

Obituaries

Patrick J. Darling (1945-2016)

Dr. Patrick J. Darling, archaeologist, educator, and heritage manager, joined the ancestors on March 1st 2016. According to an online news report, Dr. Darling peacefully passed on in his home surrounded by his family. He was 71 years old. His funeral service was held on March 9th at Bournemouth Crematorium, UK. He is survived by his wife: Lisa; children: Melissa and Jonathan; and brother: Coralie. Patrick Darling was until his death a Senior Research Associate in the Department of Conservation Sciences, Bournemouth University, UK.

I received the news of Dr. Darling's transition in mid-May, two months after the fact. I was treading on some of the old archaeological grounds that Darling had walked when the news reached me in Nigeria. How did I miss the passing of this colossal figure in Nigerian archaeology? I am sure many are still unaware of his transition. This is not surprising, though unfortunate. Patrick Darling was not a conventional archaeologist. He did not hold any highbrow academic position, neither did he receive one of those ground-breaking research grants. Yet, his contributions to African archaeology were no less spectacular.

I use this occasion to reflect on the legacy of Dr. Darling as an archaeologist and a staunch advocate for the preservation of Africa's cultural heritage. I do so not because of any privileged access that I have into his personal life (I have none). I am however aware of his impacts in the archaeology of West Africa and Nigeria, especially in the Yoruba-Edo world, an area that has preoccupied my own intellectual curiosity. I met Patrick Darling on two occasions and we exchanged perhaps four emails in total. I know enough to say that for about forty-three years he was ruled by the unalloyed passion to document the spectacular tangible African heritage and to interpret Africa's past accomplishments to the wider world.

Patrick attended University of London where he received BA in Geography and MSc in Agricultural Economics. He bagged his Ph.D. in archaeology from Birmingham University.

The network of earthworks in the Edoid region of southwest Nigeria is the subject of his dissertation. His voluminous dissertation was published in 1984 as *Archaeology and History in Southern Nigeria: The Ancient Linear Earthworks of Benin and Ishan* (Parts 1 and 2) in the Cambridge Monographs in African

Archaeology (11) and the BAR International Series (215). That publication announced Patrick to the world of African archaeology as a serious but unconventional scholar. The storied fieldwork that produced both the dissertation and the monograph is a testimony to the tenacious and creative spirit of the man.

I don't know the circumstances under which Patrick arrived in Nigeria but, as he stated in the preface to his BAR monograph, he began his research on the Edoid earthworks in early 1973. He was moved by the urgent need to document and map the earthworks before their total obliteration by the onslaught of mechanized forest clearing, erosion, and artisan mining of the earthworks for house construction. He had the foresight to see the historical importance of these earthworks as transcripts of a great society. He recognized that the much celebrated Benin earthworks which Graham Connah (1975) and others have documented are only part of a larger and regional networks of embankments that stretched hundreds of kilometers across the rainforest of southwest Nigeria.

In order to better understand the extent of these embankments, Darling launched the most ambitious archaeological survey project in Nigerian archaeology. And, this was to be implemented not in the open savanna landscape but in the thicket of southwest Nigeria's secondary rainforest. The then 28+ year-old man was daring in his research agenda and steadfast in his commitment that the systematic survey and mapping of these earthworks across over a 2,000-square mile area was a task that must be carried out. His infectious and boundless energy met the approval of many people in high and low places including the then military governor of the Mid-Western State, Brigadier S. O. Ogbemudia, and the Director of Nigeria's Federal Department of Antiquities (later Director General of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments), Dr. Ekpo Eyo. With their support, Patrick developed a five-year research project for which, according to him, he received notification for a government funding plan.

He was excited by this promise of support and he immediately took the bull by the horns. He set up a nimble but efficient research team with equipment that included prismatic compass, measuring tapes, and several cutlasses. Today, these tools would appear to a graduate student as primitive but they are no less efficient and appropriately accurate. That was in the 1970s when the capabilities of a Global Positioning System (GPS) would have sounded like a Star War fantasy.

The logistics and strategies of Darling's survey should be part of the handbook for archaeological fieldwork in the Tropics. According to him, he spent the cooler mornings cutting through the thick thorny undergrowth, while he dedicated the

steaming afternoons traveling and recording where the ancient earthworks intersected with motorable roads, bicycle tracks, and footpaths. He shifted the gear in the evenings to interview the elders of the extant villages and towns he was traversing. He also spent some of those evenings transcribing his survey records onto graph papers.

Alas! The support that he was promised by the government came to a quick and abrupt end following the 1975 military coup. The funding dried up but Darling did not give up. Before then, he had already covered about 1,300 kilometers of survey distance! So, he adjusted his research design. He cut back on some of the grand plans of his survey, and concentrated instead on studying the profiles of the Edoid embankments in exposed locations. Even with this reduced plan, he managed to measure over 300 profiles of the embankments and collected surface and sub-surface ceramics in over 400 sites. I have on numerous occasions quoted and cited Darling's work on the Edoid embankments. Here is one of those several renditions (Ogundiran 2013: 861):

Patrick Darling's path-breaking archaeological survey in the Edo-Esan area of southwestern Nigeria has uncovered over 16,000 km of concentric earthworks forming boundaries around more than 500 interconnected settlements, enclosing a total area of 6,500 km² (Darling 1984). His work showed how agricultural communities, who combined yam, oil palm, and vegetable cultivation with hunting and gathering, gradually built up their landscape over time beginning from about AD 500.

Upon the completion of his Edoid embankment project, Darling shifted his focus westward to the neighboring Yoruba-speaking area. There, he collaborated with Robert Soper (and later worked briefly with Babatunde Agbaje-Williams) to survey and map the royal palace at Oyo-Ile, the capital of Yoruba's largest political unit (Soper and Darling 1980). He also explored the archaeological potentials of a number of rockshelters in central Yorubaland. But the most enduring of his Yoruba projects was the painstaking mapping of the Sungbo Eredo earthworks. Between 1993 and 1997, Patrick Darling and his team of Bournemouth University students, UK volunteers, and Nigerian staff traversed the rainforest of Epe-Ijebu area to map out the courses of the famed but little known Sungbo Eredo embankment and ditch complex. His assortment of tools was not different from that of the 1970s. The only addition was the low resolution GPS, mostly useless under the thick foliage of southwest Nigeria. Patrick was again undeterred. He forded through the swamps of

Epe-Ijebu area and stomped over its overgrown paths like a possessed elephant. Where necessary, he hired motorbike taxis, what Nigerians call *okada*, to reach some of his earthwork destinations. The adventure was hair-raising, and would make a good Nollywood movie. According to Darling (1998: 55):

Each day, surveyors equipped with orienteering compasses, local guides, waterproof paper and pens, were sent up to 30 kilometres in all directions - none knowing exactly where they would finish. Their routes were crossed by great fingers of impassable freshwater swamp; one Nigerian girl waded up to her neck in water and one British student was left up a tree when his raft disintegrated.

As a result of this work, Darling gave us the first general and near-complete outlines of Sungbo Eredo embankment-ditch complex. His survey shows that the complex was about 160 km (100 miles) long, and in places 20 meters deep. The embankments and ditches enclosed "a vast area, nearly 40 kilometres north to south and 35 kilometres east to west"; and these, he argued, were "deliberately engineered with ditch baulks to retain seasonal rainwater as shallow moats". He was however careful to note that "Some sections of the Eredo remain to be reached by ground survey" meaning that future work would reveal a far more complex network of the earthworks and ditches than he was able to show. I now think that many archaeologists were too cautious to accept his verdict that Sungbo's Eredo is "set to push back our understanding of state formation in the African rainforest by half a millennium or more". Here, Darling implied that the construction of some of these earthworks began about 300-500 AD. Thankfully, David Aremu, Gérard Chouin, and others have recently embarked upon building on the pioneering research that Darling and his students started (e.g., Aremu 2002).

Patrick Darling was not only comfortable in the bush with his prismatic compass. He was also a steward of Africa's cultural heritage as a manager and publicist. He carried out most of his preservation advocacy, educational, and fieldwork adventure vacation tours in Nigeria under the auspices of **Africa Legacy**, a not-for-profit organization that he established in 1996. He set up this outfit to promote the positive and realistic aspects of African heritage to colleges and universities worldwide. Darling led this organization till 2011, according to his LinkedIn profile. The noble political mission of Darling is not in doubt: to write the legacy of African achievements into contemporary global consciousness.

Thanks to him, he pushed hard to facilitate the enlistment of the Edoid embankments (popularly called Benin Walls) as a World heritage. Although this was not accomplished, the Guinness Book of records has since 1974 recognized the Benin Walls as the world's second largest man-made structure after China's Great Wall. And, the *New Scientist* heavily relied on Patrick Darling's assessment when it describes the Edoid embankments as "four times longer than the Great Wall of China", consuming "a hundred times more material than the Great Pyramid of Cheops", and forming "perhaps the largest single archaeological phenomenon on the planet" (Pearce 1999).

Patrick Darling was not content with publishing his findings only in academic journals. He was an avid promoter of the gargantuan accomplishments of African ancestors in the popular media and international circles. Inverting popular knowledge with factual and spicy comparisons is an enviable forte of Patrick Darling. On this score, he had both major and minor media in his corner. He used his publicist skills so well in order to push the Sungbo Eredo rampart-ditch complex story to both the new and old media including the New York Times and the BBC News. The later quoted him thus: "In terms of sheer size it's (Sungbo Eredo) the largest single monument in Africa - larger than any of the Egyptian pyramids..." It's a comparison with shock factor but it's not inaccurate.

His dedication to the preservation of African heritage however goes beyond archaeological resources. He was interested in the entire repertoire of indigenous African knowledge. Hence, in 2005, Darling succeeded in receiving a British Library's Endangered Archives grant to help preserve the Late Professor Ade Obayemi's lifetime collection of documents and correspondence, and to make these available to the world. Through Dr. Darling's intervention, about 950 unbound articles and 130 audio tapes of oral history and cultural resources were preserved.

I have traveled, lived, and worked in those areas of southwest Nigeria where Patrick Darling carried out his archaeological fieldwork - Ekpoma, Benin, Ijebu... Those impossible paths that he successfully navigated were not for the faint-hearted archaeologist. His passion and care for the African story no doubt propelled him to reach those seemingly forbidden inner recesses of the past. He was in every way his own man. He made ways where there was none. He patiently listened to his instincts unperturbed by the doubting onlookers. He was stubborn but for the right cause. Thanks to his uncompromising stance, we have learnt far more than would have been possible about the rich Africa's past. Along the way, many misunderstood him

and mistook his passion for self-promotion. Some minimalists, even those who have made an excellent career studying Africa, dismissed his claims of Africa's great civilizations as delusional. By so doing, they ignored the evidence that Darling presented and therefore remained perennially ignorant of Africa's past. Some of Darling's writings show that he could also be as dismissive of others, especially those who do not take him seriously. Nevertheless, his commitment and hard work to uncover the greatness of Africa's past far outweigh his multitudes of gaffes in interpersonal relations.

With his passing, the Yoruba-Edo ancestors have lost one of their best advocates; and the most popular, intrepid interpreter of their monumental legacies. I hope a new unconventional and free-spirited person who walk, dream, and think like Patrick Darling would soon emerge, a man or a woman unfettered by disciplinary consensus and tradition. I hope such a person would have far more support from African and non-African colleagues/institutions than Patrick Darling received. Adieu, Patrick Jonathan Darling.

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A second obituary from UK branch

PATRICK JONATHAN DARLING, 1945 - 2016

We report with regret the death of Patrick Darling on 1 March 2016 at the age of 71. He went to Nigeria in the mid-1970's as a school teacher in Benin. He was fascinated by the system of earthworks which extend over a considerable area NW of the city and he set out to map this network, by foot, by bike, and with a machete—a task which, as he said, no-one else at the time was likely to undertake. He subsequently wrote up this work as a PhD thesis at the Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham, later published as a book by BAR in 1984, under the title “Archaeology and History in Southern Nigeria: the ancient linear earthworks of Benin and Ishan”. It remains his most significant contribution to Nigerian archaeology. His interest continued in such structures, notably at Old Oyo (in conjunction with Robert Soper) and at Sungbo's Eredo (SW of Ijebu Ode).



In the early 1980's, Patrick became a member of staff of Bayero University in Kano, and this allowed him to investigate in particular the numerous signs of indigenous iron working in that area. His final statement on the issue was

published as recently as 2013 (The world's earliest iron smelting? Its inception, evolution and impact in northern Nigeria, in “The World of Iron”, ed. Jane Humphris and Thilo Rehren, Archetype Publications, 156-167). Characteristically, he claimed that a thermo-luminescence date obtained by him for an iron-smelting site in the Kazaure Hills rivalled the earliest such dates known in Anatolia, whereas

the generally accepted date for the introduction of iron into West Africa is some 2000 years later. After his time in Kano, his career went in another direction when he obtained a degree in agricultural economics at Wye College (then an independent institution within the University of London) enabling him to work as an agricultural consultant in various parts of Africa. However, he never lost interest in Nigeria's archaeology, which he pursued first as a research associate of Bournemouth University, and later as promoter of an independent organisation which he called African Legacy. Up to the end, he was busy with a manuscript called "Exploring Nigeria's past: its visible archaeology, cultural landscapes and local lore". It remains unfinished. On his death, he leaves his wife, Lisa, and two children, Melissa and Jonathan.

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Patrick Darling's publications in *The Nigerian Field* (compiled by Joyce Lowe)

1974. The earthworks of Benin. **39**: 128-137.
1975. The earthworks of Benin: some cross-profiles. **40**: 159-168.
1981. The ancient canoe port of Benin. **46**: 40-51.
- 1985 (letter) How the "double-headed snake" feeds. **50**: 50.
1989. How cattle, iron, sorghum and irrigation influenced social and agricultural development in Hausa land. **54**: 11-18.
1997. Sungbo's *Eredo*: Africa's largest monument. **62**: 113-129.
2002. Mother earth: past agriculture in Nigeria's rainforest. **67**: 91-110.
2004. Burnt earth: paint, pots, furnaces, terracottas and bricks as art forms in Nigeria. **69**: 137-152.
2008. Baobab trees and Nigeria's savannah zone archaeology. **73**: 25-47.

OBITUARIES (Members outside Nigeria)

I report with regret the deaths of the following members:

Life Members

Mr K.M.Lamb, New Zealand, 2 February 2016, aged 91. In the 1950s, he was in the Forestry Department at Kumba, at that time in the British Cameroons.

Lady Beryl Newns, January 2016, aged 89. She was the widow of Sir Foley Newns, who wrote on "Bird watching" [Sierra Leone], in *Niger. Fld.* **28**, 172-183 (1963).

Ordinary Members

Mr R.N. Jenkin 14 December 2015.

Dr Patrick Darling, Bournemouth, 1 March 2016, aged 71 (see obituaries).

Mr George Dugdale, Reading, 1 March 2016, aged 84. In the late 1970s, he helped set up an M.Sc. programme in Meteorology at the University of Ibadan. He gave two talks to Ibadan Branch on weather-related topics, "Seasons in Nigeria", and "Line Squalls". Later, he joined the TAMSAT group (Tropical Agricultural Meteorology using satellite data) visiting West African countries to carry out experiments.

Joyce Lowe