

Council of Europe
Conseil de l'Europe



Strasbourg, 23 January 1997
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PE-S-DE (97) 47

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

BU-DBP

Group of specialists - European Diploma

**Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site
(Austria)**

Category C

RENEWAL

*Expert report
by Charles STAUFFER
(France)*

1. BACKGROUND

The European Diploma, category C, was awarded to the Krimml Waterfall Natural Site in 1967. Since then the diploma has been renewed every five years, most recently in 1992.

As the diploma is due for renewal for a further five years, the Council of Europe's Directorate of Environment and Local Authorities asked me to carry out an on-the-spot appraisal in order to determine whether the site still met the criteria according to which it was awarded the diploma and whether the recommendations attached to the last renewal had been implemented.

The latest recommendations to be made were as follows:

1. the current plan for extending the protected area on both sides of the Falls to be formalised as soon as possible and the Council of Europe Secretariat to be kept informed of the changes made to the present boundaries;
2. consideration to be given to the possibility of incorporating the Achenthal valley into the protected area and the CDPE to be informed of any further action taken on this proposal;
3. sanitation work at the Schönangerl restaurant to be completed within the next two years and the electricity cable to be laid below ground at the same time;
4. every effort to be made to ensure that developments around the Falls have as little impact as possible on the beauty of the landscape; in particular, attention to be paid to the reservoir of the hydro-electric plant, roof of the saw mill, car-park, etc;
5. efforts to keep motor traffic to a minimum, especially between the village and Schönangerl, to be continued.

II. CONDUCT OF THE APPRAISAL

The visit took place on 28 and 29 June 1996; no member of the Council of Europe Secretariat was able to accompany the expert.

The protected area was visited on 28 June and the following day was spent discovering the Krimmler Achenthal.

We were received by:

- Mr Kremser, head of the Hohe Tauern National Park, accompanied by Mr Lainer, chief administrator of the Neukirchen park,
- MM Hinterstoisser and Fischer-Colbrie, in charge of the 13/2 section of the Salzburg wildlife protection department,
- ÖAV representatives,
- the services linked to the construction of the Schönangerln waste water evacuation system,

- Mr Hinterstoisser Sr, in charge of environmental aspects,
- Mr Oberhollenzer, Mayor of Krimml.

I apologise to anyone left off this list and should like to take this opportunity to thank all the organisers, particularly Mr Lainer, for their warm welcome and the faultless organisation of the two-day visit.

III. MAIN FEATURES OF THE PROTECTED AREA

The Krimml Falls are located in the north-western corner of the Hohe Tauern National Park. This park lies within the municipality of Krimml, in the Ober-Pinzgau district of the Land of Salzburg.

The Krimmler-Ache Falls are on three levels, with a total drop of 400 m.

The boundaries of the protected area were initially set at 200 m on either side of the waterfall, and 100 m up and down from the Falls.

The immediate surroundings of the protected area are forests belonging to three types of owner: some belong to the Austrian state, some are privately owned (mainly those on the right bank) and most of the land at the foot of the Falls belongs to the ÖAV.

Apart from the Schönangerln Inn, located on one of the levels of the Falls, the immediate surroundings comprise the village of Krimml, the private Geroldpass road and a number of tourist facilities enabling large numbers of visitors to admire this natural wonder.

Of course, an expert report of this type must also examine activities in the immediate vicinity of the protected area.

IV. MAIN SUBJECTS DISCUSSED DURING THE VISIT

1. Intermediate area between the Falls and the village

The village is linked to the protected area by a path underneath the Geroldpass road. This path enters a wooded area after passing a row of shops and restaurants, to which a new kiosk has been added since our previous visit. This addition is regrettable and the decision to grant planning permission a cause for dismay.

A closer look revealed the tricks played by certain shopkeepers and restaurateurs to gain as much space as possible to display their wares or attract custom.

For example, (and given the location right next to the forest, this calls for special attention), during our previous visit, the area between the shops and forest had been turned into a parking area for employees' cars. This time these vehicles were parked in the forest along the path leading to the Falls and the original parking lot had been used for tables to seat patrons.

I shall return in another section to other ways in which commercial pressure is exerted around the Krimml.

2. The foot of the Falls

The public information area, inaugurated to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the diploma award, was set up on the basis of a study carried out by Salzburg University. As the 1993 annual report mentions, we had been presented with the preliminary draft on our previous visit. It must be acknowledged that, on the whole, the information area is perfectly integrated into the site. Covering a relatively small area, it explains different aspects of the region to the public.

The ÖAV office is located very close to the ticket-booth. Money raised is used to finance most of the ÖAV's activities.

The 1987 floods - the damage caused by them is still visible today - had required the whole of the foot of the Falls to be relandscaped.

Advantage was taken of the upheaval and repair work to make the descent from the ticket-booth to the Falls accessible to the disabled. The various man-made paths, forming a haphazard network, were removed and the plan to build a wooden viewing platform was abandoned. Considerable amounts of sensible work had restored a natural appearance to the whole site.

Human erosion at the foot of the Falls is still a problem as all visitors insist on going into the spray to take a photograph. Only the introduction of concealed viewpoints, like the "rest areas" found in Swiss national parks, could end this erosion.

To sum up, we could say that the foot of the Falls have recovered their natural appearance and both the wooded areas and the public spaces have been tastefully restored.

3. The old Krimmler Achenthal road

Most visitors walking up to the Schönangerln take the old Krimmler Achenthal road, now for pedestrians only. The road zigzags up and each bend reveals a different feature of the landscape.

ÖAV staff are responsible for maintenance and cleanliness. As always a minority of visitors cause damage that obliges the staff to think up ways of making specific improvements to reduce even further the harmful effects of so many tourists.

It is remarkable that, despite an endless flow of visitors, damage has been so slight, something that should encourage the staff.

Finally, it should be pointed out that work carried out to install water pipes has barely affected the road. This is the result of deliberate efforts by the people supervising these works.

4. Schönangerln

The Schönangerln Inn is built very close to the Falls, on a jutting piece of rock.

Ninety per cent of all visitors to the Falls visit the inn, making it a major concern of those in charge of the protected area (witness successive expert reports). Five years ago the problem of the evacuation of waste water lay at the heart of discussions.

This problem, to which I shall return a little further on, has been solved successfully; similarly, the part which had to be rebuilt after the 1987 flood has been successfully redesigned and landscaped.

Issues raised during my previous visit also included the electricity cable and telephone line; this problem too has been successfully tackled, as both cables have been laid in a trench alongside the sewage pipes.

The inn's water supplies come from a spring on the opposite bank. The water main crosses the waterfalls opposite the terrace; the pipe is an eyesore and it too should be buried underground, in due course.

5. The landscape seen from Schönangerln

We mentioned three elements marring the splendid landscape that fans out at the foot of the waterfall. The roof of the sawmill now spoils the view far less than it did, having been repainted shortly after my previous visit.

The second element was the hydro-electric plant reservoir. The choice of location is regrettable since, if it had been located only a few hundred metres downstream, it would have been out of sight. The vegetation planted around the reservoir has now grown and partly conceals it.

The third element - last but not least - was the huge car-park. Apart from planting a few trees, no landscaping effort had been made. This eyesore remains and destroys the charm of the Krimml village.

We know that this car-park is outside the protected area but it was built because of the waterfalls and is very ugly. Those responsible for granting (or refusing) planning permission for car-parks, etc, should pay particular attention to constructions near the site. Their shape, form and location should be in keeping with their surroundings.

The image of the village of Krimml would benefit if these matters were all dealt with.

6. Upstream towards the mouth of the Achenthal

The upper part of the Falls, upstream from Schönangerln, less popular possibly because it is less spectacular, forms a linchpin with the Achenthal.

7. Schönangerln sewage pipe

A sewage pipe for the inn has finally been laid, having proved unavoidable.

Now that the final replanting has taken place, it is difficult to believe that such major work was carried out.

This resounding success is primarily the work of the landscape architects, who chose the most landscape-friendly location for the pipe. The project co-ordinator also contributed by sticking to the deadlines and applying a carefully worked out timetable, synchronising the forestry and engineering aspects of the project.

These works were an opportunity to introduce a more random afforestation approach, better suited to this kind of landscape.

I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate everyone involved in this work, which should be held up as an example.

8. Other matters

a. *Woodland management*

Aware of the small size of the protected area, Austrian officials have studied a forestry management plan applicable to all owners and implemented in the form of a special case-by-case agreement. The aim is to encourage as far as possible the planting of deciduous trees, lacking in this area, and also to introduce an irregular structure likelier to guarantee a lasting landscape. This management plan was presented by Mr Lainer at a meeting of protected area managers held in the Peak District (United Kingdom) in September 1995.

This approach is in keeping with successive resolutions and is a welcome development.

b. *Motorised transport*

Two types of automobile traffic are currently found near the Krimml waterfall.

Firstly, vehicles used for delivering goods or transporting employees. I noticed that everyone working for the shops and restaurants near the Krimml Falls commutes to work by car. This practice is regrettable and has a snowball effect.

Secondly, a mini-bus shuttle service is offered by two businesses near the Falls. The drivers stop and ask tourists if they want a lift to the Schönangerln Inn. The author of the last report but one expressed concern about this practice, echoed by myself five years ago. There is still cause for concern and strict measures must be taken to stem this traffic.

We have deliberately left aside the problem linked to farming in the Achenthal, Krimmler Thauernhaus and some of the huts at the bottom of the valley.

c. *Unfair competition*

We were approached at the beginning of our visit by Mr Richter. He handed us a file containing plans for a new car-park in the Krimml area.

Mr Richter is the owner of the car-park I mentioned earlier. This point is worth raising, partly to draw the attention of those responsible for the site to the need to take care when granting planning permission and also to ask the Mayor of Krimml to bear in mind the importance of Krimml and the village's overall appearance for the beauty of this site, when he takes decisions. If people are given preferential treatment, eyesores could be built.

It is a shame that the village of Krimml lies outside the national park. This kind of problem could be more easily solved if it were brought inside the park.

V. THE KRIMMLER ACHENTHAL

The second day was spent visiting the valley into which the Falls flow. This 20 km valley links the Krimmler Kees (on the Italian border) to the Salzbach valley.

This trough-shaped glacial valley is extensively used by a number of farmers. The management of the Hohe Tauern park has signed a number of agreements to step up protection measures in respect of certain biotopes.

These measures are aimed at creating a network of high-level protection areas, with the remainder of the sector being classified as a peripheral zone.

We paid particular attention to the Warnsdorferhutte refuge, which has recently been restored and equipped with a small sewage treatment plant.

Here too, I saw that great effort had been made to avoid pollution and a great deal of energy employed to solve technical problems linked to Alpine activities.

The Austrian authorities are seeking to bring the Krimml Achenthal within the perimeter of the European Diploma protected area. Well aware of the difficulties they are likely to come up against, they have opted for an agreement-based approach, easier to implement than an ambitious one.

CONCLUSIONS

The Krimml Falls look much as I remember them. A number of points have been improved, so that full justice has been done to this natural treasure. Nothing can stand in the way of renewing the European Diploma for a further five year period.

The recommendations made at the time of the previous renewal have, for the most part, been followed. Consideration is still being given to extending the protected area covered by the Diploma.

DRAFT RESOLUTION

The following recommendations might be attached to the renewal:

1. every effort to be made to ensure that the Environment Department is consulted about any applications for planning permission for additional facilities, businesses or other constructions within sight of the Krimml Falls;
2. any further installation or extension of shops and restaurants on the road leading to the Falls to be definitely banned;
3. the number of motorised shuttle services to be limited to the two or three already in existence.

The Secretariat has prepared a draft resolution (see Appendix II).

APPENDIX I

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE
COMITÉ DES MINISTRES

RÉSOLUTION (92) 12

CONCERNANT LE RENOUELEMENT DU DIPLÔME EUROPÉEN
OCTROYÉ AU MONUMENT NATUREL DES CHUTES DE KRIMML
(Autriche)

*(adoptée par le Comité des Ministres le 18 mai 1992,
lors de la 476^e réunion des Délégués des Ministres)*

Le Comité des Ministres, en vertu de l'article 15.a du Statut du Conseil de l'Europe,

Vu la Résolution (65) 6 instituant le Diplôme européen;

Vu la Résolution (67) 23 octroyant le Diplôme européen au Monument naturel des chutes de Krimml;

Vu les propositions du Comité directeur pour la protection et la gestion de l'environnement et du milieu naturel (CDPE),

Renouvelle jusqu'au 27 octobre 1997 le Diplôme européen octroyé au Monument naturel des chutes de Krimml dans la catégorie C;

Assortit le renouvellement des recommandations suivantes :

1. formaliser le plus rapidement possible le projet actuel d'extension de la zone diplômée de part et d'autre de la chute et informer le Secrétariat du Conseil de l'Europe des modifications qui seront apportées aux limites actuelles;
2. étudier la possibilité d'intégrer la vallée de la Krimmler Achenal dans l'ensemble de l'actuelle zone diplômée et informer le CDPE des suites réservées à ce projet;
3. réaliser au cours des deux années à venir l'assainissement de l'auberge Schönangerl et mettre sous terre, par la même occasion, la ligne électrique;
4. mettre tout en œuvre pour que les aménagements réalisés autour de la chute aient un minimum d'impact sur la beauté du paysage; des mesures devraient être prises notamment en ce qui concerne le bassin de rétention de la centrale hydroélectrique, le toit de la scierie, le parking, etc.;
5. poursuivre les efforts en vue de limiter le plus possible le trafic de véhicules à moteur, principalement ceux qui assurent la liaison entre le village et Schönangerl.

APPENDIX II

DRAFT RESOLUTION (97) ...

ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA
AWARDED TO THE KRIMML WATERFALLS NATURE SITE

(Austria)

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of 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 (67) 23 awarding the European Diploma to the Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site;

Having regard to the proposals of the Bureau of the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the field of Biological and Landscape Diversity (BU-DBP);

Renews the European Diploma awarded to the Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site in category C, until 2002;

Attaches to the renewal the following recommendations:

1. every effort to be made to ensure that the Environment Department is consulted about any applications for planning permission for additional facilities, businesses or other constructions within sight of the Krimml Falls;
2. any further installation or extension of businesses on the road leading to the Falls to be definitely banned;
3. the number of motorised shuttle services be limited to the two or three already in existence;
- [4. the landscaping of the car-park, which is still an eyesore, to be improved;]
- [5. the water-pipe carrying drinking water to the Schönangerln Inn to be buried;]
- [6. the possibility of extending the boundaries of the protected area to be considered, so that activities in the peripheral areas can be better controlled.]

Recommendations between square brackets [...] are Secretariat proposals.