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**COMMITTEE FOR THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
IN THE FIELD OF BIOLOGICAL AND LANDSCAPE DIVERSITY**

CO-DBP

Group of specialists - European Diploma

Maritime Alps Nature Park

(Italy)

Category A

RENEWAL

Expertise Report
by Mr Alfred FROMENT
(Belgium)

The expert was not accompanied by a representative of the Secretariat during his on-the-spot appraisal.

Resolution (93) 20 awarding the European Diploma appears in Appendix I; the Secretariat has provided a draft resolution for possible renewal in 1998 in Appendix II.

I. INTRODUCTION

As the validity of the Maritime Alps Nature Park's European Diploma is due to expire on 3 May 1998, an on-the-spot appraisal was carried out to examine whether, in accordance with the regulations in force, renewal would be justified.

This visit took place on 4 and 5 September 1997. The expert was accompanied throughout the visit by Ms P ROSSI, Director of the Park. He would like to express his satisfaction with the good organisation of the visit programme, with the variety and competence of those he met, and with the frank and forward-looking nature of the discussions.

II. PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

Thursday 4 September

Morning:

- Presentation of the plans for the park's new operational centre, situated on the site of former barracks in the commune of Entracque: visit to the site with Ms P ROSSI, Director, and MM G CANAVESE, Deputy Director, A BIANCO, Councillor and former President of the Park Council, and P FANTINI, warden

The current construction of a new "operational centre" will enable the Park to solve the problem of over-crowding at its headquarters in Valdieri. On-site expansion had proved impossible, and thus the relocation of the entire technical division in the neighbouring commune of Entracque provides a satisfactory solution, particularly considering the rehabilitation of a disused military area that it entails: it also allows the Park to meet the new technical requirements for workshop security and to provide shelter for any animals requiring care or being transferred, for example to other parks.

In addition, the land still available at the site (5 ha) means that plans to create an educational fauna observation area for the wolf, similar to the one in the Abruzzi, can be envisaged.

- Visit to the Park Information Centre in Entracque

Renovation of the centre will take place next year. A temporary exhibition on the wolf is currently running, aimed at heightening public awareness of the issue of the wolf's return to the Maritime Alps, although the question does not yet arise in the Park itself.

It should be noted that each Information Centre displays the European Diploma logo beside that of the Nature Park. Each Centre concentrates on a specific theme: in Entracque, it is the Park's wildlife that is highlighted.

- Visit to the work conducted in collaboration with the electricity company (ENEL) in the Rovina valley, near Lake Rovina

The Rovina valley is characterised by the presence of ENEL electricity installations (dam, reservoirs, roads). Fruitful collaboration has existed for some years between ENEL and the Park, with a view to meeting ENEL's environmental obligations and improving reception facilities for visitors.

In addition to various site-clearing operations (quarries, rubble) and the reconstruction of stone walls, over-head cables have been buried and a large parking area (600 spaces) has been laid out and equipped for the public.

- Visit to the Piastra site, where a joint Park/ENEL Information Centre is due to be created in an existing building

Park/ENEL collaboration is to be further concretised in the creation of an information centre at the entry to the Rovina valley, a short distance from the underground electricity power station. This building, situated at the edge of the Park, is a key information point. Emphasis will be placed on the interaction between the Park and ENEL in working towards the goals of preserving the biological habitats and landscape of the Park and its surroundings.

We will return to this partnership further in the report.

- Visit to the St Giacomo facilities

The Barra valley, which runs more or less parallel to the Rovina valley, represents a second important focus for tourism. Various facilities have been introduced to improve visitor reception (parking and picnic area, information panels...).

It should be noted that, as this valley is entered via the Rovina valley, the information centre and the (planned) gate-like edifice marking the entrance to the Park will serve both valleys.

Afternoon:

- Meeting with the press (TV – Piedmont)
- Meeting with representatives of local municipalities: (Mr G PEPINO, mayor of Entracque, Mr I DI GIAMBATTISTA, mayor of Valdieri, Mr M ALDO, from the Mountain Community of the Gesso valley); ENEL representatives: Ir. DICINTIO, departmental manager and Mr SIDALI from the public relations section; Mr R MUCCIARELLI, President of the Park and Mr G ADORINO, councillor. Those present in the morning also attended this meeting.

There was a broad exchange of views. The main points covered were the following:

1. the recommendations attached to the award of the Diploma in 1993
2. the question of fishing
3. obtaining national park status
4. the question of quarries
5. social and economic management plan
6. collaboration with ENEL
7. the return of the wolf

These different points will be dealt with in a separate chapter.

Friday 5 September

Morning: (the expert was accompanied by the same persons as on Thursday morning)

- Visit to the activity area at the entrance to the village of St Anna di Valdieri, and presentation of the plans for an open-air museum

The only village within the Park boundaries is to have its scope for activity improved. The open-air museum is to be built here, based on various features of ethnological, historical, cultural and natural interest within and around the village.

An initial instalment of finance for this project has been obtained (250 million lire).

The valley between St Anna di Valdieri and the Terme di Valdieri demonstrates that the landscape tends to reforest naturally when agricultural smallholdings are abandoned. This cover has adverse effects on certain habitats as well as on the landscape in general.

- Visit to the information centre at Terme di Valdieri, the nearby botanic garden and new tourist facilities

The information centre is now operational. Given its proximity to the botanic garden, it is dedicated to the Park's flora and vegetation.

Mention should be made of the beautiful (wooden) decorations and educational panels that have been prepared by the Park staff. The European Diploma, attractively framed, is on clear display in the film room.

In the botanic garden, species are grouped according to broad types of environment. Two new biotopes (calcareous and siliceous grassland) have been added, and an interesting nature trail has been added to the garden.

- In the Valella valley, description of research into chamois populations and a radio-tracking demonstration by Ms P BRAMBILLA.

Research into populations of large fauna, especially the chamois, is continuing, particularly through university studies to determine the ethnology of the latter (territoriality, feeding patterns, activity periods...).

The ongoing collaboration with Piedmont universities and research centres is a positive aspect of the Park's management and a source of stimulation and enhanced prestige for the wardens.

Afternoon:

- Visit to the Park's recently extended territory, taking in the former Palanfrè Nature Park, the accommodation centre currently being constructed in Palanfrè and the Information Centre in Vernante. Mr S BASSIGNANO, mayor of Vernante, Mr G ADORINO, councillor, and Ms C CALSALLO, a guide, accompanied the expert.

The 1995 extension to the Park led to a change of name: the Argentera Nature Park became the Maritime Alps Nature Park.

This increase to the Park's perimeter satisfies point 2 in the recommendations attached to the Diploma.

Thus, the Park's range of biotopes has been felicitously supplemented by a limestone massif and the corresponding habitats and species.

As for the protective beech grove dominating the town of Palafrè, it represents a "special reserve". It would be interesting to carry out an inventory of its internal structure, especially with a view to defining management measures more exactly.

In the past the village has had up to 400 inhabitants.

The pastoral hill-farming economy which developed here in a complex system of customs and methods suitable for exploiting the area deserves to be mentioned in the new reception and accommodation centre which the Park has built in the village. Such a memorial would also be a fitting addition to the existing ethnographic trail that begins in Vernante.

A new reception centre has just been opened in Vernante, focussing on the forest. It is situated beside the museum devoted to the local "hero", Pinocchio.

Nowadays, Pinocchio is popularised by about a hundred murals decorating the town's walls and façades.

III. THE PARK, ITS CURRENT SITUATION AND PROSPECTS

The on-site visit and discussions with the managers and others enabled the expert to pinpoint a certain number of general or specific topics for consideration during the Diploma's 5-year period of validity.

3.1 The recommendations attached to the award of the Diploma in 1993

1. *"Avoid any new scheme for a motorway link between Italy and France which may directly or indirectly affect the protected area of the Mercantour-Argentera Massif as a whole;"*

The plans for a new link will not affect the protected area. On the Italian side, negotiations are currently focusing on the upgrading of the Tende tunnel, which would be a worthwhile alternative.

2. *"To improve the present perimeter of the park so as to add to the fauna of the protected biotopes and ensure better ecological links between the various zones of national interest that are already protected."*

The inclusion of the Palafrè Nature Reserve, together with the area separating it from the Argentera Park, has resulted in the new designation "Maritime Alps Nature Park".

Moreover, the mayor of Valdieri has stated that he is in favour of extending the Park to include the "Special Nature Reserve" (Phoenician juniper), which lies within his commune near the Park's boundary.

On the other hand, plans to extend the Park towards the Stura valley (the commune of Aisone) have met with fierce opposition from hunters.

The desire to see the Park's perimeters extended in this zone thus remains a topical issue.

3. *"Find the necessary funds for creating an adequate infrastructure (car parks, picnic sites) on the outskirts of the park so as to channel the visitors more effectively;"*

Much progress has been achieved in this area since the Diploma was awarded.

It is still planned to signpost the main roads leading into the Park clearly, so that everyone is aware that they are entering a protected area. As well as these large "gate-ways", many more "small gates" should be set up, so that the perimeters are clearly identified on the various secondary access roads.

Bearing in mind the scale of tourism in certain sections of the Park, this policy of organising adequate reception facilities and restricted car access should be continued.

For example, the expert considers that car access to the Valella valley through Terme di Valdieri is damaging and should in future be more strictly regulated, given the valley's important location within the park and the existing facilities.

Existing plans to construct a parking area in the valley and to improve the road leading to it should be reviewed with a view to stricter limitation. At the most, an access route should be provided, reserved for hikers making for the refuges, and the road should be left in its current state.

4. *"To pursue steps for regulating fishing in a way that is more in keeping with the aims of the park;"*

A fishing management plan has been prepared.

It is to be included in the general management plan for the protected zone.

5. *"Continue and step up co-operation with the Mercantour National Park in the fields of education, scientific research and management."*

Collaboration with the Mercantour National Park is a very positive aspect, the details of which are described in full in the annual reports of the two parks. Particular mention should be made of the submission of the INTERREG II project (wolf, migration of species and cultivation) as well as of the Collaboration Charter.

3.2 Park status

A unanimous desire was expressed to have the Park's status changed from that of a nature park (Piedmont) to a national park.

Several reasons were given:

- a change in the attitude of the regional authorities;
- greater prestige and better conformity with regard to the management objectives;
- equivalent status with the Mercantour National Park, which would facilitate the possible future creation of a European transfrontier park;
- improved financial resources for the peripheral communes.

The expert takes the view that the wish to change the park's status should be encouraged. However, he did inform those he met that the qualitative requirements for this were about to be increased, particularly with regard to the peripheral zone, which should be organised and managed as a genuine buffer zone for the Park.

Note that the Piedmont area currently has 54 protected zones (nature reserves and parks) and 2 national parks: Val Grande and Gran Paradiso.

3.3 Landscape plan

The discussion on quarries, electrical cables, display boards etc, led to the idea that more consideration should be given to the landscape dimension of the park and its peripheral area. More specifically, the quarries should be exploited in a way that respects the environment: a landscape plan should be in force at all stages of exploitation and should determine the restoration methods at the time of closure.

As regards co-operation with the electricity company, this should soon take the form of a study aimed at proposing measures for landscaping the area beyond the power station, which is located at the very edge of the park.

More precisely, this question concerned the transformer and a new shed which is particularly visible from the access roads.

As far as the Park's territory is concerned, the Park/ENEL collaboration could also result in the creation of a map indicating sensitive areas, which would contrast the areas of healthy biological habitats and landscapes with the weak spots, chiefly linked to the presence of permanent technical installations. It is important to improve these as part of a long-term plan to reduce environmental liabilities.

3.4 Social and economic management plan

As a result of new regulations, this plan must be drawn up. Accordingly, an interesting initiative has already been taken by the Park and the tourism authorities to publicise the protected zone ("park information points" in hotels and restaurants), to promote regional dishes, and to guide tourists in the Park and its surroundings...

It should be noted that the Park is one of a network of 10 European pilot parks for sustainable tourism, which aim to maintain the resources on which tourism depends.

3.5 The return of the wolf

Compared to the situation in the Mercantour, this is a minor problem.

Whatever happens, everyone is aware that information is essential. Action has already been taken to this effect and is being continued, particularly in the Entracque Visitor Centre and the wildlife area that the park hopes to construct beside its new operational centre.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The expert considers that there is enough positive information to recommend the renewal of the European Diploma to the former Argentera Nature Park, which has been extended to become the Maritime Alps Nature Park. He proposes a certain number of points that should be included in the recommendations attached to the Diploma to assist the Park's management in its task:

1. work towards obtaining National Park status, firstly to ensure closer conformity with the management's current qualitative objectives, and secondly to consolidate the European entity which it already constitutes with the Mercantour National Park;
2. pursue steps to extend the limits of the Park, with a view to integrating the Special Nature Reserve (Phoenician juniper) and, if possible, augmenting the range of protected habitats to the Stura valley;
3. pursue the policy of managing tourist numbers by offering well-integrated reception facilities (parking area, picnic area...) and information intended to increase understanding of nature and to guide the public within the protected zone;
4. limit car access to sensitive areas, and in particular to the Valletta valley, so as to create, together with the Valasco valley, a large area of tranquillity in the centre of the Park;
5. prepare a landscape plan for the sensitive areas of the park and its surroundings, for inclusion in the new management plan for the protected zone.

DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

• REPORTS

- Document awarding the new designation of Maritime Alps Nature Park, subsequent to the amalgamation of the Argentera Park and the Palanfrè Nature Reserve (1995)
- Ecological plan for fishing management (2 volumes) (1996)
- Summary of the Park's investments (1987-96)
- Plans for the open-air museum in St Anna di Valdieri (March 1995)
- "Wolf" report: development of the species in the Maritime Alps

- The Italian-French INTERREG II transfrontier co-operation programme (1994-95)
- Co-operation agreement with the Huascarau National Park in Peru
- Convention with the Association of Naturalist Wardens on the organisation of guided tours and educational activities (1995), under the Act of 18 June 1989 "Disciplina delle professioni turistiche"
- Examples of agreements with external collaborators: university researchers, trainees...
- Sketches for the proposed park "gate-ways"
- Preliminary report on the wildlife management plan (1987-2000)
- Report dated 27 June 1997 by the Department of Safety, Hygiene and Public Health on the radioactivity levels in the Park following the Chernobyl accident.

- **INFORMATION DOCUMENTS**

- *Montagnes sans frontière*, co-produced with the Mercantour National Park (1995)
- Guide to the educational trail in the Terme de Valdieri forest (in French)
- Guide to educational activities in the park
- Information sheets on the bearded vulture (prepared with the Mercantour Park)
- The Park's (monthly) newsletter (December 1996, April 1997 and July 1997)
- Map of the Palanfrè Nature Reserve
- Information bulletin on research activities in the Palanfrè Nature Reserve (1995)
- Mycological research in the Palanfrè beech grove (1988)
- The return of the bearded vulture (video)
- Various periodicals and information leaflets

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (93) 20

**CONCERNING THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA
TO THE ARGENTERA NATURE PARK
(Italy)**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 3 May 1993
at the 493rd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, in accordance with Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,
Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to the proposals of the Steering Committee for the Conservation and Management of the Environment and Natural Habitats (CDPE);

Having noted the agreement of the Government of Italy;

Having deliberated,

Formally awards the European Diploma, Category A, in accordance with the regulations for the European Diploma (Resolution (91) 16), to the Argentera Nature Park;

Places the aforesaid park under the patronage of the Council of Europe until 3 May 1998;

Attaches the following recommendations to the award:

1. avoid any new scheme for a motorway link between Italy and France which may directly or indirectly affect the protected area of the Mercantour-Argentera Massif as a whole. In any case, the Secretariat of the Council of Europe should be informed from the beginning of any possible impact studies to be carried out;
2. improve the present perimeter of the park so as to add to the fauna of the protected biotopes and ensure better ecological links between the various zones of national interest that are already protected. Any alterations to the current boundaries must be notified immediately to the Secretariat;
3. find the necessary funds for creating an adequate infrastructure (car parks, picnic sites) on the outskirts of the park so as to channel the visitors more effectively;
4. pursue steps for regulating fishing in a way that is more in keeping with the aims of the park;
5. continue and step up co-operation with the Mercantour National Park in the fields of education, scientific research and management.

APPENDIX II

DRAFT RESOLUTION (98) ...

concerning the renewal of the European Diploma
to the Maritime Alps Nature Park

(formerly the Argentera Nature Park)

The Committee of Ministers, in accordance with Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma,

Having regard to Resolution (93) 20 awarding the European Diploma in Category A to the Argentera Nature Park,

Having regard to the proposals of the Committee for the activities of the Council of Europe in the field of Biological and Landscape Diversity (CO-DBP),

Renews the European Diploma, awarded to the Maritime Alps Nature Park until 3 May 2003,

Attaches the following recommendations to this renewal:

- work towards obtaining National Park status, firstly to ensure closer conformity with the management's current qualitative objectives, and secondly to consolidate the European entity which it already constitutes with the Mercantour National Park;
- pursue steps to augment the limits of the Park, with a view to integrating the Special Nature Reserve (Phoenician juniper) and, if possible, extending the range of protected habitats to the Stura valley;
- pursue the policy of managing tourist numbers by offering well-integrated reception facilities (parking area, picnic area...) and information intended to increase understanding of nature and to guide the public within the protected zone;
- limit car access to sensitive areas, and in particular to the Valletta valley, so as to create, together with the Valasco valley, a large area of tranquillity in the centre of the Park;
- prepare a landscape plan for the sensitive areas of the park and its surroundings, for inclusion in the new management plan for the protected zone.