

# **Skellig Michael Implementation Group Annual Progress Report 2011**

## **Background**

### **The Skellig Michael Management Plan:**

The Skellig Michael World Heritage Site Management Plan 2008-2018 has been developed to protect and preserve Skellig Michael World Heritage Site (WHS), also known as Great Skellig. The Plan was published on 9 July 2008 and addresses cultural and natural heritage issues in an integrated manner. The Management Plan provides a framework for the proactive management of the site, helping to ensure that its Outstanding Universal Value is sustained and preserved for future generations. The permanent protection of Skellig Michael's heritage is of the highest importance to the international community as a whole. The Plan was produced by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) - (the Heritage function of the Department was transferred to the new Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht with effect from 1 June 2011), in conjunction with the Office of Public Works (OPW) and was developed in consultation with local interest groups, non-governmental organisations and other interested parties.

### **Site Ownership and Management:**

Skellig Michael, with the exception of the lower lighthouse and helipad areas, is owned by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht on behalf of the Irish people. The Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) is the State body responsible under the World Heritage Convention for policy development relating to the built and natural heritage of the site. The OPW is responsible for the management of the site. It is a recommendation of the Operational Guidelines issued by the World Heritage Committee that all State Parties have adequate management frameworks, a documented management system and appropriate legislation in place to protect the World Heritage status of inscribed sites.

### **Skellig Michael Implementation Group (SMIG)**

The SMIG is representative of the Government agencies with responsibilities in relation to management issues on Skellig Michael, namely:-

- The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) which is resourced by; the National Monuments Service, National Monuments (Archaeology), National Parks & Wildlife Service, Built Heritage and Architectural Policy Section and
- The Office of Public Works (OPW) provides Visitor Services & National Monuments (Conservation Architecture) and Management support.

The SMIG is responsible for the oversight of the implementation of the actions set out in the Skellig Michael Management Plan and the recommendations of the Report on the UNESCO Mission to Skellig Michael in 2007.

During 2011 the Skellig Michael Implementation Group met on three occasions:-

The following items were on the agenda for discussion on 11 February 2011;

- Sign-off on minutes of SMIG meeting of 15 November 2010
- Sign-off on SMIG Annual Progress Report 2010
- Resources to record works on Skellig Michael as advised by the Expert Academic Advisory Group (EAAG)
- Update on the progress of the excavations and stratigraphic reports
- Update on Conservation Plan for Skellig Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Update on the Safety Report – visitor safety leaflets –signage – toilet facilities
- Finalise preparations for the Skellig Conference on 19 April 2011

The agenda for 12 July 2011 consisted of the following items;

- Sign-off on minutes of SMIG meeting of 11 February 2011
- Progress Report on the Action Plan Programme 2008-2018 – Update
- World Heritage Committee Decision 34 COM 7B.89 – progress on the requirements for the follow-up report
- Liaison with the boatmen and other stakeholders
- World Heritage Website Update

The agenda for 18 October 2011 consisted of the following items;

- Sign-off on minutes of SMIG meeting of 12 July 2011
- Progress Report on the Action Plan Programme 2008-2018 – Update
- World Heritage Committee Decision 34 COM 7B.89 – progress on the requirements for the follow-up report/Draft response
- EAAG – Interim Advice / Terms of Reference
- World Heritage Website Update

### **Achievements for 2011**

A number of the actions set out in the Skellig Michael Management Plan have been successfully progressed in 2011 as follows:-

#### **Skellig Michael Management Plan-Action 5**

DoEHLG (SMIG) hosted a seminar, entitled “Skellig Michael-Investigation, Discovery, Presentation”, in the Coach House, Dublin Castle on 19 April 2011. It was chaired by Dr Michael Ryan and Professor Loughlin Kealy with in excess of 100 attendees. The programme for the day consisted of the following speakers and presentations;

**Geology – setting the scene** (Michael O’Sullivan)  
**Historical Evidence-Early History** (Teresa Bolger),  
**Regensburger Schottenlegende** (Diarmuid Ó Riain),  
**Medieval documentary evidence and Folklore** (Jenny White Marshall)  
**Accessing the monastery – the steps** (Grellan D. Rourke)  
**Evolution of the monastery** (Grellan D. Rourke and Edward Bourke)  
**Monastic way of life** (excavated evidence) (Ann Lynch)  
**The human remains** (Linda Lynch)  
**The South Peak – changed perceptions** (Grellan D. Rourke and Alan Hayden)  
**The South Peak – geology** (Michael O’Sullivan)  
**Conservation – principles and issues** (Grellan D. Rourke)  
**The Lighthouse Period- Research methodologies** (Grellan D. Rourke),  
**Engineering issues** (Jack O’Leary) and  
**Wildlife implications** (Steve Newton)

Radio Kerry hosted a two hour programme on the Skelligs on Saturday 12 February 2011 and Newstalk 106-108FM hosted a one hour debate on Sunday 13 February 2011. On 12 October 2011 Grellan Rourke delivered a lecture on the works on Skellig Michael at the Crawford Gallery Cork to the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society.

### **Action 6**

No meetings took place in 2011 between the OPW and the boatmen. Legal Advisors have been appointed by both the boatmen and the OPW to assist in dealing with certain matters which remain unresolved.

### **Skellig Michael Management Plan - Actions 7-11**

#### **Works**

This was the worst season in living memory in terms of weather and access to the island and it was impossible to access the island in May with work on the island only commencing in late June.

#### **Preliminary works**

The pier was cleaned down in advance of any work taking place on the island. There had been some damage from winter storms. As in the previous year and following the recommendations on the Safety Review, the steep areas above the lighthouse road were inspected by the safety consultants to check for possible rock falls. The roadway was also cleared of debris, which had fallen onto it since the close of the previous season. The drains and gullies were cleared and the huts repaired as required and made habitable again. Repairs were undertaken to the solar panels and associated wiring.

#### **Maintenance**

The annual maintenance programme was carried out. Maintenance was carried out on The East and North Steps were cleared of sea campion growth and minor repairs were undertaken to ensure their continued structural preservation. General maintenance was

carried out also within the Monastery and the Lower Lighthouse Road. In order to undertake the maintenance works on the South Peak it was necessary to set up safety ropes throughout. These works were undertaken in August. The continued maintenance of the South Steps [visitor's access] was undertaken as required. These steps become loose with the passage of visitors and these are inspected and repaired on a very regular basis.

Due to the very inclement weather throughout the season it was not possible to get the materials out to the island for the part replacement of the canopy at Cross Cove. This work was consequently deferred until next season.

The stored building materials and equipment stored near the Monastery was sorted and bagged prior to its removal from the site by helicopter in January.

### **Lower Lighthouse Road**

The main focus of the works in 2011 was the continuation of work to the Lower Lighthouse Road retaining wall and the excavation and repair of the Lighthouse Platform situated just above the start of the climb to the Monastery

The work to the retaining wall at Cross Cove continued. It was only possible to undertake this work late in the season due to the nesting seabirds. The exposed face on the west side was scaffolded and repaired at the end of the season. The internal face will be completed in 2012.

The lower section of retaining wall had been pointed with a very heavy cement mortar and, as a consequence, no seabirds nest within so it was possible to begin work along this section of walling at the start of the season. The wall, for a length of approx. 50m was scaffolded on the exterior and the cement mortar removed from both the internal and external faces. Due to the hard nature of the material it was not possible to undertake this work for long periods at a time with a result that this work was alternated with other work. Once the cement was removed, the wall was pointed using a hydraulic lime mortar.

### **Upper Lighthouse Road**

This project is still in the initial planning stages. A copy of the LiDAR survey had been provided to the structural engineer for use as the framework for a detailed survey of the upper road, which is in a serious condition. It was not possible to do any further work here due to the adverse weather conditions in 2011.

### **The Lighthouse Platform**

The main structural work undertaken was to the Lighthouse Platform, situated about 100 steps above the Lower Lighthouse Road. This platform had been in a state of collapse for many years and it had been supported from below to make it safe.

Initial excavation revealed evidence for two walls of a previously unknown building. The walls were plastered internally and there was evidence of roof slates, mortar, window glass and brick fragment also found. It is thought to have been an early lighthouse

structure. A set of 3 stone steps were also discovered which linked the platform to the South Steps. There was no evidence for pre-lighthouse structures. The terrace had been originally quarried to provide building stone.

The dangerous nature of the site was clearly demonstrated by the discovery that one large boulder had fallen and partially crushed one of the side walls of the platform.

It was necessary to undertake conservation work as the excavation works continued. The front retaining wall was very dangerous and the deformed western part had to be dismantled under archaeological supervision. It was necessary to undertake some urgent remedial structural support before the rebuilding of this section of walling could continue. Continual bad weather slowed down the pace of the work considerably. However, by the end of the season the structural intervention had been completed and most of the repair works undertaken. There is still some minor archaeological supervision and recording to take place in addition to final conservation and presentation works. These will be undertaken at the start of next season. At that stage the public will be allowed access to the platform.

Archaeological spoil had to be managed to facilitate the excavation and works. The material not required for the platform was taken down to the road below and used to raise the level of the roadway where it had eroded over the years.

### **Monastery**

The conservation of St. Michael's Church still remains to be done. Samples of mortar from both periods of the structure had been taken previously and a detailed analysis carried out. Locating suitable sands and aggregates from the mainland has proven very difficult and a conservator/geologist was employed to investigate where the original material might have come from. Suitable material was sourced on Beginish Island but by then the season had come to an end. Special permission will be required from the local authority to remove enough material from that source in order to undertake the work of re-pointing the building in 2012.

### **Recent Discoveries**

The steps discovered last season below the helipad and close to the entrance to Cross Cove were further examined but due to adverse weather conditions it was not possible to record them in 2011. An attempt will be made to do so next season.

### **Specialist Reports**

An abridged illustrated report on the Skellig lichens was completed and uploaded on the World Heritage website ([www.worldheritageireland.ie](http://www.worldheritageireland.ie)) in 2011.

A proposal to undertake a study of the storm petrels, based on discussions on site in 2011, was put together by Birdwatch Ireland and submitted towards the end of the season for consideration.

### **Damage**

Damage was reported at the base of the original South Steps just up from the sea; in this area they are of lighthouse construction. This damage was done out of season, probably sometime during the months leading up to the start of the season. A battery-powered drill had been used to try to prise out some of the bronze housings for uprights associated with railings, now long gone. Two of the housings had been successfully removed. Indiscriminate damage had been done to the steps themselves.

### **Waste Management**

As in previous years all waste is segregated and removed from the island on a weekly basis, weather permitting, where it is disposed of in a manner agreed with the Local Authority.

### **Archaeological Work**

The focus of work in 2011 was the production of the Archaeological Stratigraphic Report for excavations carried out in the monastery and on the South Peak in the period 1986-2010. Ann Lynch, Edward Bourke and Alan Hayden are the main authors with contributions by a number of specialists. This report details all excavations carried out up to 2010 and includes an account of the early history of Skellig Michael, dating evidence, an analysis of the artefacts, palaeoenvironmental analyses and interpretation of the faunal remains. Interim conclusions are presented in advance of more in-depth research which will accompany the final published report. The stratigraphic report will be placed on the Department's World Heritage website ([www.worldheritageireland.ie](http://www.worldheritageireland.ie)) by the end of January 2012 and a small number of hard copies will be printed for lodgement in the state archaeological archives.

A small-scale excavation also took place during the summer, directed by Martin Reid of the National Monuments Service, at a small constructed terrace known as 'the lighthouse platform'. This terrace is located adjacent to the south steps that lead up to the early medieval monastery. The works were carried out in advance of and in tandem with conservation works to preserve the walls of the terrace that had substantially collapsed in the 1980s and were now considered unsafe. The work uncovered evidence for two walls of a previously unknown building which based on the evidence of pottery, glass and other finds, represents the remains of a roofed structure erected by the lighthouse builders dating to the first half of the nineteenth-century. The building had been deliberately demolished and stone removed. This may have happened after a large boulder fell and partly crushed one of the side walls of the terrace. This boulder was never removed and the terrace appears to have been abandoned at this stage.

### **Skellig Michael Management Plan Action 12**

The SMIG has agreed to invite EAAG to continue with its work for a further 2 years on present terms of reference to include further support from EAAG. Letters of invitation issued to EAAG members.

### **Skellig Michael Management Plan Actions 13-19**

Works are ongoing on a draft conservation management plan for the Skelligs Special Protection Area (SPA). This plan will be available for public consultation in due course.

### **Skellig Michael Bird Census 2011**

A breeding seabird census was carried out on 1-2 July 2011

The table below gives breeding seabird count details:

<b>Species</b>	<b>Count</b>
Fulmar	590 apparently occupied nests (AOS)
Lesser black-backed gull	44 AOS 41 individuals
Herring gull	29 AOS + 10 individuals
Great black-backed gull	12 AOS
Kittiwake	408 AOS
Guillemot	1094 AOS
Razorbill	335 individuals
Puffin	Not counted

### **Skellig Michael Management Plan Action 20**

A lichen survey completed in 2009 and a report and survey uploaded onto the World Heritage website in 2011. Details of the lichens survey together with colour illustrations can be found on the World Heritage Ireland website [www.worldheritageireland.ie](http://www.worldheritageireland.ie).

### **Skellig Michael Management Plan - Action 30**

A consultant has been appointed to undertake a visitor carrying capacity survey of the island. Term of Reference and a proposed review framework have been agreed for the survey. It was intended to commence this survey during the 2011 visitor season but due to adverse weather conditions commencement of the survey was deferred until the 2012 visitor season.

### **Skellig Michael Management Plan Actions 32**

The visitor season, with guide services operated by the OPW, commenced on 11 Jun 2011 and the guide services ceased with the closing of the visitor season on 14 October 2011.

### **Skellig Michael Management Plan - Action 51**

An updated Safety Statement was completed in 2011 in advance of the visitor season.

### **Skellig Michael Management Plan - Action 52 and 56**

Signage outlining safety issues and the precautions necessary for visiting the island is now in place on departure piers and on the island. Chains have been installed at two locations on the island to assist access by visitors. Regular maintenance work is undertaken to assist with safety measures. In 2011 visitors were advised via visitor

leaflet, signage on the mainland and the website that no toilet facilities were available on the island, however, it is indicated following a review by the Site Management Team that such facilities are required on the island. A feasibility study on the provision of toilet facilities was commissioned by the OPW in 2008 and was considered in the context of the Safety Review of April 2010. A further feasibility report was prepared in January 2012 in the light of a possibility that a suitable location may be available with the next couple of years to accommodate toilets. The technical design, the management of waste, water supply and cleaning are issues which will be addressed by the Office of Public Works before a final decision is made on the new proposals.

#### **Skellig Michael Management Plan - Action 64**

A report on the research programme on geology and historic quarrying on South Peak has been commissioned.

#### **World Heritage Committee Decision WHC-10/34 COM 7B.89**

Work is ongoing on the preparation of a follow up report on the recommendations of the UNESCO Advisory Mission to the Skellig Michael World Heritage Site which took place in November 2007 (World Heritage Committee Decision ref. 32 COM 7B.96) and the subsequent Decision of the Committee WHC-10/34 COM 7B.89 at its meeting in Brasilia in 2010. The follow up report is required by the World Heritage Centre by 1 February 2012 for consideration by the World Heritage Committee at its meeting in St. Petersburg on 24 June – 6 July 2012.

#### **Work In Progress**

A number of actions are ongoing and will be the focus of the SMIG in 2012, including:-

- *ongoing operation of the Skellig Michael Site Management Team and the Expert Academic Advisory Group,*
- *preparation of a final archaeological report for publication,*
- *resolution of the boatmen permit system,*
- *improved liaison with local interest groups and other relevant parties,*
- *publication of the conservation plan for the Skelligs SPA,*
- *reviewing the guide operation on the island,*
- *increased understanding of and appreciation for Skellig Michael and its environs,*
- *continuing implementation of an integrated emergency rescue plan to maintain a high level of safety on the island,*
- *continuing implementation of the Safety Review recommendations,*
- *monitoring of those factors with the potential to impact on the built and natural environment of Skellig Michael,*
- *continued improvement of visitor management strategies,*
- *continued liaison with the Commissioners of Irish Light,*
- *Proposal for a 3 year IRCSET Funded PhD Student to study the European Storm Petrel.*