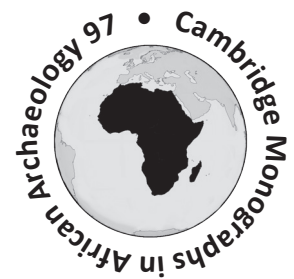


# The Cutting Edge

Khoe-San rock-markings at the  
Gestoptefontein-Driekuil engraving  
complex, North West Province, South  
Africa

Jeremy Charles Hollmann



**Access Archaeology**



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**I dedicate this study to the memory of Ed Eastwood (1946–2008)**



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# Abbreviations

BP	Years before present
BRN	Boschpoort Road North
BRS	Boschpoort Road South
ca	circa
CAPD	Circular arrangement of pecked dots
CB	Charlie Badenhorst
DH	Driekuul Hill
DRN	Driekuul Ridge North
GDC	Gestoptefontein-Driekuul Complex
ha	hectares
L-B-H	Limbs, body and head (spread-eagle motifs)
L-B-H-T	Limbs, body, head and tail (spread-eagle motifs)
L-B-O	Limbs and body only (spread-eagle motifs)
L-B-T	Limbs, body and tail (spread-eagle motifs)
LSCA	Limpopo-Shashe Confluence Area
MQ	Married Quarters
P and O cluster	Cluster of parallel and overlapping incisions
RARI	Rock Art Research Institute, University of the Witwatersrand
RPES	Roughly parallel and evenly spaced (incisions)
SAHRA	South African Heritage Resources Agency
SAPD	Stacked arrangement of pecked dots
SH	Skeleton Hill
VF	Vorster's Farm



# Preface

My first contact with this extraordinary religious complex on the farms Gestoptefontein and Driekuul was late in 2004 when I was asked to carry out an archaeological impact assessment on Driekuul Hill, a rock art site near Ottosdal, a village in North West province. The mining company Wonderstone Limited, whose operation is based on the adjoining farm, Gestoptefontein, sought permission to destroy this hill in order to assess the quality of the wonderstone<sup>1</sup> outcrop on which the rock art is pecked and incised (see chapter 1).

On this preliminary excursion I accompanied an official from the holding company Assore, a couple of mine employees and colleagues from the Rock Art Research Institute (RARI), University of the Witwatersrand. We had made the two and a half hour journey from Johannesburg early that day and spent the rest of the morning walking about on the hill, looking for the engravings. It did not appear to be a large or extensively engraved site, although we did note two striking instances of ancient interaction with the rock. Most obvious was a surface into which people had ground at least 50 grooves up to 25 mm deep and just under half a metre long. The other, a more conventional image on a densely engraved pavement of rock, was the largest and most detailed depiction of a woman's pubic apron I have encountered. In my excitement, I called everybody over to admire the work. I heard subsequently from one of the mine employees that afterwards the company official had walked off muttering disparagingly about the quality of the art and scoffing at my enthusiasm over such a poor piece of work.

This attitude of disdain and incomprehension was quite general amongst the 'white' people I met, but with important exceptions. I was often questioned about the reasons for my interest in what one person called '*kaffergoed*' (a demeaning expression in Afrikaans for things made by people who are not 'European' or 'white'). An artisan asked me why I chose to work on primitive and prehistoric artefacts when I could be studying the heritage of white South Africans, such as the ox wagons of the pioneering *Voortrekkers* of the mid-1800s. On another occasion, after thieves stole the battery from my car while it was parked near Driekuul Hill, the landowner, who kindly towed my vehicle back to the mine, asked me in puzzlement how I could justify spending so much time on

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<sup>1</sup>Wonderstone is the name given to the form of pyrophyllite, a mineral with similar properties to talc, that occurs in this part of North West province (see chapter 1).

the heritage of the very people who had stolen my battery. He also suggested that I was doing my job of documenting the rock art rather too thoroughly. Others found it hard to understand what kept me so busy on the hill – they had walked over it and ‘seen nothing’. They were especially negative about the numerous cuts and pecks on the rocks. These were evidence of the sheer meaningless of the markings made by these inferior people as they idled away their time in the sun. Tswana-speaking workers assumed that I was making a lot of money; why else would I spend so much time up there on the hill in the sun amongst the snakes? I earned a Tswana nickname – Monakgeng – it means, in English, ‘the one who lives in the veld’. I was flattered to hear that I was credited with the ability to spot rock art through the grass and in the dark, this no doubt because of my habit of wandering around on the hills at twilight, when the angled light makes it easier to spot rock art that might have been missed at other times of the day.

People’s responses were not overwhelmingly negative, however. Pieter de Jager, whose family had owned the hill and whose ancestor’s initials were carved into the rock on the hill, is an historian who is passionately interested in the history of the area (De Jager 2008). I found too, that when I had the opportunity to work with people on aspects of the rock art, they were receptive to my enthusiasm and the tentative explanations I offered. These were the people who related stories to me about the wonderstone hills and told me where I could find more rock art.

I soon realised that the middle management of Assore, while concerned to observe the letter of the law and anxious to be seen as honouring their legal obligations, saw the rock art as overburden, a niggling and time-consuming problem that had to be dealt with before they could strip it off and examine the extent and quality of the deposits below. There was an additional reason for their haste. The mine’s prospecting licence was soon to expire. The archaeological work would have to be carried out as soon as possible if they were to prospect within the limited time remaining before the expiry of the permit. One of their chief concerns was that the South African government’s Department of Minerals and Energy would then grant a prospecting licence to somebody else. The presence of competitors would complicate and perhaps threaten the mining company’s operations.

As it turned out, the prospecting licence did indeed expire. Nonetheless, Wonderstone was able to renew their licence.

In their haste and apparent ignorance of the presence of rock art on the hill, a local farmer and historian told me later, the mining company had first attempted to go ahead with the destruction of the hill without any kind of archaeological impact whatsoever. Mine management had organised a *braai* (barbecue) for the owners of the portions of Driekuil 280 IP and had informed these local farmers that the company intended to destroy the hill. One of the farmers, Pieter de Jager, who knew about the rock art on the hill, asked the mine manager what they were going to do about the rock art. ‘What rock art?’ the manager wanted to know. De Jager told him that the hill was covered with engravings and that an archaeological survey would have to be carried

out to establish whether or not the prospecting would be permitted. Shortly afterwards Assore contacted RARI and asked them to assess the site.

In the Archaeological Impact Assessment (AIA) (Hollmann & Huffman 2005) we recommended that full mitigation of the site be carried out so that Wonderstone could thereafter apply for a permit from the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) – the national body that coordinates the identification and management of the national estate – to destroy the site. SAHRA issued the necessary permit to carry out survey work and stipulated in addition that Wonderstone would be obliged to remove and house these in a small museum on the mine's property.

Based upon our initial visit to Driekuil Hill, I allowed four days in which to locate and record the rock art. Working with a colleague, Riaan Rifkin, I soon realised that this was a gross underestimate. The more we looked around on the hill, the more evidence of rock marking we saw. I use the term 'marking' because much of the evidence of human activity on the hill was in the form of cuts and hammer marks, and not 'images' (see chapter 3). In addition we noticed triangular and diamond shaped 'meshes' incised on surfaces on the hill. I considered these valuable data, soon to be destroyed, and so spent an additional 14 days recording them, as well as additional representational imagery that we had overlooked in our initial survey.

At the outset of the project Benjamin Smith (then director of RARI) and I had judged the site as 'minor' when compared with the much larger and relatively well-known rock art site on the farm Gestoptefontein and, therefore, expendable. Wonderstone employs around 150 people (Jos Joubert, pers. comm. 2011) and in a region with high unemployment we did not want to stand in the way of economic betterment. I was also aware that for Wonderstone and, for that matter, Ben Smith too, the destruction of the hill was a foregone conclusion. For SAHRA, the archaeological assessment and mitigation were merely legally required processes before they could get to work on the hill. I was uncomfortable with my collusion in the destruction of an archaeological site but consoled myself with the thought that I was facilitating much-needed development and that at least the largest rock art site was to be left untouched.

The knowledge that I was working on a 'condemned' site strengthened my resolve to make the survey and recording work as complete as possible. I felt a strong sense of responsibility for the place. Once my work was done, the site would be destroyed. Beside the few context-less stones in the small museum on the mine, my notes and records would be the only reference to the place. With this anxiety in the back of my mind I took especial pains to photograph the motifs and markings in great detail, returning to the site to re-photograph many of the markings and motifs.

As I located and recorded the hundreds of motifs and markings on Driekuil Hill I learnt of other rock art sites, also on wonderstone, from curious local farmers and mine employees who came to see what I was doing. I visited these sites and began to realise that Driekuil Hill was one of several wonderstone outcrops, all of which bore similar motifs and markings. Indeed, it seemed that every significant wonderstone outcrop bore rock art. The import of Driekuil Hill

started to assume different proportions. Far from being an isolated, minor and thus unimportant place, it was part of a much bigger picture, a constituent of a 'complex' of at least 12 sites. Moreover, this complex was unique in terms of its wonderstone substrate and the content of the rock art. My close acquaintance with the rock art on Driekuul Hill also enabled me to compare this body of motifs and markings with engraved rock art sites elsewhere. It became apparent that although there are intriguing and important similarities between certain motifs and markings at other sites in North West province, Free State, Gauteng and even further afield in the Northern, Eastern and Western Cape provinces (see chapter 2 for discussion of the so-called 'Khoekhoen art tradition'), the Gestoptefontein-Driekuul Complex (GDC) as I started to call it, was a meaningful and self-sufficient unit of analysis in its own right.

The removals heightened the tension between myself and mine management. Even though I was well aware that I had been hired for just this reason, I felt horrified at the prospect of overseeing the destruction of the place that I had spent so much time surveying and that I had grown to love. Mine management put pressure on me to remove only the minimum number of rocks from the hill. I, on the other hand felt justified in expanding upon the original list of stones to be removed that I had submitted to SAHRA. After all, the permit stated that I was entitled to remove not only the stones I had specified, but also 'any others that can be accommodated' and since I was in charge of the operation I used my discretion and happily exceeded the initially proposed number of stones earmarked for removal. We took most of the stones out using machines – a large machine-mounted pneumatic drill and a back actor. The machine operators worked carefully to remove the stones, using the same equipment that later would level the hill into a series of terraces. Soon there were rows of stones packed along the side of the mine's processing plant. Using the mine's diamond-tipped saws we worked long hours to cut the 100 or so stones to size. Again, a head office representative attempted to prevail upon me to ensure that 'the best' stones were sent away to the provincial museum 70 kilometres away in Klerksdorp and to the University of the Witwatersrand. There was merit in this suggestion – more people would be able to view the rock art – but there was also, I suspected, an ulterior and less civic-minded motive. Were the 'best' pieces to remain at the mine 'museum' it would mean that people would come to see them and that would be a nuisance and an inconvenience for the company.

Relations at this stage were at an all time low between myself and this head office official. When, after working five or six 12-hour days, we had not quite finished the work, he informed me that 'funds were exhausted' and that Wonderstone would not pay me to complete the work; I had exceeded my brief and removed too many stones, compared to the total I had specified on the original list. It was a strategic move on the company's part. By this time the stones had all been safely removed and, because mine management was champing at the bit to strip the hill, I had told SAHRA that the way was clear to grant Wonderstone their permit for the destruction of Driekuul Hill. It did not take them very long to strip the hilltop and discover that, for the next few years at any rate, the deposit was not worth the expense involved to exploit it.

In other words, the company had what it wanted and did not attach much value to it. I had lost my hold over them and now they had me over a barrel. My professional integrity was at stake and I could not leave the project incomplete. In addition they had realised that I had an intense personal interest in the work. I had told them of my academic interest in the site and my intention to research the sites for a doctorate. The same head office functionary had already informed me that as I was interested in the sites for personal reasons, I should be prepared to bear some of the costs myself.

The situation was thus very delicate and I was extremely anxious about the prospects of my getting permission to carry out survey work on the other wonderstone outcrops owned by Wonderstone. I completed the work of cataloguing the stones and moving them into the mine's museum and I supervised the transport of selected stones to Klerksdorp Museum for no charge. The stones destined for the University of the Witwatersrand were finally delivered several years later. Thanks to the interest of an individual within the company, a designer has produced some display posters I compiled, but these have not yet been completed. The place is not yet a functioning museum. Although Wonderstone did initially spend some money on preparing wood and glass display cases for the museum, I have had to prevail upon mine management to paint the building and fit glass into some of the windows.

I had fought hard to do the best I could for the site and the stones that were removed and in the process I had antagonised management. I had no qualms about it in the light of their behaviour and attitude. Indeed I had pushed back hard against them by putting in an application to have the largest remaining rock art site on Gestoptefontein declared a National Heritage Site; receipt of this application was never acknowledged and as far as I am aware the authorities have not evaluated the application. On the other hand I was still beholden to mine management. I wanted permission to continue working on their property. More than that, I also wanted the mine to give me free accommodation in their guest house, only 500 metres from the big site on Gestoptefontein, while I did the work. Head office, to whom I had addressed my request, wrote back and informed me that they had no objection to my surveying the big engraving site but 'unfortunately' the guest house would be in continual use for the foreseeable future and I would not be able to use these facilities. This was a blow to me because I was working on a limited budget. Having to pay for accommodation off-site at a bed and breakfast (even at reduced rates) would stretch my finances and reduce the amount of time I could afford to spend doing the survey. I did not have a job and I intended to use the money I got from Wonderstone to do my survey work.

It was at this stage that Jos Joubert, the Mine Manager, came into his own. He overrode head office's decision and made the guest house available to me when it was not in use. Although an avowed 'philistine' on heritage matters, I think he respected my tenacity and seemed to hold no grudge against my emphatic behaviour concerning the rock art removals from Driekuil Hill and was at least prepared to tolerate my presence on mine property.

There were therefore a number of factors that impelled me to undertake a

detailed study of the GDC. The threatened status of the sites, lack of any in-depth research into the rock art, and people's ignorance and prejudice, not to mention the fact that I was casting around for a suitable thesis topic, all drove me to tackle this project. Having presided over the destruction of Driekuil Hill, I was determined to spend time amongst the largest remaining body of motifs and markings – Gestoptefontein Hill. Located in the midst of the mine, bounded to the north by a service road and the quarried remains of what may have been one of the largest engraving sites in North West province, the mine offices, workshops to the east, the powder plant to the west, and farmland to the south, I sometimes saw my work on the hill, an area of about one hectare, as an analogy. I was working in the belly of the beast, finding and recording treasures while all around the unthinking, uncaring world proceeded about its business.

I could not sustain this elitist attitude for any length of time, however, in the face of the many contradictions it concealed. After all, without the mine's existence, I would not have been involved with the rock art in the first place, and I depended on mine management's largesse for access to the sites and for accommodation in their guesthouse. I was indebted and so at other times I had to settle for something less grand – I was simply recording what was left of the hill, after many years of destructive and uncoordinated mining and collecting.

It is now more than six years since I wrote this preface. The mine museum, containing the remains of some of what was salvaged from Driekuil Hill, was officially opened in December 2012 but is rarely visited. Then, in 2015 my worst fear was realised when a Head Office official told me that Wonderstone was considering to mine Gestoptefontein Hill (the largest, most densely engraved remaining site). The Mine Manager, Jos Joubert, had always said to me “The company *will* mine the koppie [i.e. Gestoptefontein Hill], but *not* in our lifetime”. He was wrong about that – the company wanted to mine the koppie *now*. Remarkably (and to their credit), however, considering that I told Wonderstone management that I would recommended against any further mining (as I duly did) they approached me to carry out an AIA to this end in 2015. In the report (Hollmann 2015) I wrote:

Gestoptefontein Hill is a threatened remnant of one of the country's the most outstanding examples of a Khoe-San rock art tradition that involved making images and other markings in the performance of women's initiation rites. It is therefore recommended that Gestoptefontein Hill be declared a Grade 1 heritage site of national significance. The site should be protected from any mining activities. In the event of the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) approving the mining of Gestoptefontein Hill, extensive mitigation and the construction and maintenance of a public display of the rock art would be required.

The mitigation and public display costs would have outstripped the potential value of the wonderstone deposits below Gestoptefontein Hill and as far as I



know, plans to mine the best preserved remnant of an ancient religious 'happening' have been shelved – forever, one hopes.

None the less there are still communication problems between the production-oriented people that plan and execute mining operations, and the heritage people whose concern is the the protection of important archaeological and historical remains. Concerns about the fencing around Gestoptefontein Hill are a good example of how we can misunderstand each other. In a letter to management written in 2014 I pointed out that the fence around Gestoptefontein Hill did not enclose the entire field of engravings. Important and vulnerable engravings were excluded from the rest of the site by the enclosure, constructed from large steel drums, weighted with stones, painted white and linked to each other with thick gauge fencing wire. This fence provided a visual barrier and demarcated the area that was not to be entered. Some of the barrels, however, were standing on top of engraved surfaces. I suggested doing away with any fencing, in view of the potential for damage caused by digging fence post holes in an engraving site. I had expected to hear from Wonderstone management in due course to discuss how the work should be done and if necessary to arrange for a permit from SAHRA the heritage authorities. I never received a response to this letter but early in 2016, after Wonderstone paid me to come out and physically point out the localities of all the engraving sites of which I was aware, I noticed that the barrels were gone and that there was a (new) wire fence around Gestoptefontein Hill. Closer inspection showed that the fence still did not enclose all the rock art and other markings. Furthermore the wire fence was painted with silver paint on site, thus spattering some of the rocks with silver paint. This work was done without a permit from SAHRA and was thus illegal.

To make matters worse, some (again unpermitted and unsupervised) preliminary quarrying of a small hole was carried out at the foot of Gestoptefontein Hill to inspect the colour of the underlying wonderstone. In the process of excavating the hole, the machine operator backed the excavator over some densely engraved rocks, destroying most of the motifs.

These incidents underline the need for mine management and archaeologists to talk to each other and to work together closely on developments where mining and heritage resources are so closely intertwined. The damage could have been avoided had an informed heritage practitioner been invited to participate in the process of re-siting the fence from planning to execution. Similarly the destruction of engravings could also have been avoided by engaging a heritage professional. I know from my own experience that management resent paying archaeological consultants (they think we charge too much), but it is also the case that because management is so 'production' oriented it does not occur to people in these positions that their activities – even those carried out with good intentions – might have adverse consequences for the heritage for which they are responsible. Yet again the rock art has been carelessly (and needlessly) damaged.

Heritage and development do not necessarily have to be at loggerheads, but the reality is that in South Africa despite good legislation they often are, especially when it comes to mining interests. This is to be expected when we have

a state bureaucracy in which the Department of Mineral Affairs and Energy (DME) apparently enjoys so-called 'senior status' over the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) and acts with apparent impunity. In late 2014 one of the Boschpoort Road rock art sites narrowly avoided damage when the company Sino Rock arrived at a farm on Driekuul, without the required SAHRA permit and proceeded to extend an old test pit, creating an excavation approximately 100 m<sup>2</sup> and c. 2 m at its deepest point. This was carried out within the legally prescribed 10 m exclusion zone of the rock art site. Although reported to SAHRA in March 2015, the case is still "pending and under assessment" over two years later.

Elsewhere in South Africa, the ignorance of and disregard for our heritage was highlighted again in 2016, when the DME permitted open cast mining at Canteen Koppie, an important and legally protected archaeological site in South Africa's Northern Cape Province. It was only through the determined efforts of an archaeologist and concerned citizens that the mining was stopped, but not before the site was damaged. SAHRA's voice was notably absent. A judicial review has been ordered into the granting of the permit but nobody should hold their breath to wait for the outcome.

This preface has most largely been about the threats the GDC rock art faces because it was a little appreciated and even denigrated part of the South African past. Ironically, it was this very neglect in the first place that led me to explore the significance and meaning of the what I call the 'phenomenon' of the Gestoptefontein and Driekuul rock art. With this book I have fulfilled my promise to explore the significance that these wonderstone outcrops had for people in the past and to make these results known to fellow researchers and to the public. By proposing a past for these places in which the outcrops played an important role in the social life of the people who visited them, I have tried to show that these places deserve our respect and appreciation. No matter how the ideas in this book may be modified or discounted in future, nobody can now claim that the rock art of these places is insignificant or redundant. The wonderstone outcrops with their rock markings and motifs were an integral part of the social landscape of the past. They should enjoy our care and protection in the present.