



Mid Atlantic Ridge Expert Workshop, Iceland

Government of Iceland
in cooperation with the
UNESCO World Heritage Centre
16 January 2007

SYNTHESIS REPORT

1. Introduction

1. The Mid Atlantic Ridge Expert Workshop was held in Reykjavik, Iceland on 16 January 2007 with the participation of experts from Iceland, Norway and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre¹.
2. The meeting was **opened and welcomed** by Ms Ragnheidur H. Thorarinsdottir, chair of the Icelandic World Heritage Committee (IWHC), followed by the introduction round of the participants. Sigurður Á. Thráinsson, member of the IWHC and natural focal point of Iceland took over chairing the meeting.

2. Presentations

1. Dr. Mechtild Rössler (UNESCO World Heritage Centre) provided an overview presentation on **the evolution of the World Heritage Convention and serial trans-boundary nominations according to the Operational Guidelines**. She described how the implementation of the Convention evolved since 1972, how cultural and the natural heritage is defined and is linked together in one instrument. In 1992 the categories of cultural landscapes were integrated into the Operational Guidelines, in 1994 the Global Strategy was introduced and over time the concepts transboundary, transnational, serial and large scale nominations evolved. New thinking and terms are now in use such as sustainability, biodiversity and others. New dimensions of serial sites in a thematic framework were discussed including the Ruta Inca/Quapac Nan, Rift Valley, Alpine Arc and Pacific Line Islands. Experts meetings were and are crucial for the evolution of the interpretation of the World Heritage Convention. Underrepresented themes including scientific discoveries, routes, shared heritage or climate change are being explored. Ms. Rössler then described the background of the meeting in Iceland and the idea of serial trans-national nominations along the ridge. In September 2004 the "Earth Heritage-World Heritage" conference at the Dorset- and Devon Coast was held bringing together geological experts from around the world met. A side meeting with experts from Iceland, Norway, the United Kingdom, Portugal as well as IUCN, WCPA and the World Heritage Centre

¹ Experts from the United Kingdom, Portugal and IUCN/WCPA were not able to attend.

discussed the idea of nominations along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge (MAR) in a joint framework. This meeting was the first meeting on MAR.

Following the meeting Mr Tony Weighell (UK) wrote a paper, outlining a general framework for the Mid-Atlantic ridge with definitions about the project and its key-values. Ms. Rössler underlined that one of the State Parties must take the lead for the nomination for one or more parts (which later could be extended). All countries connected to the MAR have already ratified the Convention. In preparing a serial nomination it is important to specifically define the extent of the MAR, which is the longest rift valley in the world or approx. 16 000 km from north to south. It is therefore important to look into paragraphs 134b, 135, 137-139 in the OG in this connection. Ms Rössler also stressed that the MAR-project would be a pilot project on geological heritage. Finally she emphasised the importance of informing States Parties and experts of the idea of such a serial nomination and pointed out that a co-operation with the Nordic World Heritage Foundation, scientific groups (including IUGS) would be important.

2. **Mr. Snorri Baldursson (Institute of Natural History, Iceland) presented the case of the Surtsey nomination document as “Surtsey, creation and evolution”.** He discussed the formation and development of the island and mentioned that Surtsey was nominated under criterion (viii) as a geological feature. Iceland is the largest land mass of the Mid-Atlantic ridge and Surtsey could be linked to the serial nomination of the MAR.

During the discussion Ms Rössler pointed out that tourists may become interested in Surtsey if it was accepted for World Heritage Listing which could become a management issue. Árni Bragason member of the IWHC mentioned that there will be a visitor centre in the Vestman-Islands established and that it would be possible for the tourists to take boat-cruises around Surtsey. The World Heritage Centre indicated that there are other sites such as St. Kilda (UK) which are not made accessible to visitors, but only to researchers. It is important to carefully look into how the site interpretation at visitor centres and the accessibility to the public. Mr Baldursson mentioned that it is dangerous to get to Surtsey and that one can be stranded there for days because of fog so it is also for practical reasons that it is closed to the public. Mr Sigurður Á. Þráinsson mentioned that the minister of environment does not want the island to be open to the public, just to researchers and instead the visitor centre in the Vestman Islands will serve the public. The National History Institute is making an exhibition about Surtsey which will be moved to the Vestman Islands after being exhibited for a few months in the Culture House – National Centre for cultural Heritage in Reykjavík.

3. **Mr. Gaute Sønstebo (Directorate for Nature Management, Norway) made a presentation on Jan Mayen and Bouvet islands** which are the Northern- and Southernmost points of the MAR and both belong to Norway. Jan Mayen is part of the Kingdom of Norway since 1929 and Bouvet Island since 1930. He explained in detail the geological and geomorphological formation and biological diversity of the islands and highlighted current research carried out by his Government at both sites. He stated that Norway only intends to nominate them within the framework of MAR and not on their own. He mentioned that the discussions regarding the nomination of the MAR in Norway have so far been informal, but the islands Jan Mayen and

Bouvet Island are now included on the most recent Tentative List of Norway which still has to be accepted.

3. Mid-Atlantic Ridge – a review of a potential serial nomination

Ms. Rössler indicated the five key points to be discussed under this item of the agenda based on the background document:

- (i) *Exchange of information on the nature and distribution of Mid Atlantic Ridge heritage*
 - (ii) *Set limits to the Ridge “phenomenon”- the volcanic features associated with mid oceanic spreading in the Atlantic extended beyond the ridge; where should limits be set for practical and scientific reasons?*
 - (iii) *Review the distribution and function (in terms of heritage protected) of existing World Heritage sites on the Ridge*
 - (iv) *Identify heritage (biological, geological, cultural) that is potentially of Outstanding Universal Value on the Ridge but currently lies outside World Heritage sites*
 - (v) *Produce a report on the above including: review of the issues involved managing such serial sites; the use of serial nominations for capacity building; recommendations for action*
- i. *Exchange of information on the nature and distribution of Mid Atlantic Ridge heritage (biological, geological, cultural);*

The participants agreed that it would be most important to bring in other countries with territories along the Ridge into the project and spread information about the scheme. It is thus important to have information on the web-page and make a brochure which we could send to the relevant parties. The World Heritage Centre noted that it was going to have a meeting with Mr Tim Badman, site manager of Dorset in February 2007 and would keep him informed.

The importance of specifically defining the MAR and decide about the limits of the phenomenon was stressed. There are two main theories about the limits of the MAR. The narrow one which limits it to the Ridge itself and the second and broader one where the whole phenomenon of the opening of the Atlantic Ocean is included and thus the Canary Islands (Spain) or the Capverdes Islands would form part. It was suggested to ask two or three scientists to define the limits of the project. It was recommended that Mr Tony Weighell would be asked to steer the definition work and that Mr Helgi Torfason would introduce the project at the IUGS (International Union of Geological Sciences) meeting in Oslo.

Recommendations:

- To bring in the other countries into the co-operation concerning potential MAR sites and to encourage the State Parties which sites are related to the MAR to include them in Tentative Lists;
- To encourage considerations of the outstanding universal value of the Ridge;
- To contact research and scientific groups at universities to join in the information gathering;
- To produce a web-page on the project and encourage funding for a brochure;

- To set up a time-frame and report about the progress at the side meeting during the 31st session of the World Heritage Committee in New Zealand.
- ii. *Set limits to the Ridge “phenomenon”-the volcanic features associated with mid oceanic spreading in the Atlantic extended beyond the ridge; where should limits be set for practical and scientific reasons?*

A first draft of the MAR-project was already written in 2004 and it was suggested to get back to Mr Tony Weighell and ask him to draft the framework text on the ridge and limitations of the ridge and we would bring the draft to the next meeting. This would include specifically: What is the ridge in the scientific terms? Is it just the ridge itself or the opening of the Atlantic Ocean?

It was noted that it is not possible to nominate the MAR as a whole because of the submarine parts outside of the national jurisdictions. We have thus to look at terrestrial features and submarine areas within the national jurisdictions. It was mentioned that it would be wise to form a small group of scientists which would set the limitations for the MAR in relation to this proposal. The key values would be geological and biological features, mainly criteria (viii) and (x).

Furthermore, concerning transboundary properties, adjacent borders, and prepare joint transnational properties the relevant paragraphs of the Operational Guidelines need to be considered. We must also look at serial transnational properties, non contiguous sites of the same geological, geomorphological formations. It was considered that criterion viii² to be the most important but that x³ is also important due to biological diversity. There is also a question about the importance of criteria ix⁴. The World Heritage Centre would contact both Mr Weighell and Mr Badman for further advice.

Recommendations:

- To work with Universities and specialized research groups to identify the limits of the Ridge and to inquire about research groups in universities from State Parties concerned;
- To encourage students to write their thesis on the ridge phenomenon and the protection of sites along it;
- To review the legal possibilities under the World Heritage Convention and collaborate with the marine programme;
- To collaborate with other relevant international conventions (e.g. CMS) and programmes (IOC).

² Criteria viii: be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth’s history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features.

³ Criteria x: contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

⁴ Criteria ix: be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals.

- iii. *Review the distribution and function (in terms of heritage protected) of existing World Heritage sites on the Ridge;*

The meeting noted that a number of sites already exist along the ridge including in Iceland and Portugal, but that these sites may need to be reviewed for other values (e.g. geological).

Recommendations:

- To recommend State Parties to review how their existing World heritage sites to the MAR;
- To encourage consideration of potential re-nominations for other values, e.g. Pico Island (Azores, Portugal);
- To prepare a letter to relevant State Parties to inquire whether they would be interested to review their Tentative Lists and existing sites in relation to a MAR nomination; The World Heritage Centre was asked to send this Circular Letter.

- iv. *Identify heritage (biological, geological, cultural) that is potentially of Outstanding Universal Value on the Ridge but currently lies outside WH sites;*

So far most of the MAR meetings had been informal or related to other meetings. The Iceland meeting concluded that a stage was reached where those meetings need to be more formal. One or more of the State Parties concerned have to take a leading role in the cooperation and nomination work.

Recommendations:

- To potentially set up a working group, when the interest of State Parties is clear and has been voiced;
 - to set up a drafting group for the framework text;
 - to reiterate that this process is not impacting on existing nominations and that it is not blocking State Parties to nominate sites;
 - to illustrate the two options: to nominate on its own and also as a part of a serial nomination of the MAR phenomenon;
 - to encourage nomination of focal-points for the project and to ask countries to nominate experts to participate in the working group.
- v. *Produce a concise report on the above including: review of the issues involved managing such serial sites; the use of serial nominations for capacity building; recommendations for action:*

The meeting also concluded to make a synthesis report of its findings to be included on the web-pages of the World Heritage Centre.

Recommendations:

- To place the report on the WHC- web pages;
- To send the Circular Letter to Brazil (St Paul's Rock), Iceland, Denmark (Faroe Islands), Spain (Canary Islands), Portugal, Norway, Cap Verde and the United Kingdom (Gough Island).
- To encourage funding from the EU and other sources;

- To encourage funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers (has to involve three Nordic countries);
- To encourage in terms of managing systems regular meetings of the group;
- To welcome a next meeting in the Azores, in case Portugal wishes to host it;
- To establish a specialist group after the New Zealand side meeting and to start with an informal working group which could be formalized when the limit of the project and the countries involved is clear;

4. Other issues

Mr Einar Sæmundsson from Thingvellir National Park/World Heritage site asked about management plans for serial sites. Whether one needs to have the same management plan for all the sites? Ms Rössler answered that this was an issue that need to be discussed in detail in the working group. The *Operational Guidelines* would require a Management System – this could be done through an agreed charter. It is important to co-ordinate all issues including name – changes to existing World heritage sites nominated again under the MAR. The purpose of the meeting in Iceland was to formalize the project. Following this meeting an official letter will be sent to the relevant countries.

5. Closure of the meeting

The Chairperson thanked all participants for their presentations and active involvement in the discussions. It was decided that the World Heritage Centre would send the conclusions of the Reykjavík-meeting to the other State Parties involved in the Ridge and inform them about the project.

6. Site visit

Following the meeting an excursion to the World Heritage site at Thingvellir was carried out, a cultural property located on the Ridge.