

Skellig Michael Implementation Group Annual Progress Report 2010

Background

The Skellig Michael Management Plan:

The Skellig Michael World Heritage Site Management Plan 2008-2018 has been developed to protect and preserve Skellig Michael World Heritage Site (WHS), also known as Great Skellig. The Plan was published on 9 July 2008 and addresses cultural and natural heritage issues in an integrated manner. The Management Plan provides a framework for the proactive management of the site, helping to ensure that its Outstanding Universal Value is sustained and preserved for future generations. The permanent protection of Skellig Michael's heritage is of the highest importance to the international community as a whole. The Plan has been produced by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG), Ireland, in conjunction with the Office of Public Works (OPW) and has been developed in consultation with local interest groups, non-governmental organisations and other interested parties.

Site Ownership and Management:

Skellig Michael, with the exception of the lower lighthouse and helipad areas, is owned by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on behalf of the Irish people. The DoEHLG is the State body responsible under the World Heritage Convention for policy development relating to the built and natural heritage of the site. The OPW is responsible for the management of the site. It is a recommendation of the Operational Guidelines issued by the World Heritage Committee that all State Parties have adequate management frameworks, a documented management system and appropriate legislation in place to protect the World Heritage status of inscribed sites.

Skellig Michael Implementation Group (SMIG)

The SMIG is representative of the Government agencies with responsibilities in relation to management issues on Skellig Michael, namely:-

- The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) which is resourced by; the National Monuments Service, National Monuments (Archaeology), National Parks & Wildlife Service, Built Heritage and Architectural Policy Section and
- The Office of Public Works (OPW) provides Visitor Services & National Monuments (Conservation Architecture) and Management support.

The SMIG is responsible for the oversight of the implementation of the actions set out in the Skellig Michael Management Plan and the recommendations of the Report on the UNESCO Mission to Skellig Michael in 2007.

During 2010 the Skellig Michael Implementation Group met on three occasions:-

The following items were on the agenda for discussion on 25 January 2010;

- Sign-off on minutes of SMIG meeting of 11 September 2009
- Mandatory Report to UNESCO World Heritage Committee February 2010
- Update in relation to Health and Safety Review
- Update regarding Visitor Services
- World Heritage Website Update

The agenda for 3 June 2010 consisted of the following items;

- Sign-off on minutes of SMIG meeting of 25 January 2010
- Sign-off on SMIG Annual Report 2009
- Progress Report on the Action Plan Programme 2008-2018 – Update
- Interim Advice Report of Expert Academic Advisory Group (EAAG)
- Resources to record works on Skellig Michael as advised by EAAG
- Toilet facilities – Feasibility Study – Update
- Safety Review – Update
- World Heritage Website Update

The agenda for 15 November 2010 consisted of the following items;

- Sign-off on minutes of SMIG meeting of 3 June 2010
- Progress Report on the Action Plan Programme 2008-2018 – Update
- Resources to record works on Skellig Michael as advised by EAAG
- Future Advice of EAAG
- Toilet facilities – Feasibility Study – Update
- Safety Review – Update
- World Heritage Committee Decision 34 COM 7B.89
- Liaison arrangements with the local authority, boatmen and other local stakeholders

Achievements for 2010

A number of the actions set out in the Skellig Michael Management Plan have been successfully progressed in 2010 as follows:-

Skellig Michael Management Plan –Action 5

Decision taken at November meeting of SMIG to hold a public conference in April 2011 in Dublin Castle to facilitate a series of presentations on the archaeology, architecture and natural environment of Skellig Michael, on the rationale for the work and proposed future work. Agenda, speakers and invitees to be decided on by a steering group in DoEHLG and OPW.

Skellig Michael Management Plan –Action 6

Meetings were held by OPW with the boatmen on 10 February, 13 May, 30 June and 20 July 2010 to address matters related to boat permits and access to Skellig Michael. Minutes of the meetings were provided to the boatmen. Minister Mansergh and other local representatives attended the meeting of the 30 June with the boatmen. These meetings should assist in addressing matters raised by the World Heritage Committee in its Decision WHC-10/34 COM 7B.89 in establishing a forum for liaising with the boatmen who transport visitors to the island so as to put in place formally agreed arrangements for landing and timetables.

Skellig Michael Management Plan - Action 7 -12

Works

It is anticipated that a full report on all aspects of the archaeological excavations will be available on the World Heritage website (www.worldheritageireland.ie) by Spring 2011. It is proposed to have the report prepared for full publication in 2012. To date the following have been completed

- Palaeoenvironmental work
- Human remains analysis
- Radiocarbon dating
- Historical research (to end of 13th century)
- Pottery reports
- Artefact analysis

And the following matters are not yet finalized but are in progress

- LiDAR survey – processing near completion.
- Site drawings
- Stratigraphic reports
- Artefact illustration
- Faunal remains

South Peak

The works programme for 2010 focused initially on the South Peak with the excavation of the last remaining section of the access route, the Broad Ledge. A report the previous year had identified problems with water damage and the potential loss of important archaeological evidence. Excavation revealed that a very wide set of steps ran along this ledge. Five of the steps still remained although some had become dislodged. The conservation works re-positioned these steps and gave support to what remained of the flight by putting back those steps which had fallen off the ledge. The drain was repaired to prevent future erosion of this feature.

Survey, photographic and film record was taken before, during and after the conservation work was completed. In addition, the specialist geologist worked with the team on the site to finalise the site work/investigation for his South Peak report. Some additional observations were made, adding to our knowledge. Some limited survey work was also undertaken lower down the route.

Some study was also undertaken on the Saddle itself, leading up to the start of the route up the South Peak. Observation suggests that a set of steps would have led up from the Saddle to the start of the climb. This alters our perception of the focus on the South Peak.

Monastery

The works at the Monastery are almost completed. The conservation of St. Michael's Church remains. Samples of the mortar from both periods had been taken previously and a detailed analysis carried out. Some considerable time was spent trying to locate identical sands and aggregates from the mainland, where the original material came from. To date the OPW has been unsuccessful in locating suitable material so the re-pointing of the structure was postponed until 2011. The search for suitable materials is continuing.

The area allocated for storage of building materials and equipment over the years was 'reclaimed'. These materials were sorted and double bagged for removal from the site. Many attempts were made for the removal of this material by helicopter but bad weather patterns frustrated this work over a period of many months. The material was finally removed in January 2011. With this action the Monastery is now clear of all extraneous material save for the scaffolding to complete the work to St. Michael's Church.

Lower Lighthouse Road

Works to repair the retaining wall continued this season once the works were completed on the South Peak. It was only possible to undertake this work in the second half of the season due to the nesting birds. A notifiable action consent for the work was issued by NPWS, which was undertaken using a methodology devised on site in conjunction with Birdwatch Ireland. A section of the wall west of the workmen's huts and the walling on the east side of Cross Cove were completed. There were considerable delays due to health and safety issues and the requirement to have each section of scaffolding specially designed beforehand and then signed off on independently before any works could take place. The weather frustrated these actions considerably.

Maintenance Programme

The pier was cleaned down before the start of the season by the OPW boatman. There was much damage from winter storms and the lower section of railing along the roadway had been carried away by the sea. This was replaced before the island was officially opened to the public. In addition, the steep areas above the lighthouse road were inspected by the safety consultants to check for possible rock falls. This was an important recommendation of the Safety Review.

Maintenance was carried out on the east and north steps during the season in order to ensure their structural preservation. It was necessary to cut back the sea campion growth associated with these steps. General maintenance was carried out also within the Monastery, on the South Peak and along the lighthouse road. This will be an annual activity. The continued maintenance of the south steps [visitor access] was undertaken as required. These steps become loose with the passage of visitors and they are inspected and repaired on a very regular basis, often daily.

The protective canopy at Cross Cove was inspected by the structural engineer. A programme of replacement has been agreed which will focus on repairing the most urgent sections first. This work will begin in 2011 but some additional support was added to reinforce areas where the structure had weakened.

The Upper Lighthouse Road

This project is in the initial planning stages. A form of the LiDAR survey was given to the structural engineer to use as a framework for a detailed survey of the upper road, which is in a serious condition. Detailed on-site work commenced and will continue into 2011. Detailed inspection has also begun and a full structural report will be completed by the end of 2011.

In addition, an initial site visit was made with Birdwatch Ireland in relation to storm petrels. The extent of the work was outlined and it was agreed that in advance of this work a storm petrel survey would need to be undertaken. The OPW now has sound data upon which to base an approach to the project.

New Discoveries

During the season two important discoveries were made in relation to steps. A series of steps exist south east of and below the helipad. Two short sets have been recorded in the past and are of lighthouse construction. This area was examined thoroughly with the aid of ropes and there is evidence to confirm that these date from the lighthouse period. However, further east and closer to the entrance to Cross Cove there are additional steps of some antiquity. From an initial inspection it would appear that they date from two different periods. These will be more formally recorded in 2011.

The remains of a very old staircase were discovered on the north east side of the island. This was investigated and recorded photographically with the aid of ropes. The remains of a shaped cross was also found in association with these steps. Further investigations will continue in 2011. However, it would appear that this staircase pre-dates all the others and may have led up from the north east side of the island to the east enclosure wall of the Monastery where the earliest entrance is situated.

Specialist Reports

The specialists who undertook the lichen survey were commissioned to write a piece for the World Heritage Ireland website www.worldheritageireland.ie. Appended to this will be a list of the lichens found on the island with colour illustrations. A lichen, new to Northern Europe, was discovered on the island. This web report should be delivered by April 2011. When the specialists were on the island the opportunity was taken to inform the guides about the lichens so they can pass this knowledge on to interested visitors.

Waste Management

All waste is segregated and removed from the island on a weekly basis where it is disposed of in a manner agreed with the Local Authority. This system put in place a number of years ago continues.

Skellig Michael Management Plan Actions 13 - 23

Works are substantially completed on a draft conservation management plan for the Skelligs Special Protection Area (SPA). It is anticipated that public consultation on this plan will occur in early 2011. Natura Environmental Consultants were engaged in 2009 for the production of the Skelligs SPA plan which will include:

- A broad scale vegetation map;
- A monitoring programme for manx shearwater; and
- An action plan to deal with the accidental or deliberate introductions of predator species.

Skellig Michael Bird Census 2010

A breeding seabird census was carried out 9-12th July 2010
The table below gives breeding seabird count details:

Species	Count
Fulmar	662 apparently occupied nests (AOS) + 15 individuals
Lesser black-backed gull	10 AOS + 29 individuals
Herring gull	7 AOS + 48 individuals
Great black-backed gull	3 AOS + 11 individuals
Kittiwake	365 AOS + 34 individuals + 32 chicks
Guillemot	1092 AOS
Razorbill	213 individuals
Puffin	Not counted

Other bird species recorded:

Cory's shearwater	1
Peregrine falcon	3
Chough	2
Raven	5
Shag	2
Oystercatcher	2
Rock pipit	22
Wheatear	5
Wren	4
Hooded crow	2

A study to investigate the winter whereabouts of the puffins that breed on Skellig Michael was initiated in 2010. In July, scientists at the Coastal & Marine Resources Centre and School of Biology, Earth and Environmental Science, University College Cork attached miniature “geolocator” tags, weighing only 1.5 grams to 24 puffins. When these birds return to Skellig Michael in 2011, the tags will be recovered and the data they contain will be used to calculate where the birds have been over the winter months.

Skellig Michael Management Plan - Action 26

Kerry County Council was invited to consider the recognition of the Skellig Michael World Heritage Site Management Plan 2008 – 2018 in the County Development Plan for Kerry.

Skellig Michael Management Plan - Action 27

The new World Heritage Ireland website www.worldheritageireland.ie was launched by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on 8 June 2010. This is a subject specific website dealing with all matters concerning Ireland's World Heritage properties and projects relating to World Heritage. This website provides information on Ireland's two World Heritage properties Brú na Bóinne and Skellig Michael together with the properties on the new World Heritage Tentative List.

Skellig Michael Management Plan - Action 28

To ensure secondary legislation is in place to provide for the enlargement of the area of the Special Protection Area for Skellig Michael, to include the area of sea between and around the islands Statutory Instrument S.I. No. 74 was made in 2010 entitled “EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (CONSERVATION OF WILD BIRDS (SKELLIGS SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA 004007)) REGULATIONS 2010” details of which can be found on the World Heritage website at <http://www.worldheritageireland.ie/skellig-michael/natural-heritage/>.

Skellig Michael Management Plan - Action 32-41

The Visitor Season on Skellig Michael was extended in 2010 to the end of October but due to adverse weather conditions the island was closed to visitors on 17 October 2010. Guide training was upgraded in 2010 with ongoing training programmes planned for 2011, to include a training update on recent research, so as to enhance the visitor experience.

Certain visitor statistics are recorded by the guides each year with a more detailed survey planned for 2011 to include a visitor analysis and trends, and an analysis of visitor impact on the property. There is ongoing monitoring of unauthorised access to Skellig Michael.

Skellig Michael Management Plan Public Action 42-49

The Visitor's Guide was completed in 2009 with a further guide produced in 2010 entitled "Safe Access Guide" in the light of the Safety Review published in 2010. These leaflets/guides are available locally to Skellig Michael and are included on the World Heritage Ireland website for the information of visitors in advance of travelling to the island.

Skellig Michael Management Plan - Action 50-52

Safety

The OPW engaged Byrne Ó Cléirigh Limited Consultants/Engineers to conduct a Safety Review in relation to Skellig Michael as a result of the occurrence of two fatalities following falls on the island in 2009. This Review was completed and a report produced in April 2010. The recommendations have been fully accepted by the Office of Public Works. Certain of the recommendations in this Safety Review had already been implemented for the 2010 visitor season.

A draft Safety Statement for the island was completed in 2010 in accordance with Health and Safety legislation. The Emergency Plan is in place and two full-scale exercises have been carried out. The Safety Statement is currently being updated in advance of the 2011 season. The OPW are engaging with the Commissioners of Irish Lights to explore using part of their accommodation for guides or conservation workers.

Signage

Warning signs have been erected on the island outlining the difficult terrain. The guides on the island have been instructed in relation to particular risk areas for visitors. A guide greets visitors at the bottom of the steps and informs the visitors of the difficult terrain and briefs them on how best to proceed safely. A steel chain has been fixed to a vertical rock alongside a narrow ledge and some steps have been improved. The OPW have contacted Kerry County Council with a view to erecting warning signage on the mainland in relation to the hazards of visiting the island and the precautions necessary.

Toilet facilities on the island

Malachy Walsh & Partners produced a feasibility report on the provision of toilet facilities on the island. OPW Engineers met with Kerry Co Council officials regarding a public toilet facility on the island. The Site Management Team will draft a position paper with a view to a decision on the matter in advance of the 2011 visitor season. The lack of toilet facilities on the island is outlined on website information relating to the island.

Skellig Michael Management Plan - Action 57-60

Adverse weather conditions on Skellig Michael in 2010 impacted on the number of visitors to the island. It is intended to monitor rainfall amounts in 2011.

Skellig Michael Management Plan - Action 61-67

The DoEHLG engaged in correspondence with the EAAG following the interim advice provided by it in March of 2010.

World Heritage Committee Decision WHC-10/34 COM 7B.89 (copy of which is attached at Appendix 1)

In light of the Decision of the World Heritage Committee WHC-10/34 COM 7B.89 Mr. Grellan Rourke has been appointed site manager of the Skellig Michael Site Management Team (SMT) at its meeting on 11 October 2010 and this appointment has been endorsed by the SMIG at its meeting on 15 November 2010.

Work In Progress

A number of actions are ongoing and will be the focus of the SMIG in 2011, including;-

- *ongoing operation of the Skellig Michael Site Management Team and the Expert Academic Advisory Group,*
- *progressing of the stratigraphic report on excavations,*
- *resolution of the boatmen permit system,*
- *improved liaison with local interest groups and other relevant parties,*
- *publication of the conservation plan for the Skelligs SPA,*
- *reviewing the guide operation on the island,*
- *increased understanding of and appreciation for Skellig Michael and its environs,*
- *continuing implementation of an integrated emergency rescue plan to maintain a high level of safety on the island,*
- *continuing implementation of the Safety Review recommendations,*
- *monitoring of those factors with the potential to impact on the built and natural environment of Skellig Michael,*
- *continued improvement of visitor management strategies,*

Appendix 1

Decision:34 COM 7B.89

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC-10/34.COM/7B,
2. Recalling Decision **32 COM 7B.96**, adopted at its 32nd session (Quebec City, 2008),
3. Acknowledges the progress achieved through the development of the Skellig Michael Management Plan 2008–2018 prepared by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, in conjunction with the Office of Public Works and following an extensive consultation process, that was formally submitted to the World Heritage Centre in July 2008;
4. Regrets that no substantial progress has been made in delivering a fully resourced publication programme to enable the conservation approaches to be fully and widely understood and urges the State Party to begin this programme with appropriate scientific advice;
5. Notes that the first meeting with the boatmen only took place in February 2010 and requests the State Party to give higher priority to liaising with stakeholders who transport visitors in order to put in place formally agreed arrangements for landing and timetables;
6. Also regrets that the State Party did not consider the need for a specific Site Manager to be appointed for the property, and also requests that the State Party reconsider this or assign a member of the Site Management Team to take lead responsibility;
7. Also urges the State Party to complete a Risk Assessment and a Visitor Carrying Capacity Study as soon as possible in order to put in place adequate arrangements for visitors that mitigate as far as possible risks to which they may be exposed;
8. Further requests the State Party to report back on all the points above and the recommendations of the 2007 advisory mission to the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies by **1 February 2012** .