

The IFRAO Code of Ethics

Written by IFRAO

Tuesday, 17 November 2009 12:11 - Last Updated Tuesday, 17 November 2009 12:35

The following Code of Ethics was ratified by the full IFRAO meeting on 14 July 2000 in Alice Springs, Australia. It represents the recommends minimum ethical standards for conducting rock art research anywhere.

1. Preamble

1(1). This Code of Ethics describes general guidelines which IFRAO recommends to its members.

1(2). Rock art provides a window to our collective past, helps us make sense of the present and contributes to our future. Some of it has been handed down to us by many generations preceding us, to safeguard it for many generations to follow us. Unless we can trace our lineage directly to those who created the rock art and have retained aspects of its original cultural context, it does not belong to us in any way.

1(3). The cultural significance of a rock art site is embodied in the entire fabric of the site, in addition to the actual art present; in the traditional use of the place and the activities that occurred there; and in the meanings and intangible qualities of the place.

1(4). Understanding the cultural significance of a place is fundamental to its care, and where such understanding is inadequate, any interference may be regarded as inappropriate.

1(5). The 'patina of history' apparent in the fabric of a rock art site is important evidence and forms an integral part of that fabric. It includes natural or artificial changes or traces.

2. Definitions

Fabric: all physical aspects of a rock art site, including accretionary deposits, the art itself,

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traces of later human responses, modifications, even traces of vandalism in cases, lichen, and so forth.

Geomorphic exposure: any rock surface.

Graffiti: collective term describing recent anthropic graphic markings or inscriptions that are incompatible with the known or presumed uses of the rock art on the same panels.

IFRAO: the International Federation of Rock Art Organisations.

Indigenous cultural custodians: descendants of people who created rock art, who are obligated by their cultural traditions or beliefs to act as the custodians or curators of rock art.

Management: administrative control over the management of rock art sites, including preservation, access control, public presentation.

Massive intervention: significant changes to the environmental conditions under which the rock art survives. This includes housing in a building, or removal of the supporting bedrock to another location.

Members: the members of IFRAO.

Peer approval: the approval of an action or proposed action by relevant specialists who have no pecuniary involvement in the project in question.

Rock art: the surviving graphic markings of cultural activities found on rock surfaces.

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Triumvirate of IFRAO: the ruling council of IFRAO, consisting of the immediate past president, president and incoming president [assuming that my proposal to form such a council is approved in Portugal].

Traditional owners: see Indigenous cultural custodians.

3. Issues of Ownership

3(1). *Traditional owners and indigenous cultural custodians*: In areas where indigenous peoples live whose lifestyles and beliefs continue traditions associated with rock art, members recognise their ownership of the sites, and all research, conservation or management of such sites are subject to the full approval of the traditional owners. In areas where such indigenous peoples and traditions are no longer present, members shall endeavour to understand and promote management practices consistent with such beliefs in so far as they are known from ethnographic or archaeological evidence. In the absence of such evidence to the contrary, provisional concepts of such beliefs (e.g. non-human sources of authority, nature of the sacred, non-linear time/space) should be projected from similar societies and traditions elsewhere.

3(2). *Local antiquities and cultural heritage laws*: Members shall abide by all local, state or national laws protecting archaeological sites and monuments, and comply with heritage protection laws generally.

3(3). *Non-traditional ownership of sites*: Members shall respect the rules, laws or requests of any individuals or organisations possessing legal ownership of the land rock art sites are located on, or the land that must be traversed in order to reach the sites.

3(4). *Copyright and ownership of records*: In regions where traditional indigenous owners exist, they possess copyright of the rock art designs. Members wishing to reproduce such designs shall make appropriate applications. Records made of rock art remain the cultural property of the rock artists, or collectively of the societies these lived amongst.

4. Recording of Rock Art

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4(1). *Methods of recording*: Members shall not physically interfere with rock art except as provided in Clauses 5(2) and 6. No substances shall be applied to rock art for recording purposes, except substances that are regularly applied to individual panels by natural processes (e.g. water at open air sites).

4(2). *Coverage of recording*: All recordings of rock art are incomplete. Therefore rock art recordings need to be as comprehensive as possible, and by multi-disciplinary means.

4(3). *Conduct at sites*: New uses of sites, including for purposes of research, shall not change the fabric of a site, and shall respect associations and meanings of the site and its contents.

4(4). *Conduct in foreign countries*: In addition to other requirements listed herein, researchers working in foreign countries shall do so in consultation with the region's rock art organisation, and shall provide copies of reports and publications to that organisation.

5. Removal of Samples

5(1). *Archaeological research*: No excavation shall be undertaken at a rock art site unless it forms part of an appropriately authorised archaeological research project. This includes the removal of any sediment to uncover rock art images. Similarly, no archaeological surface remains shall be removed or relocated.

5(2). *Sampling of rock art and adjacent geomorphic exposures*: No samples shall be removed of paint residue, accretionary deposits of any kind, or of the support rock, except after the following requirements have been satisfied:

- (a) The sample removal is to form part of a larger and specific research design that has peer approval;
- (b) The sample removal has been approved in writing by two peer researchers (i.e. scientists specialising in the analytical study of rock art);

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- (c) The funds necessary for the best possible analytical laboratory support have been secured;
- (d) The analyst has extensive first-hand experience in sampling geomorphic surfaces;
- (e) Traditional indigenous custodians, where they have jurisdiction, have approved the sample removal;
- (f) The relevant local or national authorities have approved the sample removal;

5(3). *Excavation*: No excavations shall be undertaken at a rock art site unless the expertise of identifying rock art-making tools is available to the researchers proposing such excavation.

6. Conservation

6(1). *Setting*: The area around a rock art site, its setting, may contain features associated with the rock art and other evidence of its history. The visual, historical and other relationships between a site and its setting which contribute to its significance shall be retained in all conservation or preservation work.

6(2). *Site fabric*: In all conservation, preservation or management work at and near rock art sites, the visual, historical and scientific significance of the site fabric shall be retained. The removal or palliation of 'graffiti' shall be undertaken only after approval of the relevant authorities, and be effected only under the guidance of qualified rock art conservators. Massive intervention is to be reserved for situations of extreme threats to rock art, and shall be undertaken only after extensive peer review and approval.

6(3). *Protection*: Members will not disclose the locations of non-public and unprotected rock art sites to the general public. Ultimately, the best protection will depend on the awareness of the general public of the value of rock art. Part of any conservation effort should include the education of the public towards respect for rock art wherever it occurs.

7. Disputes

7(1). *Conduct*: Members shall endeavour to treat other members in a courteous manner. In regions where traditional indigenous owners exist, members shall ensure that they are kept

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informed about all aspects of research work, and that copies of completed reports are made available to them. Where such reports appear in technical jargon, ordinary-language versions are to be made available.

7(2). *Plagiarism*: Members shall acknowledge the use of other researcher's recordings, published comments and ideas.

7(3). *Dispute settlement*: Members shall make every endeavour to settle disputes among themselves, as IFRAO is reluctant to settle disputes among its members. Where a dispute cannot be settled and threatens the integrity of IFRAO, application for arbitration shall be made to the President of IFRAO, providing the relevant documentation. The dispute will then be arbitrated by the Triumvirate of IFRAO if its resolution is urgent, but preferably at the subsequent General Meeting of IFRAO.