

Australia makes worst 100

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AN Australian cultural site has made it onto the list of the world's 100 most endangered monuments.

The Dampier Rock Art Complex on the Dampier Archipelago in northwestern Australia - the largest corpus of rock art in the world - dates from 10,000 BC and is the only site in the country to make the top 100.

The World Monuments Fund, who released their official list for 2008 yesterday, said the planned expansion of an industrial complex would wipe out more than a third of the National Trust of Australia listed rock art area and posed an urgent threat to the site.

The area comprises up to one million artworks and has sparked international interest in protecting the site.

Bombs in Iraq, better commutes in Ireland and melting ice caps were other factors threatening the 100 most endangered architectural and cultural gems in the world, the nonprofit group said.

The World Monuments Fund's list for 2008 for the first time included climate change as a hazard for some of the world's great historic sites.

Surging development and commercialism, along with political conflict, also pose risk to sites such as the Church of the Holy Nativity in Bethlehem.

While the list included various sites both natural and man-made, the fund said there was one clear cause for all of the destruction.

"On this list, man is indeed the real enemy," said Bonnie Burnham, president of the fund. "But just as we have caused the damage in the first place, we have the power to repair it."

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

Tara Hill in Ireland, considered a sacred landscape, is now threatened by the development of a highway meant to ease the commute from Dublin. Canada's Herschel Island, situated on the edge of the Yukon and home to ancient Inuit sites, could be washed away in melting permafrost, the group said.

Meanwhile, the war in Iraq has put that country's entire cultural heritage at grave risk, the nonprofit group said.

Since 1996, the fund has made more than 500 grants totaling more than \$US47 million to sites in 74 countries.

The New York-based group said more than 75 percent of endangered sites on previous lists had been rescued or were well on the way to being preserved.

The complete 2008 list can be viewed at www.worldmonumentswatch.org.