

FRENCH NEWS MARCH 2007

SENDING OUT AN SOS

A demonstration of support for Aboriginal heritage took place on February 2 in the Pech Merle caves, in the Lot, organised by the Comité Départemental de Spéléologie du Lot, and in the Dolmen de Planagrèze, Caniac du Causse.

The issue has arisen because the Australian government has refused to register a huge rock-art site on the Burrup peninsula as a heritage site, allowing the oil group Woodside to extend its activities instead.

The Burrup is sacred land to the Aborigines, and shelters between 500,000 and one million rock carvings up to 30,000 years old. The destruction of these would be an ecological and cultural disaster.

The Australian association The Friends of the Australian Rock Art (FARA) is fighting to prevent the destruction of the Burrup and is organising international action to pressurise the Australian government. Fanny Vignals, an artist and representative of FARA in France, told French News: "The site is like the Vatican for the Christians. It is a sacred place."

Bertrand Defois, a spokesperson for the Centre de Préhistoire du Pech Merle, said the centre was supporting the action because its members are "against the damage caused to these types of remains. We did the same for carvings in Portugal. It is cultural and thematic solidarity. Aborigines also have an ethnographic importance, they helped give people a new approach to their prehistory.



In support of the Aborigines: sending a clear message to Australia from the Pech Merle caves

"It is more on the principle of the matter that the protests are being organised. The Australian government won't change its mind because there are billions of dollars behind the project and the area is virtually a desert.

"A letter was sent in December to the Australian government to try and find a solution. The reply came back that the project will go ahead anyway."

"We are not expecting them to change their mind, that is not realistic," agrees Vignals. "But we hope they will install their infrastructure without damaging the rock art. History should be preserved because it helps us to understand who we are."

FARA is still looking for associations or individuals who would like to organise

demonstrations on other sites linked to Prehistory and in other world capitals. Actions have already taken place in Paris in front of the Eiffel tower, in Australia and Germany.

Spain, England and Brazil are on the list for the next demonstrations. Demonstrations are also going ahead in Paris on February 25, and in the Lascaux caves of the Dordogne on March 3.

There needs to be a minimum of 15 people at each demonstration, enough to spell out the slogan "Stand up for the Burrup" on their T-shirts. When all the pictures are gathered, they will be sent to the Australian government as proof of international opposition. SG

www.standupfortheburrup.com