DISCOVER KAKAPEL & THE ITESO CULTURE
Where History and Nature meet

KENYA
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ABOUT TARA

TARA is a Nairobi-based, non-governmental organisation committed to recording the rich rock art heritage of the African continent, to making this information widely available and accessible and, to the extent possible, safeguarding those sites most threatened by humans and nature.

The organisation works closely with communities where rock art is found. TARA also works with national and international heritage bodies, including the UNESCO World Heritage Centre to achieve its missions.

African leaders and Rock art

“Africa’s rock art is the common heritage of all Africans, but it is more than that. It is the common heritage of humanity.”

Former South African President Nelson Mandela

“The rock art of Africa makes up one of the oldest and most extensive records on earth of human thought. It shows the very emergence of the human imagination. It is a priceless treasure. And it is irreplaceable. But Africa’s rock art is not just about the distant past. It is about today and tomorrow as well. Scientists, historians, artists, and students must be able to study and understand its significance for decades and centuries to come.

Africa’s rock art is the common heritage of all Africans, and of all people. It is a cultural gift from our ancestors that can bring diverse people together - with pride and a common commitment to share it and preserve it. Yet, today, Africa’s rock art is severely threatened. Its future is uncertain. Perhaps the greatest threat is neglect. A lack of resources, combined with a lack of official interest, has left too many rock art sites unguarded against vandals and thieves. It is time for Africa’s leaders to take a new and more active role. We must save this cultural heritage before it is too late.”

Kofi Annan, Secretary-General United Nations (2005)

KAKAPEL NATIONAL MONUMENT

In western Kenya, the Kakapel National Monument (in Busia County) is one of Kenya’s premier rock art sites, uniting a variety of styles and artistic traditions over a long period of time in one location.

The site (see above) is formed by a series of three shallow, adjacent shelters, located at the base of a granite outcrop, below the main Kakapel rock. These shelters face south and receive some protection from wind and rain. Most of the rock art (paintings) is concentrated on the middle or central shelter wall; this is where the main panel is located. The left or western shelter displays a few paintings; this shelter also has an open surface suitable for habitation. There are no visible paintings in the right or eastern shelter, an area more exposed to rain.

The artists chose this site deliberately. They recognized its significance, especially as a place of entry into the solid rock (for purposes of contacting ancestral spirits). In southern Africa, rock paintings are said to have provided access to spirits living within the rock, the art forming a door for which shamans entered to seek help in traditional healing and the control of nature.

This site was declared a Monument by Government notice 5287 of July 2004, in terms of the Antiquities and Monuments Act, Chapter 215 of the Laws of Kenya. The law provides fierce penalties for persons caught damaging the site. Photographs of the site may be taken, and visitors are welcome (8:00am to 5:00pm daily).
THE ROCK ART OF KAKAPEL

Most of the rock art at Kakapel consists of rock paintings. There are also engravings including cupules and grooves. Many of the paintings on the main panel are superimposed on older images. Superimposition is very common in rock art. At Kakapel, at least three styles of painting have been identified. The first style consists of red and white geometric images made by Twa hunter-gatherers, using their fingers, possibly including two elephants, one red (see image below left) and one white (see page 1). These paintings could be between 2,000 and 4,000 years old. The second style of art here consists of red and white stylised cattle paintings (see image below right) made by pastoralists.

The third and last style of painting consists of white geometric designs probably made by ancestors of the Iteso people during the last few hundred years (the Iteso are the modern inhabitants of Kakapel who came from Uganda more than 300 years ago). Elsewhere in eastern and southern Africa, Bantu-speaking farmers are known to have painted and used crude white paintings in secret initiation and other rites-of-passage ceremonies. This third painting style may have been used for similar purposes. Direct dating (of rock art) has proved exceptionally difficult, largely because of the lack of carbon content in the pigments used. Where carbon content exists, rock paintings can sometimes be dated using the Carbon-14 process. Most East African rock art has yet to be scientifically dated; dates provided in this booklet have been determined from general chronologies based on other archeological factors.

KAKAPEL COMMUNITY CULTURAL CENTRE

In April 2007, TARA and the National Museums of Kenya organized a community workshop to define ways of conserving and valorising the Kakapel National Monument. This led to the construction of the Kakapel Community Cultural Centre, which was opened officially in April 2010. Two major aims of this Centre are to preserve the African rock art heritage as well as to provide community space for the local Iteso people, for showcasing and publicising their culture. The Centre is managed by the Kakapel Monument Stakeholders’ Committee (community selected representatives). The annual Iteso Cultural festival is now held at the Centre every December.
Since its opening, the Centre has held a number of community-led events and activities, all of which testify to the artistic nature of the Iteso people. For example, the Centre has hosted the Kakapel Cultural Festival (see below images), which is led by the Iteso King Emorimor (see image on page 6) and annually attended by more than 2,000 people from Kenya and abroad. As part of its community engagement work, TARA has provided funds to the Centre, equipping it with basic camping facilities in order to generate income for some of the Centre’s operational costs.

In July 2013, through an infrastructure investment fund, the Centre was refurbished with donor support from the Australian High Commission. The Centre was provided with office equipment, tents, chairs, a public address system for functions, and a generator among others. This investment promotes the Centre’s capacity to generate and manage its resources; equally, it strengthens the Centre’s role in awareness-raising and community pride about the area’s cultural heritage. As a result, the community enjoys the benefits of responsible cultural tourism.

THE ITESO PEOPLE AND THEIR CULTURE

The Iteso people of Kenya and Uganda live primarily in Iteso District of Uganda and across the Kenya-Uganda border in the Bukedi District of Uganda and the Busia District of Kenya. The Iteso speak an Eastern Nilotic language, which belongs to the Iteso family of Eastern Nilotic speakers. Other members of the language group include the Karamojong cluster of Eastern Nilotic speakers, comprising the Karamojong people of Uganda and the Turkana people of Kenya (who, besides the Iteso, are the largest ethnic groups of the Iteso family of Eastern Nilotic speakers).

Kakapel Cultural Festival 2010.

Kakapel Cultural Festival 2013.

Kakapel Cultural Festival 2013.
To showcase the Iteso heritage, the community has built a Community Cultural Centre which is modeled on a traditional Iteso house (see page 4) near the Kakapel National Monument. This Centre has a number of local attractions (including ceremonies, rituals, storytelling, dances, worship, pottery making, drama performances, souvenir bargains, as well as food and drink). There is a camping area next to the Centre, and on a sunny day, one can see Mount Elgon, which has the largest base area of any freestanding volcano in the world.

In addition to visiting the traditional Iteso homestead, visitors may explore the Kakapel outcrops including the Big Rock (over 200 metres) looking at indigenous plants, tree species, and, of course the rock paintings and engravings. The Kakapel Community Cultural Centre, Busia County Offices, and the Teso Administrative District are additional attractions.

More attractions include the Malaba River Bridge, the other Chelelemuk Hills including massive rocks ideal for climbing, impressive caves home to thousands of bats, various bird species and the resident De Brazza’s monkeys. Sightseeing of traditional architecture and nature walks are options too. Visitors are sure to enjoy stunning views and serene landscapes and to have adventures.
The Kakapel Community Cultural Centre can organize captivating and enriching experiences for visitors staying in Kakapel, either one day, two weeks, or one month. The Centre is open (8:00am to 5:00pm daily).

**PARTNERS AND DONORS**

This publication was made possible by the Australian High Commission.

**CONTACTS AND DIRECTIONS**

**Where to Stay**

**Kakapel Community Cultural Centre, Amagoro**
Tel: +254 729 775728, 726 532303, 725 676510
Email: kakapelcentre@gmail.com

**Jaki Guest House, Malaba**
Tel: +254 724 737014
Email: jakiguesthotel@yahoo.com

**Garden Park Tourist Hotel, Malaba**
Tel: +254 722 405055
Email: info@gardenparktouristhotel.com

**Rondo Retreat Centre, Kakamega Forest (1.5 Hrs)**
Tel: +254 056-30268 / +254 735-894474
Email: rondo@trinityfellowship.or.ke

(See photo below)
How to Get There

Kakapel is only a few kilometres from the Ugandan border. From Bungoma, Kenya, take Malaba Road west for 20 kilometres until a turnoff (at Amagoro) on the right. Continue for 7 kilometres on an all-weather murram road. The route is well sign-posted.

Sources


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www.africanrockart.org

With the support of the Australian Government