

Sceilg Mhichíl
World Heritage Property
OPW Works Season 2023
UNESCO Report – Final Issue 12th January 2024



OPW Oifig na
nOibreacha Poiblí
Office of Public Works

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1. Introduction

This report aims to outline the repair works completed on the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Sceilg Mhichíl in the 2023 season. The works were overseen by the Office of Public Works (OPW). The report will outline the extent of the repair works carried out in 2023 and will also briefly summarise works to be undertaken in 2024. The report will also list potential threats to the site and how these threats are being managed by the OPW.

Sceilg Mhichíl opened for tourists on 13th May 2023. The OPW work crew carried out a sweep and necessary maintenance works to the monastic settlement and steps in advance of the 2023 tourist season. Sceilg Mhichíl officially closed on the 11th October 2023 and all OPW work crew left the island.

The OPW organised an experts site visit to Sceilg Mhichíl on 12th July 2023. The experts site visit was part of the proposed Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA) to be carried out at Sceilg Mhichíl. The CVA is part of a wider *Preserving Legacies* project. The aim of the experts site visit was to discuss and highlight the effects of climate change on the island's cultural and natural heritage.

The OPW installed scaffolding at the Upper Lighthouse sea wall to facilitate the proposed repair works to the sea wall. The works were successfully carried out in the 2023 season by OPW. All works were carried out under Ministerial Consent issued by the Minister for DHLGH.

Additionally, the OPW appointed Eamonn Costello (Kerry) Ltd in the 2022 season to install 3 no. permanent crash decks on the lower and upper lighthouse roads to replace the temporary crash decks previously installed in the 2021 season. The works to the crash decks commenced in 2022 and were completed in the 2023 season. All works were carried out under Ministerial Consent issued by the Minister for DHLGH.

The OPW co-ordinated with the National Monuments Service (NMS) and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) to ensure the protection of the island's archaeology and wildlife. All works were carried out under Ministerial Consent issued by the Minister for DHLGH. All future works at the twin lighthouses will be carried out within the context of an agreed Conservation Management Plan for the sites and in accordance with Objectives of the Sceilg Mhichíl Management Plan 2020-30.

The OPW completed the UNESCO Periodic Reporting in 2023 in collaboration with DHLGH who are the National Focal Point for reporting to UNESCO. The OPW completed the questionnaire included in Section II of the UNESCO Periodic Reporting and issued the questionnaire to the World Heritage Unit in DHLGH for approval. The final questionnaire was submitted by DHLGH to UNESCO on 24th July 2023.

Other tasks and works undertaken in 2023 include the following:

- NPWS carried out surveys on bird species populations and nesting locations.
- OPW Killarney Districts National Monuments Architects carried out 7 no. site visits to assess and monitor ongoing works on site.
- The permanent Crash Decks installation works were completed on site by the appointed main contractor Eamon Costello (Kerry) Ltd. They were installed in 3 no. locations on the Lower and Upper Lighthouse Roads.

- OPW installed scaffolding at the Upper Lighthouse sea wall to facilitate the masonry repair works to the sea wall. The masonry repair works to the sea wall were completed on site in the 2023 season.
- OPW M&E Section installed a trial CCTV on the storage shed located near the Landing Pier.
- OPW continued with the maintenance works to the Upper Lighthouse Road.
- DHLGH appointed Alan Hayden consultant archaeologist to carry out an archaeological excavation of the rock spur on the terrace above the Upper Lighthouse.
- An experts site visit was carried out on 12th July 2023 as part of the Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA) and the *Preserving Legacies* project.
- The UNESCO Periodic Reporting was completed in collaboration with DHLGH.
- The Commissioners of Irish Lights carried out a site visit to Sceilg Mhichíl on 25th July 2023.
- Crossing the Line productions continued with their ongoing filming of repair and survey works as a visual record of the works on site for OPW archives.

2. General Description

The island of Sceilg Mhichíl lies 11.6 km off the most westerly point of the Iveragh Peninsula, Co. Kerry (SMR: KE 104A-001; National Grid Reference 024812 060654). The island is approximately 21.6 ha in area. The WHP is owned by the Minister for the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on behalf of the Irish State. The Lower Lighthouse. Lighthouse tower and helipad are owned by the Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL).

The island's geological composition consists of Devonian Red Sandstone, formed in the Devonian Age approximately 400 million years ago. The topography that we see today is the result of rock formations that occurred circa 100 million years ago. Sceilg Mhichíl was also cut off from the mainland during the sea level rises resulting from the end of the last ice age approximately 10,000 years ago.

There are two main components of the WHS on the island. One is on the North Peak, the monastery enclosure located on the eastern side of the island that comprises a series of terraces, dry stone enclosing walls, three cisterns, seven corbelled cells (six intact) and two oratories. There are also the remains of St Michael's Church. This part of the monastic settlement was accessed via a series of three stairways, only one of which is accessible today.

The second part of the World Heritage site is located on the South Peak with the remains of a hermitage, constructed ledges and altar remains.

The post-medieval industrial heritage of the island are the twin lighthouses and lighthouse road, built in the 1820s, the 19th-century pier, and the Commissioners of Irish Light's helipad.

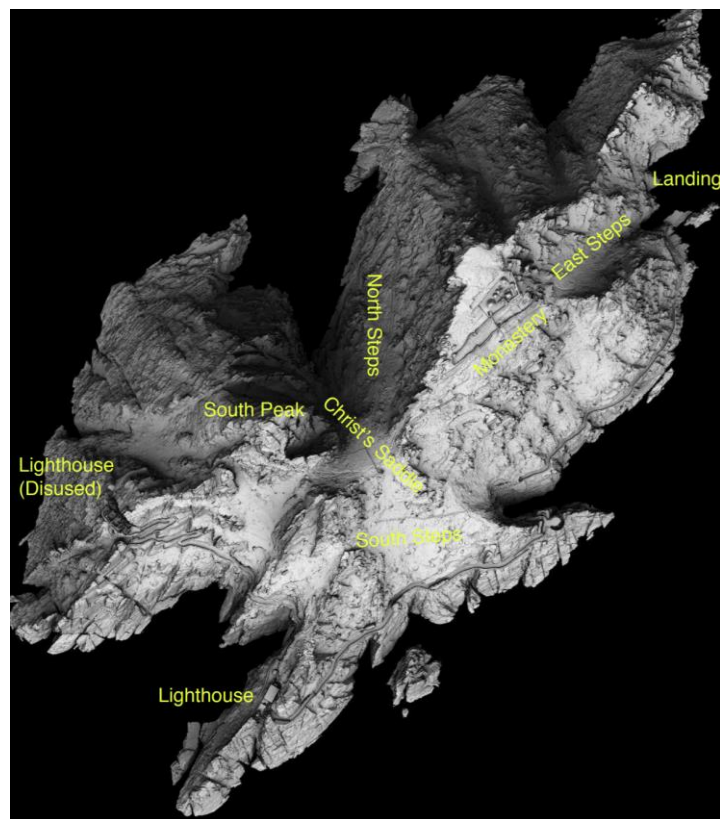


Figure 1 - LIDAR View of Sceilg Mhichíl (Bourke, Hayden, & Lynch, 2011)

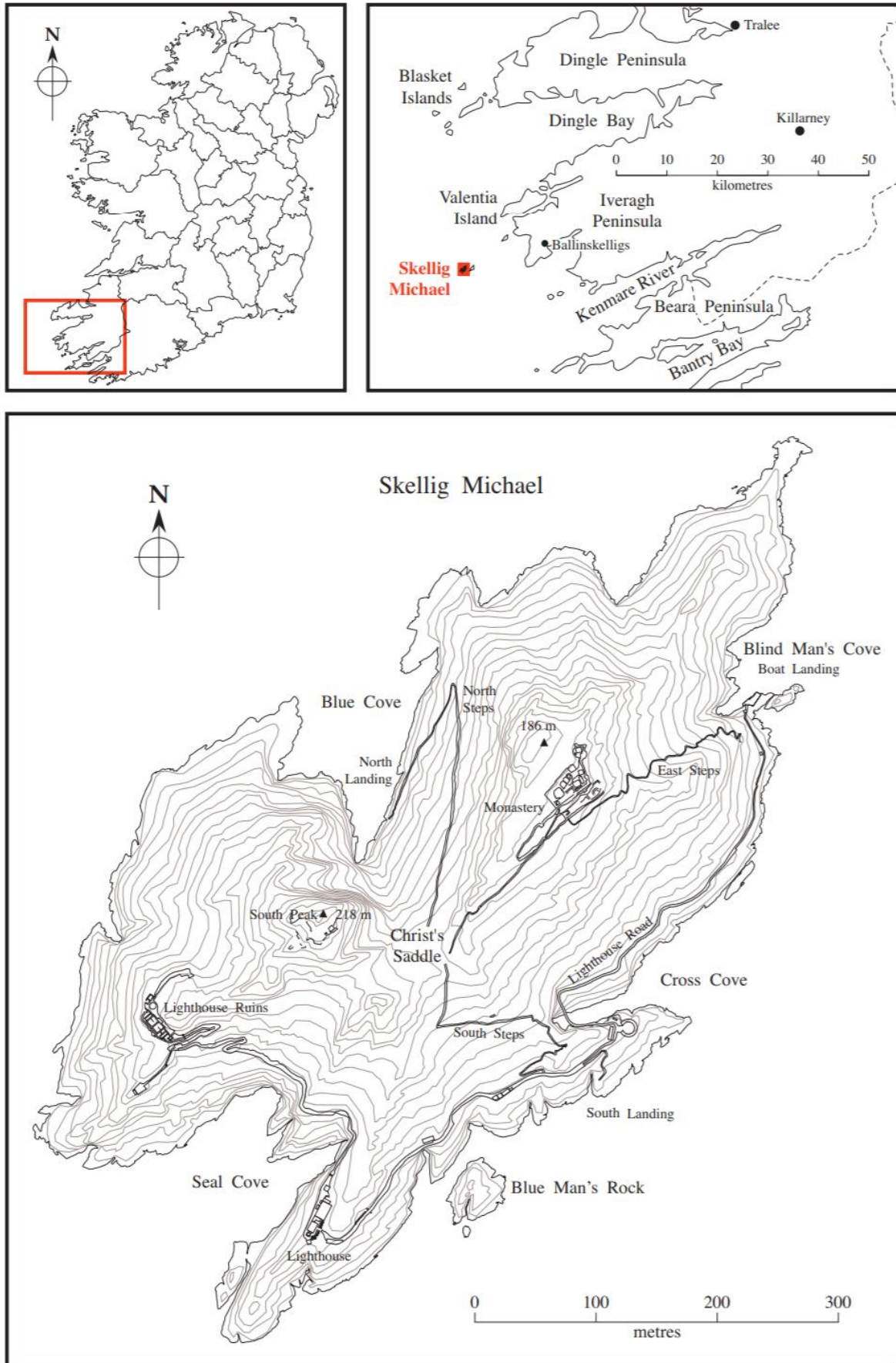


Figure 2 - Location Map of Sceilg Mhichíl (Bourke, Hayden, & Lynch, 2011)

3. Brief Site History

The following description can be found in *Skellig Michael World Heritage Site Management Plan 2008 -2018* (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government; Office of Public Works, 2008, pp. 11-13):

The word *Scelllic* means a rock, particularly a steep rock. The first reference to Scelig occurs in legend, where it is given as the burial place of Ir, son of Milesius, who was drowned during the landing of the Milesians. Françoise Henry, a noted academic, mentions a text from the eighth or ninth century in which reference is made to an episode of strife between the Kings of West Munster and the Kings of Cashel. Duagh, King of West Munster, is said to have ‘fled to Scellecc’. This event is attributed to the fifth century, but we have no means of knowing if a monastic settlement already existed on the island at this time. Charles Smith, writing in 1756, refers to the monastery being founded by St Fionan, who lived in the sixth century.

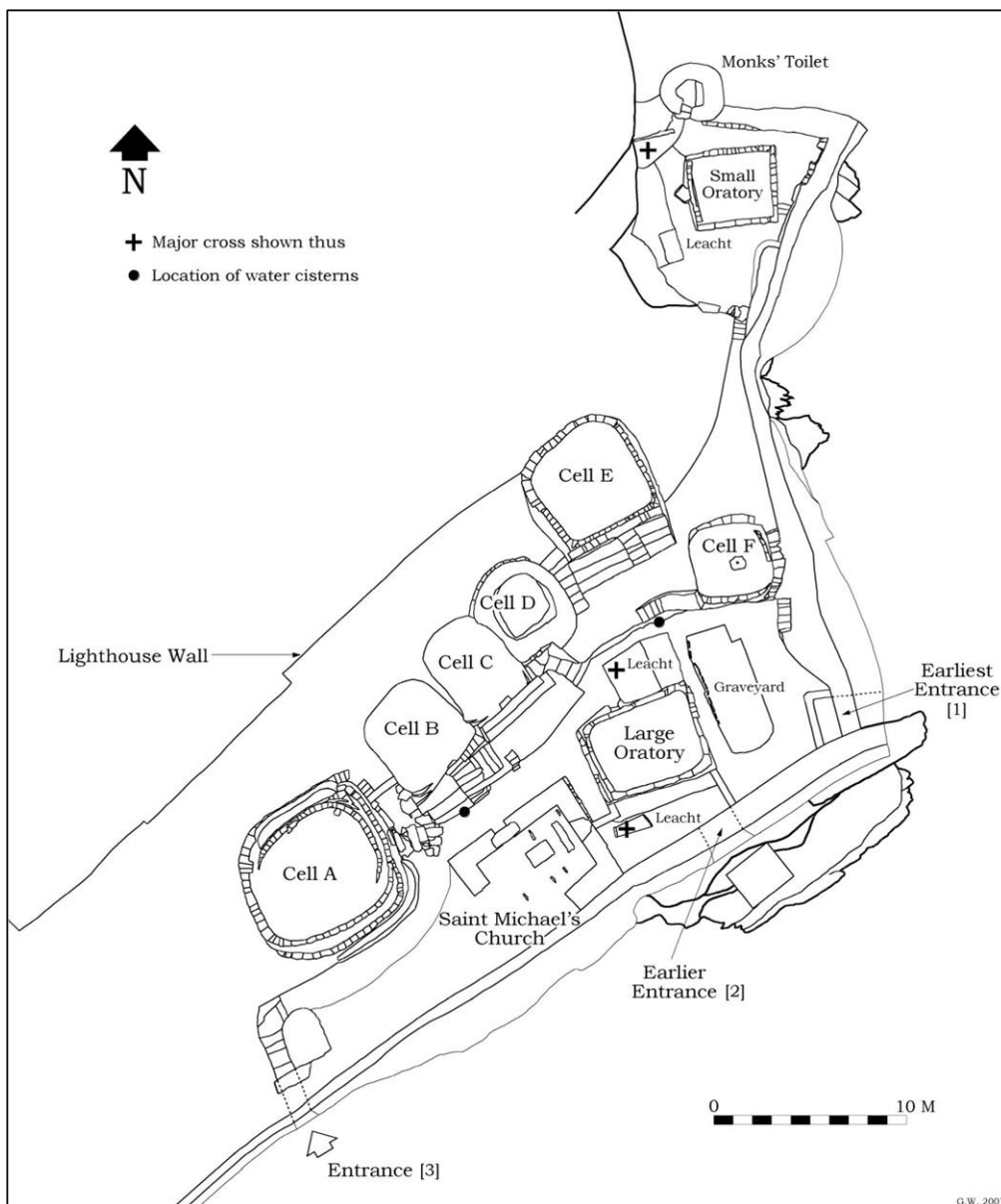


Figure 3 - Plan of Monastic Settlement

The earliest documentary evidence is *The Martyrology of Tallaght*, written near the end of the eighth century by Mealruain. It commemorates the death of a monk from Sceilg called Suibhni ('Suibhni of Scelig'). This reference to Sceilg in the festology of one of the most celebrated monasteries of Ireland suggests that Sceilg was already well established at this time. A monastery may, perhaps, have been founded here as early as the sixth century, but in the absence of evidence, precise dating is impossible.

Sceilg is referred to in the *Annals of Inisfallen* under the year 824 and also in the *Annals of Ulster*, which give an account of the plunder of the Monastery by the Vikings. In 882 the *Annals of Inisfallen* refer to the death of 'Flann, son of Cellach, abbot of Scelec'. The Monastery was dedicated to St Michael at some time in the tenth century. This is suggested by two references to the Monastery in the *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland* by the Four Masters. The first reads, 'Age of Christ, 950, Blathmhac of Sgeillic died'; the second reads, 'Age of Christ, 1044, Aedh of Scelic-Mhichil died'. Thus, one can assume that the dedication to St Michael occurred between the years 950 AD and 1044 AD. In monasteries, it was customary to build a new church to celebrate a dedication, and the oldest part of the church, known as St Michael's Church, fits architecturally into this period.

The church of St Michael was mentioned in *The History and Topography of Ireland* by Giraldus Cambrensis, who was in Ireland in the late twelfth century. His account of the miraculous supply of communal wine for daily Mass in St Michael's Church implies the constant occupancy of the Monastery at the time.

In the early thirteenth century, a general climatic deterioration resulted in colder weather and increased storms on the seas around Sceilg. This, along with a shift in the Irish Church from a monastic to a diocesan structure, signalled the end of Irish eremitic island colonies, with the result that the community of Sceilg Mhichíl eventually moved to the mainland at Ballinskelligs. This was probably not a single event, but is likely to have happened over a period of time. The island probably continued to be used as a dependency of the Augustinian Abbey at Ballinskelligs, the island Monastery being occupied by some monks during the summer months. The prior of Ballinskelligs was still addressed in papal letters as 'Augustinian prior of St Michael's, Roche (de Rupe)'. The Augustinians must also have been actively involved in promoting and managing pilgrimages to the island and in maintaining the structures there.

Sceilg Mhichíl remained in the hands of the Augustinian monks until 1578 when, as a result of the Desmond rebellions, Queen Elizabeth I dissolved certain monasteries that were under the protection of the Earl of Desmond. The Sceilg Islands thus passed into secular hands, to the Butler family.

Although the monastery ceased to exist, the island continued to be used as a place of pilgrimage. In 1756, Charles Smith gives his first recorded description of the rock. He refers to the difficult and dangerous pilgrimages and says that 'many persons, about twenty years ago, came from the remotest parts of Ireland to perform these penances, but the zeal of such adventurous devotees has very much cooled of late'.

In the early 1820s, the Corporation for Preserving and Improving the Port of Dublin (the predecessor of the Commissioners of Irish Lights) purchased the island from John Butler of Waterville under a compulsory purchase order for the purpose of erecting two lighthouses on the Atlantic side. These were made accessible by an improved landing on the east side and a road that was blasted out on the precipitous southern and western sides of the island.



Figure 4 - Painting of Sceilg Mhichíl by Admiral R. B. Beechey, R.H.A., mid 1800s (CIL)

In 1880, the OPW took the monastic remains into guardianship and commenced a project for the repair of collapsed structures. Since that time, the OPW has continued in its efforts to maintain and preserve the monastic remains. The State purchased the island in 1989 from the Commissioners of Irish Lights, with the exception of the lower (working) lighthouse and its curtilage and the helipad area with its adjacent store. The Commissioners also retained a right-of-way over the road.

4. Site Access

The site is accessed by boats departing from Portmagee or Knight's Town on Valentia Island. The Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL) conduct intermittent maintenance works on the light at the Lower Lighthouse and access the island through the use of helicopter, landing on the helipad. The OPW currently issues 15 boat licenses annually to private operators, subject to review. The number of daily visitors is capped at 180 visitors per day. Approximately 15,919 visitors landed on Sceilg Mhichíl in the 2023 season. Boats land at the pier and passengers disembark by climbing the steps. Visitors then ascend the Lower Lighthouse Road. A section of this route passes under a crash deck. The visitors reach the base of the eastern steps where an OPW guide gives an induction before directing them to the monastery steps. Additional guides are located at the monastery complex, completing the tour. On average, visitors currently spend three hours on the island. Toilet facilities for visitors are located near the existing helipad.



Figure 5 - Tourists arriving at the landing pier

5. Works Descriptions 2023

5.1. Upper Lighthouse Road Repairs

Repair works to the Lighthouse Road commenced in the 2017 season and continued through the 2021 season. The repair works to the Lighthouse Road are nearing completion. No major repair works to the Lighthouse Road took place in the 2023 season.

Maintenance works to the Lighthouse Road were carried out in the 2023 season by placing sandbags in certain locations to redirect rainwater runoff and by carrying out compacting of any loose stones. The main purpose of the repair and maintenance works to the Upper Lighthouse is to provide safe access for workers and future visitors to the fog signalling platform and Upper Lighthouse complex.

The OPW also carried out masonry repair works to a damaged section of the sea wall located on the Upper Lighthouse Road in the location of Crash Deck no.2. The damage to the section of sea wall was the result of a rock fall that occurred at the beginning of the 2022 season. The OPW were granted DHLGH Ministerial Consent for the proposed works. Alan Hayden consultant archaeologist issued an archaeological method statement for the works to OPW in May 2023 that accompanied the Ministerial Consent application (see Appendix A). The works were carried out under Ministerial Consent issued by the Minister for DHLGH.

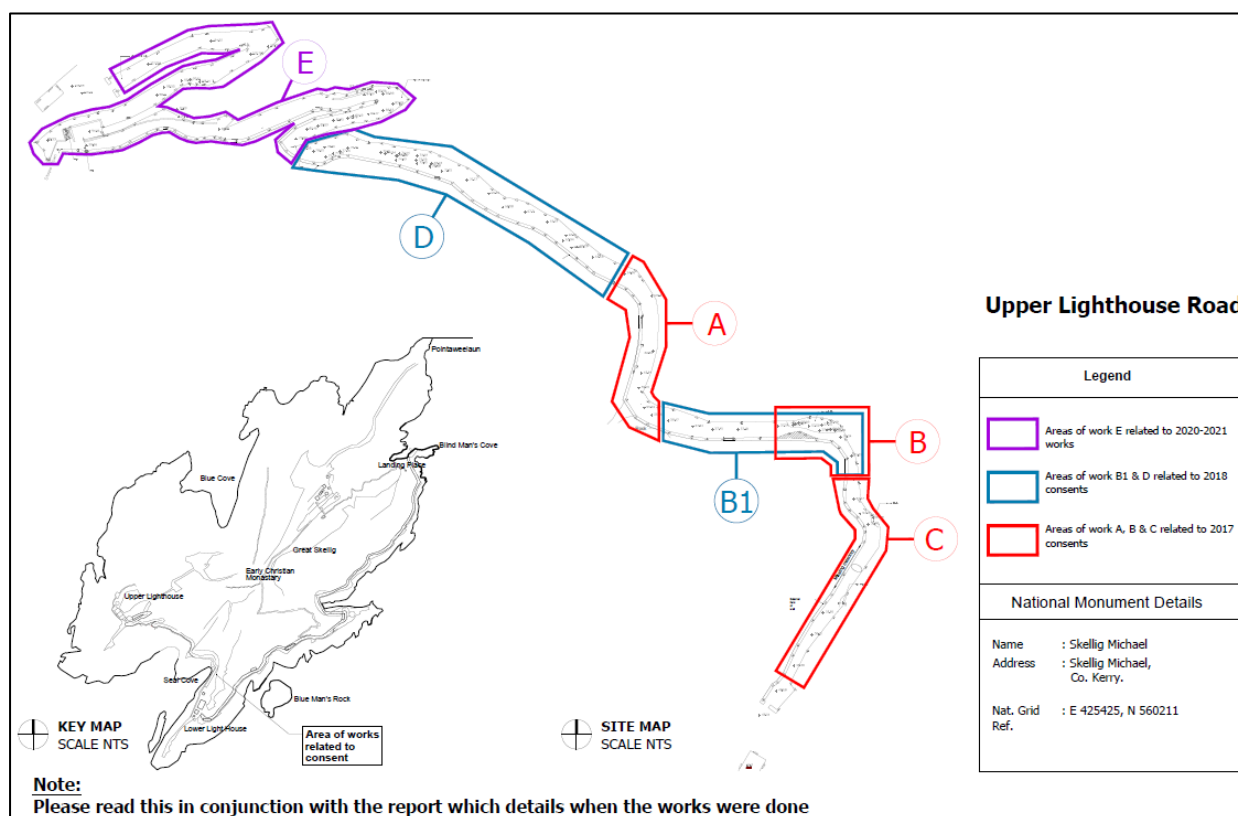


Figure 6 - Works to Upper Lighthouse Road 2017 - 2021



Figure 7 - View of the Upper Lighthouse Road
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Figure 8 - View of the Upper Lighthouse Road from the Upper Lighthouse gate
© Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland



Figure 9 - Completed repair works to the damaged section of sea wall on the Upper Lighthouse Road



Figure 10 - Completed repair works to the damaged section of sea wall on the Upper Lighthouse Road

5.2. Discovery Programme Survey - Monastery

Since 2015, the Discovery Programme have been monitoring the movement of the main retaining wall of the monastic settlement. Markings were added in 2017 to the South Peak to determine the stability of the structures at that location. The Discovery Programme issue an annual report to the OPW with their findings and recommendations.

Due to deteriorating weather conditions, the Discovery Programme were unable to carry out their site visit and survey of the monastic settlement in September 2023. The Discovery Programme will return in the early 2024 season to carry out the survey and issue their report to OPW.

Due to increased rainfall and pressure from runoff rainwater, the OPW will be undertaking repairs to this section of the enclosing wall over the coming years. The OPW commissioned a digital survey of the Monastery in 2021 to facilitate the future repair works. All works will be subject to DHLGH Ministerial Consent and best conservation practices will be implemented. All proposed repair works will be subject to an agreed archaeological mitigation strategy.



Figure 11 - Discovery Programme marker point locations at monastery retaining wall

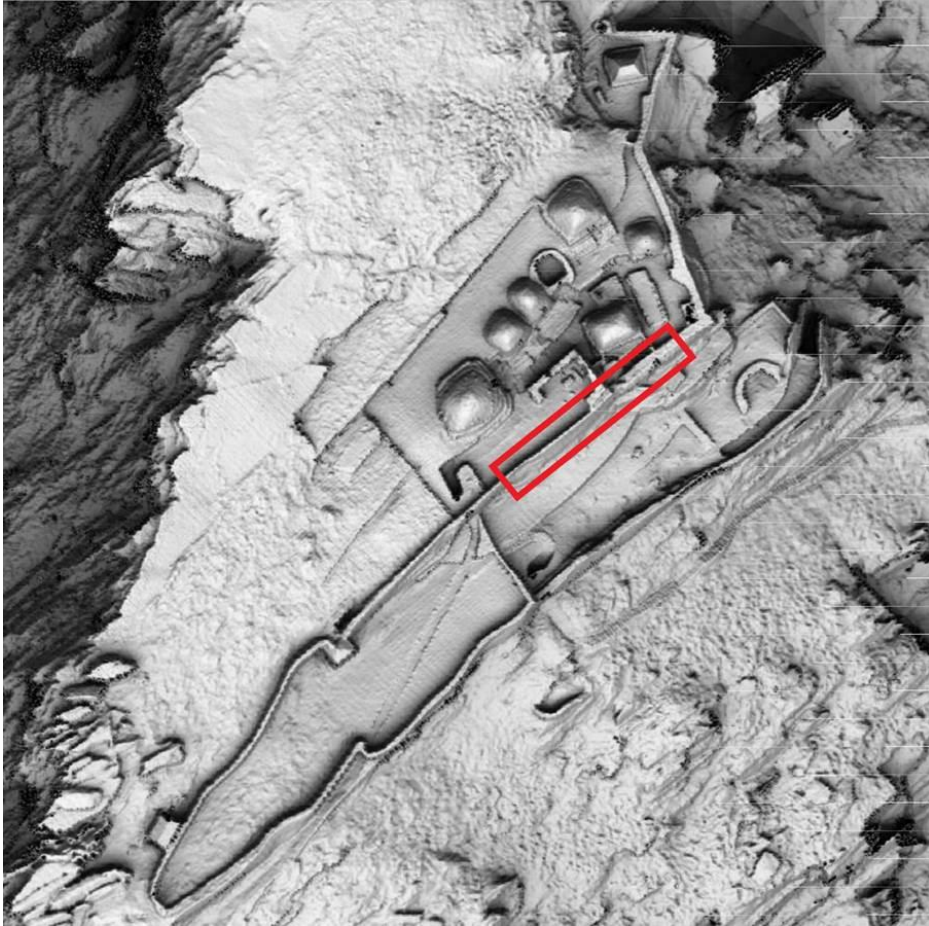


Figure 12 - Location of movement to retaining wall below St. Michael's Chapel

5.3. Works to Lower Lighthouse

5.3.1. Project Background

The Lower Lighthouse complex was completed in 1826 but has seen significant alterations in the intervening years. The Keepers' Houses originally had a pitched roof but this was removed in 1910 and a reinforced concrete flat roof was added. In 1968, the original lighthouse tower was demolished and a new tower constructed. The Keepers' Houses were inhabited until 1987 up until when the lighthouse was fully automated.

OPW is currently in negotiations with the Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL) to lease the lower lighthouse. CIL will retain full ownership and control of the lighthouse tower and this will be inaccessible to building users. In 2019, with the permission of CIL and approved Ministerial Consent, the OPW commenced internal stripping out works including the removal of the existing dry lining to expose the original building fabric beneath.

The Lower Lighthouse will be refurbished to accommodate OPW staff, as well as NMS, NPWS and external consultants that visit the island. The aim of these works is to provide safe accommodation with sleeping, washing, cooking, administrative and communication facilities for OPW site operatives, consultants and visiting academics. The OPW are currently working on plans for the proposed Lower Lighthouse refurbishment.

DHLGH commissioned Colin Rynne from University College Cork to prepare a Statement of Significance report for the Lower and Upper Lighthouses at Sceilg Mhichíl in 2022. The Statement of Significance report was issued to OPW by DHLGH.

5.3.2. Installation of workers composting toilet at the Lower Lighthouse complex

The OPW obtained Ministerial Consent from DHLGH in April 2022 for the installation of a proposed new workers composting toilet and associated works including the removal of a section of the existing bund wall at the Lower Lighthouse complex.

The section of the bund wall was removed in the 2022 season and the foundation for the proposed composting toilet was installed on site. The installation of the new composting toilet at the Lower Lighthouse complex was postponed until the 2024 season due to other priority works on the island.



Figure 13 - Foundation for the proposed composting toilet installed at the Lower Lighthouse compound

5.3.3. ARUP Energy and Water Strategy Report

The ongoing refurbishment of the Lower Lighthouse has highlighted many of the challenges, which have faced human settlement on the island over the millennia. The main challenge is that of water supply. There is no natural source of fresh water on the island. Historically, the monks and the lighthouse keepers collected rainwater. This required an innate knowledge of bird nesting locations, nesting season, saline levels due to windborne salt and other factors, as collected fresh water was easily contaminated due to local environmental factors. The island also lacks a supply to the main electrical grid. The Lower Lighthouse will be entirely off grid and energy usage proposals require expert advice.

The OPW commissioned ARUP to undertake a report for an energy and water strategy for the Lower Lighthouse complex in 2020. The report recommended the use of solar photovoltaic panels, the delivery of fresh potable water to the island by boat, the use of recycled water for other purposes, a natural ventilation solution and the use of composting toilets. The OPW are now seeking to appoint a consultant M&E engineer for the proposed M&E works at the Lower Lighthouse. The OPW are also seeking to appoint a consultant structural engineer for the proposed works at the Lower Lighthouse.

5.4. Works to Upper Lighthouse

5.4.1. Project Background

The Upper Lighthouse is located at the end of the Upper Lighthouse Road and is in a ruinous state. The construction of the Upper Lighthouse began in 1821 together with the Lower Lighthouse. The upper light only functioned until 1870 due to the establishment of a new light on Inishtearaght, 22 miles north of Sceilg Mhichíl. The Upper Lighthouse consists of a lighthouse tower and dwellings which were formerly used by lighthouse keepers. These were built using rubble masonry, cut stone, brickwork and slate cladding on the outer walls. The dwellings were one storey buildings with attic rooms on top.

The proposed works to the Upper Lighthouse are subject to further investigation by OPW and DHLGH. The aim will be to give the visitors a greater sense of how the lighthouse keepers and their families lived and worked on the island in the 19th century. All proposed works will be subject to DHLGH Ministerial Consent.

The OPW appointed Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist in the 2021 season to carry out extensive archaeological excavations of the existing debris at the Upper Lighthouse. A section of the debris was left *in situ* due to the presence of nesting birds at the time. Alan Hayden carried out archaeological excavations of the remaining debris at the Upper Lighthouse in the 2022 season.



Figure 14 - Aerial view of the Upper Lighthouse and sea wall
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Figure 15 - Aerial view of the Upper Lighthouse and sea wall
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5.4.2. Sea wall repairs

The OPW installed scaffolding to the Upper Lighthouse sea wall in the 2023 season to facilitate the proposed masonry repair works. All works were carried out following receipt of DHLGH Ministerial consent in April 2021. Fergus Mc Cormack, Senior Architect OPW carried out a site inspection with DHLGH Archaeologist, Alan Hayden consultant archaeologist and the Envirico ornithological clerk of works on 13th July 2023 to agree on the repair methodology for the sea wall. Alan Hayden consultant archaeologist issued archaeological method statements to OPW in January and August 2023 for the proposed works (see Appendices B & C). The masonry repair works were completed in the 2023 season and the scaffold was dismantled by OPW. The final archaeological monitoring report was issued by Alan Hayden to OPW in October 2023 (see Appendix D).



Figure 16 - View of the scaffolding installed at the Upper Lighthouse on Sceilg Mhichíl
© Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland



Figure 17 - View of the scaffolding installed at the Upper Lighthouse on Sceilg Mhichíl



Figure 18 - Repair works carried out by OPW to the sea wall at the Upper Lighthouse



Figure 19 - Repair works carried out by OPW to the sea wall at the Upper Lighthouse



Figure 20 - Repair works carried out by OPW to the sea wall at the Upper Lighthouse

5.5. Preserving Legacies Project and Climate Vulnerability Assessment

5.5.1. Preserving Legacies Project

The OPW and DHLGH announced on 13th March 2023 that Sceilg Mhichíl has joined a new global initiative to safeguard sites of cultural significance from the impacts of climate change. Sceilg Mhichíl was selected as one of ten global sites for the project which is funded by the National Geographic Society and Manulife in partnership with the International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). The purpose of the project is to develop the scientific knowledge and technical training for site leaders and the local community to develop place and people-based climate change adaptation plans for the World Heritage Property of Sceilg Mhichíl.

The OPW Senior Architect and site manager for Sceilg Mhichíl is representing the OPW in the Preserving Legacies project. The project requires attending regular trainings and producing deliverables for the site. The OPW are working on the project in collaboration with DHLGH.

The OPW Senior Architect and DHLGH Senior Archaeologist for Sceilg Mhichíl attended a Preserving Legacies workshop in Petra, Jordan from 6th to 8th June 2023. The workshop was hosted by the Petra National Trust (PNT) in collaboration with the Petra Development & Tourism Region Authority (PDTRA).

5.5.2. Climate Vulnerability Assessment

The OPW commissioned Carrig Conservation International as consultants to carry out a Climate Vulnerability assessment (CVA) for Sceilg Mhichíl. The purpose of the CVA is to identify risks caused by climate change to Sceilg Mhichíl and its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). The CVA is also part of the wider *Preserving Legacies* project.

As part of the CVA, the OPW organised an experts site visit to Sceilg Mhichíl on 12th July 2023. The aim of the experts site visit was to discuss and highlight the effects of climate change on the island's cultural and natural heritage. A total of 24 no. experts from different professional backgrounds attended the site visit. The site visit was filmed and recorded by Crossing the Line Production. A number of experts were also interviewed during the site visit.

A follow-up online questionnaire was later issued to the attendees following the experts site visit. The results of the questionnaire will allow to prioritise impacts for discussion at the follow-up experts workshop to be planned later during the year.

The OPW also organised an experts workshop on 9th and 10th November 2023 as a follow-up to the experts site visit carried out at Sceilg Mhichíl on 12th July 2023. The workshop took place in Bedford Hall in Dublin Castle over two half days. A total of 45 experts attended the workshop. (see Appendix H).



Figure 21 - Group photo of the experts site visit held on 12th July 2023 taken near the site huts at the Lower Lighthouse Road on Sceilg Mhichíl

© Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland



Figure 22 - Group photo of the experts site visit held on 12th July 2023 taken at the Monastery on Sceilg Mhichíl

© Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland



Figure 23 - Group photo of the experts site visit held on 12th July 2023 taken at the Lower Lighthouse on Sceilg Mhichíl
© Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland



Figure 24 - Group photo of the experts site visit held on 12th July 2023 taken at the Lower Lighthouse on Sceilg Mhichíl
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5.6. UNESCO Periodic Reporting

The UNESCO Periodic Reporting is one of the core conservation mechanisms of the World Heritage Convention. The State Parties are divided into five regions and are invited by the World Heritage Committee to submit a Periodic Report on the application of the World Heritage Convention in their World Heritage Property.

Each year, one of the five regions is required to complete and submit Sections I and II of the questionnaire. Ireland is included in the Europe and North America region. The reporting period for the Europe and North America region was set for 2022-2023 and the examination of the Regional Report by the World Heritage Committee will take place in 2024 as part of the Third Cycle of Periodic Reporting (2018-2024).



Figure 25 - Stages of the Periodic Reporting taken from the UNESCO website

The OPW Senior Architect and manager for Sceilg Mhichíl was responsible for completing Section II of the questionnaire in collaboration with the DHLGH World Heritage Unit. The OPW and DHLGH liaised and held meetings to go through the Periodic Reporting questionnaire. Additionally, a summary of the World Heritage Property’s attributes was required in the questionnaire. DHLGH commissioned Dr. Christopher Young as a consultant to produce the attributes for the site. The final report was issued by DHLGH to OPW in July 2023 (see Appendix E).

The OPW submitted the completed questionnaire to DHLGH as Focal Point on 24th July 2023. DHLGH submitted the final Section II of the Periodic Reporting questionnaire to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee on 24th July 2023. The Section I of the Periodic Reporting was completed and submitted by DHLGH as Focal Point to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.

5.7. Rescue Exercise

The physical nature of the island and the uneven monastic steps are challenging to visitors and can cause serious accidents and injuries. The OPW has carried out two rescue exercises in 2019 that involved bringing a dummy casualty from the monastery to the pier on a stretcher. The Irish Coastguard Mountain Rescue team were involved in the rescue exercise and it is envisaged that a rescue exercise will take place during June of every year. However, rescue exercises were not carried out in 2020, 2021 and 2022 due to the Covid-19 emergency and weather events.

The OPW carried out a rescue exercise on 20th May 2023 on Sceilg Mhichíl (see Appendix F). The rescue exercise was led by the Iveragh Unit of the Irish Coast Guard in conjunction with the Valentia Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI). A medical emergency exercise was carried out at the Monastery with OPW personnel as observers. During the rescue exercise, 3 no. additional rope anchor locations were identified along the Monastery steps. The additional rope anchors were later installed, tested and certified by OPW.



Figure 26 - Rescue exercise carried out on site in the 2023 season



Figure 27 - Rescue exercise carried out on site in the 2023 season

5.8. 2023 Maintenance Plan

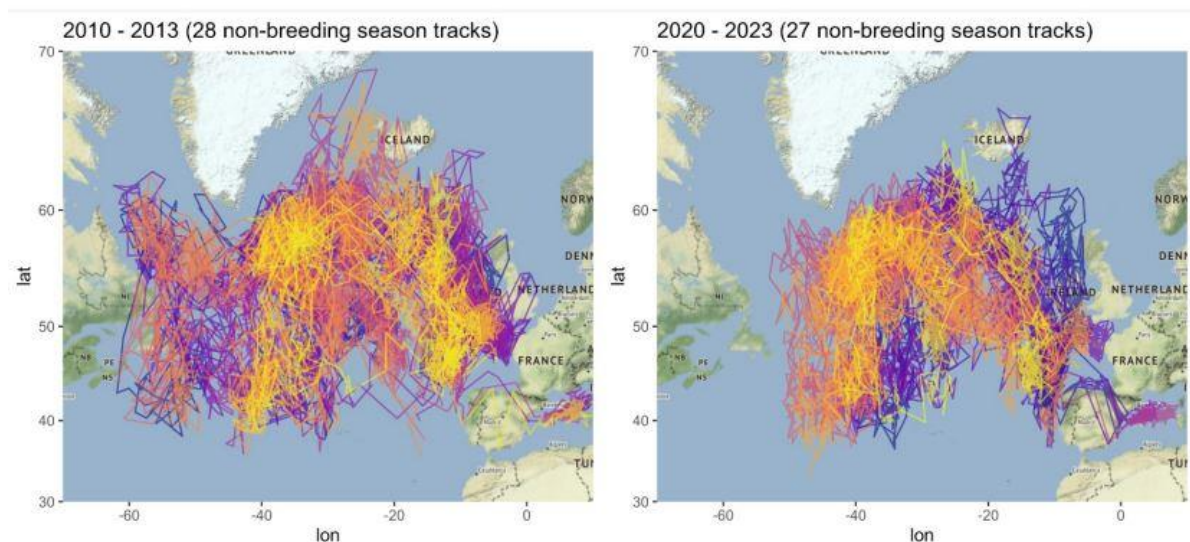
The OPW produced a maintenance plan outlining the maintenance works to be carried out by OPW at the start of the 2023 season at Sceilg Mhichíl. The OPW carry out annual maintenance works on the island four weeks prior to the commencement of the tourist season. The purpose of the works is to make the island safe for the general public, OPW personnel, contractors, consultant, etc. The works include site set up, safety sweeps removal of stone and debris, cleaning of vegetation, repair works, etc. The 2023 Maintenance Plan was issued to DHLGH in April 2023 (see Appendix G).

The 2023 safety sweep Ministerial Consent application was submitted to the DHLGH in April 2023 and accompanied by an AA / NIS (Appendix K).

5.9. Puffin Survey

The School of Biological, Earth & Environmental Sciences, University College Cork (UCC) led by Mark Jessopp and Jamie Darby conduct a puffin survey at Sceilg Mhichíl each year. The aim of the research is to track the movements of the breeding Sceilg Mhichíl puffin population outside the breeding season. Due to an outbreak of avian flu, the surveys were cancelled during the 2022 season. The puffin survey works resumed in the 2023 season and UCC carried out their survey in June 2023.

The report identified that 7 out of 20 geolocators from 2021 and one from 2020 were retrieved. It identified the mean distance travelled by the puffins during the chick rearing period was further in 2021 than 2023. Year round data from these tags provided information on migration routes and overwintering distribution across the North Atlantic between September – February. UCC recorded that new geolocators were deployed on 18 individuals and stated a total of 37 puffins have been equipped with them. UCC intend to recover these tags in Summer 2024. (see Appendix L)



GLS tracks of puffins from Skellig Michael during the non-breeding season. The maps on the left show areas used by puffins in 2010-2013, on the right are the areas used in 2020-2023. Though the overall migration pattern has remained similar, there has been a noticeable shift in areas used between the two periods.

Figure 28 - Atlantic Puffin tagging report 2023 UCC

5.10. National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Surveys

Survey works were carried out by the NPWS on Sceilg Mhichíl in 2023. The NPWS appointed an Ornithological Clerk of Works, Brian Power for the duration of the 2023 season. His role was to monitor the potential impact of ongoing works on the island's wildlife.

5.11. Sceilg Mhichíl 2020 – 2030 Management Plan

The final version of the Sceilg Mhichíl 2020 – 2030 Management Plan was formally launched by the DHLGH and OPW on 16th December 2021 and superseded the 2008 – 2018 Management Plan. The new Management Plan has been produced by DHLGH, in conjunction with the OPW, after being developed following consultation with local groups, non-governmental organisations and other interested parties. The plan provides information on the various aspects of the management policy for Sceilg Mhichíl, including conservation and preservation, visitor management, the legislative protections it enjoys and the development considerations necessary to protect the site into the future. Management challenges are also addressed, such as threats to the biodiversity and the impacts of climate change. All future works on the island will be closely monitored to assess their potential impact on wildlife.



Figure 28 - The Management Plan 2020-2030 sets out the protocols and goals for the future repair works on Sceilg Mhichíl

5.12. Archaeological Works

The OPW appointed Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist for the 2023 season to monitor works on site and carry out archaeological excavations as required.

The repair works to the Upper Lighthouse sea wall were archaeologically monitored by Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist in the 2023 season. Archaeological method statements were issued by Alan Hayden in January and August 2023 (Appendix B). The OPW installed scaffolding in the 2023 season to allow for the inspection of the sea wall and to facilitate the proposed repair works. Alan Hayden issued an additional archaeological method statement in August 2023 following the inspection of the sea wall (Appendix C). The final archaeological monitoring report was issued by Alan Hayden in October 2023 (Appendix D).

The repair works to the damaged section of sea wall in the location of Crash Deck no.2 on the Upper Lighthouse Road were archaeologically monitored by Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist in the 2023 season.

DHLGH appointed Alan Hayden consultant archaeologist to carry out an archaeological excavation of the rock spur on the terrace above the Upper Lighthouse.

5.13. Carrying Capacity

The OPW appointed Creagh House Environmental (CHE) Ltd to carry out a report on the Visitor Carrying Capacity of the Monastic Enclosure' at Sceilg Mhichíl for the 2023 Season. The final report remains outstanding.

5.14. OPW Architects’ & Design Team Site Visits

The OPW Conservation Architects undertook 6 no. site visits to Sceilg Mhichíl over the 2023 season, from May to September led by Fergus McCormick OPW Senior Conservation Architect. A site visit report was drafted by the OPW with a photographic record following each site visit. The site visit reports recorded progress of all repair works and were issued by the OPW following each site visit.

The OPW organised an experts site visit to Sceilg Mhichíl on 12th July 2023. The experts site visit was part of the proposed Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA) to be carried out at Sceilg Mhichíl. The CVA is part of a wider *Preserving Legacies* project.

The Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL) visited Sceilg Mhichíl on 25th July 2023. The site visit was led by Fergus McCormick OPW Senior Conservation Architect. The CIL visited the Monastery, the Lower and Upper Lighthouses, the Upper Lighthouse Road and the Fog Station.

Site Visit No.	Date
1	17/05/2023
2	15/06/2023
3	12/07/2023
4	13/07/2023
5	25/07/2023
6	23/08/2023
7	10/10/2023

Table 1 - List and Dates of OPW National Monuments Architects’ visits



Figure 29 - Group photo of the experts site visit held on 12th July 2023 taken at the Upper Lighthouse on Sceilg Mhichíl
© Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland



Figure 301 - Group photo of Commissioners of Irish Lights site visit on 25th July 2023 with Maurice Fitzgerald OPW Killarney District Works Manager & Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist



Figure 32 - Photo taken at the Monastery during the Commissioners of Irish Lights site visit on 25th July 2023.
Left to right - Maurice Fitzgerald OPW Killarney District Works Manager, Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist, Terri Sweeney Meade OPW Assistant Principal Architect, Eugene Boyle OPW Architect, James O'Donoghue OPW Foreman

5.15. Audio-visual Recording of 2023 Works by Crossing the Line Productions

OPW commissioned Crossing the Line Productions to film works on the island for the 2023 season. The aim of the film footage is to provide a visual record of the works during the 2023 season. An audio-visual synopsis of the 2023 works will be produced and issued to the OPW in 2024. The audio-visual files produced by Crossing the Line acts as a record of works in conjunction with site reports and photographic records.



Figure 31 - Crossing the Line Productions filming on site at Sceilg Mhichíl

6. 2023 Challenges

6.1. Rock Collapse & Climate Impact

Rock-falls have increased in frequency in recent years, due to the effects of climate change. The high levels of precipitation are leading to soil erosion and rock falls. The substantial rock fall which occurred in 2020 on the lighthouse road near the site huts resulted in the installation of a temporary crash deck at this location and at another two high risk locations on the Upper Lighthouse Road to protect OPW operatives from falling debris.



Figure 32 - Rock Fall on 27th July 2020

A serious rock fall occurred on the lower lighthouse road on 13th June 2022. The island was closed to the public with immediate effect for 3 weeks from 13th June 2022 and re-opened on 4th July 2022. To mitigate the effects of rock falls, the OPW installed a new canopy on the lower lighthouse road of approximately 100 linear meters in length following a grant of Ministerial Consent by DHLGH.



Figure 35 - View of the canopy installed at the Lower Lighthouse road following the rock fall that occurred on 13th June 2022

Another rock fall was recorded on the Upper Lighthouse road which occurred before OPW accessed the island in the 2022 season in the location of crash deck no. 2. The rock fall caused significant damage to the sea wall. The OPW installed a temporary railing as a temporary safety measure in the location of the rock fall. The OPW carried out repair works to the damaged section of the sea wall in the 2023 season following receipt of Ministerial consent from DHLGH in May 2023. The consent application was accompanied an Appropriate Assessment and Natura Impact Statement (see Appendix I).



Figure 33 - View of the rock fall in the location of crash deck no.2 on the Upper Lighthouse road



Figure 34 - Temporary safety railing installed on site by OPW where the rock fall occurred in the location of crash deck no. 2 on the Upper Lighthouse road



Figure 38 - Damaged of section of sea wall repaired by OPW in the 2023 season

6.2. Crash Decks Installation Works

The proposed Crash Decks installation works commenced in the 2022 season on Sceilg Mhichíl. The OPW obtained DHLGH extension to Ministerial Consent in July 2022 for the installation of the permanent crash decks. The extension to Ministerial consent was based on the revised crash decks design provided by Downes Associates consultant structural engineers.

The OPW appointed Eamonn Costello (Kerry) Ltd as main contractor the Crash Decks installation works following a tender process. To facilitate the transportation of construction materials, the main contractor installed a temporary crane at the landing pier. The structures of 3 no. crash decks were installed on site by the main contractor. The works were halted on 29th September 2022 due to deteriorating weather conditions. The stainless steel mesh and canopy for the 3 no. crash decks were installed by the main contractor in the 2023 season.

The stainless steel cable stays were also installed by the contractor in the 2023 season following receipt of an extension to Ministerial consent from DHLGH. The Consent application was accompanied by an AA / NIS (see Appendix J). The works to the 3 no. crash decks were completed in the 2023 season and the Certificate of Practical Completion was issued by the Senior Architect in October 2023.

The installation of permanent and robust crash decks is critical for the safety and wellbeing of OPW workers on site and for the future access and use of the upper lighthouse road by visitors. The viability of the island as an accessible tourist location is dependent on safe access conditions on the Lighthouse roads.



Figure 359 - Crash Deck No. 1 installed on site



Figure 36 - Crash Deck No. 2 installed on site



Figure 41 - Crash Deck No. 3 installed on site

6.3. Landing Pier

The OPW are also considering repair and enhancement works to future proof the landing pier against the effects of climate change. Measures will need to be discussed and agreed with DHLGH, including the possibility of constructing a wall on the pier to protect the landing area from increased swells and higher tides. There is a more long-term strategy of increasing the height of the pier to accommodate predicted sea level rises due to climate change.

OPW are in discussion with Met Éireann, the Irish national meteorological organisation, regarding the possible installation of a weather station on the site to provide an accurate record of weather events and to monitor changing climatic patterns.

6.4. Security

OPW guides typically have a full-time presence on the island throughout the tourist season. They are housed on the island and provide an informal security presence. Unauthorised landings outside the tourist season are undocumented and unquantified. OPW operatives work on the island from Monday to Friday. Due to the lack of a guide presence in the 2020 season, the site was exposed to unauthorised landings and excursions during the weekends. No damage was reported. A number of attempted landings were discouraged by operatives during the working week. The OPW has a number of signs in place warning unauthorised trespassers of the dangers posed to them; however, this alone is not enough of a deterrent. An unauthorised drone has also been previously noted. This occurred during the peak of the nesting season and could have caused potential stress and danger to nesting seabirds.

The OPW will endeavour to provide greater security to the site. The OPW installed a trial CCTV and solar panels on the storage building adjacent to the landing pier in the 2023 season. The OPW were granted DHLGH Ministerial Consent in April 2022 for the proposed installation of CCTV on the storage building adjacent to the landing pier. Technical information was provided by OPW M&E Engineering section to accompany the Ministerial consent application. The installation of the trial CCTV was successful and the OPW will install the permanent CCTV in the 2024 season.

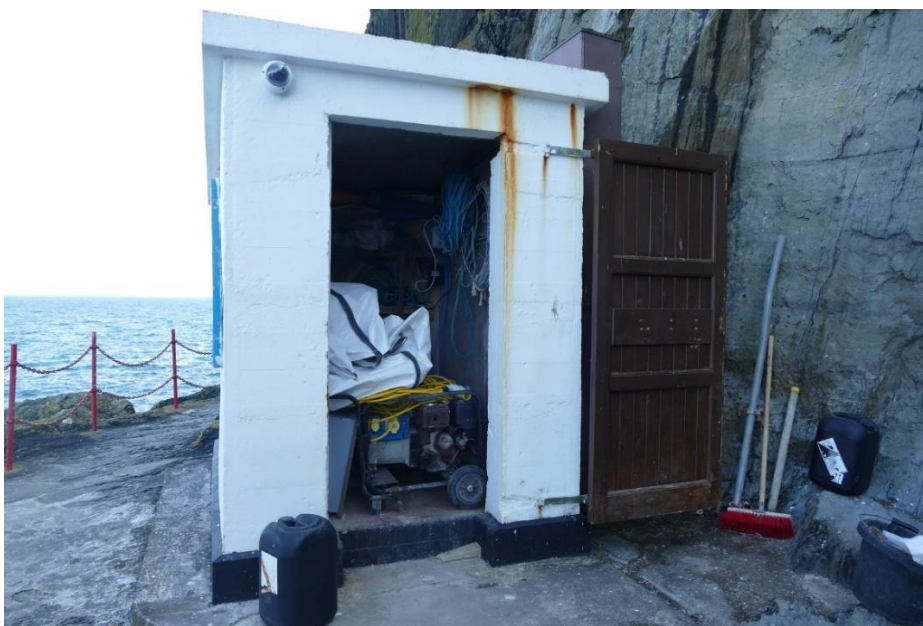


Figure 37 - CCTV installed on the storage building adjacent to the landing pier

7. 2024 Objectives

The objectives for the 2024 season can be summarised as follows:

- Collaboration with DHLGH on the drafting of the Lower and Upper Lighthouses Conservation Plan to inform future works, mitigation strategies and research frameworks for the lighthouse structures.
- Repair works to the Lower Lighthouse sea wall, subject to DHLGH Ministerial Consent.
- The installation of new OPW workers composting toilets in the compound of the Lower Lighthouse.
- The installation of permanent CCTV on the storage building near the landing pier.
- Continuation of the repair of the Upper Lighthouse road under archaeological supervision.
- Conducting the Climate Vulnerability Assessment Community Workshop (CVA) in Kerry for Sceilg Mhichíl.
- The continued monitoring of the movement at the monastery enclosure retaining wall by the Discovery Programme.
- Ongoing wildlife surveys.
- Ongoing filming of the works on site.

8. Bibliography

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