

**Joint World Heritage Centre – IUCN Monitoring Mission
to Simien Mountains National Park World Heritage Property**

MISSION REPORT

***Reactive Monitoring Mission to Simien Mountains National Park
Ethiopia***

10 – 17 May 2006



**Guy Debonnet (UNESCO)
Lota Melamari (IUCN)
Bastian Bomhard (IUCN)**

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Executive Summary

The World Heritage Committee requested at its 29th session (Durban, 2004) a joint UNESCO/IUCN monitoring mission to Simien Mountains National Park to assess the state of conservation of the property and progress towards achieving the 4 benchmarks set by the World Heritage Committee at its 25th session to guide the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger. The mission took place 10 – 17 May 2006.

This joint mission report summarizes the mission's key findings on current conservation and management issues at the property. It includes detailed recommendations regarding the benchmarks set by the Committee, including a proposal for 4 revised benchmarks, and other recommendations to improve the conservation and management of the property.

The mission found that substantial progress has been made towards the benchmarks 1, 2 and 4 set by the Committee at its 25th session. At the same time, the mission concluded that it is imperative to finalize the park boundary changes and to legalize them through a re-gazetment of Simien Mountains National Park. The mission also noted that benchmark 3 was not achieved and will not be achieved in the near future. The mission concluded that in spite of the progress made since 2001, the threats to the values for which the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List have not yet been resolved.

Based on its findings, the mission recommends that the World Heritage Committee retain the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger. To guide a possible future removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger, the mission proposes the following 4 revised benchmarks (to replace the benchmarks set by the Committee at its 25th session):

- (1) Finalize the extension of SMNP to include the Silki Yared – Kiddis Yared Mountains and the Ras Dejen Mountain with the interlinking corridors;
- (2) Re-gazetment of the new park boundaries, including the extensions of Lemalimo, Mesarerya, the Silki Yared – Kiddis Yared Mountains and the Ras Dejen Mountain as well as the realignment of the boundary to exclude certain villages;
- (3) Develop a strategy and action plan, as part of the planned management plan revision, to significantly reduce the impact of livestock grazing on the conservation of the property by introducing "no grazing" and "limited grazing" zones based on ecological criteria and by setting up a strict management regime in zones where grazing will still be tolerated in the short to medium term, and secure funding for its implementation;
- (4) Develop a strategy and action plan as part of the management plan to support the development of alternative livelihoods for the people living within the park as well as its immediate vicinity, in order to limit in the medium term their impact on the natural resources of the property, and secure funding for its implementation.

The mission discussed these revised benchmarks with the State Party and believes they are achievable in the short term (1-2 years) if the necessary external financial support and some technical assistance are provided. UNESCO and IUCN, as well as other conservation agencies, such as Frankfurt Zoological Society, might be able to provide the technical assistance, whilst limited funding could be provided from the World Heritage Fund. However, for the implementation of the management plan, and the strategies required under benchmarks 3 and 4, donor funding will need to be mobilized.

1. Background to the Mission

The Simien Mountains National Park (SMNP) was one of the first properties inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1978. The property was inscribed on the basis of its importance for biodiversity (criterion iv) and its exceptional natural beauty (criterion iii). The park is home to a number of threatened and endemic species. Of the 21 large mammal species that can be found in the park, three are locally endemic (Walia ibex) or endemic to Ethiopia (Ethiopian wolf and Gelada baboon) – these are the flagship species of SMNP. The Walia ibex (*Capra walie*) and the Ethiopian wolf (*Canis simensis*; also called Simien fox) are considered as critically endangered and endangered, respectively (IUCN 2006 Red List). The Walia ibex can only be found in the Simien Mountains, where its current population is estimated at 623 individuals (November 2005). The Ethiopian wolf is the rarest canid in the world, with a total population estimated at less than 500 animals (IUCN 2006 Red List). A census carried out in 2005 estimated the population in the Simien Mountains at 78 animals. Other large mammal species include the Anubis baboon, Hamadryas baboon, klipspringer, and golden jackal. The mountains are also home to 5 small mammal species and 16 bird species endemic to Eritrea and/or Ethiopia as well as an important population of the rare lammergeyer, a spectacular vulture species. The Simien Mountains are part of the Afro-alpine centre of plant diversity and are characterized by a high but yet unquantified level of plant endemism. The scenery is spectacular, composed of a vast undulating plateau dissected by forested rocky valleys and dominated by the rugged peaks of the Simien Mountains, including the highest peak in Ethiopia, Ras Dejen (4,624 m), situated to the east of the park.

SMNP was created in 1969. At the time of its creation, a number of villages and important tracts of land used by the local communities were included within the parks boundaries. This situation had not changed at the time of inscription of the park on the World Heritage List. In fact, the nomination document mentions that 80 % of the park was subjected to human use, in particular livestock grazing, agriculture and human settlement, leaving only 20 % undisturbed and available for the Walia ibex. It further specifies that the plateau was over-run by domestic livestock, resulting in erosion and reduction of the habitat available for the Ethiopian wolf. It points out that the central area of the park around the village of Gich had been under excessive agricultural cultivation for a long time, leading to erosion and that agriculture was expanding into the middle terraces, leading to deforestation of the giant heath vegetation and further reduction of the habitat available for the Walia ibex. The nomination further specifies that the resettlement of the human inhabitants of the property had been planned by the provincial Government and that an extension of SMNP was in the planning to include more critical habitat of the Walia ibex into the park. At the time of nomination, the population of Walia ibex was estimated at 250 animals in the park, and a further 50 animals outside the park, while the population of Ethiopian wolf was estimated at 20 individuals.

Shortly after the inscription, the political conflict in the country escalated in a civil war and in 1983, the State Party reported that park staff was forced to abandon the property, which was occupied by rebels. There is evidence that the Walia ibex was heavily poached during this period and that part of the population moved into better protected areas to the east of the park. In 1991, at the end of the conflict, the State Party submitted a report on the state of conservation of the property, noting that while all park infrastructure was destroyed during the conflict, it had not significantly affected the natural resources and values of the property. Following reports on the deterioration of the Walia ibex population, a monitoring mission was fielded in November 1996. The mission noted the decline in populations of the flagship species Ethiopian wolf and Walia ibex, the continued human pressure on the park, with 60% of the park subjected to human use and over 4500 people living in the park and a further 30,000 living in its immediate vicinity, the increased use of the remaining wildlife habitats by livestock, the expansion of agricultural fields in the park and the on-going construction of the Debarq – Mekane Birhan road through the property. On the basis of this report, the World

Heritage Committee at its 20th session (Merida, 1996) decided to inscribe the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger. The inscription on the Danger List more or less coincided with a transfer in 1997 of the responsibility for the management of the site from the national level to the Amhara Regional Government.

In 2000 the regional authorities organized a fact-finding mission, in which high level officials of the Amhara Regional Government, representatives from different government agencies and local administrations and experts from the Centre for Development and Environment of the University of Berne participated, to study the threats to the property and develop recommendations to address these threats. The recommendations included the creation of a steering committee to co-ordinate the conservation efforts by the different levels of administration, the realignment of the road, the realignment of park boundaries by excluding villages situated on the edge of the park and at the same time including further key habitats of Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf, the relocation of 4 villages in the park (Gich, Islam Debir, Adarmaz and Muchila) and the development of a project to support sustainable development activities in the buffer zone. In October 2000, during a UNESCO workshop on “The Role of World Heritage in Danger listing in promoting international cooperation for the conservation or World Natural Heritage” organized in the framework of the World Conservation Congress in Amman, a representative from the state government presented a paper justifying opposition to the Danger listing and requesting a monitoring mission to the property. This mission took place in April 2001. The mission concluded that although the Amhara Regional Government was demonstrating a commitment to address the threats to the values and integrity of the property and that the situation with regard to the management of the park was improving, the results on the ground were not yet sufficient to consider the property out of danger. The mission proposed a number of recommendations for priority actions to be taken, largely based on the recommendations of the 2000 high level mission and proposed the following benchmarks to guide a removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger. The benchmarks were adopted by the Committee at its 25th session (Helsinki, 2001).

Benchmarks set by the World Heritage Committee at its 25th session to guide the removal of SMNP from the List of World Heritage in Danger:

- (1) Realignment of the park’s boundary to exclude the villages along the boundary;***
- (2) Extension of the park to include at least Mesarerya and Lemalino Wildlife Reserves;***
- (3) Significant and sustainable reduction in the human population density within the park, especially within the core area;***
- (4) Effective conservation within the extended national park of a larger population of Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf.***

Since 2001, the State Party has provided regular reports on the State of Conservation of the property and progress towards achieving the above mentioned benchmarks. In February 2005, the State Party report announced that considerable progress was achieved towards 3 of the 4 benchmarks but that it was unable to achieve the benchmark referring to the reduction of the human occupation within the property. This prompted the World Heritage Committee at its 29th session (Durban, 2004) to request the State Party to invite a joint UNESCO/IUCN mission to the property to assess progress and review the possibility of removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger at its 30th session (Vilnius, 2006). The mission took place 10 – 17 May 2006. The mission team was composed of Guy Debonnet, programme specialist for natural heritage, representing UNESCO’s World Heritage Centre, Lota Melamari, IUCN-WCPA protected area expert, and Bastian Bomhard, IUCN Programme on Protected Areas, representing IUCN. Detailed terms of reference and the programme of the mission, as well as the contact details of the mission team and the names and affiliation of people met by the mission team can be found in annex 1-4 of this report. Annex 5 includes maps showing the original and revised park boundary of SMNP.

2. Institutional framework and management structure

In 1997, the responsibility for the management of SMNP was transferred by the Ethiopian Government from the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Organization to the Amhara Regional National State. Subsequently, the Amhara Regional Government established the semi-autonomous institution known as the Amhara Parks Development and Protection Authority (PaDPA), which took over the management of SMNP from the Bureau of Agriculture. The new arrangement affords the park to interact with grassroots stakeholders including neighboring communities (Kebeles) and districts (Weredas). It has to a large degree brought in shared decision making on park management issues. Park budgets for both development and running costs are now provided by the Amhara Regional Government. A major international donor to SMNP has been the Austrian Government, through the joint Austrian-Ethiopian Integrated Development Project (IDP), which has given substantial financial assistance to support the park and local communities.

The above has streamlined administrative bureaucracy as the park warden and other park staff have a direct link with decision makers. During interviews with various stakeholders, the mission team observed an improved decision making process through streamlined and structured accountability and ownership among the players at all levels (from the Amhara Regional National State President to the Head of PaDPA, from PaDPA to the park warden and other park staff).

This is enhanced by regulations enacted in January 2001 that attribute roles and responsibilities between PaDPA and the Amhara Bureau of Agriculture. The regulations give emphasis on adopting an integrated development planning and management approach involving the neighboring communities, districts, park administration, the Amhara Bureau of Agriculture and other stakeholders. This approach, if put into good practice, could promote a dialogue leading to the harmonious coexistence of SMNP and its neighboring communities. However, although important progress was made since the 2001 monitoring mission, it is still a long way to achieving the objective of preserving the natural resources and values of SMNP while promoting sustainable livelihoods for the neighboring communities, mainly because of the long history of people in the park and the still high dependence of local communities on the park resources.

3. Progress made towards the benchmarks set by the World Heritage Committee at its 25th session

3.1 Benchmarks 1, 2 and 4: Realignment of the park's boundary to exclude the villages along the boundary, extension of the park to include at least Mesarerya and Lemalino Wildlife Reserves, and effective conservation within the extended national park of a larger population of Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf.

The mission acknowledges that the realignment of the park boundary to exclude certain villages and to include the extensions of Lemalimo and Mesareya, and thus a larger population of Walia ibex, is implemented in the field. Thus, substantial progress was made with regard to benchmarks 1, 2 and 4. (These benchmarks relate to the park boundaries of SMNP and are therefore dealt with collectively in this section.)

The realignment of the park boundary was negotiated with the local communities, first at Wereda level, then at Kebele level, in 2004 and 2005. Through this exemplary participatory

process a consensus was reached in cooperation with all local stakeholders. New park boundaries were determined, in the field marked with paint, and so far demarcated with 100 concrete beacons in the highlands (a further 10 are to follow in the lowlands). In the meantime GPS readings were completed and confirmed along the revised park boundary, and a draft map was compiled showing the revised park boundary (see Annex 5). According to State Party, SMNP covers now some 23,200 hectares, compared to the 13,600 hectares currently inscribed as World Heritage property. The whole process of the realignment of the park boundary was supported by the IDP and resulted in a very high acceptance of the new park boundaries by the local communities. The communities are now fully supportive of the revised park boundary. This has significantly improved the management situation.

The process of the realignment of the park boundary resulted in the requested exclusion of numerous villages along the boundary of the park (benchmark 1), including the villages of Adarmaz and Muchila, which were earmarked for resettlement by the 2000 high level mission, as well as the exclusion of some areas under cultivation. It also resulted in the requested inclusion of Lemalimo and Mesareya Wildlife Reserves (benchmark 2).

The extensions towards Lemalimo and Mesarerya were crucial for the effective conservation of a larger population of Walia ibex within the extended national park (benchmark 4) because they added a significant proportion of the Walia ibex population into SMNP (at least 60-90 animals; in total 623 animals in November 2005) as well as all currently occupied areas of Walia habitat. At present there is no poaching of Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf inside SMNP, and the populations of both species are increasing in the area. However, 75% of the Ethiopian wolf population in the Simien Mountains (in total 71 animals in June 2005) is still outside SMNP, on the much less disturbed highlands from the Silki Yared – Kiddis Yared Mountains to the Ras Dejen Mountain, which also include significant, currently unoccupied areas of Walia habitat. These highlands are therefore already earmarked as an extension for SMNP and, provided the necessary funds for the demarcation process are made available, this extension can be completed in 1-2 years. Because of its importance for the effective conservation of a larger population of Ethiopian wolf within the extended national park (benchmark 4), the mission regards this third extension as crucial for the conservation of the values for which the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List.

Two issues could potentially jeopardize this newly proposed extension: 1) the planned Bwahit – Dilyibza road, of which the originally proposed route would go through the extension area, and 2) the recently established Arkwasiye village, located right in the middle of the critical wildlife corridor linking the current park area with the extension area. However, the mission was informed by several officials at community, district and regional level, that the Amhara Regional Government is now considering another route for the Bwahit – Dilyibza road, going through the valleys outside the extension area rather than through the highlands, and that the Arkwasiye village, which is considered as an illegal settlement, could be relocated along this newly proposed route (see also section 4.3). The State Party should confirm this in its next report to the World Heritage Centre.

In addition to the implementation of all the extensions in the field, there is a need to legalize these extensions through a re-gazetment of SMNP based on the new park boundaries. The re-gazetment has to go through the national parliament. Both the regional and national authorities confirmed that this was planned and achievable in 1-2 years. Once the re-gazetment is achieved, the State Party will have to propose the new boundaries for approval to the World Heritage Committee. This will require a re-nomination of the property as this will be a significant boundary change (article 165 of the Operational Guidelines). The mission concluded that the revised park boundary, including the third extension, will need to be legalized through a re-gazetment of SMNP and also be approved by the World Heritage Committee as the new boundaries of the World Heritage property.

3.2 Benchmark 3: Significant and sustainable reduction in the human population density within the park, especially within the core area.

The issue of people living inside the park dates back to the time of its creation, as several villages and land used for agriculture and livestock grazing were included in the protected area. This problem remained unresolved at the time of the inscription of SMNP on the World Heritage List in 1978. In fact, the nomination mentions that the provincial authorities were committed to resettle the villages situated in the park to address this threat. This proposed resettlement has not been completed, however, because of the lack of alternative livelihood options and space elsewhere and, hence, the unwillingness of the villagers to move.

There are no accurate estimates on how many people were included in the park at its creation in 1969. However it is clear that substantially more than half of the extent of the park was under human use¹ at the time of inscription. In 1979, one year after the inscription on the World Heritage List, 7 villages were relocated from the northern slopes of the escarpment, reducing the extent of human use to 33% of the park surface (4000 ha for grazing and 2000 ha for cultivation). This forced resettlement resulted in tensions between the local communities and the park management authorities. Based on a 1994 population census, the number of people living within the park was estimated at 11,000, whilst the 1996 mission report (which recommended the inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger) quotes 30,000 people living in the park area and depending on the use of its natural resources and 4500 people living inside the park. The 1994 Simien Mountains Baseline Study by the University of Berne concluded that 3286 ha in the park were under cultivation. The 2004 Simien Mountains study, prepared by the Centre for Development and Environment of the University of Berne, estimated the population growth rate 1.5 – 2 % per year, resulting in a doubling of the population every 35 years.

The realignment of the park boundary (see benchmark 1) resulted in the exclusion of numerous villages from the park and, thus, in an important reduction in the number of people living in the park. According to a rapid assessment carried out in October 2005, 582 households were found living in the park (amounting to 3173 people), whilst 1477 households living in its immediate vicinity are cultivating plots inside the park. The total area under cultivation in the park was estimated at 2281 ha. So it can be concluded that thanks to the realignment of the park boundary, the population within the park was reduced from 4500 to 3200 people, whilst the area under cultivation was reduced from 3300 ha to 2300 ha.

This leaves however a significant population inside the new park boundaries, most notably the village of Gich, which is situated in the middle of the core area and accounts for about half of the remaining households in the park. In 2003 the park authorities organized a number of meetings with village representatives, to discuss voluntary resettlement to a site identified in the lowland, some 300 km away from the park in West Gonder. However, the inhabitants of Gich village categorically refused the proposed resettlement. Given the fact that a forced relocation would lead to renewed conflicts with the local communities and is difficult to defend because the villages were already established when the park was created, it seems unlikely that the third benchmark set by the Committee for removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger can be achieved in the near future.

The State Party is well aware of this problem and has proposed to conduct a study to identify alternative livelihood options for local communities and, based on this, to develop a strategy to address this issue in the long term. An International Assistance Request was approved by the Chairperson of the Committee in December 2005 and the international consultant that

¹ According to the nomination file, 80 % of the park was under human use. The 1986 management plan specifies that at the time of its creation, 53 % (10,000 ha) of the park was used by local communities for cultivation (3400 ha) or grazing (6600 ha).

was hired by the World Heritage Centre to conduct the study together with the park authorities started working in late June 2006.

The main impacts of the villages inside the park are related to the intensive use of the natural resources of the park. Since it seems unrealistic to expect a significant and sustainable reduction of the human population inside the park in the short to medium term, it is imperative to take appropriate measures to reduce the impacts of the human presence in the property, so that it does not endanger the values for which the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List. *The mission therefore proposes to revise the third benchmark as to address the impact of people on the property rather than the number of people living in the park.* Resource uses that have been documented over the years are poaching, deforestation, livestock grazing and cultivation. It needs to be pointed out that the park resources are not only used by the people who are resident within the property but also by the local communities living in its immediate vicinity.

The issue of poaching does no longer seem to be a major concern. In the past, deforestation has resulted in serious degradation of natural resources in and around SMNP, leaving the area susceptible to soil erosion by water and wind. Extensive areas both within and outside SMNP are almost devoid of native woody vegetation. The degradation and its ecological impacts have forced both the Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf to vacate some of their original ranges and to move further up into the less disturbed highlands. To tackle the issue of deforestation, plantations of fast growing species, mainly Eucalyptus, have been put in place in the villages in and around the park. Because of this, in theory, local communities are apparently no longer dependent on the native woody vegetation for fuel wood. Nevertheless, there is still some deforestation for fuel wood, as villagers prefer to sell the Eucalyptus as construction wood instead of using it for their fuel needs. However, with strict enforcement, this problem can be managed in the short term.

Cultivation inside the park remains a serious concern. This form of land use is incompatible with the conservation objectives of the park and therefore should be phased out in the future. For the moment the park authorities are enforcing a ban on further extensions of the areas cultivated in the park and this seems well respected. However, as villages in the park depend on the cultivated land for their livelihoods, it will be difficult to phase out cultivation in the short term. It needs to be stressed that cultivated lands in the park are heavily degraded and very low in productivity. Most villages rely on food aid for part of the year. The 2004 Simien Mountains Study notes that the people in Gich village are depended on food aid for 5 to 6 months a year. This clearly shows the unsustainability of the current livelihood strategy. The alternative livelihood strategy that will be developed over the coming months will hopefully show options on how to address this issue in the medium term. It will be important that the strategy provides for the establishment of clear agreements with the population cultivating areas in the park. Thereby they will accept and agree to abandoning areas they are currently cultivating in exchange for the support provided for the development of alternative livelihoods. The areas freed from cultivation can then be rehabilitated. The alternative livelihoods strategy should be an integral part of the revised management plan.

Livestock grazing is probably the most damaging resource use in the park, given the extensive area that is used for grazing and the current overstocking. There are no recent reliable data available about the number of livestock in the park and its impact. The 1996 survey work in SMNP estimates that of the 900 ha Afro-alpine vegetation in the park (before the current and proposed extensions), 25 % are heavily overgrazed and 60% are heavily grazed, leaving only 15 % in a more or less natural status. Overgrazing is resulting in a deterioration of the quality of the grazing lands with an increase of unpalatable grasses. It has negative consequences for the vegetation cover and composition, and for soil preservation. Livestock is in direct competition with Walia ibex for grazing areas, confining the Walia ibex to the steeper and less accessible areas, and is also impacting on small

mammal populations, which are the major food source for the Ethiopian wolf. Contact between wildlife populations and livestock are also increasing the risk for transmission of diseases (see also section 4.5).

It is important to note that the livestock grazing inside the park does not only belong to people living within the park or its immediate vicinity but also to relatives living far from the park. Grazing pressure in the park does not seem to be diminishing. On the contrary, park staff explained to the mission that since the park authorities have been enforcing the ban on the further extension of areas under cultivation, residents from Gich village have been increasing their livestock as a livelihood strategy. The park authorities, in cooperation with the Austrian funded Integrated Development Project, have initiated activities to increase on-farm fodder production, to introduce new high-productivity breeds of cattle and to introduce zero-grazing practices but these activities are still in a pilot stage and have not yet produced visible improvements in the grazing pressure on SMNP. At the same time, the park authorities are sensitizing the communities to abandon grazing in certain vulnerable areas prone to erosion or which are used by the Walia ibex but these “no grazing” zones are not enforced yet.

The mission feels that there is an urgent need to develop a strategy to deal with livestock grazing inside the park. The strategy should be based on the immediate creation and enforcement of “no grazing” zones and zones where limited grazing will still be tolerated but closely regulated in view of a phase out in the medium to long term. The “no grazing” zones should be determined on the basis of ecological criteria, in particular suitable habitat for Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf and areas prone to erosion. The core area, wildlife development zone and soil rehabilitation zone that are currently proposed in the draft management plan (see also section 5.2) are probably a good basis to determine the “no grazing” zones. For the areas where limited grazing will continue to be tolerated, a strict management regime will need to be put in place. For that, it will be necessary to inventory the individuals who currently have livestock in the park, as well as the types and numbers of their livestock. Livestock grazing rights should be limited to the local communities living inside the park or its immediate vicinity and clear arrangements should be made on the types and numbers that will be authorized to graze in the park. At the same time, a comprehensive programme to upscale the pilot activities for on-farm fodder production, introduction of improved breeds and zero-grazing practices should be developed, targeting the people who are benefiting from the grazing rights, in exchange for and in order to achieve a gradual reduction of livestock numbers and areas where grazing is tolerated. It will be necessary to make clear arrangements with the individual livestock owners. As with the strategy to address the issue of alternative livelihoods, the strategy to manage grazing pressure should be an integral part of the revised management plan of the property.

It is clear that the implementation of both strategies will require significant funding and can not be funded through the current budget of the park. Over the last decade the park has received substantial support from the Austrian Government, enabling it e.g. to implement pilot activities in the field of sustainable development in the park and buffer zone. As mentioned above, as part of both strategies, these pilot scale activities now need to be upscaled in order to really significantly improve the state of conservation of the park. However, the current phase of the Austrian funded Integrated Development Project is ending in 2007 and it is unclear if a further phase will be funded². It will be crucial to identify, before the current project phase is ending, a source of funding to implement the management plan that is under development, and in particular the strategies to address the threats of the current resource use in the park.

² The mission had planned a meeting with the Austrian embassy in Addis Ababa, but unfortunately this meeting had to be cancelled, because the mission's return flight was grounded in Gonder for a day for technical reasons.

4. Other key conservation and management issues

4.1 Progress made with regard to the additional actions requested by the World Heritage Committee at its 29th session

With regard to the additional actions requested, the mission concluded that the information provided by the State Party in its progress report dated 31 January 2006, which was reported in the 2006 State of Conservation report for the property (see WHC-06/30.COM/7A), reflects well the situation at the property. Activities to comply with the Committee's request are underway. A brief overview of the status of the activities follows.

a) Map and monitor the extent of agricultural encroachment in the park:

The mapping has been completed and the monitoring is underway. GIS analyses shows that the extent of cultivated land has not changed much over time. However, the intensity of agricultural activities has increased considerably and poses the main problem.

b) Restrict use of the park by domestic livestock:

At present the use of the park is not restricted at all (see also sections 3.2 and 6.1).

c) Undertake a household by household census of residents in the park and set up a system to monitor the human population:

The census and monitoring are underway as part of the alternative livelihood study, and initial results should be reported by the State Party as soon as available.

d) Continue the policy of zero tolerance of domestic dogs:

The policy is continued and so far rabies has never occurred in the park. It is critical that all domestic dogs are allowed only around the houses in the villages and, ideally, are vaccinated against rabies (see also section 4.5).

e) Consider strategic extensions to the park or its buffer zone:

An extension towards the Silki Yared – Kiddis Yared Mountains and the Ras Dejen Mountain with the interlinking corridors is planned and, provided the necessary funding is made available, can be completed in 1-2 years (see also sections 3.1 and 6.1).

4.2 Debark – Mekane Birhan road³

In the late 1990s, a road was constructed from Debark to Mekane Birhan through SMNP, connecting Sankaber Camp, Chennek Camp and Sebat Minch Camp. It provided for the first time road access to SMNP for both park staff and tourists and still provides the only road access to Janamora Wereda. Thus the road is used for both park traffic and through traffic. As noted by previous missions to SMNP, the current route of the road is problematic in some areas, especially in the west and east of the park where it cuts through Erica woodland and Walia ibex habitat. Re-alignment options were discussed by the 2000 high-level fact-finding mission and include 1) a shortcut between Sawre Hill and Sankaber Camp avoiding the Erica woodland and Walia ibex habitat at the edge of the escarpment and 2) an alternative access road from Sawre Hill to Mekane Birhan avoiding the park altogether and channeling through traffic around the park. However, given their resource implications, none of the re-alignment options has been realized to date.

Average traffic on the road is reported to be very low at present (on average 8 vehicles per day) and does reportedly not impact significantly on the park's wildlife including the Walia

³ For a detailed discussion of the road issue see Hurni H 2005: Decentralised Development in Remote Areas of the Simien Mountains, Ethiopia. IP2 Working Paper 1. Centre for Development and Environment, University of Berne, Switzerland.

ibex. However, this might change over time, especially if the road is extended to provide road access to Beyeda Wereda (see section 4.3), and some soil erosion and habitat degradation has already occurred along the road. Furthermore, the mission team observed considerable truck traffic on the road, reportedly transporting fertilizer to local villages before the beginning of the wet season, which highlighted the potential impacts of heavy through traffic. The road requires periodic maintenance, and at present some of the maintenance materials are taken from within SMNP, which should be avoided.

The mission concluded that 1) mitigation measures are required to avoid further soil erosion and habitat degradation and to allow recovery of already eroded and degraded areas along the road (this includes immediate steps to control livestock grazing on steep slopes above the road); 2) close monitoring of any traffic in the park and its impacts is required; and 3) effective traffic control measures have to be identified and implemented. For example, an existing night drive ban for all vehicle traffic through the park needs to be strictly enforced with immediate effect to reduce the disturbance of the park's wildlife. The mission also suggested further consideration should be given to averting the public use of the road for through traffic to reduce environmental impacts. In this context the mission was informed of a long-term road master plan for the region which includes the proposal for a new road to Mekane Birhan and Beyeda Wereda passing far south of the park. This would avert any through traffic in SMNP. The monitoring of traffic in the park and its impacts should help to determine an appropriate timing for the building of the new road.

4.3 Bwahit – Dilyibza road and relocation of Arkwasiye village

In March 2006, ongoing road construction was reported close to the Bwahit Mountain in an area of critical wildlife habitat, outside the current World Heritage property but inside the extended SMNP. The construction had apparently been approved and initiated, without prior consultations with the park authorities, by the regional Road Authority in order to connect the Beyeda Wereda, one of the few remaining districts without any road access, with the Debark – Mekane Birhan road (see section 4.2). The road was supposed to go from Bwahit to Dilyibza via the illegal Arkwasiye village, itself sited in a critical wildlife corridor, as well as the undisturbed highlands of the Silki Yared – Kiddis Yared Mountains and the Ras Dejen Mountain. Considering the potential impacts on critical wildlife habitat, especially of the Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf, and the integrity of the proposed third extension of SMNP, the park authorities immediately stopped the ongoing road construction and are currently exploring an alternative option for the road in consultation with the regional Road Authority.

The proposed alternative route follows recommendations made by previous missions⁴. It is supposed to start at an environmentally less problematic point along the road between Bwahit and Mesarerya Mountains and to then take a route through the valleys outside the third extension area rather than through the highlands. Thereby it would avoid critical wildlife habitat and the Arkwasiye village, while also providing road access to the Amdir and Mikana villages along its way from Bwahit to Dilyibza.

During discussions with the mission team, clear commitment was shown from government officials at all levels in the region to construct the road along this alternative route. However, this alternative route needs to be surveyed first.

In a meeting with park staff and local district representatives, the mission team was also informed that a win-win solution had finally been found to the problem of the Arkwasiye village. Considering the proposed re-routing of the Bwahit – Dilyibza road, the villagers had agreed to a relocation of their village and the associated marketplace to a level lowland area

⁴ See Hurni H 2005: Decentralised Development in Remote Areas of the Simien Mountains, Ethiopia. IP2 Working Paper 1. Centre for Development and Environment, University of Berne, Switzerland.

with sufficient water supply along the alternative route. There it would no longer block the critical wildlife corridor and in particular the movements of Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf between the current park and the newly proposed extension.

4.4 Construction of Simien Park Lodge at Buyit Ras

The mission assessed the location and construction of the private Simien Park Lodge at Buyit Ras based on a site visit and available documentation. The lodge, a British-Ethiopian joint venture, is expected to open in late 2006 and will be the first of its kind in any Ethiopian national park, offering high-quality accommodation (60 beds) just outside the park boundary of SMNP. This will certainly benefit the park and increase visitation, especially from tourists at the top end of the tourism market, which is not been catered for by the park at present. The mission recommended PaDPA to carefully consider integrating this development with other local tourism services such as those offered by the Walia Guide Association.

The lodge development proposal was scrutinized and subjected to an environmental impact assessment (document provided to mission team). Following a two year review process, it was finally approved, and a number of requested mitigation measures were incorporated in the lodge development plan. According to PaDPA, the investors were very cooperative in the EIA process and continue to comply with the set standards. The park administration, on the other hand, is closely monitoring the construction and operation of the lodge and makes sure that the requested mitigation measures are being taken.

The mission concurred with previously received reports that the location of the lodge is not ideal from an aesthetic perspective. The lodge is sited directly adjacent to the main road leading into the park, sits on a saddle overlooking the park, and is thus fairly visible from afar although the first row of huts was not constructed as close to the edge of the ridge as originally planned. However, the architecture and building materials used blend nicely with the local surroundings and styles, and planted vegetation is supposed to eventually shield the site, thereby further reducing the visual impacts of the buildings on the park.

Other issues of concern are the supply of water and the disposal of solid and liquid wastes. To ensure a sufficient water supply, the investors have constructed a well and will also construct a pump and pipes, with which water will be withdrawn from a local stream outside SMNP. The water withdrawal is being negotiated with the local community. The lodge features solar panels for heating water. The investors have also constructed a power line from Debarq to the park to supply the lodge with electricity. On the lodge site, they have complied with suggested mitigation measures for the lights and power cables of the lodge, in order to minimize visual impacts.

Liquid waste will be collected and treated in grease traps, septic tanks and drains, whereas ways of collecting and treating solid waste are still being discussed. Options discussed include recycling, composting and/or burying solid waste outside the park. The mission recommended that a proper disposal plan is developed for solid waste before the completion of construction work on the lodge.

According to PaDPA, a 35 year lease agreement was signed with the British-Ethiopian investors, who are paying at present a concession fee of only Birr 700 (ca. US \$ 80) per year. However, once the break-even point of the project is reached, the park is supposed to receive a share of the tourist income from the investors. The mission noted that PaDPA might want to review the comparably very unfavorable conditions of this agreement.

4.5 Transmission of diseases between domestic animals and wildlife

Native species in SMNP vulnerable to the transmission of diseases are especially the Walia ibex and the Ethiopian wolf. The large numbers of livestock grazing in and around the park, and the close contact especially between livestock and the Walia ibex, pose a high risk of disease transmission, with potentially catastrophic consequences for the Walia ibex population. It is therefore critical that measures are being taken to limit the risk of disease transmission between domestic animals and wildlife in and around SMNP.

Following the disease-related death of 3-4 Walia ibex in 2004, experts have recommended measures that could help limiting the risk of disease transmission, by reducing both transmission and infestation rates. With support from the IDP, an Animal Health Clinic has been constructed and equipped in the buffer zone of the park, and an animal health worker was supposed to take up work there on 1 June 2006. This clinic will offer vaccinations as well as other treatments for livestock grazing in the park and will work closely with other veterinary clinics, including mobile clinics, and 7 community health workers responsible for animal health in the Kebeles and Weredas around the park. Once fully functional, and if it is supported in the long term, the new clinic could be instrumental in controlling diseases.

The Ethiopian wolf population is potentially threatened by a transmission of rabies from domestic dogs⁵. A policy of zero tolerance of domestic dogs is continued in SMNP and so far rabies has never occurred in the park. The mission did not encounter any domestic dogs in or around the park. To prevent a transmission of rabies such as in the southern Ethiopian Bale Mountains, it is critical that all domestic dogs are allowed only around the houses in the villages and, ideally, are vaccinated against rabies.

The mission encouraged the park administration to seek technical advice from the Veterinary Specialist Group of IUCN's Species Survival Commission, as well as the IUCN Caprinae Specialist Group and Canid Specialist Group.

5. Management of the property

5.1 Management Capacity

For the budget year 2006, the Government of the Amhara Region has allocated PaDPA a budget of 1.5 million Birr (ca. US \$ 170,000), of which 0.6 million Birr have been allocated to SMNP. The budget allocated to SMNP is increasing annually, by about 10 percent, from 540,000 Birr in 2005 to 600,000 Birr in 2006 and an estimated 650,000 Birr in 2007. This budget covers the staff time and core running costs of SMNP but is insufficient to cover any major infrastructure investments or buffer zone development projects. These, along with some additional running costs, are covered by the IDP. For 2006-2007 the IDP has allocated 400,000 Birr for various project activities in the park and its buffer zone. The IDP has also provided 100,000 Birr for the installation of some 200 beacons along the revised park boundary. As matching fund to the International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund, the Amhara Regional Government has also provided 120,000 Birr to support the development of an alternative livelihood strategy, which covers the cost for one car, one laptop and 3 technical staff.

At present, SMNP employs 57 staff (soon to be increased to 60) including 7 technical staff (e.g. chief park warden, ecologist, senior and junior wildlife experts and a community development expert) and 36 scouts. Most scouts are based in outpost camps, where they

⁵ See also Randall DA et al. (2006): An integrated disease management strategy for the control of rabies in Ethiopian wolves. *Biological Conservation* 131, 151-162.

usually stay with their family, and change their outpost camp roughly every two years. Most SMNP staff requires further training. The IDP employs another 5 technical staff plus the project manager. There are also a number of guides, porters and cooks available for tourists, most of which have received basic training, but these are not employed by SMNP.

The construction of new park infrastructure including the Debark visitor centre, entrance gate camp, outpost camps, and visitor facilities at campsites was funded by the IDP, while the Amhara Regional Government is responsible for maintaining both the old and new park infrastructure. The 1.6 million Birr visitor centre opened in Debark in 1994, the first of its kind in Ethiopia, includes an information centre, where visitors pay their entrance fees, conference hall, nine offices for the park warden and staff, a library or museum (not yet functional), souvenir shop and cafeteria. At present it also hosts the Walia Guide Association. The Sawre camp at the new entrance gate has an information desk and office (not yet functional) as well as four solar-powered scout houses, while the Sankaber and Chennek camps have basic camping facilities such as toilets, springs, showers, recreation huts and recreation benches. There are 10 outpost camps, which are considered to be sufficient to cover the current extent of SMNP, but these might need to be supplemented when the Ras Dejen extension is implemented. Each of the outpost camps is manned with scout(s).

The Amhara Regional Government has provided SMNP with 3 cars but 2 of these are in a very bad shape. The IDP has also provided 2 cars, and 2 more were supposed to arrive soon after the mission took place, but their primary use relates to the development projects for the local communities. They are only occasionally used for park management purposes. The IDP has however supplied the park staff with essential equipment, including 25 binoculars as well as radios and stoves (which save 50% fuel wood) for the 36 scouts, all of whom are equipped with guns. However, more equipment is still required, for example more binoculars, and some of the recently supplied equipment already requires maintenance.

Considering the substantial support from the IDP, which has been critical for the recent improvements of the state of conservation of SMNP, two questions arise: 1) Who will be funding further park infrastructure and equipment once the IDP is completed? This also relates to further upgrades of the basic visitor facilities at the existing campsites. 2) Who will be funding the required maintenance of the old and new park infrastructure and equipment? The current project phase of the IDP is expected to be completed by March 2007.

5.2 Management Plan

To date SMNP does not have an approved management plan. A detailed management plan was first developed by Professor Dr. Hans Hurni in 1986, former park warden from 1975-1977, but it was never implemented because of the civil war. With support from the IDP, the Austrian firm Falch Consulting developed a new draft management plan from 1997-2000, including a proposal for a complex zoning scheme as basis for future management of SMNP. This draft was subsequently discussed with various stakeholders, but the comments received were not incorporated, and thus the new draft management plan has not been finalized or approved to date despite the urgent need for an updated general management plan.

At the time of the mission, PaDPA, with support from the IDP, was looking for an Ethiopian consultant to update and finalize the 2000 draft management plan for approval and implementation. According to the "Terms of Reference for Finalizing the SMNP Management Plan", the 3-4 week consultancy was supposed to include a thorough review and revision of the draft, a site visit, stakeholder discussions and a final stakeholder workshop.

The current management challenges at SMNP clearly highlight the urgent need for approving and implementing an updated general management plan to guide the future management and development of SMNP and to provide baseline information for future monitoring. The

mission team felt, however, that this immensely important task should not be rushed and may not be accomplished adequately if the process to finalize the management plan proceeds as planned.

The mission team felt that the 2000 draft management plan needs a thorough review and revision to reflect recent developments in and around SMNP. For example, the management plan needs to take into account the recently built roads and their impacts. Furthermore, the proposed zoning and the management plan's linkages to other planning documents of the area need to be reconsidered.

An adequate zoning scheme should form an excellent basis for the future management of SMNP. However, the proposed zoning needs to be reconsidered carefully based on ecological criteria and existing pressures. It needs to take into account the people living within the park and its immediate vicinity as well as their impact on the natural resources of SMNP, and it needs to include a clear strategy and action plan to significantly reduce the impact of livestock grazing on SMNP.

The updated general management plan will also need to address issues such as tourism planning and management, tourism infrastructure development, traffic monitoring and management, law and bye-law enforcement and disease control.

Based on its findings, the mission clearly stressed the need to seek further technical advice, for example from IUCN and UNESCO, both in the field of general management planning and specific technical subjects such as tourism planning and management (see section 5.3). The mission also stressed the need to involve all stakeholders in the finalization of the management plan in order to give it a maximum level of acceptance.

5.3 Tourism Planning and Management

Tourism planning and management could be improved with benefits for SMNP, its visitors and local communities at both the regional and local level. The Amhara Region, and northern Ethiopia in general, have very high tourism potential, not the least because of the two cultural World Heritage properties within Amhara Region, Gonder and Lalibela, and SMNP, at present the only national park in the region, as well as a third cultural property, Aksum, in the neighboring region of Tigre. Regional tourism planning and management is, however, in its infancy. Therefore it is highly recommended that the Amhara Regional Government develop a general tourism master plan for the region (and beyond), which will help to manage and market tourism at the regional level, benefiting the individual sites of interest as well as the whole region. This general tourism master plan should also address issues such as licensing of tourism operators and guides, capacity building and benefit sharing.

With support from the IDP, initial efforts have been made in building capacity in and sharing benefits from tourism with local communities, but the strong seasonality of tourism at SMNP, lack of regional tourism planning and management, and the competition between local guides and guides from Addis Ababa have not yet resulted in widespread benefits. However, a number of local people have received basic training as guides, porters and cooks, and both the guides and cooks are organised in associations. Further targeted training is still necessary to improve these services and their promotion.

The entrance fee scheme of SMNP is currently too complex and should be simplified. Considering the increasing visitor numbers and improving visitor facilities, the mission felt that the current entrance fees for SMNP could be raised, at least for international visitors. A willingness-to-pay study should help to identify an appropriate entrance fee. At present, the once-off entrance fee of 50 Birr (US \$ 6) per 48h goes to the Amhara Regional Government treasury, which does not provide an incentive to PaDPA for increasing it. Service fees for

camping, scouts, guides and porters are collected altogether and later allocated to the different service providers. The introduction of a modest but mandatory “community development” fee could benefit local communities, in return for their cooperation, and help tourists to understand the complex challenges in the park and its buffer zone.

Safeguarding the natural resources and values of SMNP, maintaining their natural state and attraction, and getting visitor satisfaction and solitude pose a great challenge to park planners and managers. It is crucial that the location and construction of visitor facilities within the park does not interfere with vistas values and core conservation values of the park. The mission noted, however, that although developmental activities in SMNP are modest, some of the park facilities including campsites and outpost camps were poorly planned, thus not aesthetically fitting into their natural surroundings. For example, some of the facilities interfere with scenic viewpoints and/or impede landscape features of interest to park visitors. It is thus highly recommended that the revised management plan capture adequately the need for well planned and positioned park facilities for the enhanced enjoyment of visitors. The revised management plan should make provisions for the appropriate planning and positioning of infrastructure such as walking trails, pick-nick sites and campsites, lodges, roads and park administration and research facilities.

The mission encouraged the park administration to seek some technical advice from the UNESCO World Heritage Tourism programme⁶ and the IUCN-WCPA Tourism Task Force⁷ for developing both the above mentioned tourism master plan and, as part of the revised management plan, a plan for tourism infrastructure development within SMNP.

6. Recommendations

The mission proposes the following recommendations regarding the benchmarks set by the Committee for removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger as well as other recommendations to improve the management of the property and address the current threats to its conservation.

6.1 Recommendations regarding the benchmarks for removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger

The monitoring mission concluded that the benchmarks set by the Committee at its 25th session are not yet met and therefore it recommends to retain the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger (see also section 7). The mission acknowledges that substantial progress was made with regard to benchmarks 1, 2 and 4. Considering the current state of conservation of the property, especially the status of the two key species *Walia ibex* and Ethiopian wolf, and the challenges the property is still facing, the mission proposes to revise these benchmarks to ensure the effective conservation of the key values and integrity of the property. Two new benchmarks 1 and 2 are proposed for this. As mentioned under point 3, the current benchmark 3 is unlikely to be achieved in the short to medium term. Therefore the mission proposes to replace this benchmark with two revised benchmarks 3 and 4, focusing on reducing the impacts of the local communities on the property, rather than their relocation outside the park. Therefore the mission proposes the following revised benchmarks for removal of SMNP from the List of World Heritage in Danger:

⁶ See <http://whc.unesco.org/en/initiatives/25>

⁷ See <http://www.iucn.org/themes/wcpa/theme/tourism/tourism.html>

(1) Finalize the extension of SMNP to include the Silki Yared – Kiddis Yared Mountains and the Ras Dejen Mountain with the interlinking corridors.

The mission acknowledges that the extension required by the benchmark set by the 25th session was achieved in the field and that this proposed benchmarks goes beyond the previous benchmark. The current extensions towards Lemalimo and Mesarerya were crucial to include a larger population of the Walia ibex into SMNP, one of the key values of the property. However, despite this extension, the main population of the Ethiopian wolf, another key value of the property, is still outside the park. The proposed extension will include most of the wolf habitat remaining in this part of Ethiopia into the park, and therefore the mission regards this extension as crucial for the conservation of the values for which the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List. According to the State Party, the extension is already planned and is not problematic as the area is virtually uninhabited and the State Party agreed that the proposed benchmark is achievable in the short term (1-2 years) if the necessary funds for the demarcation process are available. The State Party might consider requesting International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund to cover these costs.

(2) Re-gazetment of the new park boundaries, including the extensions of Lemalimo, Mesarerya, the Silki Yared – Kiddis Yared Mountains and the Ras Dejen Mountain as well as the realignment of the boundary to exclude certain villages.

The mission acknowledges that the realignment of the park boundary to exclude certain villages and to include the extensions of Lemalimo and Mesareya is implemented in the field. However there is a need to legalize these extensions together with the extensions proposed in the revised benchmark 1 through a re-gazetment of SMNP based on the new park boundaries. The re-gazetment has to go through the national parliament. Both the regional and national authorities confirmed that this was planned and that the proposed new benchmark was achievable in the short term (1-2 years). Once the re-gazetment is achieved, the State Party will have to propose the new boundaries for approval to the World Heritage Committee. As this will be a significant boundary change, this will require a re-nomination of the property (article 165 of the Operational Guidelines), and the State Party may wish to request technical assistance from the World Heritage Centre to complete this process. However, as the re-nomination will require time, the mission does not recommend to include the re-nomination into the revised benchmark 2.

(3) Develop a strategy and action plan, as part of the planned management plan revision, to significantly reduce the impact of livestock grazing on the conservation of the property by introducing “no grazing” and “limited grazing” zones based on ecological criteria and by setting up a strict management regime in zones where grazing will still be tolerated in the short to medium term, and secure funding for its implementation.

As mentioned above, livestock grazing is a major threat to the integrity of the property and needs to be addressed. The required strategy can be developed in the short term as part of the planned update of the management plan, which is scheduled to be finalized by mid 2007. However, it is also important to secure funding for the implementation of the strategy and the mission acknowledges that this funding has to come from external sources. The Committee might therefore want to call on foreign donors, in particular the Austrian Government, which has a long term involvement in the site, and the GEF, which is currently preparing a support programme for the national protected area system, to support the implementation of the strategy. The mission also proposes that UNESCO and IUCN assist the State Party in mobilizing the funding to implement the strategy.

(4) Develop a strategy and action plan as part of the management plan to support the development of alternative livelihoods for the people living within the park as well as its immediate vicinity, in order to limit in the medium term their impact on the natural resources of the property, and secure funding for its implementation.

The strategy should seek to address the different impacts mentioned above (deforestation, livestock grazing and cultivation) by providing a vision on how the development of alternative livelihood options as well as other measures can diminish the dependence of the people living within the park as well as its immediate vicinity on the natural resources in the park. Probably, the strategy will not only have to focus on providing options within the region but also on providing opportunities for the young generations to acquire the necessary skills to find alternative livelihood options outside the region, as the developmental options around SMNP are limited as a result of the general degradation of the environment. Supporting access to education (both primary education in the villages around SMNP and secondary education in Debarq and other urban centres) could be an interesting option to evaluate. This strategy should be based on the results of the alternative livelihood study which is ongoing with support from the World Heritage Fund. Based on the results, it might be possible to formulate this benchmark in a more precise way in the future. Again, there will be a need to secure outside funding for the implementation of the strategy.

Timeframe

The proposed benchmarks were discussed with the State Party and seem achievable in the short term (1-2 years). It will however be crucial to secure the outside funding for the implementation of the strategies required under the revised benchmarks 3 and 4.

6.2 Other recommendations for the conservation and management of the property

During the site visit, the mission team made a number of very specific recommendations regarding the management of the property, including tourism planning and management. The following list summarizes only the most important recommendations to improve the conservation and management and address the current threats to SMNP.

Management plan

- (1) The State Party and PaDPA are strongly encouraged to seek further technical advice from IUCN and UNESCO in the process to finalize the management plan for the park. This should include consulting experts in the field of general management planning and inviting UNESCO and IUCN to send an expert to the final stakeholder workshop.*
- (2) The State Party and PaDPA are also encouraged to involve all stakeholders in the finalization of the management plan in order to give it a maximum level of acceptance.*

Tourism planning and management

- (1) The State Party and Amhara Regional Government are strongly encouraged to develop a general tourism master plan for the region which should also address issues such as licensing of tourism operators and guides, capacity building and benefit sharing.*
- (2) The revised management plan should make provisions for the appropriate planning and positioning of infrastructure such as walking trails, pick-nick sites and campsites, lodges, roads and park administration and research facilities.*
- (3) The State Party and PaDPA are strongly encouraged to seek technical advice from the UNESCO World Heritage Tourism programme and the IUCN-WCPA Tourism Task Force for developing both the tourism master plan and, as part of the revised management plan, a plan for tourism infrastructure development within SMNP.*

- (4) *The entrance fee scheme of SMNP should be revised and simplified, and information material such as maps and species lists should be made available to park visitors.*

Other key conservation and management issues

- (1) *Strict law and bye-law enforcement through adequate patrolling is necessary to prevent and punish illegal activities such as further deforestation of native vegetation within SMNP. This includes enforcing the future “no grazing” and “limited grazing” zones.*
- (2) *The traffic on the Debarq – Mekane Birhan road and its impacts on the park should be closely monitored, and effective traffic control measures should be identified and implemented. The existing night drive ban for all vehicle traffic through the park needs to be strictly enforced with immediate effect. Mitigation measures should be identified and implemented to avoid further soil erosion and habitat degradation and to allow recovery of already eroded and degraded areas along the road.*
- (3) *The Bwahit – Dilyibza road should take the proposed alternative route through the valleys outside the third extension area rather than through the highlands in order to avoid critical wildlife habitat and the illegal Arkwasiye village.*
- (4) *The Arkwasiye village should be relocated along the alternative route of the Bwahit – Dilyibza road where it would no longer block the critical wildlife corridor between the current park and the newly proposed extension.*
- (5) *The construction and operation of Simien Park Lodge at Buyit Ras, including the implementation of requested mitigation measures, should be monitored, and a proper disposal plan should be developed for solid waste.*
- (6) *The State Party and PaDPA should continue to take the necessary measures to limit the risk of disease transmission between domestic animals and wildlife in and around SMNP including the policy of zero tolerance of domestic dogs.*
- (7) *The State Party and PaDPA are encouraged to seek further technical advice from the Veterinary, Caprinae and Canid Specialist Groups of IUCN’s Species Survival Commission on the issue of disease transmission and management.*
- (8) *The State Party may wish to consider requesting financial support, for example from the Rapid Response Facility, to take measures against the imminent threat posed by the possible transmission of diseases between domestic animals and wildlife.*
- (9) *The State Party and PaDPA are encouraged to look into partnership options for SMNP with other African World Heritage properties in similar situations or settings (e.g. UKhahlamba / Drakensberg Park, South Africa) for further capacity building.*

World Heritage housekeeping issues

- (1) *The State Party should submit to the World Heritage Centre and IUCN a finalized topographic map showing the revised park boundary of SMNP as soon as available.*
- (2) *The State Party should submit a re-nomination of the property (as required by article 165 of the Operational Guidelines) once the extensions of SMNP have been finalized and the new park boundaries have been re-gazetted. Since the official name of the protected area is Simien Mountains National Park, the State Party should at the same time correct the name of the World Heritage property, inscribed as Simien National Park at present.*

7. Conclusions

The mission was impressed by the level of commitment on behalf of the State Party, and in particular the Amhara Regional Government, to address the threats to the conservation of the Simien Mountains National Park, which led to its inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger. A lot of progress has been made in improving the management of the property since the last UNESCO/IUCN monitoring mission in 2001, and in particular since the Parks

Development and Protection Authority of Amhara Region was created. The mission commends the Austrian Government for its ongoing financial support, and the Centre for Development and Environment of the University of Berne for its significant technical assistance, to make these improvements possible and hopes that this support will be continued in the future. The mission also appreciates the support of the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) through its Afro-alpine Ecosystem Conservation Programme.

The mission acknowledges that substantial progress has been made towards the benchmarks 1, 2 and 4 set by the Committee at its 25th session to guide a removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger. At the same time, the mission concluded that it is imperative to finalize the park boundary changes and to legalize them through a re-gazetment of SMNP. The mission also noted that benchmark 3 was not achieved and will not be achieved in the near future. The mission concluded that in spite of the progress made since 2001, the threats to the values for which the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List have not yet been resolved.

Based on these findings, *the mission recommends that the World Heritage Committee retain the Simien National Park World Heritage property on the List of World Heritage in Danger. The mission proposes a set of 4 revised benchmarks to guide a possible future removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger.* The mission discussed these revised benchmarks with the State Party and believes they are achievable in the short term (1-2 years). The mission acknowledges that external financial support and some technical assistance will be needed to meet these benchmarks. UNESCO and IUCN, as well as other conservation agencies, such as Frankfurt Zoological Society, might be able to provide technical assistance, whilst limited funding could be provided from the World Heritage Fund. However, for the implementation of the management plan, and the strategies required under benchmarks 3 and 4, donor funding will need to be mobilized. The mission recommends the World Heritage Committee to call on donor agencies and other State Parties to the Convention to provide this funding, and recommends that UNESCO and IUCN assist the State Party in mobilizing the funding. The mission also recommends that the World Heritage Committee, once the revised benchmarks are met, makes use of the case of Simien Mountains National Park as a success story on how Danger listing can bring about the necessary regional, national and international commitment to sustainably address the threats to World Heritage properties.

8. Acknowledgments

The mission team would like to acknowledge with great appreciation the excellent support provided by the UNESCO Office in Addis Ababa, especially Ms Fumiko Ohinata, and by the Parks Development and Protection Authority of Amhara Region, especially Ato Mulugeta Woubshet. The mission team would also like to thank Ato Leykun Abune and Ato Teshome Mulu of the Austrian funded Integrated Development Project as well as the warden, Ato Negussie Tsegaya, and staff of SMNP for their support of the mission.

9. Annexes

- 1) Terms of Reference of the mission
- 2) Programme of the mission
- 3) Contact details of mission team
- 4) Names and affiliation of people met
- 5) Maps showing the original and revised park boundary

Annex 1: Terms of Reference of the mission

Terms of Reference for a Joint UNESCO/IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Simien National Park (Ethiopia)

Undertake a joint UNESCO/IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission from 10 to 17 May 2006 to the **Simien National Park** World Heritage property in **Ethiopia**. The mission should:

- (i) Assess the state of conservation of this property;
- (ii) Hold consultations with the Ethiopian authorities and relevant stakeholders in examining the progress made in relation to 1) the recommendations of the joint 2001 UNESCO/IUCN monitoring mission; 2) the benchmarks set by the World Heritage Committee for a removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger (**Decision 28 COM 15A.4**); and 3) the additional actions requested by the World Heritage Committee (**Decision 29 COM 7A.5**);
- (iii) Discuss with and advise as necessary the Ethiopian authorities on developing and implementing an updated general management plan for the park and a tourism master plan for the region where the park is located;
- (iv) Assess progress made with the implementation of the activities funded by the World Heritage Fund, i.e. the development of an alternative livelihood strategy for local residents, and how this is going to contribute to a significant and sustainable reduction of the population density within the park;
- (v) Examine the progress made with the revision of the park boundaries and evaluate, in consultation with the Ethiopian authorities, the necessity of a renomination of the Simien Mountains National Park based on the revised park boundary;
- (vi) Assess whether conditions warrant removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger in accordance with the provisions of paragraphs 177-191 of the Operational Guidelines (February 2005); or, if necessary, review and revise, in consultation with the Ethiopian authorities, the benchmarks and additional actions, and agree on a timeframe for measuring further progress towards the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger;
- (vii) On the basis of the foregoing findings, make recommendations to the Government of Ethiopia and the World Heritage Committee for a better conservation and management of the property.

Annex 2: Programme of the mission

| Date | Schedule |
|----------------------------|---|
| 10 May 2006 (Wednesday) | Arrival Addis Ababa |
| 11 May 2006 (Thursday) | 9:00 Meeting UNESCO Addis Ababa (Ms Fumiko Ohinata) 9:30 Security Briefing 10:30 Meeting UNESCO Addis Ababa (Mr Howard Elhassan) 14:10 Departure Addis Ababa 15:50 Arrival Gonder 16:15 Departure Gonder 18:15 Arrival Debarok |
| 12 May 2006 (Friday) | 6:30 Departure for Simien Mountains National Park 7:00-18:00 General Site Visit (Sankaber Camp, Chennek Camp, Sebat Minch Camp / Mesarerya and Lemalino extensions) 18:30 Departure for Debarok |
| 13 May 2006 (Saturday) | 6:30 Departure for Simien Mountains National Park 7:00-18:00 General Site Visit and Visit to Buffer Zone and Villages (Sawre Camp, Sankaber Camp, Chennek Camp, Buyit Ras Camp etc.) 18:30 Departure for Debarok |
| 14 May 2006 (Sunday) | 8:30-12:30 Meeting Park Warden, Park Staff and Project Staff, Walia Guide Association and Woreda Administrations at Visitor Centre 13:00-15:00 Travel from Debarok to Gonder 15:00-16:00 Debriefing Meeting with the North Gonder Zonal Administration (Ato Getachew Jember) |
| 15 May 2006 (Monday) | 7:30-10:30 Travel from Gonder to Bahir Dar 11:00-13:00 Meeting Parks Development and Protection Authority (Ato Mulugeta Woubshet) 14:30-15:30 Meeting Bureau of Culture and Tourism (Ato Mulugeta Seid) 16:30-17:30 Meeting Regional President (H.E. Ato Ayalew Gobeze) |
| 16 May 2006 (Tuesday) | 12:00-14:00 Meeting Mission Team (mission report and recommendations) 14:00-15:00 Meeting Parks Development and Protection Authority (Ato Mulugeta Woubshet) 16:50 Departure Bahir Dar (The flight to Addis Ababa was grounded in Gonder for technical reasons.) 17:50 Arrival Gonder |
| 17 May 2006 (Wednesday) | 12:00 Departure Gonder 13:00 Arrival Addis Ababa 14:00-16:00 Meeting UNESCO Addis Ababa (Ms Fumiko Ohinata) 16:00-17:00 Meeting Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (H.E. Ato Ahmed Nasser Ahmed) 17:00-19:00 Meeting UNESCO Addis Ababa (Ms Fumiko Ohinata) 19:00 Meeting Dr Zelealem Tefera (Frankfurt Zoological Society Afro-alpine Ecosystem Conservation Project) Departure Addis Ababa |

Annex 3: Contact details of mission team

Mr Guy Debonnet

Programme Specialist
Natural Heritage Section
UNESCO World Heritage Centre
7, Place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP
France
Tel: + 33 1 45 68 0765
Fax: + 33 1 45 68 5570
Email: g.debonnet@unesco.org

Mr Lota Melamari

CEO / Coordinator
Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania (WCST)
Garden Ave. Plot No. 39
P.O. Box 70919
Dar es Salaam
Tanzania
Tel: + 255 22 211 2518
Fax: + 255 22 212 4572
Email: melamarilota@yahoo.co.uk

Mr Bastian Bomhard

Bing Lucas World Heritage Intern
Programme on Protected Areas
IUCN - The World Conservation Union
Rue Mauverney 28
1196 Gland
Switzerland
Tel: + 41 22 999 0166
Fax: + 41 22 999 0025
Email: whmonitoring@iucn.org

Annex 4: Names and affiliation of people met

H.E. Ato Ahmed Nasser Ahmed, State Minister, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Addis Ababa

H.E. Ato Ayalew Gobeze, President, Amhara National Regional State, Bahir Dar

Ato Mulugeta Seid, Head, Bureau of Culture and Tourism of Amhara Region, Bahir Dar

Ato Mulugeta Woubshet, Manager, Parks Development and Protection Authority of Amhara Region, Bahir Dar

Ato Getachew Jember, Chief Administrator, North Gonder Zonal Administration, Gonder

Ato Leykun Abune, Coordinator, Project Coordination Unit, Integrated Development Project of the Austrian Development Cooperation, Gonder

Ato Teshome Mulu, Manager, Simien Mountains National Park Integrated Development Project of the Austrian Development Cooperation, Debark

Ato Negussie Tsegaya, Warden, Simien Mountains National Park, Debark

Ato Amsale Amare, Head, Debark Woreda Administration, Debark

Heads and other officials, Addi Arkay, Debark and Janamora Woredas

Guides, Walia Guide Association, Simien Mountains National Park, Debark

Dr Zelealem Tefera, Coordinator, Afro-alpine Ecosystem Conservation Project, Frankfurt Zoological Society, Addis Ababa

Mr Howard Elhassan, Director, UNESCO Addis Ababa Office

Ms Fumiko Ohinata, Programme Specialist, UNESCO Addis Ababa Office

Annex 5: Maps showing the original and revised park boundary

- 1) Map (Centre for Development and Environment, University of Berne, 2000) showing the original park boundary (red) of SMNP before excluding the villages along the boundary and including Mesarerya and Lemalino Wildlife Reserves



2) Map (Parks Development and Protection Authority of Amhara Region, 2006) showing the revised park boundary of SMNP after excluding the villages along the boundary and including Mesareriya and Lemalimo Wildlife Reserves

