

Brú na Bóinne

The lower reaches of the Boyne Valley (Brú na Bóinne), co Meath, Ireland, incorporates a complex of 70 archaeological sites in an important landscape setting. In 1993 UNESCO designated the complex a World Heritage Site.

The primary aim of the management of the complex is the conservation of the ancient monuments. The secondary aim is to help visitors understand and appreciate the heritage and cultural implications of these monuments. The valley is managed in an integrated manner in order to broaden the visitor experience and to interpret the monuments in the context of the landscape.

The complex is managed by Duchas: The Heritage Service, the State body responsible for the management and presentation of ancient monuments in Ireland. 95% of the land forming the 'core area' of the visitor complex is privately owned agricultural land.

Visitor pressures on the largest archaeological site, Newgrange, in the early 1990s was a cause for concern for the Office of Public Works. There was also recognition that the local communities had not benefited from the growth of visitors to the monument.

A Committee of representatives of local, regional and State interests was convened to consider future management options. The Committee made five recommendations:

- Additional legal and physical protection for the antiquities
- Acceleration of the reinstatement/presentation of the other major sites in the complex
- Provision of a new internal transport system
- A new visitor arrival focus
- Introducing demand management and dispersal techniques.

These recommendations were presented in a Master Plan for the Boyne Valley. The involvement of landowners and the local community and the sharing of the vision led to its adoption. The Master Plan has an initial ten-year time frame and is recognised as an 'evolving' concept.

Benefits arising from improvements:

- An improved spread of visitation throughout the year.
- Visitor numbers in January and February have doubled over the past two years.
- Numbers to the complex now stand at 235,000 in 1999.
- Self-sufficient in running costs.
- Wider socio-economic benefits for the community, resulting from direct employment and the gains locally of increased tourist activity in the community.

The new way of thinking coincided with (i) the State's desire to make better use of its heritage and cultural resources for tourism, (ii) the strategic tourism thrust provided by Bord Fáilte, (iii) the reorganisation within the Department to effect a more responsive approach to heritage site management and presentation and (iv) the availability of ERDF funds for heritage projects.