

**OL ARI NYIRO NATURE CONSERVANCY  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT**



Submitted to

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BY  
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December 13, 2012

## **INTRODUCTION**

A two day field trip to assess the archaeological potential of Ol Ari Nyiro Nature Conservancy was made by a team from the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2012 (Drs M'Mbogori & Kiura). Ol Ari Nyiro Ranch sits on 100,000 acres of land and is home to several species of African fauna and flora. The Ranch is privately owned and is located in Laikipia County within the Kenyan Rift Valley.

The visit was a follow up of earlier archaeological assessments which had been made by a team from NMK and the University of Pennsylvania between the year 2002 and 2005 led by Professor Karega Munene and Dr. Kathleen Ryan. Field surveys, surface collections and several test excavations were undertaken during these initial visits and materials deposited with the Archaeology Laboratory at the National Museums of Kenya. However, a copy of the full archaeological report for the previous expeditions was not submitted to the NMK neither to the Conservancy.

## **OBJECTIVES**

At the request of Mrs. Kuki Gallmann (owner of conservancy), the objectives of the visit included but were not limited to the following;

1. Revisit and try to relocate previous archaeological sites.
2. To visit new sites (discovered after 2005)
3. To survey for possible new sites
4. Assess the newly built museum premises and offer advice on archaeological exhibits
5. To try and establish any relationship between the archaeological sites and probable cultural significance of their location in reference to the Mukutan Gorge.
6. To chart way forward in regards to archaeological investigations within the conservancy and its relationship with other archaeological sites within greater rift valley

## **PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK**

To achieve objective 1, the museum team drove around the ranch in the company of Mrs. Gallmann and 2 of her assistants including Mr. Patrick (manager who was also involved with archaeological activities of team led by Prof. Karega) to relocate the archaeological areas which were worked on previously. The task proved to be difficult due to the vegetation cover (overgrown grass and shrubs obstructed the view of the test pits and of archaeological surface artifacts). This was not the case during the earlier archaeological surveys by Prof. Karega's team (Plate1).

However, with the help of Mr. Patrick and use of GPS readings from the previous surveys, the team was able to relocate 5 of the sites (table 1). Two of them were found to be iron working areas as evidenced by the presence of a large number

of iron slags (Plate 2), whilst one of the remaining 2 (Plate 3) was recorded as a midden (in the 2002 field notes). We were unable to establish the archaeological significance of the midden site since we lacked any reliable information from the assistant and the notebooks in our possession.

Table 1: Observed archaeological sites at Ol Ari Nyiro Ranch

Site Location	Coordinates(U TM)	Significance	Year reported /worked	Notes
Dam ya Kondoo	37 N 0210130 0062800	Iron Age- Slag	2003	About 4 areas with iron working
Boma ya Dume	37 N 0210558 0062592	Iron Age- Slag		Several Iron working localities close to each other
Western border	37 N 0216674 00674223	?	2002	No information
Boma (circles)	37 N 0216468 0066605	?	2002	Excavation of a Midden
Shrine/burial	37 N 0211982 0063127	Neolithic/LSA ?	2012	35 stone mounds/circles reported

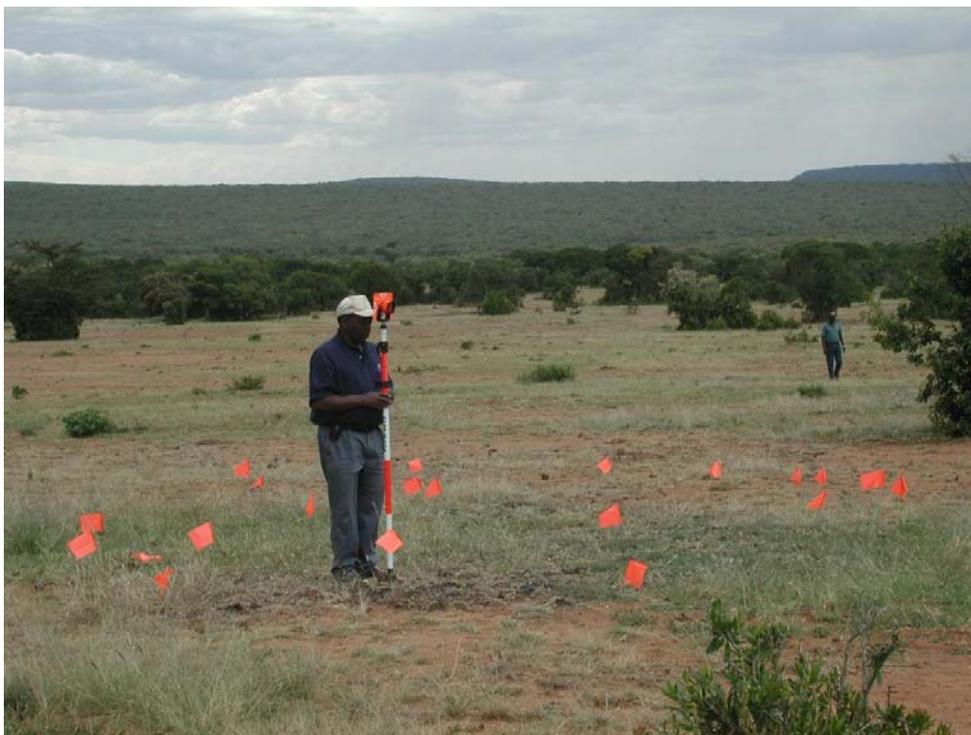


Plate 1: Surface conditions during past excavations



(2-i) Iron Age site at Dam ya Ndume \_2012

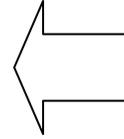


(2-ii) Iron Age site Dam ya Ndume \_2003

(2-iii) One of the iron slags in the Iron Age site

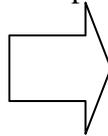


Plate 2 (I,ii,iii): Dam ya Ndume Iron Age Site



(3i) Looking for previously excavated archaeological sites

(3ii): Over grown grass on one test pit where several artifacts were recovered



Plates 3 (I,ii): 2002 Midden excavations

Due to time limitation, the team was not able to visit Jangili cave whose excavations produced obsidian artifacts, pottery and bones (as indicated in the field note books as well as materials stored at the Archaeology Laboratory, NMK). This site is located far apart from the previous 5 and it seems to be of earlier periods- probably belonging to Later Stone Age or Neolithic periods.

### **SITES DISCOVERED AFTER 2005 EXCAVATIONS**

To the north of the Ranch Center, Mrs. Gallmann led the team to a newly discovered site. This site just like the other sites is covered by overgrown vegetation hence making it difficult to clearly see its contents. Nevertheless, the team examined the site and found out that it contained both stone circles (Plate 4) on the left side of the road and stone mounds (Plate 5) on the right side of the road.



Plate 4: Partial view of a stone circle

The stone borders that were used for building the mounds are quite large in comparison to the ones for stone circles.



Partial view of a stone mound on the right side of the



Single border from a mound

Plate 5: Stone mounds

The circles and the mounds are separated in the middle by an area which may have been used as a shrine. This is evidenced by two unique stones. Though no conclusive evidence is available, one is tempted to suspect that one stone is a symbol of a male while the other symbolizes a female (Plate 6). The symbolic stones are separated by a distance of about 4 meters. While the male symbol is

erected on the ground, the female one is erected on, and supported by smaller stones such that it does not touch the ground on any part (Plate 7). This shows that the presence of these stones was not accidental but intentional.



“Male” Symbol

“Female” Symbol

Plate 6: Possible shrine



Support for “female”  
symbolic stone

Plate 7: Base of the “female” stone symbol

It was however difficult to map out the circles and mounds and to have a clear visual impression of their set up. Moreover, the variation in the burials could indicate possibility of different sexes, age or status within the burials. These burials may be similar to others which have been documented further north in the Lake Turkana Basin including those of Namorutunga and Jarigole where there is clear indication of differences in status, age and/or sex within the burials.

### **POSSIBILITY OF FINDING NEW SITES**

The general landscape of Ol Ari Nyiro, presents both savannah and woodland environments which would have been suitable for prehistoric populations. The ranch is within the Kenyan Rift Valley system a region that has yielded thousands of archaeological sites including some of the oldest fossils and stone tools in the world. Similarly, the Ol Ari Nyiro land has never been cultivated hence making preservation of prehistoric sites possible.

Although only Iron Age and Later Stone Age/Neolithic sites have so far been reported in this ranch, other older sites have been reported not too far from Ol Ari Nyiro. For example, one of the oldest fossils in the world *Orrorin tugenensis*, a 6 million year old hominid was found in the neighboring County of Baringo while Early Stone Age Acheulian tools have been found at Lewa downs in the neighboring Isiolo County.

It is highly probable that proper and systematic surveys would lead to discoveries of new sites which are likely to give further insight into human and cultural behavior evolution through a possible chronological sequencing of earliest humans as evidenced by *orrorin tugenensis*.

### **NEW MUSEUM PREMISES**

A brief discussion though not conclusive was held regarding the museum premises but further advice will be offered once the range of archaeological sites and materials is established.

### **LINK BETWEEN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MUKUTAN GORGE**

The stone circles, mounds and the assumed shrine are in line with the Mukutan Gorge (Plate 8). It is not clear as to whether the prehistoric people who used the shrine chose its location in reference to the Gorge or if there was other driving factors.



Plate 8: Mukutan Gorge

A clear picture of this would be possible after a survey has been done to map out the location of sites and other cultural features in reference to the Gorge. Moreover, the area within the Gorge offers serenity which can possibly draw ritual undertakings. In addition, this area is resourceful both in water and food and thus the possibility of habitation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the above findings, it is clear that more archaeological work is needed at Ol Ari Nyiro if any conclusive results are to be reached. All the objectives were partially achieved but in general and a more vivid picture of archaeological tasks has been attained. The most obvious evidence of Iron working within the ranch is iron slag. Small quantities of Iron slag were seen in several localities. There was no evidence of furnace although this could be due to the dense vegetation especially grass at the time of the survey. No artifacts were seen on the ground although there is evidence of the same in the collection previously excavated and surface collected by the team lead by Professor Karega. Some of the artifacts identified in the collection include microliths and cores made from different types of rocks including obsidian, basalt and quartz. Obsidian is not readily available within the vicinity but certainly is within the central rift (tens of kilometers from within). Volcanic rocks are however readily found. No pot sherds were found during the survey. Again this can be attributed to the dense vegetation during the

visit. However, pottery is reported in the collection previously excavated and collected by the same team. Burial mounds were previously reported by the same team well as other archaeologists.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Before any new/further excavation work can be undertaken at Ol Ari Nyiro, it will be necessary to do the following:

1. Facilitate analysis of all the materials that were previously excavated from the ranch. This includes the lithics (stone tool artifacts, pottery, fauna and geological material).
2. Clear the areas with archaeological sites to enable collection of datable materials
3. Involve an archaeological team to conduct systematic surveys within the ranch during a dry season (when the land is bear of grass).
4. Map out all the sites in the ranch in order to understand their spatial distribution and its relationship with topographical features.
5. Involve a multi-disciplinary team of experts who will bring to bear the different aspects of biological and cultural understanding in relation to human habitation of this area from the earliest to the most recent times.
6. Develop a theme and storyline for the proposed museum