

Namibian Artwork Returned After 100 Years

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IN 1909 the Schutztruppe in the then German South West Africa sent out patrols in search of a suitable site to erect a heliograph station.

As they were looking for an area with a mountain and water, the Brandberg was one of the places explored. Under the command of Offizier Jochmann the Schutztruppe discovered something completely different - rock paintings dating back to the stone age 6 000 years earlier.

Jochmann realised the value of the discovery and instructed the photographer, Unteroffizier Emile Bauer to take photos of the paintings and copy them onto tracing

paper. Bauer's photographic equipment consisted among other of glass slides and very heavy tripods, which he managed to transport with a mule dedicated specifically for this task.

The copies were sent to Germany, but Bauer decided to keep a permanent copy in the country and ended up with two rolls of tracing paper measuring 12m in length. Jochmann wrote an article to a newspaper in Berlin, *Die Woche* in 1910 on the discovery.

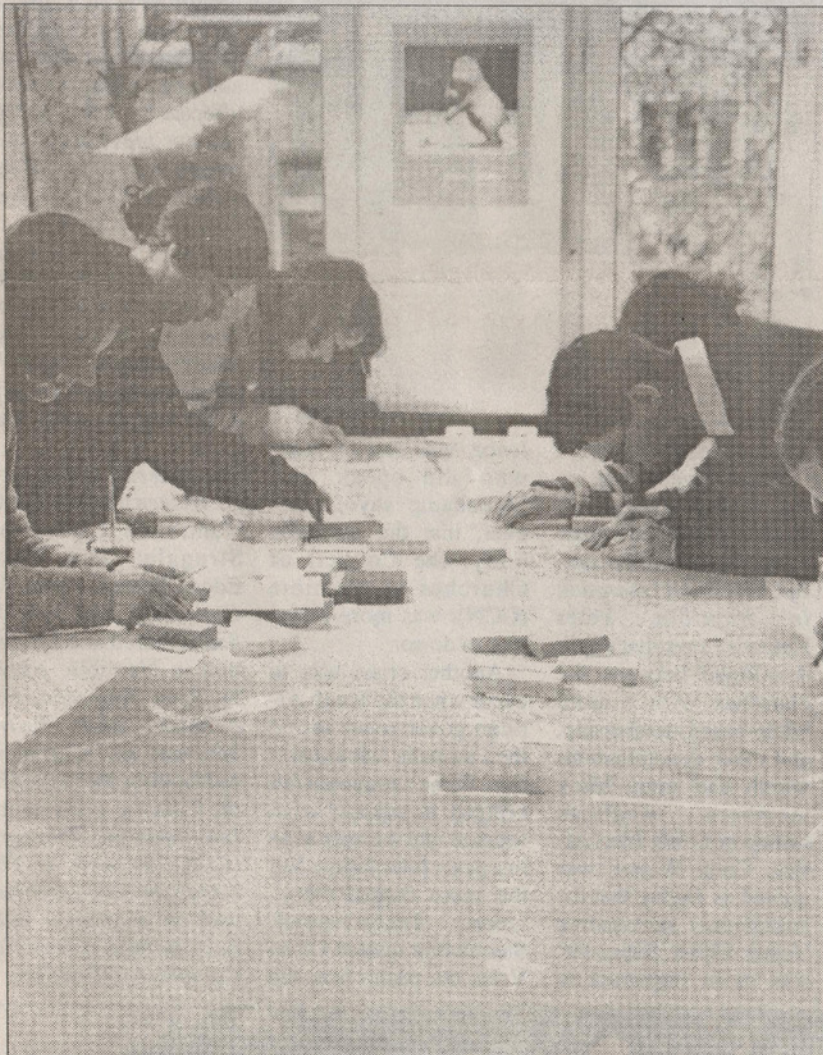
In 1919 Bauer and the other Schutztruppe were repatriated to Germany. He came back two years later with his wife and worked on various farms and at Swakopmund. In 1935 he went back to Germany and took the rolls with him. He died

two years later. War broke out and in 1945 his wife and two children still had the rolls but no food. They tried to sell it to various museums, but no one was interested as the images were not identified and therefore worthless to museums. The rolls remained with the Bauer family.

Bauer's son, Wolfgang, qualified as an engineer and decided to return to Namibia in 1950. He worked for the South West Africa Company at the mines at Brandberg West and Grootfontein. On his return he could not bring the rolls with him, but in 1954 he received special permission from the Democratic Republic of Germany to export the rolls to Namibia as they



BIG MOMENT... The restored rolls of rock art in Namibia were unrolled in the presence of invited guests at the Swakopmund Museum last Friday. Taking the honours was the person who responsible for the restoration, Dr Tilman Lenssen-Erz of the University of Cologne (left). Looking on are the German Ambassador to Namibia, Harald Nestroy and his wife, Angelika (fifth from the left), and Wolfgang Bauer and his wife, Margerete. Bauer is the son of Emile Bauer who made the very first copies of rock art in the country in 1909.



HARD WORK... Students of the University of Applied Sciences Cologne worked 500 hours on restoring the very brittle and torn rolls of tracing paper containing the first copies made of rock art in Namibia. (Photo: courtesy of Dr Tilman Lenssen-Erz)

had no cultural value for the Germans. The rolls were posted to Namibia.

Bauer Jnr. made contact with an expert on rock paintings, Dr E. Scherz who was able to identify the drawings coming from Brandberg, the Bushman Paradise at Spitzkoppe and the farm Ameib near Usakos. Bauer and Scherz decided to hand

over the rolls to Dr Alfons Weber of the Swakopmund Museum for safe keeping. Kept in black plastic bags, the rolls were never touched again for 42 years.

Weber died in 1984 and nobody knew about the rolls and their history until 1996. A committee member of the Sam Cohen Library and Swakopmund Museum, showed the rolls to Dr Tilman Lenssen-Erz, an archaeologist and expert on rock art of the Heinrich Barth Institute at the University of Applied Sciences Cologne, who was in the country working on a book on the Brandberg's rock art. He took the rolls with



ZOOMING IN... A close-up of some of the drawings on the 12 m long roll made in 1909 by Emile Bauer, a photographer with the Schutztruppe.

him to Germany. Nothing was heard from Lenssen-Erz again and the museum thought he had forgotten about the rolls. An e-mail message about two months ago broke the silence with the good news that the rolls had been restored.

Last week Friday, almost 100 years later, the two rolls were finally returned to Namibia by Lenssen-Erz and Bauer and handed back to the Sam Cohen Library where they will be avail-

able for study by students and experts.

Restoring the rolls, in a very torn and brittle condition, proved a new challenge to the institute with ten years of experience in restoring all kinds of documents. It took 500 hours over two months, "but it is still fairly brittle," Lenssen-Erz warned. He said the tracing paper used by Bauer was not meant to be archived. With the assistance of the German Embassy the task could

be completed at a cost of N\$15 000, using very sophisticated and complicated techniques.

Although much better reproductions of Namibia's world famous rock art collection are available, the historic importance of these rolls as the very first reproduction, could not be ignored. After numerous journeys between the two countries the rolls are finally back and destined to last at least another century.