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AN INDIAN TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY BLOG

CHAVE DEWOOD

The Konkan Petroglyphs – Chave Dewood

BY KEVINSTANDAGEPHOTOGRAPHY ON MARCH 14, 2019 • (2 COMMENTS)



The start of day two of our weekend exploring the petroglyph sites in the Konkan gave us a stark reminder of just how perilous these sites are, and how in all probably some have already been lost forever.



Laterite mining near the Chave Dewood petroglyph site

A short distance from the Chave Dewood petroglyph site, laterite mining is continuing at a rapid pace, forever scarring the landscape.





In some instances the local government have been able to put a stop to mining that was occurring close to known petroglyph sites. In other instances the government has managed to convince the landowners to erect brick boundaries protecting the sites. What we don't know of course is how many potential new sites are at risk from the mining, it's very much a race against time.

Fortunately for us, Chave Dewood has not been lost forever, and thank goodness for that – it is another amazing site ! The petroglyphs here were discovered very recently in January 2016, are in two distinct sub-sites :

Site 1

Contained within a wall that clearly predates the petroglyph discovery, this site contains a group of nine carvings mostly depicting animals. Dominating the scene is a 3m x 4m life-size depiction of an Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*, also called the greater one-horned rhinoceros) , seemingly in motion with the sense that it is almost leaping forward.



Chave Dewood petroglyphs by boundary wall



Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), also called the greater one-horned rhinoceros. Whilst small pockets of one-horned rhino population still exist in the far north of India and Nepal, they became extinct in the Konkan region a long time ago. I have been trying to determine exactly when that was, but I can't find any reliable sources. Our guides for the weekend suggested that rhinos became extinct in the Konkan around 15,000 BC.

What we don't know of course is whether rhinos were actually roaming the landscape of the Konkan when this petroglyph was created. The detail of it would suggest it was not done from a distant memory, but it's quite possible that it may have been carved from a group that migrated from the north where rhino populations were more abundant. On balance I don't think that is the case, but one has to consider all possibilities.



Many of the other animals at Chave Dewood also have this “in motion” feel to them, and all of them are the outline of the animal with only one front leg and one rear leg visible. However, both ears of each animal do appear to be always depicted.



Deer petroglyph – Chave Dewood





Tiger petroglyph – Chave Dewood



Most of these photographs were taken standing on a wall with my camera on a pole, ably assisted by Vishnu who was taking the shots remotely via my iPhone.



I have subsequently tried to modify some of these image to improve the perspective (so they appear more overhead), and more clearly highlighting the outline of the carvings. It's a relatively easy thing to do with decent resolution photographs and some software, and it removes the temptation to highlight the carvings in-situ by use of chalk or other substance (please do not to this!). Anyway, here are my attempts...



Computer enhanced image of the rhino petroglyph



Computer enhanced image of tiger petroglyph, with another animal and abstract design

Mostly inside the rhino but also surrounding it are elliptical shapes, it's hard to figure out what these are depicting although they seem to occur in pairs. I did wonder if they might be representing footprints.





This is a well known site in the local area, so damage from mining is unlikely. Instead, the main risk here is erosion, and the damage that is being done during the monsoon season. As you can see from the photographs below, the site is on a slope and all the rainwater run-off (a lot of it as this is laterite rock) is being channelled down and through the rhino petroglyph. We have already lost at least 20% of the image, I hope some efforts can be made in the near future to try and alleviate the situation somehow.



Erosion during the monsoon season is taking its toll on the rhino petroglyph



Rhino

head – Chave Dewood

Site 2

A short distance from site 1 at Chave Dewood is another petroglyph site with three human and three animal figures. Sadly erosion here has taken its toll on some of the petroglyphs and they are hard to make out.



The above image is the best preserved and perhaps the most interesting. It consists of a headless figure with straight arms, a bulging belly, knees bent and legs wide open. Between the legs a deep hole has been gouged out, I'm not sure if this was part of the original petroglyph or has been subsequently done.

Although much later in date, I was struck by the similarities between this carving and the Lajja Gauri sculpture I had seen in Badami Museum a few years ago.



Lajja Gauri sculpture, Badami museum, Karnataka

This would appear to be a fertility icon and symbolizes the procreative and regenerative powers of mother earth. Similar mother goddess imagery can also be found on Indus Valley seals, and her worship is/was prevalent in the Deccan. Somewhat intriguing is the fact that Lanja/Lanjika means ‘naked’, but there is also a geographical area in the Konkan called Lanja.

Nearby is the carving of a human figure with arms partially outstretched with an animal on either side. This would appear to be another example and variant of the “Master of Animals” iconography, far better executed examples we saw the previous day at [Barsu Sada](#).





It was quite difficult to determine what some of these animals are, we had a number of theories on-site; hyena, wild boar, possibly even a hippo – more studies and comparisons will be needed to draw any firm conclusions.



A further carving of a human figure was just about still visible, with again animals appearing nearby, although heavily worn away.



Adjacent to this second site at Chave Dewood is a large circle of laterite boulders marking the site of an iron age burial (1500 – 600 BC).



Iron age burial enclosure

Right next to the burial site, yet another reminder of how this landscape is being extensively mined.



Laterite mining next to iron age burial enclosure



Laterite mining next to iron age burial enclosure

This was one of seven petroglyph sites I visited in the Konkan during the course of a weekend.
Here's some quick links to the other sites :