

Hortobágy (Hungary)

No 474rev

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Hortobágy National Park
<i>Location</i>	Hajdú-Bihar, Jász-Nagyun-Szolnok, Heves, and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Counties
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Hungary
<i>Date</i>	25 June 1998

Justification by State Party

Hortobágy is an outstanding example of a harmonious interaction between people and nature, based upon sustainable land-use practices, thereby maintaining a diversity of species and biotopes. The *Puszta* represents the highest scenic quality, with pleasing or dramatic patterns and combinations of landscape features, together with important aesthetic and intangible qualities. The area is completely unspoiled by large-scale, visually intrusive or polluting industrial and urban development, with associated infrastructure. It has a distinctive and common character, including topographic and visual unity. At the same time, the integrity of the landscape is maintained with monuments, buildings, and other structures of great historical and architectural interest. There is consensus among professionals and public opinion as to the world importance of the site, reflected, for example, through associations with internationally renowned writings and paintings about the landscape and its inhabitants. This landscape is undoubtedly a resource of world importance in terms of both rarity and representativeness.

Hortobágy National Park, which extends over a vast territory, represents the continuous existence of traditional land-use forms over several thousand years, maintaining the highest level of biodiversity.

The Hortobágy National Park bears unique witness to the cultural traditions of 18th and 19th century animal keepers.

The Park is surrounded by settlements on three sides, and the man-made environment to be seen today is characterized by a rich historical diversity. It encompasses relics of various nations and cultures who have left traces behind during their migrations. There are monuments ranging from *kurgans* (burial mounds) from as early as the 2nd millennium BC through the devastated settlements of medieval Hungary to

the numerous 18th and 19th century buildings that are still in use today and are of exceptional architectural value.

Although the man-made environment of today is diversified and stratified, the feature that makes this region unusual in Hungary and unique in Europe results mainly from herding, which was of great importance in the 18th and 19th centuries. The process of depopulation began in the 14th century and the region had become deserted by the end of the 17th century following the series of wars with the Ottoman Empire.

Criteria iii and iv

The Hortobágy National Park is an exceptional surviving example of the sustainable land-use by grazing of natural grasslands.

Animal husbandry on extensive grasslands was the basic activity and way of life of the nomadic people who inhabited this region in the 5th and 4th millennia BC, and also of the Hungarian conquerors at the end of the 1st millennium AD. This way of life was maintained throughout the Middle Ages (a late 16th century map shows this region as being used for grazing cattle) and the later period of prosperity set a final imprint on the man-made environment of the region. Herding is a form of land-use which does not alter the natural landscape but instead makes use of the natural resources without causing any damage to them. It requires only extensive pastures and few, if any, solid structures. It is therefore not by accident that the nominated area contains very few buildings. These include wells for the use of stock, thatched wooden shelters for use in winter, bridges over rivers, and *csárdas* (provincial inns) scattered along the roads at intervals of half or one *jordana*. These are not only the invaluable records of the former pastoral life but also living proof of the harmonious co-existence of man and nature.

Criterion v

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*. It is also a *cultural landscape* as defined in paragraph 39 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

History and Description

History

Numerous peoples migrated from the east into the Carpathian Basin in prehistory. The nomadic group who arrived around 2000 BC at the end of the Bronze Age were the first to leave their imprint on the natural landscape in the form of many burial mounds (*kurgans*). The region lay outside the Roman Empire, and at this time it was settled by the Sarmatians, an equestrian group of oriental origin. The Avars came to the region in the mid 6th century AD, and they were followed by Slavic settlers.

The Hungarians arrived in what is now Hungary at the end of the 9th century under their leader, Arpád. Since the area was ideal for animal husbandry they occupied the lands around the Tisza river in the 10th and 11th centuries, and by the early 13th century there was a dense network of settlements, whose economic base was pastoralism, in the Hortobágy, the main axis of which was the trading route from Buda through

Tiszafüred and Debrecen into Transylvania. A Cuman group from southern Russia settled peacefully around Nagykunság in the south-west of the Hortobágy in the early 13th century.

However, the whole region was devastated by the Mongol horde that swept through this part of Europe in 1241-42 and many settlements were never rebuilt after the sudden withdrawal of the Mongols following the death of their Great Khan. Numerous villages were depopulated and abandoned during the Black Death in the mid 14th century, whilst the growth of Debrecen attracted the inhabitants of other villages to the new urban centre.

The region fell into the hands of the Ottoman Turks when Debrecen was captured in 1543. Yet more villages were abandoned in the course of the wars that swept the region between 1593 and 1608 and as a result of the Crimean Tartar incursion in 1594, and the Fifteen Years War which saw the Turks driven out of Hungary in 1711.

The 150 years of Turkish rule consolidated the pastoral economy that was to dominate the Hortobágy henceforth. Great herds of cattle and sheep were kept on the open pastures from early spring to late autumn, being driven to winter shelters near water sources for the winter. This system broke down, however, in the early 19th century as a result of the poor economic state of Europe at the end of the Napoleonic wars and changes in dietary habits. At the same time, water regulation systems were set up, notably control over flooding of the Tisza river: this resulted in the draining of former wetlands, which were converted to arable farming. Reduction of the water available for the natural pastures decreased their fertility, which was the cause of serious overgrazing in the early part of the 20th century.

Efforts were made to diversify the land use of the Hortobágy, the most successful of which was the creation of artificial fishponds between 1914 and 1918 and again in the 1950s, as a result of which they now cover 65km². An attempt to introduce rice cultivation in the 1950s was not successful, nor were forestation projects on alkaline grasslands resulting from the water regulation schemes.

Description

The Hortobágy National Park is part of the Tisza plain of eastern Hungary. It is surrounded by settlements to the south, east, and west. The two main settlements are Tiszafüred on the Tisza river and the city of Debrecen. The two are linked by the main historic communication ridge route.

The oldest man-made elements of the landscape are the Early Bronze Age burial mounds (*kurgans*). Their dimensions are variable – 5-10m high and 20-50m in diameter – and they are generally conical or hemispherical. They are always to be found on dry land, but located near a source of water. They were often used for secondary burials by later peoples, and in some cases Christian churches were built on them by the Hungarians. Also to be found in the Park are the low mounds (*tells*) that mark the sites of ancient settlements, now disappeared.

Settlement in the Middle Ages followed the Debrecen-Tiszafüred route. The main group was in the area defined by the existing settlement of Hortobágy, Naghegyes, Náduvdar, and Nagyiván. Documentary records have shown that many of these had churches. With the progressive depopulation of the region from the 14th century onwards, the settlements disappeared. The only man-made features in the wide plains

of the Puszta were light temporary structures made of reeds and branches, used to provide winter shelter for animals and men.

The sole surviving structures from this time, which were public buildings constructed built in stone, are the bridges and the *csárdas*. The Nine Arch Bridge at Hortobágy is the longest stone bridge in Hungary. A wooden bridge known to have been in existence as early as the 14th century was replaced in 1827-33 by the existing structure in classical style. The Zádor bridge in the southern part of the National Park was built in 1809 with nine arches, but the two side piers were swept away by a flood on the Zádor river in 1830 and never replaced.

The *csárdas* were provincial inns built in the 18th and 19th centuries to provide food and lodging for travellers. The typical *csárda* consists of two buildings facing one another, both singled-storeyed and thatched or, occasionally, roofed with shingles or tiles. A tavern was normally set up on the side of the road with a railed-off counter in a room that had access to the wine cellar. A few also had one or two guest rooms. On the opposite side of the road from the *csárda* was provision for horses and carriages. The best known of the *csárdas* are those at Balmazújváros (18th century), Hortobágy (first built in 1699 and reconstructed on several occasions), Nagyhegyes (early 19th century), Nagyiván (mid 18th century), and Tiszafüred (c 1770).

Management and Protection

Legal status

The Hortobágy National Park was established in 1972 by Presidential Decree of the National Authority for Nature Conservation No 1850. The original 52,000ha was extended by a further 11,422ha in 1993 and it reached its present extent in 1996.

It is regulated by Articles 31-41 of the 1996 Law No LIII on Nature Conservation. These impose severe limitations on any activities that may have adverse impact on the character and qualities of protected areas, including land clearance, building or other form of construction or earth moving, and unauthorized vehicle use.

Management

Of the total area of the Park (74,820ha), 68,196ha are in State ownership (principally the National Park Directorate, with other areas owned by the water management authorities, the Hungarian army, and other State institutions). Of the rest, 5069ha are owned by collective farms, 1263ha by private individuals, 254ha by municipalities, and 38ha by non-governmental organizations.

Article 36 of the 1996 Law on Nature Conservation requires there to be a management plan for each protected natural area, to be revised every ten years. That currently in force for the Hortobágy National Park, prepared in 1997, covers the following items:

- Purchase of remaining areas owned by collective farms;
- Supporting the establishment of stock-rearing companies in the surrounding settlements, so as to avoid fragmented land management;

- Obtaining rights for nature conservation in areas specified for extension of the Park;
- Enforcement of regulations dealing with the use of chemicals, hunting, etc in the buffer zone;
- Systematization and better dissemination of research data;
- Continuation and extension of new species surveys;
- Designation of natural values discovered by research as protected;
- Development of an overall research strategy.

Article 30 of the 1996 Law on Nature Conservation requires protected natural areas to be protected, “in case of necessity,” by buffer zones. The buffer zone for the Hortobágy National Park has been defined; it covers an area of 199,380ha.

The National Park Directorate has a staff of 42, of whom twenty are administrators/professionals, thirteen are rangers, six technical staff, and three drivers. The Directorate is under the overall control of the Ministry of Environment and Regional Policy. It is the authority of first instance in relation to non-State-owned properties within the Park.

The *kurgans*, *csárdas*, and other historic properties within the Park are protected as historic monuments under the provisions of the 1997 Law No LIV on Ancient Monuments. The regional offices of the National Office of Ancient Monuments in Debrecen, Eger, and Szolnok are responsible for monitoring their state of conservation and taking necessary action.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Conservation of the natural values of the nominated area has been continuous since the Hortobágy National Park was established in 1972. A series of laws enacted since 1995 have increased statutory controls over the designated area, providing protection for the preservation of man-made environments and assigning responsibilities for protection to community councils, local municipalities, and county administrations.

The entire nominated property is a Biosphere Reserve under the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme. More than 23,000ha are protected under the RAMSAR Convention as wetlands of international importance.

Authenticity

The historic trajectory of the *Puszta* has been such that its cultural growth and decline are recorded indelibly in its landscape. The landscape of today is a palimpsest of its long history which has not been overlaid by more recent technological or social developments. Its authenticity as a cultural landscape is therefore absolute.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An expert nominated by ICOMOS after discussion with IUCN visited the property at the end of April 1999.

Qualities

The landscape of the Hungarian *Puszta* as exemplified by the Hortobágy National Park bears exceptional testimony to its evolution over time. The natural resource of vast expanses of grass and other animal foods attracted settlers there from earliest times to practise a nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoral way of life. Abundant traces of their presence from prehistory to the recent past survive intact or as vestiges, and the subsequent economic decline of the region has ensured that they have not been obliterated by more recent development.

Comparative analysis

The *Puszta* is a flat floodplain that is periodically inundated, lying on an alluvial fan that has been eroding continuously since the end of the last Ice Age. Morphologically it is partly flood plain and partly loess ridges, and the characteristics of both can be clearly seen in the Hortobágy National Park. In Europe this type of landscape is only to be found in the Carpathian Basin. The only other similar landscapes that are comparable in size are to be found to the east of the Urals.

ICOMOS comments and recommendations

This property was first nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 1988, under the natural criteria. On the recommendation of IUCN it was not accepted for inscription, but its natural qualities as a Biosphere Reserve and Ramsar site were acknowledged. Since that time the Committee has developed its categorization of cultural landscapes, and the present resubmission is made under the cultural criteria, implicitly as a cultural landscape.

The nomination dossier contains considerable information about the natural qualities of the nominated area, with almost equal space in the “Description of Property” section devoted to natural habitats, biotopes, and the avifauna as to the cultural heritage. The important links between the natural characteristics of the region and its cultural development are not clearly stated, although diligent search through several sections reveals the essential facts.

In the description of the cultural heritage, details are supplied of the most important *csárdas* and the two historic bridges. However, there is only a general account of the prehistoric burial mounds (*kurgans*) and a passing reference to settlement mounds. Similarly, there is no information about specific abandoned medieval village sites.

The mission report commented favourably on the degree of protection afforded to the cultural elements located in the property, but proposed that the State Party should be requested to provide a comprehensive list of the cultural heritage of the Hortobágy National Park, with details of any programmes of inventarization, research, and excavation currently in operation. If no such programmes exist, the State Party is strongly urged to formulate and implement them without delay.

The report also drew attention to the lack of information in the nomination dossier concerning the interaction and coordination between state agencies responsible for the protection of the natural and cultural heritage respectively. Details relating to this point should be supplied by the State Party. However, neither this request, nor that in the preceding paragraph, is considered by ICOMOS to warrant

delay in the inscription of this outstanding cultural landscape.

The information on the natural values of the Hortobágy National Park in the nomination dossier was very comprehensive. On the basis of the mission report, ICOMOS feels that IUCN might be requested to reconsider its 1988 recommendation, with the possibility of inscription under natural criterion iii.

Brief description

The Hortobágy is a vast area of plains and wetlands that have been used by humans for grazing their domestic animals for more than two millennia.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *cultural criteria iv and v*:

Criterion iv The Hungarian *Puszta* is an outstanding example of a cultural landscape shaped by a pastoral human society.

Criterion v The landscape of the Hortobágy National Park preserves intact and visible the evidence of its traditional use over more than two millennia and represents the harmonious interaction between human beings and nature.

ICOMOS, September 1999