

# IRELAND

## Skellig Michael

### Brief description

This monastic complex, perched since about the 7th century on the steep sides of the rocky island of Skellig Michael, some 12 km off the coast of south-west Ireland, illustrates the very Spartan existence of the first Irish Christians. Since the extreme remoteness of Skellig Michael has until recently discouraged visitors, the site is exceptionally well preserved.

### 1. Introduction

**Year(s) of Inscription** 1996

#### Agency responsible for site management

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### 2. Statement of Significance

**Inscription Criteria** C (iii) (iv)

#### Statement of Significance

The Monastery and Hermitage on Skellig Michael represent a “unique artistic achievement” and are an “exceptional testimony to a civilization which has disappeared”. They are an outstanding example of a perfectly preserved Early Christian settlement and the architectural ensemble is unique because of its level of preservation “illustrating a significant stage in history”.

During the course of conservation and repair works, it has been possible to examine the structures in detail and it has been possible to work out a relative chronology for the cells. A clear evolution of dry-stone masonry techniques is evident so this site offers a unique documentation of the development of this type of architecture and construction.

It is the most spectacularly situated of all the Early Christian island monastic sites, particularly the isolated hermitage perched on narrow man-made terraces just below the South Peak.

#### As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

The extreme remoteness of Skellig Michael, where the monastic settlement may have begun in the 7th century (earlier than the Hebridean and Northern Isles sites), has allowed an exceptional state of preservation and, until recently, hardly any visitors. Until about 1950, there were even no reliable ground-plans and archaeological drawings. Within the whole corpus of such monuments, Skellig Michael must be claimed among the earliest, certainly the best presented, and the most impressive of monastic settlements on Atlantic islets.

Recommendation: that this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria iii and iv:

Skellig Michael is an outstanding, and in many respects unique, example of an early religious settlement deliberately sited on a pyramidal rock in the ocean, preserved because of a remarkable environment. It illustrates, as no other site can, the extremes of a Christian monasticism characterizing much of North Africa, the Near East, and Europe.

#### Committee Decision

Bureau (June 1996): the Bureau recommended the Committee to inscribe the nominated property on the basis of criteria (iii) and (iv) considering that the site is of outstanding universal value being an exceptional, and in many respects unique example of an early religious settlement deliberately sited on a pyramidal rock in the ocean, preserved because of a remarkable environment. It illustrates, as no other site can, the extremes of a Christian monasticism characterizing much of North Africa, the Near East and Europe.

Session (1996): the Committee decided to inscribe the nominated property on the basis of cultural criteria (iii) and (iv) considering that the site is of outstanding universal value being an exceptional, and in many respects unique example of an early religious settlement deliberately sited on a pyramidal rock in the ocean, preserved because of a remarkable environment. It illustrates, as no other site can, the extremes of a Christian monasticism characterizing much of North Africa, the Near East and Europe.

- Statement of significance adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site
- No change required

**Boundaries and Buffer Zone**

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: adequate

**Status of Authenticity/Integrity**

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

**3. Protection****Legislative and Administrative Arrangements**

- The site is protected under the Ireland's National Monuments legislation
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

## Actions taken/proposed:

- Need to tackle occasional out of season visitors
- Action taken on a national level
- Timeframe: not provided

**4. Management****Use of site/property**

- Unpaid visitor attraction (The site is only accessible about 4 and a half months of the year)

**Management/Administrative Body**

- Steering group set up in 1995. It is an informal steering group to guide the management of the site
- No site manager but none needed
- Management by the State Party; management under protective legislation; consensual management
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

## Actions proposed:

- Need to tackle occasional out of season visits (authorities responsible for this activity: Office of Public Works)

**5. Management Plan**

- Management plan is being implemented
- Implementation commenced: January 1995
- Management plan is currently being revised. Revision is expected to be completed in 2006
- The Plan was prepared by an inter-disciplinary in-house group. It addresses the need to tackle occasional out of season visitors

- Title: not provided
- Very effective
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness:

Office of Public Works  
National Monuments Section  
e-mail: martin.luby@opw.ie

**6. Financial Resources****Financial situation**

- All funding for the site come from Government sources
- No funding drawn in through World Heritage Fund
- Sufficient

**7. Staffing Levels**

- Number of staff: not provided
- Access to specialist stone conservation and engineering conservation

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Very good: conservation, management, promotion
- Good: interpretation; education; visitor management
- Staff resources are adequate

**8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques**

- Access to internationally recognised conservation courses. Training for craftsmen in-house and on courses as required
- No training needs
- No training on site management
- No mention is made in the report of other sources of expertise and training in conservation and management techniques

**9. Visitor Management**

- Visitor statistics: 10,044 in 2004
- Visitor facilities: there are no facilities for visitors on the island. They are monitored by full-time guides who direct them and offer interpretation
- Visitor facilities are adequate given the location of the site off the S.W. coast

- There is a tourism/visitor management plan for the site: numbers visiting the site are strictly limited each day. On the island visitors are controlled by guides who offer interpretation. They manage numbers through the site and control access

### 10. Scientific Studies

- There is an agreed research framework/strategy for the site
- Risk assessment, monitoring exercises, condition surveys, archaeological surveys, visitor management
- Studies used for the monitoring management of the site

### 11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- No signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem not used on publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local communities, businesses, local authorities
- There is an education strategy for the site through guide interpretation
- Access to the site is by guided tours
- No website available but information on site is available on both [www.opw.ie](http://www.opw.ie) and [www.viron.ie](http://www.viron.ie). (The Office of Public Works and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government manage the websites).
- No local participation

### 12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

#### Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

#### Conservation interventions

- Ongoing excavation, structural repair and conservation have been on going since 1995. Information of such works was published in the British journal *Antiquity* (Vol. 76 No. 292 June 2002). Many multi-volume publications planned.
- Present state of conservation: very good

#### Threats and Risks to site

- No threats or problems identified

### 13. Monitoring

- Formal monitoring programme
- Structures are constantly monitored by staff. Guides monitor visitors and report problems

### 14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, management, protection
- Strengths of management: major structural consolidation of site, focused archaeological excavation and subsequent conservation works
- No weaknesses identified