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# La Pintura

The Official Newsletter of the American Rock Art Research Association  
Member of the International Federation of Rock Art Organizations

[www.arara.org](http://www.arara.org)

## Presidential Message

Evelyn Billo



WELCOME TO THE future, from your new president. As I listened to the founding members' forum at the Farmington Conference recalling ARARA's roots, I looked around the room at the collective experiences, knowledge, and friendships among those who had gathered to celebrate ARARA's first 35 years. It caused me to reflect on our future and the personal and organizational goals we can set now to assure a strong and active membership in these challenging times.

We currently have a wonderful structure of active and dedicated committees where members share interest in Awards, Conference Planning, Conservation and Preservation, Education, Publications, and the Web. All committees are seeking new members! Please make a personal commitment to at least one of the above and also consider how you can help ARARA through:

1) *Outreach*: Donate a membership to a student with an interest in archae-

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## Rock Art at the World Archaeological Congress in Dublin, Ireland

Mavis Greer

**THIS SUMMER FOUND SEVERAL** ARARA members in Ireland to participate in the sixth World Archaeological Congress (WAC) from June 29 to July 4, 2008.

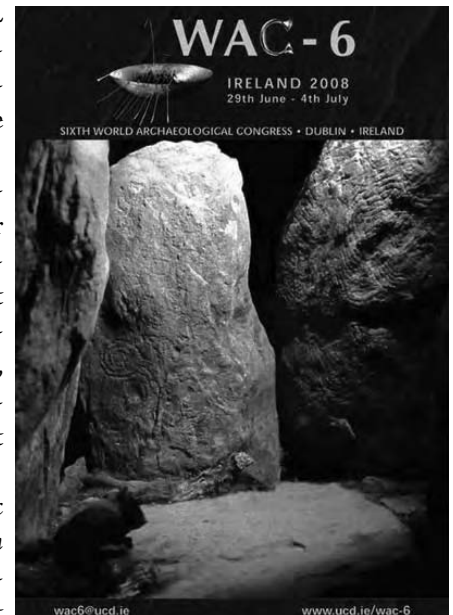
For four of us, planning for the congress began almost a year earlier. After the 2007 Society for American Archaeology meeting, Donna Gillette set in motion the process that brought together W. Breen Murray, Mavis Greer, and Michele Hayward under her leadership to chair the first of nine rock art sessions of the congress.

Our symposium entitled *Prehistoric Concepts of Spirituality as Reflected in Rock Art* was interested in presentations that used rock art as an artifact

class to examine past spirituality, religion, or ideology. The popularity of the topic was surprising, and with more than double the number of abstracts received than could be scheduled within the allotted two-hour time frame, an additional two-hour session was requested and granted. Thus, 15 papers were accepted, and 11 researchers attended the conference and presented their research. Many countries were represented, and the international researchers presented a variety of approaches to the topic.

Margaret Bullen from Australia opened the session with her presentation on *The Knowable and the Unknowable in Rock Art*. She examined whether or not we think about spirituality the same as those who came before us. She discussed how, by examining rock art, we can suggest what might have been

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## Rock Art at WAC

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known to the past cultures.

Robert Wallis of Richmond University in London looked at the topic from a different perspective. His paper entitled *Re-enchanting Rock Art Landscapes: Animic Ontologies, Adjusted Styles of Communication and Non-Human Agency* discussed a distinction between natural and cultural landscapes. He found the distinction not as straightforward as one would think. Wallis sees no division between spiritual and animistic and promoted embracing a multi-hierarchical view of spiritual landscapes involving humans and non-humans.

Gerard O'Regan from New Zealand is of both Irish and Maori descent and spoke on the *Spiritual Attributes in the Placement of Maori Rock Art in the South Island of New Zealand*. He studied the distribution of Maori rock art and found a skewed mathematical curve suggesting that rock art was not put in shelters randomly. Additionally, although natural features were often considered by the Maori to have spirituality, rock art was not concentrated near these particular natural features.

Claire Turner, an M.A. student at the University of Witwatersrand, presented *Battling Baboons: Concepts of Spirituality in the San Rock Art of the Drakensberg, South Africa*. She concentrated on

baboon figures in a single rock art site and examined them relative to San ethnography, which has accounts about the animals being closely associated with people. However, unlike people, baboons have negative energy and represent spirits of the dead.

The next presentation was also about South African rock art, and Patrick Byrne of the Rock Art Institute of

Witwatersrand spoke about *Handling the Matter: Theoretical Approaches to Interpreting Handprints of the Waterberg, South Africa*. He noted that there are many examples of handedness in cultural beliefs, and in this area of South Africa spiritual concepts distinguish between the right and left hand. He focused on right handedness and how this dominated physiological and cultural information in rock art of this area.

Dagmara Zawadzka presented the paper co-authored by herself and Daniel Arsenault on *Spiritual Places: Canadian Shield Rock Art within Its Sacred Landscape*. They looked at criteria indicative of sacredness, such as location, properties of the rock used, and acoustics. They found that locations considered spiritual now probably were considered spiritual in the past.

Herbert Eling (INAH, Coahuila, Mexico) and Solveig Turpin (University of Texas, Austin) continued with spirituality in the New World but moved south into Mexico with their paper *Trance and Transformation in the Indigenous Art of Coahuila*. They noted that the defining characteristic of this hunter-gatherer rock art is redundancy. Although mostly abstract designs, the few animals and humans are often shown in transformation and magical flight, which shows an iconographic similarity to the Pecos River area to the north. Eling and Turpin

also found that human hand and foot prints had a spiritual function in this area, and deer antlers and headdresses reflect both spirituality and seasonality. They conclude that spiritual interaction within art tied together the hunting and gathering groups of the region.

Breen Murray (University of Monterrey, Mexico) con-

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ARARA members Donna Gillette, Breen Murray and Mavis Greer during a break at the WAC 6 conference in Dublin, Ireland (photo by Garry Gillette).



An example of rock art in Ireland, from the site of Newgrange (photo by Mavis Greer).

## Rock Art at WAC

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tinued with the theme of deer and spirituality in his talk on *Deer: Sacred and Profane*. The deer is still sacred for some northern Mexico groups, and some aspects of the earlier religious importance of the animal can be seen in the modern deer dance performed in a Christian setting incorporating aspects of earlier ritual. Deer hoofprints are used to mark the location where peyote grows, and the plant is linked with transformation and rock art creation in Mexico and the American southwest. Deer are also important for both male and female fertility.

*Rock Art and Ritual in the Kurnool District, India*, was presented by Jamie Hampson, Nicole Boivin, and James Blinkhorn from Cambridge University. The on-going project focuses on the continuity of rock art associated with spirituality and religion from antiquity to the present. Hunters and gatherers, farmers, ritual specialists, and pilgrims are all known to have made rock art for religious purposes in this area. This theme of people from more than one kind of background making rock art of a spiritual nature was continued by the next presenter. Jose Fernandez's presentation was on *Solar and Stellar Paintings in Schematic Rock Art of the Iberian Peninsula*. He examined sun-like portrayals (rayed circles and disks) in both rock art and on ceramics. ☼



A lively performance by an Aboriginal performer set the tone for the conference (photo by Garry Gillette).

Jean-Michel Chazine presented a co-authored paper with Jean Courtin, Noury Amaud, and Jean Clottes on *Hand Stencils in Cosquer Cave: Men and/or Women?* They presented the results of a computer program used to measure ring and index finger lengths to determine whether the painters in Cosquer were men or women. They found handprints

of both sexes in the cave, and they are now interested in measuring to determine if more than one handprint belonged to the same person. Placement of the handprints in the cave may have been for healing symbolism or training.

Because of cancellations there was time for Julie Drew of Australia to share a portion of a video she made with women of the Wardaman Aboriginal Corporation called *Renewing Women's Business*. The documentary follows Lily Gingina Burdum, an elderly Wardaman woman from the Victoria River District, and Julie Drew, an archaeologist from the University of Sydney, on a camping trip. This portion of the video shows them at a rock art site where the women told stories about the art.

As the women walked away from the site they implored the spirits not to follow them but to stay at the site.

Attendance was good at all the rock art sessions, and discussion was lively about a variety of topics related to rock art, although not necessarily limited to the presentations of the day. The conference provided a good overview of the research questions and rock art conservation problems being addressed throughout the world. ☼

## Deer Valley Rock Art Center Names ARARA Intern

**KIM ARTH**, THE NEWLY-APPOINTED Executive Director of the Deer Valley Rock Art Center, announced the recent hiring of Alex Chermiside for an Archive Collection Internship at the Center. He will be working two days per week at the Rock Art Center beginning in mid-September on the classification and scanning of ARARA's archives, among other projects.

Alex Chermiside is a recent graduate of the University of Washington Master's program in Museology with a strong background in collections management. He has worked extensively with digitalizing images and linking them to

databases to facilitate user access. In his thesis, "A Model for the Organization of Archival Materials to Facilitate Research on Collectors and Collections," he developed a way that archival material could be easily accessed by researchers, both physically and online. He has worked at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, the Museum of History and Industry, and the Seattle Asian Art Museum, all located in Seattle.

At the Deer Valley Rock Art Center, Alex will begin with developing a process and procedure for rehousing, scanning and cataloging – in other words, finding an effective way to input data to make it more accessible to ARARA members. *La Pintura* will include a full report on the progress of the archive project in later issues. ☼