



# **THIMLICH OHINGA CASE STUDY PORTFOLIO**

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MS 715  
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*All images by Dr. Edward Luby and used with permission.*

## STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholder groups, or those with interest in Thimlich Ohinga's interpretation include:

- The local community
- The National Museums of Kenya
- Professor Luby and Museum Studies at San Francisco State University
- Local educators and students
- Tourist groups (local and international)
- Citizens of Africa
- The Archeological Institute of America (AIA)
- Historians and Archaeologists

## MISSION AND VISION

### *MISSION OF NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF KENYA*

To promote conservation and sustainable utilization of national heritage through generation, documentation, and dissemination of research and collection management knowledge, information and innovations.

### *VISION OF NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF KENYA*

To be a global leader in heritage research and management.

## SITE SIGNIFICANCE

An internationally significant archaeological site controlled by the National Museums of Kenya, Thimlich Ohinga is a rare wonder to behold.

Located in the Nyzana Province of Kenya, Thimlich Ohinga occupies a remote 52-acre parcel of land. The unique 500-year-old monumental stone walls were built with natural unshaped stone that are fitted together without mortar or concrete, like a puzzle. The site likely served as a fortification and urban complex, and was reused through the years by different groups who occupied the site until the 1970's.

The cultural landscape represents a tradition of stone wall construction characterized by the early settlement of the Lake Victoria Basin. The incredible stone enclosures are a unique example of defensive architecture in East Africa.

The site was designated as a National Monument by the Republic of Kenya in 1981, and was nominated by Kenya to be included on the prestigious UNESCO World Heritage List in 2010. This upcoming conservation center aims to blend culture with nature where visitors can take in eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and wildlife tourism.



## PROPOSED INTERPRETIVE THEME

“Preserving 500 Years of Living Culture” not only allows for exploration of the act of preserving Thimlich Ohinga, but also fosters examination into other areas related to Thimlich Ohinga in regards to its living culture.

The interpretive material should tie the preservation thread through out, but also include and discuss other topics related to the living culture of the site. Such topics include: information about the ethnic groups associated with the site, building techniques and features, the history and background information of the site, the surrounding environs, and preservation overall.

## TARGET AUDIENCES

The target audiences of Thimlich Ohinga are:

- Kenyans
- Tourists
- School Children

Since Thimlich Ohinga is a unique site in remote Kenya, the audience will gain an experience like no other. In visiting Thimlich Ohinga, visitors will want to learn about the site, walk the trail, and experience the natural surroundings through observation and immersion.

## COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

Several communities have been involved or will play a role in the interpretation of Thimlich Ohinga. These groups include:

- The National Museums of Kenya and the Kisumu Museum
- The community-based initiative, including local crafts people and traditional stone masons.
- Local educators and school teachers
- International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)
- Professor Luby and Museum Studies Students at San Francisco State University

Each group plays a unique role in the site's interpretation. It could directly involved (producing materials specific to Thimlich Ohinga), or indirectly involved (producing overall or generic guidelines for interpreting a cultural heritage site).



## MAIN PANELS

The main panels (see pages 5–11) discuss the sub-topics relating to the main interpretive theme. These topics include background information about the site, overall information about the traditional Luo homestead, building techniques and features, recent history, plant and animal life, and site preservation.

Panels should be made from materials that are best suited for the tropical climate of East Africa. Metal supports resist insect damage and the surface should be UV-resistant, if possible, to prevent fading.

Panels should follow the low-profile specifications set by the National Park Service (NPS). For more information about low-profile signage, please refer to *Wayside Exhibits: A Guide to Developing Outdoor Interpretive Exhibits*.

## SUB-TOPIC PANELS

The sub-topic panels go into further detail than the main panels. These should be smaller in size, but also conform to the NPS guidelines.

These panels briefly elaborate on a spotlight topic or bring attention to a particular specimen. Sub-topics could include: the native plants, monkeys living in the forest, other wildlife living at the site, specific species of medicinal plants, in-depth information of the Luo homestead, building materials, and more.

An example of a sub-topic panel featuring Euphorbia is on page 13.

## INFORMATIVE BROCHURE

The informative brochure is the first point of contact with the visitor. They should feature basic information about Thimlich Ohinga, such as getting there and background information, as well as brief details about the site. The brochure should be available at many locations, like partner locations, tourism bureaus, nearby hotels, and the site itself.

An example and more in-depth explanation of the brochure is available on page 14.



**36 x 24** This is the most common size. It has room for a large graphic, 75–100 words of main text, small inset graphics, and short captions or labels.



**24 x 24** This size works well when there is a single simple graphic with 75 words of text and one or two short captions or labels.

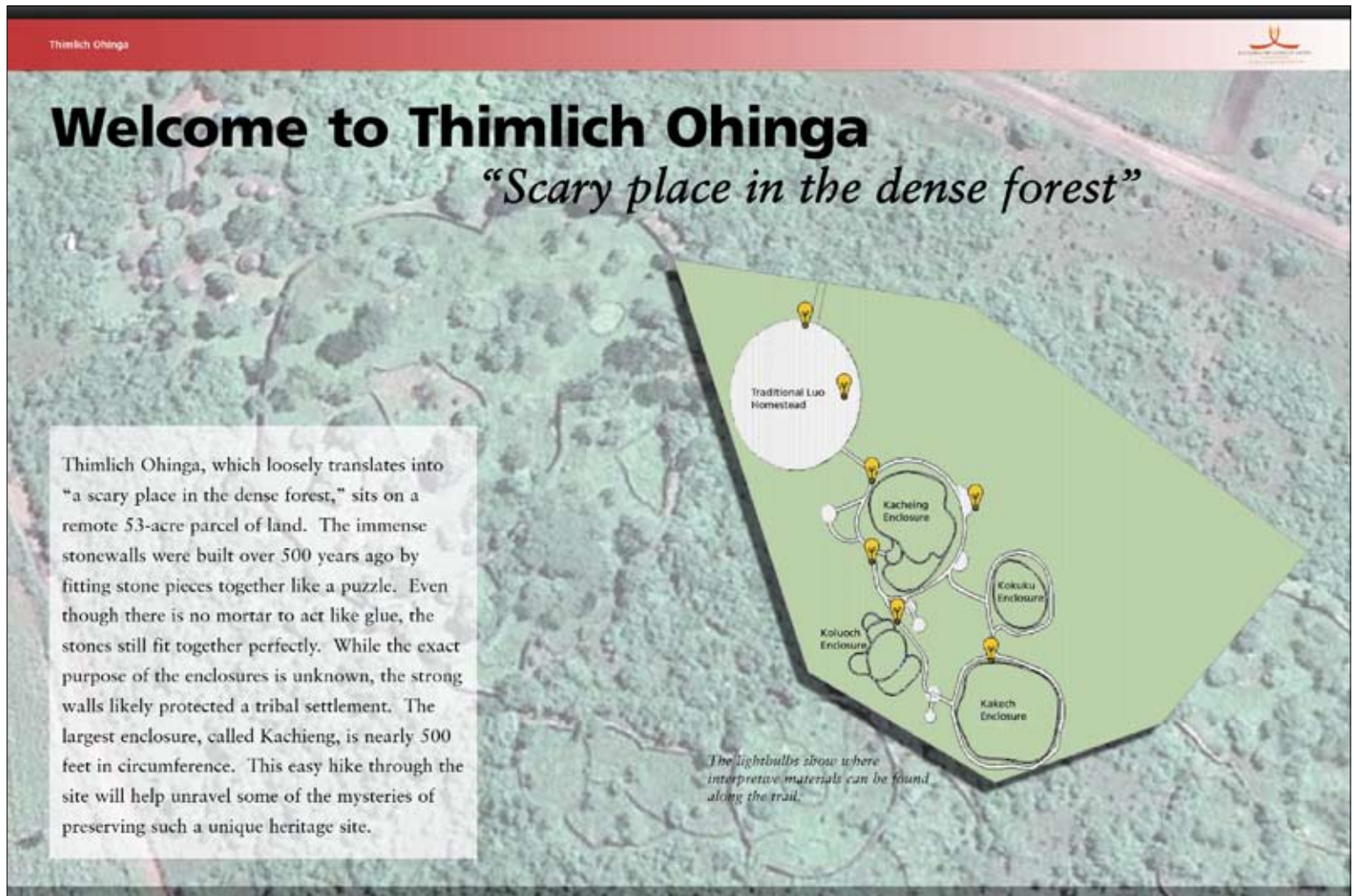


**6 x 12**

Trailside exhibits are low to the ground and most often used as identification panels for plants or architectural features. They require a single simple graphic, short title, and 25 words of text.

Panels should be designed and installed according to the National Park Service's low-profile specifications. The low-profile angle is 45 degrees. (National Park Service. *Wayside Exhibits: A Guide to Developing Outdoor Interpretive Exhibits*. Oct 2009.)

To communicate the interpretive theme, at least seven panels will be installed along a trail that takes the visitor throughout the site. On the next seven pages, an example of a panel featuring different subtopics that relate back to the interpretive theme are presented with notes about each panel. Additional methods of communicating the themes follow.



## PANEL TEXT

Thimlich Ohinga, which loosely translates into “a scary place in the dense forest,” sits on a remote 53-acre parcel of land. The immense stonewalls were built over 500 years ago by fitting stone pieces together like a puzzle. Even though there is no mortar to act like glue, the stones still fit together perfectly. While the exact purpose of the enclosures is unknown, the strong walls likely protected a tribal settlement. The largest enclosure, called Kachieng, is nearly 500 feet in circumference. This easy hike through the site will help unravel some of the mysteries of preserving such a unique heritage site.

Caption: *The light bulbs show where interpretive materials can be found along the trail.*

## NOTES

1. This sign is designed at 24x36 inches.
2. Any trail warning signs and preparation signs should be located near the orientation panel (see page 13 for an example).
3. The map should be redrawn to better show the entire site, including the parking lot, visitor’s center, camping sites, bathroom facilities, and rest or picnic areas. These should all be clearly coded using a legend system or easy to understand universal graphics. The map should also clearly show the trail.
4. The light bulbs can be replaced with another more recognizable symbol to indicate where the panels are located.

Thimlich Ohinga



## Living the Traditional Luo Way

Luo people live at Thimlich Ohinga today. The round houses in this traditional Luo homestead would have belonged to a typical Luo family. The family lives in an enclosed place called a *pacho* along with their livestock. The hut belonging to the head of the household is placed at the center of the *pacho*. In this hut, the male members of the family entertain guests and eat their meals. The male sons, both married and unmarried, have huts to the sides of the main entrance of this center hut. The huts of the wives are arranged by seniority in the upper part of the *pacho*. The first wife is at the center, followed by the second and third to the left and right sides.



The thatched roofs of these traditional Luo homes need regular maintenance. What other materials can you identify in the construction of these homes?

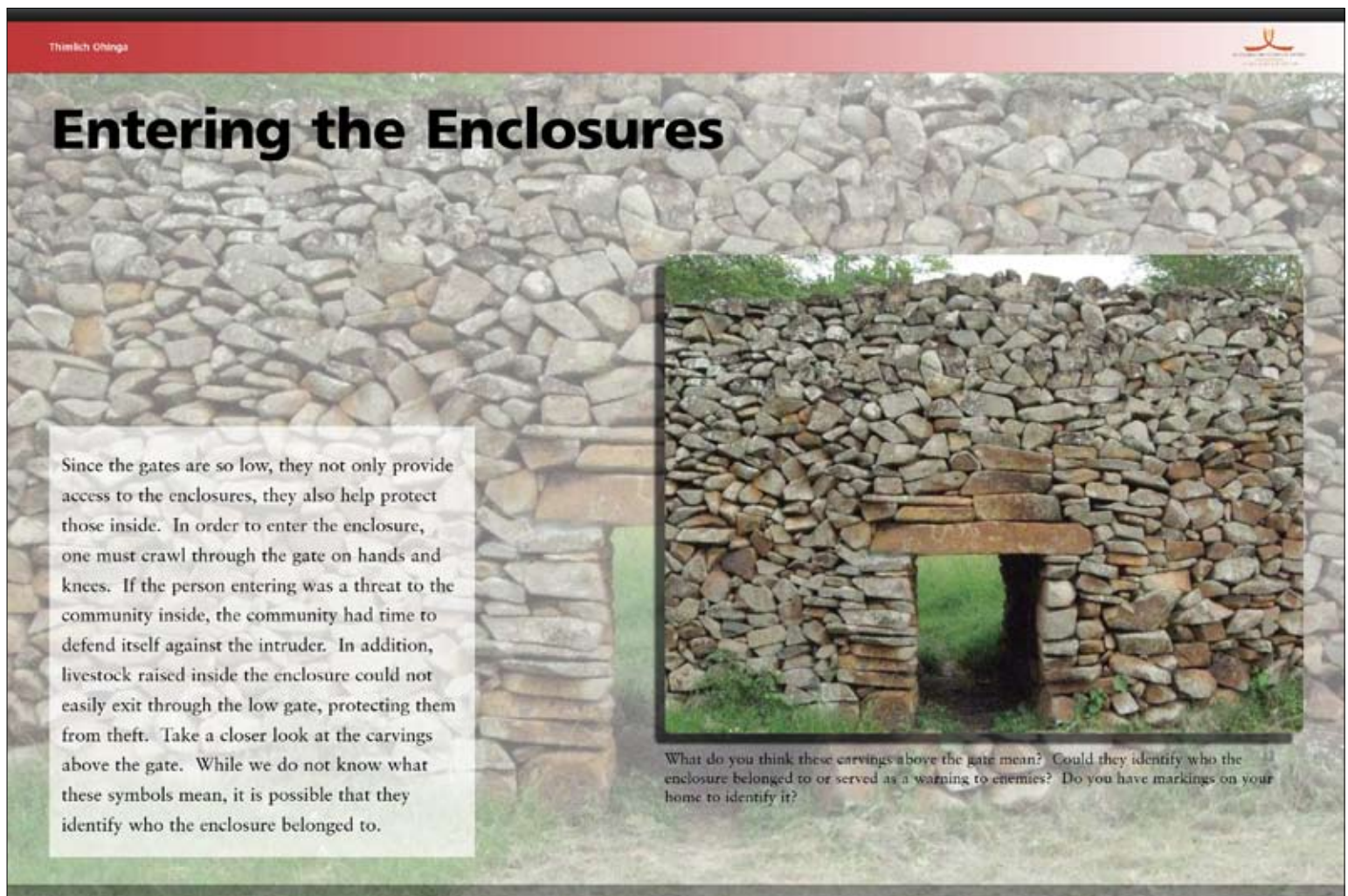
### PANEL TEXT

Luo people live at Thimlich Ohinga today. The round houses in this traditional Luo homestead would have belonged to a typical Luo family. The family lives in an enclosed place called a *pacho* along with their livestock. The hut belonging to the head of the household is placed at the center of the *pacho*. In this hut, the male members of the family entertain guests and eat their meals. The male sons, both married and unmarried, have huts to the sides of the main entrance of this center hut. The huts of the wives are arranged by seniority in the upper part of the *pacho*. The first wife is at the center, followed by the second and third to the left and right sides.

Caption: *The thatched roofs of the traditional Luo homestead need regular maintenance. What other materials can you identify in the construction of these homes?*

### NOTES

1. This sign is designed at 24x36 inches.
2. This area could have more interpretation with additional signage, but should not duplicate the exhibit at the Kisumu Museum.



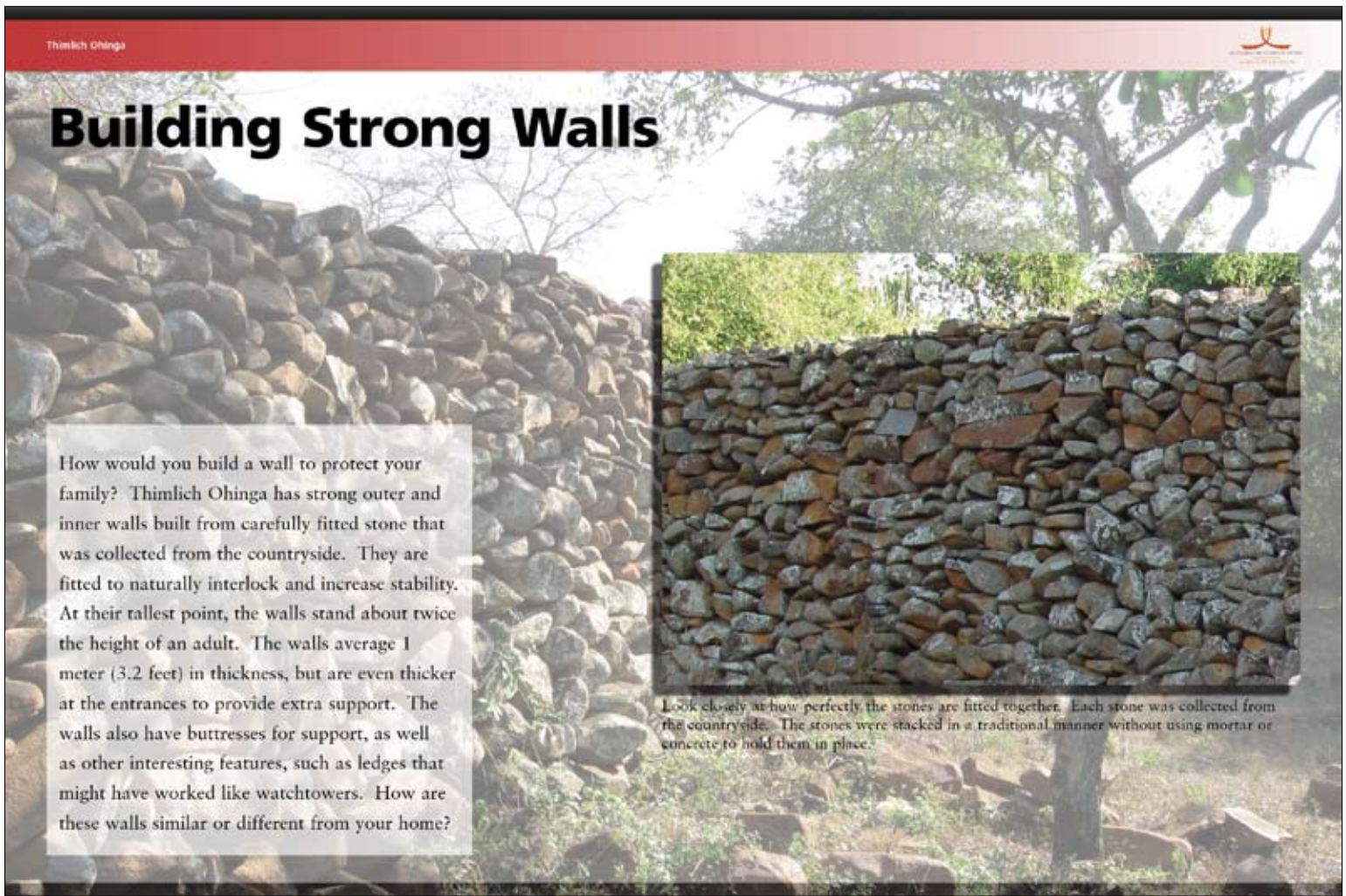
## PANEL TEXT

Since the gates are so low, they not only provide access to the enclosures, they also help protect those inside. In order to enter the enclosure, one must crawl through the gate on hands and knees. If the person entering was a threat to the community inside, the community had time to defend itself against the intruder. In addition, livestock raised inside the enclosure could not easily exit through the low gate, protecting them from theft. Take a closer look at the carvings above the gate. While we do not know what these symbols mean, it is possible that they identify who the enclosure belonged to.

Caption: *What do you think these carvings above the gate mean? Could they identify who the enclosure belonged to or served as a warning to enemies? Do you have markings on your home to identify it?*

## NOTES

1. This sign is designed at 24x36 inches.
2. If visitors are not allowed to get close to the gate to see the carvings, a replica of some sort should be available. This could be coupled with an interactive station, such stone rubbing or an activity that allows visitors to make their own symbols.



### PANEL TEXT


How would you build a wall to protect your family? Thimlich Ohinga has strong outer and inner walls built from carefully fitted stone that was collected from the countryside. They are fitted to naturally interlock and increase stability. At their tallest point, the walls stand about twice the height of an adult. The walls average 1 meter (3.2 feet) in thickness, but are even thicker at the entrances to provide extra support. The walls also have buttresses for support, as well as other interesting features, such as ledges that might have worked like watchtowers. How are these walls the same or different from your home?

*Caption: Look closely at how perfectly the stones are fitted together. Each stone was collected from the countryside. The stones were stacked in a traditional manner without using mortar or concrete to hold them in place.*

### NOTES


1. This sign is designed at 24x36 inches.
2. There could be a touch-station or interactive associated with this sign. Examples include: some stones that visitors could touch and lift to get a sense of how heavy they are or a "try it" station where visitors try to stack stones to build their own wall. A piece of stone could also be mounted to the sign instead.
3. Additional smaller signage that spotlights the building materials could also be created to go into further detail if necessary.

Thimlich Ohinga



# Thimlich Ohinga's Recent History

While we know that Thimlich Ohinga's history goes back several hundred years, it is still a relatively young heritage site. Did you know that Thimlich Ohinga was inhabited as recently as the 1970s? After it was abandoned for the last time in 1981, Thimlich Ohinga was granted protection under Kenyan heritage laws as part of a cultural landscape. Evidence of its previous inhabitants is all over Thimlich Ohinga. Looking at the enclosure names is one way to identify previous inhabitants. "Ko-" or "Ka-" are prefixes meaning "belonging to." The Kachieng enclosure translates to "Chieng's Enclosure." How many more indicators can you find?



This caption would explain the above picture, which would hopefully be of some of Thimlich Ohinga's previous inhabitants. For an example of a caption, please see the portfolio.

## PANEL TEXT

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Caption: (place holder)

## NOTES

1. This sign is designed at 24x36 inches.
2. The image is a placeholder for one of the more recent inhabitants of the site. The caption should provide more insight to who is pictured. For example, if the picture was of Chieng and his family, the caption could read, "Chieng and his family lived at Thimlich Ohinga until YEAR," and add in some interesting fact about them. This could be how much cattle they raised, how many generations can be tied to him, or something else that is especially notable.

Thimlich Ohinga



# Flora and Fauna of the Forest

The surrounding landscape was very important to the people who lived at Thimlich Ohinga. While the forest was viewed as a sacred place, it also provided much needed resources, such as sisal, firewood, grass, and medicinal plants. Plants were both native and cultivated in the area. How many different plants and animals can you identify on the trail? Look for smaller signage to help you with your search.



The Vervet Monkey (*Chlorocebus pygerythrus*) lives in the forest surrounding Thimlich Ohinga and you may have already seen or heard them. The Vervet Monkey has a diverse diet that includes fruit, leaves, seeds, birds' eggs, and insects. They are sometimes viewed as a nuisance because they will also eat crops raised by the local people.

## PANEL TEXT

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Caption: The Vervet Monkey (*Chlorocebus pygerythrus*) lives in the forest surrounding Thimlich Ohinga and you may have already seen or heard them. The Vervet Monkey has a diverse diet that includes fruit, leaves, seeds, birds' eggs, and insects. They are sometimes viewed as a nuisance because they will also eat crops raised by the local people.

## NOTES

1. This sign is designed at 24x36 inches.
2. This sign could easily be the start of an offshoot of signs that highlight specific plants or animals. Please see page 13 for an example.

Thimlich Ohinga



# Preserving Thimlich Ohinga

In the years since the last occupants lived at Thimlich Ohinga, natural and human elements have continued to threaten this unique site. Trees and vegetation have compromised the stability of some of the walls by growing through the stone. Some stones have been moved or toppled by winds. Fallen and damaged walls need restoration, and structures inside the enclosures need to be reconstructed to reflect their original form. In order to preserve this resource, a community-based effort is in process. Local masons and community members working in the traditional methods will help in the ongoing preservation of Thimlich Ohinga.



Plant life that grows near or on the walls accelerate the deterioration of the stone. Amazingly, the growing plants can displace stones and push them from their spot.

## PANEL TEXT

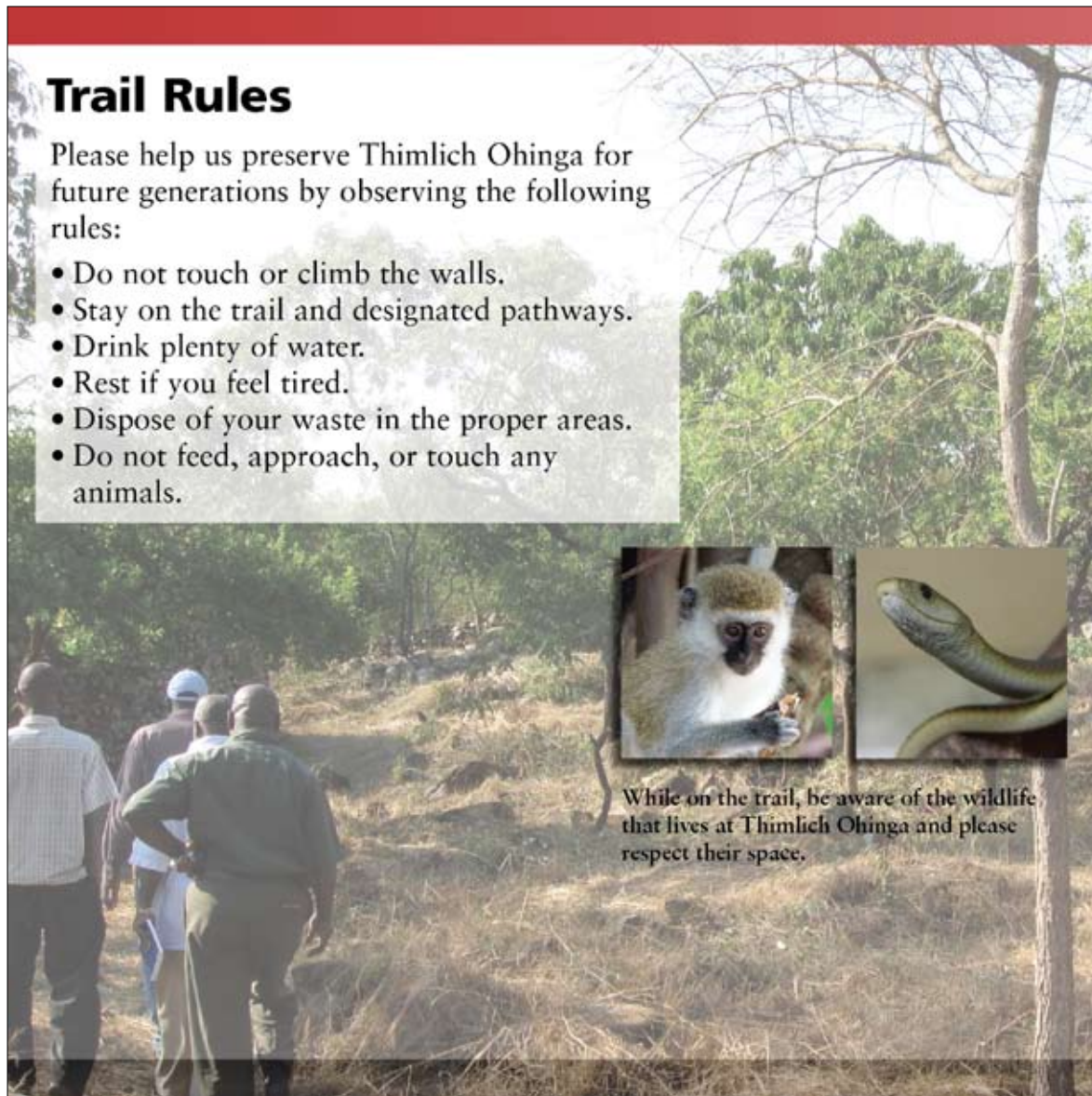
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Caption: Plant life that grows near or on the walls accelerate the deterioration of the stone. Amazingly, the growing plants can displace stones and push them from their spot.

## NOTES

1. This sign is designed at 24x36 inches.
2. Smaller signs could be used to show images of the previous state of the walls, what the structures inside the enclosures might have looked like, or more information on the community-based initiative.
3. The message could be adapted to inform the visitor on how they can help.

*Smaller signs can be used to spotlight specific information. Warning signs should be medium sized (in this case, 24x24 inches) and clearly placed so that they are visible. Specimen spotlight panels, like the one of the following page, can be much smaller to avoid obscuring the view. Keep in mind though that the smaller the sign is, the fewer amount of words that can be used. For examples of how these signs can be mounted, please refer to page 4.*



### PANEL TEXT

Please help us preserve Thimlich Ohinga for future generations by observing the following rules:

- Do not touch or climb the walls.
- Stay on the trail and designated pathways.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Rest if you feel tired.
- Dispose of your waste in the proper areas.
- Do not feed, approach, or touch any animals.

### NOTES

1. This sign is designed at 24x24 inches.
2. This sign should be located next to the orientation panel along with any additional train information signs.
3. If possible, please include first aid information and pictures of wildlife to be aware of while on the trail.

## What plant is this?

### *Euphorbia candeabrum*

*Euphorbia candeabrum* is a succulent speices of plant in the *Euphorbiaceae* family. The name comes from its branching habit, which resembles a candelabrum. What other plants are in the same family as this tree?



Euphorbia is one of the most diverse genera of plants, with 2008 different species. This tree is related to Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*, pictured left) and Cypress Spurge (*Euphorbia cyparissias*, pictured right).



### PANEL TEXT

*Euphorbia candeabrum* is a succulent speices of plant in the *Euphorbiaceae* family. The name comes from its branching habit, which resembles a candelabrum. What other plants are in the same family as this tree?

Caption: Euphorbia is one of the most diverse family of plants, with 2,008 different species. This tree is related to Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*, pictured left) and Cypress Spurge (*Euphorbia cyparissias*, pictured right).

### NOTES

1. This sign is designed at 12x12 inches.
2. The comparison Euphorbia plants could be species that are more familiar in East Africa or to visitors in general. For greater effect, they should be species that look like they might be unrelated.
3. Other signs that belong to this group of sub-topics could feature the monkeys, reptiles, medicinal plants, and other natural features of the site.

The brochure should be treated as the first contact between the site and visitor. They should be informative without being overbearing. Language should be simple and entice potential visitors to make the trek to the site. All the basic information should be available on the brochure, including background information, entry fees, available activities, location and directions for getting there, and what to know before visiting. Ideally,

the brochure would be available through many outlets, such as partner locations, tourism bureaus, nearby hotels, and the site itself. A digital version can be available at the National Museums of Kenya web site. The brochure can also act as a souvenir of visiting the site, reminding the visitor what they had seen and done while at Thimlich Ohinga.

This example brochure is designed as a standard full-color, tri-fold brochure.

In order to maximize the available information, a quick response (QR) code can be placed on the brochure (See middle panel on example brochure). A potential visitor who has the brochure and the proper technology can scan the code to visit related information at the appropriate web site. Free QR-code generators are available online.

The trail map from the first panel can be used again inside the brochure, but should also include a legend to reflect the trail itself, interpretive material stops, and other amenities (parking lot, visitor's center, restrooms, etc). In addition to the legend, basic information about the trail can be included with a link to a web page for further information.

### ABOUT THIMLICH OHINGA

An internationally significant archaeological site controlled by the National Museums of Kenya, Thimlich Ohinga is a rare wonder to behold.

Located in the Nyanza Province of Kenya, Thimlich Ohinga occupies a remote 52-acre parcel of land. The unique 500-year-old monumental stone walls were built with natural unshaped stone that are fitted together without mortar or concrete, like a puzzle. The site likely served as a fortification and urban complex, and was reused through the years by different groups who occupied the site until the 1970's.

The cultural landscape represents a tradition of stone wall construction characterized by the early settlement of the Lake Victoria Basin. The incredible stone enclosures are a unique example of defensive architecture in East Africa.

The site was designated as a National Monument by the Republic of Kenya in 1981, and was nominated by Kenya to be included on the prestigious UNESCO World Heritage List in 2010. This upcoming conservation center aims to blend culture with nature where visitors can take in eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and wildlife tourism.



### ENTRY CHARGES (KES):

<i>Residents</i>	
Adult	100
Child	50
<i>Non-residents</i>	
<i>Within East Africa</i>	
Adult	400
Child	200
<i>Outside East Africa</i>	
Adult	500
Child	250
<i>Overnight Fees</i>	
Per person	500
Add'l fee	250

Thimlich Ohinga is open to the public daily from 9:00 am – 6:00 pm

Contact  
Kisumu Museum  
PO Box 1779  
KISUMU 40100  
Tel. +254 57 2020332  
kisumu@museums.or.ke  
www.museums.or.ke





## Thimlich Ohinga

*"The scary place in the dense forest"*



### WHAT TO DO AT THIMLICH OHINGA

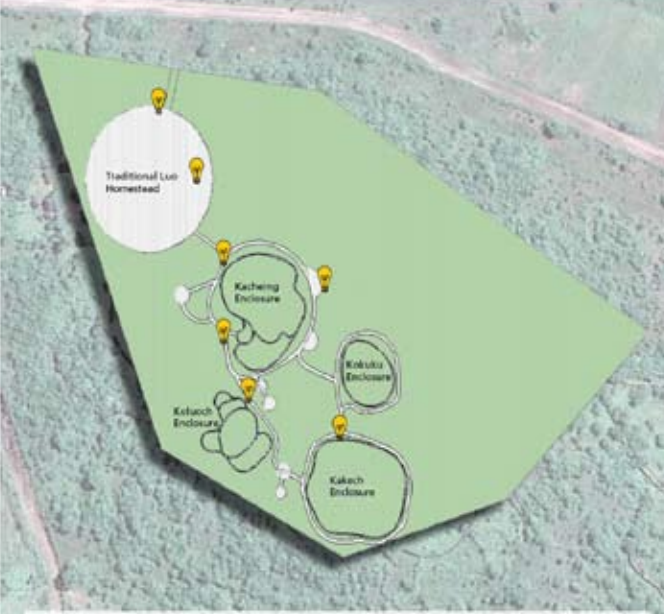
- Walk the 1.2 km (3/4-mile) trail that winds through the traditional Luo homestead and around the amazing four enclosures.
- Experience the natural surroundings, and take part in observing the flora and fauna living at the site.
- Camp overnight at one of the many bandas sites and enjoy the pristine night sky.
- Learn about the rich cultural history of rural Kenya at the visitor's center.
- Learn about and purchase traditional crafts.

### GETTING TO THIMLICH OHINGA

- This should be step by step instructions on how to get to the site.
- Several options can be explained, such as by private vehicle or how to book a multi-site tour.
- A web link with more information can be listed as well.

### BEFORE YOUR VISIT...

- Make sure you have plenty of water and snacks with. There are limited opportunities to purchase more.
- Plan your trip ahead of time.
- A third tip for visitors.
- A fourth tip for visitors.
- A fifth tip for visitors.



The easy 1.2 km (3/4-mile) trail leads the visitor through the site with several interesting stops along the way. Groups of 6 or more can opt to take a guided with one of the knowledgeable trail interpreters. For more information about the interpretive trail, please visit [www.museums.or.ke/TOTrail](http://www.museums.or.ke/TOTrail).