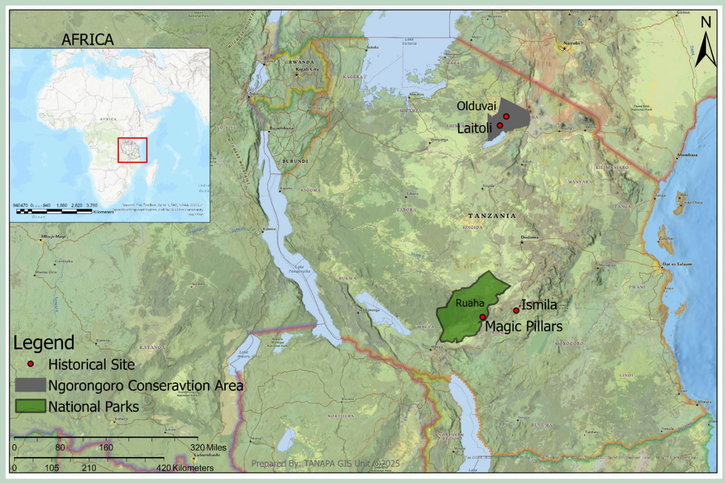
BRIDGING CONTINENTS TO SAFEGUARD DEEP TIME: A CALL FOR COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AT ISIMILA STONE AGE SITE

ICOM international Council of museums Belgium

BACKGROUND (Introduction to the poster)

Isimila Stone Age Site in southern Tanzania is a globally significant archaeological and geological heritage site, preserving Acheulean tools and stratified paleo-landscapes dating back nearly 300,000 years. This poster highlights the urgency of addressing threats from erosion, and the need for renewed international research partnerships based on equity, capacity-sharing, and community engagement.



SIGNIFICANCE OF ISIMILA

- Thousands of Acheulean tools found in ancient riverbeds and terraces
- Evidence of hominin innovation and possible social organization
- Part of broader East African paleo-land scape (like Olduvai, Laetoli)
- Stratigraphic layers useful for studying long-term environmental change
- Education, recreation and memorial value



NATURAL PILLARS – A GEOLOGICAL HERITAGE UNDER THREAT

- Iconic sandstone pillars shaped by Pleistocene erosion
- Scientifically valuable for understanding paleo-climate and sedimentation
- Facing gully erosion, weathering, and structural instability

- Site currently managed under Ruaha National Park by Tanzania National Parks (TANAPA)
- Conservation efforts needed: bioengineering,drone surveys, 3D scanning
- Call for researchers to support technical assessments & preservation

NEW DISCOVERY: MAGDA MAGIC PILLARS (RUAHA NATIONAL PARK)

- In 2025, newly identified sandstone formations in Ruaha, nicknamed “Magda Magic Pillars”
- Visual and geological similarities to Isimila formations
- No prior archaeological or geological study conducted
- Research needed to:
- Date the pillars and compare with Isimila
- Analyze their geomorphological origin
- Assess potential cultural or environmental links
- Emphasizes the need for region-wide geological and heritage surveys



CHALLENGES TO CONSERVATION

- Erosion driven by climatic change, drainage issues, and visitor movement
- Sediment loss impacting both natural and cultural layers
- Limited technical and financial resources for active mitigation
- Existing efforts by TANAPA: fencing, signage, monitoring — but more advanced tools are needed
- Need for remote sensing, terrain modeling, and real-time erosion monitoring



EQUITABLE INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

- Past: Dominance of foreign-led research with little local participation
- Present: Push for African-led research and data sovereignty • Proposals:
- Joint field schools with African and global universities
- FAIR data protocols (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable)
- Cross-training in 3D documentation, digital archiving, drone use
- Shared metadata in English & Kiswahili

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & DECOLONIAL HERITAGE

- Local communities serve as guides and custodians of knowledge
- Importance of oral history, indigenous land-use, and spiritual ties
- Decolonial approach: from collection to connection
- Co-creation of materials in local languages
- Establish Community Research & Heritage Centre at Isimila

VISION: MODEL FOR FUTURE HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

- Integrating archaeology, tourism, education, and climate resilience
- Embedding conservation in National Park structure
- Cross-linking between sites (Isimila & Magda Magic Pillars)
- Creation of open-access digital archive
- Development of long-term erosion control strategies
- Call for scientific diplomacy across continents to preserve deep-time heritage



CONCLUSION

Isimila is more than stones; it is a record of shared human legacy. To preserve it — and explore new discoveries like the Magda Pillars — we need international solidarity grounded in local leader-ship. This poster invites scientists, heritage bodies, and communities to act together now.

Presenter and Author

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