
Ḥimā Cultural Area (Saudi Arabia) No 1619bis

1 Basic information

State Party

Saudi Arabia

Name of property

Ḥimā Cultural Area

Location

Ḥimā Area
Najrān Region
Saudi Arabia

Inscription

2021

Brief description

Located in an arid, mountainous area of southwest Saudi Arabia, on one of the Arabian Peninsula's ancient caravan routes, Ḥimā Cultural Area contains a substantial collection of rock art images depicting hunting, fauna, flora and lifestyles in a cultural continuity of 7,000 years. Travellers and armies camping on the site left a wealth of rock inscriptions and petroglyphs through the ages and until the late 20th century, most of which are preserved in pristine condition. Inscriptions are in different scripts, including Musnad, South-Arabian, Thamudic, Greek and Arabic. The property and its buffer zone are also rich in unexcavated archaeological resources in the form of cairns, stone structures, interments, stone tool scatters and ancient wells. This location is at the oldest known toll station on an important ancient desert caravan route, where the wells of Bi'r Ḥimā date back at least 3,000 years and still produce fresh water.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

13 March 2024

2 Issues raised

Background

The property was inscribed in the World Heritage List in 2021 on the basis of criterion (iii) (Decision 44 COM 8B.11), and the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value was adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 2023 (Decision 45 COM 8B.76). This is a serial property of six component parts, enclosed by a single buffer zone. At the time of the inscription, the World Heritage Committee recommended that the State Party consider extending the

property in the future, based on further archaeological research.

During the evaluation of this property, ICOMOS considered that it was difficult to evaluate the adequacy of the boundaries and delineation of the buffer zone due to a lack of documentation of sites within the buffer zone and wider area. Accordingly, the World Heritage Committee had recommended further inventorying be conducted following inscription of the property.

In addition, during the evaluation procedure, ICOMOS and the State Party discussed the possibility of extending the buffer zone to include Jabal al-Kawbab and part of Jabal al-Qāra. The State Party agreed to this proposal, indicating that it could be achieved following a detailed documentation process.

Progress in relation to these and other recommendations was reported by the State Party to the 45th session of the World Heritage Committee (Riyadh, 2023). The World Heritage Committee welcomed the progress made and noted the State Party's intention to submit a proposal for a minor boundary modification to expand the buffer zone (Decision 45 COM 7B.147). It was also recommended that the State Party consider extending the boundaries of the property, depending on new information arising from new archaeological surveys and inventorying.

Modification

The proposed minor boundary modification directly addresses the recommendation by ICOMOS to extend the buffer zone to include Jabal al-Kawbab and part of Jabal al-Qāra, increasing the overall size of the buffer zone from 31,757.83 ha to 77,255.34 ha.

ICOMOS considers that the proposed minor boundary modification to the buffer zone is a significant improvement and should be welcomed. The extended buffer zone includes Jabal al-Kawbab, a large area of Jabal al-Qāra containing a substantial percentage of the known rock engraving sites in the area, and an additional area to the west of the Ḥimā Wells component part. Smaller adjustments to the buffer zone are proposed to the south and southeast of the property.

ICOMOS notes that the entire area (including the proposed extensions to the buffer zone) is a Registered Archaeological Site and is protected through the Saudi Law of Antiquities, Museums and Urban Heritage Royal Decree No. 9/M of 01/11/2014. In addition, the State Party advises that it intends to proclaim the entire area (inscribed property and buffer zone) as an Archaeological Park, ensuring a high degree of protection.

The policies in the management plan will apply to the extended areas, including zoning within the buffer zone to ensure protection of the most sensitive areas. The policies in place for the buffer zone will strictly limit infrastructure and tourism developments and provide for local planning guidelines for the Ḥimā Township.

ICOMOS considers that, taken together, these proposed changes will provide significant additional support to the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value of the inscribed property.

The proposal does not include any changes to the boundaries of the inscribed component parts because the State Party considers this to be premature in relation to the continuing archaeological surveys and related studies. ICOMOS considers that this is consistent with the World Heritage Committee's recommendation in Decision 45 COM 7B.147.

3 Recommendations

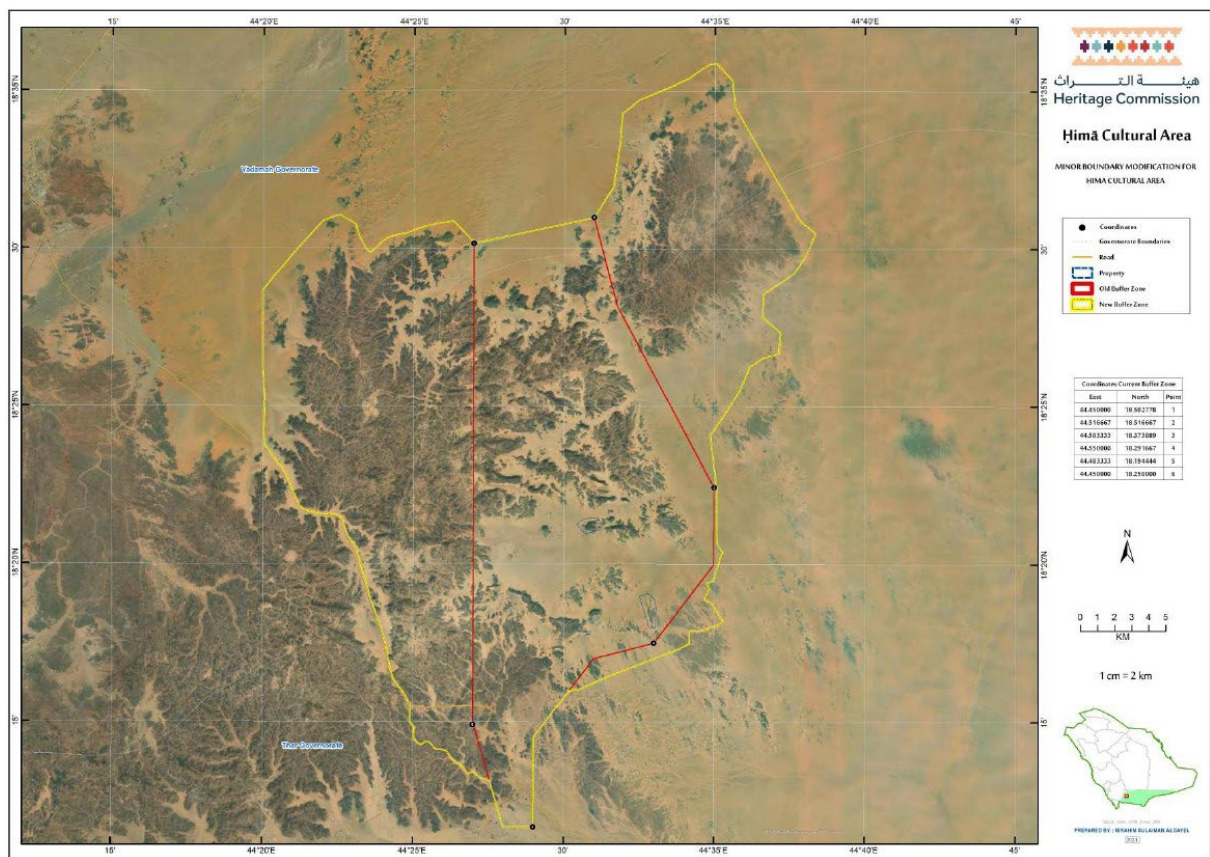
Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the proposed minor modification to the buffer zone of Ḥimā Cultural Area, Saudi Arabia, be **approved**.

Additional recommendations

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- a) Implementing the proposal to declare the entire area (inscribed property and buffer zone) as an Archaeological Park,
- b) Considering the need of minor modifications to the boundaries of component parts through a minor boundary modification request based on continuing archaeological survey and inventorying.



Map showing the revised boundaries of the buffer zone (February 2024)