

The Ghajn Tuffieha Project Report

October 1998.

1. Introduction

1. Following completion and EPD approval of the Management Plan, and the agreement between the EPD and the Foundation on the adjustment and amendments to the original management contract signed in August, 1996, a new contract was signed in July, 1998. The administration of the public land in question, as per site plan attached to the deed, was transferred to the EPD by the Lands Dept. by instrument dated 28th April, 1998.

2. Wardening & Patrols

1. The Foundation has retained two environment wardens, William Saliba and Judith Spiteri, to assist in the implementation of the management plan. These are also qualified in life saving. The Foundation, however, has not set up an organised beach safety patrol. Attempts to do so this summer in conjunction with the Int. Red Cross proved unsuccessful.

2. Early morning and night patrols were also conducted by Management. Some pilfering of hose pipes and connections, removal of bamboo supports for saplings and other minor incidents have taken place throughout the summer. The padlock at access point to the beach was broken twice over the summer. This compares with over 8 times over last summer '97. A fire was started just by the road to the car park in July. Signs were vandalised on three occasions. The first damaged all signs with spray paint. The second and third partly damaged one or two signs. These were replaced immediately with spares. Damaged signs were repaired. Otherwise no major incidents were recorded affecting the site.

3. Afforestation and Irrigation

During Spring 1998 an irrigation system was set up facilitating the watering and fire fighting measures required for a proper afforestation project. 250 trees and shrubs were planted, namely tamarisk africana and Atriplex Halimus, along the clay slopes, in accordance with the management plan. A full scale planting in the coming Autumn is planned, involving 1,000 trees and shrubs, provided that the right indigenous trees will be available from the agriculture dept. and other sources.

4. Beach Cleaning.

The separation of waste at source was retained throughout the summer, with 20 colour coded bins made available for paper, plastic, aluminium, glass and mixed waste. Other mixed bins were also placed for the first time on the little beach below Qarraba as well as the one below the Isthmus. Others were placed along the clay slopes. These last ones are emptied by the wardens, while the rest are removed by Green Skip who is responsible for separating the mixed waste a second time and delivering it up for recycling. The mixed bins along the beach are removed by the beach cleaning section of the Tourism Department. One beach cleaner is currently being used by this Department to clean the beach every day up to October. He has turned out to be much more efficient than his predecessors. Overall the beach cleaning this summer has improved dramatically. However fine tuning is required to keep the beach very clean, namely:

1. The area around the bar should be kept spotless by the bar operator.
2. Sand sifting should be introduced on a more regular basis. This summer, to our knowledge this took place only once.
3. The clay slopes, that have been the subject of a number of Foundation cleanups, need constant attention since these are not serviced by the said beach cleaning section.
4. Sand along the steps leading to the beach should be swept regularly. This last recommendation was included in the MEU report. While it is clear that sand is not identified as unclean, and is regularly washed down again with the rains, the Foundation agrees that if the stairs are swept of sand in the summer this would give the beach a tidier appearance.
5. Flotsam and jetsam washed ashore should be removed from the beach over the autumn and winter months by the Beach Cleaning Section.

The MEU rating for the beach at the start of the summer was very low, 3 out of 10. However this rating was given for Ghajn Tuffieha and Gnejna together. All future ratings of Ghajn Tuffieha must be made separately. Furthermore the state of the clay slopes was also taken into account when, as mentioned above, these are not being serviced by the appropriate department. This should be remedied, or extra funds made available to the manager to secure an adequate state of cleanliness.

5. Reduction of waste.

The bar has co-operated with the Foundation to terminate the sale of water in plastic bottles. This evidently lead to a substantial reduction in plastic waste on the beach, although some members of the public were bringing their own. An sign has been put up by the bar informing the public of the problems of PVC bottles.

6. Offroading.

Ample signs has been put up informing the public that this is not permitted, and will carry stiff penalties. Very few infringements this summer have been recorded. Any offroaders sited have been registered with the police authorities, together with supporting evidence, including photos.

7. Beach Safety.

Although this does not fit into the Manager's brief, a holistic approach to management dictates that this be given due consideration, especially since the bay has claimed a record number of lives due to very treacherous underwater currents. The wardens' ledger has listed at least cases of persons meeting with serious difficulties. These have been assisted by the wardens, the operator of the bar and a handful of volunteers, many of which patronise the bay for surfing. To date no fatal casualty has been recorded this summer. However it is clear that in order to provide a proper and professional beach safety, assistance is required from the Civil Protection Dept.

Two tow lines have been laid out by the Manager, with marker buoys, to assist bathers in difficulty to pull themselves to shore. This has been a great success, with many bathers using them in times of need. The one closer to the bar has also served as a boat lane for vessels entering the bay.

Sundays have been problematic owing to the number of yachts that were ignoring the Malta Maritime Authority markers delineating the area out of bounds for sea craft. By the fourth Sunday, however, most craft were willing to cooperate with the wardens, armed with cameras and radios, and left the protected area without any incidents.

8. Fire Hazards.

Once more the area has been the victim of 5 bush fires, 3 along the clay slopes, one along the slope on the South side of the Isthmus and a fifth along the main road to the car park just East of the roam overlooking the road. This last one took place at exactly midnight in July, thus ruling out a natural outbreak. All fires have been traced to vandalism or gross negligence, with a probability of the former. However no persons were caught in the act. On the last mentioned occasion the fire department was called to intervene and put out the fire with the assistance of two fire engines and two Gaia personnel, who then proceeded to put out two more fires that had started up above the Roman Baths on the other side of the main road leading up to Mgarr. The 500 gallon fire engines were insufficient for the job and had to be assisted by a third from the Floriana fire station while the other two returned to the Xemxija station to refill.

This last episode is a clear indication that the two fire engines stationed at Xemxija are insufficient to cope with bush fires, which furthermore, will not be given priority over town fires. It is for this reason that the Foundation has been negotiating with the Agriculture Dept. to utilise a fire engine donated for the cause by a German environment group FEE in March. To date, however, it has not been successful. The Fire engine has remained idle and lacks some hose equipment. If this Fire Engine could be utilised, the Foundation will organise a list of volunteers who would train in fire fighting and who could be called upon to assist the authorities in cases of emergency. In such cases the fire dept will certainly not be able to cope. This effectively means that years of afforestation work in Malta could go up in smoke in minutes.

9. Restoration.

1. The Manager is currently co-operating with Din l-Art Helwa to restore the Ghajn Tuffieha Tower. Din L-Art Helwa have offered Lm1,500 - Lm2,000 for the project. Archect Norbert Attard has been commissioned to draw up a condition survey and bill of quantities.
2. The Manager is currently looking into the possibility of restoring the military buildings at Hotba l-Bajda over the winter months to accommodate an all weather interpretation and visitor centre. It is in touch with NTOM and Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna to assist in this project.
3. The Foundation has offered to assist the Mgarr Local Council in the search for finances to restore the Lippija Watchtower which is also in a poor state of repair.
4. The rubble surface of the road leading to Ghajn Tuffieha Bay was set for removal by the PA. The Manager is working with the PA to have this removed in the immediate future so as to restore a major feature within the conservation area, and to rehabilitate it with trees and shrubs. The Foundation is contracting an individual contractor for two days to remove the lowest part of the rubble surface. This will enable the contractor to measure the progress of work involved and submit a quote for the removal of the remainder of the rubble. Work is expected to commence week beginning 19th October, 1998.
5. A mass of discarded rubble waste left in a derelict field by the car park (adjacent to used arable land) was removed in July. The field will accommodate part of the afforestation project, but requires some fresh top soil to replace the eroded soil. This will be provided before afforestation.

10. Blue Flag Status for Ghajn Tuffieha.

The Foundation will be applying for the internationally acclaimed blue flag award for the beach and its environs. Whilst a lot of the ground work required has reached varying stages of completion, beach safety and adequate public conveniences are essential for any contemplation of such an award. The assistance is required of the Civil Protection Department for beach safety and the Tourism Department for public conveniences. These will be briefed in the immediate future.

11. Conclusion.

1. Improvements on site following the first 15 months of activity have become quite visible. The accumulation of years of rubbish along the slopes has been removed;
2. The measures against offroading and the afforestation have allowed the vegetation to start recovering to the point where signs of erosion have been substantially reduced. The first season's rains that took place on the 24th September were averaged at 80mm. The extent of clay and other soils that were washed down to the sea were negligible. The first rains in the Autumns of 1996 and 1997, in contrast, saw the development of large gulleys along the sandy beach which were filled with clay deposits covering about 20% of the beach. The slopes are visibly greener than they were in 1996 when a photogrammetric survey of the whole site was conducted. This is clear from photos taken in 1998
3. Monitoring of the sand has shown little or no reduction in quantity overall, although there are indications that the height has been reduced in some areas while the length of the sandy stretches has increased. Specific data is expected to be published through a private study in the near future.
4. Beach safety so far has improved. to date there have been no fatal casualties in Malta's most treacherous bay since the Foundation's presence on site in July, 1998. It must be stressed again, however, that the manager's brief has not included beach safety and no entity has been specifically commissioned for this purpose.
5. The first waste separation at source set up on the island has met with great success. The public response to the waste education and the system introduced has been positive. It is hoped that this will facilitate the setting up of the system on a national basis.
6. Public response to site regulations such as those against open fires, dumping, camping and offroading has generally been positive following some isolated negative reactions. Most people that have approached the Foundation have shown approval or appreciation of the overall management of the site.