

UNITED KINGDOM

Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast

Brief description

The Giant's Causeway lies at the foot of the basalt cliffs along the sea coast on the edge of the Antrim plateau in Northern Ireland. It is made up of some 40,000 massive black basalt columns sticking out of the sea. The dramatic sight has inspired legends of giants striding over the sea to Scotland. Geological studies of these formations over the last 300 years have greatly contributed to the development of the earth sciences, and show that this striking landscape was caused by volcanic activity during the Tertiary, some 50–60 million years ago.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription 1986

Agency responsible for site management

- Mailing Address(es)
Environment and Heritage Service,
Department of the Environment, Northern
Ireland

Castle Street 35
BT1 1GU Belfast
Northern Ireland
United Kingdom

e-mail: ruth.blair@doeni.gov.uk
website: www.ehsni.gov.uk/natural/designated/WHS.shtml

2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria N (i) (iii)

Justification as provided by the State Party

In terms of its natural heritage, the Causeway Coast is of outstanding universal value and meets two of the criteria for an outstanding natural property:

- It is a prime example of the earth's evolutionary history during the Tertiary epoch.
- It contains rare and superlative natural phenomena.

The geological activity of the Tertiary era is clearly illustrated by the succession of lava flows and

interbasaltic beds which are in evidence on the Causeway Coast. Interpretation of the succession has allowed a detailed analysis of Tertiary events in the North Atlantic.

The extremely regular columnar jointing of the Theoleiitic basalts is a spectacular feature which is displayed in exemplary fashion at the Giant's Causeway. The Causeway itself is a unique formation and a superlative horizontal section through columnar basalt lavas. Its sea level location, where the dimensions and structure can be observed closely and where the tops of the columns form a pavement, makes it a truly exceptional feature.

The cliff exposures of columnar and massive basalt at the edge of the Antrim Plateau present a spectacle of exceptional natural beauty. The extent of visible rock sections and the quality of the exposed columns in the cliffs and on the Causeway combine to present an array of features of international significance.

Since it was first documented in 1693 the Causeway Coast has been the subject of much controversy concerning the origins and history of the earth. The site is a classic locality for the study of Tertiary basalts and has played a fundamental role in the historical development of geological interpretation. Its value for scientific research, which has made important contributions to petrogenesis over a period of nearly 300 years, marks it as a site of international significance in the history of earth science.

Cultural Property

In addition to its universal value as an exceptional natural property, the Causeway Coast is of outstanding cultural value in that it contains a nautical archaeological site associated with an event of international historical significance.

The site of the sinking of one of only four Galleass of the Spanish Armada, the Girona, has yielded a magnificent collection of artifacts and jewellery which have provided significant insights into the Armada and 16th century European history.

As provided in IUCN/ICOMOS evaluation

(IUCN): The Causeway Coast including the Giant's Causeway is a classic locality for the development of features associated with basaltic lava flows and their weathering. It is particularly noteworthy for its magnificent development of columnar structures in the basalt lavas, formed during the cooling of the flows; the clear development of weathered horizons, or ancient (reddened, iron-rich lateritic)

soils between some flows) the three dimensional form of individual flows, particularly the flow forming the Grand Causeway at and near sea level; the contrast between older olivine basalt flows and the later, thick quartz basalt or tholeiitic flows (which comprise the higher parts of the cliffs and the Grand Causeway), the varied suite of late-formed zeolite minerals that infill former gas cavities in the lava flows, the clear demonstration that late vertical dykes of basalt cut the basaltic lavas; and the spectacular marine erosion features associated with this varied geology. It thus meets criteria (i) and (iii) for natural properties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Giant's Causeway should be inscribed on the World Heritage List. The Committee should note recent improvements to the management of the property and endorse the proposal to elevate its legal status to a National Nature Reserve.

(ICOMOS): ICOMOS believes that the Giant's Causeway, though a natural site, is no less a part of mankind's cultural heritage. It meets criterion II of the guidelines for cultural properties, since it influenced considerably the development of the arts during the pre-Romantic and Romantic periods.

According to Celtic oral tradition the giant, Finn Mac Cool, built with its own hands this causeway in order to go from Ireland to Scotland. After 1760 this tradition stimulated wide interest in Europe thanks to the apocryphal works of Macpherson (*Ossian* in 1760, *Fingal* in 1761 and *Temora* in 1763). In this way the grandiose basalt formations of County Antrim in Ireland and Staffa Island in the Hebrides became part of system of literary references, which were later added pictorial elements (in 1801, in order to flatter the tastes of Napoleon Bonaparte, Girodet began an *Ossian* cycle at the Chateau of Malmaison) and musical ones (in 1830 Mendelssohn composed the *Fingal's Cave* symphonic poem).

If the Committee wants the Giant's Causeway to be included as a cultural property, it would be only logical to require that a complementary proposal be made. This would add the Great Causeway and Fingal's Cave on Staffa Island, since these two properties are indissociable from the legend.

Committee Decision

Bureau (1986): the Bureau recommended that the steps being taken by the Northern Ireland authorities to declare this property as a national nature reserve should be supported. The representative of the United Kingdom noted that the

recommendation of inscription of this site on the World Heritage List would help further this process.

Committee (1986): the Committee was informed by the observer from United Kingdom that this property was expected to be declared a National Nature Reserve within the next few weeks.

- Proposal for Statement of Significance has been made by State Party
- No change required to UNESCO's official description of the site

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: no buffer zone has been defined
- State Party states that a draft area plan has recently been released. If the section of the plan relating to the WHS remains unchanged then adequate protection for the site will be provided

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- Planning policies for the area are presented in the local area plan. Legislation relating with the NNR, SAC and ASSI designations also applies
- The protection arrangements are considered highly effective

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Rural landscape; free visitor attraction

Management /Administrative Body

- Steering group formally set up on 01 January 2004. Its aim is to prepare a management plan for the WHS: to coordinate the work of key landowners and stake holders to deliver management actions
- No site manager but one is needed
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: regional, local
- Management under protective legislation; consensual management
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

Actions proposed:

- Setting up of a management group: The steering group has been reformed into a management group to take forward the management plan. Timeframe: completed

5. Management Plan

- Management plan is being implemented
- Implementation commenced: April 2005
- Very effective
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Environment and Heritage Service, National Trust, Moyle District Council and Giant's Causeway Visitor Facilities Ltd

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- National Trust (an independent charity responsible for the management of the majority of the WHS and covering the costs for the upkeep of the site, supervision of visitors, provision of access and health and safety); Environment and Heritage Service, Department of the Environment. In the future by Giant's Causeway Visitor Facilities Ltd. Operating costs for the building and landscape that make up the World Heritage site are provided by many different stakeholders such as owners, regional and local authorities
- No funding drawn in through the World Heritage Fund
- insufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: 5

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

- Good: conservation, management, promotion, education, visitor management
- Average: interpretation
- The site also benefits from geological expertise
- Staff resources are inadequate: It would be beneficial to have a co-ordinator to assist in the delivery of the management plan
- Support from regular volunteers (National Trust)

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

- The National Trust run an educational facility next to the site
- No training on site management for stakeholders

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 466,000 visitors in 2003. Trend: stable
- Visitor facilities: Car parking, temporary visitor centre with a tourist information centre, audio visual exhibit, upper and lower paths, National Trust shop and other shops, café, hotel, toilets.
- Visitor facilities are inadequate
- Visitor needs: new visitor centre is planned
- There is no tourism/visitor management plan for the site

10. Scientific Studies

- There is no agreed research framework/strategy for the site
- Risk assessment; studies related to the value of the site; monitoring exercises; condition surveys; archaeological surveys
- Monitoring connected with ASSI, SAC designations
- Studies used for management of site: These studies fed into the preparation of the management plan

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- Not enough signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem not used on publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: local communities, local authorities. Inadequate: visitors, businesses
- There is no education strategy for the site
- No website available
- Local participation: local representative on steering group which drew up the management plan

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- World Heritage Bureau sessions: 26th (2002)
- World Heritage Committee sessions: 25th (2001); 27th (2003); 29th (2005)

- Actions taken following the reactive monitoring report: management plan prepared and Competition launched: management plan has been prepared and submitted to the Centre and IUCN. International competition has been launched to design new visitor facilities and interpretation

Conservation interventions

- Closure of part of the lower cliff path due to instability and erosion
- Present state of conservation: very good

Threats and Risks to site

- Development pressure, environmental pressure, natural disaster(s), visitor/tourism pressure, oil spillage at sea
- Specific issues: development pressure within the setting of the site
- Area plan developed: new area plan will consider the setting of the site and have planning policies to protect it. No timeframe provided

13. Monitoring

- No formal monitoring programme
- A section within the new management plan details all factors/features to be monitored

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, economic
- Strengths of management: improvement of visitor facilities, better interpretation, management plan completed and conservation standards maintained
- Weaknesses of management: lack of awareness and co-ordinator for site and lack of resources for implementation of management plan

Future actions:

- Proposal for a WHS Officer (no timeframe provided)