

11/2/2003

Hello to all,

About 6,000 years ago the San people, the oldest indigenous tribe in southern Africa, started to record their surroundings by chiseling pictures in the sandstone rock of north central Namibia. Over the years they created over 2,500 images on the rocks around a spring nestled in a mountain valley.

The San people, commonly referred to as the Bushmen, are a nomadic, hunter / gatherer society. They hunt wild game and harvest the bounty that the land provides. They represent the last remaining link to the original people of Africa. They are a very shy, peaceful people, and will simply move away in the face of aggression. As a result, their land has been taken by more powerful tribes, and their numbers have dwindled. At one point, they were the most populous group in this region. Today there are an estimated 2,000 left in Namibia, and an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 across the whole of southern Africa.

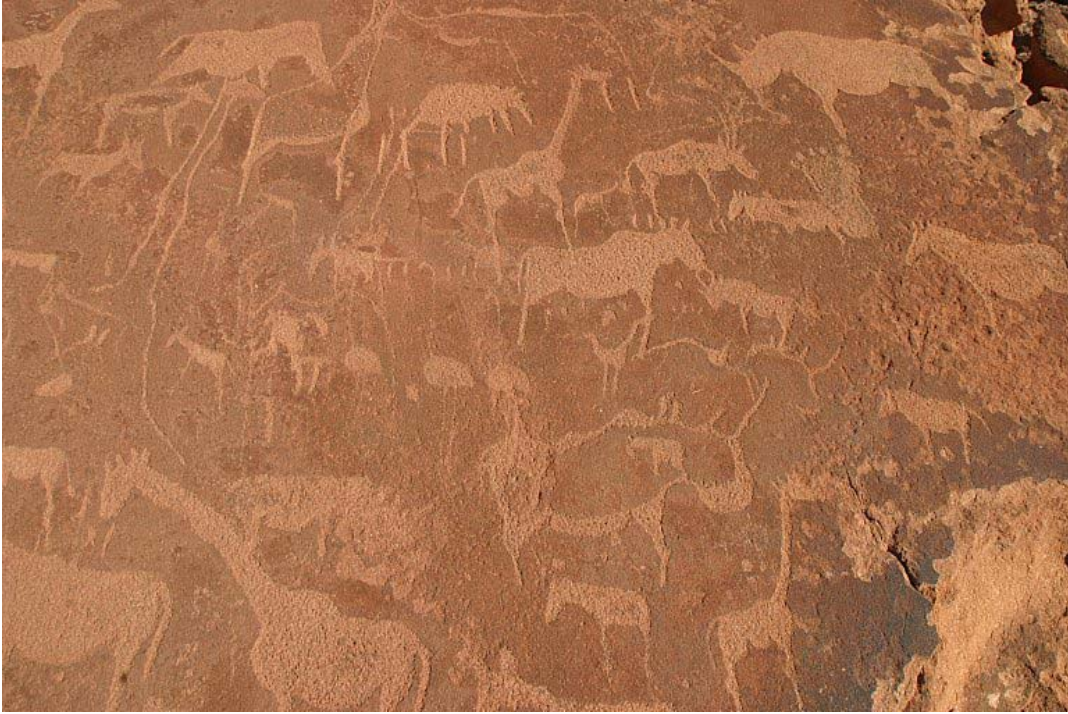
Of those that remain, there are essentially none that live a fully isolated, traditional life. Over the years they have been exposed to many facets of modern life, both good and bad. Today they still live a simple life in the bush, but are at the mercy of the farmers and game reserve owners who allow them to live, hunt and gather on their lands. Due to their isolated and reserved nature, contact and interaction with them is very rare.

A few days ago, we had the chance to meet a San family and interact with them. They showed us some facets of their traditional life. The opportunity for the experience was both intriguing and voyeuristic. It took some time and an extended conversation with our local guides before I could come to terms with it. The tough fact is that these people need some cash to survive in the world that has been left to them, and these interactions provides a means to generate that cash without turning to more damaging ways to acquire it.

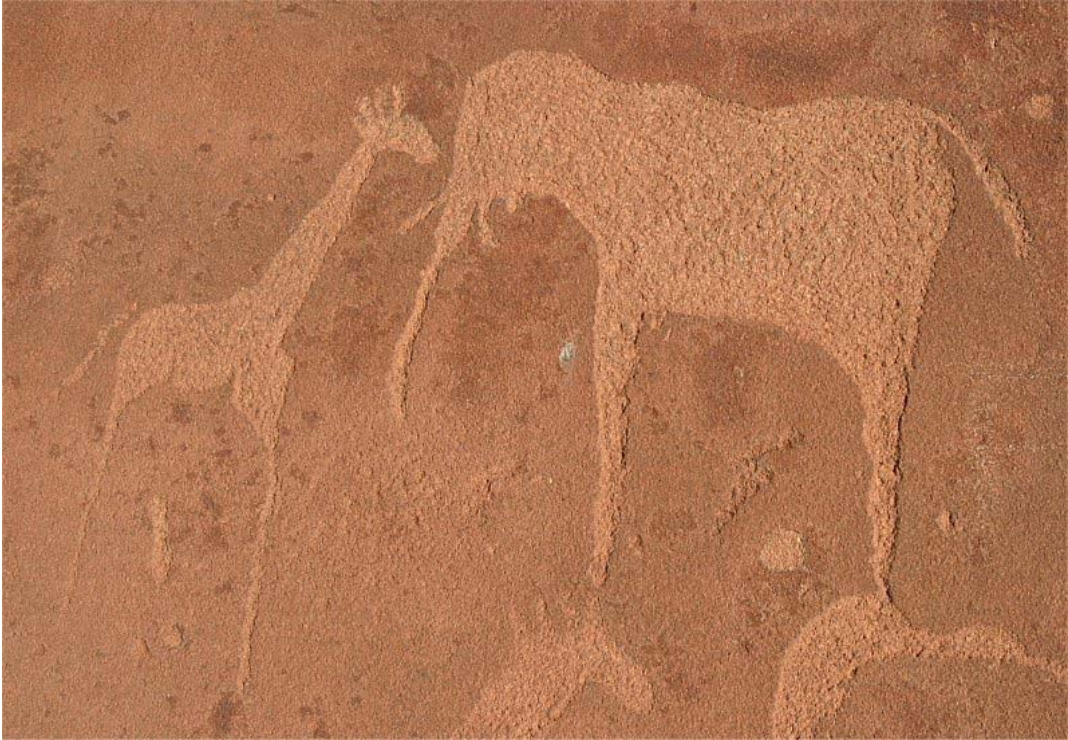
To minimize the impact of the interactions on their culture, the organizers of this experience rotate different family groups from the remote bush into the area where we met them every four to six weeks. Interaction is not an every day, scheduled event, but is organized at the request of the select number of guides who are aware of the situation. Many times the San have simply migrated away to a different camp or are out in the bush hunting and are not available to interact. We were very fortunate to have met them and to have touched a facet of human existence that connects us to the lives and the people of our most remote ancestors.

Following are some pictures from our time with the San.

Be well,  
Doug



Petroglyphs of the ancient San people



Petroglyph detail



One of the San fathers looks on while the women and children of the family sing and play.



A young San girl.



Making fire.



Young San boy



One of the mothers in the family.



Another of the mothers.



One of the senior sisters of the family.





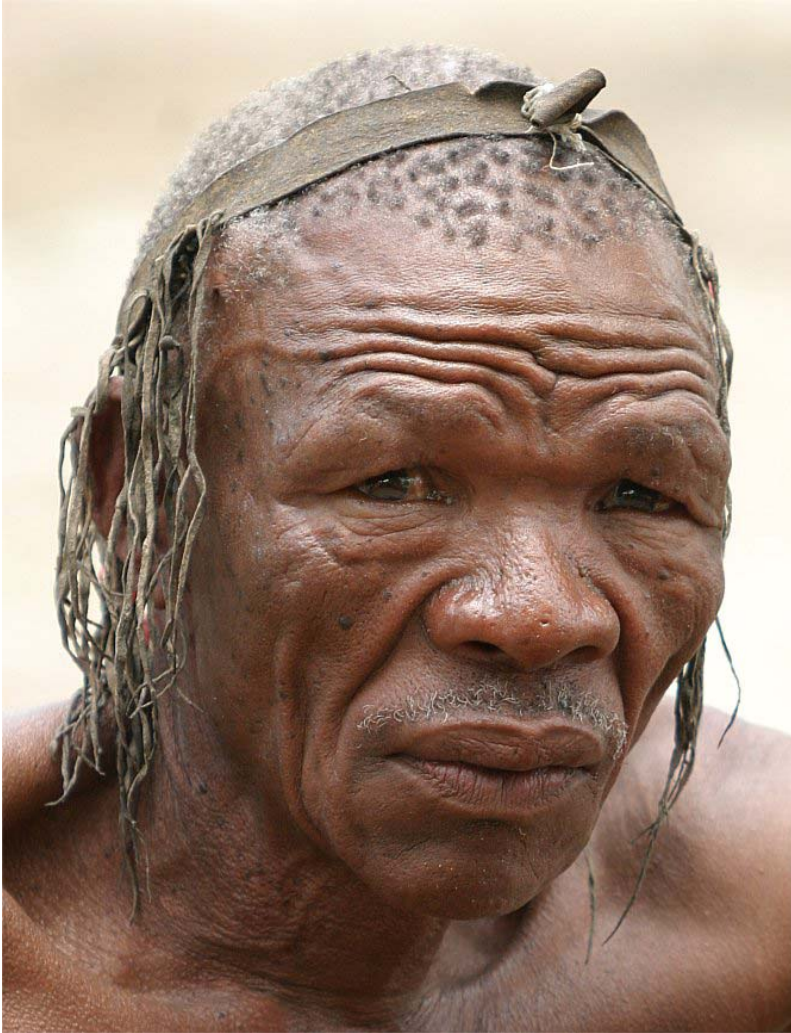
The other senior sister



One of the husbands making rope from tree bark.



Making rope from tree bark. The finished product is incredibly light and strong.



The senior husband in the family.