

Advertised beauty spot 'in a terrible state'

Michael Testa



These pictures showing the vandalism and neglect at Wied Qlejgha were taken by staff photographer Alfred Giglio during his last coverage before he collapsed and died at the Allied Newspapers Ltd premises, yesterday morning.

Ramblers Association of Malta president Lino Bugeja has called on the authorities, particularly the Ministry of Agriculture, to save the Maltese countryside from further neglect.

A case in point is Wied Qlejgha, which forms part of the Bahrija Walk advertised by the Malta Tourism Authority that cries out for action after having been neglected for the past few years.

Mr Bugeja said that a month ago, MTA chairman Romwald Lungaro Mifsud had called on the association to point out any shortcoming in the country walks.

Together with MTA officials, association members yesterday retraced the Bahrija Walk, which is in an area of idyllic beauty on the outskirts of Rabat. The project cost thousands of Maltese liri.

The aim of the visit was to ensure that the details contained in the guidebook published by the MTA were correct.

But, Mr Bugeja said, the visit revealed that Wied Qlejgha, which forms part of the walk, was in a terrible state. Wooden benches and tables had been stolen or vandalised and the whole site had fallen into neglect. Notices with information about the valley were in a bad state.

"It is inconceivable how thousands of liri are spent on the embellishment of central strips and roundabouts while such a scenic spot as Wied Qlejgha is being left to rot," Mr Bugeja said.

He said that although the supervision and maintenance of the valley was not the responsibility of the local council, the least the council could do as a civic duty was to inform the authorities about the horrible state of the site. Local councils could ensure that such sites were accessible to the public, protected and maintained, he said.

At the beginning of the Bahrija Walk is a beautifully sited picnic area in the valley near Fiddien, where water from Wied Liemu flows down to Wied Buzbiez and further down to Chadwick Lakes.

Some time ago this picnic site, introduced in 1998, was equipped with sturdy tables, benches and information boards, one of them explaining the flora and fauna of this beauty spot. Gabions - steel-mesh cages filled with stones - were used to reinforce the walls of the valley.

A cobbled water lane running along the water stream lead to an adventure playground for children.

Here, until recently, families could enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of the countryside at any time of the year.

Mr Bugeja said it was useless to issue publications illustrating countryside walks to encourage tourists and the public to visit if the sites were not well-kept.

He said that a factor related to the neglect at Wied Qlejgha was the lack of sensitivity on the part of the public, in that nobody seemed to care; nobody reported the state of the valley and the picnic area. The public ought to file reports to arouse awareness of the situation.

Mr Bugeja remarked that the Ramblers Association, in its campaign to open up the countryside, has embarked on various activities in collaboration with other NGOs and state organisations in order to ensure that rambling was not only unhindered but also a pleasant experience.

"In our attempt to give back to the people what is theirs by right - the natural heritage - we are being stifled by total disregard from official quarters," he said.

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