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Ross Sea Heritage Restoration Project: A model for conserving heritage values in Antarctic Specially Protected Areas

Ross Sea Heritage Restoration Project: A model for conserving heritage values in Antarctic Specially Protected Areas

Working Paper presented by New Zealand

Summary

New Zealand's Antarctic Heritage Trust has undertaken a decade long major programme of heritage conservation of the buildings and artefact collections from Antarctic Specially Protected Areas (ASPAs) 155, 157 and 158 on Ross Island. These sites include the only expedition bases built by Robert Falcon Scott (ASPAs 155 and 158) and Ernest Shackleton (ASPAs 157).

The extensive and methodical programme, part of the Antarctic Heritage Trust's Ross Sea Heritage Restoration Project (the Project), has seen 62 specialists from 12 countries undertake conservation work. From purpose built conservation laboratories, teams have worked year round in Antarctica since 2006. At the end of the 2014-15 Antarctic summer the Project reached a milestone at these three sites, with the buildings' major conservation complete and 18,248 individual objects conserved. Ongoing maintenance will now be undertaken at these sites and major conservation efforts will focus on the continent's first building at Cape Adare and the surviving Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition building at New Zealand's Scott Base.

The Project is unprecedented in its scale and complexity in respect of heritage conservation in the polar-regions. For this reason New Zealand recommends that CEP Members (1) consider the potential usefulness of this approach for protection of historic buildings and artefact collections at other ASPAs or at Historic Sites and Monuments (HSMs), (2) note that the Antarctic Heritage Trust is meeting the provision of the relevant ASPA management plans which places an obligation on National Antarctic Programmes to consult together with a view to ensuring that management activities within the ASPAs, including conservation, are implemented (3) acknowledge the work of the Antarctic Heritage Trust in New Zealand which has conceived, funded and implemented this extensive programme of conservation.

Background

By way of context, the Management Plans for these ASPAs specify a regular programme of conservation work shall be undertaken on the buildings and artefacts and charges National Antarctic Programmes operating in, or those with an interest in, the Area to consult together with a view to ensuring the management activities are implemented. The responsibility for this conservation has been undertaken by the Antarctic Heritage Trust, a New Zealand not-for-profit organisation, on behalf of the international community.

The Antarctic Heritage Trust works closely with national governments and includes senior representatives of the Governments of each of Britain, United States of America, New Zealand and the Republic of Ireland on its board of trustees. As a New Zealand entity, Antarctic Heritage Trust's activities in Antarctica are permitted by the New Zealand Government.

The Antarctic Heritage Trust has conceived and is managing and implementing the Ross Sea Heritage Restoration Project to save the iconic early explorers' legacy for current and future generations. This includes the historic bases of Scott, Shackleton, Borchgrevink and Hillary and the thousands of objects still in-situ. The Trust is financially supported by the government of New Zealand and has received one-off grants from the governments of Britain, Norway and Ireland, along with various international agencies including The Getty Foundation, The February Foundation, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the American Express Foundation and UK Antarctic Heritage Trust, as well as individual philanthropists and donors globally. Operational support in Antarctica is provided by New Zealand government crown entity Antarctica New Zealand. More information is available at www.nzahit.org

New Zealand has previously submitted Information Papers at key points of the Project to keep Members abreast of the work (ATCM XXXI IP094, ATCM XXXII IP013, ATCM XXXV BP041).

Update

Project

The Project has reached a key milestone with the completion in the 2014/15 Antarctic summer of the intensive conservation work to the three historic buildings of Scott and Shackleton on Ross Island and their extensive collection of artefacts.

Guided by detailed and peer reviewed conservation plans for each site, the systematic programme of conservation has seen 62 specialists from 12 countries undertake conservation work meticulously over the last decade. This has seen 6,141 artefacts individually conserved from Shackleton's historic base at Cape Royds, 11,561 from Scott's historic base at Cape Evans and 546 from Hut Point. The steps in the conservation programme and images of the before and after conservation work on the collection are included in IP 13. Since 2006, the artefact work has been undertaken year round in Antarctica by international professional conservators with specialisms in textiles, organics, metals and paper. Conservators have worked in teams onsite at the Antarctic Heritage Trust's mobile conservation laboratory during the Antarctic summers and at a purpose built facility at New Zealand's Scott Base during the Antarctic winters.

The building conservation has seen the weatherproofing of the buildings, removal of snow and ice threatening Cape Evans historic hut, repairing and maintaining the buildings' fabric and the insertion of systems both below and above ground to deflect and prevent water, snow and ice entering the buildings. Images are included in IP 13.

During the conservation work previously undiscovered artefacts have been found including most famously crates of scotch whisky and brandy at Shackleton's historic base (*Journal of the Institute of Brewing vol. 117, no. 2, 2011 pp156-165*), previously unseen Ross Sea Party photographs and a photographer's notebook from Scott's historic hut at Cape Evans.

The next priorities are the conservation of the first building on the continent at Cape Adare and the original building at New Zealand's Scott Base, built for the Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1955-58, whilst ongoing maintenance of the buildings and artefacts from Scott's and Shackleton's historic bases on Ross Island is planned.

Education and Outreach

The Antarctic Heritage Trust has also been active in providing education and public outreach opportunities to highlight the legacy at these historic sites. This has included the provision of objects in touring exhibitions (*Scott's Last Expedition*) (ATCM XXII IP013), the production of documentaries by the BBC (*The Secrets of Scott's Hut*) and National Geographic (*Expedition Whisky*), and the book *Still Life: Inside the Antarctic Huts of Scott and Shackleton*. The sites are also accessible virtually through new technology delivered in e-exhibitions www.scottslastexpedition.org, within audio-visual immersive exhibitions (*Still Life: the Exhibition*), via an online game www.scottslastexpedition.org/expedition/interactive-game/ and through Google's World Wonders project <http://goo.gl/EoeTXD>

More Information

More information can be found at www.nzaht.org and the work of Antarctic Heritage Trust can be viewed there or at <http://goo.gl/XPYzPT>

Comments and ongoing dialogue are invited from any Party with an interest in the restoration, protection and preservation of Antarctica's heritage.

Recommendation

New Zealand recommends that CEP Members:

1. consider the potential usefulness of this approach for protection of historic buildings and artefact collections at other ASPAs or at Historic Sites and Monuments in Antarctica;
2. note that the Antarctic Heritage Trust is meeting the provision of the relevant ASPA management plans which places an obligation on National Antarctic Programmes to consult together with a view to ensuring that management activities within the ASPAs, including conservation, are implemented; and
3. acknowledge the work of the Antarctic Heritage Trust in New Zealand which has conceived, funded and implemented this programme of conservation.