

IDENTIFICATION

- Nomination** : Solovetskii historical, cultural and natural complex
- Location** : Arkhangelskii Region
- State Party** : Russia
- Date** : 4 October 1991

DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

The six islands of the Solovetskii archipelago are in the western part of the White Sea, 290 km from Arkhangelsk. They cover in total 300 sq km, Solovetskii itself accounting for 219 sq km, and the others 47.1, 19, 1.2, 1.25, and 1.1 sq km respectively.

Human occupation began on the islands as early as the Mesolithic period (5th millennium BC), when the climatic conditions were more favourable than at the present day. The main prehistoric settlement period was in the 3rd millennium BC, when villages, sacred sites, and irrigation systems were built on Big Zayatskii and Anzer Islands. On the former there is a compact group of religious and funerary monuments, including 18 stone labyrinths, over 600 stone burial cairns, and several stone alignments and circles. One of the labyrinths, over 22 m in diameter, is the largest known in the world. Anzer Island has only four labyrinths and 38 cairns, disposed in three irregular rows along the sea shore. The area is of great importance, since research on archaeological discoveries have made it possible to trace climatic history through changes of vegetation and variations in shorelines.

At the end of the warmer drier climatic episode around 1000 BC a modified version of the traditional way of life survived among the Sami and Karelia peoples throughout the Middle Ages.

The Solovetskii Monastery was founded by three monks from the Kirillo-Belozersk and Valaam Monasteries in the 1430s. It expanded in subsequent centuries to cover not only the main islands of the archipelago, but also large stretches of land on the neighbouring mainland.

In 1478 the monastery came under the protection of the Novgorod State, passing subsequently to Moscow. There was a major economic reorganization in the mid 16th century, inspired by Father Superior Philip Kolichev, who built roads, founded a dairy farm, joined up series of small lakes to provide abundant fresh water, and created new industries, such as brickmaking and ceramics. He also inspired the erection of some of the major ecclesiastical monuments on the islands.

A stone fortress was built in 1582-94, and in the 17th century Solovetskii became the economic, religious, military, and cultural centre of the

whole region. It was used as a place of exile and imprisonment for state criminals, but it also attracted many pilgrims.

After successfully surviving a siege by Government troops in 1668-76 when the monastery revolted against the church reforms of Patriarch Nikon (a unique phenomenon in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church), the monastery continued to thrive in the 18th and 19th centuries, when many timber buildings were rebuilt in stone. The military function disappeared in 1714 with the construction of a new fortress at the mouth of the Northern Dvina, but the Solovetskii fortress continued in use as a prison. Craft activities expanded into other fields, such as icon painting, wood carving, engraving, and lithography. The detached monasteries on the smaller islands became important trading outposts and trade generally increased with Russian cities, leading to improvements to the harbour and the construction of warehouses. The Makayev monastery was converted to a botanical garden, supplying hothouse fruits to Russian cities.

This came to an abrupt end with the Revolution, when the monastery was abolished, being replaced by the "Solovky" State Farm. That, too, was abolished in 1923, when the islands became special camps, housing political and other prisoners in wooden huts (most of which have been preserved). From 1939 to 1957 the islands were used by the Russian Navy for training purposes. In 1967 the Museum Preserve was created, and in 1990 the monastery was reinstated.

The heart of the complex is the monastery itself, on Solovetskii Island. It is in three parts, the central square with its complex of monumental buildings, and the northern and southern courtyards devoted to domestic and craft activities.

The central square is flanked by the Church of the Assumption, in Novgorod style with its refectory and cellarage (1552-57), the Saviour Transfiguration Cathedral (1558-66), the Bell Tower (1776-77), the Church of St Nicholas (1831-33), and the Holy Trinity, Zosimus and Sabbath Cathedral (1859). The north courtyard complex includes high-quality craft buildings, including the icon workshop (1615), the tailors' and cobblers' workshops (1642), 16th and 17th century store-rooms, the 17th-19th century Father Superior's lodgings, and a 17th century leather-dressing cellar. In the south courtyard area are a late 16th century drying barn, an early 17th century mill, a 17th-19th century wash-house, and a 19th century bath-house.

The Solovetskii Monastery Fortress was built in 1582-94 from boulders. It is five-sided, with a tower at each corner and covers over 5 ha. The walls are 7 m thick at the base.

The monastery village includes chapels built to commemorate several Tsars, hostels for pilgrims, a dry-dock, a hydroelectric power station (1910-12), and industrial installations of various kinds.

There are a number of detached monasteries - four on Solovetskii Island (all 19th century), the early 17th century Trinity monastery on Anzer Island, a 16th century complex, including a stone harbour, on Big Zayatskii Island, and the St Sergius Monastery on Big Muksalma Island, founded in the 16th century.

AUTHENTICITY

There can be little doubt that what has survived has a high degree of authenticity. It has not been subjected to the demands of tourism for neatness and bright colours; indeed, its long years as a prison camp and as a naval training base will have ensured that little unnecessary restoration was practised.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION

The Solovetskii complex has been officially protected as "a monument of art, antiquity and nature" since as early as 1924. In 1960 400 archaeological and 114 architectural monuments were registered. The Solovetskii Historical and Architectural Museum Preserve was created by Decree in 1967, and this was re-affirmed in 1988. It is administered by the United Administration of the Museum Preserve, which has the benefit of an elaborate system of planning controls.

The dossier claims that the state of conservation is generally satisfactory, but concedes that the detached monasteries are badly degraded. Conservation work by a specialized Ministry of Culture research organization has been in progress since 1955, and the Arkhangelsk restoration workshop has been involved in projects since the 1970s.

EVALUATION

Quality

The Solovetskii complex is an outstanding one, representing the apogee of Russian Orthodox monastic endurance and enterprise in a hostile environment.

Additional comments

The ICOMOS Bureau, none of whose members had visited the site, was unanimous in its support for the inclusion of Solovetskii on the World Heritage List, following its study of the comprehensive documentation provided in the dossier. It is of the opinion that the word "natural" should be removed from the title, since the historical and cultural importance of Solovetskii far outweighs its natural interest. It recommends that IUCN be requested to consider this aspect of the site.

ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That this cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of Criterion iv, but that the description be amended to read "Solovetskii historic and cultural complex".

- **Criterion iv** : The Solovetskii complex is an outstanding example of a monastic settlement in the inhospitable environment of northern Europe which admirably illustrates the faith, tenacity, and enterprise of late medieval religious communities. Its subsequent history is graphically illustrated by the wealth of remains of all types that have survived.

ICOMOS, October 1992