



BLUE SOLIDARITY: Table Mountain in Cape Town was lit blue on Friday night to mark World Diabetes Day. It joined more than 1 000 of the world's most famous landmarks, including New York's Empire State Building, the Sydney Opera House and the London Eye, which were all lit blue

Picture: SHELLEY CHRISTIANS

NASHIRA DAVIDS

AT SUNSET, figures in white robes snake up one of the world's most famous mountains to sing and chant and beat drums in a cave.

But the noise from Peers Cave in Table Mountain National Park — an international heritage site — is causing sleepless nights in Sun Valley in Cape Town.

And Gavin Bell, one of the park's managers, said the cave contained the only remaining San paintings in the Peninsula, because all the others had been "trashed".

Last week Bunny Pendlebury of the local neighbourhood watch summoned park rangers to remove a group who had made

fires in the cave. This week Pendlebury said he received a call from a resident at 2.40am to complain about the chanting.

At daybreak, the groups meet at a fish pond, where they wash their hands and feet. Ephraim Nafetfa, assistant general secretary of the Zion Christian Church, said its representatives had met park officials.

"It is definitely not a rule or practice of this church that members meet or sleep in caves or conduct any church or prayer services there," he said. And while there was no proof

that members visited the cave, Nafetfa said officials would advise them not to do so.

Dr Graham Avery of the Iziko Museum said archaeological deposits older than 100 000 years had been uncovered in Peers Cave. He believes the cave is the most archaeologically significant place in the park. He said the cave walls were recently cleaned of graffiti but had been vandalised again.

Wits archaeologist Dr Amanda Esterhuysen said height was linked to sacredness and power by many religions.

Cave cacophony causes concern

"You often find religious groups going to Melville koppies in Johannesburg. Very often ancestral chiefs are buried on hillsides."

Bell says that it is not only church groups who overnight on the mountain illegally.

Officials have met with various groups, including shark spotters, the homeless and people walking their dogs, to discuss their activities on the mountain.

"The major threat is fire. When fynbos burns, there's a lot of damage and a threat to people's properties and lives. There are also no toilet facilities. Can you imagine the impact that has on the mountain?" said Bell.

The park, which is freely accessible, receives four million visitors a year.

