

Thimlich Ohinga: Preserving 500 Years of Living Culture

“THE FRIGHTENING DENSE FOREST”

Welcome to Thimlich Ohinga, or “the frightening dense forest in the Luo language!

Today you will be exploring one of the most unique heritage sites in Africa. This area was home to many families over 500 years ago, and the stone walls that they built still stand for us today.

The enclosures at Thimlich Ohinga give us a glimpse of what life was like for people centuries ago, and it is extremely important to preserve this site for centuries to come.



Please stay on the trail

Please leave everything the way you found it

Please have fun!



There are interpretive panels along the trail to provide you with information about the site. Please ask any questions to our staff in the visitor center!

How Were The Walls Built?

Can you see anything holding the stones together in the walls in front of you? The stones in the wall were placed and fit together much like puzzle pieces. Without the help of cement or any material to hold the stones into place, it is amazing that these walls still stand here 500 years later.



The stones fit together much like puzzle pieces

Keeping the Past Alive Today

Local Luo Stone Masons help preserve the wall enclosures at Thimlich Ohinga by replacing stones that have fallen out of place or have been damaged in the last 500 years. They help protect this valuable site. While we do not know the exact methods ancient people used to build these walls, we know they carefully fit stones they gathered from the nearby landscape.

Think about having to carry all of the stone needed to build these walls. We have a sample of the native stone used in these walls for you to feel.

Who Built These Walls?

Many Hands, Many Questions

The walls of Thimlich Ohinga are amazing, and they are also a mystery. To this day, it is unclear who the people were who built these walls 500 years ago.

While Luo people live in this area today, some oral history and historical evidence point to Bantu tribal settling of the area 500 years ago when the walls and enclosures were built.

These walls belong to the past, the present, and future generations. It is important to look at them as a triumph of human achievement and an inspiration to all.

The multicultural nature of Thimlich Ohinga is something to be celebrated by everyone!



Many mysteries remain, like the carvings on the gate.
What do you think they mean?

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a rustic stone wall made of irregular, grey and brown stones. To the left of the wall, there are green trees and foliage. The sky is visible at the top, appearing overcast. The wall runs diagonally from the bottom left towards the top right.

WHY Were the Walls Built?

Many theories exist about why exactly these walls were constructed, lift the flaps below to see some of them!

DEFENSE

Some sources say these walls were for protection, which makes sense, however there is little archaeological evidence to prove this, unless the walls did their job!

The high areas of the wall are believed to be where the warriors would guard the settlement, and the low gates would make for a crouching and easily attacked enemy.

KEEPING CATTLE IN

Since cattle have been a huge part of the different groups of people who have lived on this site for 500 years, one theory suggests that these walls were used in the settlement to keep what was inside the walls inside, such as cattle and other small animals.

**Can you think of any other reasons why people built these walls?
Write them down on the cards and attach them to our Be A History Detective board!**

The Luo Culture: A Rich History

What you are looking at is a traditional Luo home-
stead. What do you see in these structures that had to
be collected by people in order to build these
structures?

The trees, stones, and plants in the “dense, frightening
forest” were all used by the different people who have
lived in this area for hundreds of years.

The main house is where the first wife of the husband
would live, and the second and third wives and sons
lived in the remaining houses.

On your walk along the trail, think about what these
walls were used for in the time after they were built.

Cattle were kept in the enclosures, as they are a very
important part of the Luo culture. Music is another
key aspect of Luo culture-- do you think the walls
were a part of any ceremonies?



Unlocking the Past, Preserving for the Future

These objects were found on the site, and were used by people in their everyday lives 500 years ago!

GRINDING STONES

Look at the stones to the right of the sign.
The settlers of Thimlich Ohinga had to grind millet, a small cereal grain people used for food in the past, and still use today. Imagine having to grind your grain with stone-- that's hard work!



ANCIENT GAME

This stone game board found at the site shows that the people who lived here had a lively culture, with fun and games! Does this board look familiar? Mancala is a game played today, with the same board. Many think this was the same game!



Now it's your turn to try! We have replicas of both the grinding stone and the game for you to use to put yourself in the shoes of the people who lived here centuries ago.

Living Off the Land

The “Frightening Dense Forest” of Thimlich Ohinga is an amazing ecosystem that sustained the many people who have lived here in the past.

Thimlich Ohinga is a fortress in the “Scary, dense forest,” and this forest is full of plants that people in the past and the present have used for many resources.

Trees and stone were used in building, grasses and grain fed cattle, and plants were gathered for medicinal purposes. Hunting wild animals in this area helped people survive.

This habitat provided for the people in this area for centuries, and like the stone structures, must be preserved for the future.



What resources can you see in this dense forest?

Preservation For Future Generations



Can you see where stones have fallen from the wall?

In 1981, Thimlich Ohinga became a National Monument, and in 2010, steps were taken to add it to UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Much like the Great Zimbabwe ruins or the Egyptian Pyramids, this site must be preserved so that future generations can step into the past.

Preservation is a team effort, and at Thimlich Ohinga, we need the help of everyone to make this place a lasting legacy.

It Takes A Village... To Preserve!

We hope you have enjoyed your time at Thimlich Ohinga!

The history and rich living culture of this site must be preserved. This can be difficult as vegetation grows quickly-- in fact, trees can grow through the structures.

With the help of local stewards, and the help from tourists who are interested in protecting this place, Thimlich Ohinga will remain an educational and multicultural heritage site.

Bandas, or campsites are available to stay in, to extend your experience at Thimlich Ohinga.

Thank you for visiting this place with respect!



Community Workshop at Thimlich Ohinga



Bandas, or campsites, help extend your time in this magical place!