

Identification

<u>Nomination</u>	Archaeological ensemble of the Bend of the Boyne
<u>Location</u>	County Meath
<u>State Party</u>	Ireland
<u>Date</u>	29 September 1992

Justification by State Party

The quality and quantity of the collective megalithic art of the area represents a "unique artistic" and aesthetic achievement which is unequalled in its counterparts throughout the rest of Europe (criterion i).

The monuments of the area display a longevity of settlement whose origins are found in Neolithic settlements which are of "great antiquity" (criterion iii).

The various monuments, particularly the great passage tombs, represent "important cultural, social, artistic and scientific" developments over a considerable length of time. Nowhere else in the world can one find the continuity of settlement and activity associated with a megalithic cemetery such as that which exists at Brugh na Bóinne (criterion iii).

The passage tomb complex represents a spectacular survival of the embodiment of a set of ideas and beliefs which are of "outstanding historical significance" (criterion vi).

History and DescriptionHistory

Two main historical periods can be identified among the archaeological remains in this site, and in both the Bend of the Boyne was exerting significant cultural influence over much of central Ireland and beyond:

- 1 Prehistoric (3800-2200 BC)
 - Early "Western" Neolithic
 - Late "Western" Neolithic
 - Passage tomb period
 - Beaker period.

- 2 Protohistory and medieval period
 - Late Iron Age

- Developed Early Christian
- Anglo-Norman/Cistercian.

Major excavations of the great burial mounds at Newgrange and Knowth, and smaller investigations elsewhere, have revealed evidence of human occupation as early as the 4th millennium BC, but more substantial remains are known from the Late Western Neolithic. These include houses, palisaded enclosures, and field systems and represent the opening up of Ireland to agriculture with the clearance of ancient woodland. Some forty passage tombs, which testify to a higher degree of social organization and cultural evolution, are known in the area; their origins are to be found in Brittany and the western part of the Iberian peninsula. With the arrival of Beaker influences, one of the most important indicators is the switch from circular to rectangular houses.

There was little Bronze Age occupation in the area, which was not settled again until the Late Iron Age, in the mid 1st millennium BC. Knowth became a fortified settlement and many subsidiary burials were inserted into the great Neolithic mound; finds of imported goods testify to extensive trading connections. The Early Christian period, from the 8th century AD onwards, saw the construction of three large ring-forts in the area. Knowth grew into a large undefended settlement, with rectangular houses, souterrains, extensive agricultural and industrial activity, and evidence of literacy. It was the capital of the Kings of Knowth up to the Anglo-Norman invasion in the 12th century.

Under the Normans, the area became a centre of innovation under the control of the Cistercians, who eventually incorporated it into their system of granges or estate farms. It has remained an agricultural landscape up to the present day.

Description

The area known as the Bend of the Boyne (Brugh na Bóinne) covers some 780 ha and takes its name from the fact that it is defined on the south, east, and west sides by the River Boyne; part of the northern boundary is formed by the River Mattock. It is essentially a ridge running east-west with three low hills on it (Dowth, Knowth, and Newgrange). These three great burial mounds dominate the whole area, and are surrounded by about forty satellite passage-graves, to constitute a great prehistoric funerary landscape. Its intense ritual significance inevitably attracted later monuments, both in protohistory and in the Christian period. The importance of the site is enhanced by the fact that the River Boyne communicates both with the Celtic Sea and the heartland of Ireland, and so it has considerable economic and political significance.

The area is predominantly agricultural at the present time. It has been intensively explored for more than a hundred years by archaeologists and historians, and excavation has revealed many features. The Knowth group, where the earliest features date from the Neolithic period and the latest from the Anglo-Norman period, has produced thirty monuments and sites that figure on the official inventory: these include passage graves,

enclosures, occupation sites, and field systems. The Newgrange group is purely prehistoric, with a ring-fort, passage graves, a cursus, and a henge. The Dowth group is similar to that at Newgrange, but there is medieval evidence in the form of a church and a castle. Also included within the nominated area is the castle at Proudfootstown.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Most of the 780 ha site included in the nomination is in private ownership; only 32 ha, largely around Knowth and Newgrange, are in State ownership. Most of the registered monuments listed in the nomination are protected under the National Monuments Acts of 1930, 1954, and 1987. Thirty are in the ownership of the Commission of Public Works, four are subject to Preservation Orders (no disturbance permitted), and twelve are on the official Register of Historic Monuments (proposals to disturb require notification of competent authorities, who have powers to acquire or impose a Preservation Order).

Further protection will be conferred by the National Parks and Heritage Areas Bill, which is currently (January 1993) before the Dáil (Parliament). The Irish Government also has an acquisition policy within the Core Area of the nomination, especially for the purchase of upstanding monuments.

Management

Much of the site has been under either the direct management of the Office of Public Works or rigorous control by that body for many years. Both the Core Area and the Buffer Zones are defined as Special Areas of Archaeological Interest in the Meath County Council Development Plan (formulated in accordance with the Local Government and Development Act 1963 as amended), where protection against undesirable development is the stated objective. No further development is permitted within the Core Area, and development in the Buffer Zones may not be prejudicial to the management of the archaeological resource.

The Core Area and Buffer Zones proposed in the nomination are logical and the latter is broadly enough drawn to ensure that the setting of the site is not prejudiced.

In addition, the Bend of the Boyne area will form the core of the first National Archaeological Park to be established in Ireland, which will be managed as a conservation area. The Office of Public Works will be the responsible State agency, using its professional staff of archaeologists, conservation architects, engineers, land managers, craftsmen, etc. An overall study for the eventual management plan was carried out in 1989 at the request of Bord Fáilte (Irish Tourist Board) and an Environmental Impact Statement has been prepared for the site of the proposed Visitor Centre. Annual visitor numbers are currently 150,000 for Newgrange (open all year) and 40,000 for

Knowth (open six months); it is envisaged that the total figure for the new Park will be of the order of 300,000 visitors a year.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Major excavations have been carried out at Newgrange and Knowth and have been fully published. Many small excavations and surveys have been carried out in the area over the past two centuries. As a result, this extensive "fossil" landscape, with its many important upstanding monuments, is extremely well understood. Its importance has been acknowledged by the protection of most of the upstanding monuments by means of Irish antiquities legislation. The Office of Public Works has been assiduous in acquiring these monuments and managing them directly, and in ensuring that adequate safeguards are in place in respect of the whole area.

Authenticity

The archaeological remains on the site, both above and below ground, are wholly authentic. However, the restoration work carried out at Newgrange and planned for Knowth is somewhat controversial.

At Newgrange, there has been comprehensive anastylosis of the kerbstones and the revetment wall, though the latter has been curtailed to allow access by visitors. The passage roof was completely dismantled to allow the orthostats to be returned to the vertical, with the introduction of reinforcement, and a cowl has been constructed over the chamber area. The cairn itself has been stabilized by means of thin revetments of cairn stones.

At Knowth structures from all periods are being conserved. In some passage tombs outer support walls are being built for the burial chambers, involving the use of modern materials such as cement and plastic.

Where such new additions are visible they are clearly distinguished in appearance from original materials, but in other cases they are completely concealed.

In the opinion of ICOMOS, the restoration work on these monuments, the result of close collaboration between archaeologists and architects, conforms with the principles enunciated in Article 7 of the International Charter for Archaeological Heritage Management 1990.

Evaluation

Qualities

The archaeological area in the Bend of the Boyne is one of the largest and most important prehistoric and later complexes in Europe, and also one of the least disturbed. Its importance

extends beyond the British Isles, since it represents the largest assemblage of megalithic art in Europe. It is also outstanding because of the continuity that it demonstrates over two long historical periods, from the 4th to early 2nd millennia BC and from the Early Iron Age to the High Middle Ages. It is important for the information that it provides about social, economic, and, above all, religious organization and continuity.

Comparative analysis

Although megalithic monuments are distributed widely in the "Atlantic Zone" of western Europe, from Malta to Scandinavia, there is no complex that compares in density of monuments and high artistic quality with the Boyne Valley group that is the subject of this nomination.

Additional comments

The restoration/reconstruction work carried out at Newgrange and Knowth is undoubtedly controversial in some respects. It may be argued with justification that this is no greater than that performed on more recent religious monuments, such as Gothic cathedrals or Buddhist temples. The nature of these prehistoric structures, moreover, necessitates radical treatment if they are to be presented to the general public as comprehensible monuments rather than collapsed ruins.

One possible threat to the future of the monuments and the site as a whole is presented by the tourist development proposals, which might adversely affect the setting and atmosphere of the area. These are addressed in the feasibility study of 1989 but will require careful attention in the eventual Management Plan.

Recommendation

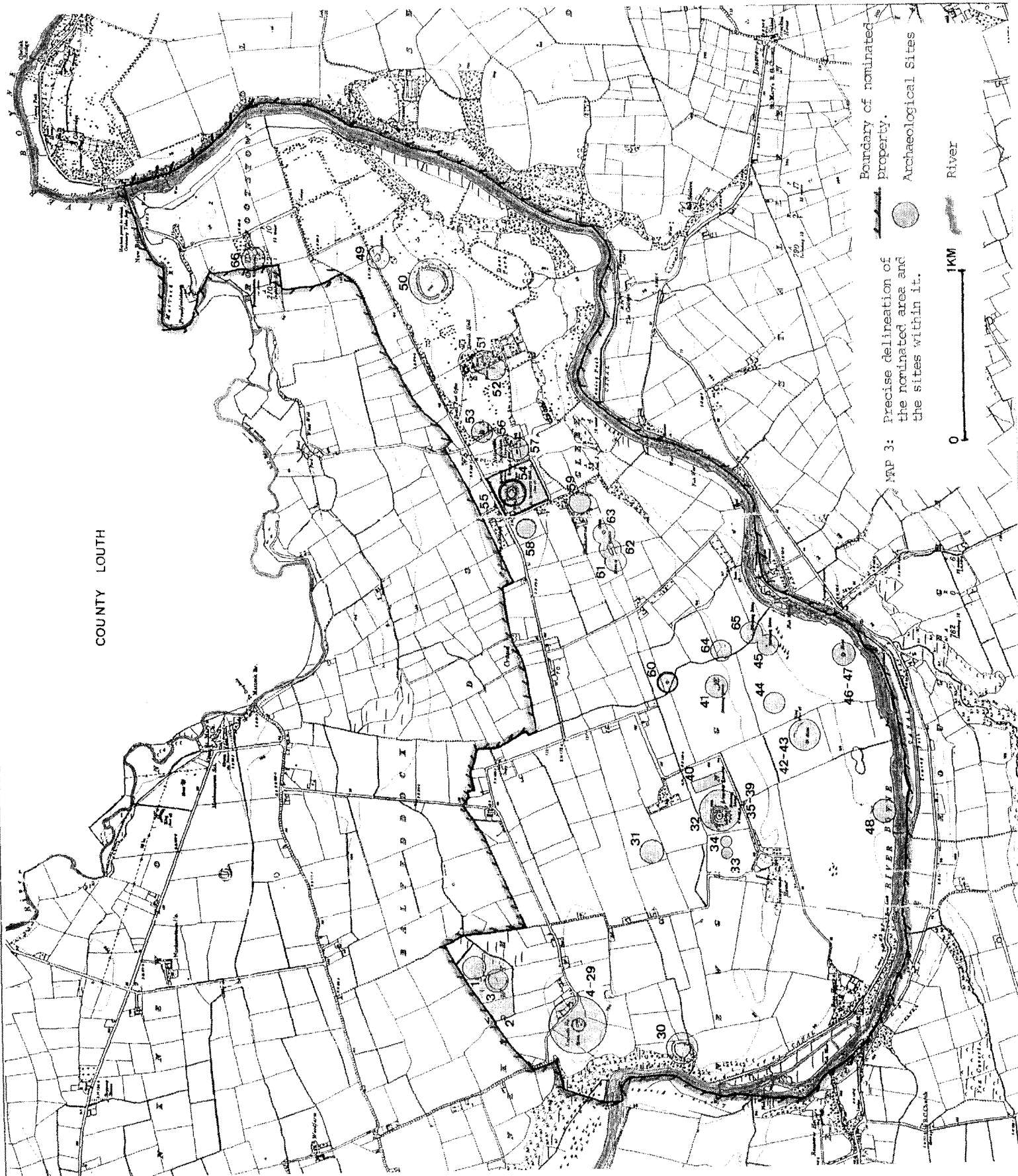
That this site be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria i, iii, and iv.

- Criterion i The Bend of the Boyne monuments represent the largest and most important expression of prehistoric megalithic plastic art in Europe.
- Criterion iii The concentration of social, economic, and funerary monuments at this important ritual centre and the long continuity from prehistory to the late medieval period make this one of the most significant archaeological sites in Europe.
- Criterion iv The passage grave, here brought to its finest expression, was a feature of outstanding importance in prehistoric Europe and beyond.

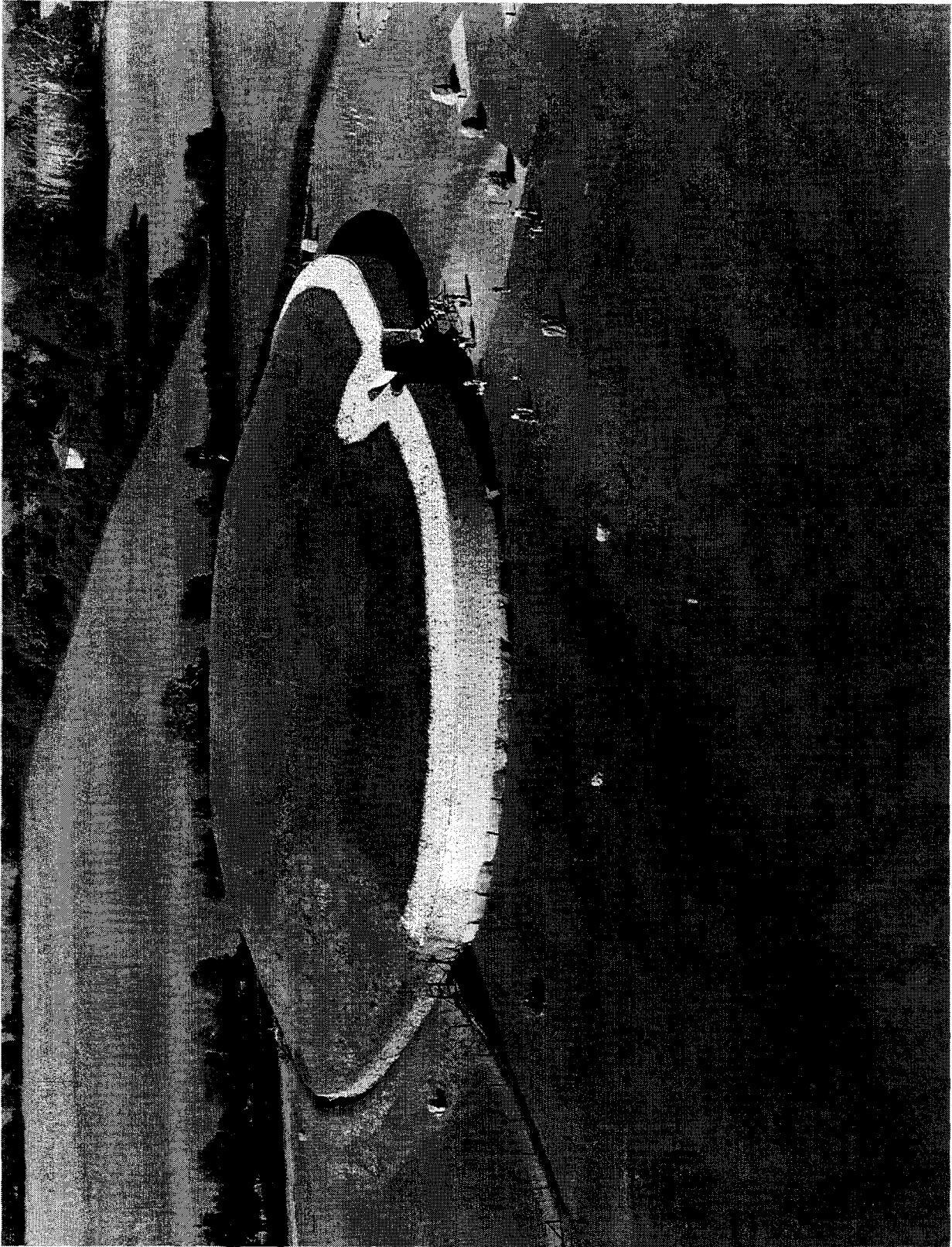
ICOMOS, October 1993



Brugh na Boinne : Carte de localisation du site avec son environnement naturel et bâti /
 Location map of the property with its immediate natural and built environment



Brugh na Boinne : délimitation de la zone proposée pour inscription
 et des sites situés dans la zone /
 Delineation of the nominated area and the sites
 within it



Brugh na Boinne : vue aérienne du grand tumulus de Newgrange entouré
d'un cercle de pierres /
Aerial view of the great mound at Newgrange with its
surrounding stone circle



Brugh na Boinne : vue aérienne du grand tumulus de Knowth au cours
des fouilles /

Aerial view of the great mound at Knowth during
the ongoing excavations