

## Angelina to Victor Borg's rescue

The promontory at Ta' Ċenċ is truly an idyllic place... one of those rarified coastal locations on our islands where one 'can get away from it all', without the obtrusive sight of concrete. The unquantifiable value of the coastal asset at Ta' Ċenċ is fully acknowledged in the Gozo and Comino local plan (GCLP), which includes the safeguarding of a pedestrian path running through the promontory down to the Kantra overlooking Mġarr ix-Xini.

This pedestrian path links Ta' Ċenċ Hotel to the villa area and, supposedly, public access to the path should be 'free and unhindered'. Well, with the police stationed round the clock at the entrance to the path, supposedly to stave off prying eyes from the film set at Mġarr ix-Xini, access to the path is no longer so unhindered.

Tourists and locals alike who drove to Ta' Ċenċ to enjoy the blissful atmosphere at Ta' Ċenċ, or simply to catch a glimpse of the 5,000-year-old Imramma Temples on the promontory, or to walk their dogs or simply go for a stroll were forced to turn back on their tracks by the police presence on site.

A number of e-mails and letters have been sent to the Prime Minister's office by irate regular visitors to Ta' Ċenċ, venting their anger at being cordoned out from their favourite haunt. So much for Map 13.6 in the GCLP which boldly designates the entire plateau at Ta' Ċenċ as a 'Coastal Viewshed Protection Zone', granting public access along the entire coastal rim of the zone. The main motivation for the designation of this grand-sounding zones in the GCLP is that "visual access to the coastline is constantly being eroded through the erection of new structures on the coast". Wise words indeed, but nothing more than empty rhetoric, I'm afraid.

Ta' Ċenċ Hotel owner Victor Borg constantly underscores the fact that most of the area at Ta' Ċenċ is his and that he simply 'tolerates' ramblers and other visitors to the area. Presumably, he is not including paying hotel customers, who are free to roam about unhindered over the extensive Ta' Ċenċ area and to even avail themselves of the services of a lido at the Kantra peninsula overlooking the Mġarr ix-Xini inlet.

*Adding Ta' Ċenċ to the list of no-go areas is simply adding insult to injury*

The lido was strangely granted a permit over what previously was coastal garigue, which partly enjoyed the highest possible level of scheduling, as boldly stated in the GCLP. Recently, Borg installed gates to cordon off the paved approach to the lido and to the Kantra, again arguing that he was simply safeguarding 'his property'. In 2005, he had even called the police to stop a crowd of angry protestors from marching to the Ta' Ċenċ promontory to protest against ongoing proposals for a golf course on site.

One wonders, don't the police in Gozo have anything more urgent to do than to squander their time at Ta' Ċenċ simply to tell people off?

Borg will counter that he is not behind the latest gate-keeping exercise at Ta' Ċenċ since the police are simply safeguarding the film set. But the mind boggles as to why the entire Ta' Ċenċ promontory has to be declared off limits. The dovetailing between the needs of the film set (privacy) and Borg's requests (that non-paying customers steer away from Ta' Ċenċ) seems very coincidental and convenient. Could it be that the police presence at Ta' Ċenċ in connection with the filming at Mġarr ix-Xini is simply a dress rehearsal for the permanent privatisation of the coastline at Ta' Ċenċ?

We have been told to be patient, since Angelina Jolie's film might lead to an economic watershed for the film industry in Malta. But the public will be denied access to Mġarr ix-Xini for at least three months. The diving industry, which cherishes Mġarr ix-Xini for its sheltered location, is up in arms over the round-the-clock closure of access to the Kantra, which is preventing their members from diving on site. They are even mulling initiating court action over the matter. Adding Ta' Ċenċ to the list of no-go areas is simply adding insult to injury.