

James Island (Gambia)

No 761 rev

1. BASIC DATA

State Party: The Gambia

Name of property: James Island and Related Sites

Location: James Island, Albreda, Juffureh, and San Domingo, are located in the Lower Niimi District, North Bank Division. Fort Bullen is located in the Upper Niimi District, North Bank Division. The Six-gun Battery is part of Banjul Municipality.

Date received: 3 October 1995; 31 January 2002.

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 serial nomination consisting of a series of *sites*.

Brief description:

James Island and Related Sites present a testimony to the main periods and facets of the Afro-European encounter along the River Gambia, a continuum that stretched from pre-colonial and pre-slavery times to the period of independence. The site is particularly significant for its relation to the beginning and the abolition of the slave trade, as well as documenting the functions of the early access route to the inland of Africa.

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

The nominated property consists of seven separate sites: the whole of *James Island*, the remains of a *Portuguese Chapel* and of a colonial *warehouse* in the village of Albreda, *The Maurel Frères Building* in the village of Juffureh, the remains of a small Portuguese settlement of *San Domingo*, as well as *Fort Bullen* and the *Six-gun Battery*, which are located in three different districts in The Gambia. Fort Bullen and the Battery are at the mouth of the Gambia River, while James Island and the other sites are some 30 km upstream. Albreda, Juffureh, and San Domingo are contained within a large buffer zone, which stretches 12 km along the coastline of the Gambia River, extending ca 500 m inland from the high-water line.

James Island is a small island (0.3 ha) in the Gambia River. Its location in the middle of the river made it a strategic place to control the waterway. The original structures comprise: the fort itself, the slave house, the governor's kitchen, the blacksmith shop, and a store. All of these are in ruins. The fort is situated in the middle of this low island, and is vulnerable to flooding by the tidal waters. It is roughly square in plan, with polygonal bastions at the four corners, chamfered at their apexes to reduce the overall spread of the building and to avoid

having to build on the shore below high-water mark. There were formerly curtain walls between the north and east bastions rising to the same height; a large stone cistern for collecting rainwater was built up against the outside face of the curtain wall. Traces of ancillary fortifications and service buildings survive at each end of the island, and on the southern shore.

Albreda, a Mandingo village on north bank of the river. Its wharf allows for visitors to cross to James Island. The village is in the middle of agricultural land, with rice fields, fruits and vegetables, as well as woods of mangrove and other trees. The village itself is part of the buffer zone, but it contains two buildings that are proposed for the inscription:

The Chapel, built by the Portuguese in the late 15th century, is in ruins, but more than 50% of its walls are still standing, including the full back elevation. The walls are built of sand and lateritic stones laid in a lime mortar. Just beside the chapel (30m on the west) is a free standing wall, which is contemporaneous with the church.

CFAO Building (Compagnie Française d'Afrique Occidentale), at the water's edge near the wharf, is a two-storey building with an adjacent single storey warehouse. The building is documented on the site in 1847. The ground floor, accessible through an open, arcaded veranda, served as a shop and store for goods. The top floor was used as a residence for agents of the trading company.

Juffureh, a typical Mandingo village, consists of traditional buildings, family compounds surrounded by woven fences, and small public open spaces. Today it is a 'pilgrimage' destination, having been identified by Alex Haley (the author of: *Roots*, 1975) as the village of his ancestors. One colonial building in the village is proposed for inscription:

The Maurel Frères Building was constructed around 1840 by the British and was later used as a warehouse by a Lebanese trader named Maurel. In 1996 it was transformed into a small museum on the Atlantic Slave Trade in the Senegambia.

San Domingo stands 1 km east of Albreda. It was a colonial settlement first established by the Portuguese in the late 15th century. It used to contain gardens, a church, a cemetery, and a well; today only ruins of a small house remain, built in lateritic stone and lime mortar. Close by there are remains of the former English settlement of Jillifree, apart from the ruins of a two-storey stone house. The sites of two or three further houses are marked by piles of stones and the cemetery is covered by undergrowth.

Six-Gun Battery was completed in 1821 in Bathurst (founded in 1816, now Banjul) on Saint Mary Island. The Battery consists of six 24-pounder guns, installed on rails, and protected by a large parapet made of stone and lime mortar.

Fort Bullen is at the end of Barra point, opposite to the city of Banjul, on the north bank of the river at the point where it meets the ocean. The fort is protected from the sea by a defensive wall made of stone and boulders. Around the fort, on the east and north sides, is a vast piece of open land, currently defined as buffer zone. A few large old trees provide shade here. The site is close to the Banjul-Barra ferry landing. The fort buildings include the *Old Rest*

House built in mud, residence of the Travelling Commissioner of the colonial administration at the beginning of the century.

History

The area of the Gambia River has long been inhabited, testified eg by the evidence of ancient stone circles and burial mounds (*mbaranar*) known in the empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai. The territory was under the rule of the Kingdom of Kaabu, an offshoot of the Mali Empire (ca. 1200-1867), and the Jollof Kingdom (ca 1300-1500). Kaabu played an important role in Atlantic-oriented trade before Europeans arrived, being in contact with the Phoenicians and Carthaginians, as well as the Arabs (from 1000 CE). The Portuguese reached the Senegambia between 1446 and 1456, when searching for the sea route to India. In 1482, they built the fort *São Jorge da Mina* (Elmina) on the Gold Coast (now Ghana). In the 16th century, English ships ventured into the Gambia region, and by the end of the century also the Dutch arrived here. Slaves became another trading item, especially in the 18th century, until slavery was abolished in Great Britain and the United States, in 1807, and in French colonies in 1848.

Using the Gambia River to access the interior, the coastal areas became the main frontier of acculturation. Kaabu maintained its traditional religion, barring the road to Islam until the 19th century. The Portuguese established contact with the indigenous population, the Niuminkas, beginning a period of trade and cross-cultural relations which, over the next five hundred years, substantially changed the face of The Gambia. Being one of the best navigable rivers in Africa, the River Gambia also had a specific advantage in reaching a vast hinterland. James Island and the associated settlements contain the surviving physical evidence of the principal European trading settlements from the 15th to 19th century, and of the European-African encounter.

James Island was used as a resting ground for fishermen long before the arrival of the Europeans. Its hereditary rulers were and still are Niuminkas, from whom it was acquired by a company of the Duke of Courland (now Latvia) who started building the first fort in 1651. It was taken over by the British, who named it James Island, after Duke of York. The fort was destroyed and rebuilt several times, when it changed hands between the British, French, Dutch, and also pirates and mutineers. By 1815, James Island was abandoned and has since remained in ruins.

San Domingo, east of the village of Juffureh, is the earliest Portuguese settlement in the area. It provided fresh water for James Island, and it was here that the European traders met their African counterparts. Albreda, probably another Portuguese settlement, was rented to French traders in 1681. It became the location of the French comptoir in The Gambia. Albreda and San Domingo served as the main trading outlets of the Kingdom of Niumi, and were the westernmost terminus of the long-distance trade routes from the interior. At the demand of the English, the site was abandoned by the French in 1857, but they came back, seen in the remains of two French trading company buildings, Maurel Frères and CFAO. Juffureh, is the village of the Mandingo trading counterparts and the location from where the British traded as business companies and ruled the area.

The Six-Gun Battery (1816) and Fort Bullen (1826), located on both sides of the mouth of the River Gambia, were built with the specific intent of thwarting the slave trade once it had become illegal in the British Empire after the passing of the Abolition Act in 1807. The sites were abandoned in 1870. During the Second World War, Fort Bullen was re-used as an observatory and artillery base by the British army as a means to protect against a possible attack from the French who controlled Senegal. After World War II, the fort was again abandoned.

Management regime

Legal provision:

All the nominated sites are property of the State.

James Island, Fort Bullen, as well as all significant historic buildings in San Domingo, Juffureh and Albreda are legally protected as National Monuments (1995), and vested in the custody of the National Council for Arts and Culture who controls it and is responsible for its conservation. The Six-gun battery is presently the subject of National Monument proclamation. The President's Office, the major stakeholder has supported proclamation, which is now awaiting gazetting at the Attorney General's Chambers. Once proclaimed National Monument, the site will come under the purview of the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC). It will be taken care of by the President's Office, on whose grounds it is situated.

As national monuments and historic sites, under the Legal Notice N°20 of 1995, the proposed sites are legally protected under the *National Council for Arts and Culture Act of 1989*.

Management structure:

The 1989 Act empowers the National Council for Arts and Culture to control the protected area, delegated to the Museums and Monuments Division of this Council.

The sites are subject to a 5-year management plan, which is the result of the joined effort of national and local organisations, supported by the Africa 2009 programme of UNESCO-ICCROM-CRATerre-EAG.

The sites are visited as part of the 'Roots package' organized by tourism agencies. Visitors include Africans in the Diaspora who come visit their ancestral homes. The sites are also used by school groups and researchers as historical evidence. Local fishermen use the island for resting during their fishing expeditions. The area is known as fertile fishing grounds.

Resources:

The revenue generated from this group of sites mainly comes from entry fees. The total annual revenue realised from the Albreda-Juffureh complex including James Island ranges between 17,000 US \$ and 20,000 US \$ (1999 and 2000 figures). But it is noteworthy that these figures are very much dependent on the vagaries of the tourist season, which is at present witnessing a downward trend.

There is one NCAC personnel attached to James Island, who serves as Caretaker, Attendant and Revenue Collector; Albreda-Juffureh has one caretaker, one museum attendant and a semi-permanent staff member for the guesthouse.

Bullen has two caretakers and one attendant for visitors. The Gun Battery (in Banjul) is taken care of by the President's Office. The caretakers work under the direct supervision of the Principal Cultural Officer who assigns him tasks after each inspection visit, which happens on average once in every two months.

Justification by the State Party (summary)

James Island and Related Sites are the most important ensemble of historic structures found in The Gambia and is of significance at both the regional and global level. Together, these sites illustrate all the main periods and facets of the Afro-European encounter along the River Gambia, a continuum that stretched from pre-slavery times to the independence period. The site is significant for its relation to the slave trade and its abolition, to the beginning of the colonial era in Africa, and to the Second World War and beyond.

Criterion iv: James Island and Related Sites are an outstanding illustration of the phases of the Afro-European encounter from the 15th Century up through the colonial era in Africa. The site shows many layers and facets of this long and turbulent history.

Criterion vi: James Island and Related Sites are directly and tangibly associated with the Atlantic slave trade, a chapter in the history of mankind that cannot be underestimated for its negative effects on Africa and many other parts of the world. As one of the largest points of transshipment of slaves in the region, the physical remains within this site embody the intangible values connected with this destructive period.

3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

Actions by ICOMOS

The nomination was first presented as '*James Island and the Albreda/Juffureh/San Domingo Historic Zone*' in 1995. An ICOMOS expert mission visited the site in February 1996. ICOMOS then recommended that further consideration of this nomination be deferred to await the outcome of a comparative study of pre-colonial and early colonial trading settlements in West Africa. A comparative study has now been accomplished, and the State Party has reformulated the nomination taking into account the comments. A second ICOMOS expert mission visited the site in July 2002.

Conservation

Conservation history:

The forts were abandoned in the 19th century, and have since remained in ruins. The villages have been inhabited and maintained in traditional manner, while the remains of the early European settlement buildings are ruined. An exception is the Maurel Frères building, which was rehabilitated as museum in 1996. The sites have been protected as national monuments since 1995. Within the Africa 2009 programme, CRATerre has organized on-site training in 1997, involving maintenance work of the ruins.

State of conservation:

All historic structures on the James Island are in a ruined state. The ruins have been stabilised, and protected by a capping. Due to the low land of the island, some structures are at times beaten by the waves during high tide and storms.

The villages of Albreda and Juffureh are well kept by the inhabitants in the traditional manner, though the roofs are gradually replaced from thatch to corrugated iron. Relatively few buildings are built in cement. The remaining walls of the ruined CFAO Building are poor and susceptible to erosion. The Maurel Frères building is in a good state of conservation, since it has been fully restored in 1996. The Portuguese chapel and San Domingo are in a state of ruins, but the ruins have been stabilised and the most endangered parts reinforced in July 2000.

The Six-Gun Battery is in a good state of conservation. Fort Bullen is in a relatively good state of conservation, though the wall that defends it from the seaside is continuously beaten by the waves, and parts of it have collapsed. Twenty metres of the damaged wall were rebuilt in July 2000, and it is foreseen to gradually rebuild the rest of the collapsed part. The State Party mentions as a specific problem the possibility of the extension of a mosque close to the Six-Gun Battery.

Management:

The nominated properties have a minimum management structure, including at least one trained caretaker per site, and the works are organized on the basis of an overall management plan. The financial resources required for the maintenance and conservation are relatively scarce, and come mainly from the entrance fees.

Risk analysis:

The ruins are subject to gradual erosion due to natural decay processes, flooding, the heavy tropical rains (growth of plants, mosses, trees, etc.). Strong winds and salty environment encourage mortar decay. The structure at San Domingo is threatened by the growing of huge trees. On the other hand, the traditional context is obviously fragile and easily subject to change.

Authenticity and integrity

The fort of James Island, a military stronghold, has been subject to various destructions, last at the end of the 18th century, and has remained in ruins ever since. Fort Bullen and the Six-Gun station were abandoned in the late 19th century, apart from short reuse during the Second World War. The settlements have retained their traditional character and materials, with relatively few interventions in cement, though the thatched roofs are gradually being changed into corrugated metal. The nominated structures can be seen as part of the traditionally evolving landscape, which has maintained its overall visual and structural integrity.

Comparative evaluation

The Portuguese arrived in Senegal and the Gambia in the 1450s, after first stopping in Arguin, now in Mauritania (a World Heritage site inscribed under natural criteria). In Arguin, they built their first trading post before moving into sub-Saharan Africa. Being the closest to Europe, Senegal and the Gambia were mapped by 1462, and one of the first European settlements was constructed on the banks of the Gambia River at San Domingo by that time. Currently there are very few remains from this settlement, but it predates the establishment of the trading posts, forts and castles of Ghana by 15 to 20 years.

In the Gambia, the Portuguese, found existing villages such as Juffureh and Albrede. Not finding commodities such as gold and spices further north in Senegal, the traders located themselves along the River Gambia, which became one of the first exchange zones between Europe and Africa. In addition to gold and spices, the Europeans sought ivory, wax, hides, ebony, coffee, indigo, cloth, beads, and eventually slaves. For these items, the Europeans gave salt, iron, brandy and other European goods.

The development of James Island differed greatly from the forts, castles, and trading posts found after rounding the coast of western Africa, in Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, and Ghana in that the main focus of the James Island site was the control of the hinterland and its riches rather than control of the coast and the trade that passed along it. This led to the placing of the fort some 30 km inland from the mouth of the river, rather than right along the coast. The importance of the river and its control can even be seen in the very shape of the Gambia itself, a long and thin strip of land surrounded on all sides by Senegal except at the sea.

James Island fort, along with Gorée Island in Senegal, were two of the principle places for trans-shipments of slaves to both Europe and America. Although no accurate numbers exist for the numbers of people that became human cargo at James Island, it was, and remains in the minds of the African Diaspora, one of the most important places of memory from this difficult period of history. Furthermore, the Six-Gun Battery and Fort Bullen were constructed with the express intent of thwarting the slave trade once it had become illegal. The dual significance of this site makes it unique within West Africa in relation to the slave trade.

The Afro-European encounter had various facets, as documented in the Island of Gorée, the Ghana Forts and Castles (both inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion vi), as well as James Island and Related Sites. These sites, along with others in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Benin, etc., together serve to tell the story of the exchange between the different continents.

Outstanding universal value

General statement:

James Island and Related Sites form an exceptional testimony to the different facets and phases of the African-European encounter, from the 15th to the 19th centuries. The River Gambia was particularly important forming the first trade route to the inland of Africa. The site was already a contact point with Arabs and Phoenicians before the arrival of the Portuguese in the 15th century. The region forms a cultural landscape, where the nominated historic elements are retained in their cultural and natural context.

The nominated properties illustrate all the main periods and facets of the various stages of the African-European encounter from its earliest moments in the 15th Century through the independence period. The specific location of James Island and its Related Sites, at the mouth of the Gambia River, is a tangible reminder of the story of the development of the Gambia River as one of the most important waterways for trade of all kinds from the interior to the Coast and beyond. The specific, important role of the site in the slave trade, both in its propagation and its conclusion, makes James Island and its Related Sites an outstanding memory of this important, although painful, period of human history.

Evaluation of criteria:

Criterion iii: refers to the nominated property as it presents a series of elements (forts, trading facilities, villages, cultivated fields, places of memory and the River Gambia itself), which help the reading and interpretation of a historic landscape strongly associated with the Afro-European encounter. The significance of the ruined structures is in providing an exceptional testimony to a 'chapter' in the history of humanity from the 15th century to its conclusion in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Criterion iv: refers to a type of architecture or type of site, which illustrates a significant creative response to specific needs in society. In the case of James Island, the question is less of types of structures or a type of site. Rather, the significance of the site is in the way the identified elements give sense to a cultural landscape. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to apply the criterion iii than criterion iv.

Criterion vi: refers to the nominated region of the River Gambia as being directly and tangibly associated with the European exploration of the African coast and the inland. The site is also exceptional in documenting the beginning and the end of the slave trade, and has retained its memory related to the African Diaspora. The nominated property complements and enriches the previously inscribed properties of Gorée Island and the Ghana forts; therefore also the use of criterion vi would be consistent.

4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for the future

It is recommended that the management of the site take into consideration the aspects of the cultural landscape of which they are a part.

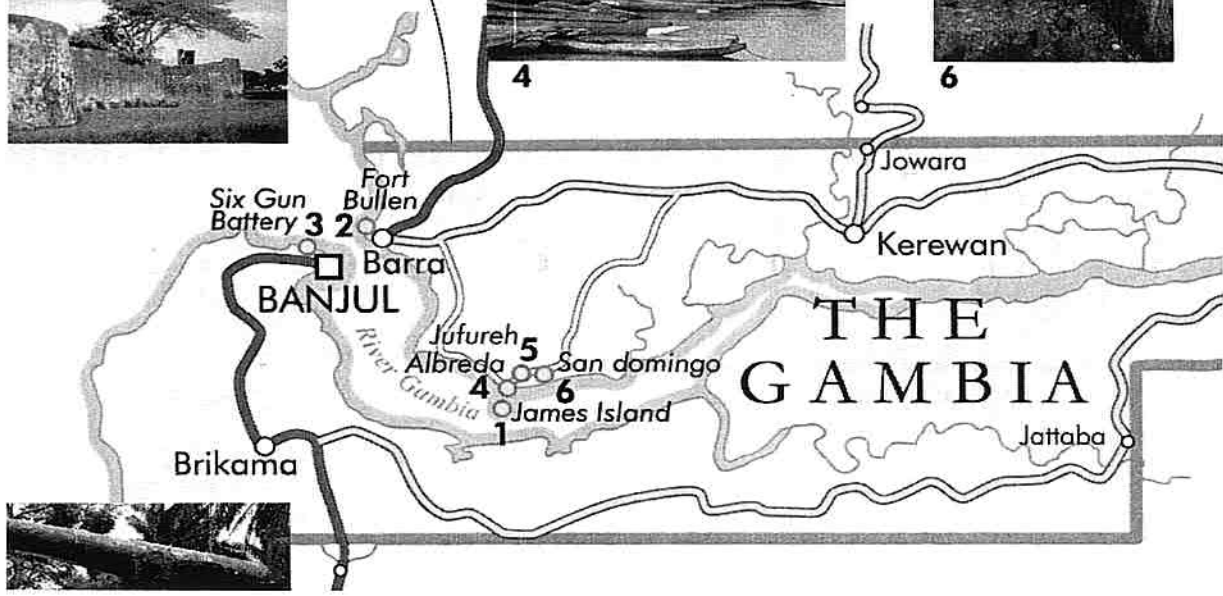
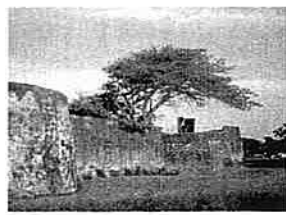
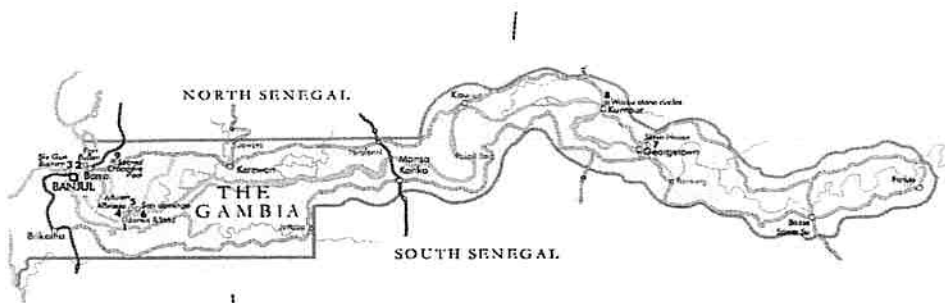
Recommendation with respect to inscription

That the nominated property be inscribed on the basis of ***criteria iii*** and ***vi***.

Criterion iii: James Island and related sites on the River Gambia provide an exceptional testimony to the different facets of the African-European encounter, from the 15th to 20th centuries. The river formed the first trade route to the inland of Africa, being also related with the slave trade.

Criterion vi: James Island and related sites, the villages and the batteries, were directly and tangibly associated with the beginning and the conclusion of the slave trade, retaining its memory related to the African Diaspora.

ICOMOS, March 2003



Map showing the location of the sites
 Plan indiquant la localisation des biens