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Ghajn Tuffieha Conservation Project

Interim Report

March, 1999.

1. *Introduction.*

During the Autumn and Winter seasons public presence on site shifts from the use of the beach to country walks and picnics, and these almost exclusively on weekends. The wardens could therefore concentrate on site work. This is done also on weekends in order to allow the warden's presence for patrol purposes.

2. *Wardening and Patrols.*

1. Despite regular patrols pilfering is still a problem. The most popular items have been pices of chain and pipes and fittings. Replacement costs currently stand at under Lm50 per annum, which is deemed reasonable considering the size and exposure of the site. Police patrols are infrequent and should be stepped up.

3. *Afforestation and Irrigation.*

1. The first phase of the afforestation project for the area has been the identification, procurement, purchase and planting of 1,000 trees and shrubs along the blue clay slopes. This has taken place over the Autumn and Winter. Details of the number and species will be given in a separate report.

2. Vandalism and theft affecting the afforestation has been negligible. Areas afforested in the Spring of 1998 are on the road to recovery. They show healthy signs of vegetation taking root. This has had a beneficial effect on the soil (clay) erosion control. A number of small trees have been seriously weather beaten following the 2 weeks of gale and near gale force winds blowing in early February mostly from the Northwest (Majistral) which sweeps sea spray all the way up the clay hills. Local farmers have informed us that sea spray is known to reach their fields much further inland, as much as two kilometres. The said trees are however recovering and growing new foliage. The few that have died are being replaced.
3. The second phase of the afforestation project is also underway. This consists mainly in irrigation and the setting up of a tree nursery on site. This has been deemed necessary for two reasons. Firstly many indigenous and endemic trees and shrubs are virtually impossible to procure from other nurseries. Secondly an expansion of the afforestation project will be too costly if trees are purchased on a regular basis. With the average tree costing Lm2.50 and shrub costing Lm1.20, purchasing 1,000 trees per year would cost over Lm2,000.
4. The Tree Nursery is being set up in the grounds occupied by the obsolete waste water treatment plant, in what used to be 4 sludge beds. These may accommodate up to 4,000 saplings.
5. Compost has been procured from Sant Antnin Waste recycling plant with the cooperation of the Environment Protection Department (EPD). This will be used for potting, while special fine compost has been purchased for seeding trays.
6. The trees currently growing in the nursery are atrplieux halimus, rosemary, aleppo pine and tamarisk.

4. Waste Management.

The separation of waste system for the main beach at Ghajn Tuffieha will recommence in late April, early May, weather permitting. The Foundation plans to upgrade the system.

1. Following recommencement of waste treatment at Sant Antnin, it will now be possible to add organic waste bins to those for plastic, paper, aluminium and glass. The Foundation, however, is also planning to recycle its own organic waste which will be used for its afforestation project. The surplus that may be taken from the beach cleaning will be sent to Sant' Antnin recycling plant.

2. A skip is being purchased for Ghajn Tuffieha Bay. This will ensure that any extra bags gathered by the bar or left by the beach cleaners will not be placed in a unsitely and unhygenic manner somewhere at the perimeter of the beach.
3. Green Skip Services Ltd. who are commissioned to collect the separated waste, will be collecting this from another skip near the car park. This will reduce the use of the track down to the beach.

5. Reduction of waste.

The Foundation plans to work with the beach bar to maintain the system introduced last summer not to sell water in pvc or pet bottles. Any bottles brought on site by the public will be reused for potting in the tree nursery.

6. Offroading.

This has largely been eradicated on site. However the occasional scrambler succeeds in running the gauntlet and riding along the clay slopes or the Golden Bay Headland. Photos of offenders are invariably taken when spotted. These have been warned that if they are seen again they will be reported and booked for both offences. In the coming season the Foundation plans to increase its publicity against offroading on site, and will be reporting offenders automatically on the first offence, which carries a penalty of between Lm50 and Lm500.

7. Beach Safety.

Over the Autumn and winter months there have been no casualties at Ghajn Tuffieha Bay. The towing lines introduced last year have proved their worth. Subsequently the Foundation will add a third towing line and put up a new billboard half way down the steps, graphically explaining safety measures to the public. Planning Authority approval for the billboard has been obtained.

8. Fire Hazards.

1. The fire engine donated to the agriculture department by the German environment group FEE for use by the Foundation still lies where it was originally parked in the Department's premises last year. The department has not allowed the foundation to use this, although FEE had brought it down on the understanding that this was to be so utilised. The Agriculture Department, furthermore, is not even utilising it itself. It has failed to allow the Foundation access to the Fire engine. It maintains that it is against Government policy to loan equipment to NGO's.

2. A water tank is to be added on site at Hotba l-Bajda to upgrade the fire fighting capabilities. This will contain approximately 5,000 litres. The tank would also facilitate irrigation since, being at the topmost part of the site, it would reduce the use of pumps.

9. Restoration.

1. The rubble surface along the clay path down to the beach has been successfully removed by the Foundation at its own expense. This was the duty of the owners of the beach bar, who failed to take action for 3 years. Rehabilitation of the site was impossible without its removal. The Foundation was therefore compelled to have it removed after liaising with the Environment Management Unit of the Planning Authority. The path is now well on its way to recovery. Many shrubs and trees have been planted on the sides. Natural vegetation has also started appearing.

10. Blue Flag Status for Ghajn Tuffieha.

Serious delays in the preparation for status have been mostly due to total lack of progress on the development of public conveniences, which is an absolute pre requisite. It is calculated by the Foundation that the more difficult conditions for status, which involve environmental management, are currently being satisfied. The basic requirement for public conveniences is however holding up the entire blue flag initiative. Progress on enforcement by the Planning Authority has been very slow. Such enforcement would compel the beach bar operators to provide adequate public convenience facilities prior to commencing operations in the coming season.

11. Equipment on site.

1. The Gaia Foundation has purchased a second hand multi purpose tractor. This will be used in assisting in the beach cleaning through sand sifting. It is also used for moving stones, soil and compost, and acts as a mobile water tank for otherwise inaccessible locations. This is possible through the use of a cart which is currently on loan until a tailor made cart is constructed. A sand sifter is also on order.
2. A number of galvanised metal poles were required for the tree nursery. 32 poles were acquired from Green Skip Services Ltd.'s scrapyards. This was a successful exercise in reuse and recycling that also saved the Foundation quite an expense.

12. The Gaia Foundation Website.

A website is currently being designed. This has the following aims:

1. Information to the general public of the Foundation's activities, which are largely concentrated on the Ghajn Tuffieha Conservation Project.
2. Education in environmental management.
3. Encouragement of public participation through voluntary assistance.
4. Networking with other NGO's involved in similar conservation projects outside Malta.

5. Information to academia through the availability of surveys and studies commissioned by the Foundation on ecology, geology, geomorphology, hydrology and environmental management.

Conclusion.

1. The main problem encountered over the past 6 months has been the lack of progress over the public convenience facilities. The Planning Authority should deal with this matter expeditiously.
2. The public response to the project has generally been good, as progress on site becomes ever more visible, especially following the recent afforestation. Some persons have expressed a willingness to assist the Foundation in its work. Subsequently another reason for scheduling wardens' work on weekends has been to utilise voluntary assistance which is generally possible at such times. Voluntary work however remains low.

Rudolf Ragonesi.