

Rock art among endangered gems

NEW YORK: Aboriginal rock art at Australia's Dampier Archipelago has been named among the planet's most endangered sites, joining treasures threatened by war, climate change, development and tourism.

The World Monuments Fund's 100 Most Endangered Sites list for next year includes architectural and cultural gems in 59 countries on every continent.

"On this list, man is indeed the real enemy," fund president Bonnie Burnham said yesterday.

"But just as we have caused the damage in the first place, we have the power to repair it."

The Dampier art, one of the world's richest collections of rock carvings, was Australia's only contribution to the list. The West Australian site has up to a million carvings, as old as 20,000 years.

"Although the rock art complex on the Burrup Peninsula — part of the Dampier Archipelago — has been listed as an endangered site by the National Trust of Australia, the planned expansion of an industrial complex that would eclipse more than a third of the rock art area poses an urgent threat to the site," the fund's website says.

The West Australian Government has granted Energy giant Woodside leases in the northern part of the Burrup Peninsula to build a \$10 billion gas plant.

The site has been named on the past three fund lists, which are released every two years.

"While the initial listing of Dampier in 2004 forced the state Government to take a closer look at the site and initiate a four-year study on the deterioration taking place there, the threat has not been alleviated," the website says. "The site has been relisted for the purpose of continuing to draw local and international attention to its endangered status."

This year's list is the first to add global warming to the forces

threatening the world's treasures.

New Orleans is among at least six historic places with futures clouded by a changing climate. In Chinguetti, Mauritania, the desert is encroaching on the ancient Chinguetti Mosque. In Antarctica, a hut once used by British explorer Captain Robert Falcon Scott has survived almost a century of freezing conditions but is now in danger of being engulfed by heavy snows.

War has put Iraq's entire cultural heritage at grave risk.

"The archeological sites of Iraq are being looted at an alarming rate and the loss is catastrophic," said Michelle Berenfeld, program manager at the fund. "Unlike objects in museums, for which there is at least some record of their existence and in most cases where they came from, objects that are stolen out of the ground are completely lost, forever."

"In Iraq, where much of these archeological sites date to the earliest civilisations on the planet, the physical remains of those cultures are the main sources of information we have about them, so stealing them is like tearing out the pages of a history book that can never be rewritten."

Conflict in the Middle East endangers the Church of the Holy Nativity in Bethlehem.

The group said Peru's Machu Picchu was threatened by unchecked tourism and St Petersburg's skyline would be changed forever if Gazprom's planned skyscraper was built for the state-controlled gas export monopoly.

Tara Hill in Ireland — an earthen fort where Celtic chieftains jockeyed for power, and legend says St Patrick confronted paganism — is threatened by the development of a highway meant to ease the commute from Dublin.

Reuters, AP



High-rise threat: The view of downtown St Petersburg that will forever change if the building of a proposed Gazprom skyscraper goes ahead



Getaway route: Beloved sites along Route 66, such as this one at "Cadillac Ranch" in Amarillo, are deteriorating and need protection



Threatened: Aboriginal rock art at the Burrup Peninsula near Dampier in Western Australia



Weathered: Tikse Gopa, a monastery building in the medieval city of Leh, India, faces a global threat

CRUMBLING HISTORY

The World Monument Fund's watch list of most endangered sites

Global warming

■ **Scotts Hut, Antarctica** It is being engulfed by vastly increased snowfall thought to be a result of changes in the weather

■ **Chinguetti Mosque, Mauritania** One of many sites in West Africa endangered by the encroaching desert

■ **Leh Old Town, Ladakh, India** A rare intact medieval city in the Himalayan region faces changing weather patterns it was not built to withstand

■ **New Orleans, Louisiana, US** Its historic neighbourhoods, decimated by Hurricane Katrina, prepare for future challenges posed by rising sea levels and the likelihood of stronger storms

Conflict

■ **Church of the Holy Nativity, Bethlehem, Palestinian territories** The site of one of Christianity's oldest churches is now deteriorating as a result of modern political tensions

■ **Famagusta walled city, Cyprus** Featured in Shakespeare's *Othello*, now neglected as political deadlock over the island's sovereignty continues

■ **Srinagar heritage zone, India** Traditional structures, built to survive earthquakes, are suffering as a result of ongoing instability in the Kashmir region

Economic and development pressures

■ **Tara Hill, Ireland** A sacred landscape at the very heart of historic Ireland, now threatened by a highway meant to ease the commute from Dublin

■ **Rock art at Dampier, Australia, and Macusani-Corani, Peru**

Where millennia of history are threatened by industrial developments

■ **Machu Picchu, Peru** One of the world's greatest treasures, once an isolated sanctuary, is already endangered by unchecked and unmanaged tourism

■ **St Petersburg skyline, Russia** A centre of architectural achievement in Russia and now the proposed location for an enormous Gazprom skyscraper that will forever change it

Geographical regions of note

Africa and the Middle East:

■ **Ikom monoliths of Cross River Nigeria** A group of 2000-year-old, mysteriously decorated stones, possibly used as an ancient form of communication

■ **Medracen and el-Khroub Numidian Royal Mausolea, Algeria** The monumental tombs of the kings who ruled this part of North Africa before the Romans invaded.

■ **The ancient baths of Qusayr Amra Jordan** The remainder of the country retreat of an eighth-century Umayyad prince, now isolated in the desert. Inside, rare examples of figural Islamic art that document the early evolution of Islamic visual culture are in danger of being lost

The Americas

■ **Route 66, US** Once the only year-round route to the West Coast, this highway evolved into an iconic getaway route, dotted with whimsical architecture and amusements as the American road trip became a right of passage. Now a pilgrimage route for modern travellers, the beloved sites along Route 66 are deteriorating and need protection



Great treasure: Machu Picchu sanctuary, is endangered

Machu Picchu, Peru, once an isolated sanctuary, is endangered by unchecked tourism