On 4 June 2019 Dr Mary Lange, Nongcebo Ngcobo and Dr Lauren Dyll set out for Mpumalanga to conduct a preliminary field trip for the research project, “Marking memories: pre-industrial to contemporary, north of the Garib River and west of the Lembombo Mountains”. The project aims to operationalise indigenous knowledge systems in a diverse contemporary South African society by the inclusion of diverse African languages, and comparisons of past through to present engravings found in two different regions of South Africa.

Engravings can be considered markings of identity. In order to foreground the idea of living heritage and dynamic identities an important component of the project is to document the multivocal, intercultural readings of the local rock engravings by members of a diverse research team that includes academics, local professionals (teachers and museum staff) and local community members. Also of interest to the project are the ways in which people in Mashishing today, use markings for their personal or community identity. Interesting discussions emanated both from the teacher’s workshop facilitated by Dr Mary and the interviews Nongcebo conducted with Busisiwe Ngwane (a local teacher) and several museum staff. Nongcebo, who is supervised by Dr Lauren, is writing her Masters within the broader project. Her topic assesses the potentiality of participation within the Mashishing Marking Memories project from a culture-centered approach.

JP Celliers, Lydenburg Museum curator, spent two days with Dr Mary, Nongcebo and Dr Lauren. They visited the museum itself, as well as the ‘Bokoni City’ that includes remnants of the Late Iron Age Bokoni farmers lived and organised their living space — many engravings depict the typical Nguni settlement patterns. Although the engravings’ authorship and subject matter is becoming clearer, its meanings and motivation for its creation remain poorly understood. Mary, Nongcebo and Dr Lauren are grateful to Lydenburg Museum staff for their warm hospitality and insightful couple of days.

The Marking Memories project is one of the projects that characterises this research and community engagement partnership. Dr Mary Lange is instrumental in the Mashishing project as an Arts, Culture and Heritage specialist, is the ARROWSA chairperson and is a CCMS Honorary lecturer. Dr Lauren Dyll is the project leader, senior lecturer at CCMS and is head of the research portfolio for ARROWSA.