



The conservation of a fragile heritage

What the visitor to the desert should know and respect, so that the Sahara may remain this fascinating world, where there are countless traces of the men who have passed on to us messages that are thousands of years old

We adhere to the spirit of the following charter

Rules of behaviour on the rock art sites

1. If you have come by car, don't take the vehicle right up to the site. Leave it at least 500 metres away and do the rest on foot. This will give you the opportunity to notice interesting details (fauna, flora, geology etc.) and minimise your impact on the environment of the site. In actual fact, a "site" is not necessarily limited to the exact spot where the images are to be found, but can include very many other things: traces of settlements, stone structures, stone and pottery remains, etc.
2. On the site, don't take or move any object, even a simple stone looking quite ordinary. Every single thing associated with the site constitutes one of the pieces of a puzzle which provides us with information about it. Once isolated, these elements lose all their interest and have nothing more to tell us, because they only mean something in relation to other elements. Don't forget that some of these details which can make the objects "speak" are invisible to the naked eye and can only be detected by specialists with specialised equipment. The surrounding landscape and all its components - including associated fauna and flora - are an important part of the features needed to understand the history of the site.
3. Never say "oh, it's only me, I'm just doing it once" to justify doing something the opposite of what has just been advocated here. In actual fact, thousands of people can say the same thing. The impression of being the first to visit a desert site is always an illusion, and in any case, many others will follow in your tracks. If you see thousands of prehistoric objects on a site, resist the temptation to take "just one": if every visitor takes one, there will soon be none left (and this has happened too often in the Sahara). Take only photographs! Above all, if you find a particularly rich site, refrain from going there - even if you avoid the objects visible on the surface, your visit will damage those hidden under a thin layer of sand.
4. Don't touch the pictures. The fats and acids naturally present on your skin will damage them (not to mention possible traces of sun cream). Remember that you are not the only visitor to the site and that in a desert environment; the slightest micro-environmental change can have important consequences, particularly on the paintings. With the increase in the number of visits, fats and similar matter will soon mount up and dull and damage the figures. Without taking into account that with time, the simple fact of touching the paintings contributes to obliterating them.
5. Particularly if you are a group, avoid trampling too much on the same spot, thus raising fine particles of sand, most of which will be deposited on the walls. If necessary, drop off your back pack before going into the shelters, since it could accidentally brush against the walls when you turn round or get up. If required, respect the limits shown by the small lines of stones on the ground in front of the shelters: they have usually been put there as a protection by the local authorities. As a general rule, before entering a site, study the ground and the surroundings - it's a way of locating the signs of past activity, so as to avoid them. This will also allow you to understand the site better.
6. Don't add graffiti or change in any way the pictures or the site. The rock pictures should not be considered as "ancient graffiti" and graffiti are not "modern rock art": they are everywhere considered as vandalism and are punishable by law. Even if others have been unthinking enough to mark their name there and add a drawing or a message of their own invention, don't continue their action by adding your own.
7. Don't walk on the pictures, don't climb on them to see other works more closely or simply to explore the place, or again to find a short cut towards another spot. Your tracks will quickly be followed and their repetition will wear down the images, going as far as damaging the sites irretrievably.

8. Don't make rubbings or mouldings of the petroglyphs (rock engravings). This wears them down and leaves residues of matter which damage the patina, or partially destroys it.
9. Don't use chalk, little pebbles or other markers to retrace the outlines of the image ... in a way that is particularly unsightly for future visitors. Such a process is to be considered as vandalism, for it permanently damages the site: the rubbing of the chalk attacks the patina, and the chalk left on the rock concentrates the humidity, encouraging local chemical reactions. For those engravings that are not easy to read, add an on-site sketch to your photos. This will later help to decipher the engraving and once back home, you can then mark in the outlines directly on the photos with the help, for example, of the appropriate software.
10. Don't moisten the paintings to make them more visible. Don't spray any product on the walls, even distilled water. The result is often worse, and it causes the progressive disappearance of the images. This method is all the more useless since one can now get extraordinary results by using digital photographs and specialised software.
11. Don't try to clean up a site, for instance by removing the wasps' nests or bird droppings visible on the walls and which can hide parts of the images. They are organic elements capable of being radiocarbon dated, and which can thus usefully contribute to the date of the images.
12. Don't camp on the sites nor make fires near them. Take your rubbish away with you, and add to the cleanliness of the locality by also taking away the rubbish that careless visitors may have left there.
13. Take photos, make drawings, take notes. Leave on the spot only your footmarks. Always remember that touching the images, in one way or another, contributes to their destruction. **In one sentence : « Look, don't touch ! »**