



**SOUTH AFRICAN HERITAGE  
RESOURCES AGENCY**  
111 HARRINGTON STREET, CAPE TOWN 8001  
PO BOX 4837, CAPE TOWN, 8003  
TEL: 321 482 4563 FAX: 021 482 4559

## MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE MUSEUMS AND ROCK ART SITES OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

The archaeological heritage of South Africa is unique and it is non-renewable. Archaeological sites, including those with rock paintings or rock engravings, are especially vulnerable to damage caused by visitors. All such sites are protected by the National Heritage Resources Act (Act No. 25 of 1999). Anyone opening a site to the public, either as a formal site museum or simply as a place of interest, must take basic precautions to ensure the safety of the site and its contents.

Expert advice should be sought from the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) or other heritage resources agency and/or from one of the museums or university departments listed below. Interventions should be reversible and the integrity of the site should be maintained as far as possible. No site should be opened to the public without a prior professional investigation that includes a conservation management plan approved by the appropriate heritage agency and, for rock art sites, complete documentation in case of later damage.

You are requested to notify SAHRA or, in KwaZulu Natal, AMAFA, of sites open to the public so that the site may be listed on a national database. Remember that a permit is required for ANY disturbance at an archaeological site and this includes erecting noticeboards, boardwalks, fences, etc. Liaison with the local publicity office and regional services council is recommended.

### THE FOLLOWING MINIMUM STANDARDS MUST FORM PART OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN:

1. **Notify SAHRA (or AMAFA) of intention to open site**
2. **Engage a professional with specialist knowledge to document the site, draw up a conservation management plan and advise on interpretation of the site.**
3. **Approach to the Site**
  - 3.1 *Arrangements for visiting*
    - \* if the site is open at all times, there should be adequate signposting;
    - \* if the site is kept locked, there should be clear arrangements for the collection and return of a key;
    - \* if it is open only by appointment, there should be a specialist guide or a specially trained local guide who has had clear instructions on what to do and say.

### 3.2 Provision for vehicles

- \* there should be an adequate and well-maintained road, preferably paved to limit dust, with off-road parking;
- \* the parking should not encroach on the site: vehicles should not park closer than about 100 m from the edge of the site;
- \* the parking area should be marked by a barrier between it and the start of the path.

### 3.3 Facilities

- \* there should be a litter bin at the parking lot and it should be emptied regularly;
- \* consider the need for toilets and the supply of refreshments and other facilities such as a shop, public telephone, rest room, etc., depending on the number of visitors expected;
- \* consider the need to establish an interpretive centre *separate* from the site, where people can see displays and where you may be able to store material, provide accommodation, etc. Remember that a permit from SAHRA is required to collect any archaeological material and so displays are best done in collaboration with a professional or institution.

### 3.4 Design of the path

- \* make sure that the path to the site is distinct;
- \* the path should follow the contours to avoid unnecessary erosion of any hill slope;
- \* make sure there are discreet signs to indicate direction where the path crosses a rocky area;
- \* the path should not enter the site at a position where the deposits or the rock art can be damaged;
- \* the introductory notice board should be displayed at the end of the path and the beginning of the site, where it will not interfere with good photographic views.

### 4. Provision of Information

- \* at least an introductory notice board explaining that the site is protected by law;
- \* where appropriate, a display with more detailed information on what can be seen at the site and what it means;
- \* a visitors' book in a container to protect it from the weather, or at the farmhouse or other convenient place (copies of these can be sent to SAHRA for record purposes);
- \* a leaflet or pamphlet explaining visitor etiquette.
- \* an explanatory leaflet or pamphlet that is specific to the site.

### 5. Guides

- \* specialist guides or specially trained local guides ensure that the meaning of the rock art or, in the case of archaeological sites, the story of the people who used the site is interpreted and so enhance the experience for the visitor. They also teach appropriate visitor etiquette and contribute to the safety of the site.

### 6. Protection of the Site

- \* measures used to protect archaeological deposits should be effective, reversible and recognisable, yet harmonious. It is important that visitors appreciate that the site is being well looked after, so it should be clean and as natural as possible. Remember that a permit is required for any disturbance or intervention at a site.

### 7. Protection of the Art

- \* a psychological or physical barrier should be set up between the visitor and the rock art, or display area, in the form of anything from a low wooden railing to a fence that encloses the entire site, depending on the vulnerability of the site or precautions necessary for the safety of the visitor;
- \* boardwalks are recommended and may include railings. They must be of treated wood or non-flammable material,
- \* every effort should be made to remove graffiti from the site, as it attracts more graffiti. A permit is required to remove graffiti at a rock art site.

### 8. Protection of the Surface and Deposits

- \* an effective cover should be put on the floor of the site to prevent dust being kicked up and damaging rock art and to stop people picking up material on the surface. Cover can be provided by a boardwalk, geotextile, or medium to large slabs of natural rock from the surrounds of the site.
- \* excavated sections should be backfilled, in consultation with SAHRA

### 9. Regular Maintenance

- \* arrangements should be made with the appropriate heritage agency or museum for a monitoring programme.
- \* provision should be made for regular visits to the site by the manager or property owner to check on litter, damage, graffiti, etc., which should be reported to the heritage agency.
- \* there should be regular monitoring of vegetation around the site so that, if necessary:
  - measures can be taken to protect it against trampling,
  - potentially dangerous plants such as those with thorns can be controlled,
  - dead wood can be removed so that damage by veld fires can be avoided,
  - firebreaks can be maintained.

### 10. Avoid having:

- \* a litter bin on site unless very large groups are catered for;
- \* braai or picnic places on the site or right next to it;
- \* camping places within 500 m (or preferably 1 km) of an archaeological site;
- \* plastic sheeting or plastic bags exposed to view unless there is no other option;
- \* concrete barriers or surfaces;
- \* metal poles or wire in contact with rock shelter or cave walls as they rust and stain the rock;
- \* a sandy surface on the outer side of a fence as this will be eroded by people walking there and the fence will be under-cut.

For further information apply to:

The South African Resources Agency, PO Box 4637, Cape Town 8000, email: [info@sahra.org.za](mailto:info@sahra.org.za), T: 021 4624502, F: 021 4624509; AMAFA, Pietermaritzburg, T: 033 394 6543; the Rock Art Research Unit at Witwatersrand University, T: 011 7176056; the Rock Art Department at the National Museum in Bloemfontein, T: 051 447 9609; the McGregor Museum in Kimberley, T: 053 842 0099; the Albany Museum in Grahamstown, T: 046 622 2312; the South African Museum in Cape Town, T: 021 650 2357; the University of Cape Town, T: 021 650 2353; the Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg, T0331 45 1404; or the Soutpansberg Rock Art Conservation Group T 015 517 7243.