Mount Sanqingshan National Park

2020 Conservation Outlook Assessment

SITE INFORMATION

Country: China
Inscribed in: 2008
Criteria: (vii)

Mount Sanqingshan National Park, a 22,950 ha property located in the west of the Huyaiyu mountain range in the northeast of Jiangxi Province (in the east of central China) has been inscribed for its exceptional scenic quality, marked by the concentration of fantastically shaped pillars and peaks: 48 granite peaks and 89 granite pillars, many of which resemble human or animal silhouettes. The natural beauty of the 1,817 metre high Mount Huaiyu is further enhanced by the juxtaposition of granite features with the vegetation and particular meteorological conditions which make for an ever-changing and arresting landscape with bright halos on clouds and white rainbows. The area is subject to a combination of subtropical monsoonal and maritime influences and forms an island of temperate forest above the surrounding subtropical landscape. It also features forests and numerous waterfalls, some of them 60 metres in height, lakes and springs. © UNESCO

SUMMARY

2020 Conservation Outlook

Finalised on 02 Dec 2020

The remarkable granite rock formations which combine with the surrounding forest and meteorological conditions to give the site the scenic values for which it is inscribed on the World Heritage list are in good condition and intrinsically resilient to threats. The values remain intact due to the property’s natural defenses: its confined physical dimensions; an effective boundary design; inaccessible terrain; and mostly effective management regime. Growth in tourism represents the most significant threat to Sanqingshan unless it is carefully planned and managed for in a way that is integrated with Provincial and Local development. Significant efforts and investment has been made to address this issue, however concerns remain over the overall numbers visiting the site. Effective management of the property’s buffer zone is as critical as management of the more highly protected core zone. Monitoring and reporting on wildlife, land use change and impact of tourism/community development need to be built upon to effectively inform management actions.
FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

▸ Landscape of exceptional scenic quality  
Criterion: (vii)

Mount Sanqingshan National Park’s (MSNP) remarkable granite rock formations combine with diverse forest, near and distant vistas, and striking meteorological effects to create a landscape of exceptional scenic quality. The most notable aspect is the concentration of fantastically shaped pillars and peaks. The natural beauty of Mt Sanqingshan also derives from the juxtaposition of its granite features with the mountain’s vegetation enhanced by meteorological conditions which create an ever-changing and arresting landscape (adapted from IUCN, 2008; World Heritage Committee, 2008; UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

Other important biodiversity values

▸ Significant biological values

The site is geologically confined which creates an unusual ecological island of temperate forest within a subtropical landscape. Sanqingshan displays significant levels of species richness and endemism as well as a number of threatened species. 2,373 higher plant species and 401 vertebrate species have been recorded, of which 45 species are listed in the IUCN Red List. The property is also a refuge for a number of disjunct species (45 recorded species) being species of common biogeographic origin (IUCN, 2008; UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

Assessment information

Threats

Current Threats  
Low Threat

The park’s natural resources are in good condition. Residential occupation of the property is concentrated in lower lying valley areas. Resettlement programmes appear to have been sensitively managed and are reducing human impacts on the core values. Livelihoods have mostly shifted from farming, logging and hunting to tourism. Quarrying has been discontinued and quarrying sites are progressively being rehabilitated. The major threat, however, is from the uncontrolled growing number of tourists, as the designed quota of tourists, 10,000/day, is not enforced. Logging and hunting have been banned in the site since inscription, according to the category ii survey of forest resources in 2019, the forest coverage rate has increased compared with that of 2009, due to conservation efforts and afforestation projects. Overall, the quality and quantity of forest resources have reportedly been improved despite a net loss of forest elsewhere (Wang, 2015).

▸ Housing/ Urban Areas

(Residential areas within the property)

Low Threat

Inside site, localised (<5%)

Outside site

At the time of evaluation over 5,000 people were resident within the park and relocation programmes were moving 1,000 people to settle in other areas. Resettlement programmes appear to be sensitively handled with adequate compensation to affected residents (IUCN, 2008). Since inscription, 1100 out of 5790 residents living inside the property have been resettled outside. Most villagers living inside the property have shifted their livelihoods from farming, logging, hunting to tourism. (Su, 2016). Logging
and hunting are banned although poaching still reportedly happens (IUCN Consultation, 2017).

**Mining/ Quarrying**

*(Quarrying sites)*

Very Low Threat

Inside site, not applicable

Outside site

Whilst some quarrying sites still exist within the property and buffer zone, they are no longer operational and are progressively being rehabilitated. (IUCN, 2008). Since inscription, 106 mining and logging companies in the property have been shut down (Wu, 2015).

**Tourism/ Recreation Areas**

*(Tourism infrastructure)*

Low Threat

Inside site, extent of threat not known

Two cable cars service the upper areas of the park providing access to most visitors. At the time of the 2008 evaluation associated visitor infrastructure was in place and stable and proposals for a third cable car had been rejected. Forecast tourism growth, however, poses the risk of further tourism infrastructure development (IUCN, 2008). Since inscription, over 100,000 sq meters of tourism facilities, including hotels and restaurants, were removed to reduce tourism impacts (Wu, 2015).

**Tourism/ visitors/ recreation**

*(Impact of tourism)*

High Threat

Inside site, scattered(5-15%)

Outside site

Tourism within the site boomed upon World Heritage inscription, increasing from 1.48 million in 2008 to 8.08 million in 2013 (Su, 2016). Even though a daily limit was set at 10,000 people/day, reports indicate that the number during the peak season could reach over 80,000/day (Sanqingshan official website, 2016). However, in more recent years, the number of tourists received by the site has returned to around 1.3-1.4 million per year, and the daily average number of tourists is within the control of environmental tourist capacity. Overcrowding, noise and visitor safety concerns require vigilant monitoring and management to mitigate impacts and ensure a quality visitor experience. The WH Committee recommended that the State Party develop a specific visitor management sub-plan to the property’s management plan, however, it is not known if this recommendation has been actioned (World Heritage Committee, 2008).

**Potential Threats**

Low Threat

The most significant potential future threat relates to the rapid increase in the number of tourists visiting the property. At present the related infrastructure is adequate but there is a need to monitor these as the numbers of visitors increase. A further potential threat could arise from pressure to develop greater road access in response to increased visitor demand. Equally careful management of the buffer zone is needed to maintain an appropriate setting for the core areas of MSNP. Climate change impacts on the ecological and meteorological values of the site are monitored through one national meteorological observation station and eight meteorological observation points in Mount Sanqingshan, which can monitor the climate change in the site in real time. However, further study is required to fully understand the impacts of climate change on the values of the site.

**Tourism/ visitors/ recreation**

*(Impact of tourism)*

Low Threat

Inside site, scattered(5-15%)

Outside site

The World Heritage status of SMNP has already increased its popularity with tourists. The rapid increase in tourism could place pressure on visitor infrastructure including the narrow and potentially dangerous trail systems (as at 2008 only about 10% of visitors were accessing remote trails and use was limited to 20-30,000 walkers per year across the 50kms of remote trails). The use of loudspeakers by tour group leaders could negatively affect the experience of other park visitors. Toilet and visitor facilities need to be be upgraded with the increase of visitors. (IUCN, 2008). Experience elsewhere in China has seen order of magnitude increases in visitation following WH inscription.
Habitat Shifting/ Alteration (Climate Change)

The park is potentially vulnerable in part due to the vertical zonation of plants and animals and the lack of connectivity of the area to other natural areas. The development of appropriate buffer zones and corridors could alleviate this potential threat (IUCN, 2008). Despite comprehensive meteorological data to monitor climate within the site, there is a lack of understanding how exactly these changes may impact the values of the site (IUCN Consultation, 2020).

Roads/ Railroads (Potential for road construction and upgrades)

Upon inscription, concern was noted that increasing popularity will create pressure to widen roads and establish a through road system, particularly in low lying areas in the western section of the park (IUCN, 2008). Upgrades to transportation infrastructure within the site include a 40km-special tourism highway, connected to external transportation such as the Shangrao High-speed Railway Station and the surrounding expressways (IUCN Consultation, 2020). These upgrades have been constructed in the interests of managing tourism, and so may be considered low threat, however care should be taken that they do not cater for tourist numbers which are beyond the carrying capacity for visitation, exceeding which may impact the values of the site.

Overall assessment of threats

Whilst there has been a rapid increase in the number of tourists visiting the site, the development and implementation of a visitor management plan as a sub-plan of the Management and Conservation Plan for MSNP would anticipate and address the need to manage the environmental impact of additional visitors. In accordance with the implementation rules of tourist management plan, all the projects mentioned in the plan have reportedly been carried out. The establishment of research and monitoring programmes to track visitor numbers and their impacts, and assess and adapt to the impacts of climate change on the park would ensure that any potential threats would be addressed, however it is unclear to what extent these issues are being addressed despite ample monitoring data available.

Protection and management

Assessing Protection and Management

Management system

There is high level oversight of the property’s management via the MSNP Management Committee. Although there are a number of government departments at all levels who are involved in the protection of the property, there is a clear sense of shared objectives thus ensuring a coordinated approach to the property’s management (IUCN, 2008). More formal management effectiveness evaluation using the IUCN Framework has still not been undertaken to date. The park has however, invested significantly in resource survey programmes (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). The current Master plan is due to expire in 2020, after which the management system will be reviewed and updated.

Effectiveness of management system

Management of the site has been the responsibility of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration Jiangxi Forestry Bureau and Shangrao Municipality with direct management delegated to the Management Committee of the MSNP. The Management Committee also acts as a coordination body bringing together the various departments of government at State, Provincial and Municipal levels who
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have a mandate or interest in the park (IUCN, 2008). Four protective zones are allocated in management planning, each linked to use controls (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). While the effectiveness of management has not been assessed, clear efforts have been made to address the tourism management issue through the construction and upgrading of tourism infrastructure, and monitoring of key climate indicators. However concerns remain over the effectiveness of measures put in place and the implementation of management actions based on monitoring data. The current Master plan is due to expire in 2020, after which the management system will be reviewed and updated.

**Boundaries**

The park boundaries are appropriately drawn to protect the natural values of the landscape and the areas required to maintain the scenic qualities of the property. The property includes all of the granite peaks and pillars which provide the framework for its aesthetic values as well as important forest remnants and wildlife habitats. Boundaries are accurately surveyed and demarcated on the ground with more than 100 boundary markers and the buffer zone is similarly well demarcated and is actively managed in sympathy with the park (IUCN, 2008).

**Integration into regional and national planning systems**

The park is subject to a broader Master Plan (2003-2020) and a more detailed Management and Conservation Plan drawn up in 2006. There are some concerns regarding consistency between these plans with respect to development proposals suggesting a need to review them for consistency. The master plan (2003-2020) is due to expire in 2020, and it is being re-planned to ensure the consistency of implementation of relevant plans (IUCN Consultation, 2020). The MSNP Management Committee acts as a coordination body which brings together the various departments at State, provincial and Municipal levels who have an interest in the park (IUCN, 2008), which will aid in the integration of site management into wider regional and national planning.

**Relationships with local people**

Considerable efforts to inform and gain the support of locals to the conservation of this site have been made both with the conduct of a campaign around the WH nomination and via the setting up of Village Committees. However more could be done to enhance participatory approaches to management decision making. The State Party at the time of evaluation noted a successful resettlement programme was underway to remove people from more sensitive parts of the property. Resettlement programmes are sensitive and often contentious, however in this case resettled villagers appear to have been adequately compensated and appear satisfied (IUCN, 2008). According to local government report, all residents inside the property have either been relocated or involved in tourism (Wu Baolong 2015; Su, 2016).

**Legal framework**

The property is state owned land and protected under a number of national laws. It was designated a National Park in 1988 and a national Geopark in 2005 (IUCN, 2008). Global Geopark status was awarded in 2012 (UNESCO, 2014). A set of protective regulations enacted in 2006 overarch the national laws. All forest lands in the property are management by the park with compensations to resettled villagers (Wu Baolong, 2015). A series of management regulations were developed after the Geopark was awarded, including land, resources, wildlife, environment and tourism. However, less is known on implementation.

**Law enforcement**

An annual law enforcement crack-down on wildlife trade in restaurants of tourist facilities is applied.

**Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations**

There has been no State of Conservation report for the property since its inscription nor have there been any monitoring missions or State Party Reports. Hence Sanqingshan has not come back to the WH Committee to assess follow through on the recommendations at time of inscription (World Heritage
Sustainable use  
Mostly Effective

The most significant threat to the park comes from the rapid growth in tourism. The park plans to manage tourism growth through maintaining access restrictions and limiting daily numbers. Tourism facilities will be developed outside the core zone. There are two cable car systems in place which focus use. As at 2008 proposals were in place to establish facilities at the cable car bases of Jinsha and Waishuangxi with natural gas powered buses used to bring in visitors who would park in buffer zone villages. Visitor numbers are monitored and access is controlled through ticket and permit sales. Trail use is closely monitored and trails are well constructed in granite and would have the capacity to withstand larger numbers of visitors. (IUCN, 2008).

Sustainable finance  
Highly Effective

At the time of the evaluation in 2008 the park was very well funded with funding received via the Central Government’s five year plan. Financial contributions come also from Jiangxi Province and Shangrao Municipality. As at 2008 the State Party reported approximately 235 million USD has been invested in the park since 1990 and annual funding has increased fifteen fold in the last five years. As of 2008 these levels of funding are very high by international standards (IUCN, 2008). There is insufficient data to assess funding levels over the past 5 years. The annual revenue from tourism reached over 500 million RMB (Su, 2016), which should be able to support financial needs of the world heritage site management.

Staff capacity, training, and development  
Mostly Effective

In 2015 staffing levels were good with 583 reported (IUCN Consultation, 2020). Training programmes are in place and there was a planned staff training program on WH of Jiangxi Province between 2006 and 2010, to include management staff, and approximately 100-300 people. (Management Committee MSNP, 2005). Local villagers are engaged in park jobs (IUCN, 2008). Given that there is increasing wear on stepped and cantilevered pathways a strong maintenance team and safety culture are clearly major priorities.

Education and interpretation programs  
Mostly Effective

A large amount of visitor information is available and a new visitor centre in Fenshui has been built with state of the art interpretation in addition to new visitor centre and museums in the south and east of the site (IUCN, 2008; IUCN Consultation, 2020).

Tourism and visitation management  
Some Concern

A large amount of visitor information is available and a new visitor centre in Fenshui has been built with state of the art interpretation in addition to new visitor centre and museums in the south and east of the site (IUCN, 2008; IUCN Consultation, 2020). Tourist numbers increased dramatically upon inscription, and daily and annual visitor quota were not being enforced. However, in recent years such visitation is reported to have been brought down to more sustainable numbers. The site has established a Smart Tourism Platform, which functions in perimeter protection, real-time visitor assistance, electronic guidance, big data and public opinion monitoring (IUCN Consultation, 2020) as well as the construction of special tourist highways within the site, which transport visitors around the site and to external modes of transport (IUCN Consultation, 2020). Despite these efforts, concerns remain over the number of tourists within the site, and that such tourism infrastructure does not facilitate excess numbers of tourists to impact the values of the site.

Monitoring  
Mostly Effective

Many local and international institutions monitor aspects of the site and over 300 papers on the geology and ecology of the site have been published (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). Sophisticated remote camera monitoring of visitors is conducted. At the time of evaluation IUCN advised on the need to establish research and monitoring programmes to monitor visitor numbers and their impacts, and assess and adapt to the impacts of climate change on the park including the potentially adverse impact of fire and
invasive alien species on the park's aesthetic and natural values. (IUCN, 2008). This recommendation is yet to be implemented.

**Research**

Mostly Effective

Effective research and monitoring programmes were in place in 2008 including for water and air quality, noise and visitor use. A comprehensive biodiversity survey was also completed involving 150 researchers and 20 field trips (IUCN, 2008).

**Overall assessment of protection and management**

Mostly Effective

The property has effective legal protection, a sound planning framework and as of 2011 is reported as being well managed (UNEP-WCMC, 2011), with the Master plan for the site due for revision in 2020. Strong government support and funding ensures that the property's natural resources are maintained in good condition and threats are considered manageable. The most significant threat relates to the future increase in tourism, and careful and sensitive planning of the related infrastructure and access development is required. Concerns remain over the number of tourists within the site, and that upgraded tourism infrastructure does not facilitate excess numbers of tourists to impact the values of the site, however it’s rugged inaccessible typography affords protection to some extent in this regard (IUCN Stakeholder Consultation, 2012). Overall, the protection and management of Mt Sanqingshan National Park is mostly effective.

**Assessment of the effectiveness of protection and management in addressing threats outside the site**

Mostly Effective

Mount Sanqingshan National Park is a small but well protected site which has historically benefitted from its remote access, however upgrades to external transportation hubs in recent years render the site increasingly accessible. The management measures and impressive levels of resourcing which have been applied to the property are effectively combatting external threats. Resettlement programmes have moved some people into the surrounding buffer zone and alternative livelihoods are being developed which are linked to the park. Controls and standards are in place for village development; however, there is some concern over the mix of building styles and materials. Consistency of design and the use of traditional styles and materials are encouraged in the park’s villages and buffer zone gateway communities to ensure harmony with the park’s features (IUCN, 2008).

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**State and trend of values**

**Assessing the current state and trend of values**

**World Heritage values**

**Landscape of exceptional scenic quality**

Good

Trend: Data Deficient

The remarkable granite rock formations which combine with the surrounding forest and meteorological conditions to give the site the scenic values for which it is inscribed on the World Heritage list are in good condition and intrinsically resilient to degradation. The 2008 evaluation provided a baseline for understanding the condition and state of the park’s Outstanding Universal Value. Since that time an updated WCMC Site Data sheet and limited stakeholder consultation report that values are stable. Up to date data is therefore somewhat lacking however, the park’s natural resources are reported to be in good condition and threats are considered manageable despite concerns over tourism numbers. There is an effective management regime in place for the park which will ensure that the property retains its aesthetic values, with a delicate balance being found between the provision of visitor access and the maintenance of the OUV of the property. (UNESCO SoOUV, 2008; UNEP-WCMC, 2011; IUCN Stakeholder Consultation, 2012).
IUCN World Heritage Outlook: https://worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org/
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consultation, 2012; IUCN Consultation, 2020).

**Summary of the Values**

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<tr>
<th>Assessment of the current state and trend of World Heritage values</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Trend: Data Deficient</th>
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<td>At the time of the 2008 evaluation the values for which Sanqingshan was inscribed were fully intact. The park’s delicate granite rock features were in excellent condition as were the biological values of the site. More recent data is limited; however, rapid increases in tourist numbers since inscription (over 8 million annually) may pose management challenges, yet without monitoring, the impacts thereof on the state and trend of values is unclear. Nevertheless, the area’s rugged topography may limit access and human impacts.</td>
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<th>Assessment of the current state and trend of other important biodiversity values</th>
<th>Data Deficient</th>
<th>Trend: Data Deficient</th>
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<td>Sanqingshan also has significant geological, biological and cultural values. Consistent with the assessment above it is assumed that biological values have equally been afforded good protection. Despite, forest cover being reported to have has suffered a net loss between 2000 and 2013 (Wang, 2015), class II forest resources survey in 2019 carried out by the site management, report that the forest coverage rate of the heritage site is higher than that in 2009. Therefore it is unclear as to the exact status of forest cover and health at this time. Monitoring of wildlife, land use and community development is being implemented through annual observation surveys, the previously mentioned class II forest resources survey and the third national land survey, however data or results do not appear to be made widely available.</td>
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**Additional information**

**Benefits**

**Understanding Benefits**

**History and tradition**

Taoism is an ancient religious culture founded in China. Sanqingshan has been an important spiritual centre for Taoism since the East Jin Dynasty (A.D.317-A.D.420) and today historic Taoist stone structures, such as Sanqing Temple, Dragon and Tiger Palace and Wind and Storm Pagoda, remain important relics of the Taoism culture and add significantly to the cultural landscape of Sanqingshan. (MSNP Management Committee, 2005) Mt Sanqingshan is one of eight mountain systems which are noted as comprising the sacred mountains of China.

**Direct employment**

Whilst some longtime residents of the National Park have been relocated to the buffer zones, efforts have been made to provide livelihoods linked to the park. For example, in the buffer zone village of Guangshan, 30% of the 400 inhabitants are engaged in park related activities. (IUCN Evaluation, 2008)

**Outdoor recreation and tourism**

According to the State Party the ongoing benefits of tourism development include revenue raising, which in turn is used for conservation and research and promotion of the scientific and aesthetic values of the Park to both the academic community, and the general public (MSNP Management Committee, 2005)

**Summary of benefits**

The natural features of Sanqingshan assume significant importance in Chinese and global culture and add...
to the broader cultural and spiritual values of the park. The park includes a diversity of physical features including a series of v-shaped valleys, numerous waterfalls up to 60 m in height, lakes and springs, and 48 granite peaks and 89 granite pillars. These natural phenomena have proven to be a significant drawcard to a huge and ever-increasing number of tourists to the site over many years. With tourism come the benefits of income generation and investment in local communities and the promotion of alternative livelihoods linked directly to the park and indirectly through goods and service provision. The property also delivers significant ongoing possibilities for research and education.

Projects

Compilation of active conservation projects

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<th>Organization</th>
<th>Brief description of Active Projects</th>
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<td>№</td>
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<td>IUCN (2012). IUCN Stakeholder Consultation. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland.</td>
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