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<b>Purpose:</b>	<b>Emergency Recuse Exercise – Simulation of casualty stretchered from Monastery to Skellig Pier</b>
<b>Location:</b>	Skellig Michael
<b>Date:</b>	20/05/2025
<b>Time:</b>	18:30 – 21:00

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**ATTENDANCE**

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Nigel Roche	OPW NM Safety Officer	NR
James O'Donoghue	OPW NM District Foreman	J'OD
Brendan O'Connor	OPW NM Scaffolder & Rope Access Technician	B'OC
Pat O'Shea	OPW NM Site Foreman	P'OS
Liam Joy	OPW NM Carpenter	
Darragh O'Brien	OPW NM Carpenter	
Tom Kerrisk	OPW NM GO Chargehand	
Cormac Cronin	OPW NM GO	
Liam McCarthy	OPW NM GO	
Brian Power	Site Ecologist	
Michael Langan	OPW Skellig Guide Supervisor	
Cornelia Lyne	OPW Skellig Guide Supervisor	
Claire O'Halloran	OPW Skellig Guide Supervisor	

**Irish Coast Guard**

Jonathan Walsh	OPW NM & Coast Guard OIC	JW
Patrick O'Donoghue	Coast Guard DOIC	
Niall O'Sullivan	Iveragh Coast Guard	
Marie O'Neill	Iveragh Coast Guard	
Kitty Mangan	Iveragh Coast Guard	
TJ Daly	Iveragh Coast Guard	
Paul Fitzgerald	Iveragh Coast Guard	
Connie Moriarty	Iveragh Coast Guard	
Aaron Turner	Iveragh Coast Guard	
Denis Kelly	Coast Guard Safety Officer	
Rob Joyce	Coast Guard CUSM	
Damien O'Driscoll	Iveragh Coast Guard	

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**ADDITIONAL CIRCULATION**

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Fergus McCormick	Senior Architect
Maurice Fitzgerald	District Works Manager
Eugene Boyle	Architect
Melisa Nicolas	Architect
Sabrina Commins	Visitors Service AP
Keva O'Grady	Visitors Service HEO
Diane Tierney	Visitors Service Safety Officer
Maggie Keane	Skellig Michael Supervisor Guide



No.	ITEM
<b>1.0.0</b>	<b>Meeting background</b>
	<p>On the evening of the 20<sup>th</sup> of May at 17:30, personnel departed Portmagee on OPW Chartered boat to Skellig Michael to carry an emergency rescue exercise by the Iveragh Coast Guard (ICG) Unit. The ICG Unit in conjunction with OPW NM staff and Skellig Michael guides on the island at the time, were planning to carry out a simulated medical emergency at the Monastic settlement on the summit of Skellig Michael.</p> <p>JW liaised with B'OC to conduct a thorough assessment, formulate a scenario and a clear plan of action required for the emergency exercise. JW assessment and plan included procedures/protocols required to treat and evacuate the injury casualty (60kg dummy on a stretcher) from the summit of the monastery to the base of the steps and OPW Personnel as observers.</p> <p>The reason for the exercise was to familiarise with resident OPW Island personnel and the IGC, their skillset and level of expertise and their contact details.</p>
<b>2.0.</b>	<b>Emergency Drill Exercise Main Body</b>
	<p>On the day of the rescue exercise, OPW NM arranged for one boat to travel to the island with OPW NM and ICG personnel and second boat to bring back OPW NM staff from the island who were already out on the island.</p> <p>The first boat carried 2 OPW NM personnel and 11 members of ICG Unit (ICG), which departed from the Portmagee pier just after 17:30.</p> <p>Unfortunately, while traveling to the island, it began to rain heavily. The steps were assessed and deemed unsafe to partake in the full emergency response exercise, carrying a stretcher and dummy down the steps from the monastery. As the steps haven't been used as much as usual as the island is closed to the members of the public and therefore for build-up of guano and vegetation on steps etc., steps were too slippery for the safety of the all personnel involved.</p> <p>Prior to exercise, B O'C and JW had a discussion in the how the exercise shall run and how the exercise shall be carried out. B O'C then set up for the emergency rescue and had all the ropes and anchoring system (slings, l'Ds etc. for belay systems and deviation points) already in place.</p> <p>The dummy had been obtained for the exercise although remained in the boat and the stretcher and wheel remained at the base of the base of the steps just for demonstration.</p> <p>On arrival to the island, all members involved gathered at the First Aid Hut at the base of the monastery steps for a safety brief, where they were asked to sign the attendance log and shown the area where emergency equipment was stored.</p> <p>NR first spoke on behalf of OPW NM to thank all those for attending and taking time to partake in the exercise. NR addressed the importance in carrying out the emergency exercise for the upskilling and learning due to the location and nature of the island, as rapid and quick response would be essential for all in the event of an accident. NR advised that due to the wet steps that drill was downed scaled and that the use of the stretcher and dummy had been cancelled.</p> <p>NR advised that Skellig Michael is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and bird sanctuary which has unique cultural, architectural and environmental importance. Activities shall be conducted in a manner that respects this cultural heritage. Personnel are to remain vigilant and stay on pathways to avoid significant impact to the nesting seabirds/wildlife.</p>



NR advised to caution when climbing steps as steps are slippery when wet and even more so as closed to the public at present and take caution when walking, keep hands free. NR advised if, taken photos to stop where safe, take photo and continue on again.

NR informed that OPW were to observe but also have a certain level in training and would be available to assist upon request.

NR then asked P O'S to speak as Foreman of the island where he reiterated the slippery steps due to build up guano.

Once NR was finished, NR then handed over to JW to brief all his personnel involved. JW briefed all personnel in how procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency and provided advised personnel of the hazards in climbing the monastery steps due to wet slippery steps, leading edges and also positioning near ropes and how to be clicked on at all times. Personnel were briefed on the terrain of the island and the narrow steps leading to the monastery. Due to wet conditions on the day, personnel were advised that steps were slippery and remain vigilant. Personnel briefed of the hazard of loose/falling debris, areas were carrying the stretcher may cause difficulty due to narrow steps and change in direction of steps with leading edges. Once brief was complete JW inform personnel that two groups be formed. JW headed one group and B O'C headed the second and went first up the steps.

JW and B O'C broke into groups to go through with each of the groups the procedure for carrying down the stretcher from top to bottom of the step from monastery, the anchors, belay systems, deviation points and where personnel shall stand when carrying the stretcher down the steps/slopes/near leading edges so that not fall over causing another casualty and where and how to stand especially at switch back locations.

Once broken into groups, B O'C took his first group up first as was too dangerous with wet narrow steps to go in one large group. JW then took his group up the steps when there was appropriate distance between groups.

At each location, personnel were informed of their requirements at each station along the way i.e. on the l'D's or on the ropes, their roles and tasks, equipment needed, straps, anchors and ropes etc. Discussed anchors/belays and these locations/positions.

Personnel were shown how and where to rig the straps/strops, ropes and l'Ds descenders. Personnel were shown the locations of the permanent installed anchors and guidance to how to run the rope and straps on the anchors.

At switch back, personnel were advised on the dangers of the rope and how not to cross over as how would case trip hazard and fall off. Personnel advised and reiterated the requirement in been clicked on at all times. Personnel need to click onto to safety rope prior to clicking off second lanyard.

While climbing, B'OC and JW briefed their groups of the scenario and how to safely carry out an emergency using the ropes and various anchor/belays installed at strategic locations throughout to pathway. B O'C and JW went through each anchoring location and purpose of each anchor. All anchors are tested and certified by OPW NM appointed contractors each season prior to be reopened to members of the public.

JW & B'OC showed personnel the rescue equipment on the island by OPW and where the equipment was stored in both hut at base of steps and also the workers hut at the top of monastery. Personnel were shown of the various rescue equipment and kit (soft day kit, straps, carabiners, vacuum mattress, stretcher, various rope lengths) available on the island and ease of access. All equipment used and stored on the island is the same equipment used by ICG. Once briefed personnel then viewed the hut and had a minute to themselves to view the monastery.

Personnel shown, in the event of rescue requiring helicopter evacuation the separate site locations were the helicopter would most likely evacuate. In the event, sometimes the casualty may need to be brought back up the steps i.e. Christ Saddle to the monastery for quick evacuation instead on having to bring casualty all the way down helipad or pier. Helicopter may use either the top of the monastery, helipad or pier for helicopter excavation.



In the event of evacuation and rescue by the Coastguard Helicopter this rescue will most likely take place from the helipad on the Lighthouse road, pier or peak above the monastery wall. The rescue area will be decided by the helicopter crew on the day of the rescue and will be determined by the wind and weather conditions.

Personnel were shown how to set up the ropes, anchors, l'Ds and locations of what is to be set up and where. Personnel advised that 4 people to be on the stretcher, 1 personal on the l'D's to control decent and the rope, 1 on tension rope and 1 personal leading the team. At various locations, straps were attached to belays anchor points so safe decent down steps. These groups then in an emergency are to which around.

Personnel shown where they would need to set up the ropes and l'Ds at the next/which belay location. At each belay anchor point on the way down, two operatives need to have already set up and second team to take over the stretcher.

Near the Wailing Woman, NR questioned JW with regards to ICG intention of setting up a tripod in the event of an emergency near the narrow steps. As the steps are narrow along parts and where the path changed direction on the first stage near the base of the steps, it is unsafe for four personnel to carry the stretcher standing at either side. ICG would need to drop the stretcher and pull/slide the stretcher across this section or two larger personnel are to carry the stretcher, one at the front and one at the back of the stretcher. Depending on the size of the casualty, this may not be possible.

NR and JW discussed the topic ICG setting up a tripod. NR advised that if required to do a trial run, OPW NM would need to consult with NPWS etc. and may need to carry out a bird survey to check birds nesting in proposed location. OPW NM would not be the specialist and would be the responsible of ICG for setting up the tripod under their own training and experience through the Coast Guard.

**3.0 Summary**

Unfortunately the practical side of the emergency drill had to be cancelled due to the weather and slippery steps. Nonetheless, this was a very worth wide exercise and personnel got to see at first-hand how dangerous and slippery the island can be poor weather conditions.

The exercise gave a chance for personnel to have a think through the aspects of any potential emergency scenario, ask questions and scrutinise the procedures in detail.

The wet evening on the island highlighted the increased risk involved especially climbing the wet steps, poor sea/travelling conditions, tricky landing conditions and the importance for time and immediate reaction.

OPW personnel on the island need to contact the Coastguard immediately when there is an accident or incident on the Island and provide as much information as possible so that ICG can make a call on appropriate action required and start mobilising the lifeboat, climbing team and helicopter for a potential rescue.

This was an excellent opportunity for both parties involved to meet face to face, to gauge the level of experience, expertise, and skillset available and how best to utilise these, should a potential incident/situation occur.

Due to the late evening in carrying out the emergency drill, due to previous cancelation over poor weather conditions, OPW and ICG could conduct communication test from the Upper Lighthouse for potential communication blackspots, as some areas of the island have no mobile coverage, no visual of the aerals and distance. OPW NM have procured Tetra radios for emergency purposes out on the island and Tetra are to carry out tests on the island.

OPW NM have received the Tetra radios although are waiting for belt clips and micro speakers to be delivered before issuing.

JW did carry out a test to MB Munster using their own Tetra radio at base of the steps prior to exercise been carried out and noted coverage all the ways to the monastery.



4.0	Conclusions
	<p>All existing safety anchors positioned along the steps to the monastery have been permanently installed at strategic locations. The safety anchors are tested and certified each year as part of Skellig Michael Maintenance Plan prior to island opening to visitors. Anchors were installed permanently to speed up any rescue operation on the Island. Anchors installed prior to the arrival of IGC rescue personnel, greatly aids efficiency and ease of set up and hugely reduce the time frame for the lowering/hauling of any potential casualty/stretchers.</p> <p>During the emergency exercise while walking through and discussing the setting of stretcher, ropes and anchoring systems for hauling the stretcher down the steps, in the event of an emergency, ICG would like to explore alternative measures. From the Wailing Woman at one section, only two personnel can carry the stretcher or pull the stretcher along, as the steps and passageway is too narrow. At one point, the steps turn and change direction, an anchor belay system/tripod is required. ICG would like to explore the idea of setting up a system for lowering the casualty over the edge of the through the use of a quadpod, with the rescuer on a harness and lowered by the softday team. This suggestion may cause a matter of dispute as it could have potential in causing harm/disturbing the nesting sea birds. ICG to come to OPW will proposal.</p> <p>During the exercise it was noted that during the week days, minimum 3 OPW NM staff usually 4 and 3 guides (7 in total) are on the island, who are trained in rope access. On weekends, OPW guides and one OPW NM staff member to clean the toilets are only ones on the island.</p> <p>In the event that an OPW personal requires assistance (illness or medical or accident) and needs to be removed from the island immediately during the weekends, it would not be possible for OPW to transport the casualty by stretcher. 10 - 12 persons would normally be required for stretcher bearing i.e. 4 - 6 carrying, 1 on l'D controlling the descent, 1 on tension rope the stretcher and a relief crew take over.</p>

**Photographs of each stage of Emergency Exercise**

JW briefing all personnel at base of steps



Groups making their way up to monastery, at first switch back location.





JW briefing all personnel at first switch back location and anchoring point.



Personnel making their up the steps to monastery

Group 1  
- B O'C



Group 2-  
JW



JW briefing personnel at 3<sup>rd</sup> switch back at



JW providing briefing of belay system at switch back at bottom of steps leading to Christ saddle



Photo of deviation on steps leading to Christ Saddle





JW briefing of personnel of the belay system at Christ Saddle. Straps here are 2 meters long cause of sharps stone to protect the ropes and so that personnel can see the crew descending and have control over the l'D's.



Crew making their way up to the anchor system at top of steps at Christ Saddle.





JW briefing personnel on top of the steps at Christ Saddle.



JW briefing personnel at deviation point near monastery.





Photograph of storage area of Workers Hut near Monastery



Photograph of personnel descending of steps to Christ Saddle



Photograph of personnel descending of steps



Photographs of personnel descending steps and removing straps and bagging the ropes.



