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TWYFELFONTEIN – A ROCK ART SITE OF LOCAL SIGNIFICANCE

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This paper deals with a group of tourist guides working at the Twyfelfontein rock art site in north-western Namibia. Within the guide group new ideas on the site and its origin have emerged, and a local discourse is taking shape, a discourse that challenges the established theory on the ethnic origin of the rock art.

Cet article traite d'un groupe de guides touristiques travaillant au site d'art pariétal de Twyfelfontein dans le nord-ouest de la Namibie. De nouvelles idées sur le site et son origine sont apparues au sein de ce groupe de guides ; et un discours local prend forme, un discours qui défie la théorie établie sur l'origine ethnique de l'art pariétal.

INTRODUCTION

In the autumn of 2004 I carried out a SIDA-sponsored Minor Field Study with a group of guides working at the rock art site of Twyfelfontein, Namibia. On their own initiative, these guides had formed the Twyfelfontein Tour Guides Association with the objective of earning a living by guiding tourists to see the site's rock art. The fieldwork was part of my master thesis research (Molin 2005). The following paper is based entirely on the conclusions from my thesis, although the wider southern African perspective has been sacrificed in favour of a stronger emphasis on the Twyfelfontein site.

Altogether, I spent eight weeks, between September and December 2004, with the site guides at Twyfelfontein doing research on their views on different aspects of the rock art site. As a source of first hand ethnographic experience, the Twyfelfontein field study provided a local perspective to my research on people's relationship to the past and to archaeological sites. I wanted to find out in what ways monumental archaeological sites can be important to members of local communities. Much of my research came to centre around people's notions of archaeological sites, and the role such sites might play in processes of identity formation.

THE AREA

The Twyfelfontein rock art site is located on the fringes of the Namib Desert, approximately 480 km north-west of the capital city, Windhoek, and about 90 km west of the town of Khorixas, the nearest urban centre and the colonial administrative centre of the former Damaraland (Kinahan & Kinahan [draft]: 24).