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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

Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve
(Germany)

Category B

RENEWAL

Expert report by
Mr Daniel DASKE
(France)

Request for renewal of the European Diploma

Naturschutzgebiet "Weltenburger Enge", Kelheim,
Northern Bavaria



No Secretariat representative accompanied the expert on his inspection of the park.

Appendix I contains Resolution (93) 14, renewing the European Diploma. Appendix II contains a draft resolution drawn up by the Secretariat for a possible renewal in 1998.

The appraisal was made on 23 and 24 September 1997 at Kelheim. On the first day, after the initial contacts and a brief general discussion of the environment in question and the various partners, there was a walking tour of the rocky defile along the Danube, the most scenic and sensitive part of the reserve. The return journey from the Weltenburg convent was made by river in a small boat. A hearing with representatives of the Alpenverein (Alpine Association) and the Bund für Umwelt- und Naturschutz (Environmental and Nature Conservation League) was arranged at my request late in the day. The second day was spent in the forests, the true dominant feature of the environment, reaching the reserve's northern boundary marked by the stretch of the Altmühl River incorporated into the Rhine-Main-Danube Canal.

Details

23 September

Walking tour of the gorge via the path along the left bank, passing by the Kloster, a grotto-like chapel built into the cliff-face, and Wipfelsfurt, the former forestry depot of Kelheim gradually being converted into an orchard. At Langewand, the narrowest point of the gorge, the route diverges from the river towards the wooded ridge via the impressive Keltenwall, a rampart of Celtic origin with a total length of 20 km, of which the reserve encloses 4.5.

After an inspection of the cliff-top plant cover, the Danube was crossed by flat-bottomed boat to reach the Weltenburg convent on the less-visited right bank. The return journey was by river in a flat-bottomed boat, pausing to observe the beaver at work in a small stand of fringing forest.

5-7 pm

Further discussion with Conservation League and Alpine Association representatives.

24 September

Field excursion mainly in the wooded areas at the Michelsberg and Befreiungshalle localities; various compartments including a magnificent stand of ash not far from Wipfelsfurt, a former spruce wood which has been cut down and planted with oaks, and the fully protected forest reserve of Ludwigshain outside the park perimeter, whose 2.5 hectares contain some 450 year old oaks. Another walk led to the Schülerloch limestone cave above the Altmühl near its confluence with the Danube. The cave, situated on the sunny slope, is under protection (site and immediate wooded surroundings) and receives nearly 40 000 visitors per year.

The present wish, apparently unanimous, is to extend the boundaries of the Weltenburger Enge Reserve to achieve greater spatial coherence by incorporating nearby reserves such as Schülerloch. Likewise, a conservation and management plan for the valuable dry grassland in the Altmühl valley is being developed along more than 16 km of the river's course.

Land purchases are carried out inter alia by the Nature Conservation League which owns 16 sites totalling 35 hectares, the fully protected forest reserve of Ludwigshain among them.

Participants in the encounters:

MM Moser,	Bayerische Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen
Sturm,	Bayerische Landesamt für Umweltschutz
Klose,	Regierung von Niederbayern
Gässler,	Landratsamt Kelheim
Eicher,	Landschaftspflegerverein VöF e. V., Kelheim
Fund,	Leiter des Forstamtes Kelheim
Engesser	Forstamt Kelheim
Kammermeier,	Forstamt Kelheim
Esser,	Referendar am Forstamt Kelheim
Senft	Deutscher Alpenverein e.V., Sektion Kelheim, und Mitglied der Naturschutzwacht im Landkreis Kelheim
Reuder,	Bund Naturschutz in Bayern e. V., Kreisgruppe Kelheim
Leible,	Regierung v. Niederbayern

I. Impact of the European Diploma

The reasons given questing renewal of the Weltenburger Enge's European Diploma are as follows. First and foremost, the Diploma is the pledge of full compliance with the regulations; for example, the Diploma requirements were invoked to prevent a noisy demonstration at a recent wedding in the Weltenburg convent when a salute to the bride and groom was to be fired. The League representative feels that the Diploma is somewhat "touristy" and remains ineffective against the issue of certain building permits. True, signs mentioning the award of the European Diploma are posted at various strategic locations.

II. Presentation of the natural environment (see 1: 25 000 base map)

The name Weltenburger Enge gives the false impression that the reserve concerns only the Danube and its spectacular rocky gorge.

In fact the protected environment is essentially wooded. The altitude ranges from 340 m at river level to nearly 500 m on the forest-clad hilltop, a calcareous formation.

The construction of the Rhine-Main-Danube canal has prompted compensatory protection measures in the zone called Schellneck Altwasser just to the north of the Weltenburger Enge Reserve. The rocky gorge monopolises interest to the detriment of the forest cover, clearly the dominant environmental feature in spatial terms; this will be further discussed below. The cliffs, with a sheer drop to the Danube in some places, retain high wildlife potential; let us mention *Prima auricula*, a plant of Alpine origin in decline at present. On 23 September at the top of a cliff we observed late-flowering goldilocks aster, a Mediterranean species, together with a fine growth of berries on the Hungarian rowan, *Sorbus pannonica*. A small colony of grey herons lives among some spruce on the right bank, less accessible than the left. A pair of peregrine falcons, always under surveillance at nesting time, completes the grandeur and significance of the rock-face environment. The three chicks hatched in 1996 have disappeared, and it is not known whether to blame the loss on traffickers in protected species or on the eagle owl, also settled in this habitat.

A 1949 sighting of the owl in the Weltenburger Enge should be noted; this was well before the more recent waves of reintroduction which brought the eagle owl and the peregrine falcon into conflict. In a small 2 hectare patch of riparian forest (Auwald) we detected the presence and activities of the reintroduced European beaver. The presence of a few nesting couples of Canada geese, apparently introduced by a local breeder, seems rather questionable despite their intrinsic beauty. The northern boundary of the Weltenburger Enge Reserve adjoins the Altmühl valley where there are noble expanses of limestone cliffs. A case of peregrine falcons nesting 150 m away from a pair of eagle owls is recorded.

The dry grasslands overlooking the river are of great value, with superb beds of pasque-flowers. The Weltenburger Enge, the entity holding of the European Diploma at present, is in the process of incorporating nearby protected environments with a view to spatial coherence and networking. If the plan to protect the Altmühl grasslands materialises, it will certainly be expedient to redefine the entire protected area which in fact encompasses the Altmühl-Danube junction, so that the name Weltenburger Enge is restrictive. It ought not to be discarded but will require amplification in due course. The active desire to extend the protected perimeter is most gratifying.

III. Dominant forest vegetation and footpath network

Approaching Kelheim from downstream, the first landmarks sighted are the crest of the Michelsberg and the imposing Befreiungshalle liberation monument deep in a hardwood forest setting which must be entered to discover the Weltenburger Enge gap. Quite plainly, the protected environment is essentially of a forest type with beech as the dominant species, closely followed by oak.

Among the other deciduous species present, which include sycamore, above the Wipfelsfurt orchard can be seen a magnificent stand of beech up to 40 m high and 145 years old, some diseased elms along the river and a few patches of softwood riparian forest (Auwald) consisting of willow and poplar. Yew trees, generally growing singly, cling to the harshest slopes. The cliff top bears small trees such as the aforementioned Hungarian rowan. What of the spruce? Local foresters answered my question by retorting, "Have you seen any?" Admittedly fewer and fewer are seen; the universal norm is that they disappear as reforestation progresses. While travelling down the Danube in a flat-bottomed boat, on the right bank we sighted grey herons sunning themselves on spruce trees among which a small heron sanctuary is installed. As the park staff freely admit, the spruce is devoted to herons and to building new footpaths; that is, the felled spruce are positioned "naturally" with the apparent aim of routing the ramblers and the problematic mountain bikers via the least damaging itineraries.

Large-scale work, very noticeable on the ground, has been undertaken by the forestry authority to this end. The aim is to bypass the most sensitive areas, on the old approaches near the cliff edges, by creating a new system of trails. Human pressure, estimated at 300 000 visitors per year, is still considerable on the left bank.

It is necessary to spare the environment as far as possible, and felling spruce trees to form a "natural" deterrent seems very expedient. A variety of forestry work is in hand. The rule of no human intervention applies to 160 hectares of the Reserve and especially the sectors that slope down most steeply to the river. A fair proportion of dry trees are left standing. The

occurrence of the stock dove in correlation with the black woodpecker is being researched. We were shown a fine plantation of 18 year old oaks where there used to be a spruce wood. Efforts to reconstitute the aged deciduous tree cover are making genuinely good progress.

IV. Educational aspect

The existence of nature trails (Lehrwege) is worth mentioning. One of archaeological interest starts at the Kelheim archaeology museum and crosses the reserve as far as the Keltenwall. This adds a valuable heritage and history element to the discovery of a protected natural environment. In the Weltenburger Enge, it is felt that the number of signposts and notice boards should be kept to a minimum. At present two wardens enforce the regulations. One of our contacts suggested recruiting a ranger to cater more adequately for the educational function. The reserve, already old-established (1938) has no reception facilities as yet, but soon will; it has been decided to build a visitors' centre in the vicinity of the landing stages, the entrance to the reserve.

V. Boat traffic

The field visit took place in September at low water. In fact the Danube has a large area of normally waterless gravel shoals. This period is described as a "respite", because the shallow depth precludes transit of large craft. Only flat-bottomed boats carrying about 10 passengers and equipped with small auxiliary motors operate at this time. Not so long ago the most attractive crags used to be floodlit for a kind of "son et lumière". Boat transport obviously remains one of the most awkward problems, in that it carries the bulk of the tourist traffic. This point is hotly debated. Craft are bigger and bigger today, some say. True, say others, but they have quieter engines and make fewer waves. As for flat-bottomed craft, it is suggested to discontinue the licences at the death of the mainly elderly owners.

A thorny issue indeed, but it is hard to imagine for one moment such a setting without any boats, considering that the full scenic quality can be appreciated only by waterway. All commercial river traffic being banned in any case, can the number of boats be further reduced and traffic restricted to certain times? The most natural way to discover and experience a river environment is to glide noiselessly with the current. I personally would be sorry if flat-bottomed craft were completely eliminated.

VI. Rock-climbing

Rock-climbing, partly linked with the strong attraction of the setting and its perpendicular cliffs, also remains a sensitive issue. By the standards of this sport, certain climbing routes in the gorge have great appeal in terms of difficulty. As a result of discussions with the Alpenverein, climbing has been restricted to certain authorised locations on the left bank. The management plan successfully aims to minimise human presence on the left bank which has sanctuary status and where the peregrine falcon breeds. On 23 September while we were in the area, a few climbers were spotted high up the cliff in an unauthorised sector of the left bank.

In order to make headway in this matter, the following combined measures may be necessary:

- securing fuller acceptance of the prohibited routes among climbers, not necessarily Alpenverein members;
- increasing the "physical deterrents" – spruce trunks, etc – to make the top of the cliffs still more inaccessible;
- tightening surveillance as far as possible.

VII. Other points raised

Water engineering on the Danube

Care continues to be necessary as regards para. 7 of the resolution adopted on 3 May 1993 at the last renewal of the diploma awarded to the Weltenburger Enge. Attention is drawn to a plan for a large-scale sill possibly to be built a few kilometres upstream, a development which could cause flooding of certain riverside forests.

Restaurant at Klösterle

Next to this chapel, built into the cliff-face inside the protected perimeter on the left bank, stands a restaurant for which there is an extension scheme. It is advisable to issue an unfavourable opinion regarding any new construction.

Closure of the cellulose factory (Zellstofffabrik)

A cellulose factory, sited on the right bank at the edge of the Weltenburger Enge, recently closed down for economic reasons. The future of the complex, consisting of land and buildings, remains uncertain. Since its present scenic impact is definitely negative, rehabilitation of the natural surroundings would be desirable to attenuate this eyesore at the downstream entrance of the gorge.

Tourist numbers, always high, have shown a further increase over the past few years. The ongoing problems which are largely related to this large human influx which is not to be condemned, for everyone deserves to experience the sight of what is surely Germany's most imposing river gorge.

In accordance with the management plan, current efforts are aimed at channelling visitors while safeguarding the natural wealth of the surroundings. Credit is due for the remarkable work done to extend the protected areas and network the Weltenburger Enge with the Schellneck on the Altmühl. The desire to achieve a reserve of larger dimensions incorporating the Schülerloch, together with the expected results of the "grassland" operation, may be considered suspicious. A highly favourable opinion concerning the renewal of the European Diploma forms the logical conclusion to this report.

The renewal should nevertheless be granted with the following recommendations:

1. Extend the boundaries of the Weltenburger Enge Reserve to achieve greater spatial unity. If appropriate, amplify the title of the reserve because the Danube gorges now represent only a part – albeit the most prestigious and vulnerable – of the protected area.
2. Make the various educational initiatives (Lehrwege) more coherent, specifically in the context of the prospective visitors' centre.
3. Generally increase surveillance of the most sensitive environments by posting wardens to "teach and dissuade", particularly as regards climbing.
4. Further limit the number of larger craft passing through the gorge, with a possible time restriction.
5. Secure rock-climbing enthusiasts' fuller acceptance of banned routes. Increase the "physical deterrents" – spruce trunks, etc – to avert cliff top erosion from human causes.
6. Maintain vigilance in respect of water engineering on the Danube, especially regarding the plan for a large-scale sill which might damage the riparian forests.
7. Prohibit any scheme to extend the restaurant at the Klösterle locality.
8. Negotiate rehabilitation of the natural surroundings on the site of a cellulose factory which recently ceased operating at the downstream limit of the gorges.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (93) 14

ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA AWARDED TO THE WELTENBURGER ENGE NATURE RESERVE (Germany)

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

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 (78) 21 awarding the European Diploma to the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve (Federal Republic of Germany);

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

Renews the European Diploma, Category B, awarded to the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve until 2 March 1998;

Attaches the following recommendations to the renewal:

1. the development and management plan for the reserve and its surroundings should be approved;
2. consideration should be given as to how much the forest needs shaping to open up the landscape towards the Liberation Monument;
3. the flow of ramblers on the left-bank cliff-tops should be channelled;
4. mooring and rock-climbing should be banned on the right bank;
5. commercial boat traffic should be brought under control;
6. research should be carried out with a view to integration of the Altmühltal into the protected area;
7. care should be taken that existing or planned water engineering schemes upstream from the reserve do not harm the integrity of the site.

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

COMITÉ DES MINISTRES

RÉSOLUTION (93) 14

CONCERNANT LE RENOUVELLEMENT DU DIPLÔME EUROPÉEN OCTROYÉ À LA RÉSERVE NATURELLE DE LA WELTENBURGER ENGE (Allemagne)

*(adoptée par le Comité des Ministres le 3 mai 1993,
lors de la 493^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 (78) 21 relative à l'octroi du Diplôme européen à la Réserve naturelle de la Weltenburger Enge (République Fédérale d'Allemagne);

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

Renouvelle jusqu'au 2 mars 1998 le Diplôme européen octroyé à la Réserve naturelle de la Weltenburger Enge dans la catégorie B;

Assortit le renouvellement des recommandations suivantes:

1. approuver le plan d'aménagement et de gestion concernant la réserve naturelle et ses environs;
2. étudier dans quelle mesure la forêt doit être modelée pour ouvrir le paysage en direction du Monument de la libération;
3. canaliser le flux des piétons sur le haut des falaises de la rive gauche;
4. interdire l'accostage et l'escalade sur la rive droite;
5. maîtriser le contrôle de la navigation commerciale sur le fleuve;
6. poursuivre la recherche pour une intégration de l'Altmühltal dans la zone protégée;
7. veiller à ce que les aménagements hydrauliques existants ou en projet en amont de la réserve ne portent pas atteinte à l'intégrité du site.

APPENDIX II

DRAFT RESOLUTION

on the renewal of the European Diploma
to the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve

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 (78) 21 awarding the European Diploma, Category B, to the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve,

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 Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve until 2 March 2003,

Attaches the following recommendations to the renewal:

- The boundaries of the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve should be extended to achieve greater spatial unity. The title of the reserve is to be amplified if appropriate, in that the Danube gorges now represent only a part – albeit the most prestigious and vulnerable of the protected area.
- The various educational initiatives (Lehrwege) should be made more coherent, specifically in the context of the prospective visitors' centre.
- Surveillance of the most sensitive environments should be generally increased by posting wardens to "teach and dissuade", particularly as regards climbing.
- The number of larger craft passing through the gorge should be further limited, with a possible time restriction.
- Fuller acceptance by rock-climbing enthusiasts of banned routes should be secured, and the "physical deterrents" – spruce trunks, etc – increased to avert cliff top erosion from human causes.
- Vigilance in respect of water engineering on the Danube should be maintained, especially regarding the plan for a large-scale sill which could damage the riparian forests.
- Any scheme to extend the restaurant at the *Klösterle* locality should be prohibited.
- Negotiations should be opened to restore to its natural condition the site of a cellulose factory which recently ceased operating at the downstream limit of the gorges.

