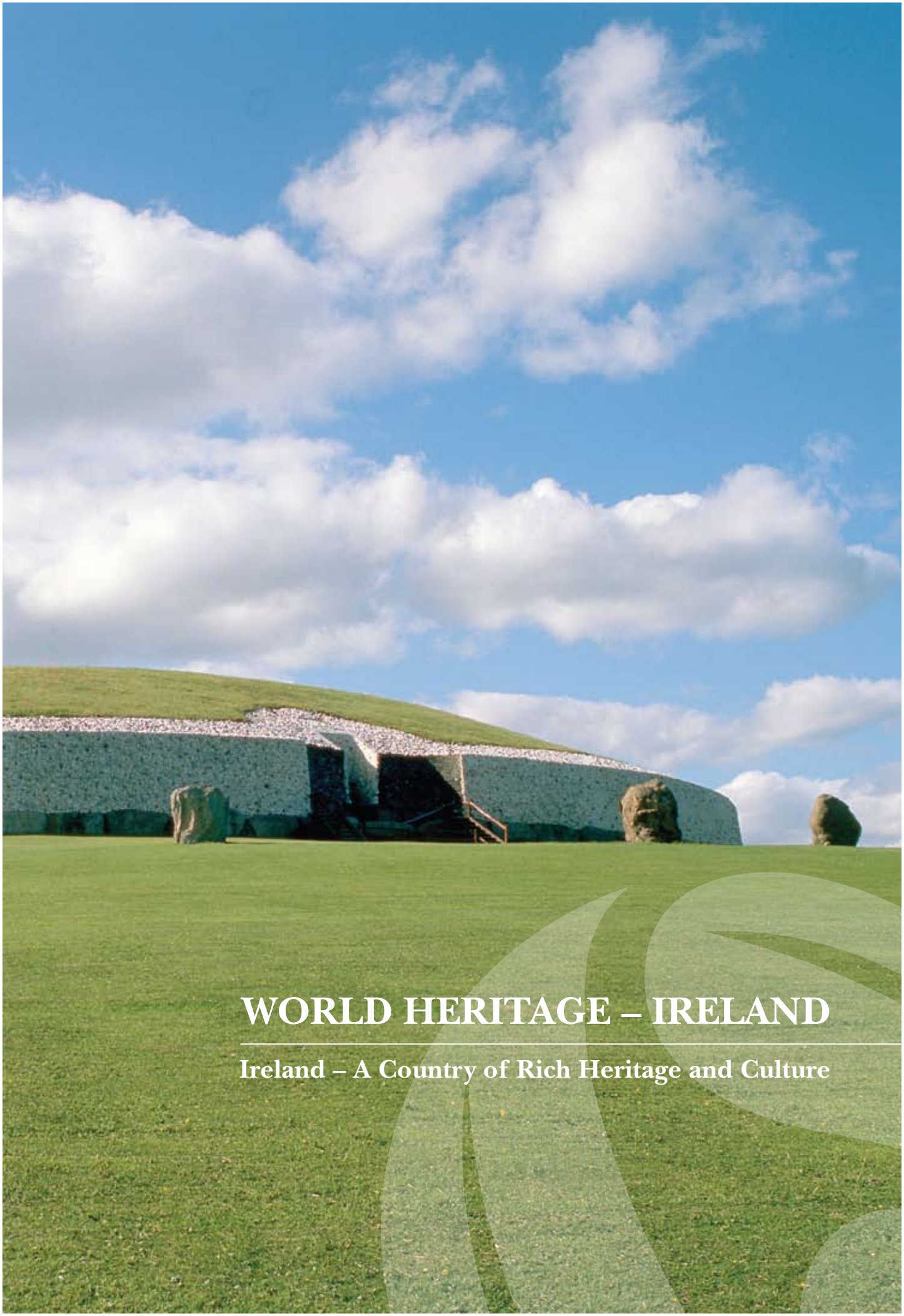

WORLD HERITAGE – IRELAND

Ireland – A Country of Rich Heritage and Culture

Front Cover photograph: *Brú na Bóinne, Newgrange, Co. Meath*
Back Cover photograph: *Skellig Michael*

Comhshaol, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Heritage and Local Government

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HERITAGE – WHAT IS IT?

Heritage is described by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as *"our legacy from the past, what we live with today and what we pass on to future generations".* Ireland is a country rich in heritage and culture and has long recognised the importance of preserving this for future generations. Our Irish culture and heritage has created the spirit and identity of our people throughout the world and makes us what we are today with our distinctive characteristics.

WORLD HERITAGE AND IRELAND

Ireland signed the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in 1991. This brings with it both opportunities and obligations; Ireland as the "State Party" commits to nominating examples of exceptional heritage sites to the World Heritage List and to manage and protect these sites sustainably into the future.

A **World Heritage Site** is a property that has been inscribed onto the World Heritage List by the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO. Properties can be either of cultural or natural significance or a combination of the two (mixed).

- **Cultural heritage** refers to monuments, groups of buildings and sites with historical, aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological or anthropological value.
- **Natural heritage** refers to outstanding physical, biological and geological formations, habitats of threatened species of animals and plants and areas with scientific, conservation or aesthetic value.

In order to be inscribed on the World Heritage List, the heritage property must be demonstrated to be of 'Outstanding Universal Value'. **"Outstanding Universal Value"** is defined *"as cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity"*. The concept of Outstanding Universal Value is assessed against criteria devised by the World Heritage Committee. In essence a nominated World Heritage Site must be accepted by the World Heritage Committee as the best example of an outstanding property of that type or theme from an international viewpoint.

At present there are three properties on the island of Ireland on the World Heritage List:

- Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast (inscribed in 1986)
- the Archaeological Ensemble of the Bend of the Boyne (inscribed in 1993)
- Skellig Michael (inscribed in 1996).

The inclusion of a property on the World Heritage List can bring great benefits to the local community as well as the country as a whole. It carries with it the possibility of increased cultural tourism and associated economic and social improvement. Together with the recognition of the global significance of a site, its inclusion on the World Heritage List carries with it a commitment on the part of the international community to contribute to its future protection.

HOW A PROPERTY IS NOMINATED TO THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Countries that have signed the World Heritage Convention can submit nomination proposals for properties within their jurisdiction to be included on the World Heritage List. The World Heritage Committee will only consider nominations in respect of properties which are on the State Party's **Tentative List**, which is an inventory of those properties which a country intends to consider for nomination to the World Heritage List. A country can only make a single nomination in any one year.

In addition, a property will only be inscribed on the World Heritage List if it:

- meets one or more of ten criteria (six cultural and four natural);
- has integrity and (in the case of cultural properties) authenticity;
- and is effectively protected and managed (normally through legal measures and a management plan).

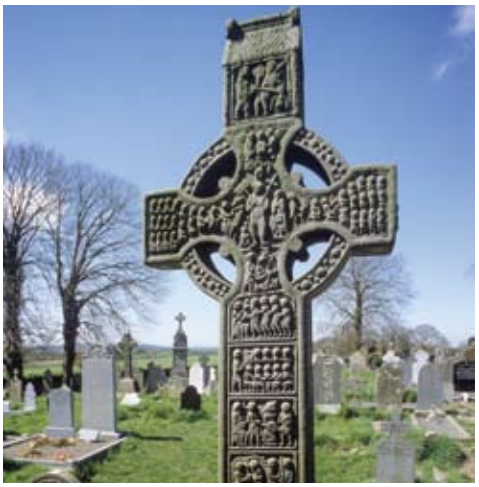
In order to ensure a successful bid to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, it is also imperative to have the support of the local community and other interested stakeholders.

The inscription process takes about a year and a half from the submission of the complete nomination document and management plan to consideration by the World Heritage Committee. Within this time, the Advisory Bodies to the Committee – ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) and IUCN (the International Union for Conservation of Nature) - will assess the nominated property to see if it meets the requirements for inscription on the World Heritage List and make their report to the Committee.

▼ *Hill of Tara-Rath na Rí*

Poulnabrone Dolmen ▼

Muireadach's Cross, Monasterboice ▼



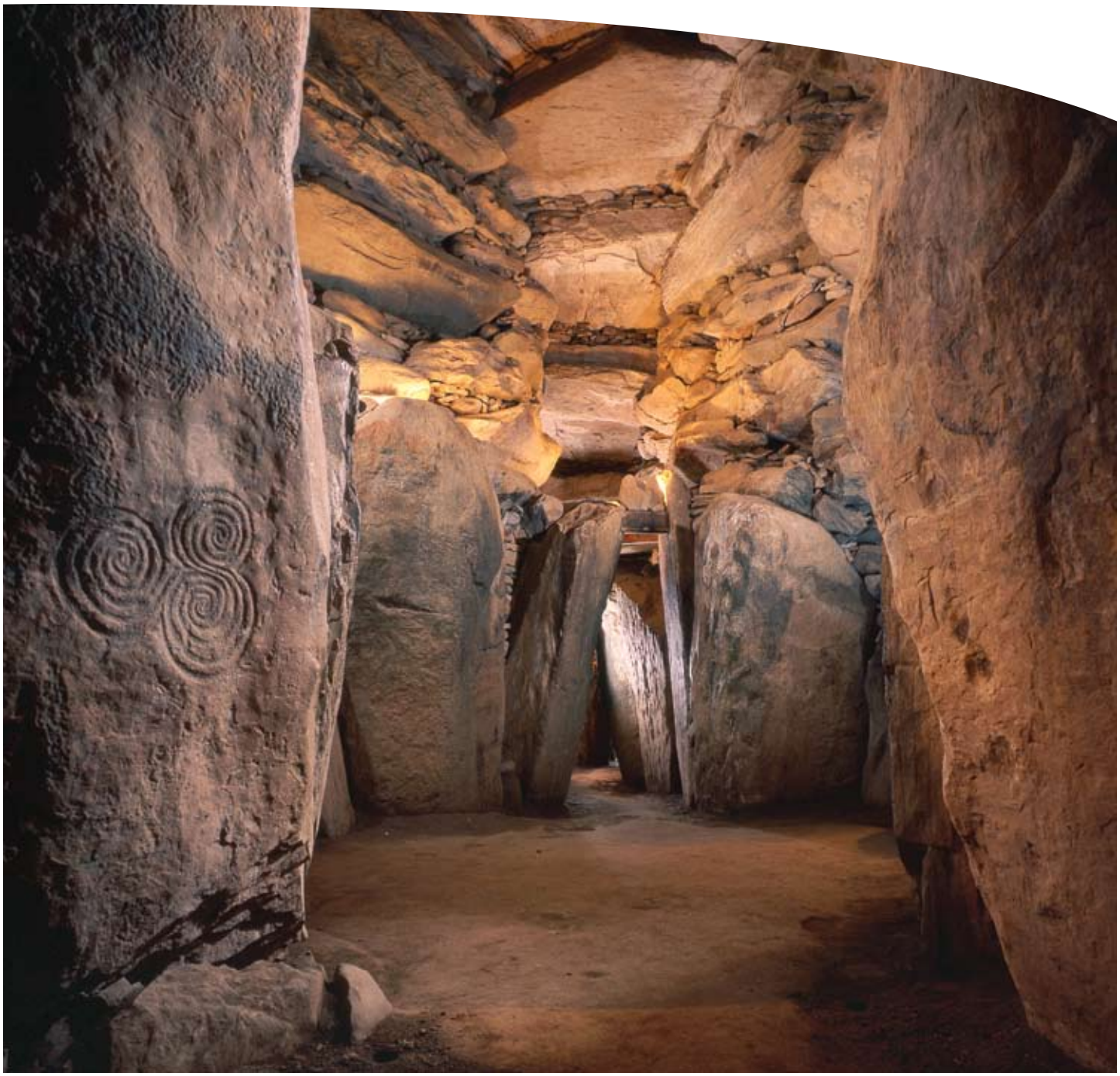
IRELAND'S WORLD HERITAGE SITES

Brú na Bóinne

(The Archaeological Ensemble of the Bend of the Boyne)

Brú na Bóinne is located between the towns of Slane and Drogheda where the River Boyne meanders into a dramatic loop. It is home to one of the world's most important archaeological landscapes, dominated by the spectacular prehistoric passage tombs of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth. In recognition of the global importance of these monuments and the many other archaeological features in the area, UNESCO designated this property a World Heritage Site in 1993.

▼ *Newgrange Chamber*



Knowth ▲

Knowth

The passage tomb complex at Knowth is at the western end of Brú na Bóinne. The great mound of this most spectacular site is outlined by one hundred and twenty seven massive kerbstones. Arranged around this are at least eighteen smaller or satellite tombs, at least two of which were built before the great mound. The site has the largest collection of megalithic art in Western Europe. It continued to be important in the Bronze Age and the Iron Age and occupation continued into Medieval times.

Newgrange

The best known Irish passage tomb is surrounded by a kerb of ninety seven stones, the most impressive of which is the highly decorated Entrance Stone, a masterpiece of megalithic art. The mound covers a single tomb consisting of a long passage and a cross-shaped chamber. There are the remains of two smaller tombs immediately to the west of the main tomb and at least one to the east.

Dowth

This is the least well known of the three great tombs of Brú na Bóinne. The mound is surrounded by a kerb of one hundred and fifteen stones and has two tombs facing westwards. The south tomb has a short passage and a circular chamber with a recess. The north tomb is cruciform in plan containing a large stone basin.

▼ *Boyne Valley, Newgrange*

Dowth Chamber ▼

▲ *Skellig Michael*

Skellig Michael

Skellig Michael, comprising a well preserved monastery and a remote hermitage located on a rock in the Atlantic, is the most spectacularly situated of all the early medieval Irish monastic sites. The island's isolation has helped preserve and protect the monastic remains, allowing the visitor to experience the remarkable achievements of the early monks. Skellig Michael is also an internationally renowned site for breeding seabirds with its steep rock slopes and cliffs providing nesting places for a variety of seabirds. It is this combination of cultural and natural history which imbues the island with a strong sense of beauty and spirituality. When inscribing the site on the World Heritage List in 1996 UNESCO described Skellig Michael as a unique example of early religious settlement which illustrates, as no other site can, the extremes of Christian monasticism. Skellig Michael is 11.6 km from the mainland and is accessible by boat between the months of May and September.

Climatic deterioration together with changes in the structure of the Irish Church signalled the end of the eremitical community on Skellig by the 13th century. The monks appear to have moved to the Augustinian Priory of Ballinskelligs on the mainland at about this time. The Prior of Ballinskelligs was referred to as the Prior of St. Michael's implying that the site still formed an important part of their monastery at that time.

In 1578, following the dissolution of the monasteries, the island passed to the Butler family although the site continued to be a place of pilgrimage into the 18th century. In the early 19th century the island was purchased by the predecessors of the Commissioners of Irish Lights in order to erect two lighthouses. They built the present east landing and a road along the south and west side of the island to facilitate the construction of the two lighthouses. In 1880 the Office of Public Works took the monastic remains into State guardianship and commenced the repair of collapsed structures. Since that time the OPW has continued to repair and conserve the monastic remains. In 1989 the State purchased the island from the Commissioners of Irish Lights, with the exception of the lower (working) lighthouse.

WORLD HERITAGE TENTATIVE LIST

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government acts on behalf of Ireland as a State Party to the World Heritage Convention. It is responsible for the submission of nomination documentation to UNESCO for inclusion of properties on the World Heritage List and for reporting to UNESCO on the state of conservation of our World Heritage properties.

In October 2008, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government set up an Expert Advisory Group to review Ireland's Tentative List of properties for future nomination to the World Heritage List. The review was undertaken during 2008 and 2009, when the Group considered which properties best met the criteria required for inscription on the World Heritage List. Following public consultation, assessment of proposals and consideration of submissions, the new Tentative List was approved by the Minister and submitted to UNESCO in March 2010. It replaces the previous list that was drawn up in 1992.

This new Tentative List appears in alphabetical order but does not reflect the order in which nominations for inscription will be progressed. The nomination of any property, from the new Tentative List, for inscription on the World Heritage List will only take place after consultation with the local community, relevant stakeholders and other interested parties. A property should be on the Tentative List of a State Party for, at least, a year before it can be nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List. (For details of properties on Ireland's Tentative List see Pages 10 & 11.)

Burren National Park ▼

▲ *Burren National Park*

The Burren

The Burren is located along the west coast of Ireland, encompassing the North of County Clare and the south east of County Galway. From the Gaelic Boireann meaning 'place of stone' – the Burren is defined by the presence of exposed limestone extending over an area of approx. 72,000ha. and is an excellent example of a glaciated karst landscape. The Burren is thought to have the most extensive cave systems in Europe, with over 90km of navigable caves. Ecologically it is very rich, containing over 70% of Ireland's native flora, including unusual combinations of Arctic, Alpine and Mediterranean species. The Burren contains over 2,700 recorded monuments and has been described as 'one vast memorial to bygone cultures'.

▲ *Céide Fields*

Céide Fields and North West Mayo Boglands

The Céide Fields and North West Mayo Boglands comprises a Neolithic landscape consisting of megalithic burial monuments, dwelling houses and enclosures within an integrated system of stone walls defining fields, which are spread over north Mayo. Many of the features are preserved intact beneath blanket peat. The significance of the site lies in the fact that it is the most extensive Stone Age monument in the world and the oldest enclosed landscape in Europe.

▲ *Clonmacnoise*

The Monastic City of Clonmacnoise and its Cultural Landscape

The Monastic City of Clonmacnoise is located on the river Shannon in County Offaly and bounded by Counties Roscommon and Westmeath. It is an outstanding example of a relict early medieval Insular monastic city unobscured by modern building development. It is set within a superlative semi-natural landscape that deepens its spiritual qualities, adding greatly to its authenticity and integrity.

▲ *Dublin Castle*

The Historic City of Dublin

In the Georgian period (1714 - 1830), Dublin became the second city of the British Empire after London, with major development and expansion providing the institutional buildings and infrastructure, and setting out the city plan substantially as it survives today. Georgian Dublin represents a significant moment in the history of the Age of Enlightenment. The establishment of the Wide Streets Commissioners and the founding of many charitable and public institutions, in buildings of high architectural quality, were high points of that period in Europe. The city has made an extraordinary contribution to world literature - important both as formative influence and as a setting. The city plan and much of the fabric which provides the setting for texts of international significance, such as O'Casey's dramatic trilogy and Joyce's Ulysses, survive.

▲ *Glendalough*

Early Medieval Monastic Sites - (Clonmacnoise, Durrow, Glendalough, Inis Cealtra, Kells and Monasterboice)

The sites are a representative sample of Early Medieval Monastic sites in Ireland, which embody the Celtic Church's rich cultural and historical past, playing a crucial role in Europe's educational and artistic development. The six properties are exemplars of centres of Celtic learning, teaching and enlightenment. The cultural tradition was unique and for a time the Irish monks were the only educators in Europe where these centuries are called the Dark Ages. For Ireland it was the Golden Age, as her missionaries kept the flame of knowledge and learning alive.

▲ *Mound of the Hostages, Tara*

The Royal Sites of Ireland - (Cashel, Dún Ailinne, Hill of Uisneach, Rathcroghan Complex and Tara Complex)

The Royal Sites were all places of royal inauguration, ceremony and assembly, representing each of the five provinces of Ancient Ireland. Navan Fort is portrayed as the royal site for the kings of Ulster, Dún Ailinne for the kings of Leinster, Cashel for the kings of Munster and Rathcroghan for the kings of Connaught. Tara was the seat of the kings of Meath and the seat of the Irish high kings. In addition the Hill of Uisneach is traditionally the epicenter (navel) of Ireland, where the five provinces met. The sites are strongly linked to myth and legend and are associated with the transformation of Ireland from paganism to Christianity and Saint Patrick.

▲ *Dun Aonghasa*

Western Stone Forts

The Western Stone Forts, comprising the seven forts on the Aran Islands, County Galway Cahercommaun, the Burren County Clare, Caherconree and Benagh, Dingle Peninsula and Staigue, Iveragh Peninsula, County Kerry, represent the penultimate use of a distinctive settlement form - the drystone, generally circular, enclosure, a class of monument that was widely used by the maritime communities of the north Atlantic seaboard of Western Europe, throughout much of later prehistory. Western Stone Forts represent the apogee of the ringfort class of monument, an enclosed farmstead occupied by an extended kin group. The distribution, character and hierarchy of forms of ringforts provide a mirror of the organisation, economy and polity of Irish society at a particular period (AD 700-1000). Western Stone Forts constitute an impressive corpus of vernacular architecture and represent a creative human response to the stony environment of western Ireland.

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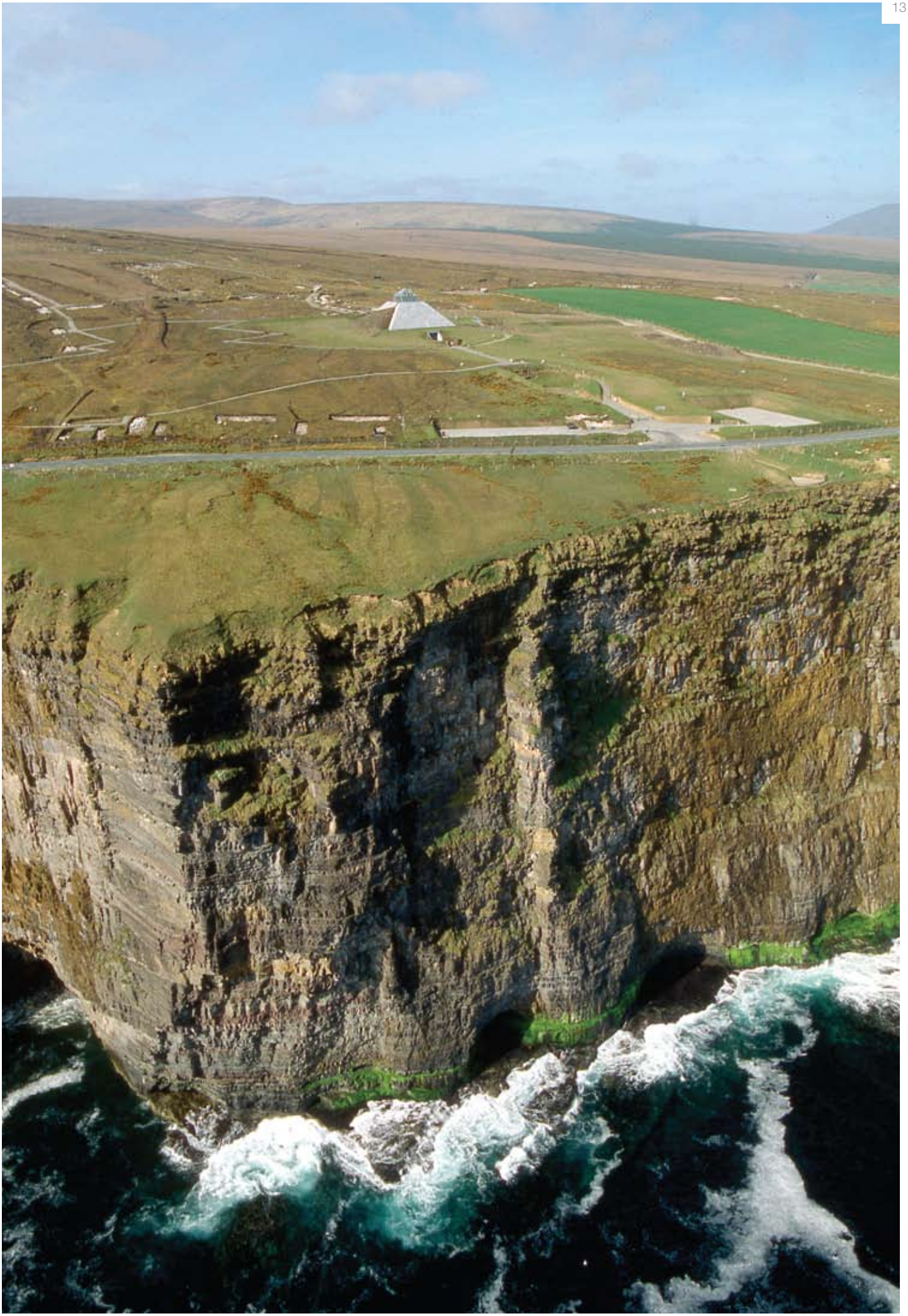
KEY TO PHOTOGRAPHS

a. Inis Cealtra
b. Rathcroghan
c. Clonmacnoise
d. Dún Eoghanachta
e. Dún Ailinne
f. Céide Fields
g. Staigue Fort
h. Dublin Castle
i. Glendalough

Opposite page: Céide Fields



FURTHER INFORMATION

Visit the following websites for further information on World Heritage and Irish Heritage Sites:

whc.unesco.org

www.worldheritageireland.ie

www.heritageireland.ie

www.archaeology.ie

www.environ.ie/en/Heritage/WorldHeritage/

www.icomos.org

www.iucn.org

▼ *Skellig Michael*

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Built Heritage and Architectural Policy Section

Newtown Road

Wexford

E-mail: worldheritagetentativelist@environ.ie

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Cultural
Organisation

World Heritage Convention