

Skellig Michael

Works Report for the 2014 Season

Over the 2014 season the weather was reasonable. As in the previous year some of the work to the lighthouse road retaining walls and parapets had to be delayed as much as possible in the season due to the nesting sea birds and *Birdwatch Ireland (BI)* acted as consultant in this regard. Further delays took place to the parapet walls, as it was not possible to work along the road in a number of places for reasons of safety while visitors were on the island.

Pre-season Safety Work

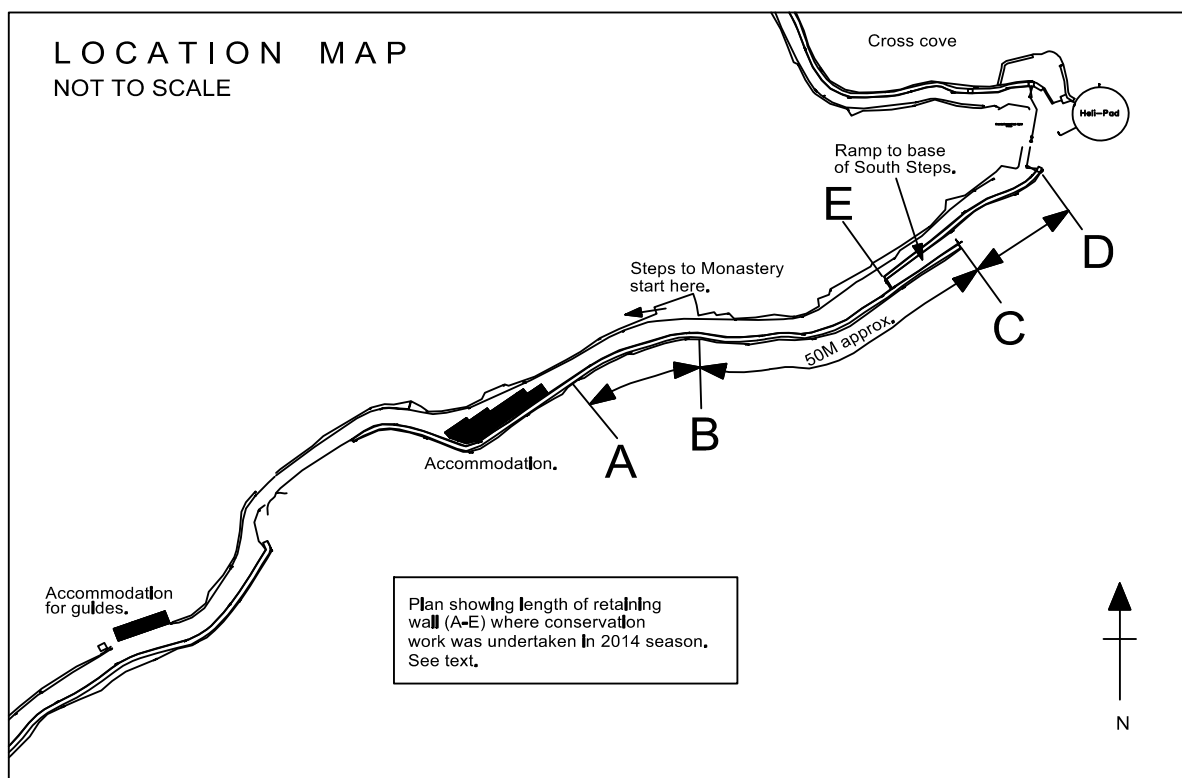
Over the winter there had been considerable rainfall which had caused a lot of stone to come down onto the road between Cross Cove and the landing pier. As in previous years the steep terrain above the road was examined and all loose stone material was removed to make the road safe for visitors. The road was then cleaned and the debris removed and the gulleys were also cleaned to ensure the effective run-off of rainwater.

Damaged North Steps

Preparatory work had been undertaken here during the 2013 season. The repair to the stretch of North Steps which had been previously damaged by a large rock fall was undertaken early in the season to coincide with the maintenance work in this area (see below). This repair work was completed and the safety netting removed.

Lower Lighthouse Road Retaining Wall & Parapet (Consent C475: 2013 & 2014)

Refer to plan below with notation A-E which is the length of retaining wall under consideration in this report. It had been envisaged that works to a section of this walling would have been started in the 2013 season but these works had to be delayed for reasons of bad weather towards the end of the season and issues generally relating to nesting seabirds.



A considerable length of scaffolding on the exposed face was erected between points A and E. Works focused at either end with a 50 m length section in the centre set aside to be undertaken in the 2015 season. The same procedure for works was adopted as the previous years. The lengths of walling completed are designated A-B and E-D on the above plan. Some work to the interior face of the parapet wall was undertaken along the stretch B-C.

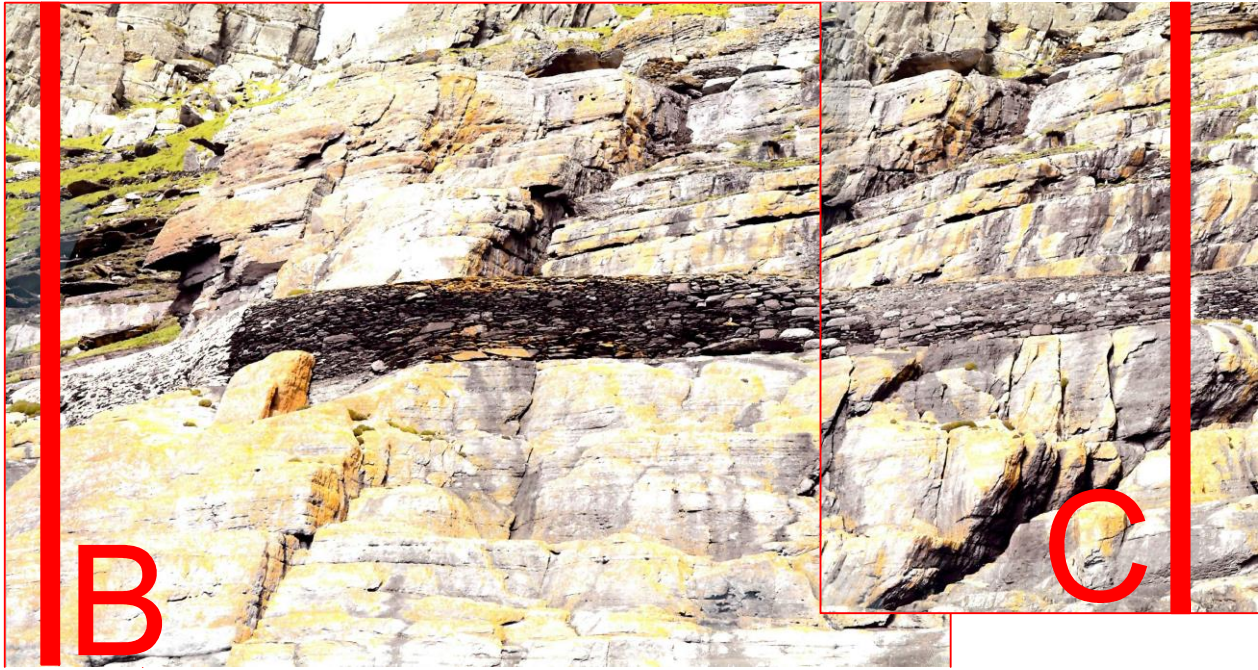
The cement pointing and concrete wall-top repairs were removed in the few places they existed and were replaced with a compatible lime-based mortar to match the existing. On the exterior the open joints were tightened according to the methodology agreed with *Birdwatch Ireland*. The works were inspected regularly by a representative of that organisation who was on-site to supervise the repair of a large hole in the section AB, close to the point B. The walling was completed on the exterior and much of the interior but it was impossible to repair all the tops of the parapets due to time limitations.

In mitigation, it was agreed to complete all the maintenance work on the island first before any works started to the lighthouse road retaining wall and parapet. The works were inspected by officers of the National Parks & Wildlife Service later in the season.

Before any works began to the retaining wall and parapet, a survey of the nesting birds had been undertaken through *Birdwatch Ireland* by Sarah Money. This survey ran from the pier end all the way to the lighthouse compound. Areas of walling where works have been undertaken since that survey were revisited by *BI* during the 2014 season and the results of this survey will form part of the documentation for the consent application for 2015.



Retaining wall A-B. This section was completed in 2014.



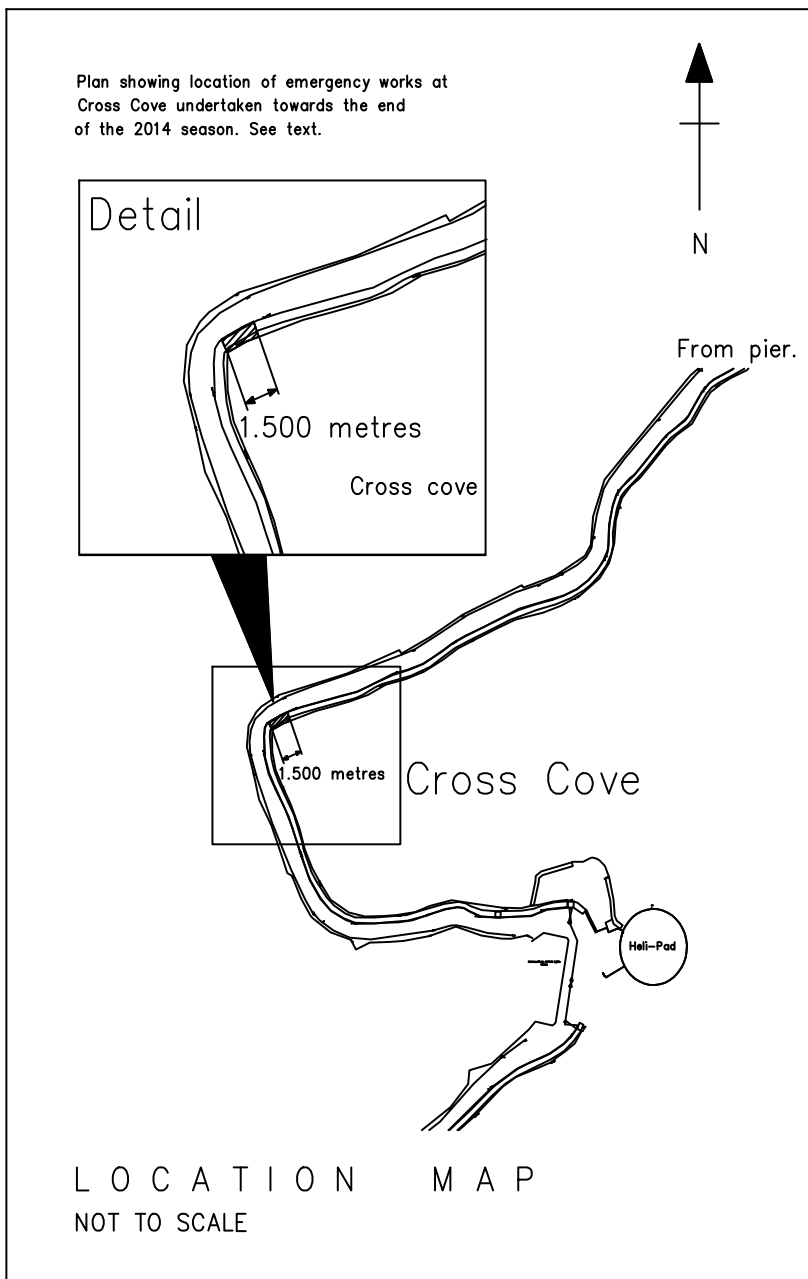
Retaining Wall B-C. This section of walling (c. 50 m length) was not undertaken in 2014.



Retaining wall C-D. See plan, as this actual stretch runs up to the point E to the left. This section of walling (E-D) was completed in 2014.

Emergency works to NE corner of Retaining Wall at Cross Cove

Conservation works had been completed in very recent years to the retaining wall around Cross Cove. However, over the winter considerable water had cascaded down in this corner causing the retaining wall (see plan for location on next page) to bulge outwards. This was examined by the project structural engineer and the immediate area was cordoned off to keep visitors back from the wall. As it was not deemed immediately urgent it was decided to undertake remedial work here later in the season when there would be fewer visitors, due to the requirement to open up the road. An extension of the consent for 2014 was granted.



The work was undertaken in early September and was supervised by an archaeologist with many years experience working on the island and the conservation architect/Site Manager. In the course of the opening up it was discovered there had been a water drain under the road which had been blocked on the retaining wall side with later cementitious repairs. This had probably been done by the lighthouse keepers. This intervention had effectively partially blocked the escape of water. In addition, lintols covering the drain had been broken, obstructing any water flow. Under the extreme pressure of the very heavy and persistent rainfalls over the winter the force of the water had pushed out the lower section of the wall so it presented a considerable bulge.

The remedial work was done during times visitors were not on the island. The roadway was opened up to reveal the drain which was cleaned out by the archaeologist. The side walls needed some minor repairs and a couple of broken lintols over the drain needed replacing. The cementitious repair was removed and the base of the wall repaired using a lime mortar forming an opening through the wall with a drain hole at the outer face. The detail was copied from other such drains along the road. See plan and photographs.



Drain after opening up.



Working on the repair of the retaining wall after the removal of the cementitious repair.

Maintenance Programme

At the start of the season the Maintenance Programme was undertaken with the help of the safety officer on the island. As in recent years maintenance was undertaken to the East, South and North Steps, within the Monastery and to the structures on the South Peak. There was some minor maintenance to the canopy at Cross Cove. Given the large areas conserved to date the timeframe for this activity has been extended significantly in recent years.

Recording

Recording work was undertaken in relation to the ongoing conservation work along the lighthouse road.

Debris removal

Small amounts of building debris were removed by boat to the mainland during the season.