

Ancient Rock Art In Namibia

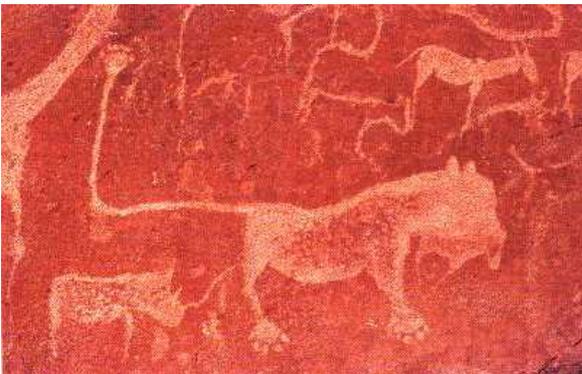
The exquisite rock paintings and engravings are a vital part of Namibian culture and heritage and give important testimony to the unwritten history of Stone Age Africa.



Two springbok (Brandberg (Riesenhöhle) rock art painting, Stone Age. Photo R Camby)



Four human figures (Brandberg (Riesenhöhle) rock art paintings Stone Age. Photo R Camby)



Lion (Twyfelfontein rock engraving, Stone Age. Photo R Camby)

Rock art suggests that humans and their ancestors have been living in Namibia for as long as eight million years and archaeologists have discovered various stone weapons and implements dating back to different ages and tribes. At present rock paintings have been found especially in the Namib Desert in shelters and caves close to hidden water sources, which the ancient peoples shared with wild animals and birds. A lot of the fascination and mystery surrounding these ancient rock paintings is the fact that their age and the exact purpose of these still remains rather unresolved.

Research suggests that ancient rock artists were of San origin as the content and symbolism are very close to the social values which still prevail today. Contents of the various rock art includes details of ritual dances and traditional tribal healers in a state of hypnotism. According to research, certain figures such as clapping women were very important as supporters to the dancers and are thus often depicted on slabs of rock in e.g. Twyfelfontein, Erongo, Brandberg and Spitzkoppe.

Animals in nature are usually illustrated in a very precise manner, such as animals fleeing or being attacked. Men are often depicted in the sense that they usually carry bows and arrows whereas women usually carry richly decorated bags and baskets. Many pre-historians believe today that they illustrate rituals of trance, and the magic of analogy as omens for the hunt or for rain. The location of these paintings have religious and magical significance, as most of them are found under crevices and overhangs which provide sheltered dwelling places close to water. It has been speculated that paintbrushes were made from animal or human hair, sharp stones were used for engravings, paints were made from



*Elephant, Twyfelfontein rock engraving, Stone Age.
Photo P Strack*

red and yellow ochre, manganese ore, gypsum, and charcoal found in abundance in the Namib Desert.

The durability of these linear drawings and precise proportions as well as the depiction of typical stances and movements prove that even eight million years ago, early Namibian artists set the stance for high standard skills and imaginary which still continues today.