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## THE ROLES OF THOSE WHO SERVE ROCK ART

By B. K. Swartz from [selected writings](#)

**Abstract.** The question that must eventually be asked in the area of rock art recording is "not what recording techniques can be used to document rock art, but what recording methods are best used to achieve certain specific goals of concern to rock art specialists." It is to be argued here that we should proceed to the next level of rock art documentation and that we should determine what rock art goals can be achieved and how by use of known techniques.

In interacting with colleagues and the public in recent years, there seems to be confusion in the priorities of rock art concerns. This is an attempt to clarify the various roles of those who deal with rock art and, from this, highlight some of the confusions. What follows may appear obvious, but it isn't in practice.

Role 1 - Practical, the **managing** of rock art resources. This is undertaking the operations of documenting (here meaning recording in a uniform and consistent pattern), inventorying and accessing.

Role 2 - Sociopolitical, the **conserving** of rock art phenomena for society. This is undertaking the operations of (1) stabilizing, preserving, restoring and protecting the original evidence, (2) replicating high fidelity facsimiles, and (3) documenting (here meaning high fidelity recording to preserve evidence) by generating records (images and descriptions). (It is the writer's view that, in the long term, only alternative three will prove feasible for this role.)

Role 3 - Intellectual, the **researching** of recorded rock art data selected to explain problems or test hypotheses.

Role 4 - Educational, the **interpreting** of rock art phenomena and explaining roles practiced by rock art community (including the above) to the general public.

Role 5 – Informational, the **promoting** of rock art evidence to the public for social awareness

Although the goals of these operations are, functionally, clear some of the operations overlap. Such overlapping should be recognized and noted. The following are examples:

1. The accessing and conserving of rock art evidence by **documenting** as a resource is

confused with **recording** of rock art as a database collected to solve specific problems of inquiry or test hypotheses in conducting research (e.g. see Schaafsma 1985:240-41; Clegg 1991; and Lee 1992:17).

2. Documenting for accessing is a different operation than documenting for conserving. Accessment documentation must be uniform and consistent so that comparable units can be compiled and evaluated. Conservation documentation must be of high fidelity so that evidence can be as fully preserved as possible and archived.

3. Also the general roles of management and conservation themselves are often confused. Management stresses evaluation and accessment, while conservation stresses preservation and curation. Management is often not recognized as a role.

4. Education should explain all roles of those dealing with rock art (including management) and not only interpret the results, but also the methods, of research.

5. The roles of education and protection are inter-connected. Education by site visitation increases risks of damage, requiring greater protection efforts.

6. Like the word documentation (above) another word commonly used in rock art discourse that has two meanings is **interpretation**. The definition of this word by Tilden (1957) conforms to usage in this paper: "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects [or replicas - BKS] by first hand experience, and...illustrative media." However the word has a standardized meaning in scientific inquiry "the inferring of conclusions from observed data" (Swartz 1974:60).

The writer believes that the clarification of these roles and terms in rock art awareness should clarify the goals of our field.

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