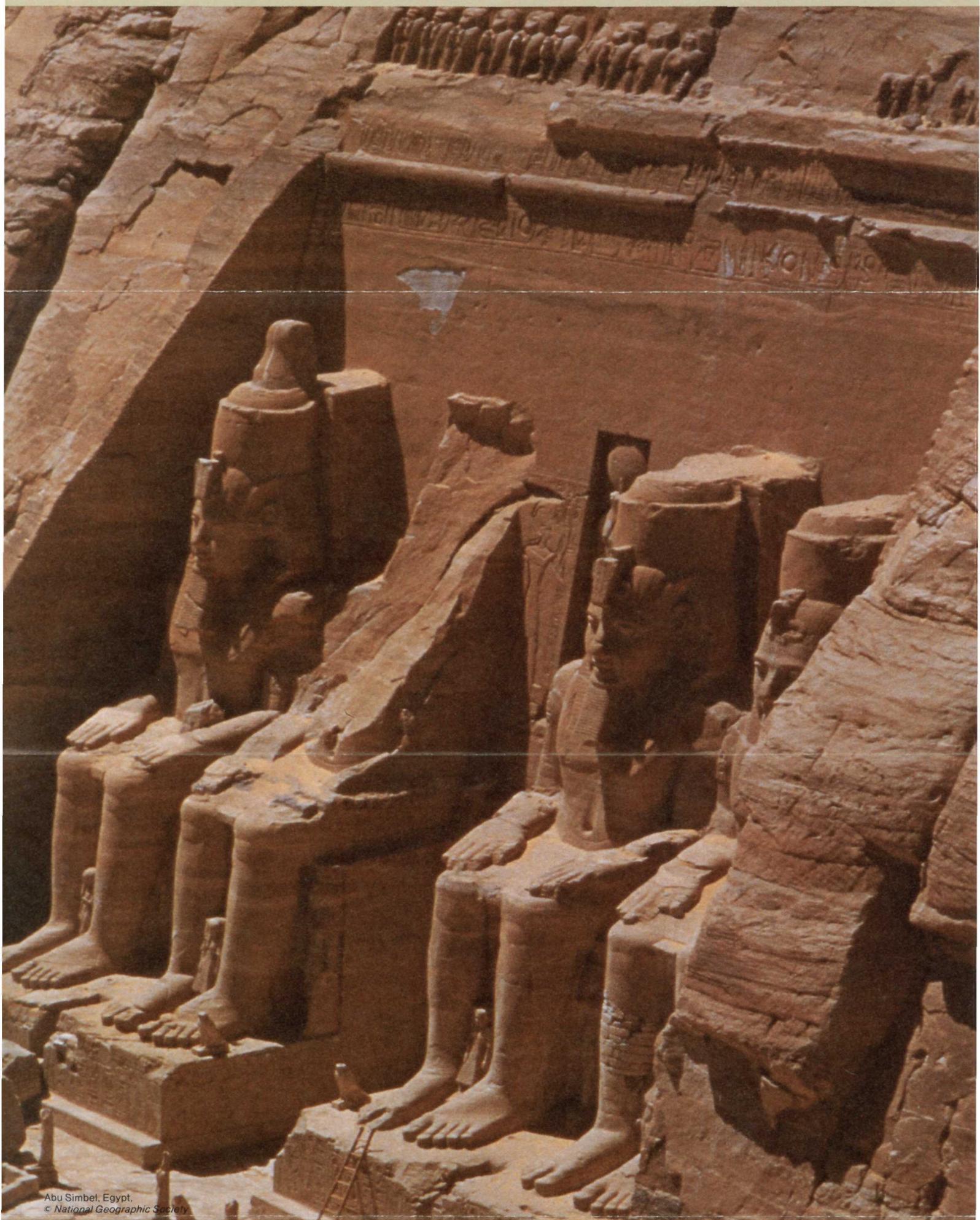


The World Heritage Convention



Abu Simbel, Egypt.
© National Geographic Society

The nations of the world have agreed, through the World Heritage Convention, to inventory, recognize and protect irreplaceable properties of outstanding international significance. Adopted in 1972, this convention defined for the first time mankind's cultural and natural heritage and established a program of preservation for the world's common inheritance.

Dramatic events gave birth to this idea. The ravages of time have scarred or effaced many marvels of man and nature. In this century, the destruction wrought by man and nature has threatened, damaged, or destroyed many internationally significant properties.

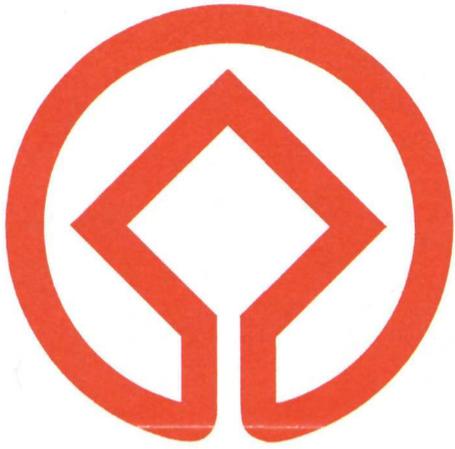
Two examples epitomize this threat. Charles Darwin's epic visit in 1835 to the Galapagos Islands of Ecuador and his observations of their unique biological adaptations lead to his pioneering studies on the evolution of life on earth—an immeasurable advancement of human knowledge. Subsequently, the islands suffered dramatically

from the impacts of uncontrolled tourism, introduced exotic species, and mining. In 1959, the Charles Darwin Research Station was established to provide facilities and support to hundreds of international scientific missions which have promoted research and conservation in the Islands. In 1960, the rising waters of Lake Nasser imperiled the Egyptian temples of Abu Simbel, constructed in the 13th century B.C. by Ramses II. Facing an irreplaceable loss, many nations generously assisted the Egyptian people in saving this symbol of one of the world's first great civilizations. An international team of archeologists and engineers from 24 nations worked together against time and the elements to disassemble and relocate the monument to higher ground.

The success of these and similar efforts have demonstrated that threats to mankind's common heritage transcend national boundaries and pointed to the need for regular and continuing international cooperation.

A Shared Inheritance

The World Heritage Convention



The World Heritage emblem symbolizes the interdependence of cultural and natural properties; the square is form created by humankind and the circle represents nature, the two being intimately linked. The emblem is round like the world and at the same time it is a symbol of protection.

A System of International Cooperation

The majority of nations have now affirmed this concept by international treaty, the Convention Concerning Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. This treaty provides for the designation of certain cultural and natural properties of "outstanding universal value to mankind." Such properties, declares the treaty, constitute a legacy whose "deterioration or disappearance is a harm-

ful impoverishment of the heritage of all nations of the world." The treaty calls for more than just recognition. It provides for positive action to preserve these properties. Each participating nation assumes primary responsibility for protecting and interpreting its own properties, while pledging to cooperate with other nations when assistance is required.

Attaining World Heritage Status

How does a property qualify for World Heritage recognition? Any nation signatory to the treaty may nominate a property within its jurisdiction. Cultural properties may qualify by meeting at least one of the treaty's criteria, such as a unique artistic achievement, an exceptional testament to a vanished civilization, a place associated with events or ideas of universal significance. Natural areas must demonstrate international significance in areas such as the earth's evolutionary history,

ongoing geological or biological processes, or exhibit exceptional natural phenomena, formations, or scenic or scientific features.

All proposals are evaluated and acted upon by the World Heritage Committee, composed of 21 elected member nations. The committee is assisted by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) for cultural area proposals and by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for natural area proposals.

Financial and Technical Assistance

Over the past decade the treaty has extended crucial help to many threatened World Heritage Sites, among them: Serengeti National Park, Tanzania; Galapagos National Park, Ecuador; Swayambhu Temple, Nepal; the Kotor Region of

Yugoslavia; Antigua Guatemala, and Tikal National Park, Guatemala; Shalimar Gardens and Lahore Fort, Pakistan; and Garamba National Park, Zaire. More than 45 member nations have received technical training and assistance.

United States Participation

The United States provided initiative and leadership in the development and implementation of the treaty. Russell Train, President of the World Wildlife Fund-U.S., is credited with the first official proposal to establish an international body concerned with the preservation of the world's cultural and natural heritage. The Convention was formally adopted in 1972; a year later the United States became its first member nation.

works in cooperation with the Departments of State, Commerce and Agriculture, the Smithsonian Institution and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. It draws staff support from the National Park Service, which has assisted most of the member nations in establishing and protecting areas of national and international significance.

In 1979, the United States joined with Canada to nominate the first joint World Heritage Site, the National Parks of Wrangell-St. Elias and Kluane on the Alaska-Yukon border.

The Department of the Interior coordinates World Heritage activities within the United States. It

World Heritage Sites in the United States

Twelve World Heritage Sites have been designated in the United States as of 1984: Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, Illinois; Everglades National Park, Florida; Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona; Great Smoky Mountains National Park, North Carolina-Tennessee; Independence

Hall, Pennsylvania; Mammoth Cave National Park, Kentucky; Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado; Olympic National Park, Washington; Redwood National Park, California; San Juan National Historic Site, including La Fortaleza, Puerto Rico; Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, Alaska; and Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming.

For More Information

For more information on the World Heritage Convention, write to the Director, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

to the U.S. Committee, International Council on Monuments and Sites (US/ICOMOS), 1600 H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

Inquiries regarding cultural heritage programs, domestically and internationally, may be addressed

Inquiries regarding natural heritage programs, domestically and internationally, can be addressed to the World Wildlife Fund-U.S., 1601 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

Olympic National Park, Washington,
National Park Service

