
Great Burkhan Khaldun Mountain and its surrounding sacred landscape (Mongolia)

No 1440

Official name as proposed by the State Party

Great Burkhan Khaldun Mountain and its surrounding sacred landscape

Location

Mungunmorit Soum (District) in Tuv Aimag (Province)
Umnudelger Soum (District) in Khentii Aimag (Province)

Brief description

The nominated Great Burkhan Khaldun Mountain, and its surrounding landscape, lies in the central part of the Khentii mountains chain that forms the watershed between the Arctic and Pacific Oceans in the north-east of Mongolia. This is where the vast Central Asian steppe meets the coniferous forests of the Siberian taiga.

Burkhan Khaldun is associated with the worship of sacred mountains, rivers and *ovoo*-s (shamanic rock cairns), in which ceremonies have been shaped by a fusion of ancient shamanic and Buddhist practices.

Since the 1990s, after sixty years of repression, official support has been given for the revival of traditional practices of mountain worship.

Burkhan Khaldun is also associated with Chinggis Khan, as his reputed burial site and more widely with his establishment of the Mongol Empire in 1206. It is one of four sacred mountains he designated during his lifetime, Khaldun as part of the official status he gave to mountain worship. Burkhan Khaldun is considered to be the cradle of Mongolian nationhood.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

In terms of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (July 2013), paragraph 47, it is also a *cultural landscape*.

1 Basic data

Included in the Tentative List

Burkhan Khaldun, as part of a serial site for Mongolia Sacred Mountains: Bogd Khan, Burkhan Khaldun, and Olgontenger, was included in the Tentative List in 1996.

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

None

Date received by the World Heritage Centre

27 January 2014

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations

ICOMOS consulted its International Scientific Committee on Cultural Landscapes and several independent experts.

Comments about the evaluation of this property were received from IUCN in December 2014. ICOMOS carefully examined this information to arrive at its final decision and its March 2015 recommendation; IUCN also revised the presentation of its comments in accordance with the version included in this ICOMOS report.

Technical Evaluation Mission

A joint ICOMOS/IUCN technical evaluation mission visited the property from 26 August to 5 September 2014.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

On 7 October 2014, ICOMOS requested the State Party to provide further information on comparative analysis, boundaries, bibliography and reconstruction work. The State Party responded on 4 November 2014 and the supplementary information provided has been reflected in this text.

A letter was sent to the State Party on 22 December 2014 raising ICOMOS Panel concerns over the proposed boundary of the property and the lack of clarity as to how all the nominated areas related to the main sacred mountain.

A skype meeting between ICOMOS and the State Party was subsequently held on 9 January 2015 and an additional letter was sent on 26 January 2015.

The State Party provided additional information on 18 February 2015 which has been taken into account in this evaluation. The main change proposed in this information was from a serial nomination of three sites (Great Burkhan Khaldun Mountain, the Sacred Mount Binder and the Baldan Bereeven Buddhist Monastery), to the nomination of a single site, the Great Burkhan Khaldun Mountain.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

12 March 2015

2 The property

Description

The permanently snow-capped mountains of the Khan Khentii mountain range overlook the vast Eurasian steppe lands. Water running off the mountains feed significant rivers flowing both to the north and south. High up the mountains are forests and lower down mountain steppe, while in the valley below are open grasslands dissected by rivers feeding swampy meadows.

This is a remote landscape with high aesthetic qualities, high bio-diversity, and little modern development.

Great Burkhan Khaldun Mountain

The sacred mountain Burkhan Khaldun is closely associated with Chinggis Khan, with his birthplace, his possible grave, with his establishment of the Mongol empire, and with his formalization of mountain worship.

At the end of the 12th century Chinggis Khan formally established worship of the Burkhan Khaldun Mountain, along with other sacred mountains in his empire (see History).

For many centuries it has been one of the most important sacred natural objects for all Mongol peoples. However, in the intervening centuries, traditions of mountain worship declined as Buddhism was adopted in the late 15th century and there appears to have been a lack of continuity of traditions and associations.

Since the 1990s, the revival of mountain worship has been encouraged and old shamanist rituals are being revived and integrated with Buddhist rituals. State sponsored celebrations now take place at the mountain each summer.

Notwithstanding these strong associations, there is some debate amongst scholars on the precise location of the Great Burkhan Khaldun Mountain.

Evidence from ancient texts, especially *the Sacred History of the Mongols* 1241 (see history), make it clear that the Great Burkhan Khaldun is located in the Khentii Mountain range and near the head of three rivers – the Onon, Kherlen and Tuul. *The Compendium of Chronicles* (1307-1311) suggests that the name might apply to the whole mountain range rather than one mountain. Many scholars and archaeologists have tried to locate Chinggis Khan's burial place but so far without success.

The Great Burkhan Khaldun mountain is the one peak within the mountain range that has three stone *ovoo*-s (or cairns) and a defined pilgrimage route to these and its summit, which it is suggested differentiates this peak from two others that have been considered (although neither of these are mentioned in the *Secret History*). Furthermore there is a suggestion that the remains of a

stone building near the middle *ovoo* could be the remains of a temple built by Chinggis Khan's great grandson (although evidence for this has so far not been substantiated by archaeological investigations).

The Burkhan Khaldun Mountain was named as Khentii Khan (The King of the Khentii Mountain range) for political and religious reasons between the 18th and the early 20th centuries.

The Great Burkhan Mountain has thus come to be known as the mountain celebrated as sacred by Chinggis Khan and where he might be buried. It is clear that further evidence for this burial or other clearer evidence might in the future be found, but meanwhile the Great Burkhan Khaldun Mountain is acknowledged as the most likely peak for these associations.

The Great Burkhan Khaldun Mountain has few structures other than three major stone *ovoo*-s or cairns that have become the focus of worship. These are placed alongside paths connected to a pilgrimage route. The cairns were apparently destroyed in the 17th century but have now been re-constructed with timber posts on top. The pilgrimage path starts some 20km from the mountain by a bridge over the Kherlen River at the Threshold Pass where there is also a major *ovoo*. Pilgrims ride on horseback from there to the large Beliin *ovoo* made of tree trunks and adorned with blue silk prayer scarves and from thence to the main *ovoo* of heaven at the summit of the mountain.

Natural Landscape

The mountain landscape includes such natural features as the sources of the Onon and Kherlen rivers, mountains, lakes, rivers, hot springs, and areas which are home to rare and endangered animals and plants.

Most of the mountain is within an area protected for its natural diversity which has been negatively impacted in other parts of the Eurasian steppe. IUCN notes that: "*the property contain notable natural values, which appear significant at national, and possibly regional, levels.*"

The sacredness of the mountain is strongly associated with its sense of isolation, and its perceived 'pristine' nature. Although this nature might not be related to how the landscape looked in Chinggis Khan's time, it is now an essential part of its sacred associations.

The Sacred Onon Springs with hot, mineralized water are used by local people in winter time as a sort of sanatorium. Over some of them are small wooden structures.

Shamanism

Mongols believe that most of the elevated land in the great Mongolian steppes has spiritual significance and that this has persisted since ancient times. From archaeological and documentary evidence, it is suggested that worship at these mountains could have

begun before or at least during the period of the Hunnu Empire (from 209 BCE until 93AD).

Linking current practices to what existed two thousand years ago is however problematic. The Mongol peoples migrated into the area of the Khentii Mountains only around the 8th-11th century and, until the 12th century, lived alongside many other groups such as Turkic people. Further, the Mongolian steppe has come within the purview of many empires since the fall of the Hunnu Empire and all of them had their social and cultural structures including the organisation of pastoralists and religious practices. Furthermore it appears that mountain worship was widespread.

The nomination stresses that what makes Mongolian Shamanism important is the fact that the protection of pristine and unblemished nature is fundamental to its integrity and authenticity. It suggests that the nature described as experienced by Chinggis Khan in the *Secret History of the Mongols* (see History) still persists today.

History and development

The name "Mongol" is apparently mentioned in Chinese sources from 4th century AD as Shi Wei Mong-gu. Later Chinese sources also confirm that during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), a nomadic people known as the Meng-gu lived in the forests and grasslands to the northeast of Dalai Nuur on the borders of present-day Manchuria.

In the later part of the 8th century it is believed that peoples known as the Mongols migrated south and first settled in the area to the north of Burkhan Khaldun. By the 11th century the Mongols around the Burkhan Khaldun were still small in number, one of many peoples jockeying for power in what is now northern Mongolia.

Between 1188 and 1206, Chinggis Khan successfully unified several groups of peoples inhabiting the Mongolian steppes, such as Turks, Tungus and the various Mongol peoples, including the Borjigin Mongols to which he belonged, and formed what became known as the Mongol people or Mongolian nation. Chinggis Khan was proclaimed the Great Khan and began building the Mongol Empire, the largest that the world has seen. His capital, in the Orkhon Valley in central Mongolia, was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2004.

Evidence suggests that mountain worship existed in the Khentii Mountains long before the arrival of Mongolian peoples, probably since before or at least during the Hunnu period. The Hunnu (or Xiongnu) empire, which was a confederation of nomadic peoples, dominated much of the Asian steppe (in what is now Siberia, Mongolia, Southern Mongolia, Gansu and Xinjiang) from 209 BCE until 93AD). Their realm could have included the region of Burkhan Khaldun.

After the Hunnu, successive Empires of the Asian steppe included the Sianbe, Jujan, Turkic Empire, Uighur, Kyrgyz, and Xidan States all of whom were underpinned by their own form of nomadic pastoralism and religious practices which have left an imprint on the Mongolian steppe landscape in the form of petroglyphs, burials, deer stones, etc. some of which are in the nominated area.

Details of Chinggis Khan's Empire are recorded in *The Secret History of the Mongols*, written for the Mongol Royal family by an anonymous author sometime after the death of Chinggis Khan and completed in 1241. This book details how Chinggis Khan first declared the Great Burkhan Khaldun Mountain as sacred in the 13th century, and how it was worshipped constantly thereafter during the time of his Empire. Chinggis Khan also declared as sacred Otgontenger of the Khangai Range, the five peaks of Tavan Bogd at the western edge of the Altai Mountain Range, and Bogd Khan of the Khentii Mountain Range.

Chinggis Khan is reputedly buried near a river on the lower slope of the mountain but in a location that was deliberately hidden.

The significance of Shamanism in Mongolia began to decline in the late 15th century, as an organized campaign was undertaken by the ruling Princes to convert Mongolians to Buddhism associated with the Tibet Gelugpa (or Yellow Hat) Sect.

Around three hundred years later, there was a resurgence of interest in mountain worship and a law called "Khalkh Juram," approved in 1709, proclaimed Khentii Khan (Burkhan Khaldun Mountain) and Bogd Khan (near Ulan Batur) as "Mountain reserves" sacred places to be glorified and honoured for the purposes of worship.

By this time Mongolia had submitted to the Qing Dynasty. Later in the Qing dynasty in 1778, as a result of King Yundendorj's efforts, Bogd Khan, Khan Khentii (Burkhan Khaldun Mountain) and Otgontenger Mountains were also officially declared as mountain reserves, and the decision taken to worship them.

Since 1990 with the renewal of older Mongolian practices, these national traditions and customs of nature worship and protection in Mongolia, and the laws associated with "Khalkh Juram", have been revived and these traditions and customs are now incorporated into State policy.

On 16 May 1995, the first President of Mongolia issued a new Decree "*Supporting initiatives to revive the tradition of worshipping Bogd Khan Khairkhan, Burkhan Khaldun (Khan Khentii), and Otgontenger Mountains*". The Decree pronounces the State's support for initiatives to revive Mountain worship as described in the original Mongolian Legal Document and as "set out according to the official Decree". Since 1995, Otgontenger, Burkhan

Khaldun, and Bogd Khan Khairkhan Mountains have been worshipped as State sacred Mountains.

3 Outstanding Universal Value, integrity and authenticity

Comparative analysis

ICOMOS notes that the initial comparative analysis only offered comparisons with properties already inscribed on the World Heritage List. Supplementary information provided by the State Party in November 2014 added comparisons from Tentative List sites.

The main inscribed comparators are two mountains inscribed under natural criteria: Mt. Kenya, Kenya, and Kilimanjaro, Tanzania); seven mountains inscribed as mixed sites: Mt. Athos, Greece, Tongariro, New Zealand, Machu Picchu, Peru, Tai Shan, China, Mt. Emei, China, Mt. Wuyi, China and Huang Shan, China; and two mountains inscribed under cultural criteria alone: Sacred Kii Mountain Range, Japan and Sulaiman-Too Sacred Mountain, Kyrgyzstan. The analysis also mentions Mount Fuji, Japan, for its elements of sacredness.

The analysis tends to point out similarities rather than differences between Tai Shan, China, Mt Athos, Greece, and Sacred Fujiyama, Japan, and the nominated property, as all reflect persistent and unique traditions of worshipping sacred mountains over the past several hundred years, whether associated with Confucianism, Shintoism, or Christianity, and also represent the national identity of those nations within which they are located.

Sulaiman-Too is seen as the only mountain that is part of the Eurasian steppe lands.

The Tentative list sites considered are The Hua Shan Scenic Area, China, Mount Gerizim and the Samaritans, Palestine, and The Four Sacred Mountains as an Extension of Mt. Taishan, China. The nominated property is seen to share similar characteristics with these three but also differences related to nomadic rather than settled agriculture and to different religions.

The analysis also compares Burkhan Khaldun with other sacred mountains in Mongolia especially Bogd Khan, and Olgontenger. The conclusion is that Burkhan Khaldun is the cradle of Mongolian nationhood and the historical spiritual homeland of the Mongol people; Burkhan Khaldun is a national symbol and the totem mountain of Mongolia, while the other two are not. It is also the birthplace of the Mongol Empire and has close associations with Chinggis Khan, the founder of the Mongol nation and Empire. Finally also mentioned is the close association with *The Secret History of the Mongols*, recognized as a unique cultural heritage by UNESCO in 1990.

ICOMOS considers that a case has been made that Burkhan Khaldun, as a sacred mountain associated with

the Empire of Chinggis Khan might be considered for the World Heritage List.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis has justified consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Justification of Outstanding Universal Value

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

The Great Burkhan Khaldun Mountain, is seen to:

- Reflect deeply rooted traditions of the worship of sacred mountains and sacred sites;
- Reflect associations with Chinggis Khan and in particular his birthplace, his unification of the Mongol tribes and his burial place;
- Represent the idea of Mongolian nationhood;
- Have been at the centre of events that profoundly changed Asia and Europe between the 12th and 14th centuries as the cradle of the Mongolian Empire.

ICOMOS considers that the significance of the Great Burkhan Khaldun Mountain has been established, as has its association with Chinggis Khan, and his support and adoption of mountain worship throughout his empire based on long standing shamanic traditions associated with nomadic peoples.

What has not been established is a continuity of mountain worship first from ancient times to those of Chinggis Khan and then from his time to the present day. The early designation of mount Khan Khentii in the Qing period (early 18th century) suggests that it was an existing sacred site, and may have been for a number of centuries. It is quite plausible that its identity as a sacred mountain dates from the 13th century or even earlier. It is also just possible that there was some continuity in (private) ritual practices since that time. However the specific (very simple) ritual mentioned in the *Secret History of the Mongols* is not mentioned in later periods, and the specific *ovoo* ceremonies and pilgrimages are not mentioned in the *Secret History* or other 13th century texts. It is possible that the practice dates from the Buddhist era. But continuity has so far not been proved.

Also difficult is the association of the nominated property and in particular Burkhan Khaldun with the idea of the Mongolian nation or the birthplace of the Mongolian people. Whereas the extraordinary influence that Chinggis Khan exerted on Eurasia and further afield can readily be seen to have more than national importance, the association with the Mongolian nation is necessarily an importance that relates to national boundaries and cannot be seen as outstanding in wider terms.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The nominated site has adequate attributes within its boundaries to reflect what has been nominated.

Authenticity

All the natural and cultural attributes of the Burkhan Khaldun Mountain display their value. Various parts of the mountain are vulnerable to an increase in tourism which could profoundly change its sense of isolation if not well managed.

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (iii), (iv), (v) and (vi).

Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the property offers exceptional evidence of and testimony to vital cultural traditions of mountain and nature worship thousands of years old.

On the issue of whether the cultural traditions and particularly nature worship can be seen to be thousands of years old, as set out above, there are issue with the idea of continuity of traditions. There is evidence that mountains in the Khentii range and elsewhere in Mongolia were considered sacred in ancient times – before Mongol people moved into the area and that these practices were adopted by the incomers and reinforced formally by Chinggis Khan. It is less clear that there has been a continuity since that time but there could have been.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

Criterion (iv): *be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the property has associations with the birthplace of Chinggis Khan, Mongolian nationhood and the founding of the Mongol Empire. For all these reasons, it is seen to demonstrate its vital historical significance within Asian and world history.

The associations of Burkhan Khaldun with Chinggis Khan, and thus with the power of his Empire, are documented in terms of the evidence in the *Secret History of the Mongols* that refers to his relationship with the mountain and his formal State support for mountain

worship, associated with his unification of the Mongol peoples.

It would appear to be more difficult to justify how this mountain is associated, other than in a tangential way, with the creation of the Mongolian Empire or with the Mongolian nation.

ICOMOS thus considers that the criterion could be justified on the grounds that the mountain reflects the formalisation of mountain worship by Chinggis Khan at the time of the Mongolian Empire, a key factor in his success in unifying the Mongol peoples.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

Criterion (v): *be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that within parts of the property is evidence of pastoral land management of grasslands, with herdsman moving their mixed flocks in seasonal patterns of transhumance, a way of life that has become vulnerable with the development of modern technology, a globalized economy and irreversible environmental changes. This pastoralism is well preserved around the area of the nominated property precisely because of the sacred nature of much of the land and its relative isolation from population centres and development.

ICOMOS considers that no clear evidence has been put forward for suggesting that the pastoralism practiced in this area is particularly or unusually distinctive. Movement practices vary from region to region and from era to era. It is possible that some features of pastoralism in this region have greater continuity with historical practices than other remote parts of rural Mongolia.

Furthermore, this type of pastoralism, involving seasonal movement, is also often linked in social and economic terms to sedentary agriculture and settlements as part of a much wider network. It is thus also difficult to see this small area being a coherent and self-contained entity.

Furthermore, the process of settling appears to have begun in the area with permanent houses being built for herder's families.

A more fundamental problem is that it appears that pastoralism is only allowed outside the Khan Khentii protected area – and that this protected area will be extended to cover the whole property (see Protection).

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

Criterion (vi): *be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the property is directly and tangibly associated with *The Secret History of the Mongols*, an historical and literary epic of outstanding universal significance.

ICOMOS considers that *The Secret History of the Mongols* has been recognised as being a literary epic of world importance in its entry in the Memory of the World Register. This text covers many aspects of Mongolian culture but certainly refers to Burkhan Khaldun and its links with Chinggis Khan, in particular to a simple ceremony held on the mountain and its formal recognition, with other sacred mountains, by Chinggis Khan.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

ICOMOS considers that the criteria (iv) and (vi) and Outstanding Universal Value have been justified.

Description of the attributes

The whole of the Burkhan Khaldun Mountain, its sacred ooo-s, pilgrimage path, sacred springs, and its varied nature are all attributes of its Outstanding Universal Value. To these could be added archaeological sites on its slopes and the long views of the mountain.

4 Factors affecting the property

At present the main factors affecting the property are mainly connected with environmental pressures related to wind, fire, floods, drought, extremes of temperature, solar radiation, etc. Development pressures and human impact are very slight but it is possible to see signs of potential growth.

ICOMOS notes that little remedial action is being taken, or can be taken, against wind, fire, floods, and drought even though they can disturb the ecological balance of the landscape.

Control of erosion caused by precipitation, changes of temperature, solar radiation, and wind is foreseen in future activities of the Management Plan for conservation and protection of the nominated property.

In those parts of the nominated property outside the Khan Khentii Special Protected Area and with no legal protection (see below), mining could be a threat.

The remoteness of the property, and the lack of facilities means that tourist pressure is very low at present. However the number of pilgrims and visitors to the property is growing, particularly pilgrims who come to

state supported ceremonies. And the nomination dossier comments on what is seen as the dramatic increase in the number of travellers in tourist camps and the increase in the number of foreign visitors.

At present adverse human impact on the landscape is slight and mainly connected to the use of informal roads across grasslands. ICOMOS considers that there is a need to monitor and control the roads network. Special places for parking and recreation should also be organized. All of these issues have been considered and addressed in the Management Plan.

Growth in the number of livestock in general and in goats in particular could become a threat to the environment in the future by causing desertification of the grassland from overgrazing. ICOMOS considers that this matter is to be addressed through management programs and regulating policies, although it is in part related to the growth in numbers of people living in the area.

There is also the issue of grazing animals impacting adversely on archeological sites. Adequate protection measures would need to be based on adequate documentation and this matter has also been recognized in the Management Plan.

IUCN states that: *“Concerns identified from IUCN’s consideration of the nomination include potential risks from tourism (low intensity at the moment, so low risk if well managed), mining (which would be addressed only provided extant mining regulations are enacted)...”*

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are a combination of unplanned tourism, unplanned vehicular access, overgrazing and mining in unprotected areas.

5 Protection, conservation and management

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

The current boundary is unrelated to contours and natural features, being delineated by straight lines. ICOMOS considers that further consideration should be given to amending the boundaries to reflect recognisable features. The same situation pertains to the delineation of the buffer zone.

The logic of the area enclosed by the buffer zone is also not clear as it almost touches the property boundary in several places. A clearer rationale needs to be provided for the delineation of the buffer zone.

There also appear to be some discrepancies between the boundaries shown on the various maps provided with the nomination dossier.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated property and of its buffer zone need to be re-drawn to reflect recognisable natural features; and that the rationale for the scope of the buffer zone needs to be clearly defined.

Ownership

All land in Mongolia is at present in the State ownership.

Protection

Not all of the property is legally protected at present: although the majority of the Great *Burkhan Khaldun Mountain* is situated on the territory of the Khan Kentii Special Protected Area (KK SPA), a small area to the north-west and a much larger area to the south lie outside this protected zone.

Even though the KK SPA offers legal protection, it should be noted that this is for natural and environmental protection rather than cultural heritage protection.

The buffer zone is included within the buffer zone of the KK SPA. Currently the property buffer zone has no protection for cultural attributes nor does it have any regulatory procedures related to land-use or new construction.

There are plans to include the whole property and its buffer zone in the territory of the KK SPA in 2015.

Since 1990 and the renewal of older Mongolian practices related to sacred mountains, national traditions and customs of nature protection in Mongolia and the laws associated with “Khalkh Juram” have been revived and are now incorporated into State policy.

On 16 May 1995, the first President of Mongolia issued a new Decree “*Supporting initiatives to revive the tradition of worshipping Bogd Khan Khairkhan, Burkhan Khaldun (Khan Khentii), and Otgontenger Mountains*”. The Decree pronounced the State’s support for initiatives to revive Mountain worship as described in the original Mongolian Legal Document and as “set out according to the official Decree”.

These traditions have been updated to reflect present day circumstances and since 1995, Otgontenger, Burkhan Khaldun, and Bogdkhan Khairkhan Mountains have been worshipped as State sacred Mountains.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place for the cultural aspects of the landscape is not yet adequate and needs to be strengthened; and that specific protection for the buffer zone needs to be defined.

Conservation

On the Burkhan Khaldun Mountain, all the *ovoos*-s and places associated with sacred rituals are maintained by pilgrims. There appears to be no active management of paths to combat erosion.

There are however controls in place for motor transport but the measures should be strengthened to better organize car parking and recreation zones for visitors.

The Decree of the President on “Regulation of ceremony of worshipping and offering of state sacred mountains and *ovoos*” provides legal tools for visitor organization during the large state worshipping ceremonies.

Any activity on Burkhan Khaldun Mountain itself, other than worshipping rituals, is traditionally forbidden. The KK SPA reserve staff do however undertake fire-fighting, forest protection, forest clearing and renovation, and address illegal hunting and wood cutting.

Little active conservation is undertaken on archaeological sites.

ICOMOS considers that conservation activities are basic and more preventative and active measures need to be taken based on a wide assessment of need and priorities.

Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

At the national level, management of the site is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Nature, Environment and Green, and of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

ICOMOS notes that at a local level although the nomination dossier states that an Administration for the Protection of the World Heritage Property responsible for both natural and cultural protection and conservation of the property is to be established, no timescale has been provided for its establishment.

Traditional protection is supported through the long standing tradition of worshipping nature and sacred places. For example, it is forbidden to disturb earth, waters, trees and all plants, animals and birds in sacred places, or hunt or cut wood for trading.

Policy framework: management plans and arrangements, including visitor management and presentation

A draft Management Plan was submitted as part of the nomination dossier. This will run from 2015-2025 and covers both cultural and natural heritage. It includes both long-term (2015-2025), and medium-term (2015-2020) plans.

The version of the Management Plan submitted was an initial version which has not yet been approved or implemented. The text is somewhat tentative in nature. It is stated that it is intended to establish a new Management Administration for the protection and management of the property as a whole and to complete and implement the integrated management plan. Before

completion and adoption, ICOMOS considers that more work is needed to augment the Plan to allow it to provide an appropriate framework for management of the property.

ICOMOS notes that it is not clear when this new system will be put into effect. Furthermore the necessary funding has still to be put in place from stakeholder organisations. However it is acknowledged that this is unlikely to be adequate and further support will be needed from aid and international donor organizations.

Meanwhile it appears that the property is not under active management for its cultural attributes nor is work guided by specific strategies and policies.

Although a management plan exists for the Khan Khentii protected area and this is implemented by the Administration of Khan Khentii Special Protected Area, it is restricted to conservation of the natural environment.

Local authorities at the levels of *aimak*-s, *soum*-s and *bag*-s have responsibility for providing local protection. Although *soum* administrations have people responsible for environmental protection, there appears not to be any formal arrangement for cultural heritage work.

Overall the current management regime does not yet offer effective management of the nominated area or its buffer zone in terms of protecting its cultural attributes.

ICOMOS considers that the current management structure is inadequate; there is a need to establish the proposed new Management Administration and to augment, complete and implement the draft Management Plan as soon as possible.

6 Monitoring

ICOMOS understands that at present archaeological reconnaissance of the property's territory is still under development. The records of sacred and archaeological sites are therefore not yet complete or adequate as a basis for monitoring.

In general there is a lack of research on archaeology, ethnography, local folklore and oral traditions, as well as geology, botany and zoology. Some documentation exists in the form of schematic inventorial records (that identify generic groups of sites rather than individual sites) but there are no detailed maps which could give better understanding of the property and its evolution through the history. This lack is acknowledged in the national programmes and in the Management Plan.

ICOMOS considers that an adequate database to underpin monitoring needs to be established.

7 Conclusions

The sacred mountain of Burkhan Khaldun and its associations with Chinggis Khan are the main focus of this nomination dossier. The precise location of the mountain that is reputedly the burial place of Chinggis Khan and which he established as a centre of mountain worship, is still a matter of some conjecture amongst scholars, but there is no doubt that it lies with the Khan Khentii mountain range. The evidence put forward for Burkhan Khaldun in relation to the pilgrimage paths, *ovoo*-s and links to early texts in the nomination dossier, although not conclusive proof, show that on the basis of present knowledge the mountain has the best claim. As further evidence might only emerge in the longer term, ICOMOS considers that the location of the sacred mountain as now embraced should be accepted.

However the boundary of the mountain need to be more satisfactorily defined in relation to natural features and the inconsistencies between various maps resolved.

The links between the sacredness of the mountain and its pristine nature are strong. The traditions of mountain worship instigated by Chinggis Khan reflected a fusion of shamanism, rooted in the ancient tradition of nature worshiping practices of nomadic peoples, and Buddhism introduced from Tibet.

Although the idea in the nomination dossier that nature as experienced by Chinggis Khan and as described in the *Secret History of the Mongols* still persists today, is difficult to justify, what is important is the sacred association of nature that has been largely unexploited by people. Maintaining that link in the face of increased tourism, will be crucial.

Currently the protection and management of the property is not yet adequate to meet these challenges. The whole property needs legal protection, the protection offered by the buffer zone needs to be clearly defined, and active management of the cultural attributes needs to be put in place on the basis of an approved management plan, based on an augmented version of the current draft plan.

8 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

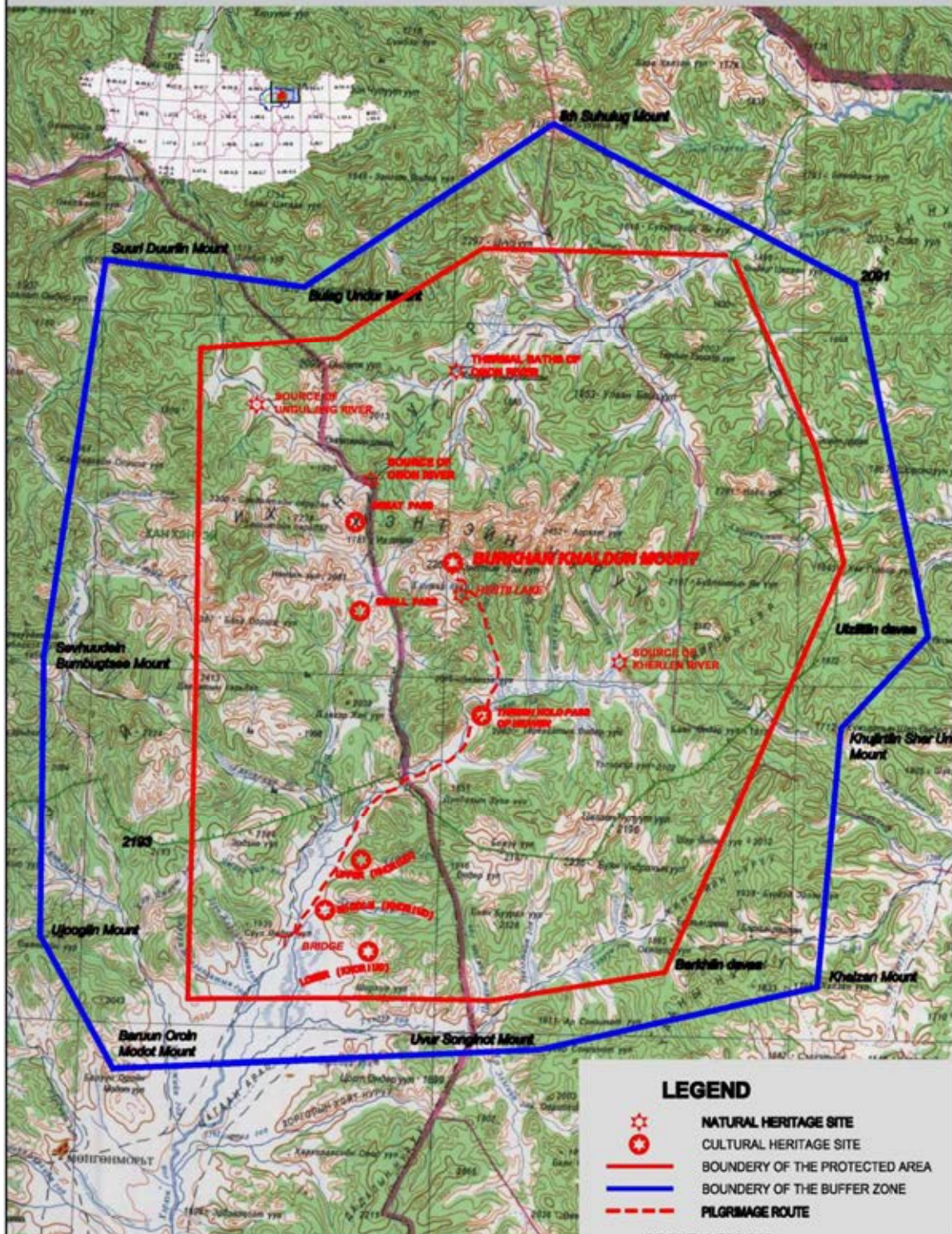
ICOMOS recommends that the nomination of Great Burkhan Khaldun Mountain and its surrounding sacred landscape, Mongolia be **referred back** to the State Party in order to allow it to:

- Put in place legal protection for the nominated area that covers cultural as well as natural attributes;
- Clearly define the protection offered by the buffer zone;

- Re-define the boundaries of the property and the buffer zone to relate them to physical attributes;
- Confirm that no mining or extractive industry will be permitted within the nominated property;
- Put in place an overall management structure with resources to implement an augmented and approved management plan;
- Draw up and implement a conservation programme, covering preventative and active measures, based on a wide assessment of need and priorities.

ICOMOS would be ready and willing to offer advice on these aspects in the framework of the Upstream Processes.

I. BUFFER ZONE OF THE PROPERTY: GREAT BURKHAN KHALDUN MOUNTAIN AND ITS SURROUNDING SACRED LANDSCAPE



Revised map showing the boundaries of the nominated property



Great Burkhan Khaldun Mount



Main Ovoo of Heaven on the top of the Mountain



Shamanism and sacred site



Inside decoration of the Main Temple