

# **WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN SUMMARY**

## **671: HA LONG BAY (VIETNAM)**

Summary prepared by WCMC/IUCN (January 1992) based on the nomination submitted by the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. This original and all documents presented in support of this nomination will be available for consultation at the meetings of the Bureau and the Committee.

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### **1. LOCATION**

A group of offshore islands, some 164km east of Hanoi, in Tonkin Gulf.

### **2. JURIDICAL DATA**

Established as a historical and cultural relict and national scenic spot by the Minister of Culture in 1962. Land tenure is held by the Provincial Government.

### **3. IDENTIFICATION**

Ha Long is a large bay with a multitude of limestone rocks and a limited number of earth islands formed from decayed lateritic mountains. In total, there are 1,600 islands and islets, of which 1,000 have been named. Larger islands rising to 100-200m are found in the south, interspersed with smaller islets of 5-10m height interspersed. To the east of the Bay medium size islands feature almost vertical slopes. Numerous caves and grottoes are found, with stalactites and stalagmites. The earth islands are inhabited. There is a diverse flora throughout Ha Long, and primary tropical forest is found, mostly on the islands of Ba Mun and Cat Ba. Results from preliminary surveys indicate the presence of about 1,000 fish species. Mammals, reptiles and birds are found on the islands, especially those derived from laterite.

Numerous archaeological sites have been found and there is evidence to suggest occupation by the Hoa Binh Culture, some 10,000 years before present. Archaeological sites at Tuan Chau, Ngoc Vung, Cai Dam, Dong Naim and Cat have revealed so many artifacts that they have been grouped under the term 'Ha Long Culture', typical of the northeastern coast of Viet Nam in the Neolithic Age. During prehistoric times, Ha Long was a significant port, located on the trade routes between China, Japan, and other countries in South East Asia.

### **4. STATE OF PRESERVATION/CONSERVATION**

The Ministry of Culture, Information and Sports is responsible for the overall management of Ha Long, although the People's Committee of Quang Ninh Province has the immediate responsibility for the administration and management of territory within its jurisdiction. Despite development in the region, Ha Long itself will be protected as a major tourist and cultural centre.

## 5. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

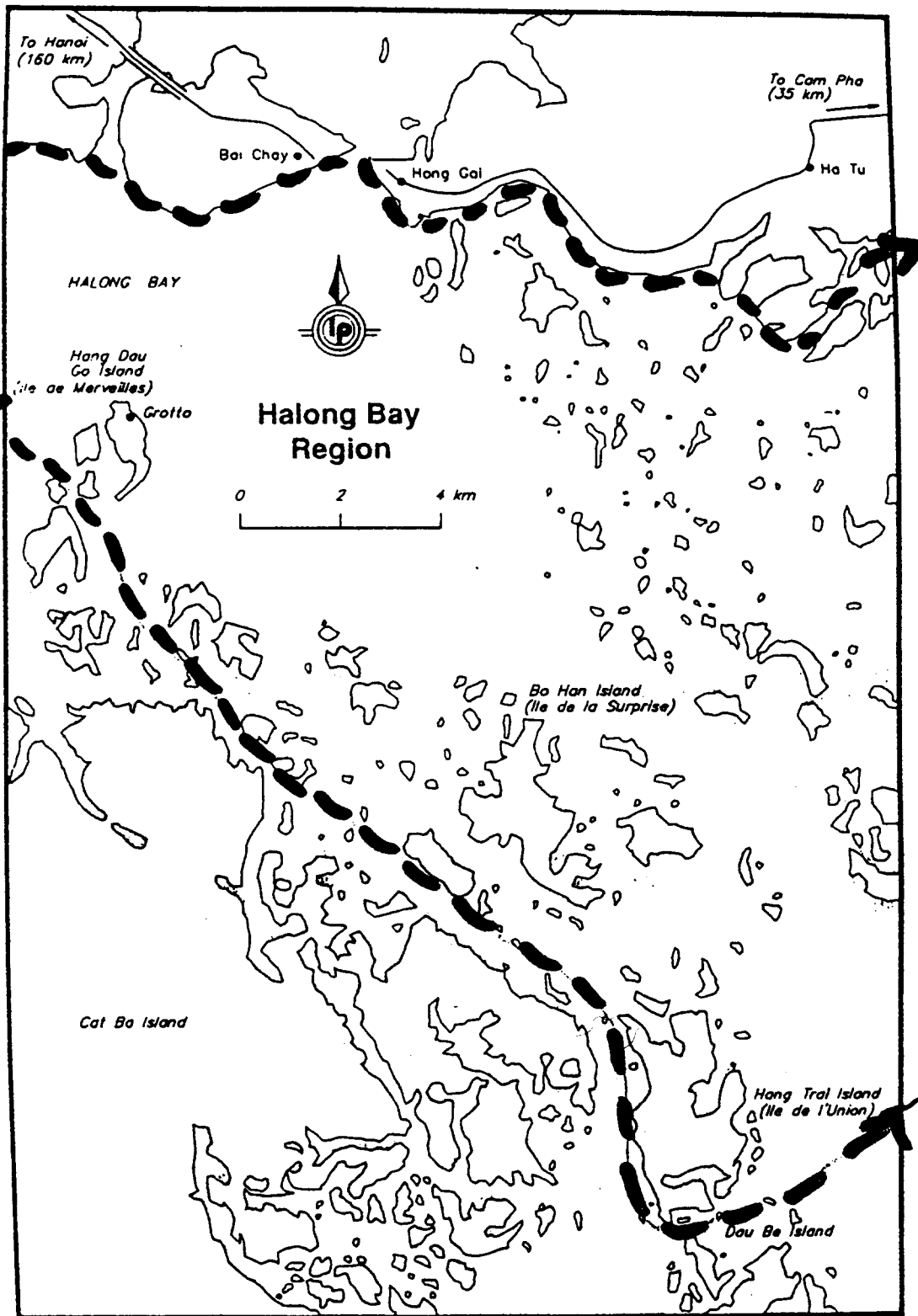
The Ha Long Bay area nomination, as presented by the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam provides the following justification for designation as a World Heritage property, although the precise criteria are not specified.

### Natural property

- (ii) **Outstanding examples representing significant ongoing geological processes, and biological evolution.** Ha Long's spectacular combination of seascape and islands is the direct result of orogenic processes. The area is biologically rich, especially in marine species.

### Cultural property

**Criterion not specified.** Ha Long Bay area contains numerous sites of archaeological interest, indicating occupation from as long ago as 10,000 years. Ha Long was a significant trading area in prehistoric times.



# WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

## 671: HA-LONG (VIET NAM)

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### 1. DOCUMENTATION

- i) IUCN/WCMC Data Sheet (1 reference)
- ii) Additional Literature Consulted: Cheung, C., 1992. Report on a Visit to the Coasts of Vietnam. WWF, 27 p. and maps.
- iii) Consultations: 9 external reviewers, Vietnamese Government officials.
- iv) Field Visit: March/April 1993. Jim Thorsell.

### 2. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

Several similar sites with limestone outcropping can be found in south-east Asia. The closest rival in terms of scenic appeal and protection is in Thailand's Phang Nga Bay near Krabi. Other examples are found at El Nido in Palawan and in North Korea but these are smaller and unprotected. The limestone pillars of Guilin in China are not in a marine setting, nor are those at Wulingyuan (inscribed in 1992). The unusual seascape of Ha-Long Bay is certainly the most extensive in size and contains the greatest number of islands. If the adjacent islands within the Cat Ba National Park are included it would also have the distinction of being the only place where an endemic monkey, the white-headed langur, can be found.

### 3. INTEGRITY

Because of their precipitous nature, most of the islands in Ha-Long Bay are uninhabited and unaffected by man. The exception are several of the flat "earth islands" which are settled. The main threats are primarily focussed on the marine environment and include the heavy siltation which has smothered many of the Bay's corals. Pollution from the industrial developments along the coast, especially around Hon Gay harbour, which is a major transshipment point for coal, is another threat. Overfishing is reflected in fishery statistics which have shown a 50% drop in production over the past 5 years.

With one million tourists visiting the area every year there will certainly be impacts from this type of use but no documentation is available on the subject. IUCN has prepared a project proposal to address the tourism issue that has been sent to the Vietnamese authorities for their consideration.

The final questions relating to integrity are the legislative basis for protection and the lack of field management. An english version of the law and the regulations for the Bay has been requested but is still not available. Indications are, however, that Ministry of Culture legislation may not provide adequate measures and that it could be reinforced with under the Council of Ministers Decision 194/CT which provides for protection of coastal areas (Ministry of Forestry). It was also observed that the local authorities have no presence in the area, no boats to access the site, no detailed resource inventories and no management plan.

#### **4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

The boundaries as presented in the nomination need some adjustment to better encompass the features of World Heritage quality. a 4-5 km buffer zone away from the industrial activities along the coast should be excluded from the nomination. Added to the site should be the islets adjacent to Cat Ba Island which form part of the National Park but are found in the adjacent province of Haiphong. The terrestrial part of Cat Ba should not be included as it has been too modified. The modified site boundary would be triangular (approximately 30 km on each side) and would approximately encompass the islands between Hang Ban Go to Dan Cong Dong to Ho Ba Ham. The adjusted limits of the site would need some form of legal designation, the boundaries would need to be marked and a management plan for the area prepared.

#### **5. EVALUATION**

The limestone pillars in the sea at Ha-Long Bay are a unique natural feature of great scenic beauty and biological interest. Their proper protection and inscription on the World Heritage List under natural criterion (iii) are clearly merited. The following actions, however, need to be taken in order to insure a more coherent nomination with strengthened integrity:

- assessment of the adequacy of the legal basis; and
- adjustments in the boundary delimitation as noted above.

After this it will be necessary to urgently address the issues relating to tourism, to prepare a management plan and institute management activities in the site.

#### **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Bureau should defer a decision but encourage the Vietnamese authorities to consider the above prerequisites for an acceptable nomination.



**COUNTRY** Viet Nam

**NAME** Ha Long Bay

**IUCN MANAGEMENT CATEGORY** VIII (Multiple Use Area)

**BIOGEOGRAPHICAL PROVINCE** 4.10.04 (Thailandian Monsoon Forest)

**GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION** A group of offshore islands, some 164km south-east of Hanoi, in Tonkin Gulf. 106°58'-107°22'E, 20°45'-20°56'N

**DATE AND HISTORY OF ESTABLISHMENT** 28 April 1962. Established as a historical and cultural relict and national scenic spot under Decision No. 313/VH VP, issued by the Minister of Culture.

**AREA** 150,000ha

**LAND TENURE** Government

**ALTITUDE** Sea level to 100-200m

**PHYSICAL FEATURES** Ha Long is a large bay with a multitude of limestone rocks emerging from the Hon Gai sea, schistic islands from the Cam Pha sea and a limited number of earth islands formed from decayed lateritic mountains. In total, there are 1,600 islands and islets, of which 1,000 have been named. Larger islands, rising to 100-200m, are found in the south, with smaller islets of only 5-10m height interspersed. To the east of the Bay medium size islands feature almost vertical slopes. Numerous caves and grottoes are found, with stalactites and stalagmites. The earth islands are inhabited.

**CLIMATE** No specific information available.

**VEGETATION** There is a diverse flora throughout Ha Long, and primary tropical forest is found, mostly on the islands of Ba Mun and Cat Ba.

**FAUNA** Results from preliminary surveys indicate the presence of about 1,000 fish species. Mammals, reptiles and birds are found on the islands, especially the earth type.

**CULTURAL HERITAGE** Numerous archaeological sites have been found and at Giap Khau (Hon Gai) there is evidence to suggest occupation by the Hoa Binh Culture, some 10,000 years ago present. Archaeological sites at Tuan Chau, Ngoc Vung, Cai Dam, Dong Naim and Cat have revealed so many artifacts that they have been grouped under the term 'Ha Long Culture', typical of the northeastern coast of Viet Nam in the Neolithic Age. During prehistoric times, Ha Long was a significant port, located on the trade routes between China, Japan, and other countries in South East Asia.

**LOCAL HUMAN POPULATION** An unspecified population makes its living in and around Ha Long, which is a major centre for fishing, agriculture and maritime transport. Steps have been taken to open new ports, factories and housing on the shore in line with a long term economic development programme.

**VISITORS AND VISITOR FACILITIES** Ha Long is extremely popular with both Vietnamese and international tourists. During 1990-1991, some one million visitors came to the Bay.

**SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND FACILITIES** No information

**CONSERVATION VALUE** The principal conservation values appear to be scenic, landscape values; geological interest; biological diversity, especially in marine species; and archaeological remains.

**CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT** The Ministry of Culture, Information and Sports is responsible for the overall management of Ha Long, although the People's Committee of Quang Ninh Province has the immediate responsibility for the administration and management of territory within its jurisdiction. Despite development in the region, it appears that Ha Long itself will be protected as a major tourist and cultural centre.

**MANAGEMENT CONSTRAINTS** No information

**STAFF** No information

**BUDGET** The national government provides a budget to the provincial People's Committee; more specific data are not available.

**LOCAL ADDRESSES** Ministry of Culture, Information and Sport, 51-53 Ngo Quyen Street, Hanoi

**REFERENCES**

Anon. (1992). Nomination form of Ha Long - Vietnam. Minister of Culture, Information and Sports. 6 pp. Unpublished.