Foreword

The cradle of humankind, a paragon of democracy, a nation of rich and varied history – South Africa is all of these things and more. The Department of Arts and Culture is committed to preserving this diverse heritage for posterity and also promoting it within the greater context of Africa as a whole. We are happy to take all opportunities to inform our visitors about our wealth of resources as far as our heritage is concerned. This book represents such an opportunity and, while it is by no means a complete representation of South African and African heritage, it is certainly a very comprehensive “highlights package” and I have no doubt that it will make you want to travel the length and breadth of our beloved continent to experience this heritage for yourself.

Whether Africa interests you because of its natural beauty, its cultural complexity or its history, this book will hold something to inform, interest and inspire you and, we hope, leave you with a better understanding and appreciation for this marvelous land that Africans of all nationalities, cultures and creeds call home. It is with great pride and pleasure that I invite you to enjoy the excellence of Africa’s heritage institutions and the wonders that our continent has to offer.

Minister of Arts and Culture
Lulu Xingwana

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National Department of Arts and Culture:
2010 Project Management Office:
Duduzile Mazibuko - Content Advisor and 2010 Project Manager
Communications Department:
Lisa Combrinck - Editor and Head of Communications
Heritage Unit:
Vusi Ndima

African World Heritage Fund:
Dr Webber Ndoro - Director
Inge Herbert - Resource Mobilisation and Communication
Graciela Gonzalez Brigas - Programme Specialist

Editorial services:
DeskLink Media Team

Design and Layout:
DeskLink Media
Luthuli Nyathi, Sizakele Shingange

Project Management:
Chris Watterson

Printed by:
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Foreword
by Deputy Minister Paul Mashatile

Africa offers an indisputable wealth and diversity of heritage, only a small sample of which is represented here; just enough to whet the appetite. Over the past century, the continent has offered up a multitude of archaeological and palaeontological evidence to support its claim to being the cradle of humankind. With the discovery of Mrs Ples in Sterkfontein, South Africa in 1947, Lucy in Hadar, Ethiopia in 1974, and most recently of Austrolopithecus Sediba – still awaiting a name – in Sterkfontein in 2008, the continent has repeatedly laid claim to an unrivalled heritage stretching back to the very origins of humanity, and arguably tracing its first forays into the development of art and culture.

This is apparent in the thirty-odd African countries that are home to remarkable rock art, some of which date back tens of thousands of years. Many of these have attained the status of World Heritage Sites – among them Ukhahlamba/ Drakensberg Park in South Africa; Tsodilo in Botswana; Tassil n’Ajjer in Algeria, Air and Ténéré Natural Reserves in Niger, and Kondoa in Tanzania, to name but a few.

There is no way that we could create a truly exhaustive and comprehensive guide to all of our nation and continent’s cultural heritage but if this guide encourages you to go out and learn about Africa, then it has served its purpose. We invite you to discover the rich cultural history of Africa.
Our continent is justly celebrated for its abundant natural heritage. From the southern beauty of the Cape Floral Kingdom, to the tropical forest of the Congo basin in the West, the glacier-clad summits of Mt Kenya in the East, to the vast expanses of the Sahara desert in the North, Africa boasts a glorious diversity of landscapes and environments. These are home to a fantastic array of wildlife, long recognised as a major draw card for visitors to the continent.

Amidst the beauty of its landscapes, the people of Africa have carved out their own unique and varied paths, developing cultural and knowledge systems that have yet to receive the recognition and celebration that they deserve. Many of the achievements of the people of Africa are slowly, yet surely, being brought to light; the remains of the ancient civilizations of Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe being a case in point. The shadow of the colonial era, and before that, of the slave trade, also form part of the continent’s heritage, marked by the trading posts, forts and castles that once saw millions of African people deported to foreign countries. The slave trade brought the Africans in contact with the world, and gave rise to a global explosion of cultural innovation. Thus today, African heritage is not only present in Africa, but in a myriad of forms across the globe.
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Rock painting of an eland, close to Doreen Falls.

The Importance of Heritage

With so many challenges confronting the African continent, why utilise precious resources on increasing Africa’s presence on the World Heritage list? Themba Wakashe, director-general of the DAC, and Dr Webber Ndoro, director of the AWHF, explain the significance of heritage, and why it is well worth supporting.

In May 2006, Themba Wakashe, director-general of the DAC, presided over the launch of the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF), describing it as ‘a trailblazing exercise’. The first of its kind, the aim of the fund was, and is, to increase the presence of Africa on the UNESCO World Heritage list, as the continent is sorely underrepresented despite numerous sites of enormous significance to humankind.

While there are at present some 890 sites worldwide inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, only 116 of these are in Africa. Given that the continent is currently believed to be the ‘cradle of humankind’, and is home to a vast number of sites of both cultural and biological significance, this is somewhat surprising. Both Mr Wakashe and Dr Ndoro attribute this to, among other things, a lack of awareness among both governments and communities about both the nature and potential usefulness of World Heritage sites. In addition, people tend to take natural and cultural heritage sites for granted, until such time as they are threatened – often too late. Moreover, says Mr Wakashe, many would-be African World Heritage sites are highly inaccessible, meaning that substantial investment in infrastructure is necessary – roads must be built, and so on. In some cases, language also becomes a barrier to the recognition of a valuable site (see Africa Unknown).

Not only is Africa underrepresented to begin with, but, of its 116 recognised sites, twelve appear on the 31-strong list of sites in danger, which details those sites that are not being managed properly. ‘So even though we have fewer sites, we have more sites that are being threatened with being thrown out because they’re not being managed properly,’ Ndoro says.

There is also a tendency to regard the recognition of such sites as ‘merely’ a question of prestige, and thus secondary to many critical issues facing African nations. Problems such as poverty, the AIDS crisis, and the need to ensure that all citizens have access to education are obviously of the highest priority and cannot be ignored. What Dr Ndoro and Mr Wakashe want to convey is that the development of the African presence on the UNESCO World Heritage list need not be seen as snatching desperately needed resources away from these areas; rather, if effected properly, this development can be utilised as a means to address these very same issues.
Koutammakou, the Land of the Batammariba - UNESCO World Heritage Site, Togo
Koutammakou, the Land of the Batammariba - UNESCO World Heritage Site, Togo
Thus the AWHF aims to increase Africa’s presence on the list, both by supporting State Parties (those states in Africa that have signed the UNESCO convention regarding World Heritage Sites) in the identification, nomination and effective management of new sites, and by assisting in the rehabilitation of sites in danger. A further key objective is the utilisation of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites as a vehicle for development – ‘to see whether we can use World Heritage Sites to alleviate poverty, for example, given the fact that quite a lot of these sites are in rural communities where we’ve got a lot of poverty; these sites could attract tourists, and that, in turn, could benefit local communities,’ says Dr Ndoro.

Clearly many of the issues surrounding development are of the highest priority for most African states; however, to dismiss the value of recognising would-be African World Heritage Sites as merely a question of ‘prestige’ ignores the significance of their potential contribution to restoring the esteem and identity of many African communities. Heritage refers to the achievements of a culture, and – as both Mr Wakashe and Dr Ndoro emphasize – are an important source of pride and identity. Through the reconnection, so to speak, of communities with their cultural heritage and the achievements of their ancestors, communities may begin to regain a sense of pride and identity eroded by oppressive regimes, colonisation and poverty.

As an example, Mr Wakashe points out that the discovery of the ancient city of Mapungubwe, which was kept secret for many years by the apartheid government, as its existence disproved many of the rationales used to justify white occupation and alleged superiority. Similarly, Mr Wakashe refers to the libraries of Timbuktu – a cultural treasure falsifying the belief that Africa has no written history. At its
Ruins of Kilwa Kisiwani and ruins of Songo Mnara - UNESCO World Heritage Site, Tanzania © Tito Dupret/patrimonium-mundi.org

Rwenzori Mountains National Park - UNESCO World Heritage Site, Uganda © Tito Dupret/patrimonium-mundi.org
height, approximately between the 13th and 16th centuries, Timbuktu was home to a thriving industry in which books were written, imported and copied; the city housed works of unparalleled scholarly value, in addition to laying claim to some of the best scholars in the world. (In fact, when Malian Emperor Mansa Musa returned from a pilgrimage to Mecca with several Arab scholars, he was amazed to find that they were vastly less qualified than many of those of Timbuktu. Some were allegedly required to obtain further qualifications merely so that they could attend classes as students).

Thus it is hoped that, aside from the possible economic benefits of a developed tourism industry, an increase in the flow of visitors to Africa (added to the attention that UNESCO World Heritage status draws to the achievements of African cultures) would do much to dispel the sometimes crippling misconceptions that the world – and importantly, many Africans themselves – may hold about ‘Darkest Africa’.
South Africa’s World Heritage Sites

Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape

The 160,000 ha Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape of dramatic mountainous desert in north-western South Africa constitutes a cultural landscape communally owned and managed. This site sustains the semi-nomadic pastoral livelihood of the Nama people, reflecting seasonal patterns that may have persisted for as long as two millennia in southern Africa. It is the only area where the Nama still construct portable rush-mat houses (haru om) and includes seasonal migrations and grazing grounds, together with stock posts. The pastoralists collect medicinal and other plants and have a strong oral tradition associated with different places and attributes of the landscape.
Entrance to Robben Island
Robben Island

Robben Island was used at various times between the 17th and 20th centuries as a prison, a hospital for socially unacceptable groups and a military base. Its buildings, particularly those of the late 20th century such as the maximum security prison for political prisoners, witness the triumph of democracy and freedom over oppression and racism.
Cape Floral Region Protected Areas

A serial site – in Cape Province, South Africa made up of eight protected areas and covering 553,000 ha, the Cape Floral Region is one of the richest areas for plants in the world. It represents less than 0.5% of the area of Africa but is home to nearly 20% of the continent’s flora. The site displays outstanding ecological and biological processes associated with the Fynbos vegetation, which is unique to the Cape Floral Region. The outstanding diversity, density and endemism of the flora are among the highest worldwide. Unique plant reproductive strategies, adaptive to fire, patterns of seed dispersal by insects, as well as patterns of endemism and adaptive radiation found in the flora, are of outstanding value to science.
The iSimangaliso Wetland Park was listed as South Africa’s first World Heritage Site in December 1999.
The ongoing fluvial, marine and aeolian processes in the site have produced a variety of landforms, including coral reefs, long sandy beaches, coastal dunes, lake systems, swamps, and extensive reed and papyrus wetlands. The interplay of the park’s environmental heterogeneity with major floods and coastal storms and a transitional geographic location between subtropical and tropical Africa has resulted in exceptional species diversity and ongoing speciation. The mosaic of landforms and habitat types creates breathtaking scenic vistas. The site contains critical habitats for a range of species from Africa’s marine, wetland and savannah environments.

iSimangaliso Wetland Park

The iSimangaliso Wetland Park is home to the greatest congregation of hippo and crocodiles in South Africa.
Vredefort Dome
Vredefort Dome, approximately 120 km south-west of Johannesburg, is a representative part of a larger meteorite impact structure, or astrobleme. Dating back 2,023 million years, it is the oldest astrobleme yet found on Earth. With a radius of 190 km, it is also the largest and the most deeply eroded. Vredefort Dome bears witness to the world’s greatest known single energy release event, which had devastating global effects including, according to some scientists, major evolutionary changes. It provides critical evidence of the Earth’s geological history and is crucial to an understanding of the evolution of the planet. Despite the importance of impact sites to the planet’s history, geological activity on the Earth’s surface has led to the disappearance of evidence from most of them, and Vredefort is the only example to provide a full geological profile of an astrobleme below the crater floor.
Fossil Hominid Sites of Sterkfontein, Swartkrans, Kromdraai, and Environs

The Taung Skull Fossil Site, part of the extension to the site inscribed in 1999, is the place where in 1924 the celebrated Taung Skull – a specimen of the species Australopithecus africanus – was found. Makapan Valley, also in the site, features in its many archaeological caves traces of human occupation and evolution dating back some 3.3 million years. The area contains essential elements that define the origin and evolution of humanity. Fossils found there have enabled the identification of several specimens of early hominids, more particularly of Paranthropus, dating back between 4.5 million and 2.5 million years, as well as evidence of the domestication of fire 1 million to 1.8 million years ago.
Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape
Mapungubwe is set hard against the northern border of South Africa, adjoining Zimbabwe and Botswana. It is an open, expansive savannah landscape at the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe rivers. Mapungubwe developed into the largest kingdom in the sub-continent before it was abandoned in the 14th century. What survives are the almost untouched remains of the palace sites and also the entire settlement area dependent upon them, as well as two earlier capital sites, the whole presenting an unrivalled picture of the development of social and political structures over some 400 years.
From top to bottom:
Artefacts discovered at the site;
The women of Mapungubwe
Ukhahlamba Drakensberg Park

South Africa boasts eight World Heritage Sites: Mapungubwe, the Richtersveld, Robben Island, the Fossil Hominid Sites of Sterkfontein, Swartkrans, Kromdraai and environs, the Cape Floral Region, iSimangaliso Wetland Park and Vredefort Dome. Only Ukhahlamba Drakensberg Park makes the list both for its natural and cultural properties.

The steep rocky slopes, rolling Alpine grasslands and densely vegetated river valleys of Ukhahlamba Drakensberg Park make it an area of spectacular and tranquil beauty, rich in diverse habitats and teeming with plant, bird and animal life – several species of which are endemic to the region. Its aesthetic quality, biodiversity and incidence of globally threatened species alone make it a place of outstanding natural value; and then, scattered amongst this natural bounty, some 500 rock shelters and overhangs house one of the world’s oldest art collections.

‘It’s the best understood rock art anywhere in the world; it’s also amongst the most exquisitely beautiful, with the most complex artistic techniques used in rock art anywhere – with the possible exception of some techniques used in France,’ says Dr Geoffrey Blundell, director of the Origins Centre. Preserved in part by the porous stone on which they were painted, the art of the San offers the sole traces of a tenure believed to have lasted at least 25 000 years.

‘The language is lost’ says Blundell. ‘There are traces of the culture that remain in Xhosa speaking groups and to a lesser degree amongst Zulu speaking groups’. Across South Africa, successive waves of settlers – beginning with Stone Age farmers roughly two thousand years ago – challenged the hunter-gatherer way of life. While San relationships with groups such as the Nguni were often positive, at times conflict over land and cattle broke out, with at least one group of San from the Drakensberg believed to have been massacred as a result of ongoing cattle theft. The arrival of colonists heralded more suffering for the San – aggressive hunting practices decimated the herds of game while grazing cattle stripped the veld of plant foods, leaving the San to starve. In certain areas, the San were openly declared vermin and hunted down: according to Blundell, two individuals from the Sneeuberg area boasted of killing more than two thousand San people – each. While the various San groups that inhabited the Drakensberg were not subject to such outright genocide, they were nevertheless believed to be extinct by the late 19th century.

The general disregard of European settlers for the San was frequently reflected in their perception of rock art as crude and primitive – a conclusion patently belied by the images.
View of the Drakensberg amphitheatre as from the upper Tugela River, South Africa

Many of the sites in this region contain scenes depicting hunting, dancing, fighting, food gathering or ritual and trance scenes of hunting or rainmaking.
“It’s the best understood rock art anywhere in the world; it’s also amongst the most exquisitely beautiful, with the most complex artistic techniques used in rock art anywhere”
"Although the Kalahari San did not themselves create rock art, applying ideas from their beliefs and rituals allowed researchers to make sense of many of the mysterious Drakensberg images"
The Golden Gate derives its name from the brilliant shades of gold cast by the sun on the sandstone
The transatlantic slave trade

Spanning an entire continent, the Slave Trade Route Heritage Sites constitute an international memorial to one of the most shameful episodes in human history.

The trade in enslaved Africans which took place from the 15th to 19th centuries was the largest deportation in world history. Over the course of four centuries, an estimated 25-30 million people were violently torn from their homelands and shipped abroad, causing untold human suffering, and leaving an indelible imprint on culture and society worldwide. Between twelve and 17 million Africans crossed the Atlantic as part of the infamous ‘triangular trade’; many more died on the long forced march to the coast and on board ships to the New World.

The triangular trade – so named for the rough shape of a triangle created by the three journeys between continents – began in Europe with the shipping of weapons, textiles and other commodities to Africa. There they were exchanged for Africans sold into slavery, often those vanquished in wars, mentally ill or convicted of crimes. Loaded up with human cargo, the ships set sail for the Americas, where in turn they were exchanged for a cargo of sugar, tobacco, coffee and cotton bound for Europe.

The millions forcibly sent to the Americas re-peopled lands in which the native population had been decimated, largely due to diseases carried by invading Europeans. These newly acquired territories allowed colonisers the opportunity to grow an abundance of luxury crops such as sugar, tobacco and coffee, impossible in the climatic conditions of Europe. Yet the destruction of the local population left them without a potential workforce. With insufficient European migrants or convicts to meet the need for labour, they turned to Africa.

According to Professor David Eltis, author of The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas (Cambridge, 2000), the use of Africans as slaves resulted at least in part from the relatively sudden large-scale interaction between the people of the European and African continents, brought about by rapid advances in shipping. Thus, while slavery was no longer practised in Western Europe – due, Eltis speculates, to the development of a Pan-European sensibility, a sufficient recognition of fellow humanity to make other Europeans ineligible for slavery – the speed with which Europeans and Africans were brought into contact on a large scale allowed little time for a similar recognition to develop, one transcending differences in appearance, culture and societal norms. ‘The English and Dutch were more likely to view non-European peoples as lying outside the social contract and therefore beyond the protection of the web of individual rights they were weaving.'
Island of Gorée, Senegal situated two kilometers from the capital city of Dakar

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Forts and castles, Greater Accra, Ghana

© AWHF/J. Nyangila
for themselves’, he told Time magazine in an interview in 2000. ‘As long as some group is regarded as outsiders then freedom for insiders is perfectly compatible with enslavement and exploitation’.

Eltis also argued that the transatlantic slave trade followed from the power of African states to resist European colonisation until the late 19th century, making it impossible to establish plantations in the much closer West Africa. ‘They were forced to treat Africans as equals’, he told Time. ‘The plantations were established in the Americas instead, and the expensive transatlantic slave trade was necessary to bring them labour. In this sense the slave trade was the result of African strength. Europeans bought slaves, they did not obtain them through European-led raids’.

So why were Africans prepared to sell other Africans into slavery? According to Eltis, a similar pan-African identity had not yet developed in Africa, perhaps in part due to the size of the continent. ‘The insider-outsider divide was, for whatever reason, much more localised in sub-Saharan Africa’ he told Time.

Despite being from a wide range of places across the continent, the people traded as slaves were generally deported from only a few ports on the coast of Africa, the most active of these being Whydah on the so-called ‘Slave Coast’ of North Africa; Bonny, on the Bight of Biafra; and Luanda, on the West Coast of Africa. Indeed, West Central Africa was one of the largest suppliers of slaves, sending nearly half of the entire African labour bound for the Americas and roughly 80 per cent of those shipped to South East Brazil. For the duration of the voyage – usually around two months – slaves were sexually segregated and kept naked, with the men frequently in chains. About a quarter were children. Both outbreaks of disease due to unsanitary conditions and episodes of violent resistance meant that a significant percentage did not survive the voyage.

The Transatlantic Slave trade was brought to an end in the mid 1800s, at a time, Eltis claims, when slaves were fetching record prices – suggesting that its demise was influenced by moral considerations. Brazilian authorities began arresting slave ships at the end of 1850, and in 1867 the last slaving expedition – to Cuba – took place. By this time an estimated 3 600 000 Africans had been brought to Brazil alone, where their culture played a massive role in the

“Between twelve and 17 million Africans crossed the Atlantic as part of the infamous ‘triangular trade’; many more died on the long forced march to the coast and on board ships to the New World”
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Worldwide, the fusion of African cultures with those of their destinations brought about new societies and cultural forms, a legacy reflected in UNESCO’s Representative List of Intangible Heritage of Humanity, which includes several nominations highlighting the ‘cultural interactions of the slave trade and slavery’. Those most recently added include Argentina’s Tango, Uruguay’s Candombe and France’s Maloya; but there are many others.
Historic Centre of Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, one of the oldest cities of the New World that housed the slave market.

Cidade Velha, Cabo Verde, formerly Ribeira Grande served as a place of concentration for enslaved Africans.

Aapravasi Ghat, Mauritius
Africa Unknown

Of the five Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa, only two have entries on the World Heritage List, an omission which the African World Heritage Fund hopes soon to rectify. Two remarkable sites may soon be put forward for consideration: the Bijagós archipelago, and the historic centre of M’banza Kongo.

Celebrating heritage draws attention to the achievements of a people, according them a degree of respect; the suppression or enforced forgetting of past glory can be a powerful tool in the creation of inequality between groups – a tool which European colonists in Africa have often used to convince both themselves, and the people they oppressed, of European superiority.

Hence the African World Heritage Fund’s work to increase Africa’s presence on the World Heritage List, by tackling the many issues that prevent sites from being recognised by the world at large. Language, for example, can be critical. According to Dr Webber Ndoro, director of the African World Heritage Fund, Portuguese-speaking countries are particularly underrepresented, primarily because heritage specialists in those countries struggle to find information about compiling a tentative list and applying for nomination in their native tongue. Thus language becomes a barrier that prevents valuable sites from being granted the recognition and protection afforded by World Heritage status; and the world is deprived of the opportunity to discover new facets of Africa’s – often obscured – history and achievements.

‘This is why we introduced language-specific training courses where the participants can interact amongst each other and with the trainers in their mother tongue,’ explains Dr Ndoro. In partnership with Portuguese-speaking countries such as Brazil (IPHAN – Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional) the African World Heritage Fund is therefore implementing a tailor made capacity building programme for Portuguese speaking countries. An initial training course took place in Mozambique in 2009; this will be followed by a training course in Tchitundo Hulo (Namibe - Angola) this year, organized within the framework of the UNESCO Prehistory Programme.

Five countries in Africa are Portuguese-speaking: Angola, Mozambique, Guinée Bissau, São Tomé and Principe, and Cape Verde. At present, only two of these have entries on the World Heritage list: the Island
The Boloma Bijagós Reserve situated off the coast of Guinea Bissau © IUCN
of Mozambique, with its ancient fortifications and possibly the oldest building in the southern Hemisphere, the Chapel of Nossa Senhora de Baluarte; and Cape Verde’s Cidade Velha (‘old city’) – as an important link in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, it was once one of the richest cities in the Portuguese empire.

Thus Angola, Guinea Bissau and São Tomé and Príncipe are not represented. However, each of these countries has compiled – or in the case of São Tomé and Príncipe, is in the process of compiling – a tentative list of properties that they consider to be of ‘outstanding universal value’ to be considered by the State party for nomination as a World Heritage Site.

A site currently appearing on Angola’s tentative list is the historic town of M’banza Kongo, capital of the Zaire province in Angola. Established as a town in the 13th century, it became the capital of the ancient Kongo Kingdom, which once extended across an area that today forms parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, and part of Angola.

Portuguese missionaries baptised King Nzinga Mbemba (renamed Afonso I) in the early 16th century, and the two nations began exchanging ambassadors soon after. During this time a cathedral was built, the ruins of which can still be found in the historic city.

In the latter part of the 16th century the kingdom was weakened by invasions from neighbouring groups, and came under the control of the Portuguese; M’banza Kongo was renamed São Salvador. In the century that followed, the Kongo kingdom was decimated by the slave trade, losing an estimated 13 million people. Kongo was eventually divided up by the French, Belgians and Portuguese at the infamous Berlin conference of 1885, at which several European nations met to portion out colonies in Africa, thereby hastening the colonisation of the continent.

Kongo nationalism and culture resurfaced in the 20th century; as greater knowledge and awareness of the nation’s past status spread, calls for autonomy increased, culminating in the independence that the three countries now possess.

Today the remains of the capital of this once powerful kingdom can be seen in M’banza Kongo. The historic centre has been protected by law since 1957, and in 1995, the Ancient Residence of the Kongo kings was classified a National Monument by the Angolan government.

A second site waiting in the wings for possible World Heritage status – this time in recognition of its natural, rather than cultural, significance – lies off the coast of Guinea Bissau. The Boloma Bijagós Biosphere Reserve, an archipelago created by the ancient delta of the Rio Geba and the Rio Grande, is riddled with streams and rivers channelling nutrient-laden freshwater into the seas, leading many species to feed and reproduce in its waters. Thus the surrounding ocean is alive with fish, molluscs, crustaceans and marine turtles;
the region is also home to the Nile crocodile and hippopotami, and the largely forested islands shelter a multitude of primates.

Approximately 23 of the islands are inhabited by an ethnically-diverse population, a reminder of the region’s colonial history. The archipelago once played an important role in trade along the West Coast, and built up a navy sufficiently powerful to fend off Portuguese invasion in 1535; the islands only fell to Portugal in the first half of the twentieth century.

At present, São Tomé and Príncipe has not yet established a tentative list of universally significant properties within their borders; they are still in the process of doing so. In a workshop conducted in January last year, they began by establishing a pre-inventory of a number of sites, also drafting a tentative listing of Roça Agostinho Neto. With every new listing, the ignorance and misconceptions surrounding ‘Darkest Africa’ moves faster towards becoming a thing of the past.
Separated by the arid expanses of the Sahara, North Africa has followed a distinct cultural path to that of the rest of the continent, its history closely aligned with that of its Mediterranean neighbours. Today, many of the historical cities of the region still reflect this ancestry, and have been awarded World Heritage Status.
Historic Cairo, Egypt
© UNESCO/Giuliano Ricci
Today historic Cairo still displays its medieval layout, and abounds with monuments, mosques and Coptic churches, built over the course of the last millennium.

For almost three million years, the nine million kilometres of desert that make up the Sahara (‘the Greatest Desert’) have separated the countries lying on the Mediterranean coastline of North Africa from the rest of the continent. This stretch of land was once home to the ancient nations of Carthage and Numidia, which both became Roman provinces. In the early fifth century, Rome lost North Africa to the Vandals; the loss marked a crucial point in the fall of the Western Roman Empire, as North Africa had served as an important supplier of grain.

In 533, Byzantine emperor Justinian I reclaimed the territory. A hundred years later, the Arabic Islamic conquest of North Africa began; by 670 most of the region was under Muslim control. From the Middle Ages onwards, the Ottoman empire held sway over most of North Africa with the exclusion of Morocco, until the 19th century when Spain, Italy, France and the United Kingdom colonised territories. Since the middle of the 20th century the countries of North Africa have been independent. Several of the ancient cities of this region have become World Heritage sites, valued in part for the historic, social and cultural information embedded within their use of space, building materials and so on. Investing in the maintenance and integrity of these cities not only preserves such information, but in many cases benefits the lives and prospects of those who inhabit them.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Algeria’s Casbah, where the city stands in need of urgent repair, as there is an imminent possibility of houses collapsing – a far cry from its glory days. Nicknamed ‘la Blanche’ (‘the White One’) due to its sharp slope of white buildings descending towards the sea, the city has a history riddled with infamy, glamour and intrigue. From its antique origins as a Phoenician trading post in the 6th century BC, it came under Roman rule, until the Vandals in turn expelled them. In the 16th century the city rose to power as a stronghold for the Barbarossa pirate brothers who plundered the vessels and towns of the Mediterranean and Atlantic; tens of thousands of Europeans were kidnapped and held for ransom in the Casbah’s dungeons, among them Miguel de Cervantes – author of Don Quixote – who spent five years in the city before being ransomed, and Fra Filippo Lippi, a renowned artist of the Italian Renaissance.
Medina of Tunis, a mosque in Tunisia originally built in 688 by Arab conqueror Hassan ibn Nooman.
At that time the fortified city was a place of abundant wealth, boasting a plethora of fountains, public baths, mosques and more than 100 prayer halls. Much of this was destroyed in reprisals by European forces, and, in 1716, by an earthquake that levelled a great deal of the city. The Ottomans rebuilt the Casbah, only to lose it to French colonisers in 1871. Fearing that the labyrinthine nature of the fortified city offered potential for resistance fighters, the French destroyed its walls and surrounded the city with colonial-style buildings, also creating a central boulevard and wider streets to facilitate the movement of troops. Despite this, the twisting, hive-like structure of the Casbah made it a focal point for the resistance during Algeria’s 1954-1962 war of independence; in the early 1990s it once again sheltered insurgents, this time Islamist guerrillas revolting against the government.

Like Algeria’s Casbah, the Medina of Tetouan in Morocco garnered infamy for its reputation as a base for piracy at various points in its history. In 1305 King Abu Thabit established the city, from which many attacks on Spain’s Ceuta were launched, ultimately ensuring the Medina’s destruction at the hands of the Castilians in 1400. A century later the Medina at Tetouan was rebuilt by Andalusian Moors fleeing the Spanish Reconquista; it also became home to a noteworthy Sephardi Jewish community. In 1860 the city once more fell to Spain, who virtually transformed the Medina into a European city, a metamorphosis so loathed by the Moors that they razed all signs thereof at the first available opportunity. In 1913, the city became the capital of Spanish-occupied Morocco, a status it maintained until 1956, when it became part of the independent state of Morocco.

In contrast to the pirate strongholds of the Casbah and Tetouan, the Medina of Tunis has garnered itself a more respectable history. The Medina grew up around ‘Ez Zitouna’ – ‘The Mosque of the Olive Tree’, originally built in 698 by Arab conqueror Hassan ibn Nooman. With the mosque as its sacred heart, and surrounded over time by the souks of noble trade guilds, the medina grew to be a self-contained city encompassed by ramparts. During the Hafsid era (1230-1574), the region became an important focus for intellectual, religious and economic activity throughout Africa, the Middle East and Europe, and one of the wealthiest cities in the Arab world. This status is reflected in the diverse influences present in the architecture of the city. The medina remains one

“Nicknamed ‘la Blanche’ (‘the White One’) due to its sharp slope of white buildings descending towards the sea, the city has a history riddled with infamy, glamour and intrigue”
of the best preserved cities of the region, having passed through 13 centuries of existence without being ravaged by either natural or man made disasters; buildings from the middle ages still stand, as do many of the palatial homes built during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, as well as some 600 monuments, including mosques, fountains, mausoleums, and madrasas.

Like many of the old Islamic cities, the medina consists of a tightly-knit collection of alleyways and covered passages. Although these are not laid out according to a grid – or any easily observable system – anthropological studies have shown that the city in fact demonstrates a method of planning, structured around privacy and a system of human relations.

Known as the ‘pearl of the desert’, the oasis town of Ghadames in Libya has a recorded history dating back to the Roman conquest, yet archaeological evidence suggests that is the oldest inhabitable town in the Sahara, dating back to the Paleolithic period. It is thought that the oasis town was invaded by the Romans during the first century BC; by the sixth century Byzantine missionaries had converted the inhabitants to Christianity. During the following century Islam took hold, brought by Arab rulers, and the oasis came to be one of the busiest caravan trading centres in the Trans-Saharan trade route, a status it maintained until the 19th century.

Ghadames is remarkable for the construction of its buildings, engineered to withstand the extremes of temperature experienced in the desert. Thick, whitewashed clay walls, angled and pierced with occasional ventilation holes, are carefully laid out to form a cool interior space throughout the city. The layout of Ghadames also displays rigid social mores – the underground passages form walkways for men, while a network of rooftop alleyways allow women to separately pursue their own daily activities.

Since the 1980s, the majority of former inhabitants have left Ghadames for the air-conditioned spaces of the neighbouring city – yet at the height of summer, many still retreat back to their homes in the oasis, when the scorching heat overwhelms modern technology.

A survey of some of the historic cities of North Africa would not be complete without a mention of the Egyptian city of Cairo. Founded in the 10th century, it rose to prominence as a centre of learning, with a library alleged to contain some two million books. In 1250, the Mamelukes tore Egypt from Arabic control,
established Cairo as their capital; during this time the city is said to have experienced a golden age. In 1517, they were routed by the Ottomans, who ruled until 1798 when Napoleon briefly held the city. Muhammad Ali Pasha then established an independent empire with Cairo as its capital; in 1882 the city fell to the British, eventually becoming independent in 1922.

Today historic Cairo still displays its medieval layout, and abounds with monuments, mosques and Coptic churches, built over the course of the last millennium. It is home to more than 600 classified monuments, many of which are described as ‘incontestable masterpieces’, and which reflect the longstanding status and prestige of this unforgettable city.
May 7th, 2010 was a day of far happier historical significance at Liliesleaf than the infamous day of the apartheid police raid on 11 July 1963. Through an extraordinary series of events a signed, original copy of the 1955 Freedom Charter was returned to South Africa and accepted by Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe and Minister of Arts and Culture Lulu Xingwana at the site.

This particular signed copy of the Charter came up for auction at Bonhams auction house in London. The South African National Archives contacted Nicholas Wolpe, CEO of the Liliesleaf Trust, to assist in retrieving this fundamental piece of South African history. (Wolpe’s father, Harold, was one of the few Rivonia accused to escape from prison) The Charter was bought for £60 000 and will in future be stored in the National Archives.

As Wolpe sees it, besides the Trust’s involvement with purchasing the Charter, Liliesleaf itself is a ‘unique and pertinent place’ for its return as ‘to some extent, aspects of the Charter were articulated and given expression through the activities here’.

The opening paragraph of the Freedom Charter as adopted at the Congress of the People in Kliptown on 26 June 1955 states: ‘We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people’.

The significance of Liliesleaf is not just in the history of the raid but also in the meetings of a truly ‘diverse group of leaders, with differing religious and even political ideals, who put aside their own interests in order to pursue a bigger vision – the overthrow of apartheid’. Wolpe draws a parallel between Robben Island and Liliesleaf,
Overview of Liliesleaf Farm with the famous 1960s aerial photograph in the foreground
The Thatched Cottage, scene of the arrests.
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Liliesleaf witnessed the development of the ‘armed struggle’. The farm was originally purchased in 1961 by the South African Communist Party (SACP). Later it became the headquarters for the ANC’s military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) or ‘Spear of the Nation’.

On 11 July 1963 the South African National Security Police raided the farm hoping to find Walter Sisulu there. Instead they surprised a meeting of the high command of MK. The meeting was taking place in the Thatched Cottage behind the Main House; not only was Sisulu present but also Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada, Rusty Bernstein and Raymond Mahlaba. They were taken by surprise, and having no opportunity for escape, were all arrested.

Draft documents for Operation Mayibuye, a plan for guerrilla warfare in South Africa, were under discussion and lay on the table in front of them. A desperate Dennis Goldberg, trying to dispose of other incriminating documents, was arrested in the Main House. The fateful meeting was to have been the last at Liliesleaf Farm because the leadership of MK had been concerned that it and its underground activities had been discovered by the apartheid government.

Nelson Mandela had previously been living at the farm pretending to be a ‘houseboy’ but was not in fact present on the day of the 1963 raid, as he was already serving a five-year prison sentence on Robben Island. It was the discovery of his diaries and papers, hidden in the farm’s Coal Shed by Arthur Goldreich, that precipitated his status as Accused Number One for the subsequent Rivonia Trial.
The watershed trial, where 156 accused were charged with 221 acts of sabotage against the state, began in October 1963 and ended in June 1964. Most of the accused were subjected to South Africa’s notorious 90-days-without-trial law. Mandela and Sisulu’s co-accused also included Andrew Mlangeni, Bram Fischer, Joe Slovo, Ruth First and Harold Wolpe.

With the emergence of the ‘New South Africa’ post 1994, it became important for the country to start honouring places of anti-apartheid activity and memory. The Liliesleaf Reunion was held in 2001. Then South African President, Thabo Mbeki, established the Liliesleaf Trust to ‘restore, preserve and maintain the historical structure, buildings and legacy of the site’. The aim of the Trust is to ‘ensure that the essence, spirit and soul of Liliesleaf are maintained for current and future generations’. This task is felt keenly by Wolpe, the CEO of the Trust. ‘Liliesleaf is a living, breathing entity, a place of activity,’ he says. ‘It cannot be a static entity – that would fly in the face of what Liliesleaf is about.’

Currently Liliesleaf consists of the historic Main House, Outbuildings, Thatched Cottage, Garage, Coal Shed, Coal Bunker, and the new Liberation and Resource Centres and the ‘Secret Safaris’ Bedford truck.

The People Map in the Liberation Centre graphically represents the ‘tentacles’ of stories, and the associations of people linked to the site. Names of the six men arrested on the farm during the raid form a tight circle in the middle of the Map. Names of connecting people radiate and spiral outwards – Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, Nelson Mandela, George Bizos and Ruth First jump out from against the brickwork (amongst many famous others) while others not so immediately recognisable prove intriguing – one is compelled to play with the interactive touch-screen version of the People Map to learn more about each one.
Nelson Mandela’s room

The Interactive Table in the Main House
The Trust/ Pixel Project has already won two awards for the Interactive Table in the Main House: a Silver Loerie (Experiential Digital Application) and a ‘Best in Class: Museum’ from the Interactive Media Council. When discussing the exhibits Wolpe talks about literally ‘making the walls talk’, of ‘not creating a place where visitors just read text panels’.

The table displays a ‘3D interface consisting of video, images, audio, and text and is browsed by visitors using two aluminium “navigators”’. The Cabinet of Curiosity in the lounge of the Main House presents stories of spies up telephone poles and a mysterious cellar and will shortly be upgraded to include animation and additional audio.

All the buildings are strikingly bare of furnishings – testimony to a history discounted, sold and lost post the raid and pre-1994 South Africa. Wandering the passages of the Main House, one is stopped by an eerily ringing telephone – an old black handset, with a dial – picking it up one not only hears stories of spy agents, ‘terrorists’ and infiltrators but also feels the immediacy of the adrenalin rush of tension, secrecy, fear and dark hope that surely shadowed the struggle leaders in every waking moment.

Liliesleaf really does provide a ‘journey of enlightenment’ to visitors, teaching us that not a single one of us exists merely as an isolated individual; we carry our family stories, our histories and our memories in every waking moment. We move among sites and places that vibrate with the stories to which they have played host, we interact with those who have walked the path to freedom and those who will improve upon it. Our personal stories are intimately connected and entwined and we continue to write them every day.

“The aim of the Trust is to ‘ensure that the essence, spirit and soul of Liliesleaf are maintained for current and future generations’
The Origins Centre is not short of impressive technology, both ancient and modern: alongside displays of stone tools, cutting-edge modern machinery operates, including a projected ‘rain animal’ that snaps at the viewer if it is disturbed, and an award-winning educational computer game. But it is arguably its incorporation of contemporary artworks within the more obviously educational, scientific exhibits that sets it apart in its ability to transport visitors to a different world.

For the San, the rock face they painted formed a veil between this world and the spiritual realm. The Origins Centre, a homage to Africa’s heritage as the birthplace of humanity, parallels this. Within a building designed to manifest the idea of the veil, an archival space containing the Rock Art Research Institute’s valuable items runs through all three levels of the building – the present and the very distant past interweave, celebrating that which sets humanity apart from other species – the development of art and technology.

Among the extensive collection of rock art and engravings housed within Origins – including the world’s oldest man-made image – are contemporary artworks by leading South African artists that reflect on the themes of the museum.

Set in the indigenous garden approaching the museum entrance, lies an enigmatic concrete sculpture by artist Marco Cianfanelli commemorating Raymond Dart, who discovered the Taung skull, the remains of an early hominid child that...
Walter Oltmann’s map of the world adorns the main entrance of the Origins Centre.
Russell Scott's Axis Mundi
lead scientists to believe that humanity originated in Africa. Cianfanelli’s memorial outlines a modern human skull within the Taung skull, which in turn lies within the skull of a chimpanzee; the form of the whole resembles the shape of Africa, commenting on Africa’s status as the origin of humanity.

Progressing to the entrance of the museum, the visitor is confronted by Walter Oltmann’s map of the world - rippling silver sheets of woven aluminium, flowing ribbon-like across the museum walls. A thread of copper traces the path of humankind through Africa and into the wider world beyond, simultaneously echoing the thin red line found in many San paintings, the ‘threads of light’ connecting us to the world of the spirit.

These ‘threads’, an image commonly seen in San rock art, form the second motif of the museum; a motif that is given a literal twist in the tallest room of the museum, in which a set of eleven exquisite 2m by 4.5m wall hangings are displayed. Designed by Tamar Mason, and beautifully embroidered with beads, eggshell, glass and safety pins by Emma Mnguni and a team of women from Kwaggafontein, the wall hangings use imagery from contemporary Bushman art, as well as rock art and engravings to chronicle the history of the San.

“It is arguably its incorporation of contemporary artworks within the more obviously educational, scientific exhibits that sets it apart in its ability to transport visitors to a different world.”
“Among the extensive collection of rock art and engravings housed within Origins – including the world’s oldest man-made image – are contemporary artworks by leading South African artists that reflect on the themes of the museum.”

people, including scenes of their traditional life, the arrival of black and white settlers, genocide and the AIDS pandemic.

Both threads and light come into play in Willem Boshoff’s *Signs of People*, which floats suspended in space like so many termite wings, a thousand perspex words recording the names given to the disparate South African peoples. These are transmitted by a revolving light, so that the viewer is labelled with ethnic stereotypes. In its resemblance to translucent wings, the work reflects on the transience and vulnerability of many of the indigenous languages of South Africa, gradually disappearing and some already extinct.

The threads of light link this world to that on the other side of the veil; it is there that the shaman encounters the mysterious beings of the spirit world. These are given physical form in Russell Scott’s *Axis Mundi*; a mysterious giant snake of sculpted wood weaves through the length of a display hall, while a host of strange half-animal, half-human creatures protrude from a giant termite
This is the genius of the Origins centre – the way in which all elements of its construction and design work together to educate, display and comment on themes around the origins of humanity, and the history of the San people, the world's oldest surviving cultural group.
A child of Africa

April 2010 saw Professor Lee Berger of the University of the Witwatersrand announce a find to eclipse the likes of Tutankhamen’s sarcophagus – an important new fossil that may shed further light on our origins.

In early August 2008, Berger discovered a new series of caves – somewhat to his surprise, as he had spent some 19 years working in the area. The find seemed a promising one, with large mammal fossils immediately apparent. Lime miners had punched a hole in the middle of the site, but it seemed otherwise undisturbed.

When Berger returned to the cave in mid-August, accompanied by a post-doctoral fellow, Berger’s son Matthew and the family dog, he theorised that miners had not damaged the site because ‘probably they’d started sampling here and someone had walked up the hill and said “Oh wait, easy stuff up the hill, let’s leave it”. I finished that statement and Matt said “Dad, I found a fossil”.

As Berger approached, he found his son holding a small block, apparently thrown some distance from the cave by the miners. ‘Five metres from him I could see exactly what it was’ he says. ‘It was a hominin clavicle sticking out of the rock…There are only a few animals in Africa that have clavicles: bats, moles and primates… I knew it was a hominin clavicle because a hominin clavicle has an s-shape to it, and primates have more of a straight or an l-shape to the clavicles…I did my PhD on them; I’m one of the world’s experts on hominin clavicles’.

It was an astounding discovery. ‘[Hominid fossils] are probably the rarest sought-after objects on earth’ he explains. ‘There are probably only two to three thousand fragments that have ever been found…. and that’s with 85-90 years of constant looking in Africa. Let’s say there are 6-700 numbered fossil hominids of early human ancestors from Sterkfontein, which is the richest single deposit on Earth of these things – and it’s been worked effectively continuously since 1935 when it was first opened up’.

Even more extraordinary, he says, was the further discovery of a hominin canine and mandible protruding from the other side of the rock. ‘When you talk about partial skeletons where you have a piece of cranium or any part of the head that you can associate with any part of the body, you are literally talking about 7 or 8 specimens that have ever been found in Africa’.

Having contacted the South African Heritage Agency and begun the process of applying for the necessary permit, Berger took the block to Wits, where a preparator started work on it. It soon became apparent that they were dealing with an articulated skeleton. With permit secured, Berger returned to scour the site, accompanied, he says, by ‘everyone with a PhD or masters in archaeology or paleoanthropology or any interested area’ ... We got back out there early in the morning and two and a half hours later we hadn’t found a single thing that could be positively identified as a hominin. We were devastated, because it was a tiny site, we should have been able to just click that block back into either one of the walls, or at least find some associated material. Everyone broke for tea, and I
walked over to the edge of the pit... and the light got up just enough to shine on the back of the pit. And there, sticking out, was a proximal humerus...As I approached it I realised sitting next to it was a scapular, in position, the shoulder blade with the proximal humerus. And I’m thinking “We’ve found the child!”

What ultimately came to light was not the child, but a second skeleton; an adult female, providing the researchers with two of ‘arguably the most complete skeletons of early human ancestors ever discovered’. Although Berger objects to the term “missing link” – ‘because evolution doesn’t work like a chain of events, one thing leading to another thing; its much more of a bush or a branching exercise’ – the skeletons are believed to be a new species, approximately 1.9 million years old, and filling a critical gap in human evolution. ‘They seem to fall between the earliest australopithecines like Lucy and Little Foot, Mrs Ples and the Taung child, and later things which are clearly our direct ancestors, like homo erectus’ says Berger. ‘I don’t think anyone will ever again argue that we haven’t found

“When you talk about partial skeletons where you have a piece of cranium or any part of the head that you can associate with any part of the body, you are literally talking about 7 or 8 specimens that have ever been found in Africa”

The cranium of the juvenile Au. Sediba skeleton, now named Karabo. © Brett Eloff
anything in the human lineage that’s not transitional. This thing has long legs like we do; a pelvis for striding that’s unique to homo erectus and homo sapiens; it’s got arms the length of an orangutan and hands that are short, powerfully built; its got a face that’s very advanced, with a nose. And the anterior teeth are like ours, the posterior teeth are like something more ancient and primitive; it’s got an advanced shaped brain with vertical sidewalls – it’s tiny! I mean, it’s … the size of one of these very early australopithecines. And yet it’s shaped like something much lighter. And what’s so fascinating about it is that it’s different from what we had been putting into that position – things like homo habilis, which have large brains but more primitive faces’.

It appears that adult and child may have fallen victim to a kind of ‘death trap’; evidence suggests that the fossils were preserved in an underground lake, filling them with a mixture of water, lime and sediment, while other fossils found show signs of a fall. ‘It’s a miraculous preservation situation that we’ve not seen repeated anywhere else’ Berger says. Sixty scientists – from both South Africa and abroad – have been brought in to work on what is being uncovered, the extent of which has required the creation of new inventories of research. ‘We’ve found a richness of record that will stun people when it comes out… we’re getting a look at the environment that’s completely unprecedented. The plants, the other animals, and the insects are equally well preserved’.

After years of presenting ‘little bits and pieces, scraps’ to a frequently incredulous audience, announcing a find so self-explanatory in its completeness delights Berger. ‘It’s there, it’s manifest, it is what it is, and they’re so complete that there’s really no argument’. He is very much aware that this is the find of a lifetime. ‘If human beings are still writing about themselves a million years from now, if they’re still interested in looking at their origins - these fossils form a part of that record. I’ve never before worked on anything where you know you’re sitting with something that has just become an iconic part of the human record. It’s very humbling that you know [that what you are working with] has just joined Tutankhamen’s sarcophagus or the Mona Lisa as part of something that humans identify themselves with’.