
Trang An (Viet Nam)

No 1438 Bis

1 Basic data

State Party

Viet Nam

Name of property

Trang An Landscape Complex

Location

Ninh Binh Province, North Viet Nam

Inscription

2014

Brief description

Situated near the southern margin of the Red River Delta, the Trang An Landscape Complex is a spectacular landscape of limestone karst peaks permeated with valleys, many of them partly submerged and surrounded by steep, almost vertical cliffs. Exploration of caves at different altitudes has revealed archaeological traces of human activity over a continuous period of more than 30,000 years. They illustrate the occupation of these mountains by seasonal hunter-gatherers and how they adapted to major climatic and environmental changes, especially the repeated inundation of the landscape by the sea after the last ice age. The story of human occupation continues through the Neolithic and Bronze Ages to the historical era. Hoa Lu, the ancient capital of Viet Nam, was strategically established here in the 10th and 11th centuries AD. The property also contains temples, pagodas, paddy-fields and small villages.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

11 March 2016

2 Issues raised

Background

The property was inscribed in 2014 under criteria (v), (vii) and (viii), although both ICOMOS and IUCN recommended it for deferral due to the inadequate boundary of the property, in relation to the proposed justification for inscription, and the legal protection and management problems with its buffer zone. At the time of the evaluation, ICOMOS noted that the proposed boundaries did "not relate in a meaningful way to the archaeological record so far uncovered in nine caves" in that the nominated property also included the "remains of Hoa Lu and the scenic landscape of rice paddies which are not relevant in a nomination for a series of archaeological sites that relate to habitation by communities in the late Pleistocene to the Early – Middle Holocene periods." ICOMOS found that the

stronger potential from a cultural perspective for this property to be nominated as a mixed site was related to the value of the archaeological record and the material present in some caves which are mainly concentrated in the forested limestone pinnacles in the west of the property. On the other hand, Hoa Lu and the scenic landscape do not contribute to the justification for nominating the property.

Upon inscribing the property, the World Heritage Committee made several recommendations including to modify the boundary of the property to better reflect the areas and attributes of Outstanding Universal Value and to ensure an appropriate surrounding buffer zone.

The State Party has therefore prepared a proposal for a minor modification of the boundary which is the object of the present evaluation.

Modification

The minor boundary modification concerns only the nominated property and does not affect the perimeter of the buffer zone, although its size is slightly reduced by the modest expansion of the property area.

The State Party holds that the guiding principles for the modification of the boundaries of the property aim to include the following:

- Archaeological sites which are vital to understand pre-historic human occupation and adaptation to the changing environment;
- Areas containing superlative features bearing natural beauty or aesthetic significance;
- A sufficient expanse of geological landscape and landforms to illustrate the final stages of geomorphic evolution of tower karst in a tropical humid environment.

According to the above mentioned principles, the boundaries of the property have been modified to include:

- Dinh mountain in the north – western sector of the property, being the natural setting of an ancient pagoda and complementing Hoa Lu Ancient Capital;
- A mountainous area to the south of the property;
- An area with isolated karst towers emerging from the corrosion plain to the north east of the property so as to complete the illustration of the final stage of karst phenomena;
- Slight reduction of the property in the north, to exclude a quarrying area, around Tam Coc wharf, to exclude urban development, and at Bich – Dong, to exclude an hotel.

ICOMOS notes that in principle these types of changes should be agreed upon during the evaluation process, before inscription, in that a request for a modification of the boundaries at the time of inscription is not in line with the Operational Guidelines.

ICOMOS also notes that the principles guiding the revision of the boundary are adequate to respond to the World Heritage Committee's recommendations as well as ICOMOS' concerns.

The modifications proposed and the explanation provided for the slight enlargement of the boundary of the property in different areas relate to the natural values and, secondly, the need to strengthen the integrity of the property by excluding areas where incompatible development has occurred.

In ICOMOS' view, the cultural values and attributes related to Dinh Mountain do not represent cultural attributes that are relevant to justifying the Outstanding Universal Value of Trang An in bearing significant evidence of human occupation and adaptation to climatic changes from the Pleistocene to the Middle – Holocene periods.

Other modifications to the boundaries are explained as addressing either the inclusion of natural attributes or the exclusion of less integer areas.

The property was inscribed as a mixed site, therefore the proposed minor modifications to the boundary of the property need to be assessed considering how they also contribute to an improved reflection of the natural dimension of the Outstanding Universal Value. This assessment remains IUCN's responsibility but, for a mixed property, the harmonisation of an evaluation between ICOMOS and IUCN in principle may prove beneficial for the future protection and management of the property.

Finally, ICOMOS observes that the recommendation of the World Heritage Committee which requested the State Party to "ensure an appropriate surrounding buffer zone" for the property has not been addressed by the present minor boundary modification request, which only concerns the modification of the boundary of the inscribed property.

ICOMOS considers that this request also needs to be addressed by the State Party, and that an effective preparatory phase for this step would be the improvement of the management system and of the Management Plan, currently under finalisation and therefore allowing the opportunity to accommodate the revision of the buffer zone within the action plan.

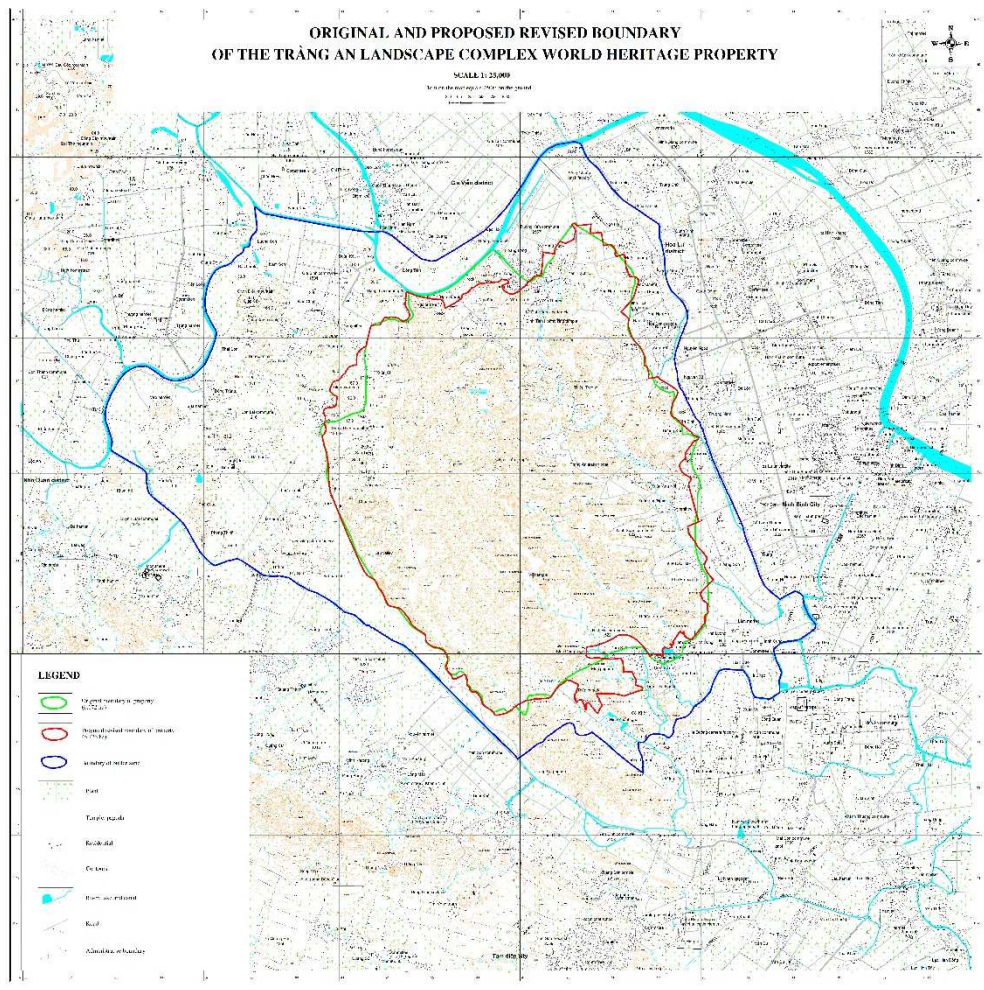
3 ICOMOS Recommendations

Recommendation with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the proposed minor modification to the boundary of Trang An Landscape Complex, Viet Nam, be **approved**.

Additional recommendations

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party finalises the Management Plan and strengthens the management system.



Map showing the revised boundaries of the property