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Lucia Clayton Martinez, Roleystone, WA, Australia
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Dr Heather Builth, Upper Sturt, SA, Australia
Jeff Doring, Glenorie, NSW, Australia
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Jordan Ralph, Glengowrie, SA, Australia
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Andrew Clifford, Auckland, New Zealand
Gretel Gonzalez, Santa Cruz, Perito Moreno, Argentina
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IFRAO Report No. 51

The silver jubilee of IFRAO: a success story

IFRAO was founded on 3 September 1988 in Darwin, Australia, on the day after the conclusion of the First AURA Congress. Inspired by the great achievement of that event, the first major international rock art conference, representatives of nine rock art organisations met informally to discuss common interests and the future of international co-operation. Within the first few minutes of that meeting they decided spontaneously to form a federation, named it, and then discussed its charter in general terms: it should be a common forum and initiator of policies, projecting or representing the common interests of member organisations without interfering in their autonomy. It would operate as a democratic advisory body in which each member organisation, irrespective of size, would hold one vote, exercised by an official representative.

By the end of October 1988, nine rock art organisations confirmed their affiliation with IFRAO. They were ACASPP (U.S.A.), AURA (Australia), CeSMAP (Italy), CIARU (Uruguay), a French group that became defunct, RAAM (Canada), SARARA (South Africa), SIARB (Bolivia) and IRA (India). Of these, only five still exist 25 years later: ACASPP, AURA (which already in 1988 was the largest rock art organisation in the world), CeSMAP, CIARU and SIARB. IRA was abolished in 1989 and replaced with a more dynamic member organisation in India, RASI, and over the following years numerous other rock art organisations joined IFRAO. After 12 years of operation, their number had swollen to 36, covering in the order of 7000 researchers in the field. As IFRAO reaches its silver jubilee, 51 member organisations are affiliated with the federation, representing most parts of the planet, and practically all of its rock art specialists.

Until the 1980s, individual rock art researchers as well as the few rock art organisations then existing (in

Canada, U.S.A. and Austria) operated largely without being aware of the work conducted in other parts of the world — sometimes even in their own country or region of activity. As a result the field experienced a great diversity of research approaches and terminologies, reflected in a multitude of idiosyncratic constructs, sequences, chronologies, designations and definitions. Communication between different groups was limited, and where it did occur it often led to misunderstandings, and attempts at clarification sometimes led to academic feuds. Clearly rock art research featured none of the attributes of a proper scientific discipline.

Therefore one of IFRAO's initial principal concerns was the standardisation of those aspects of a discipline that are essential for effective operation, communication and collaboration: terminology, ethics, methodology and the technical standards used in analysis and recording. These subjects were addressed through extensive consultation of specialists and, where appropriate, the deliberations of appointed sub-committees. For instance, the IFRAO Standard Scale was designed by a process of consultation over a period of three years before it was produced in 1994. It has since become the universal colour calibration standard not only in this field, but is being used also by museologists, palaeontologists, archaeologists, pedologists, geologists, conservators and many others. As the only international colour standard backed by colour re-constitution software its prospects of becoming a widely used research and documentation tool are self-evident. Almost 75 000 specimens of the IFRAO Standard Scale have now been distributed worldwide, and it has been reprinted several times. Its use in printing has long become standard practice.

The Constitution of IFRAO was drafted by Professor Ben Swartz and subjected to discussion in 1994. At the memorable 1995 congress with CeSMAP in Turin, the constitution was unanimously approved under the chairmanship of Professor Dario Seglie.

To establish a uniform code of ethics for the rock art researchers in the world, IFRAO appointed a sub-committee at its 1998 congress with SIARB in Cochabamba, which delivered a draft code that was ratified, after modifications, on 14 July 2000.

Wide-ranging consultation has also been the basis of determining a uniform terminology, which has led to the publication of a draft glossary of rock art science in July 1999. Having been subjected to further improvements after suggestions from many more cutting-edge researchers was received, this draft was finalised in the 2001 publication of the *Rock art glossary* by a Belgian publisher (second edition 2007).

Methodology has experienced a more subtle process of standardisation, in which un-rigorous practices have been gradually weeded out, through debate, editorial practices and good example. This is a work in progress, which was initially begun by the eradication of harmful recording practices of rock art, which until 1988 were employed by hundreds of practitioners worldwide. The application of water and other liquids to rock paintings, the chalking of rock art and the production of casts and rubbings of petroglyphs were all purged within a decade, and a number of other practices prejudicing current or future research methods are also being discouraged. The introduction of rigorous methodology in rock art research has been an ongoing process for many years that is likely to continue well into the future. Much of it centres on the need to phase out practices that lack a sound epistemology, which in the past have dominated the field.

However, in most respects the work of IFRAO has been rather low key, consensus oriented and discreet. This is because its original charter decreed that IFRAO will not meddle in the domestic business of member organisations or interfere in matters of their autonomy. Moreover, the federation was conceived as a democratic body, with only the most minimal formal structure, created particularly to facilitate reciprocal assistance and the streamlining of common goals through indirect means rather than by direct action. During the 1990s, cohesion and cooperation within the discipline benefitted greatly from the international conferences supported by IFRAO. Rather than establishing its own cycle of meetings, in keeping with the ideals of the federation IFRAO began nominating major international events by its member organisations as official IFRAO Congresses. This practice has seen such events taking place in all continents except Antarctica:

1988: Darwin, Australia, held by AURA
1992: Cairns, Australia, held by AURA
1993: New Delhi, India, held by RASI
1994: Flagstaff, U.S.A., held by ARARA
1995: Turin, Italy, held by CeSMAP
1996: Windhoek, Namibia, held by SARARA
1997: Cochabamba, Bolivia, held by SIARB
1998: Vila Real, Portugal, held by APAAR
1999: Ripon, Wisconsin, U.S.A., held by ARARA
2000: Alice Springs, Australia, held by AURA
2004: Agra, India, held by RASI
2006: Lisbon, Portugal, held by APAAR
2009: Capivara National Park, Brazil, held by ABAR
2010: Foix, France, held by ARAPE
2012: La Paz, Bolivia, held by SIARB
2013: Albuquerque, New Mexico, U.S.A., held by ARARA

These events have gradually increased in size and significance and through their influence they have helped set the standards and directions within the unified discipline. In that sense alone rock art research is possibly one of the best integrated branches of learning, and the effects of this globalisation have been profound. Not only have they facilitated the operational streamlining of the disciplines, in matters of standardisation and communication, various governmental and international agencies in many parts of the world have availed themselves of the structural strengths of IFRAO, in a variety of matters of policy and practice.

Another very effective aspect of IFRAO's facilitation of collaboration among its members is in publishing. At the founding meeting in 1988 it was decided that *Rock Art Research* would be the official organ of the federation. Its style was then adopted in a deliberate expression of solidarity by several of the many excellent journals produced by member organisations, thus underlining the concept of standardisation within the new discipline. Agreements exist among members for the unfettered re-publication of material and other practices of editorial collaboration. Within this system of wide-ranging co-operation, each of the many journals of IFRAO has established a niche within which it thrives.

However, the capacity in which IFRAO has been most spectacularly successful is in the protection of the resource on which the field is based. Rock art, a non-renewable resource, suffers from degradation of many forms. Natural deterioration, through weathering processes, is now universally exceeded by threats from human intervention. Among these are iconoclasm, the deliberate destruction for political, religious or other reasons; degradation through industrial or other development, including environmental acidification and climate change; the effects of tourism on rock art sites, from caves to open-air sites; and a variety of other agents whose combined effects now far exceed those of natural depreciation. The most disturbing but also most effective form of rock art destruction is state vandalism, in which a state defaults on its legal and international obligations to safeguard the preservation of the cultural heritage on its territory. The *UNESCO Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage* of 2003 is not being adhered to by many member states that are signatories to it, and here IFRAO has developed practices and policies to deal with rogue states, such as Australia, Portugal and Chile.

Although IFRAO's Convener has intervened on numerous minor occasions when rock art was under threat, it was only in 1995 that IFRAO found itself opposed by a national government over an issue of rock art destruction. In Portugal countless rock art sites have been submerged under reservoirs in several valleys. When the government sought to dam the Côa River, along whose lower course a series of petroglyph sites are located, IFRAO mounted a campaign to stop the completion of the dam. Through the dedication and personal courage of the leader of the Portuguese rock art organisation, Professor Mila Simões de Abreu, the government lost office and the project was abandoned, at the cost of $200 million. The most disturbing aspect of this and other such confrontations was that the corruption was made possible by the collusion of pathological archaeologists with the cultural heritage vandals. This was also the case in 2001 in the Guadiana valley, likewise in Portugal. Here, however, the existence of the rock art had been kept secret by such archaeologists until the dam was nearly complete, and IFRAO failed to prevent the destruction of 600 rock art sites by Europe's largest reservoir.

An even larger dispute began in 2002, when the government of Western Australia announced that it would establish the biggest industrial complex in the Southern Hemisphere in the same location as the world's largest collection of petroglyphs, on the main island of the Dampier Archipelago. Here, the stakes were much higher: there are an estimated one million petroglyphs in the archipelago, and the scope of the proposed industrial hub of 18 large companies was to be in the order of $30 billion. IFRAO demanded that the plan be abandoned, that the sites be placed on the National Heritage List and World Heritage List, that the land be yielded to the local Aboriginal community and turned into a National Park under their administration, and that it be given an indigenous name. It took three years to drive away 17 of the 18 companies, and another two years, to 2007, to secure national heritage listing. Finally, in January 2013, much of the land was declared as the Murujuga National Park, the first such precinct to be owned and administered by Aborigines. This spectacular success shows that IFRAO has grown from a small federation of nine like-minded rock art organisations to an international agency that can take governments to task and prevail.

It is no surprise that over the past 25 years IFRAO has earned a well-deserved reputation of placing the interests of the rock art above those of public agencies, and of providing rock art researchers with an effective forum and a voice. It may be less well known that it is the only international agency that actively pursues issues of rock art protection. UNESCO and its agencies are beholden to the member states, and IFRAO is the only international body in this area capable of opposing the most powerful interests. The future of this staunch advocacy of rock art will depend to a large degree on the willingness of individuals to forego personal ambitions and face interests opposing the protection or preservation of rock art, both political and academic.

The leadership of IFRAO is composed of such people, and with what has been learned from the previous major campaigns of preserving rock art complexes it is reasonable to face the future with confidence. While the study of rock art extends back thousands of years, at least in China, rock art research as a scientific discipline is a very recent phenomenon, attributable primarily to the rise of IFRAO. By any reasonable measure, these 25 years have been amazingly successful, because of the entirely idealistic and altruistic foundations of IFRAO. On the occasion of its silver jubilee, IFRAO can look to the future with complete confidence: the future of world rock art as well as rock art research may not be assured, but it has never before been in better hands.

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August 2013

RAR 30-1107