



OPW Oifig na
nOibreacha Poiblí
Office of Public Works

Sceilg Mhichíl World Heritage Property

OPW Works Season 2025 UNESCO Report

Date of Issue to DHLGH 04/12/2025



Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. General Description	6
3. Brief site History	8
4. Site Access	11
5. 2025 Season Update	12
5.1. Upper Lighthouse Road Repairs	12
5.2. Monastery	14
5.2.1. Discovery Programme Survey	14
5.2.2. Monastery steps digital survey	15
5.2.3. Monastery steps safety signage	17
5.3. Works to the Lower Lighthouse	18
5.3.1. Project Background	18
5.3.2. Proposed Repairs and Refurbishment Works	19
5.3.3. Installation of workers composting toilets at the Lower Lighthouse complex	19
5.4. Works to Upper Lighthouse	20
5.4.1. Project Background	20
5.5. Preserving Legacies Project and Climate Vulnerability Assessment	22
5.5.1. Preserving Legacies Project	22
5.5.2. Climate Vulnerability Assessment	22
5.6. Health & Safety	23
5.6.1. Rescue Exercise	23
5.6.2. State Claims Agency	23
5.7. 2025 Maintenance Plan	23
5.8. Sceilg Mhichíl 2020-2030 Management Plan	24
5.9. Archaeological Works	25
5.10. OPW Architects & Design Team Site Visits	25
5.11. Audio-visual Recording of 2025 Works by Crossing the Line Productions	28
6. 2025 Works Description	29
6.1. Crash Deck at Cross Cove	29
6.2. Crash Decks Installation Works	32
6.3. CCTV Installation Works	34
6.4. Security Gate	34
6.5. North Steps	36
6.6. Landing Pier	37
7. 2025 Survey Works	38
7.1. National Park and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Surveys	38
7.2. UCC Puffin & Kittiwake Survey	38
7.3. UCD Vegetation Survey	38
8. Bibliography	39

1. Introduction

This report aims to outline the repair works completed on the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Sceilg Mhichíl in the 2025 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 2025. The report will also list potential threats to the site and how these threats are being managed by the OPW.

Sceilg Mhichíl was scheduled to open for tourists on 10th May 2025. This was delayed due to a High Court injunction in relation to the passenger boat permits that was lifted in June 2025. Sceilg Mhichíl opened to tourists on 10th June 2025. The OPW work crew carried out a safety sweep and necessary maintenance works to the monastic settlement and steps in advance of the 2025 tourist season. Sceilg Mhichíl officially closed on 30th September 2025 due to deteriorating weather conditions.

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.

Other tasks and works undertaken in 2025 include the following:

- OPW carried out a safety sweep before opening the site to visitors, following receipt of DHLGH Ministerial Consent.
- NPWS carried out surveys on bird species populations and nesting locations.
- OPW Killarney Districts National Monuments Architects carried out 6 no. site visits to inspect ongoing works on site.
- The stainless steel stays of the permanent Crash Decks on the Lower and Upper Lighthouse Roads were removed during the summer season. The stays were coiled up and secured in place on the bedrock below the existing retaining wall. The stainless steel stays were later re-installed in early September 2025 before the season ended.
- OPW replaced the timber boarding to a section of the existing Crash Deck at Cross Cove, following receipt of DHLGH Ministerial Consent.
- OPW installed a temporary removable safety gate at the end bay of the protection timber canopy at Cross Cove, following receipt of DHLGH Ministerial Consent.
- OPW completed the repair works to the damaged section of the North Steps, following receipt of DHLGH Ministerial Consent.
- OPW completed the installation of new workers toilet in the compound of the lower lighthouse, following receipt of DHLGH Ministerial Consent. The toilets are to become operational in 2026.
- OPW installed CCTV signage on the island's landing pier and mainland departure piers to Sceilg Mhichíl.

- OPW completed the repairs to the damaged sections of the metal decking of the 3 no. crash decks on the lower and upper lighthouse roads.
- OPW appointed PCA surveyors to carry out a digital survey of the lower section of the Monastery steps.
- OPW continued with the maintenance works to the Upper Lighthouse Road.
- 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.
- The Discovery Programme carried out their survey and monitoring works on the Monastery Retaining Wall in June 2025 and issued the final report to the OPW.

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 World Heritage Property 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.

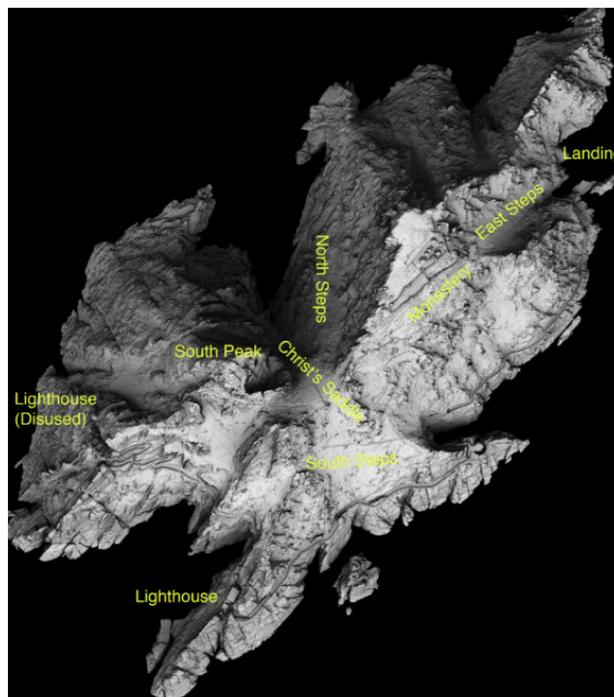


Figure 1 - LIDAR View of Sceilg Mhichíl (Bourke, Hayden, & Lynch, 2011)

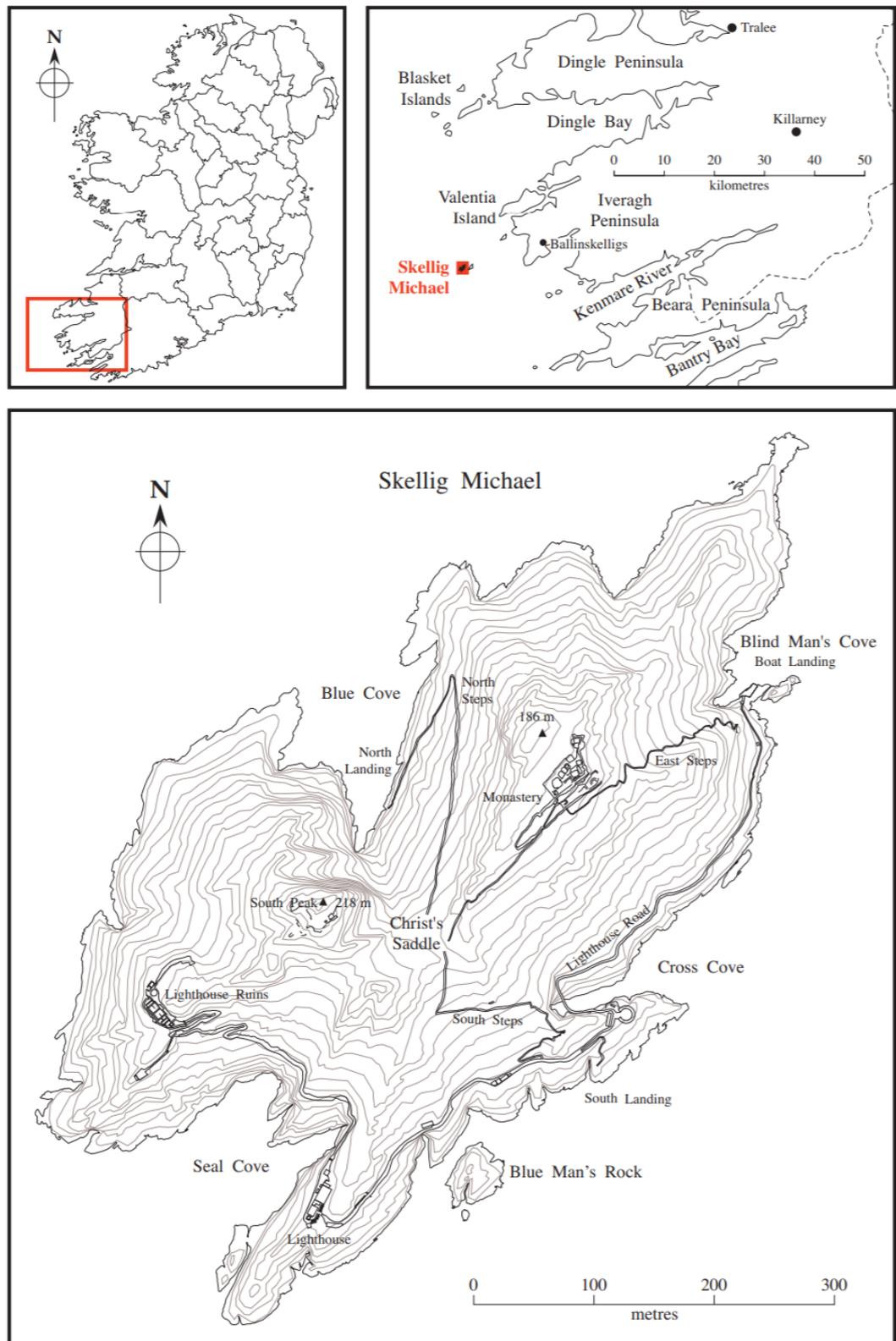


Figure 2 - Location Map of Sceilig Mhichil (Bourke, Hayden, & Lynch, 2011)

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 *Sceillic* means a rock, particularly a steep rock. The first reference to Sceilig 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.

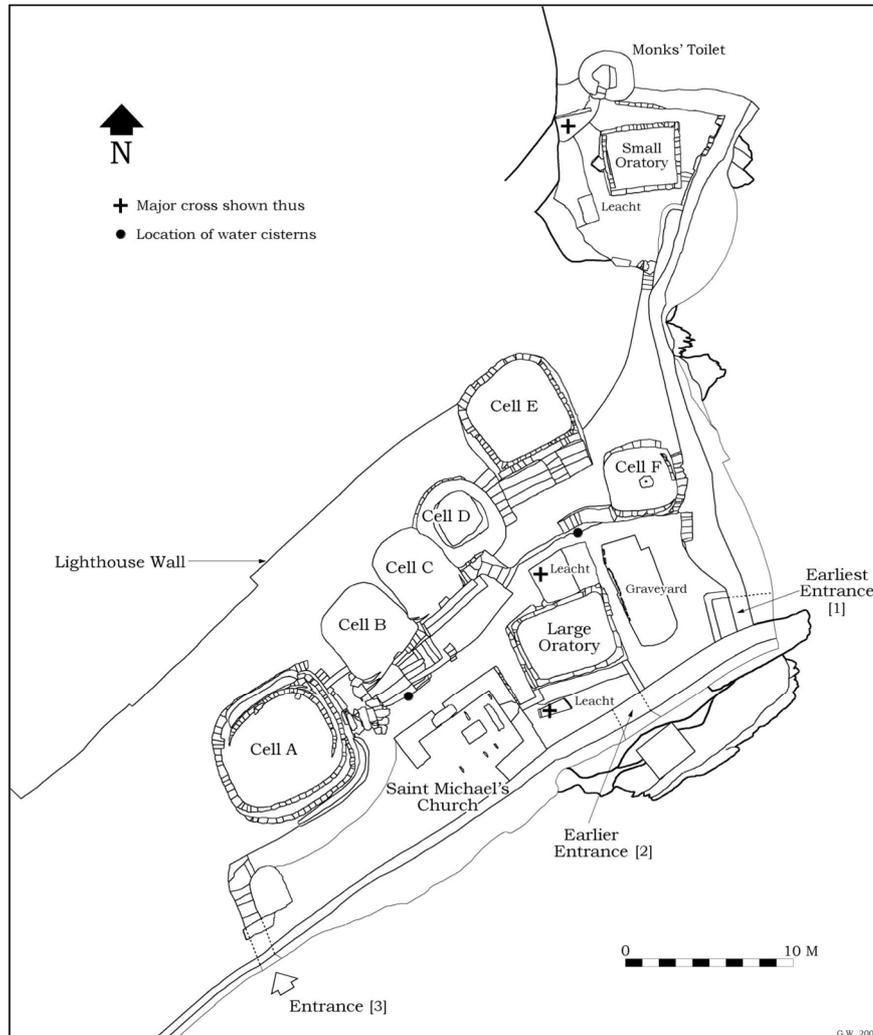


Figure 3 - Plan of the Monastic Settlement

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 Mhichil 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 Mhichil 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 and other mainland departure points. 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. The number of daily visitors is capped at 180 visitors per day. 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 a health and safety 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. 2025 Season Update

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 Upper Lighthouse Road are now complete. Maintenance works to the Lighthouse Road were carried out in the 2025 season by placing sandbags in certain locations to redirect rainwater runoff and by compacting any loose stones. The main purpose of the repair and maintenance works to the Upper Lighthouse road is to provide safe access for workers and future visitors to the fog signaling platform and Upper Lighthouse complex.

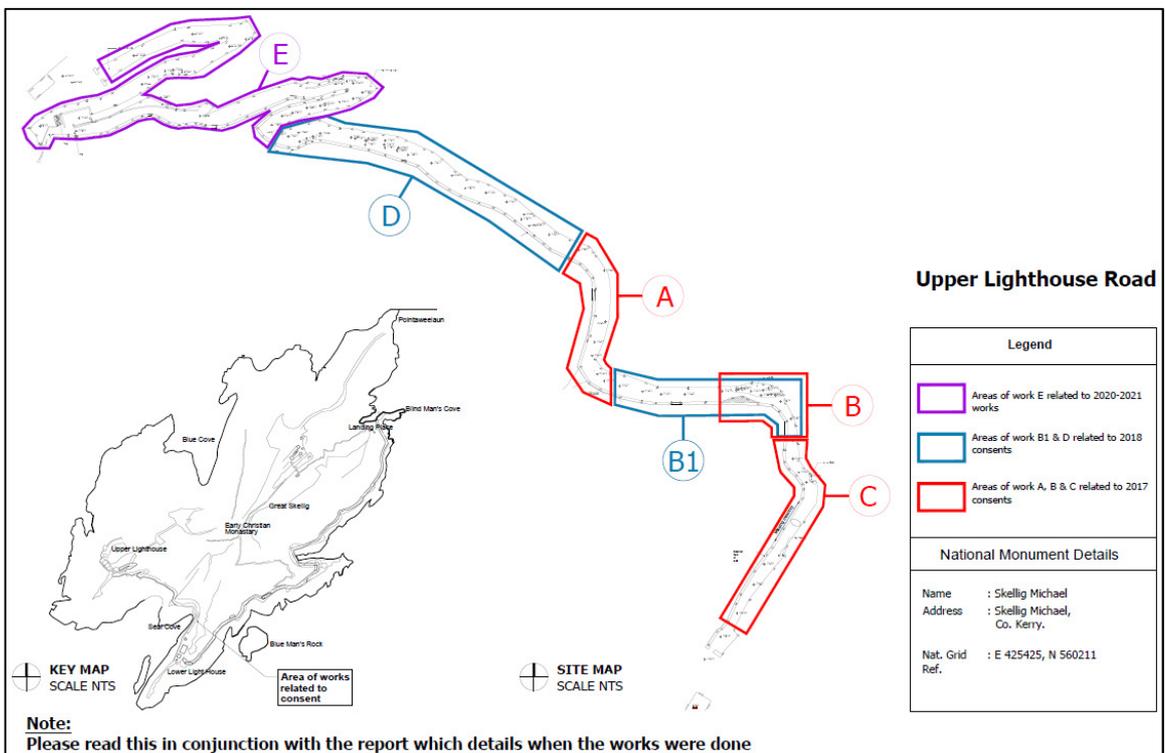


Figure 6 - Works to Upper Lighthouse Road 2017 - 2021



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



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

5.2. Monastery

5.2.1. DISCOVERY PROGRAMME SURVEY

Since 2015, the Discovery Programme have been monitoring the movement of the main retaining wall of the monastic settlement. The Discovery Programme issue an annual report to the OPW with their findings and recommendations.

The Discovery Programme carried out their site visit and surveyed the monastic settlement during the 2025 season. The Discovery Programme issued their final report to OPW in June 2025 (see Appendix E). The largest movements in the retaining wall are occurring in lines A, B and C over the ten years monitoring period. According to the Discovery Programme monitoring report, the magnitude of movement in lines A, B and C were smaller this year compared to the previous year.

Due to increased rainfall and pressure from runoff rainwater, the OPW will be undertaking repairs to this section of the retaining 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 with DHLGH.



Figure 9 - Discovery Programme marker point locations at monastery retaining wall

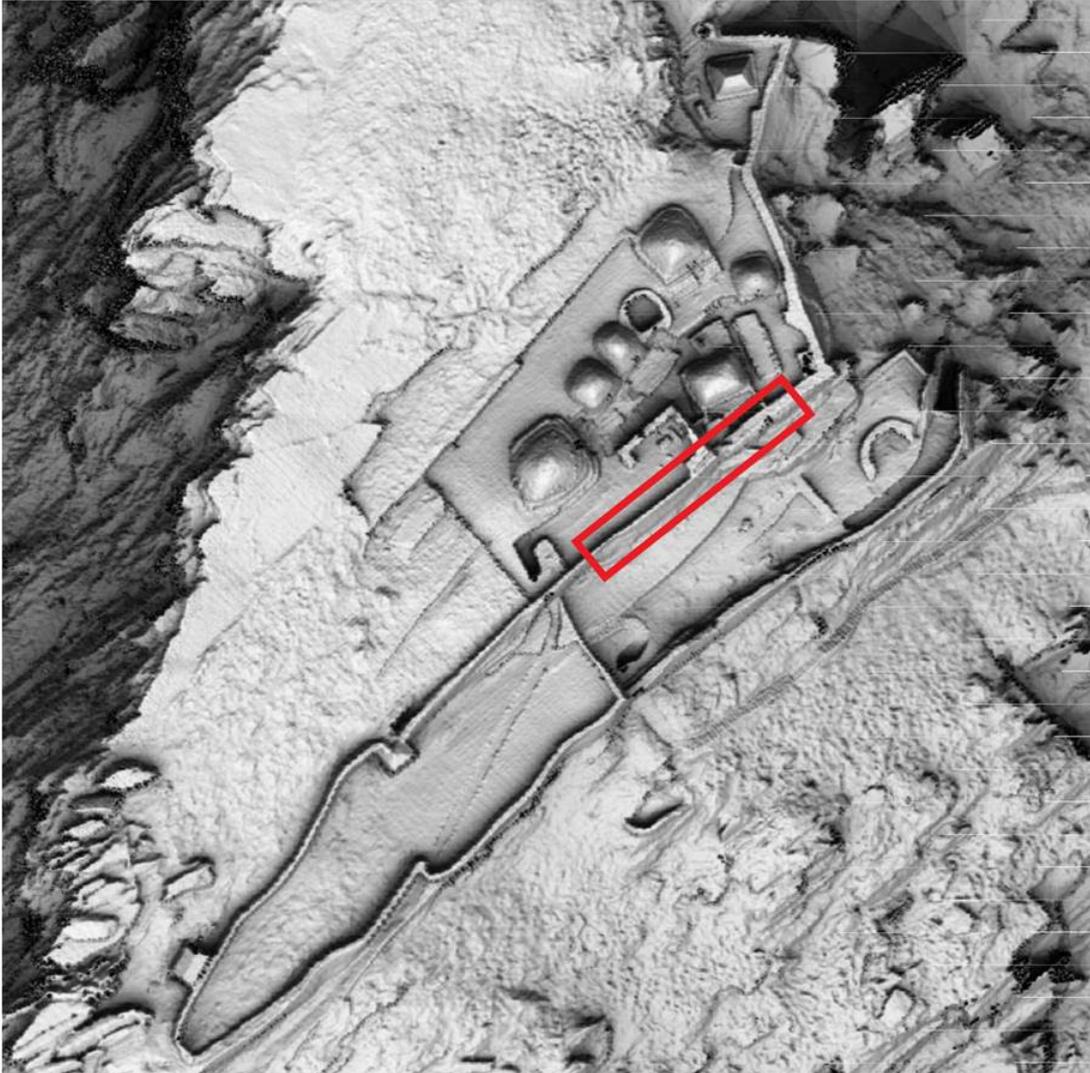


Figure 10 - Location of movement to retaining wall below St. Michael's Chapel

5.2.2. MONASTERY STEPS DIGITAL SURVEY

The Monastic steps present physical challenges to visitors to the Monastery at Sceilg Mhichíl. Visitors to the island are required to ascend and descend circa 600 medieval steps during their visits. The Monastic steps are uneven and present a trip hazard for visitors to Sceilg Mhichíl.

The OPW are proposing to assess the high-risk areas located at the lower part of the Monastic steps with its history of accidents and fatalities. The aim is to carry out an options appraisal of mitigating measures to enhance the health and safety for visitors and OPW personnel in these locations on the Monastic steps. All proposals are to be discussed and agreed with DHLGH. All proposed works to the Monastery steps are subject to obtaining Ministerial Consent from DHLGH. The Ministerial Consent is to include an NIS / AA screening document.

The OPW commissioned PCA surveyors in September 2025 to carry out a digital survey of the lower section of the Monastery steps and issue digital survey drawings to OPW. PCA issued the digital survey drawings to OPW in October 2025.

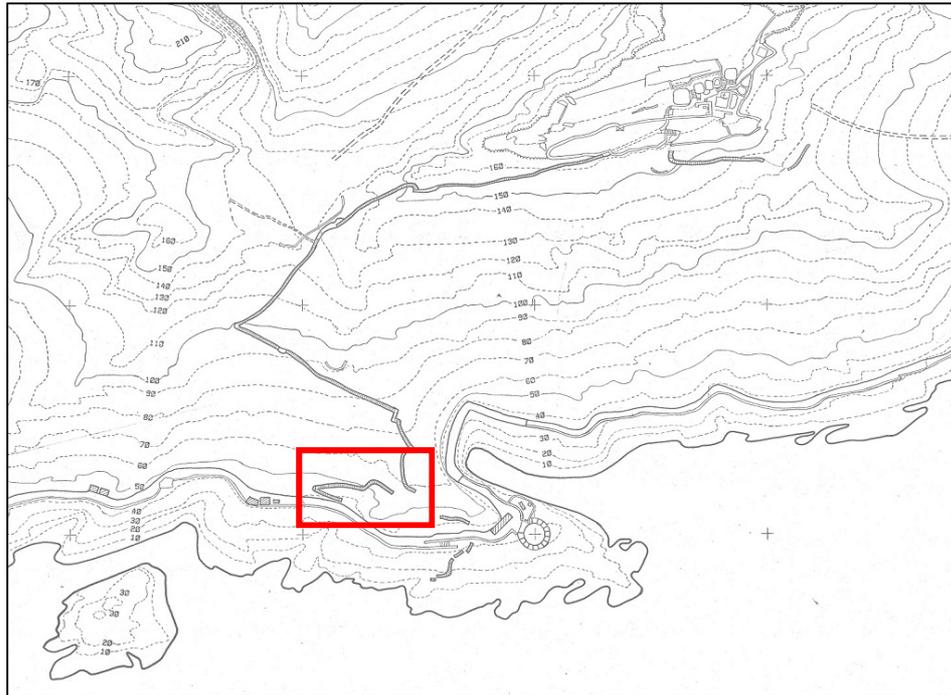


Figure 11 - Monastery Steps extent of digital survey works



Figure 12 - View of the lower section of the Monastery Steps

5.2.3. MONASTERY STEPS SAFETY SIGNAGE

The OPW replaced the existing safety signage located at a high-risk turning point on the Monastery steps with a new enlarged safety signage during the 2025 season. The purpose of the new enlarged signage was to visually improve the existing safety signage to warn visitors of the upcoming turning point to avoid serious accidents. The OPW received confirmation from DHLGH that the proposed replacement of the existing safety signage with a new larger safety signage did not require Ministerial Consent.



Figure 13 - View of the existing safety signage at the Monastery Steps



Figure 14 - View of the mock-up enlarged safety signage installed on site at the Monastery Steps

5.3. Works to the Lower Lighthouse

5.3.1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Lower Lighthouse complex was completed by CIL 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 the lighthouse became fully automated.

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.

It is proposed to refurbish the Lower Lighthouse 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.



Figure 15 - View of the Lower Lighthouse

5.3.2. PROPOSED REPAIRS AND REFURBISHMENT WORKS

The OPW are currently developing the preliminary design for the proposed repair and refurbishment works to the Lower Lighthouse. The OPW are currently in the process of procuring a full design team for the project.

The OPW appointed Blackwood Associates Architects as Conservation Architect Grade 1 for the project. The OPW M&E section will provide M&E consultancy services for the project.

The OPW are in the process of procuring a consultant archaeologist for the project. The OPW will also be procuring a consultant structural engineer and a consultant ecologist for the project.

5.3.3. INSTALLATION OF WORKERS COMPOSTING TOILETS AT THE LOWER LIGHTHOUSE COMPLEX

The OPW obtained Ministerial Consent from DHLGH in April 2022 for the proposed installation of a 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 OPW completed the installation of the new composting toilet in the lower lighthouse compound in the 2025 season, to be operational in the 2026 season.



Figure 16 - Installation of the temporary workers composting toilet in the Lower Lighthouse compound

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 and removal 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. The original floors were exposed following the archaeological excavations. The OPW installed plywood protection to the exposed floors to protect them from the elements.



Figure 17 - Aerial view of the Upper Lighthouse and sea wall

© Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland



Figure 18 - Aerial view of the Upper Lighthouse and sea wall

© Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland



Figure 19 - View of the new installed plywood protection to the existing floor 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 for Sceilg Mhichíl represented the OPW in the Preserving Legacies project. The project required attending regular online trainings and producing deliverables for the site. The OPW worked 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).

In the 2025 season, Michael Snyder visited Sceilg Mhichíl on 5th and 6th August to carry out a photographic record of the National Monument and World Heritage site as part of the Preserving Legacies Project.

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 a deliverable for the *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. The OPW also organised an experts technical workshop in Dublin Castle 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 aim of the workshop was to evaluate the exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity of Sceilg Mhichíl to climate hazards based on stakeholder understanding of the site.

DHLGH also organised a community workshop on 27th April 2024 in Portmagee Visitor Centre. The workshop aimed at assessing community vulnerability and creating a holistic view of the impacts of climate change at Sceilg Mhichíl.

Carrig Conservation International issued their final CVA report to the OPW in July 2024. The main conclusion from the CVA report focussed on the results of the risk assessment carried out by the technical and community workshops attendees. The CVA report also outlined adaptation options including visitor management, human resources, monitoring and research, experimental and climate action.

The official launch of the Sceilg Mhichíl Climate Vulnerability Assessment by DHLGH was held on 12th November 2025 in the Royal Valentia Hotel in Co. Kerry.

5.6. Health & Safety

5.6.1. 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 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, weather permitting. However, rescue exercises were not carried out in 2020, 2021 and 2022 due to the Covid-19 emergency and bad weather.

The OPW held a small rescue exercise in June 2025 with the Iveragh Coastguard (ICG) Unit. The rescue exercise was attended by OPW operatives and guides on the island. A medical emergency exercise was carried out at the Monastery with OPW personnel as observers (see Appendix F).

5.6.2. STATE CLAIMS AGENCY

The State Claims Agency (SCA) visited Sceilg Mhichíl on 13th August 2025 to carry out a safety audit of the island. The purpose of the site visit was to review progress on the safety audit recommendations issued by the SCA to the OPW in 2015.

5.7. 2025 Maintenance Plan

The OPW produced a maintenance plan outlining the maintenance works to be carried out by OPW at the start of the 2025 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 2025 Maintenance Plan was issued to DHLGH in September 2025 (see Appendix K).

The safety sweep Ministerial Consent application was submitted by the OPW to DHLGH in November 2024 accompanied by an AA / NIS document (see Appendix H). Ministerial consent for the proposed safety sweep was granted by DHLGH in March 2025. The OPW carried out the safety sweep at the start of the 2025 season prior to the guides and visitors arriving to the island.

5.8. 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 20 - The Management Plan 2020-2030 sets out the protocols and goals for the future repair works on Sceilg Mhichíl

5.9. Archaeological Works

The OPW appointed Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist for the 2025 season to monitor works on site and carry out archaeological excavations as required.

The annual pre-season safety sweep at Sceilg Mhichíl was archaeologically monitored by Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist in the 2025 season. The archaeological method statement for monitoring the annual safety sweep was issued by Alan Hayden to the OPW in April 2025 (see Appendix D). Following the completion of the safety sweep, the final archaeological report was issued by Alan Hayden to OPW in April 2025 (see Appendix G).

The OPW replaced the timber decking of the 2016 section of the existing protection crash deck at Cross Cove. Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist issued an archaeological impact assessment to the OPW in April 2025 to confirm that the works did not have an impact on the cultural and natural heritage on the island (see Appendix C).

The repair works carried out by the OPW to the damaged section of the North Steps were archaeologically monitored by Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist in the 2025 season. Alan Hayden issued an archaeological method statement in May 2025 to OPW that was included in the Ministerial Consent application to DHLGH (see Appendix A). Following the completion of the works, Alan Hayden issued the final archaeological monitoring report to OPW in September 2025 (see Appendix B).

5.10. OPW Architects & Design Team Site Visits

The OPW Conservation Architects undertook 6 no. site visits to Sceilg Mhichíl over the 2025 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 site visits held during the 2025 season are listed below.

1. 30th April 2025 – Site Visit No. 1

Attendance – Fergus McCormick OPW Senior Architect / OPW Architect / OPW H&S Unit / OPW QS / Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist

Inspection of – North Steps; timber canopy at Cross Cove; 3 no. metal Crash Decks on the Lighthouse Road; helipad

2. 11th June 2025 – Site Visit No. 2

Attendance – Fergus McCormick OPW Senior Architect / OPW Architect / Connie Kelleher DHLGH Senior Archaeologist / Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist

Inspection of – North Steps; temporary removable safety gate at Cross Cove

3. 25th June 2025 – Site Visit No. 3

Attendance – Fergus McCormick OPW Senior Architect / OPW Architect / Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist / Blackwood Associates Architects

Inspection of – Lower Lighthouse; Upper Lighthouse; timber canopy at Cross Cove

4. 9th July 2025 – Site Visit No. 4

Attendance – OPW Architects / OPW M&E Engineer / Flesk Electrical / G4S / OPW NM Visitor Services

Inspection of – hut at landing pier (location for proposed CCTV); workers toilets in the Lower Lighthouse compound; Lower Lighthouse; safety signage at Monastery Steps to be enlarged; mock-up CCTV signage at the landing pier

5. 13th August 2025 – Site Visit No. 5

Attendance – Fergus McCormick OPW Senior Architect / OPW Architect / State Claims Agency / OPW H&S Unit / OPW NM Visitor Services

Inspection of – Monastery steps; Monastery; Lower and Upper Lighthouse Roads; Visitors toilets; first aid hut and site accommodation; workers toilet in the lower lighthouse compound; North Steps; 3 no. metal crash decks

6. 20th August 2025 – Site Visit No. 6

Attendance – Fergus McCormick OPW Senior Architect / OPW Architect / 5 no. consultant Structural Engineers / OPW M&E Engineer / Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist / Tetra Radios

Inspection of – Lower Lighthouse; Monastery; North Steps; workers toilet in the lower lighthouse compound; helipad



Figure 21 - From left to right - Pat O'Shea OPW Sceilg Mhichil Foreman, Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist, Fergus McCormick OPW Senior Architect, Steven Murphy Blackwood Associates Architects, Kevin Blackwood Blackwood Associates Architects, Aaron Jones Blackwood Associates Architects at the Lower Lighthouse Road on 25th June 2025



Figure 22 - From left to right - Diane Tierney OPW Safety Officer, Keva O'Grady OPW Higher Executive Officer, Maggie Keane OPW Supervisor Guide, Sabrina Commins OPW Assistant Principal Officer, Pat O'Shea OPW Sceilg Mhichil Foreman, Patrick Fields OPW Senior H&S Advisor, Fiona Kearns State Claims Agency, James O'Donoghue OPW Foreman, John Cloney State Claims Agency, Fergus McCormick OPW Senior Architect, Andrew Arlovski OPW Graduate Architect, Eugene Boyle OPW Architect at the Upper Lighthouse on 13th August 2025



Figure 23 - From left to right - Pat O'Shea OPW Sceilg Mhichíl Foreman, Ray Murphy OPW M&E Engineer, Simon Carolan OPW M&E Engineer, Ciaran Kennedy Barrett Mahony Consulting Engineers, John Kelly DKP Consulting Engineers, Austin Dennany DRA Consulting Engineers, Lisa Edden CORA Consulting Engineers, Fergus McCormick OPW Senior Architect, Trevor Wood TW Consulting Engineers, Alan Hayden Consultant Archaeologist, Eugene Boyle OPW Architect at the Lower Lighthouse Road on 20th August 2025

5.11. Audio-visual Recording of 2025 Works by Crossing the Line Productions

The OPW commissioned Crossing the Line Productions to film works on the island for the 2025 season. The aim of the film footage is to provide a visual record of the works during the 2025 season. An audio-visual synopsis of the 2025 works will be produced and issued to the OPW in 2025. The audio-visual files produced by Crossing the Line acts as a record of works in conjunction with site reports and photographic records.

6. 2025 Works Description

6.1. Crash Deck at Cross Cove

Rock falls have increased in frequency in recent years on Sceilg Mhichíl due to the effects of climate change. The high levels of precipitation are leading to increased soil erosion and rock falls. 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 24 - View of the protection timber canopy at Cross Cove

A rock fall occurred on the lower lighthouse road at Cross Cove early in the 2025 season that damaged the 2016 section of the protective timber crash deck. A rock fall also occurred in the same area and caused damage to the new section of timber boarding at Cross Cove. OPW Architects carried out a site inspection on 30th April 2025 to inspect the rock fall and the damaged timber boarding.

The OPW obtained Ministerial Consent from DHLGH in March 2025 for the proposed repairs to the 2016 section of the existing protection canopy at Cross Cove. The OPW replaced the 2016 section of timber boarding of the existing protection canopy in the 2025 season. The OPW also repaired the section of the new timber boarding at Cross Cove that was damaged by rock falls. The repair and maintenance to the timber crash deck at Cross Cove is included in the OPW yearly maintenance programme at Sceilg Mhichíl.



Figure 25 - Rock fall on the timber protection canopy at Cross Cove

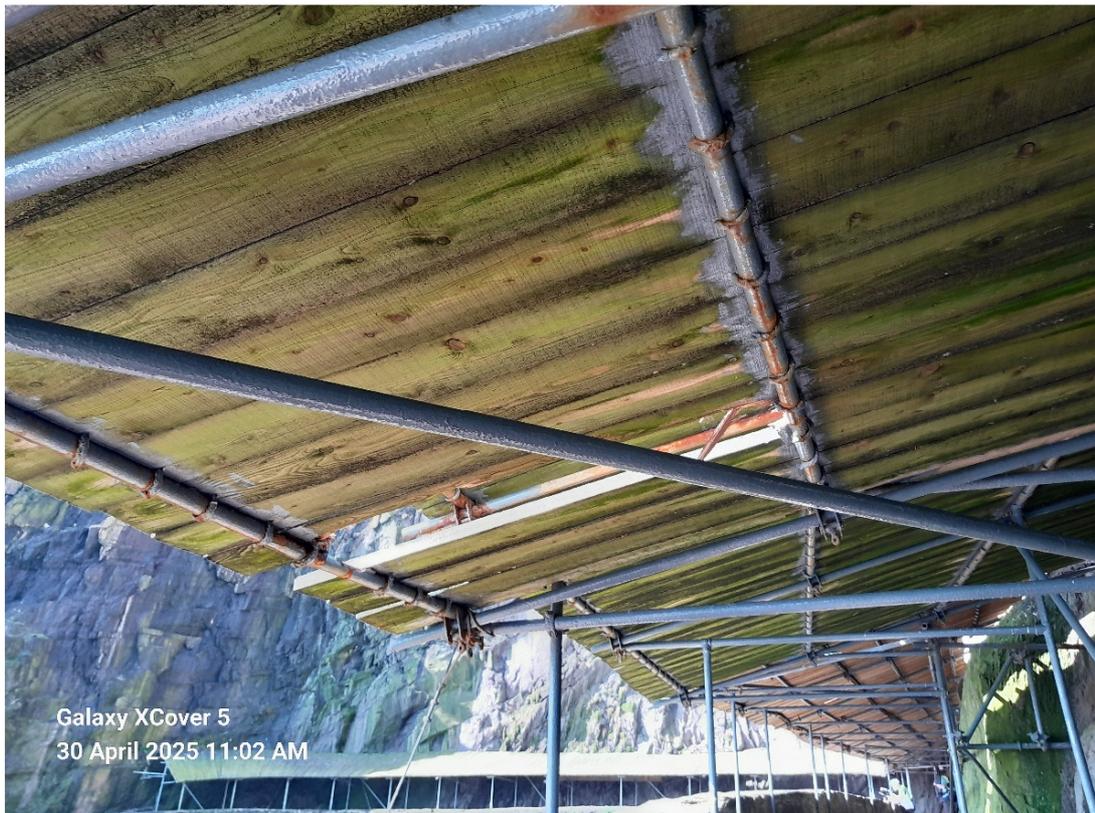


Figure 26 - Damage from rock fall to the timber protection canopy at Cross Cove



Figure 27 - Damage from rock fall to the timber protection canopy at Cross Cove



Figure 28 - Repairs completed to the 2016 section of the timber protection canopy at Cross Cove

6.2. Crash Decks Installation Works

The installation of permanent and robust crash decks is critical for the safety and wellbeing of OPW workers on the island 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.

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 3 no. permanent crash decks on the lighthouse road. The OPW appointed Eamonn Costello (Kerry) Ltd as main contractor the Crash Decks installation works following a tender process. The works to the 3 no. crash decks were completed in the 2023 season and the Certificate of Practical Completion was issued by the OPW Senior Architect in October 2023.

The DHLGH Ministerial Consent conditions outlined the requirement for the temporary removal of the stainless steel stays on the seawall side of the crash decks during the summer season to avoid injury to the birds during the nesting season. The stainless steel stays are to be re-installed at the end of the summer season before the island closure. The OPW removed the stainless steel stays to the 3 no. crash decks on the lighthouse road at the start of the 2025 summer season. The stainless steel stays were coiled up and attached to the rock face below the sea walls. The OPW later re-instated the stainless steel stays in September 2025 using rope access.



Figure 29 - Re-instatement of the stainless steel stays to the 3 no. crash decks in September 2025

The OPW repaired the metal decking to the 3 no. crash decks on the lower and upper lighthouse roads in the 2025 season. The metal decking were damaged by rock falls and stone debris. The repairs and replacement of the damaged metal decking is required to ensure the structural integrity of the 3 no. cash decks.



Figure 30 - View of the crash deck metal decking prior to the repair and maintenance works



Figure 31 - Repair and maintenance works carried out to the metal decking of the crash decks

6.3. CCTV Installation Works

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. The OPW have 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 successfully 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. The OPW also obtained an extension to the Ministerial Consent in March 2025 for the proposed CCTV installation works. Technical information was provided by OPW M&E Engineering Section to accompany the Ministerial consent application.

The OPW M&E section appointed Flesk Electrical and G4S contractors to install the CCTV on Sceilg Mhichíl in September 2025. However, due to weather conditions, the installation of the CCTV on the island was postponed to the 2026 season.

The OPW obtained Ministerial Consent from DHLGH in March 2025 for the installation of CCTV signage at the landing pier on Sceilg Mhichíl. The OPW installed the CCTV signage at the island's landing pier in September 2025. The OPW also installed CCTV signage on the mainland departure points to Sceilg Mhichíl in September 2025. The purpose of the CCTV signage is to comply with GDPR regulations.

6.4. Security Gate

Unauthorised access to Sceilg Mhichíl was documented by OPW operatives in the early 2025 season. This occurred during the island closure from 10th May until 10th June 2025 at the start of the season. The OPW installed temporary signage on the hut near the landing pier to provide warning for the island closure. The signage alone did not provide enough deterrent for unauthorised visitors to the island.

The OPW obtained Ministerial Consent from DHLGH in July 2025 for the installation of a security gate at the end of bay of the protection canopy at Cross Cove. The OPW completed the installation of the security gate in the 2025 season. The purpose of the security gate is to deter unauthorised access when the island is closed. The new security gate was closed and locked by the OPW at the end of the 2025 season.



Figure 32 - View of the new security gate installed at the end of bay of the timber protection canopy at Cross Cove



Figure 33 - View of the new security gate installed at the end of bay of the timber protection canopy at Cross Cove

6.5. North Steps

A section of the North Steps at Sceilg Mhichíl was damaged by rock fall during the winter period. The OPW obtained Ministerial Consent from DHLGH in July 2025 for the proposed masonry repair works to the damaged section of the North Steps. The Ministerial Consent was accompanied by an NIS / AA screening document (see Appendix I). The OPW carried out the repair works to the North Steps in the 2025 season under archaeological supervision.



Figure 34 - Repairs to the damaged section of the North Steps



Figure 35 - Repairs to the damaged section of the North Steps



Figure 36 – Repairs completed to the damaged section of the North Steps

6.6. Landing Pier

The OPW are 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 to protect the landing area from increased swells and higher tides.

7. 2025 Survey Works

7.1. National Park and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Surveys

Survey works were carried out by the NPWS on Sceilg Mhichíl during the 2025 season. The NPWS appointed an Ornithological Clerk of Works, Brian Power from Envirico for the duration of the 2025 season. His role was to monitor the potential impact of ongoing works on the island's wildlife and to carry out bird survey works for NPWS.

7.2. UCC Puffin & Kittiwake 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 survey was cancelled during the 2022 season. The puffin survey works resumed in the 2023 season and UCC carried out their survey in June 2023. UCC also carried out a puffin and kittiwake survey on Sceilg Mhichíl in June 2025. The puffin and kittiwake survey report was issued to the OPW in September 2025 (see Appendix L).

7.3. UCD Vegetation Survey

UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science completed their vegetation survey on Sceilg Mhichíl in July 2025.

8. Bibliography

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; Officer of Public Works; (2021). *Sceilg*

Mhichíl World Heritage Property Management Plan 2020-30. Dublin: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Bourke, E., Hayden, A. R., & Lynch, A. (2011). *Skellig Michael, Co. Kerry: the monastery and South Peak, Archaeological stratigraphic report: excavations 1986 - 2010*. Dublin: Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government; Office of Public Works;. (2008). *Skellig Michael Heritage Site Management Plan 2008 - 2018*. Dublin: Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Rourke, G. D. (2002). Preserving the Monuments on Skellig Michael for the Future. *Antiquity* 76.292, pp. 542-552.