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Anthropologists and descendents of Africa's bushmen tell the story of the history of mankind.

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The Bushmen of Botswana

MATT LAUER, co-host (Botswana, Africa):
Botswana, this country is filled with so many beautiful treasures. And one of its greatest is located not far from here. It’s Africa’s Outdoor Museum, where the history of man is painted on stone. NBC’s Keith Miller takes us there.

KEITH MILLER reporting:
It is a place that can speak to us even today about where we come from and who we were, a history of man that traces 30 centuries of existence, a land of deep worship and spirits still active.

Dr. ALEC CAMPBELL: The wind tunneling through the rocks, you know there are people there. The spirits are talking.

MILLER: The Tsodilo Hills rise above the Kalahari plains as a testament to the early life of man, because what inspired and sustained man back then is preserved today in the culture of the bushmen and imprinted on rock.

Dr. CAMPBELL: I think that these prints up here are simply people saying this is our land.

MILLER: Fantastical paintings, thousands of them, rhinos, antelopes and giraffe.

Do you think this has anything to tell us who we are today?

Dr. CAMPBELL: It's--some of the earliest ways that people were able to portray their ideas in their head.

MILLER: The bushmen of the Kalahari believed man arrived in the Tsodilo Hills directly from heaven, placed on earth by God.

Dr. CAMPBELL: When you approach the hills you should really approach them with a certain measure of reverence in your heart.

MILLER: Alec Campbell has been studying African rock art for 40 years.

Dr. CAMPBELL: This is by no means the highest painting. There's one painting here which is about 1,000 feet, and it looks right out across the desert. Looking out across the desert must have had some importance.

MILLER: A message visible for miles, passed down the generations, received today by the bushmen who still inhabit the land.
Mr. MATHAMBO NGAKAEAJA (Bushman Network Spokesman): They were simply put there so that the bushmen way of life continues for continuity. So that I can find the pictures, I can learn about how my forefathers lived and I can also show my children how my forefathers lived.

MILLER: The bushmen of today must live in two worlds. Some wear animal skins as costumes, others wear nothing else. But all of them share a life where the spiritual world is part of everyday reality. The healing dance is one way to reach the spirits and bring relief to those suffering from illness.

Mr. NGAKAEAJA: I wish I was part of that life, because exists no more.

MILLER: There are less than 100,000 bushmen left in all of southern Africa. Victims of disease, discrimination and an ever-advancing modern way of life. For decades their existence has been reported by anthropologists, aware that in time the bushmen will be overtaken by a world gone modern.

Mr. NGAKAEAJA: All I have is those stories left so I must guard those stories and take them on to the next generation.

MILLER: Now a protected site, this mountain of the gods links us to a vanishing culture and perhaps provides some measure of where mankind is going in the future.