

PRELIMINARY STUDY OF AFFIA CAVE, WATERFALL AND NATURAL BRIDGE IN OKPATU, ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

Caves and waterfalls abound in most parts of Igboland. They are the rich nature-induced attractions, which when developed will not only bring development, but also revenue to the destinations in which they are located. Enugu State is endowed with natural and cultural tourism resources located across the state, all of which can produce a distinctive tourism industry capable of generating income and raising the living standard of the local people. This study is aimed at bringing to limelight the cave, waterfall and natural bridge in Okpatu, Udi Local Government Area (L.G.A) of Enugu State. The research employed reconnaissance survey, interviews and direct observation to elicit information in the study community. Preliminary findings revealed that the sites have great potentialities, given the scenic attractions, rich heritage resources in the community and their proximity to already existing attractions within the visitor domain (including the standing furnaces in Ibite-Okpatu and the Awhum Monastery with a cave). It is proposed that the sites be developed so as to ensure improved visitation to the area. Local participation should also be encouraged to ensure sustainability of such development.

Keywords: Cave, Waterfall, Tourism, Potentials, Development

INTRODUCTION

Many natural and cultural sites which are veritable sources of income and capable of raising the standard of living of the various communities where they are found in different parts of the world, are being destroyed in Nigeria due to human activities, including farming, road construction, with little or no consideration on the adverse effect of such activities on our heritage. Nigeria is blessed with avalanche of resources of different kinds, but the implication of the gross neglect is that they are gradually being lost to posterity. Enugu State is endowed with natural and cultural tourism resources located all over the state, which when harnessed can produce a distinctive tourism industry

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capable of generating income and raising the living standard of the local communities (Okonkwo and Odum 2009). In Southeastern Nigeria for instance, many sites and features have been located including iron working sites, caves and rockshelters, abandoned settlement sites, groves, shrines, stone axe factory sites, cloth and mat weaving centres, historic buildings, museums, monuments, pottery sites, blacksmithing workshops etc. Although some of them have been declared places of historic importance, there is still need to raise the standard for sustained survival (Ekechukwu 2010).

In Nigeria, many caves and rockshelters have been identified and preserved using both local and modern approaches. Examples include the Marshal Cave in Yankari Games Reserve in Bauchi State, Ogbunike and Owerre-Ezukala caves in Anambra State, Ezeagu Cave and Waterfall I (now known as Ezeagu Tourist Complex) in Enugu State, and Uhuchukwu, Nnemchukwu and Okpuchukwu caves in Abia State. These caves were once inhabited by early men and they are very central to archaeological research in the area. These evidences of man's past activities have helped immensely in archaeological reconstruction/interpretation of caves/rockshelters (Itanyi et al, 2013). According to Ibeanu (2006), the study of caves enable researchers observe most artifacts and ecofacts as they were generally not altered by human activities. Such a study can equally furnish the researchers with the information on the environmental conditions within the area. This assertion has been supported by Murty (1985) who opined that caves/rockshelters are major sources of information on the environment and adaptive mechanism of Paleolithic hunter-gatherers in Africa and parts of the world. From the tourism standpoint, caves and waterfall can equally trigger the growth of eco-tourism, a branch of tourism yet to be fully explored in the country. If properly harnessed, caves/rockshelters and waterfall will attract eco-tourists whose travel motivations revolve mainly around nature/scenic beauty. More so, it is the belief of the researchers that with proper planning, Okpatu Cave, Waterfall and Natural bridge can be transformed into a reputable tourist destination as have been case with Altamaria Cave in northern Spain, Eiriesenwelt Cave in Germany, Reed Flute in southern China, Cave of the Crystals in northern Mexico, the Picerto Princesa underground river cave on the northern coast of the Island of Palawan in the Philippines etc. Hence, the cave under study has the potentials of pulling tourists from far and

near because the popular Awhum Monastery which has a big waterfall that has immensely contributed to the development of religious tourism in the state is located within the same circuit. Okpatu equally boasts of more than eight standing furnaces capable of pulling not only tourists seeking fun, but also archaeologists who wish to conduct researches on iron working in Igboland.

Background Information of the Study Area

Okpatu is located in Udi Local Government Area (L.G.A) of Enugu State with coordinates of 6° 39’0” N, 7° 10’ 0”E. It is located at the northern part of the local government. The town is bounded on the north by Ikolo, Ochima, Aku, Ohebe dim, Umunna, Diogbe and Umunko in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A of Enugu State, on the east by Nike in Nkanu L.G.A of Enugu on the west by Oghe Affa in Udi L.G.A, and on the south by Eke and Ngwo also in the same L.G.A.

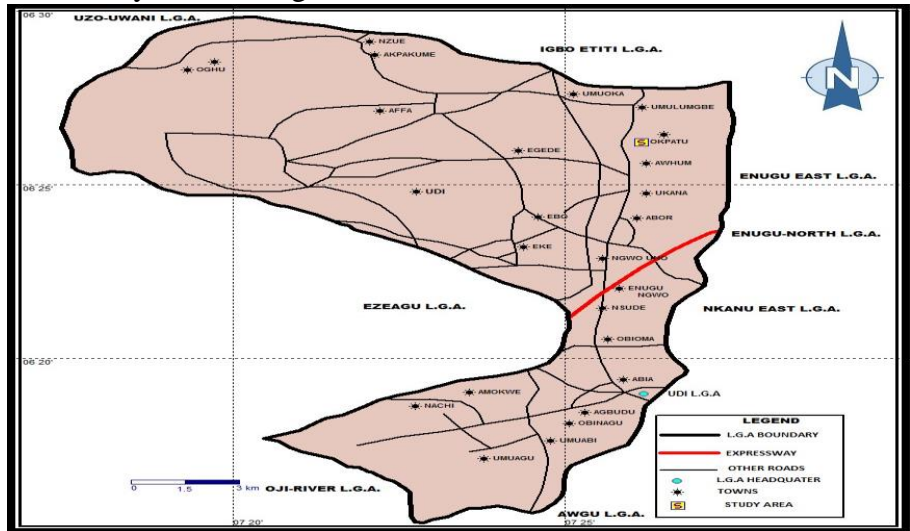


Figure 1: Map of Udi L.G.A Showing Okpatu

The history of Okpatu is one immersed in myths and legends. Oral tradition has it that Okpatu can be traced to the antecedents of a woman called “Ojebe” (though some oral traditions called her “OjebeOgene”). According to the traditional ruler of Ikeghe-Okpatu autonomous community, Ojebe- Ogene was a woman of many virtues who married three different husbands, whose names were unknown. She bore, for the first husband, a son called Ngwo in present day Udi L.G.A. She later re-married and bore Nike and Egede (in Enugu East and Udi L.G.As respectively). Lastly, she married the third husband

and gave birth to seven sons namely in descending order: Ebe, Abor, Ukana, Awhum, Okpatu, Umulumgbe and Ukehe. Another version was told by the traditional ruler of Ibite-Okpatu autonomous community. It is instructive to point out here that Okpatu is divided into two autonomous communities namely; Ibite and Ikeghe Okpatu. The second version though similar to the former pointed out that “Ojebe” instead of “Ojebe-Ogene” as claimed by the first account was the mother of Okpatu, while the third husband (the father of Okpatu) was “Ogene”. Hence, in honour of their ancestors, the descendants retained the name “Ojebe-Ogene”.

Okpatu is made up of twelve villages of which the first six villages in order of seniority belong to Ibite-Okpatu, while the last six belong to Ikeghe-Okpatu. The villages are Umeleme, Amaani, Amaukwu, Amaoka, Eziana, Amachala. Others are Umuchime, Amaagu, Umuene, Amaegbu, Obiagu, Amaagunjigbo, and Amaolugbu. However, of all the villages mentioned, only Umuchime village of Ikeghe-Okpatu practiced iron smelting. It was equally observed that of the seven towns in “Ojebe-Ogene”, Okpatu and Ebe (the eldest son) have the strongest tie. However, Ukehe the last child remains the richest and the most influential within this clan. Research result revealed that “Ojebe” went for puerperium (Omugwo) at Ukehe and died there. Ukehe was said to have taken the corpse to Umulumgbe and abandoned it there. Umulumgbe did the same and when it got to Okpatu, he took the corpse all the way to the four elder brothers and finally to Ebe. Hence, the eldest brother had a tie with him that has lasted to the present. On the other hand, Ukehe happens to be the most influential because “Ojebe” loved most and blessed him. Like every other tropical community, Okpatu is located in the rainforest region with ever green vegetation. The town has two major seasons; dry and wet seasons, and lies within the rich wooded savannah with some interspersing grassland. The hilly area called “Ugwurerengwu” is the tallest hill in Udi L.G.A and happens to be the first place where bomb was dropped during the Nigeria-Biafra war (oral interview). As noted earlier, Okpatu is known for iron working and farming which has continued to sustain them. To them, farming and iron working go together. A lineage within Umuchime village called “Umuidigo” supplied farmers with the farming implements and traces of standing furnaces are still scattered within the area and can

still be seen standing today. Some of the economic crops in Okpatu are in table 1.

Table1: Some of the Crops found in Okpatu

Economic plant (English name)	Igbo name	Botanical name	Economic importance
Cashew	Ijikara	Anacardium occidentale	Produce edible fruit.
Cassava	Akpu	Manihot esculanta	Generate income.
Maize	Oka	Zea mays	Generates income
Melon	Egwusi	Cucumerapu edulis	Generate income
Cowpea	Okpa	Vigna unguiculata	Use in cooking okpa, a common food within Nsukka cultural zone
Yam	Ji	Discorea Spp	Sold to generate money
Pepper fruit	Mmimi	Demettia tripetala	Sold for income
Avocado pear	Ube oyibo	Pecia americanum	Sold for income
Palm fruit	Nkwu	Elaeis gulnensis	Income purpose
African Breadfruit	Ukwa	Treculia Africana	Generates income
Iroko tree	Ukwu oji	Excelsa, Milicia	Generates income
Mango	Mangolo	Maginefera Indica	Generates income
Cocoyam	Ede	Colocasia Esculenta	Generates income
Orange-	Oroma	Citrus Sinensis	Generates income
Plantain	Unele	Musa Spp	Generates income

In the cultural sphere, Okpatu is known for their deep adherence to the Traditional African Religion (ATR). They observe many cultural festivals as well as honour sacred groves and shrines, including Ojebe-Ogene festival usually celebrated every ten years as a pilgrimage to Ebe by the eldest age grade called “Obodoechi”. There is also the “Ukwu” festival for reconciliation and is seen as the highest festival in Okpatu; another is “Akaani” festival for honouring the earth goddess, among others. Among the notable shrines, they have are: “Affia Okpatu shrine, Egodi, Njomikpa, Njomindeleko, etc, while the sacred groves include Nkpuru ego orie, Nkpuru okpaka, Nkpuru okpmobodo, etc. Okpatu also has some totem animals and taboos, some of which are unique to the individual villages within the community. For instance, Amaegwu people do not eat snail, because they serve the “Igwe” deity which has snail as its symbolic animal. The chief priest and titled men in Okpatu do not eat maize, sheep and

cassava because it is believed that maize is a “common crop,” and when eaten will make them “common” men. They see sheep as a foolish animal, which when eaten will make them become foolish and develop mental disorder. It is believed that this will make them deviate from speaking the truth. It is believed that cassava will prevent them from being focused during important deliberations, because of its weight.

Archaeological Survey of the Cave, Waterfall and Natural Bridge

During archaeological reconnaissance, different archaeological/ethnographic features/attractions were identified and these were presented and discussed in appropriate sections. Though the study is centred on the cave, waterfall and natural bridge, there are other rich archaeological and ethnographic resources in Okpatu which can boost tourism in the area. Aside the various festivals, shrines, and groves mentioned earlier, there are also many furnaces (about seven of them) and still standing (probably the only known ones in Southern Nigeria) and hence require an indepth study. Also the slag deposition site is a very large one with coordinates of $6^{\circ} 32' 45''$ N, $7^{\circ} 24' 20.9''$ E and a height of 7.5cm and a width of 18ft. The thickness of the heap is 28cm. There was also a heavy accumulation of potsherds in the site which suggests that clay pots were used to fetch and store water, probably by women, for the smelting process. It was equally revealed that smelting was done only by the Umuodobo lineage of Umuchime village in Ikeghe-Okpatu autonomous community, and an on the spot assessment showed that the area is an industrial site. The standing furnaces and the slag heap formed half a circle, and efforts to locate the complete circle proved abortive which probably means that iron smelting in Okpatu must have taken place only within the surveyed area, and this point of view was supported by oral tradition.



Plate 1: Sowing the slag heap

The cave and natural bridge are found in Amaagu village in Ibite-Okpatu. Oral tradition has it that the Affia stream, which extends to the waterfall and subsequently to Adada River (as presumed by the locals), supplied the people with water prior to the advent of water tankers and bore-holes. The source of the waterfall/stream was traced to “Ugwureregwu”, the tallest hill in the area.



Plate 2: Affia Stream flowing from Ugwureregwu down to the waterfall

As the name implies, the stream belongs to a powerful deity in Okpatu called Affia which also has a shrine and grove. Notwithstanding the distance, the people went there to fetch water. The water is very clean and has special aroma, probably because of the abundance of local chalk “nzu” underneath. Its coordinates are N⁰06⁰33, E 07⁰26 with a height of 268 meters above sea level. High above the stream is the natural bridge. The bridge is located precisely at 6⁰33⁰ and 7⁰26⁰59.3 E with a height of 1480meters (49feet) above sea

level. It is a big bridge with a thickness of 214cm, and a width of 870cm. It has naturally-shaped heavy boulders in the form of pillars as support; beneath one of which is a mini cave, which some people see as a rockshelter.



Plate 3: Showing the natural bridge

The mini cave has an open space that can accommodate 12 to 15 people at the same time. However, the entrance to the cave is small (59cm) and can hardly enter an adult, even while squatting. The coordinates of the mini cave are $06^{\circ} 33' 58.4''$ N, $07^{\circ} 29' 59.6''$ with a height of 270cm. According to one of the informants, Mr. Patrick Nwafor, the mini cave served as a protective shield from scorching sun or heavy rain for farmers who went to farm in the site. It is reasonable to say that the cave may not have been inhabited in the past, given the size of the entrance. However, it might have served as a hideout for children during impending danger. For instance, parents might have hid their children there during communal crises or even during the Nigeria-Biafran civil war of 1967 to 1970.



Plate 4: Showing the mini cave

Affa waterfall has a co-ordinate of $06^{\circ} 33' 55.1$ N and $07^{\circ} 26' 19.4$ and a height of 316 (10ft) meters above sea level. It has two cavities that formed a circle. The overall enclosure of the Affia waterfall is 5250cm meters, while the first cavity is 1170cm and the second, 390cm. The second cavity is the source of the waterfall and the ripples drop heavily. According to one of the informants, the cavities housed dangerous animals like crocodile, python, hyena etc. The site is a beauty to behold and eco-tourists in need of alluring attractions will really appreciate the serenity and features of the site.



Plate 5a: Showing the source of the waterfall



Plate 5b: Showing the water ripples

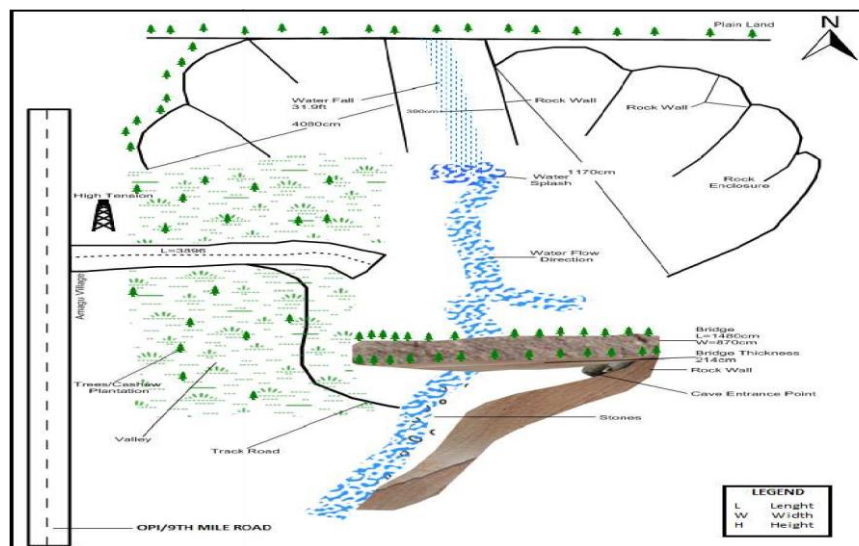


Figure 2: Site Plan of Okpatu Cave, Natural Bridge and Waterfall

Tourism potentials of the Sites

The sites under study as stated earlier, have the potentials to trigger the development of tourism in the area. Caves/rockshelters and waterfall are known to stimulate the development/growth of ecotourism in any area where they are found. This explains the growing interest in a new form of tourism known as “cave tourism”, a special interest tourism for appreciating speleological features. As rightly noted by Kaezevi and Zikovic (2010), cave tourism has become popular in Brazil, Indonesia, Russia, Romania and other countries in which carbonate relief is widespread. Because of some of the features it offers (labyrinth, narrow passages, high humidity and the lack of natural light), this form of tourism has been included in adventure or rural tourism. This form of tourism has yielded great revenue to the host communities, contributed to environmental management and beautification, job creation, provision of infrastructures as well as accessibility to the site.

There is no gainsaying therefore, that Okpatu cave/waterfall can be of immense touristic value if the different stakeholders (government at all levels, tourism experts and developers, NGOS, local people etc) come together and perform their different roles to harness their potentials. The sites boast of diverse potentials ranging from their serenity and uniqueness (which is a factor in tourism), to the clustering of other attractions in the circuit. As earlier noted, apart from the attractions under study, Okpatu also has standing furnaces dating back to hundreds of years. The study area is indeed an industrial site with massive slag deposits suggestive of intense iron working in the past. This can trigger both archaeologists and tourists to visit the site with the iron sites serving as catalyst for visitation to the cave and waterfall.

Another strong motivation to visit Okpatu is the “Awhum” Monastery (which is located in Awhum town, a few kilometers from Okpatu). This site has greatly promoted religious tourism and there is no doubt that it can stimulate visitation to Okpatu. This is because tourists are known to visit as many sites as possible within the shortest possible time and at the cheapest rate available. The proximity of the two towns and between them and Enugu, the state capital make them a promising visitor domain. These undeveloped sites have access roads leading to them which can boost tourism development. What is needed now is a clear signpost to direct people to the site, as well as

accessibility to the exact sites and accommodation facilities. As Page and Connell (2006) aver, the key features in creating world class destination is creating a product that is unique, equal or superior to any similar product internationally, firmly centred around a clear understanding of the visitor experience and a commitment to product development.

Furthermore, one other outstanding potential that can trigger off tourism development in Okpatu is the awareness of the local people of what tourism/archaeology is all about. The researchers observed that the two traditional rulers of Ikeghe and Ibite autonomous communities are Professor and Pilot, respectively. Interaction with them showed that they are willing and ready for the development of the sites, as well as aware of the various impacts associated with such development. This will provide a great boost for tourism in the area as community involvement/participation is assured. It is instructive to note here that the common notion of sustainable tourism development is that it should have widespread local acceptance and meet recognized local need (Walker and Walker 2011). For this reason, some scholars (Page and Connell 2006, Andriotis 2007, Ap and Crompton 1998), argue that it is only wise for the local residents to be involved in tourism since they ensure it thrives through their support, and that community participation/involvement ensures that “the poorest of the poor may be included in decision making”.

On a general note, Okpatu cave, waterfall and natural bridge have very scintillating landscapes, which form part of the tourism products that can enrich a tourist’s experience. The availability of other attractions within this visitor domain can only help to strengthen its viability. Through tourism, visitors to the sites, especially westerners, would begin to appreciate the contents and context of African societies better and understand that indeed, we have copious evidence to show that we have well developed intellectual cultures expressed virtually in our different languages (Oluwole 2001).

CONCLUSION

The research has x-rayed the Okpatu cave, waterfall and natural bridge and their tourism potentials. It is glaring that they are viable for tourism development, given their uniqueness and the availability of other tourism features/products within the study and its precincts. The researchers argue that the involvement of the local people is very pertinent the sustainability of tourism projects in the area. The

rationale is that they live within and own the visitor domain and therefore are in a better position to appreciate the sacrosanctity or otherwise of the attractions.

It is therefore necessary that access roads leading to the different sites be improved upon as a matter to add the needed impetus to tourism development in Okpatu. Good signposts showing the directions as well as accommodation facilities should put in place to spice the destination area as supporting infrastructure. The mini cave, natural bridge and waterfall should be harnessed as have been done to such sites with similar features as Ezeagu Tourist Complex also in Enugu State, Ogbunike and Owerre-Ezukala caves in Anambra State, Uhuchukwu, Okpuchukwu, and Nnemchukwu caves in Abia State.

Such touristic retouch will also attract archaeologists to study the sites for evidence of human activities thereby bringing it to the international scene.

The researchers therefore advocate, among other things, that governments at all levels should be actively involved to bring tourism development in Okpatu to fruition. Professional archaeologists should equally be encouraged to do intensive researches on the standing furnaces which are probably the only standing surviving furnaces depicting extensive iron working technology in Southeastern Nigeria.

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