

FIGEAC/PAYS

Rock art. Michel Lorblanchet expresses his personal views about it on the strength of his experience and knowledge of the subject.

Protecting endangered sites

A group of residents of the *département* of the Lot have recently made a stand for the Australian site of the Burrup endangered by oil exploiters. Do you know this site?

When I was working with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Affairs in Canberra in 1976-77, I was the first to study the Burrup's prehistoric incised images and to excavate their authors' environment. I was leading a team of fifteen people from university. I had been sent to the site in order to examine some endangered images and to make recommendations about their protection.

This dazzlingly rich site boasts more than 100000 rock engravings. We have 2000 of them on record and I have published twelve articles about them, both in French and in English. According to our dating, the site was occupied by kangaroo hunters for 20000 years approximately, then by aborigines who turned to gathering shell-fish 8000 years ago.

This site must absolutely be registered as a World Heritage site.



La conservation du patrimoine inquiète Michel Lorblanchet par ailleurs toujours aussi enthousiaste et passionné.
Photo DDM M.M

A World Heritage site, it is of paramount significance for the aborigines.

Have you been involved in the conservation of any other sites?

In 1992 at Coâ in Portugal, 2000 workmen were involved in the construction of a hydro-electric dam. Some Portuguese

archaeologists pointed out that this project doomed a number of rock engravings to submersion. An international committee, which I joined, was formed. Its reports indicated that on that site, the most important in Europe, paleolithic engravings dating from 25000 years could be found in the open.

Once aware of those facts, the local people started campaigning. The work on the dam was stopped. This is an example to be followed.

Are there any endangered sites in the Lot area?

I participated in the excavation and conservation of Linars cave at Rocamadour, which contained forty tombs dating from the bronze age. It has just been plundered in spite of the protective measures which were initially taken. I also excavated a very rich magdalenian shelter which has now fallen into the hands of plunderers as well. The local authorities of the Lot are now contemplating buying the site. The cave of Roucadour has been exposed to similar hazards. New protective laws are currently being worked out both by the state and by the *département* of the Lot. Everywhere in the world, the race is on between economic development and plunderers on the one hand, and archaeologists, institutional and political authorities on the other hand.

*Propos recueillis
par Monique Marcy.*