From the Rock Art Mobile Project (*http://rockartmob.ncl.ac.uk*)

Bringing Rock Art to your Mobile Phone
In *Archaeology in Northumberland*
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Northumberland is home to a rich corpus of ancient rock art, or cup and ring markings with over 1000 known examples. This incredibly enigmatic and strangely beguiling part of Northumberland's rich archaeological heritage is, however, sadly often difficult to find and devoid of any on-site visitor interpretation. Researchers at Newcastle University have been working on an innovative project to make a selection of these carvings more accessible by developing a website designed for access *in situ* on mobile phones. Three sites in Northumberland (Lordenshaw, near Rothbury, and Weetwood Moor and Dod Law, both near Wooler) were chosen for use in this project in consultation with local heritage agencies and on information regarding both their current state of conservation and potential future threats. The mobile experience encourages visitors to meaningfully explore the archaeological landscape at these sites, highlighting key points of interest through a range of images, text, and audio.

Workshop participants engaging with rock art at Lordenshaw

The twelve-month Rock Art Mobile Project (RAMP), funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, builds on existing work collected by digitisation of the Beckensall Archive (http://rockart.ncl.ac.uk), and the Northumberland and Durham Rock Art Pilot (NADRAP; http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/era/). RAMP was keen to translate some of the core data from these resources into a format friendly to both mobile phones and the rock art novice. To this end, RAMP held a series of workshops in Rothbury and Wooler with members of the public who had an interest in the countryside and/or rock art. We wanted to discover how people experience and use the rock art landscape, and to explore which types of material would be most appropriate for the audience and mobile phone deployment. The workshops, which involved visiting rock art panels, were enthusiastically attended, and observations and comments directly influenced our design. We heard about the frustrations of not being able to find

rock art, and saw the enjoyment of participants during conversations around rock art, especially on speculative discussions on the meaning and social context of rock art, despite of, or perhaps due to, the lack of definitive answers. The insights gained during the workshops are realised in the final design by the incorporation of dialogue and interactivity, along with clear and accurate directions to locate the rock art panels. This digital navigation will be aided by the addition of limited signage, which will be mostly added to existing waymarker posts at the sites.

Testing the RAMP prototype at Horseshoe Rock, Lordenshaw

Naturally, the rural environment impacted the design too. Rock art's remote locations can be challenging for mobile technology thanks to varying network availability, and the even more variable weather – strong winds, driving rain and brilliant sunshine, often all in the same day!

As RAMP was keen to make the mobile experience available to as many people as possible, we decided to create a mobile website rather than developing a platform-specific app, e.g. for an iPhone. Along with enjoying a larger user base, this approach should provide increased longevity in comparison to an app – a key consideration in the rapidly evolving field of mobile technology. Comprehensive testing of signal strength for the five major mobile providers confirmed that a mobile website is viable at all three targeted rock art sites. i.e. if a phone is capable of accessing the Internet, then visitors will be able to access the RAMP content whilst on site.

Our primary aim is for visitors to discover the carved panels, perhaps opportunistically, and through the mobile experience engage with the panels and landscape, developing a greater understanding and awareness of the rock art landscape.

Rock Art on Mobile Phones will be launching in early July 2011, so if you are visiting rock art in the North East this summer, be sure to take your phone and look out for the RAMP logo! Until then you can follow progress and get involved via the RAMP Blog at http://rockartmobile.wordpress.com or send your thoughts via Twitter to @RockArtMobile.

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Maxwell D., Mazel A., Galani A. and Sharpe K., (2011) *Bringing Rock Art to your Mobile Phone,* in *Archaeology in Northumberland. http://rockartmob.ncl.ac.uk*