

## Madriu Valley (Andorra)

No 1160

### 1. BASIC DATA

*State Party:* Andorra

*Name of property:* The Madriu-Perafita-Claror Valley

*Location:* Part of Communes of Encamp, Andorra la Vella, Saint Julia de Loria and Escaldes-Engordany

*Date received:* 31 January 2003

*Category of property:*

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*. In terms of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, paragraph 39, this is a *cultural landscape*.

*Brief description:*

The Madriu-Perafita-Claror valley is a microcosm of the way people have harvested the resources of the high Pyrenees over the past millennia. Its dramatic glacial landscapes with high open pastures and steep wooded valleys reflect changing climates, economic fortunes and social systems, as well as the persistence of pastoralism and a strong mountain culture.

### 2. THE PROPERTY

#### *Description*

The Madriu-Perafita-Claror valley still survives as a living landscape, connected to the rest of Andorra only by tracks suitable for people or animals – there is no road in the valley. Andorra is a tiny country of high mountains and steep narrow valleys in the heart of the Pyrenees. The valley forms a substantial part of the whole territory, covering 4,247 ha.

The property covers most of the watershed basin of the Madriu River, which rises near the eastern border with Spain and falls 1850 metres in 10 kilometres as it flows northwest to join the Valira valley which transects Andorra from east to west.

The upper part of the valley is an open glacial landscape with dramatic craggy cliffs, rocky glaciers and glacial lakes. Lower down the valley narrows and becomes more wooded, while in the last part the river is confined to a short gorge. A secondary valley, the Perafita-Claror joins the Madriu valley from the south-west.

The whole property covers approximately 9% of the land surface of Andorra. It is bounded to the east, south and west by the mountain ridge watersheds of the three valleys covered. To the north the boundary runs along the edge of a small escarpment below which the land drops away to the main Valira valley, along which much of the recent

intensive development in the country has taken place. In the south, the boundary coincides with the Spanish border.

The three valleys which together go to make up the nomination hang together as a coherent overall landscape. A Buffer Zone is largely in place where it can be – that is where the boundary does not coincide with an international border. The lack of a Buffer Zone along the Spanish border did not seem to present a problem, as the area over the border is only visible from the very highest ridges of the site, and is part of a protected area (P.E.I.N.). The one small area that needs better protection is west of the Pic Negre. (see below).

The valley encapsulates the way people have striven to make a living from the high mountains – settling further up when the climate was warmer in the Middle Ages and retreating as the climate cooled. The geology provided the raw materials: high altitude pastures of rich grass and fescue, water from glacial lakes, and glacial murrain in the middle part of the valley which could be formed into small terraced fields for hay and grain around the two main settlement areas. Steep forests provided building material and fuel, the mountains stone for walls and ore for smelting, while the fast flowing rivers gave energy to transform the ore into iron and later hydroelectricity.

The valley also reflects the persistence of an ancient system of communal land management by Communes – four of whom own land in the nominated site.

In detail the valley includes evidence of

- *Pastoralism*
- *Summer settlements*
- *Terraced fields*
- *Stone tracks*
- *Woodland management*
- *Iron smelting*

#### *Pastoralism*

Sheep, cows and horses traditionally grazed the high pastures whose grazing was, and still is, let annually for the summer by the Communes who own the land, and have done so since the Middle Ages. Shepherds came with their flocks and stay during the summer in *bordes*, small stone built huts with vaulted stone roofs covered over with turf. Many of these survive scattered near flat areas where animals could be safely corralled at night. Sheep used to be milked in the high pastures, the milk being converted into cheese. Remains of this practice can be seen in the ruins of *orris*, sheep pens and cheese dairies.

Today only cows and horses graze the pastures with a few of the *bordes* still being lived in by shepherds. The last sheep left 20 years ago.

#### *Settlements*

There are two main settlements in the valley at Entremesaigues and Ramio. The houses (some 12 in all) are now used only in the summer months. They do reflect however a time when the valley was settled throughout the year, some being lived in until 50 years ago. Beyond Ramio are the remains of a ruined house – the high mark of settlement in the Middle Ages. The houses are built of

dry, local 'gathered' granite stone with roofs of local schist – a tradition that is documented as stretching back for at least four hundred years. Next to every house is a large barn for storing grain and hay.

#### *Terraced fields*

Around the settlements are steep and narrow terraced fields making use of every bit of flat 'bottom' land in the valley to grow rye, wheat and to provide hay. These are in the main Madriu valley and also along the Parfait valley. Some of these terraces are kept open by grazing; the higher ones in the Perafita valley are being encroached by forest.

Higher up the valley in what is now forest are the remains of terraced fields developed for vines during the warm spell in the Middle Ages.

#### *Woodland management*

The extensive woodland cover in the lower slopes of the valley was widely used for charcoal, particularly in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, evidenced in hundreds of charcoal platforms and pitsteads. It also provided shelter for animals, winter leaf fodder from ash trees, and building materials – under a traditional, communal system. These traditional management regimes, regulated by the Communes, sustained the woodlands.

#### *Iron smelting*

On the banks of the Madriu River in the middle of the valley is the Madriu forge – remains of a so-called Catalan style forge. This is now the only remaining vestige of this type of forge developed in the Pyrenees in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. There is evidence of the smelting house, houses for workers, fields, grazing for mules. Iron ore came initially from the Claror slopes of the valley and later from Languedoc; charcoal came from the surrounding forest. The forge 'lived' off the forest and yet at the same time sustained it through the prudent management of resources. It was abandoned in 1790.

#### *Paths and Tracks*

The valley was a place of passage with tracks linking it into France and Spain – to the east towards Roussillon, to the north to Languedoc and south to Catalonia. It was part of long transhumance routes for sheep – a practice now discouraged by international boundaries. Lower down the valley tracks led from the settlements and the forge towards the centre of Andorra. These tracks were paved with flat stones to allow the passage of mules. These tracks have recently been restored.

#### *Communal ownership*

The system of land ownership and governance in Andorra dates back at least to the Middle Ages when Andorra's status as a State was confirmed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and is probably much older. Land is divided between 7 Communes who manage pasture and woodland communally and act as the local governing councils. Only the enclosed land in the valley bottom and the houses are owned privately. Thus communal land management, once much more widespread in Europe, has continued to the present day.

#### *Natural qualities*

The cultural management of the valley has contributed towards the protection of the natural ecosystems. The area is now recognised for its rare or endangered species, both birds and trees: 70% of Andorran bird species now live in the valley. The 'balanced' ecology of the valley reflects its long use. To sustain ecological interest will mean sustaining traditional practices.

#### *Intangible qualities*

The status of the Madriu-Perafita-Claror valley as the 'spiritual heart' of Andorra has become very strong over the past quarter century, during a time of rapid development in the rest of Andorra for skiing and shopping. The valley is now seen as the repository of a distinct and proud mountain culture.

#### *History*

According to tradition, in recognition of the support its people gave him against the Saracens, Charlemagne founded Andorra in 805 when he made the bishop of Urgell its overlord. The French counts of Foix contested this overlordship, and finally in 1278 an agreement was reached providing joint suzerainty and the establishment of the principality of Andorra.

Andorra was governed from 1419 by a Council, *Consell de la Terra*, with representatives from all the Communes. In 1981 the *Consell Executiu*, the Andorran Government, was established, and in 1993 Andorra joined the United Nations. The President of France and the Bishop of Urgell remain titular co-princes.

For 715 years, from 1278 to 1993, the Andorrans thus lived under a unique, stable co-principality. This long period of stability (fortified houses were apparently demolished in the 13<sup>th</sup> century as part of the 'arbitration' awards) and the relative remoteness of its mountain terrain, meant that Andorra remained a rural state with the economy based largely on livestock farming. These factors also encouraged the persistence of strong cultural traditions related to mountain living.

Change came swiftly from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century with the development of low-tax shopping in the main town of Andorra la Vella. Between 1960 and 2000 the population grew from 8000 to 70,000, with today around 33% being Andorrans. In the last twenty years, large ski resorts have been developed.

The Madriu-Perafita-Claror valley is the last remaining vestige of the Andorran rural way of life. It appears to have survived more by chance than planning through the absence of any access road. The Government is now committed to retaining this distinctiveness, through not allowing the development of a road, while at the same time putting measures in place to allow the valley to be part of the Andorran agricultural economy, through encouraging high quality livestock based on sustainable regimes.

## ***Management regime***

### *Legal provision:*

99% of the nominated site is owned by four Communes; the remaining 1% is divided amongst 26 owners. 99.5% of the Buffer Zone is publicly owned land.

Consideration of the nominated site as a World Heritage site seems to have prompted the Andorran Government to draft and approve legislation for cultural heritage and to put in place legislative arrangements for drawing up Strategic Land Use Plans by Communes.

In 2000, a Law on Territorial Organisation and Town Planning was passed under which each Commune was to draw up an Urbanisation Plan to cover land-use for the whole commune. The Plans would identify where development could take place and where it would not be allowed. Protected land within communes could be identified as being part of zones for protection of eagles, natural protection zones, cultural protection zones, zones of interest for both cultural and natural reasons, or itineraries of interest.

Draft Plans for all the four Communes involved in the nominated areas have now been drawn up and are out for consultation. Under these draft plans, development would not be permitted in the nominated area and would be strictly controlled in the Buffer Zone. The State Party has confirmed that these plans should be in place by the end of 2004 and have set out a clear timetable for achieving this.

In June 2003, a Law on the Cultural Heritage of Andorra was passed under which sites in Andorra could be designated for protection for their cultural value. Categories in the Act include both individual sites and cultural landscapes. Cultural landscapes are to be protected for their cultural, natural and aesthetic values. Sites are put forward for inscription to the Ministry of Culture by an advisory group consisting of representatives from the key cultural organisations in Andorra, including ICOMOS Andorra. It is the stated intention to designate the nominated area as a cultural landscape once owners have been identified. The State Party has indicated that the forecast date for inscribing the nominated site is July 2004.

Currently the natural environment is not protected by national legislation. However a new law on the natural environment is expected to be put before parliament in June 2004.

Thus at the time of writing, protection for the nominated area is not yet in place, although the legislative framework to allow that protection has been partly passed and the process of designation for cultural values has been started and will be completed shortly after the World Heritage Committee meeting.

### *Management structure:*

The Management Plan submitted with the nomination outlined a management structure based on a combined State/Private Committee. This was to have a legal status which would allow it to control directly what happened in the nominated area. Supplementary information received after the mission visit has confirmed that a 'single representative managerial body representing all the institutions and other agents concerned' will be set up.

The nomination process has produced beneficial results in terms of encouraging Communes to collaborate with each other and with national Ministries. This collaboration has been sealed in a formal Charter, signed by all the parties – four Mayors of Communes and the Ministers of Culture, and of Agriculture and the Environment.

The Management Plan addresses satisfactorily most of the key issue and vulnerabilities of the valley such as agriculture, hunting, forestry, and tourism.

During the mission, two management issues were discussed which it was felt had not been fully addressed by the Management Plan. These were access strategies for the valley, and the strategy for conserving the enclosed, terraced, valley-bottom fields. These reflected possible threats of a formal road, the need to provide access to sustain traditional uses of pastoralists, foresters, builders and owners, and the complete abandonment of the terraced fields to forest cover.

Supplementary information was provided by the State Party following the mission. This sets out clearly that a regular road in the valley is not to be considered. Further it also sets out the value put on the paved stone track leading up the valley, whose restoration has started and will continue. It indicates that a type of small electric vehicle has been considered on the track and that trials will start in the next few months.

The information also endorses the significance of terraced fields both in cultural and biodiversity terms. It further indicates that work on clearing and rehabilitating fields and terraces will have begun in the next two years. However as most of these fields and walls are privately owned, this programme will need the full support of the owners.

The Management Plan contains a timetable, which had already slipped by around a year at the time of the mission visit. However it is the stated intention to begin its implementation as soon as the site is legally protected.

## ***Justification by the State Party (summary)***

The valley is said to possess Outstanding Universal value through a combination of the following qualities:

- The thousand-year-old work of the men and women of a tiny mountain country which can be read without discontinuity, complete and unaltered
- The reflection of the independence, neutrality and peacefulness of a small country over seven centuries
- The tenacity of a mountain society in a harsh climate which practiced a wise balance between resources and needs
- Communal land management structures and a constitution which date back to the Middle Ages

### 3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

#### *Actions by ICOMOS*

A joint evaluation mission by ICOMOS and IUCN was undertaken in October 2003.

ICOMOS has also consulted its International Scientific Committee on Historic Gardens / Cultural Landscapes.

#### *Conservation*

##### *Conservation history & State of conservation:*

A start has been made on drawing up an inventory of built features in the valley such as shepherds' huts, former, milking sites and buildings. The methodology is satisfactory. This has yet to be extended to other built features in the landscape such as walls and revetments. Archaeological records have also been made of the smelting site in the valley but no overall archaeological survey has been carried out of the charcoal burning platforms, charcoal burners' huts, field walls, field structures or of the open landscape as a whole at the head of the valley.

Most of the shepherds' huts, which are under the direct control of the commune, have been carefully restored and the remaining ones will be undertaken soon. At the moment the commune does not have any say in the maintenance and repair of buildings in private ownership. Although most of these are in good repair, the techniques of maintenance (using cement in mortar for instance) could be improved.

Similarly field walls and boundaries of the enclosed land in the valley bottom are in private ownership and do not come with the purview of the commune. The management plan envisages that under the new Law on Cultural Heritage most structures will be protected and this will allow grant aid for repair, subject to agreement on methods and materials.

Conservation plans are in existence for the forest areas and these appear to be satisfactory. Production of timber ceased in the 1950s; in the 1980s and 1990s there was almost no intervention. Now the forests are managed for ecological objectives.

A major programme of footpath repair has been initiated and is being given high priority by the main commune. Five people are employed full time in the summer months to maintain and restore paths using a traditional 'pitched' stone technique. This has produced some impressive results. New paths are also being opened – based on the line of traditional routes.

A multidisciplinary team was set up to research the valley in preparation for the production of the nomination document. This team included specialists in history, ethnology, geology, geography, the environment and management who worked as a group and built links with local and national administrators, owners and associations.

A detailed historical appraisal of the valley based on archival material was undertaken as part of a PhD thesis at the University of Perpignan. Oral historical information was collected through interviews with owners and shepherds about life in the valley and particular the regime

of shepherds. A study on the evolution of property at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is about to start at the University of Gerona.

##### *Management:*

Until a single management body is set up for the valley, the management will remain under the control of the four communes and private owners. Control of aspects of the valley such as building materials and methods, quality of livestock and sheep grazing will rely on beneficial grant regimes being introduced – which are envisaged.

##### *Risk analysis:*

The following were highlighted in the nomination document:

##### *Development pressures:*

This has three aspects – actual development, the possible abandonment of agriculture through the draw of other livelihoods, and the intensification of grazing. The nomination does not discuss these in detail. However information, gained during the evaluation mission and through subsequent supplementary reports, has indicated commitment to ensure that through the planning and management processes, development such as the road will be controlled, and that grants and subsidies will support sustainable agriculture.

##### *Natural Catastrophes*

Avalanches are the main threat. How far these are exacerbated by the reduction of active forestry practices is not clear.

##### *Tourism*

The management plan proposes zones in the valley each with appropriate carrying capacities. It is also suggesting controlling visitors through controlling access points. Flights by helicopter will also be banned under the plan.

The following further threats should be considered:

##### *Hunting*

The hunting of chamois is a traditional practice in the valley. Further research is needed to verify that hunting controls are in accordance with the dynamics of the herds.

##### *Access by Motorbikes and 4-wheel vehicles:*

4-WD vehicles are an issue in one part only of the site – at the head of the Claror valley where they enter from outside the nominated area. Motorbikes are used by shepherds. Both need to be part of an overall access strategy for the valley – as discussed above.

#### *Authenticity and integrity*

##### *Authenticity:*

The overall cultural landscape is reasonably intact – largely because of the absence of a road in the valley. Considering the extent of development in the rest of Andorra, this is little short of a miracle. Details have in some places been compromised – such as building materials – but these are reversible. At the moment there is an almost complete absence of discordant features in the valley. The exceptions are three bothies built for hikers –

the scale of the buildings sits uncomfortably alongside the traditional shepherds' huts. It would be undesirable if these huts were to increase in number. Strong management practices however will be needed to keep the valley authentic.

#### *Integrity:*

The nominated valley forms a natural and cultural unit, which gives it integrity in cultural terms. Its integrity, as with its authenticity, will rely on cultural practices being sustained.

#### **Comparative evaluation**

The Madriu-Perafita-Claror valley is part of the Pyrenees and thus shares much in common with other Pyrenean communities – such as the commune, the type of farming, the houses and the terrain. And indeed these features are found in other mountainous areas such as the Massif Central, the Alps and the Carpathians.

Another element is the fierce independence of mountain communities –where valleys were often like small nations. It is this aspect that singles out Andorra in general, and the Madriu valley in particular, from the surrounding Pyrenees. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and accelerating in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was a loss of independence in much of the Pyrenees, not experienced in Andorra. Thus the Madriu valley until the late-20<sup>th</sup> century had the same structures and status as in the Middle Ages.

Within the Pyrenees there is already one World Heritage site: Pyrénées - Mont Perdu. This differs quite markedly from the Madriu valley. First it is in limestone country, unlike the granite of Madriu; and secondly it straddles a mountain range rather than being confined within mountains.

The nomination compares other valleys in the Pyrenees – the Valls de Lladore, Varrados, Vallibierna and Melles and concludes that none combines natural and cultural attributes as dense and rich as the Madriu valley, and all have road access and a degree of forest exploitation.

#### **Outstanding universal value**

The Madriu-Perafita-Claror valley is of outstanding universal value for a combination of the following cultural attributes:

- As a microcosm of the way people have harvested the resources of the high Pyrenees over the past millennia
- For the way its dramatic glacial landscapes with high open pastures and steep wooded valleys reflect changing climates, economic fortunes and social systems
- For the reflection of an ancient communal system of land management that has survived for over 700 years

#### *Evaluation of criteria:*

The Madriu-Perafita-Claror has been nominated as a cultural landscape on the basis of *criteria iv and v*.

*Criterion iv:* The nomination stresses the significance of the whole ensemble of the Madriu valley – the 'architectural, rural and vernacular whole' as a reflection of the significant phases of the valley's history. This may be true – but the valley cannot be said to illustrate significant stages of human history on a wider scale.

*Criterion v:* For this criterion the nomination stresses the comparative poverty of Andorra before the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the way the patterns of the valley demonstrates how people made use of the scarce resources available to them to create a sustainable living environment in harmony with the mountain landscape.

Although the nomination does not stress this, the valley also graphically illustrates, through its close proximity to the highly developed capital of Andorra, the vulnerability of the pastoral way of life.

#### **4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### ***Recommendation for the future***

Currently the Madriu-Perafita-Claror valley does not have any legal protection. This protection is planned and much of it should come into force in 2004, but not before the World Heritage Committee consider the nomination. It is however unlikely that natural protection will be achieved before 2005.

##### ***Recommendation with respect to inscription***

That the nomination be *deferred* until such time as legal protection is in place.

Further it is recommended that if the nomination is re-submitted consideration should be given to the following aspects:

1. The State Party should confirm that the Buffer Zone covers the plateau west of Pic Negre to Camp Ramonet, to give added protection to the Claror Plateau.
2. A better definition of the zones of the valley to allow for agricultural uses to support conservation and ecological objectives of built and natural assets.
3. The initiation of a complete inventory of built structures and archaeological remain on the site.
4. The initiation of an inventory of invertebrates in relation to meadows and high altitude pastures (and that this study should be part of the ongoing research undertaken by the Director of Agriculture).
5. The provision of an access strategy which supports the needs of those activities necessary for the sustainable development of the valley.

ICOMOS, March 2004