



ROCK ART, DID YOU SAY?

ANNEX 5 | LEARNING ACTIVITY

SUMMARY SHEET

Protecting Rock Art

Please review the texts available on the back of this sheet. They provide information describing the aspects that threaten rock art sites around the world.

Then, write a 150-to-200 word text explaining why these sites must be protected. Draw on the knowledge acquired during the activity:

- What groups of humans produced this artwork? For what purposes?
- How can knowledge about these groups of humans be acquired?
- What information does rock art convey?

Include specific examples and organize the information in order to convince the reader of the importance of your arguments.

This is the largest concentration of rock art sites in the world. The Burrup Peninsula, in the northwestern part of the Australian continent, is the location of some 300,000 petroglyphs. They represent human silhouettes, plants and animals, including the Tasmanian tiger, which disappeared from the Australian continent 6000 years ago. However, this site of national treasure is threatened by various industrial projects. It is on the World Monuments Fund list of sites at risk. These Aboriginal carvings, some of which are believed to be 10,000 years old, were discovered just recently. In

the 1960s, mining companies set up operations in the area rich in natural resources. Industrialization prevails in the area. A major port was built and a fertilizer plant was established. More recently, Australian petroleum giant Woodside obtained an authorization to build a liquefied natural gas plant on the peninsula. To achieve this, Woodside moved 170 carved rocks (adapted from the *Une concentration majeure d'art rupestre menacée en Australie* article, published in *Le Monde*, December 19, 2008)



Photo : Daniel Arseneault

**Sacred Algonquian site of Rocher à l'Oiseau (municipality of Sheenboro)
Details of red ochre paint pictographs, covered with traces of vandalism.**

Rock art sites are fragile and irreplaceable. They are threatened by natural phenomena (wind, sun, dust, rain), but their greatest threat is human activity. Agriculture in the conservation area, graffiti, charcoal used for heating, treasure hunting and deforestation are but a few human activities that threaten rock art sites. For instance, even today treasure hunters continue to seek gold presumably buried by Germans in 1918, at the foot of a rock painting site in Kondoa, Tanzania. "Africa's rock art is the common heritage of all Africans, but it is more than that. It is the common heritage of humanity." (Nelson Mandela – from TARA, Trust for African Rock Art, africanrockart.org, accessed online on April 30, 2016)

The main issue is the deterioration process caused by vegetation, freezing and other natural phenomena. However, a certain number of methods have been developed to limit and slow down the deterioration process, while others are currently being tested. Vandalism is also a potential threat. Some sites have been discovered near residential areas. Hence, it has become vital for authorities in charge of the local cultural heritage to carefully monitor any development project likely to have a visual impact on the sites. (About the Alta site, in Norway. UNESCO world heritage site list: whc.unesco.org, accessed online on April 30, 2016)