

Photography for Rock Art Recording

Good photographs are essential for documenting rock art and its surroundings, as well as for helping other people identify the carvings. It can take time to perfect your technique, so it is worth practising, and looking critically at your photographs to see if they could be improved in any way.

This guidance talks you through what photographs we would like you take as part of the rock art record for each panel (carved rock surface), and offers some tips for taking good rock art images.

What type of camera should I use?

Cameras generally take better quality photographs than mobile devices (mobile phones/tablets). We recommend that you use a digital SLR camera if possible, although Bridge and compact cameras can also take excellent rock art photographs. Some mobiles and tables are also very good, and improving all the time, although they often have less functions than digital cameras. Please note your camera type in the box provided on the form (e.g. DSLR, SLR, Bridge, Compact, mobile phone, tablet).

How to use the scale bar and North arrow

A scale bar and north arrow are crucial, and should be included in every photograph, except the 'Gallery' shots (see below). Each ScRAP Team will be given a 0.5m black and white scale bar, a 10cm colour scale (IFRAO), and a north arrow. If you are not part of a ScRAP Team, please use something that clearly shows the scale of the rock (it is fairly easy to make your own scale bar by measuring and painting a piece of wooden dowling in alternating black and white stripes).

The 0.5m scale bar should be placed face-on to the direction of the photograph, so that the full length of the scale is visible. The scale should be close to the panel, but ideally not actually on it. If you do need to place the scale on the panel, please make sure that it does not cover any carvings.

Use the small colour scale for any close up shots of motifs. These scales are made of light material, and can easily blow away, so you may like to glue something heavy, such as a washer, to the underneath of them.

The north arrow should be placed in the photograph frame, beside the panel if possible. If you need to place it on the rock surface, please take care not to obscure any details of the carvings or rock surface.

Remember to take the scale bar and N arrow with you when you leave – it is very easy to forget them!

What setting should my camera be on?

Set your camera to take high-resolution JPEG images (i.e. large size or best/fine quality, depending on your camera). Ideally, use the highest resolution setting available on your device.

What photographs should I take?

We recommend you take the following photographs for **each panel**. Please note that it is not essential to take all of the following for panels with simple motifs (such as a few cupmarks).

Context

- Four context shots – one from each cardinal point (N, S, E, W, or as close as you get to these) looking towards the panel. Each photograph should aim to show the carved rock within its landscape setting, with the north arrow and scale bar in position. If shadows are cast onto the rock, or access is difficult, the directions the photos are taken from do not need to be exact.
- A context shot that best shows the panel within its setting. If you think that one of your context shots (above) has already captured the best view of the panel, then no need to repeat it.
- If you have a panorama setting on your camera or mobile device, or you have software for stitching photographs to create a panorama, then we also welcome a full 360° view of the rock art and its surroundings. To create a panorama, stand beside the panel and take a series of overlapping photos standing next to the rock and looking outwards from it. The rock does not need to appear in the panorama if it is low-lying.
- There are also various free softwares available that allow you to stitch photos together into a panorama – we recommend Microsoft ICE (Image Composite Editor):
<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/research/product/computational-photography-applications/image-composite-editor/>.

Panel

- A photograph taken perpendicular to the carved surface, with scale bars and N arrow in place (for example if the carved surface is horizontal, the photograph should be taken directly from above, looking downwards).
- At least one good quality photograph (a) with scales and N arrow, and (b) without scales and N arrow, for the ScRAP website 'Gallery'.

Carving details

- Close-up shots **only** of any unusual motifs and/or natural features (please use the IFRAO scale for these shots).

Team (optional)

- Shots of fieldwork in progress where possible.

Please aim to have no more than 30 final images for each panel!

Note:

Please think about the shots you take, and aim for quality rather than quantity. It really helps to use lighting and weather effects to capture a good photo (see our Top Tips). You may want to take more photographs and edit these for your final selection. Also bear in mind that it will take time for your images to upload to the ScRAP online form, so fewer, better photos would be more efficient.

Important Note:

It is vital to keep track of which photos relate to which rock art panel, especially if you are recording several panels in one day. You can do this by noting all the photo number(s) for a particular panel on your **Photography Recording Form**, or in your note book, before moving on to the next panel. The **Photography Recording Form** is on the last page of the paper recording form, and in the *Resources* section of our website. It is also good practice to take a 'blank' shot (e.g. of a piece of paper, which could include the panel name) before starting photographing each panel.

Please include the Panel Name and Number with your record of the image numbers. It is also helpful to add the OS grid reference (OS NGR) as a double check so that we can link the photographs to the recording form, and return to the same panel if necessary.

Top Tips for taking good rock art photographs

- Remember to remove all bags, people, etc from the shots.
- Try not to get your feet, arms, hands, etc in the shot.
- Remember to put the photo scale(s) where they're clear but don't dominate the photo or obscure any of the carvings. For context shots and large-scale photos use a ranging pole (if available). For detailed close up photos use a small (IFRAO) scale.
- Try not to get your own or anyone else's shadow across the rock.
- For vertical photography, ensure the panel fills most of the image. If the panel is small move closer to the stone to take the image.
- If you have a tripod, you may like to use it in poor lighting conditions, in order to get a sharper image.
- Try not to use automatic flash, but do make the most of **lighting conditions** and weather effects – see below.

Making the most of lighting and weather conditions

Lighting can make a dramatic difference to the quality of your photographs and the visibility of the carvings. Carvings that are virtually invisible under certain lighting conditions (particularly in the middle of the day, or on dull, overcast days), can be incredibly clear at other times of day or year when the light is oblique.

- The best times to photograph rock art is in low morning or evening sunlight, or in the winter. You may want to take all your good photos at the beginning and end of the day when the light is better or return to the site when the lighting conditions are better.
- The effect of oblique lighting is even more dramatic when the carvings are wet, so a really good time to take photographs is in low sunshine following a rain shower.
- Sunlight can cause problems by casting partial shadows onto the rock surface (e.g. if you are under trees). Try and get the light consistent on the rock surface, either by waiting for cloud cover, or by artificially shading the rock surface with an umbrella, a piece of material or some clothing.
- If it is a partly cloudy day, find the best angle for the shot and wait for the sun to come out.
- A reflective material such as a silver space blanket, a mirror, or some aluminium foil can be used to increase the light on the carvings.
- For carvings on vertical or near-vertical surfaces, try to work out in advance when they will be in sunlight and, if necessary (and if possible), make a return visit at the best time of day, or when the conditions are ideal.
- Where there is little natural light (e.g. in woodland) a strong torch can be used to provide artificial oblique lighting to good effect.
- If you fancy night photography, you can try shining an artificial light, such as a torch beam, obliquely across the rock surface and recording the image using a long exposure time on the camera. Ideally, mount your camera on a tripod and use the self-timer or remote triggers to minimise camera shake. This can produce excellent results!
- If you have a remote camera flash, positioning the flash near the stones surface to create oblique lighting can also produce excellent results.

Good luck!