Rock Art as a Cultural Heritage: Strategies for Administration

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Usandawe presents an opportunity for Tanzanian administrators to work directly with a people living in an area noted for its rock art who also have special ties to these sites. In this paper I discuss the unique role which the Sandawe people can play in assisting in the administration of cultural heritage legislation concerning rock art. Given the Sandawe people's intimate relationship with the landscape and their ancestral association with rock painting, they should rightfully be party to the caretaking of this cultural resource. Based on my experiences as a rock art researcher in Usandawe, I address issues of documentation, protection, and education, as well as the practicalities and realities of conducting such research.

> It is said, they were really there;
> Why then, did they not write on the rocks?
> Even to-day then, too, a person may write on the rocks
> while on a hunt and when he is searching for honey,
> as in the past, if there is no home anywhere to stay in.
> *(Ten Raa 1969:99)*

This text of an oral history associates the ancestors of the Sandawe with rock paintings. I suggest that the Sandawe people can have an important role in assisting government agencies that oversee the cultural resources of Tanzania because of their intimate relationship with the environment. According to oral tradition, their ancestors were autochthonous and one among many hunter-gatherer groups in the area. Their early dwellings were rock shelters; in addition, other beings in their folklore, such as Matunda (the creator), haba (a spirit), and N/ini (ancestral peoples to contemporary Sandawe), were believed to reside in or to be associated with rock shelters (Lim 1992). For the Sandawe, their landscape was/is named and meaningful, including certain rock shelters. Archaeological survey and ethnographic study have revealed that Sandawe utilize rock shelters for specific purposes, such as rain rituals and healing. Some Sandawe also have continued to inhabit them for day-to-day or seasonal activities. As noted in the above text, rock painting is a Sandawe tradition and has been documented in the recent past—approximately three decades ago Eric Ten Raa watched a hunter paint a figure of a giraffe on a rock where they had camped for the night before they proceeded to the plains beyond (Ten Raa 1971:44).

The Sandawe inhabit the southwestern quadrant of Kondoa District: Usandawe (Figure 1). The Kondoa District, within Dodoma Region, of central Tanzania is particularly rich

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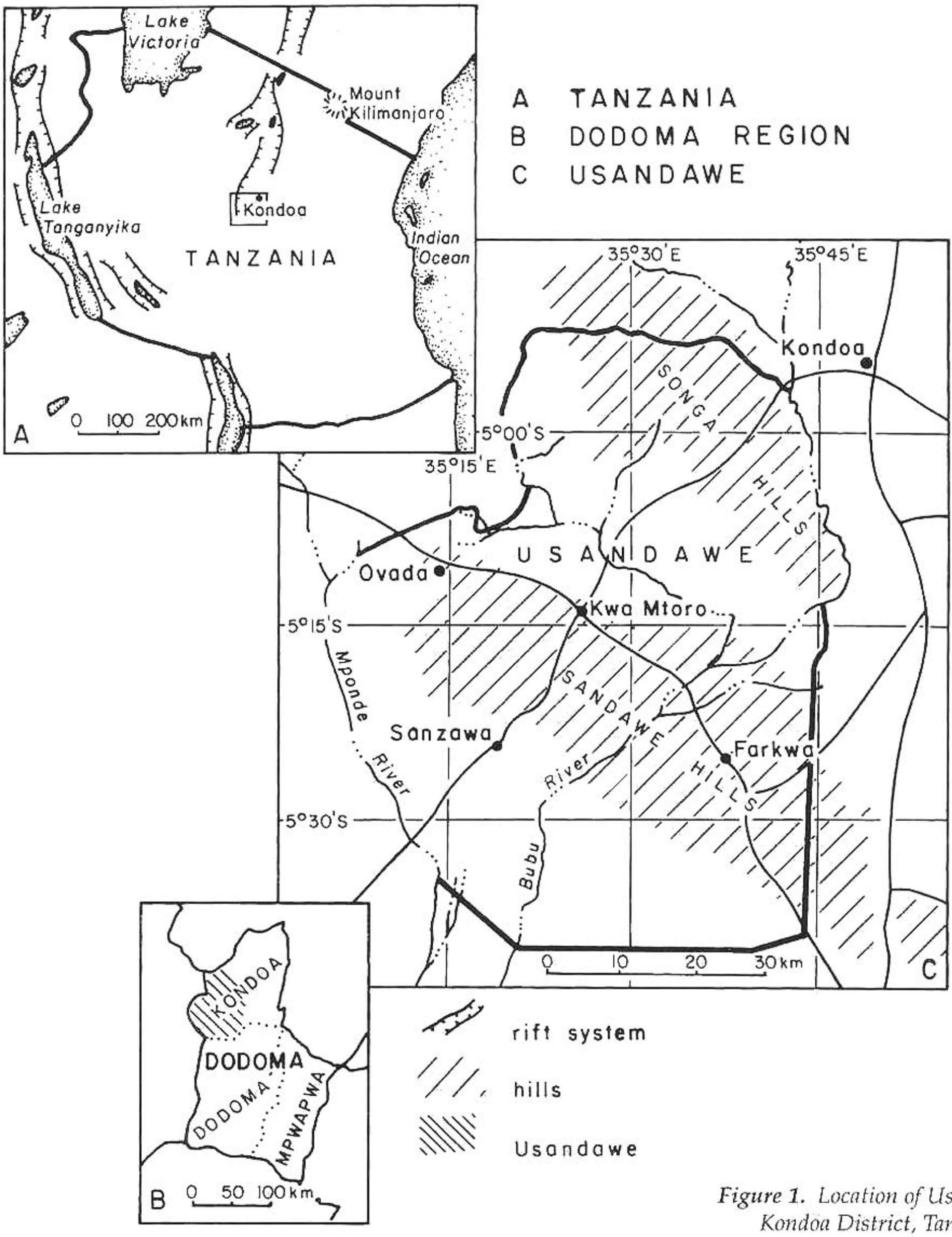

Figure 1. Location of Usandawe, Kondoa District, Tanzania.

in rock art sites (Leakey 1983, Masao 1982); many of these were initially documented by early colonial administrators and officials. Only in 1950 was there a concerted effort to consolidate and access this information in the form of a guide produced by the Tanganyika Society (Fosbrooke *et al.* 1950). This was the first time that rock art sites within one area were presented as a cohesive work. It provided the closest approximation of a survey since all other documented efforts were of sites located in a piecemeal fashion within a larger region (see Lim 1992:42ff. for a detailed account of rock art studies in this area).

Intensive surveys of the area continue to be limited, unlike the situation found in southern Africa where the study of rock art has become a recognized field of research in itself. How can the situation in Tanzania be remedied or improved? After spending almost two years in Kondoa District among the Sandawe people conducting an ethno-archaeological study of rock art, I offer some strategies for documenting and administering rock art as a cultural heritage. Although my comments are directed to the situation found in Usandawe, others collaborating with indigenous populations in initiating rock art programs elsewhere will find this of interest. In this paper, I specifically address the issues of documentation, protection, and education and the means by which a local people can participate in this process.

I preface my remarks with a cautionary note which does not preclude the invaluable assistance that the Sandawe can provide. As most archaeologists know, if the local populace does not welcome one's presence, research can sometimes be dangerous and, certainly, can be made difficult. Success as a researcher is equally dependent upon one's own abilities as well as on the goodwill of the local inhabitants; this is true throughout the world and is not an issue limited to the context of my study. In Usandawe, painted rock shelters are sometimes associated with rain sacrifice, and like sites elsewhere around the world which have indigenous affiliations, diplomacy and respect of traditions are necessary considerations for those with both avocational and professional interests in rock art. For example, in order to visit a rock shelter that I knew to have paintings (Ten Raa 1971), I needed its caretaker's permission (he accompanied me), as well as sheep for sacrifice (Lim 1992:184-185). I did see the paintings, but my needs as a researcher were not adequately met since I was limited in the manner in which I was able to document the site ("look, photograph, but do not touch anything," and I was only allowed to survey the area under the eyes of the overseer's daughter and so was unable to map the actual shelter). In another case, even with a black sheep and a white chicken for sacrifice, I was unable to see the site I suspected of having paintings because of my gender and age (Lim 1992:192-193). It, also, was associated with an oral tradition. Respecting the wishes of my informants, I did not attempt to surreptitiously locate and visit the shelter. Although this can be problematic, when access is provided, one has a wealth of contextual data which re-emphasizes the nature of the relationship between the Sandawe and their landscape.

DOCUMENTATION

Local cooperation is absolutely necessary in implementing the two concerns of cultural heritage legislation: documentation and protection. Funding for the documentation of rock art is limited in most cases in East Africa (Juwayeyi 1992:42), resulting in a patchy inventory of archaeological sites, including rock art ones. Time and capital restrict areal coverage, yet locals can significantly contribute to research and be a resource in themselves, as is the case in studies conducted by members of North American local, state, and regional archaeological societies and rock art associations. When the Sandawe people realized my interest in rock paintings, I was informed of several that I might not have documented on my own since I only intensively surveyed 16 square kilometers of the area by my base camp for archaeological sites while I conducted ethnographic studies.

Many Sandawe continue to maintain their strong ties to the land (environment) and aspects of their hunting-gathering tradition even though they are, more often than not, referred to as "former" hunters and gatherers. There are individuals who still hunt on a regular basis, as many as two or three times a week. While traversing the landscape, a Sandawe person is constantly inventorying resources for future use, including rock shelters. The Sandawe people continue to occupy rock shelters—some on a seasonal basis,

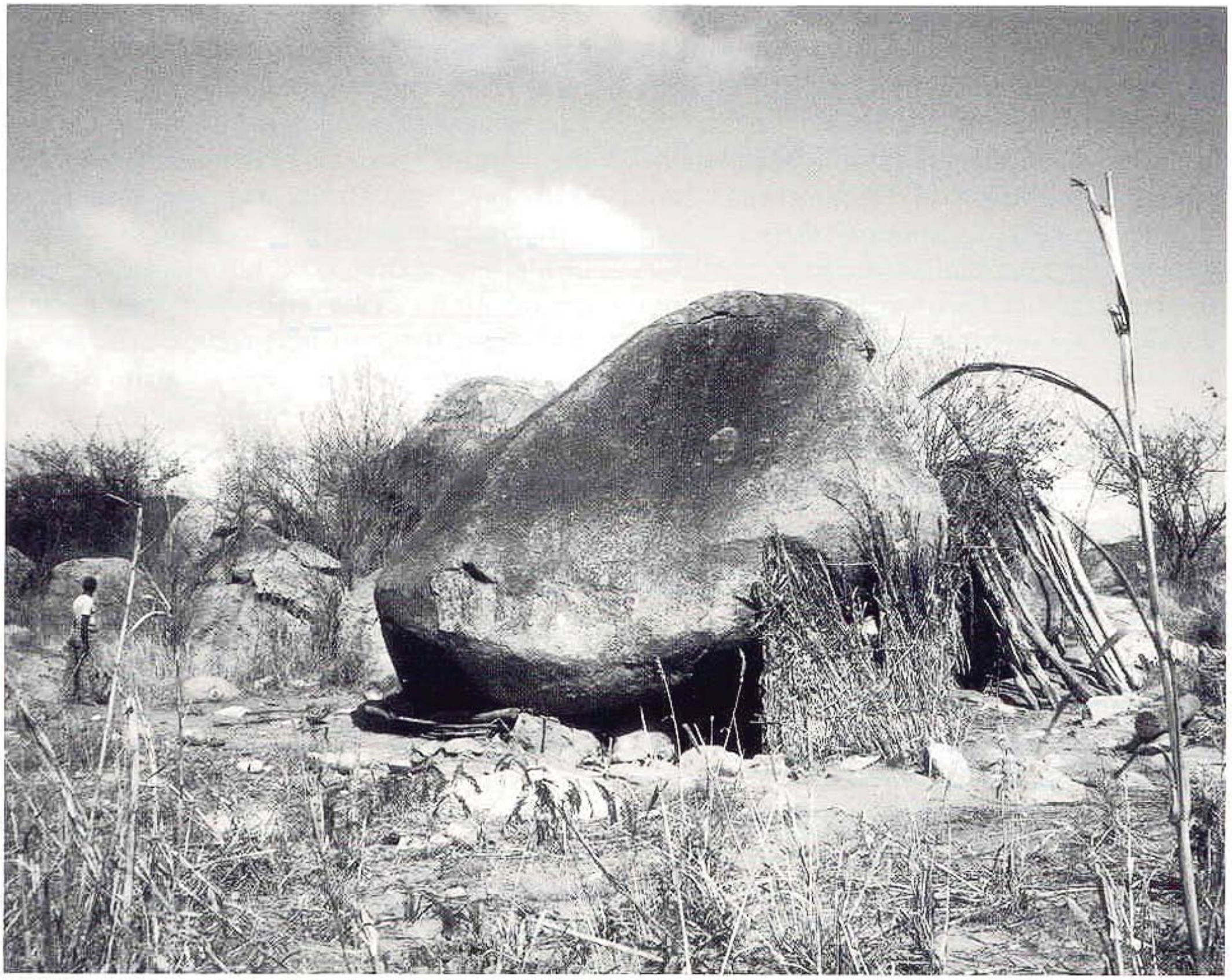

Figure 2. *A rock shelter, Gogowase 8, used seasonally for field work, abandoned in 1986. Photograph taken in 1984.*

others only temporarily (Lim 1992:130–138). One shelter was occupied seasonally for a total of nine sequential years by two brothers who cultivated the surrounding land, for four and five years respectively, until the site was abandoned because of decreasing fertility (Figure 2). The desirable attributes for some of these sites have remained the same through time so that paintings are sometimes found in shelters of contemporary usage; of 14 documented sites of contemporary use, six were painted. This knowledge is the kind that could be shared with researchers interested in these cultural resources.

With limited funds and labor, neither government agencies nor independent researchers can adequately locate and document all existing rock paintings within any one specific area. There is a need for documentation; without it, the people and rock art researchers will lose a sizable portion of this rich cultural resource. For this reason, not recording a site's existence or location, as expressed by some East African administrators (Juwayeyi 1992:42), as a means of protection does more harm than good. Given the natural degradation of sites, locations are being lost forever without any form of documentation. This in itself affects the overall data base without even considering the relationship of these sites to one another and the greater region. Site distribution is as important to our understanding of the paintings as are individual locations and their figures (Deacon 1988; Lim 1992). I am of the belief that the site itself, when compared to the

painting(s), is of equal, or even greater, importance. There are many more rock shelters with evidence of use—of which painting is but one variable. In my own study, of the 105 sites located, 33 contained paintings. This suggests, and supports Janette Deacon's conclusion in her work in the Upper Karoo (1988:131), that the choice of certain sites was purposeful and, as such, held some meaning.

If we can enlist the assistance of the indigenous population in this endeavor of site identification, the government agencies responsible for cultural heritage resources will be able to increase their inventory at less cost than would be required to fund a full-time survey team. A cultural officer/archaeologist could periodically visit the area to access this data; thus, the resource base will constantly grow incrementally rather than in fits and starts as it has, as well as be more encompassing in area. Of course, this implies that there is an informed public, that is, a local populace educated in the value of the paintings, as well as there being an area, like that of the Sandawe people, where the countryside is traversed by foot, and where the people have an intimate relationship with the landscape.

Besides the documentation of the site itself, there is the task of recording the painted figures. As I have noted earlier, the paintings are subject to degradation by natural means so that full-scale renderings are in fact the only means of ensuring their survival. On this, I am in agreement with others (Clottes 1992:23) who recommend tracing as the best and least damaging way of recording the paintings. Based on my own work, I have found that the process and the final result of tracing provides greater detail than standard photography; for me, this represents the truest rendering of the painting (compare Figure 3, photograph, with Figure 4, tracing). Drawings from photographs are inadequate

Figure 3. Section of the paintings at Tambase 2. Photograph taken in 1984.

Figure 4. *Portion of tracing illustrating the same area as in Figure 3.*

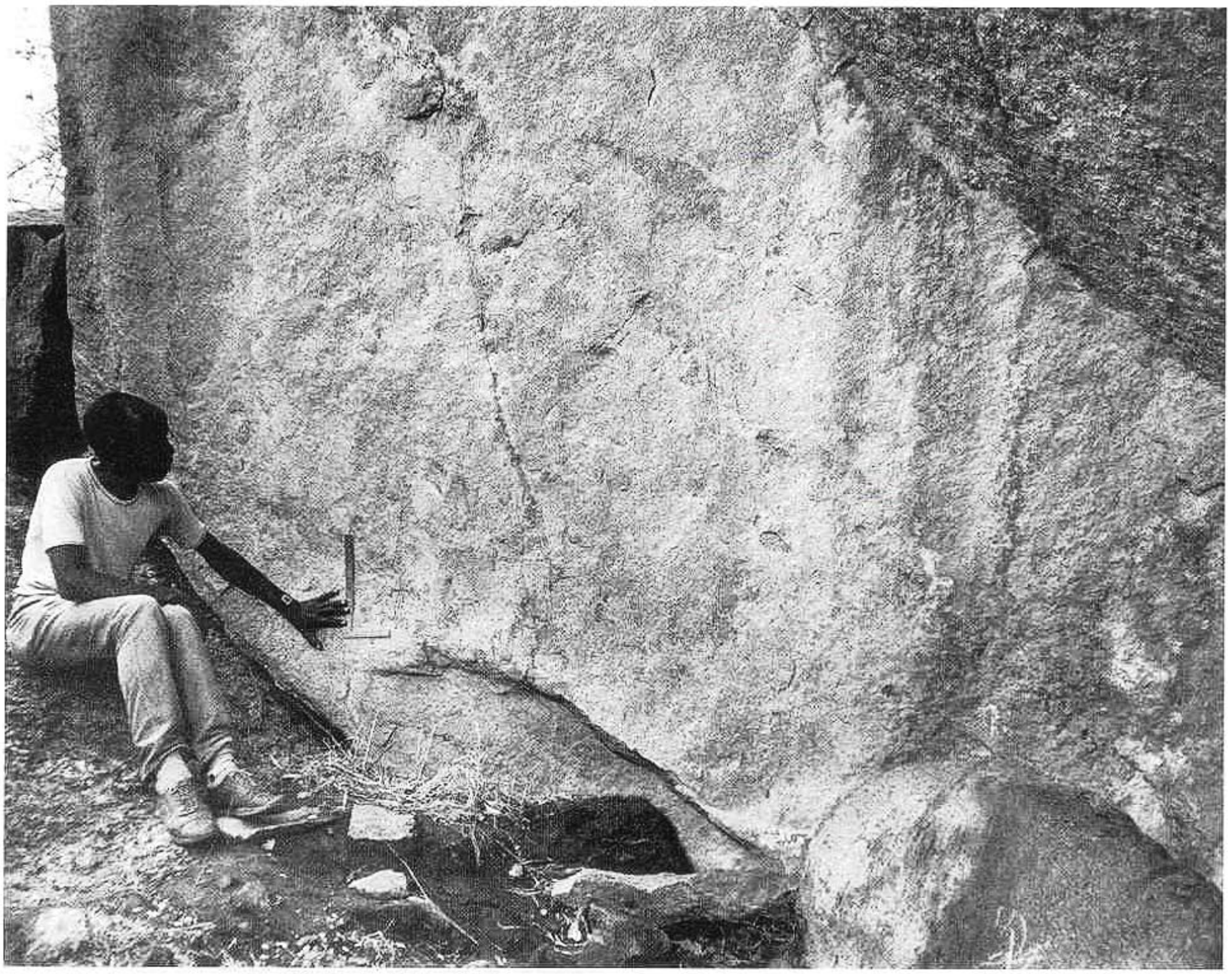

Figure 5. Section of the paintings at Takamase 1. Photograph taken in 1984.

in comparison to a tracing (compare Ten Raa's Figures 19 and 20 [1974:24, 25] with Figure 5, photograph, and Figure 6, tracing, of the same site). Robert Bednarik (1992:19) suggests that even tracing, which appears to be minimally intrusive, causes damage that may affect future study. Indeed, researchers need to employ the least intrusive and destructive means in order to protect, as well as document, the paintings. Documentation should also include a full description of methodology so that others can decide on the appropriateness of any future analytical technique with regard to assessing the data.

PROTECTION

Under the rubric of "protection" is the matter of conservation, or maintenance. Tanzania and its neighboring countries all have legislation to protect cultural heritage objects and sites. But, depending on the wording and interpretation of this legislation, more harm than good may result. In Kenya's Antiquities and Monuments Act of 1983, Osaga Odak (1992:39) remarks that in the context of rock art, "conservation strategies apparently permit repainting faded colours with similar colours and re-scratching or re-pecking the engravings to render them visible; as well as removing any deposit on the paintings and engravings as the case may be, so that the rock art remains almost 'as it was before.'" Given the ethics of rock art recording, this interpretation of conservation appears to be at odds with that of researchers. Any addition to a painting or an engraving, whether to enhance it or not, will affect further analysis and thus

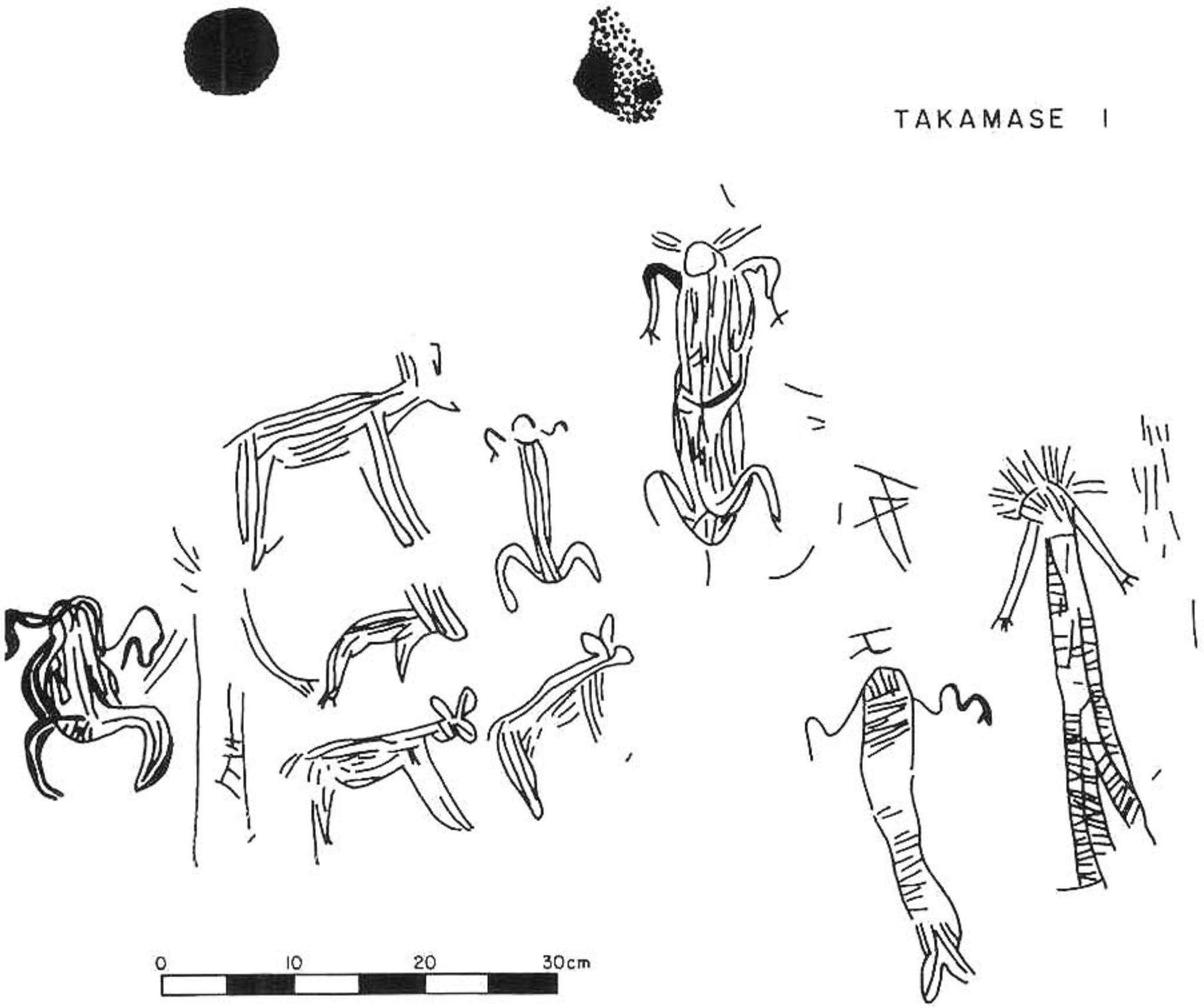

Figure 6. Portion of tracing illustrating the same area as in Figure 5.

prevent the future use of any developing technology. This, of course, assumes that the site is no longer actively used in a way that might involve applying paint or other materials by the local population. As noted in the Australian context, repainting of the rock art is part of the traditional culture; as commented by David Mowaljarlai, a traditional leader, commitment to the land is expressed by the maintenance of traditional sites which may be painted (Mowaljarlai *et al.* 1988:691).

The ultimate protection of the figures themselves is through thorough documentation. Paintings are found in an uncontrolled environment and are subject to the vagaries of nature (see Schiffer 1987 for an explicit discussion on the effects of weathering, *etc.*). Only if the site can be completely enclosed from the elements can one then hope to maintain the paintings "as they were before." Of course, we will never know what their pristine forms were, so attempting to achieve this is a moot point. As such, the most we can hope for is to prevent outright vandalism.

Caging or fencing has been used in a number of countries, including Tanzania and Australia, to protect the paintings. Quite often these protective measures have deleterious side effects which Fay Gale and Jane Jacobs (1987) have noted in evaluating various rock art management techniques in Australia. For example, erosion of the site outside of the fencing is one effect which also produces "[c]onsiderable amounts of abrasive dust and sand" resulting in areas of decreased visibility (1987:230-231). Fencing does not necessarily prevent entry to the site either; I have seen guides breach barriers, as well as

tourists. Even the guided tour can have deleterious effects on sites. As a tourist I have noted, as have Gale and Jacobs (1987), that tours can result in overcrowding of sites, inadvertent touching of the art (including by the guide who may point with a stick or touch a motif) and, as already commented, clouds of dust or sand. As remarked by participants of this symposium on preservation and conservation and previous ones sponsored by the American Rock Art Research Association (Crotty 1989), "art protection is skilled work which requires careful research" (Gale and Jacobs 1987:234).

It is true that isolation, at least from outsiders, offers a form of protection. But this has not always proven beneficial. The Mayrieres cave in France was not designated a national or historic treasure for its 15,000-year-old paintings; it was known to the public, though, as a spelunker's cave. With good intentions, a youth group armed themselves with steel brushes to clean up graffiti, but in doing so, they unintentionally damaged a portion of the paintings (Providence Sunday Journal 1992:A3). Obviously, an awareness of the rich cultural resources in the area inculcated by the government and the educational system might have prevented this.

Odak (1992:41) notes that in Kenya sites are better protected when the general public is uninformed of their existence. Withholding information is indeed a strategy, but as the Mayrieres case illustrates, lack of notice can prove deleterious. In East Africa, the larger question is who is the general public for whom these sites are being protected and preserved? Among the Sandawe people, many of the rock painting sites are associated with ritual activity and/or are being used for other purposes. The question arises then of indigenous ownership: does one remove individuals or families who inhabit rockshelters with paintings? Or, does one prevent sacrificial activity from occurring? If the reference to general public is to tourists from within and outside of East Africa, then the strategy for protecting sites may differ. Tourism is an important industry in many countries, including those of East Africa. There may be a need to balance the requirements of preserving cultural heritage resources and economic necessity with respect to the tourist industry. In this case, documentation and education go hand in hand in serving those needs.

EDUCATION

Educating the public is an ongoing endeavor. If paintings are located in an area occupied by the descendants of the original inhabitants, as in the case of the Sandawe people, then the importance of the site and the paintings may have more relevance and, thus, result in greater compliance to heritage legislation. I only say "may" because many changes have occurred in the last few decades which have had a major impact on Sandawe society. Some traditions have evolved, others have been lost. For example, the majority of the Sandawe people have become settled and now subsist on a mixed economy, although for some the hunting and gathering life continues to dominate. Secondly, some of the villages have been much more influenced than others by outside factors, such as by the Roman Catholic Mission and/or by neighboring groups (Lim 1992:82ff.). In participating in traditional activities outside of my village home, I became acutely aware that not all the adults (individuals who were in their forties and older) where I lived had participated in or witnessed the various activities that I was busily documenting.

One specific problem I encountered during my research that an educational forum on the paintings' significance might have helped was the disturbance of some of the sites by "treasure hunters." No matter where one finds archaeological sites, there always seems to be the problem of looting, but in this case, in Usandawe, the rationale for uncontrolled digging is somewhat unusual. A rumor had circulated that the paintings were made to mark places where retreating

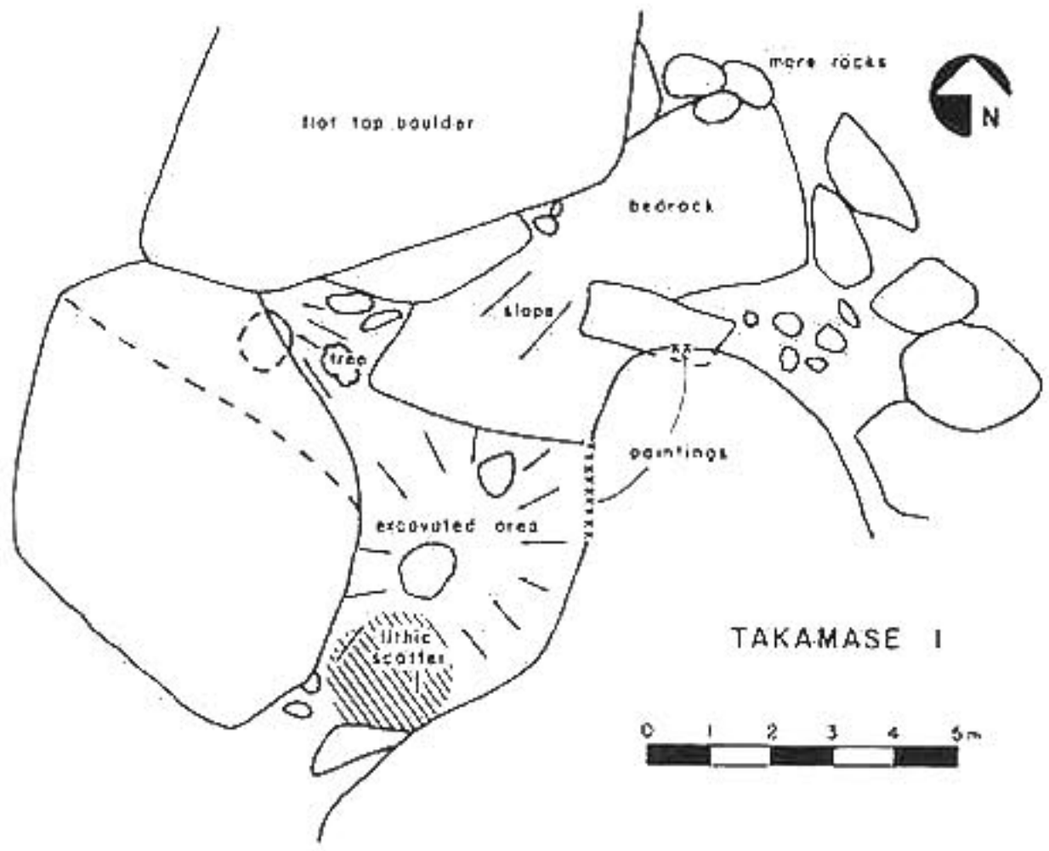

Figure 7. Site map illustrating the surface disturbance by "treasure hunters" at Takamase 1.

German administrators and army officials had left valuables (Lim 1992:130). This has resulted in the surface disturbance of several sites, which Fidelis Masao (personal communication 1984) has also noted in the Singida Region of Tanzania. Figure 7 illustrates one such disturbance. In fact, I was led to one site by an individual who had attempted an excavation. His response on being questioned was that he was "looking for something."

Quite often when local inhabitants see outsiders, particularly foreigners, traipsing around the countryside searching for something of which the locals have either limited or no understanding, an outsider's attempt at explanation is met with skepticism. At least in the Sandawe area, people were aware that in other areas of Tanzania gemstones had been found and were of value. During my first visit to the area when I was a volunteer for an archaeological excavation, people would bring colored stones and quartz crystals for assessment in the belief that this was what we sought. They could not understand why anyone would work so hard if there was no tangible profit.

Unfortunately, the reputation of foreigners exploiting indigenous populations for economic gain has preceded the researcher of today. One's presence alone may elicit demands of remuneration. At one village which I visited with my Sandawe neighbors, I was outrightly told by a participant that if I was to photograph or record in any way that particular activity I would have to pay several thousand shillings. As mentioned earlier, one needs to be respectful of one's informants' wishes, but I believe that education, beginning in primary schools, will facilitate communication and understanding for archaeological and ethnoarchaeological studies.

CONCLUSION

In summary, for the Sandawe people, one can emphasize the relationship of these studies to their history which is preserved in oral tradition. And as I have noted (Lim 1992), these oral traditions are often associated with painted rock shelters. I suggest that Tanzanian government agencies develop a working relationship with the Sandawe people, and other similar groups, for the documentation and protection of heritage sites. This can be accomplished by institutionalizing an educational program in the schools that defines heritage sites and their relevance to the history of the area and the continent—only then can the success of cultural heritage legislation be assured.

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