children, and the general public over the past 25 years.



## Impressions of Namibia: photos by Jeff LaFave



Twyfelfontein



Ekuta Cave



Jeff has a terrific eye, and can pick out and compose the rock art subjects so naturally--it is always a pleasure to feature his images in the newsletter. He pays particular attention to the interaction of the rock art with the landscape, which in Namibia is craggy, arid, and a vividly stark beauty, with a deeply ancient feel. I think Jeff has captured this all and much more.



Brandberg Giraffes



Big Cats at Etosha



Twyfelfontein



Dancing Kudus at Twyfelfontein



## Gary Breschini: In Memoriam (June 27, 1946 - June 5, 2018)

Gary was always supportive of BARARA. He was especially helpful to Paul and helped arrange several BARARA visits to Cave of the Hands and Hunter Leggett over the years.....

From the Struve and La Porte Funeral Chapel webpage: Gary Storm Breschini joined his ancestors on June 5 after three years living with cancer. Gary's family were early settlers in Salinas and he was a well-known archaeologist, lecturer, author, and community member.

Gary was the son of Margaret Storm and John Breschini, he is survived by partner, collaborator, and wife, Trudy Haversat, nieces, nephews, and many cousins. He grew up in Corral de Tierra where he developed a love for local history around the dinner table, attended Salinas schools, and met Trudy at the University of Washington where he received his PhD in Anthropology. As an archaeologist, Gary researched and wrote reports about Central Coast sites for fifty years, contributing significantly to our knowledge of the Native People's migration and lifestyle. He and Trudy assessed property for cultural resources as part of the environmental impact process. They established Coyote Press, a specialty publisher that provided out of print research materials to archaeologists, colleges, and other institutions. Their book, "Esselen Indians of the Big Sur Country," distills years of research into a popular story and was the basis of many of Gary and Trudy's lectures at local groups and service organizations. Other publications include "Early Salinas" and "Spreckels" volumes in the "Images of America" series and "10,000 Years on the Salinas Plain:

An Illustrated History of Salinas City, California" amongst thousands of professional reports and papers.

Gary was All Cal Sabre Champion while in college and an outdoor enthusiast who explored miles of trails by horseback with Trudy. He is past president of the Society for California Archaeology and the Monterey Historical Society, was a member of Registered Professional

Archaeologists among several professional organizations, and a member of the civil Grand Jury Association of Monterey County. Gary was a staunch supporter of the Santa Cruz Archaeological Society and the Archaeological Technology Program at Cabrillo and encouraged students in pursuing careers in archaeology. He is remembered for his distinctive dusty cowboy hats, usually adorned with feathers. Recently, the repository that Gary was instrumental in building and funding at the Monterey Historical Society at Boronda Road for storing the



materials collected during their professional career was named for him and Trudy.

<http://www.struveandlaporte.com/obituary/Gary-Storm-Breschini/Salinas-California/1801319>





## Western Rock Art Research: Weidler bequest supports non-profit *by Amy Marymor*

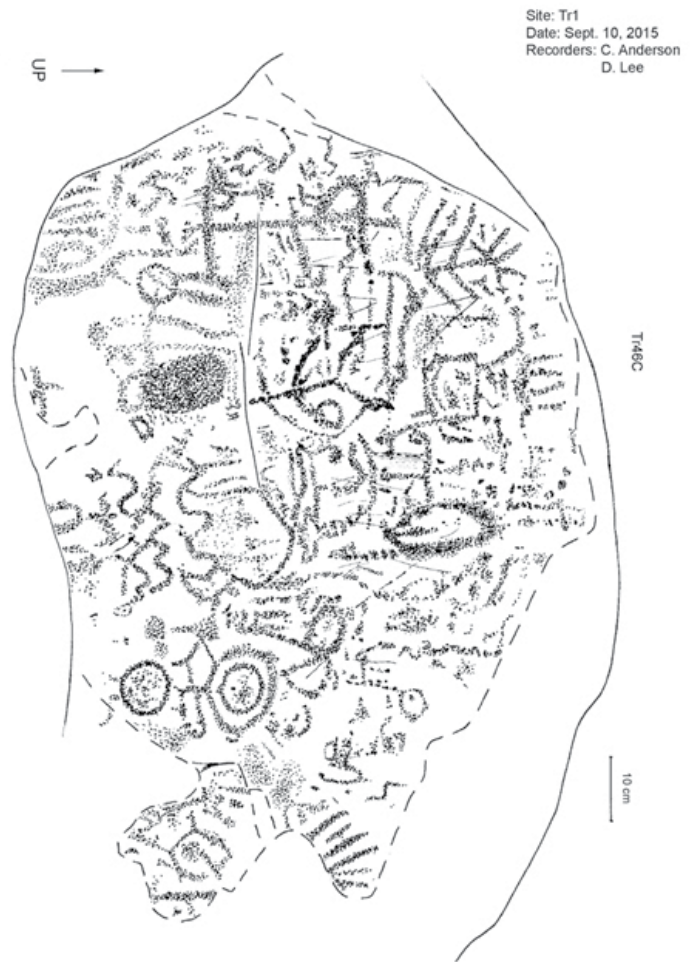
Western Rock Art Research (WRAR) is a small non-profit organization formed in 2006 dedicated to recording rock art sites in the western United States and Australia. It works as a “Challenge Cost-Share” group, providing at least matching half, or close to half, of the project cost even when contracting with government agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, Park Service, and Forest Service offices. The matching funding comes from general contributions to the organization. Recently, BARARA donated \$500 in support of its work of recording rock art and other prehistoric cultural sites.

WRAR’s mission, as described on their web page (<http://www.westernrockartresearch.org/>), is “to assist in defining the cultural landscape. The emphasis of the research is to continue to document, record, and photograph sensitive archaeological and rock art sites to provide baseline monitoring information and inform management decisions.” On an annual basis, this prolific non-profit registers an average recording of 30-35 rock art sites as well as 20-50 other archaeological sites, surveys 500-1000 acres, and members deliver 10-15 lectures all on a shoestring. Much of WRAR’s work is in the western US contracting with federal agencies and cultural resource management firms. Detailed site reports include photographs and scale drawings that are then often field checked. These records serve as comparative archives should a site be vandalized as was the high-profile case of the stolen petroglyph boulder from the Bishop Tablelands in 2012.

David Lee is the primary boots-on-the-ground recorder and began working in archaeology while employed as a Steward at the Sweeney Granite Mountain Desert Research Center, a University of California reserve in the eastern Mojave Desert. There he met Don Christensen who became his mentor and later a founding member of WRAR. The passion for preserving and recording cultural sites to provide a more complete view of prehistoric land use is shared by all members of WRAR. This passion and commitment is reflected in the high quality reports completed at the conclusion of each project.

The Australian work focuses on recording rock art sites in the Northern Territory, especially producing a series of publications that couple site records with traditional stories and knowledge connected to those specific places as told by Aboriginal Elder and Traditional Custodian Yidumduma Bill Harney of Wardaman country. These volumes are especially important as a record of the cultural stories and the knowledge of the elders which are in danger of becoming extinct. Since 2006, forty-seven sites have been recorded and over 120 hours of videotaped traditional stories have been collected, much still needing to be transcribed. Another 100 Wardaman sites have been recorded that are too remote for Mr. Harney to visit. All records are given to the tribal council in Wardaman country for their safe keeping, and are being used by younger Wardaman Rangers who are reconnecting to their ancestral lands.

As in Australia, work for the Owens Valley Rock Art



*An example of a panel of petroglyphs at Truman Meadows, part of the Owens Valley Rock Art Documentation Project*

Documentation Project involves working with local Paiute Tribal Offices for their consultation and for progress updates. To date, work in the Owens Valley has resulted in over 130 rock art sites being recorded on BLM and Forest Service properties. Projects in other states continue as well. Rock art sites are especially fragile in this day of easy access to information and the land and it is critical to learn what we can while those sites still exist.

In response to BARARA’s donation, David Lee writes: ‘Hello BARARA Members—Thank you soooo much for your very generous donation! It will be used to document “at risk” rock art sites in the Owens Valley that would not have been recorded without your help. Your group is the “Poster Child” for how a rock art group can be a real and active force for the management, education, and research on the Rock Art Sites we all love. Thank you, thank you!!!’



## Passionate Observers: Animals in Namibian Rock Art

When we think about Africa, most likely exotic animals come to mind--big cats, rhinos, hippos, giraffes, elephants, zebra and a multitude of different antelope species, as well as bird life, and reptiles of every description. And when we think about the indigenous peoples who lived here and interacted with the animals in this environment, I personally imagine a closer parity between humans and their fellow creatures--that is, a more level playing field between the two. As travelers, present day visitors to Africa relish sightings of animals that are in need of protection--but in the past of the rock art makers, the animals were ubiquitous and less vulnerable to humans. All these beings lived, if not exactly in harmony, certainly side by side in the vast landscape. The people understood intimately the ways of the animals, which they hunted, and for which they harbored a healthy respect. The representations of the animals are so remarkably well observed, that for me as a scientific Illustrator, these depictions are remarkable and keenly precise. Could I draw a giraffe or a rhno so carefully from memory? Not a chance. I really respect the artists of Namibia for their amazing perceptive powers.



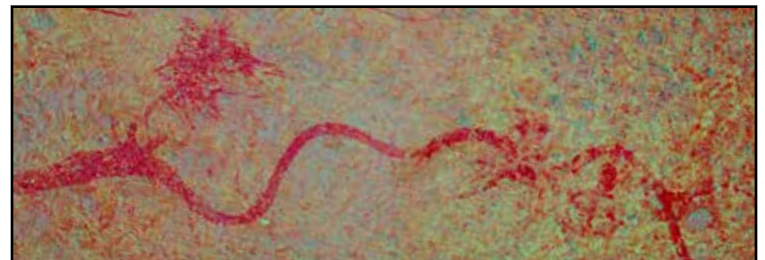
Catalog of many species at Twyfelfontein



Anibib--Elephant chasing anthros



Anibib--Giraffes are often associated with water



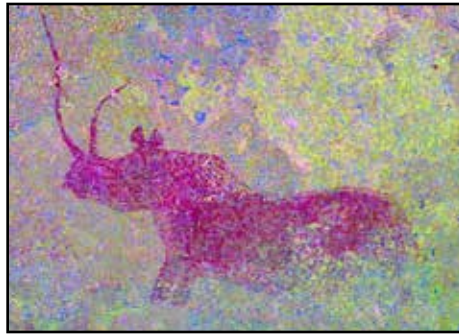
Anibib--Horned Serpent



Anibib--Giraffe Dance



Brandberg--Kudu et al



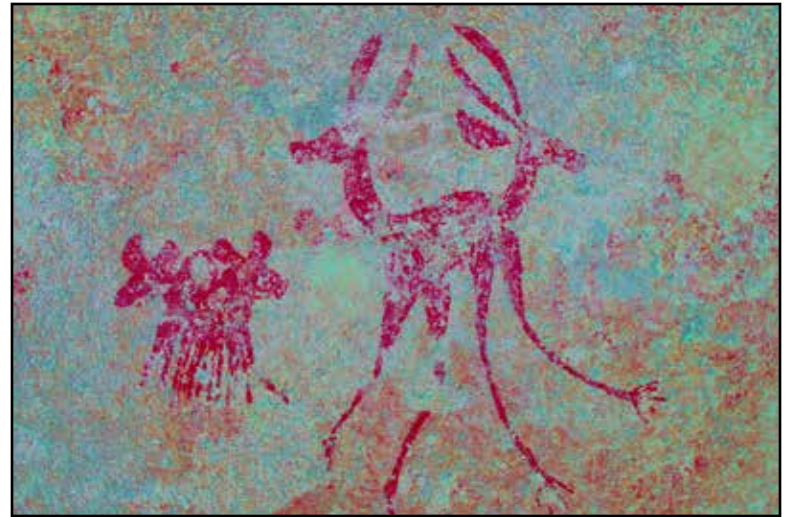
Anibib--Rhino with a elongate horn



Omandumba West--A very fine Oryx



Spitzkoppe--'Sphinx' figures

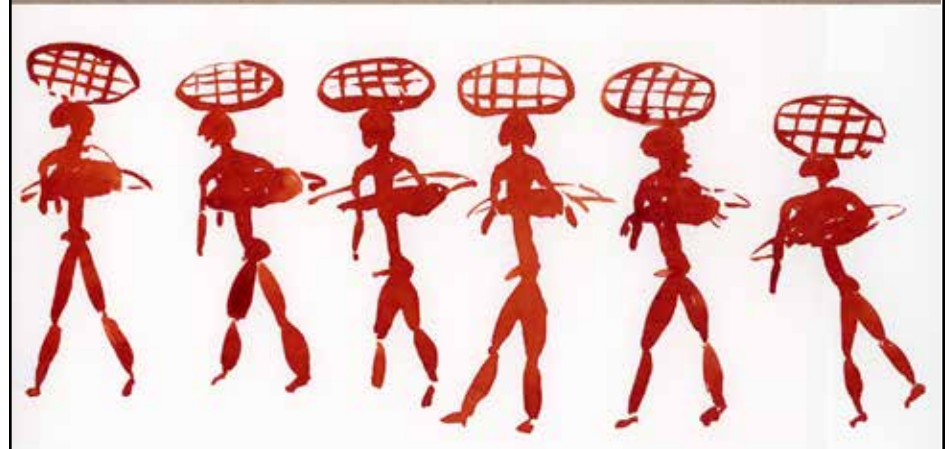


Springboksfontein--Curious double-headed animals

**The Travelers:**

- Ellen van Fleet
- Frank Cox
- Chris Galapp
- Rachael Freemn Long
- Amy Leska Marymor
- Joana Marques

not pictured: Jeff LaFave  
All photos by Andras Zboray



Pictographs enhanced via dStretch

## Where Mosquitoes Came From

This year's logo for our annual Entomology Conference features a shapeshifter that transforms from a larva into mosquito, as it emerges from water to air, symbolizing a crossing of borders for our joint USA/ Canadian meeting. According Indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest, this figure also tells a story of the origin of mosquitoes:

*Blood sucking animal-human forms used to invite travelers to their village, only to drain their blood by stabbing their long crystal noses into their necks while they slept. One young man woke in time to save himself and fled from the village with the chief in hot pursuit. The chief tracked the young man to a lake, where he hid in a tree by the shore. The chief repeatedly attacked the man's reflection in the water, became soaked, and froze solid. The young man and his people took the frozen chief and burned him to ashes. When the fire had burned out, a wind came up and blew the ashes into the air where they turned into clouds of mosquitoes.*

-- Rachael Long



## Join/Renew your membership in the Bay Area Rock Art Research Association

Founded in 1983 by Dr. Paul Freeman and Leigh Marymor, BARARA attracts like-minded individuals who are committed to exploring rock art all over the world, preserving and conserving it, providing education, and studying rock art in creative and interesting ways. Members enjoy access to field trip information and receive a newsletter that is published twice a year. Dues are collected for the membership year which runs from January 1 through December 31.

First name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

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- Individual membership \$25
- Member-plus-one \$35

Donation (amount) \$ \_\_\_\_\_ thank you!

Make checks payable to: BARARA

Mail to: BARARA Membership  
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For additional information, contact  
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