

A Preliminary Study of Cave, Rock-Shelters and Waterfalls in Owerre-Ezukala, Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study of caves and rock-shelters over time has been of immense value to both archaeologists and tourism specialists alike. To the former, they provide information on the habitation pattern of the past occupants, including their dietary habits and religious beliefs; while the latter perceive caves and rock-shelters as a means of experiencing ecotourism, learning and relaxation. Waterfalls are also appreciated for their aesthetics and as valued source of ecotourism experience. This preliminary study is aimed at bringing to limelight the tourism potentialities of the cave/rock-shelters and waterfalls in our study location. We used GPS along with direct observation/interview to locate the site, identify their inherent features and subsequently map them.

Introduction

In the earliest times, man inhabited caves and rock-shelters and left behind indelible marks like cave painting and inscriptions. These evidences of man's past activities have helped immensely in archaeological reconstruction/interpretation of caves/rock-shelters. The study of caves, as argued by Ibeanu (2006), enables researchers to observe most artifacts and eco-facts *in-situ* since they may not have been altered by subsequent human activities. Such study can equally furnish researchers with useful insight and information on the environmental conditions obtainable within the area as well as paleo-ecological and paleo-climatic changes (Ibeanu and Umeji, 2001). The study of cave deposits resulting from natural occurrences; animal droppings etc are veritable sources of information on early human subsistence patterns and changes in vegetation of the area. In the words of Murty (1985) caves/rock-shelters are major source of information on the environment and adaptive mechanism of Paleolithic hunter-gatherers in Africa and parts of the world. Caves have very tasking and intriguing scenic landscapes that form part of tourism products and attractions that could be harnessed for tourism development. Nevertheless, this aspect of nature-based tourism is yet to be fully explored in Nigeria.

It must be stressed that Nigeria is rich in archaeological and ethnographic resources and these constitute valuable eco-cultural tourism products. The artistic creativity of the Nok culture and Daima in the north, the ingenuity of Igbo Ukwu, Benin and Ife bronze and brass craftsmen in the south as well as the numerous arts and crafts, festivals and rich cultural traditions of the over 350 ethnic groups in the country, are worthy testimonies of her immense tourism potentials. These resources are diverse in nature and when harnessed for tourism purposes can generate income for government,

improve the living standard of host community and create job opportunities. It is very appalling to note that most of these resources are still untapped. Added to this is the fact that a lot of them are being gradually destroyed by development projects, including road and dam construction (Oluwole, 2006). Hence, effort should be made to avoid the wanton destruction of these heritage resources while preserving them for tourism development. As rightly noted by Olatunji (2004), ...archaeological relics and monuments, including caves, remain magnetic pulls for tourists worldwide. A notable example is the astonishing life-size paintings of bulls, horses, deer and wild boars on the walls and cliffs of the caves at Altamaria, Northern Spain.

It is the belief of the researchers that if 'Ogba-Ukwu' (cave) in Owerre-Ezukala is developed, it will no doubt attract tourists and subsequently provide benefits to developers, the community and other stakeholders. It should be noted that *Ogba-Ukwu* with four rock-shelters, two waterfalls and other intriguing features is a wonder to behold. This preliminary survey will hopefully provide a springboard for further studies and subsequent development of the site into a viable tourism centre. We used on-the-site observation, Global Positioning System (GPS) and in-depth interviews to elicit information. Measurements and photographs of the notable features within the area were taken; while the features (rock-shelters, waterfalls and cave) were further geo-referenced. The information collected gave an insight into how the host community perceived the cave and waterfall.

Background Information on the Study Area

The cave, locally called 'Ogba-Ukwu', is located in Owerre-Ezukala town in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Owerre-Ezukala is made up of eight villages namely: Iyiafor (where the cave is located), Ihe, Mkputu, Dete, Isiaho, Okpota, Ugwadi and Ideokpu.

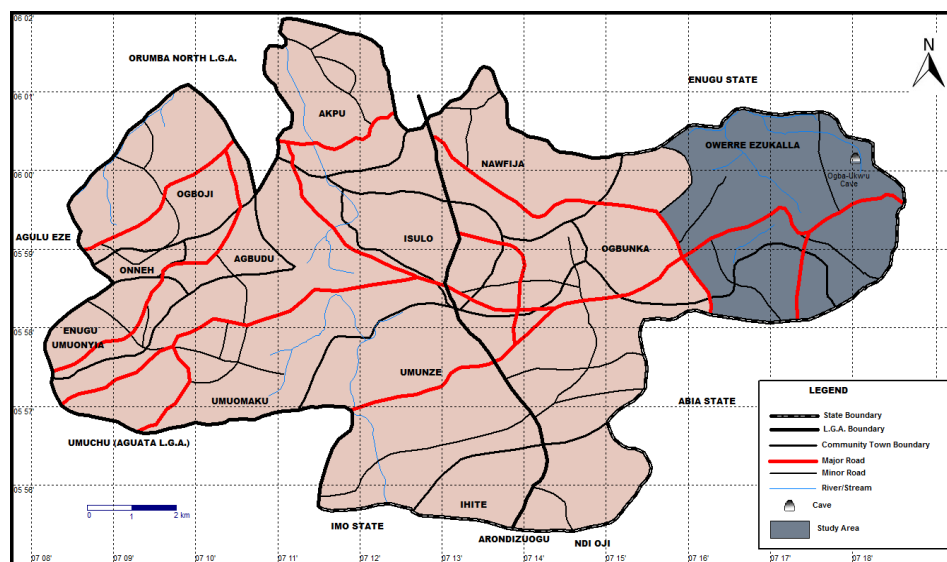


Figure 1: Map of Orumba South L.G.A showing Owerre-Ezukala.

The town falls within the tropical rainforest, but anthropogenic activities have now turned it into a derived savannah zone. The vegetation includes mainly grasses including elephant grass (*Penisetum spp.*) and stunted trees such as *Velvet tamarind* and *Acioa barteri*. The valley where the rock-shelters, waterfalls and cave are located have patches of groves depicting the natural vegetation cover, characterized by such trees as 'Oji' (*Chlorophora excels*), 'Udara' (*Chrysophyllum albidum*), 'Ogbu' (*Ficus spp.*), 'Oha' (*Pterocarpus osun*), 'Ngwu' (*Albizia ferruguiea*), 'Egbu' (*Alastonia boonei*), 'Ukwa' (*Treculia africana*), 'Akpu' (*Ceiba pentanda*) and 'Utu' (*Landalphia florida* and *Landalphia dulei*). Others are Avocado pear and Guava (*Psidium guajava*) both of which show evidence of human action in the environment. The peoples' economic activities include palm oil processing, cassava processing, yam cultivation, and hunting etc. The people are also well known for stone crushing.



Plate 1: A Cross Section of the Vegetative Cover.

Legends are often used to explain historical events, processes or relationships. Major events and/or inexplicable occurrences are often attributed to quasi-historical figures like a hunter or an adventurous farmer; who may personify social groups, or processes but cannot be demonstrated to have had historical existence. Ethnographic sources revealed that the Ogba ukwu was discovered by a hunter (whose name could not be traced), who convinced the people initially that the cave was the abode of the earth goddess; hence, the cave is revered. However, the peoples' perception about cave changed over time, and they came to understand that it is just a rock formation suitable for rest, sightseeing and educational purposes. The cave is presumed to be the largest in Southeastern Nigeria.

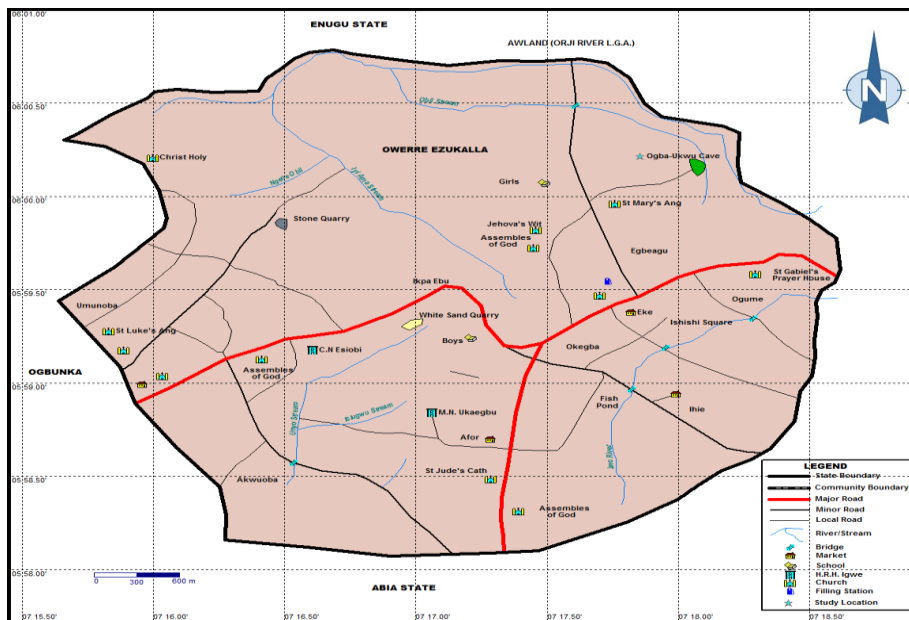


Figure 2: Map of Owerre-Ezukala Showing Ogba-Ukwu Cave.

Description of Owerre-Ezukala Cave and Waterfalls

The cave and waterfalls represent potential nature-based tourism attractions that are capable of captivating tourist interests when developed. Ogba-Ukwu is found within the farming area, a walking distance from the village settlement. It is located on Latitude 6° 02' North of the Equator and Longitude 7° 19' East of the Greenwich Meridian; a distance of 3.058km from Anambra-Abia trunk 'A' road. Other notable features in and around the site are the rocky path and surrounding hills found a few kilometers away and the staircases leading to the cave. The uncompleted building of a proposed hotel believed to be built by Nollywood filmmakers, the grading of the road leading to the cave, and wire fence erected by the villagers to ensure the safety of visitors etc, attest to the growing interest to harness the site for tourism.



Plate 2: The Signpost at the Entrance to the Cave



Plate 3: The 73 Staircases Leading Down the Cave

Four rock-shelters were identified and studied within the study area. The first is 162.46 metres above sea level and 15.6 metres wide; the second which hosts a waterfall is 162.8 metres above sea level and 15.9m wide; while the third and fourth rock-shelters measure 30.65m and 39.90m in width, respectively. The cave is only visible immediately after the fourth rock-shelter and the entrance is 3.75 meters high while the width is 2.4 meters. Upon entering the cave, one finds a spacious apartment, large enough to accommodate up to 500 persons at a time, and eight tunnels leading to different directions. The numerous cavities in the cave may have resulted from the formation of stalagmites and stalactites. However, no artifacts were found within the cave and rock-shelters except recent human residues. Geologically and geomorphologically, the walls of the cave and rock-shelters were formed in a sedimentary rock, and they contain mainly sandstones.

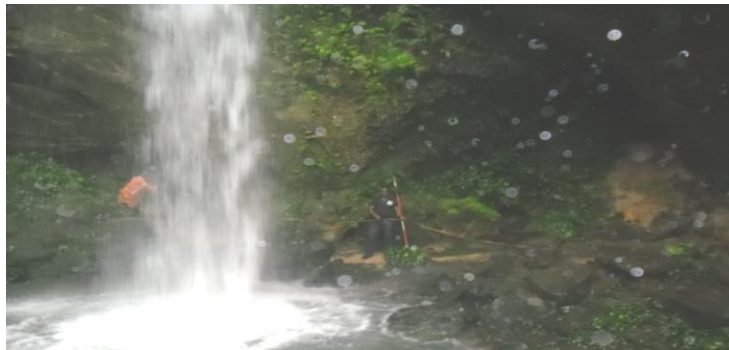


Plate 4: The Waterfall/Pool within the Site

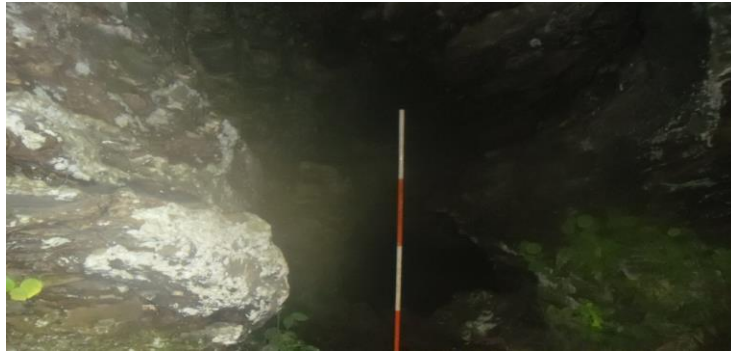


Plate 5: The Entrance to the Cave



Plate 6: The Interior Part of the Cave

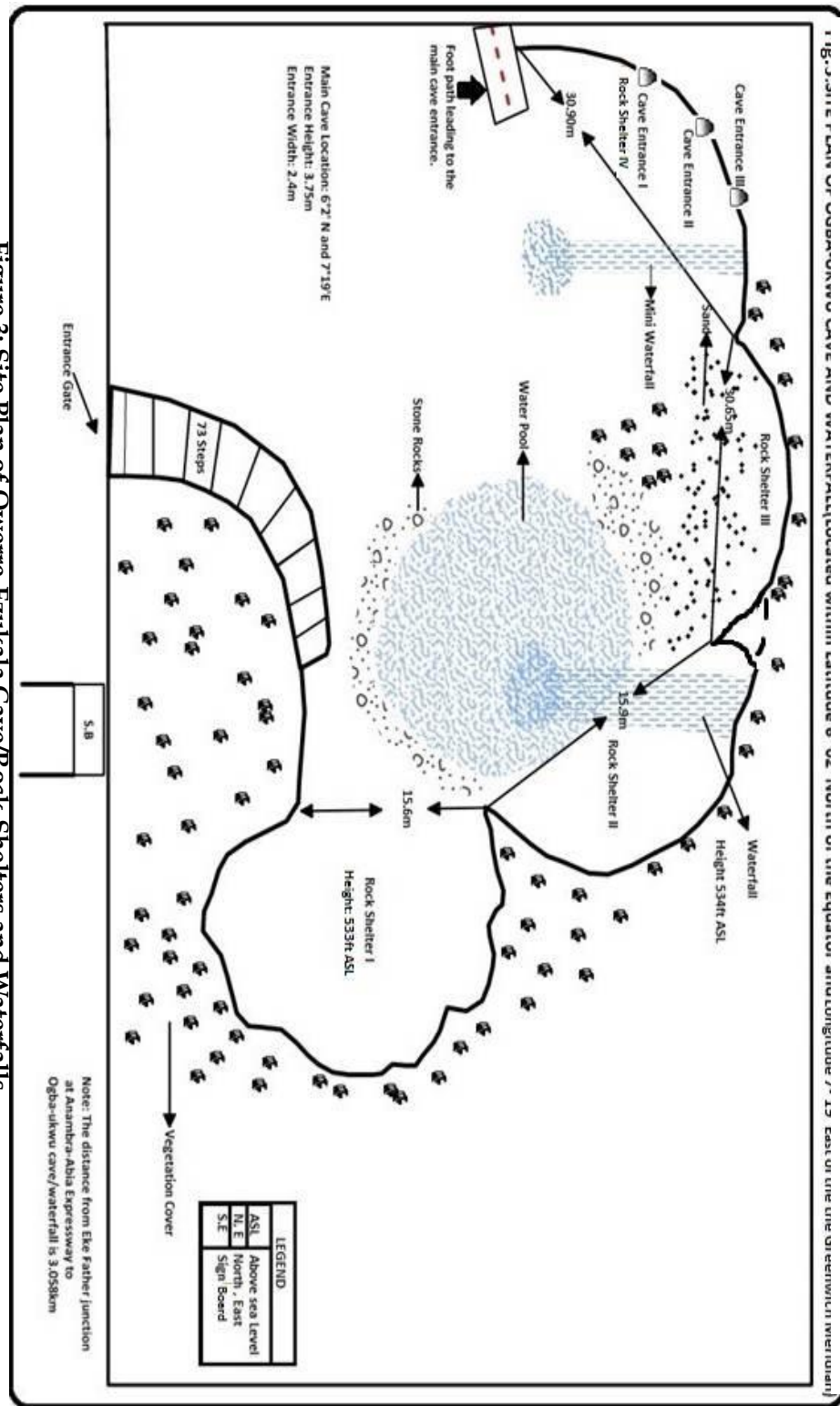


Figure 3: Site Plan of Owerre-Ezukala Cave/Rock-Shelters and Waterfalls

The Importance of Cave/Rock-Shelter and Waterfall to Archaeology and Tourism

Caves and rock-shelters are of great value to archaeology and tourism because they double as cultural heritage and eco-tourism destinations. As Garuba (1988), rightly contended, archaeological sites are sometimes synonymous with tourist centres due to their potentials, which usually place them within the same qualification or requisite spectrum.

Caves serve as a habitation site in the past and are believed to preserve the cultural sequence of human occupations that made use of the cave at some point in time. For this reason, archaeologists have been, and still are, interested in caves in order to reconstruct past activities of man using recovered artifacts and ecofacts, which are embedded *in-situ*. Aside the above, caves and rock-shelters can provide useful insight on paleoecological and paleoclimatic changes (Ibeanu and Umeji, 2001). At the same time the study of caves can help archaeologists in deciphering the belief system of the former occupants. It should be noted that caves in some parts of the world are abodes of the gods and as such, they are revered. The study can as well throw light on the farming system of the host community as the presence of waterfall within cave locations, usually serve irrigation purposes. Ibeanu (2006) noted that in Okigwe cuesta region, some of the caves identified and studied revealed evidence of farming and hunting activities as well as ritual performances. Among such caves are Okpuchukwu cave of Otamkpa and Uhuchukwu of Ahaba Imenyi as well as Isi-Ume cave of Ugwuogu of Uturu, which provided evidence of farming activities. Expectedly, he discovered artifacts within the caves such as manila, which was used as currency in the past and polished stone axes.

Furthermore, archaeologists have over the years recovered materials useful in the reconstruction of past activities of man in caves/rock-shelters. Shaw in 1974 recovered archaeological data from Iwo Eleru rock-shelter, using his finds, he clearly demonstrated early human occupation of the forest zone of West Africa as well as the transition from purely hunting and gathering way of life to possibly domestication of plants and animals.

Furthermore, some authors consider cave tourism as one of the oldest form of geotourism (Bourne, *et. al.* 2008). Geotourism is a form of natural area tourism that specifically focuses on geology and landscape (Newsome and Dowling, 2010:4). This form of tourism attractions are being developed around the world primarily as a tool for the development of local and regional communities and income generation. Humans have visited and appreciated caves for a very long time. Due to their connection with water, some caves had some degree of significance to the host community (not only for their ability to store water, but also for their beauty); they are visited for a number of reasons. Kim, *et. al.* (2008) noted that cave tourism has gained popularity in recent years; placing the main purpose of cave tourists' visit on socialization or escape from their work place or everyday routines. Ethnographic sources revealed that younger people in particular showed

stronger interest in cave tourism resources than the older generation. Cave tourism experience may involve visiting the cave as part of an organized tour group or as a self guided experience.

Notable cave destinations in the world include: South Africa's Cango caves (offering something for novice and more experienced spelunkers alike); Puerto-Princesa underground River in the Palawan, Philippines (offering tour boats sightseeing); the Waitomo Glow-worm cave in New Zealand (offering boat trip through the grotto chamber providing an up-close look at the unique and natural light show); the Barton Creek cave in the Central American nation of Belize (offering amazing human remains and guided canoe cruises through the cave); the Harrison's cave on the Caribbean Island of Barbados (offering many larger tunnels and chambers filled with smooth and colourful rocks); and Phong Nha cave in the northern part of Central Vietnam (offering special domed grottos and unique rock formations) (Lew, 2012).

The *Ogba-Ukwu* (cave), rock-shelters and waterfalls in Owerre-Ezukala can also be harnessed for tourism. The cave/rock-shelters and waterfalls have very exciting landscape that can hold tourists spellbound if harnessed and developed. It is instructive to say that sightseeing and adventurous tourists are always attracted and motivated by unusual phenomena (the concept of pull and push factors); hence caves and their associated features stand out as veritable source of awe and adventure. Recreational activities such as caving require specific landscapes or geological environments (Gray, 2004). Caves cater for the adventurous visitor; they provide an excellent educational opportunity for tourists to experience geology or to understand geomorphology and environmental changes through time. In spite of its primordial state, *Ogba-Ukwu* hosts a number of visitors particularly during public holidays or festive seasons. Consequently, the cave has brought some economic benefits to Owerre-Ezukala in the form of entrance fees, income generated through accommodation and/or home-stays, transportation, guiding activities, food and souvenirs. Oral sources revealed that the people organize a picnic/carnival every last Saturday of the month of May each year in honour of the earth goddess associated with the cave during which they have cultural displays. Traditional dishes, tapioca and other local cuisines are commonly prepared and served to grace the occasion. This way, indigenous culture is preserved and promoted for posterity.

Preservation of Owerre-Ezukala Cave/Rock-Shelters and Waterfalls

The need to preserve the rich resources around man (whether natural or cultural) cannot be over-emphasized. This is because over time they give man a sense of belonging and say a lot about who he is to the outside world. As Sowunmi (2009) posits, knowledge of the environmental setting of man is essential in order to obtain a fuller understanding of man and his cultural development through time in view of the close relationship between man

and his environment. For this reason Okpoko (2001) argued that there is every need to protect them from the assault of industrial pollution and physical degradation and aesthetic blights that currently characterized the development process in cities and rural environments. It is therefore rational to say that the cave/rock-shelters and waterfalls in Owerre-Ezukala be harnessed and promoted for sustainable development.

It is also proper to commend the host community for their little effort so far in preserving the cave. To help discourage mass visitation, the locals charge a high admission fee of over N3, 000 and visitation is by permit only. Furthermore, the age-grades engage in periodic clean-up of the path leading to the cave and in addition maintain the staircases.

It is pertinent to bring the *Ogba-Ukwu* to the attention of National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) and Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC), the agencies charged with the responsibility to preserve our national heritage and develop tourism, respectively. It is encouraged that the site and its features be listed on the National Register of Historic property and as soon as possible be declared a monument. This will help to avoid what Nkakenyi, (1990) referred to as ...disaster in the cultural history of a nation, and this may hinder cultural awareness in the country. Furthermore, supporting facilities such as access roads, accommodation and transport conveyances should also be provided to aid the developmental process. For instance, the nearest hotel to the site is located at Ezira town, a neighbouring town, which is few kilometers away from the study area. Once the above issues are addressed, the site will attract both domestic and international tourists; and will no doubt, place Owerre-Ezukala in the national tourism map.

Conclusion

This paper to a large extent has been able to throw light on the significance of caves/rock-shelters and waterfalls to both archaeology and tourism. There is no gainsaying that caves play a vital role in understanding the behavioural pattern of past human population while serving as tourist destinations. It is imperative that caves should be adequately preserved and harnessed because of their archaeological and tourism potentialities and benefits to the host community. Doing this entails enlightening the local people on the importance of caves, involving them in the developmental process so as to ensure sustainability.

Ogba-Ukwu has a long history and potentialities that can be improved upon for cave tourism development and promotion. While the cave awaits government intervention, it can be visited more often by small groups with local guide providing valuable information to enrich their experience. Such visits may take a number of days to enable the tourists enjoy other cultural practices and indigenous knowledge systems within and around the host community. It must be stressed that visit to caves provide holistic

experiences as visitors learn not only about the caves and the associated features, but also the way of life and traditions of the hosts.

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