



Strasbourg, 10 February 1998
[s:\de98\docs\de56E.98]

PE-S-DE (98) 56

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

CO-DBP

Group of specialists - European Diploma

Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park
(Spain)

Category A

RENEWAL

Expertise Report by
Mr Charles STAUFFER
(France)

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

Appendix I contains Resolution (93) 16, renewing the European Diploma. Appendix II contains a draft resolution drawn up by the Secretariat for a possible renewal in 1998.

ORDESA AND MONTE PERDIDO NATIONAL PARK

The Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park was awarded the European Diploma on 13 June 1988.

The Diploma was renewed in 1993.

The Diploma being scheduled for renewal again in 1998, the Council of Europe's Directorate of Environment and Local Authorities asked me to carry out an on-the-spot appraisal with a view to:

- ascertaining whether the park continues to fulfil the criteria for a category A Diploma;
- verifying the implementation of Resolution (93) 16, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 3 May 1993, as set forth in Appendix I.

1. GENERAL REMARKS

Lucien BRIET, born in Paris in 1860, was one of the figures responsible for the creation in 1918 of the Ordesa Valley National Park, covering an area of 2,066 ha.

On 16 August 1982 a law was passed increasing its area to 15,608 ha, including the whole of the Monte Perdido massif and the neighbouring valleys: Añisclo, Escuain and the Pineta cirque.

The same law included a peripheral area of 19,879 ha, bringing the total surface area to 35,487 ha.

The park is located in the Aragonese part of the Pyrenees and dominated by three summits: Monte Perdido, Cilindro de Marboré and Soum de Ramond. This impressive group of calcareous mountains overlooks the highest schistose and granitic summits in the central Pyrenees, and marks the boundary with the Pyrenees National Park in France.

The central or core area covers the municipalities of Bielsa (1,824 ha), Fanlo (8,265 ha), Puértolas (2,473 ha), Tella-Sin (730 ha) and Torla (2,315 ha). The municipalities own most of the land and use it as pasture land to perpetuate the farming tradition (mountain pastures in the core area).

This pastoral activity contributes to the conservation of the extraordinary landscape, the beauty and quality of which were the reasons for the creation of the National Park.

It is difficult to summarise the key features of this diploma-holding area in a few words, but they include:

- the calcareous rock, with its wealth of fossils, its karst phenomena (35 km of underground galleries and caves) and the erosion phenomenon, with some of the most remarkable glacial erosion in Spain but also great canyons carved out by fluvial erosion;

- the striking contrast between arid summits and luxuriant vegetation in the valleys;
- relict species of animals and plants;
- the rich cultural resources of the peripheral area.

2. THE EXPERT ASSESSMENT

The visit took place on 12 and 13 August 1997. No representative of the Council of Europe Secretariat was present.

I was met on the evening of August 11 by Mr Basilio RADA MARTINEZ, the Park Director, his deputy Mr Luis MARQUINA and Professor BRACELLS of the Pyrenean Institute of Ecology in JACA, who has devoted much of his research to nature in the park.

The evening was spent finalising the programme for the next two days and examining the purely administrative side of the management of the park.

The above group was joined by a number of park employees (wardens, maintenance staff) who accompanied us on the two-day visit, providing valuable assistance to guarantee the successful completion of the expert assessment.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank them all, including the administrative staff who responded to my different requests and helped me plan my movements.

The programme drawn up by Mr Basilio RADA was as follows:

12 AUGUST 1997 - MORNING

Excursion to Ordesa valley

The problem of visitors and the existing facilities.

The question of saving the ibex population.

12 AUGUST 1997 - AFTERNOON

Visit to the Torla car park and coach shuttle project.

Experimental scheme to reduce the incursion of motor vehicles.

Call at the visitors' centre.

Meeting with the local and regional authorities, the mass media and nature conservation associations.

13 AUGUST 1997 - MORNING

Excursion to Nerin via the Las Cutas forest road.

Experimental OTR vehicle shuttle scheme.

Infrastructure provided by the municipality of Fanlo, subsidised under Law No. 4 of 1989.

Puyarruego to Buerba road, then Añisclo circuit.

13 AUGUST 1997 - AFTERNOON

Pineta valley (camp-site).
Subsidised works at Bielsa.

This very busy programme actually covered only a few aspects of the vast, rich and varied whole formed by the park and its surrounding area.

3. SUBJECTS COVERED IN THE COURSE OF THE APPRAISAL

3.1. The visitors' centre

Long destined to become a key feature of the park's visitor reception facilities, the former Parador, on which conversion work was in progress at the time of our previous visit, has now become a multi-purpose visitors' centre equipped with modern communication technologies and accessible to people with physical disabilities.

The fossil of a crocodile found in the oolitic calcareous rock high on Monte Perdido serves as the starting-point for the presentation of the park. In a series of exhibitions, various distinctive features of the park are highlighted.

We shall not dwell on the success of this achievement, but the building's location is out of the way for the majority of visitors.

It would be worth avoiding the juxtaposition of pedestrians and motor cars between Puente de los Navarros and La Pradera car park; consideration should be given to the possibility of creating a path for tourists leading to the building.

Eighty per cent of all visitors to the park are Spanish. Most of the remaining 20% are French, but there is little, if any information available in languages other than Spanish, which is rather unfortunate for a site of international renown.

3.2. La Pradera car park

Resolution (88) 9, adopted when the Diploma was first awarded, called, as did my 1992 report, for a reduction in traffic to and parking at La Pradera car park.

Initial redevelopment of the car park reduced the number of parking spaces.

Since my last assessment a gate has been set up at Puente de los Navarros.

When the car park is full, the warden on duty at the gate lets cars through only as others leave. This system, which partially solves the problem in Ordesa valley, leads to disorderly rogue parking along the Torla road. The wardens have no policing powers outside the park, so this is a problem for the local police, who number only five, with reinforcements deployed in the summer, which is far too few to enforce traffic regulations in the peak season.

3.3. Torla car park

The old plan to develop a car park at Torla, in keeping with chapter III-2-3 of the Master Plan, is currently in progress. It will provide parking for 425 cars and 30 coaches.

In the month of August three 60-seater coaches will provide a shuttle service between Torla and La Pradera car park.

The licence to operate this shuttle service is subject to specifications which lay down the rules to be respected (Appendix III).

In parallel with the decision to reduce the number of vehicles in Ordesa valley, there are plans to remove the last remaining shop near La Pradera car park a shop owned by the municipality of Torla, from its present location to the building to be erected alongside the new car park.

Expert's comments:

The Ordesa valley is under excessive pressure from visitors, who go climbing in certain parts of the park; with so many paths, very few areas remain fully protected.

3.4. The Pyrenean ibex (*Capra pyrenaica pyrenaica*)

Estimated at 30 head when the diploma was awarded in 1988, their number has steadily declined to only seven or eight specimens today, among which no male has been sighted.

At the time of my last assessment there was a plan to take several animals into captivity for breeding, then to reintroduce their offspring into the park.

A female was caught in one of the cage traps set up in Ordesa valley, but after some time in captivity, in spite of constant veterinary care, it died.

This failure raises several considerations.

Over ten years ago, as soon as the decline in the Pyrenean ibex population was first noticed, the path crossing the biotope of this relict population should have been closed to the public (Camino de Turieto Alto).

Secondly, it is now clear, in view of the results, that the counting methods used were rather unreliable.

Finally, and no doubt most importantly of all, the division of responsibility between the state, the province of Aragon and the park management engenders a certain inertia which has proved fatal to the ibex.

The long shunned solution of reconstituting the population using specimens from outside has finally been adopted with the release of a male, whose movements are monitored by radio; Resolution (88) 9, it will be remembered, advised against this solution.

I do not feel qualified to pass judgment on these different decisions (or lack of decisions), but if this sorry experience is not to have been in vain, all those concerned, even remotely, by the problem must learn from this failure and publish their conclusions, so that in similar cases, here or elsewhere, the right decisions can be taken in good time.

3.5. Meeting with elected officials and the press

The meeting with various elected officials and the press was organised on the very first evening, in the presence of Mr Pablo MUNILLA, Director General of Environment Services for the Government of Aragon.

At this stage, of course, the expert's impressions were only partial. However, I was able to explain how these expert assessments are carried out and the different subsequent stages culminating in the decision of the Committee of Ministers.

The presence of the mayors from the park's main municipalities park provided an opportunity for some useful exchanges.

3.6. Traffic on the Las Cutas forest road

The Sierra de Las Cutas road links Torla to Nerin, along the Sierra de las Cutas ledge, which marks the boundary between the core zone of the Ordesa canyon and the peripheral area.

From Torla three OTR vehicles are authorised to use this forest road to take tourists as far as Brecha de Arasas.

From Nerin an OTR coach ferries tourists along the road to the same sites.

Only wardens' and authorised farmers' vehicles are allowed in the sector. This means that traffic is controlled at all times and helps to limit parking outside the spaces provided.

The transporters were selected on the basis of a call for tenders, with a very strict set of specifications. The solution seems satisfactory.

3.7. Fanlo

This village, which accounts for half the surface area of the park, was almost deserted a few years ago. Today it has 15 permanent residents, and the old houses are being restored in the purest traditional style, although unfortunately industrial tiles are all too often used instead of the traditional flat stone roofing, partly because they are cheaper and partly because few people nowadays are skilled in the art of traditional roof-making.

The park could contribute actively to training young people in these traditional techniques.

This applies to all the villages in and around the park.

Materials for this restoration work could be recovered from the old buildings to be demolished in connection with the project to build a hydroelectric dam on the river Ara.

The municipality of Fanlo has placed the old village school at the park's disposal. A project to set up an information centre on the theme of natural animal husbandry is currently in progress.

A church in the village is also undergoing restoration.

Expert's comments

Tourism as a source of income in these remote areas threatens to lure the whole population away from agriculture. To avert this serious threat to the countryside, steps should be taken to ensure the survival of traditional farming at a sufficient level.

3.8. The road from Buerba to Puyarruego

For a long time the tarmac road through the Añisclo canyon was the only access route to this unique site. In order to separate pedestrians from motor vehicle traffic, it was decided to close this road to cars. At the time of my last assessment a new road was being built to keep cars out of the canyon. Although much of this road is in the peripheral zone, or even outside the park altogether, it was built to blend into the countryside, and a major effort has been made to replant the embankments. This development will soon solve the motor traffic problem in the canyon. I have every confidence that the authorities concerned will devise an ingenious and elegant solution.

Expert's comments:

The Añisclo area is the only one where the core zone of the park is in direct contact with land outside the park. Advantage could be taken of this new road to create a buffer zone between the canyon and the area outside the park, with the new road as its boundary. The buffer zone could then qualify for some of the aid distributed to the different parts of the park.

3.9. La Pineta valley

Culminating in the cirque of the same name, La Pineta valley, in the municipality of Bielsa, drops down to Bielsa, having been carved out by a glacier of which the Monte Perdido and Pico de Marboré glaciers are the last remaining vestiges. During my last visit we discussed the problem of the camp-site located on the edge of the core zone in the vicinity of the Monte Perdido Parador. The camp-site is still there; efforts have been made to respect the park boundaries, but unfortunately the layout and capacity of the site facilities were not designed to cope with the number of campers who flock there in the peak season.

For three hundred metres the land uphill from the camp-site shows signs of intensive use as a leisure area, which is quite unacceptable. I was told that a comprehensive project to redevelop La Pineta valley was in preparation which should include the removal of the camp-site from the valley bottom. It is most surprising that such a large camp-site (with more than 1,000 campers in peak periods) should have been allowed to develop in the upper

reaches of an unspoilt valley without proper sewerage facilities. My hosts assured me that the redevelopment project would take all these considerations into account.

The municipality of Bielsa should be encouraged in this endeavour. The town hall there is a fine example of restoration work, with an excellent area set aside for a public information centre on the park. This intensive co-operation between the municipality and the management of the park would appear to augur well.

The boundaries of the central area of the park on the La Pineta valley bottom are quite difficult to explain; they do not always follow the natural boundaries, as logic would have it. Thought should be given to this subject in connection with the general redevelopment scheme. It is in the interest of all concerned, and especially that of Bielsa, to keep the valley bottom as unspoilt as possible.

4. VERIFICATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN RESOLUTION (93) 16

4.1. La Pineta camp-site

A plan to move it further down the valley is under consideration as fresh thought is given to the valley as a whole. In my opinion the people in charge of the park can be trusted to keep an eye on this project and its repercussions.

4.2. Pradera car park

This project is well under way. The completion of work on the Torla car park should provide an acceptable solution.

4.3. Support for socio-economic activities in the peripheral area

There is considerable social and economic fallout from the park in the surrounding area. The process is well under way. All depends on the means made available by the state and the province.

4.4. Ibex *Capra pyrenaica pyrenaica* - research and conservation

Too much beating about the bush, largely because decision-making powers are so widely dispersed, has led to failure in this area. It is quite possible that the result would have been the same no matter what action was taken. As I suggested earlier, however, it would be useful to analyse what actually happened, to draw conclusions and to publish the findings.

4.5. Amendment of the law so as to facilitate policing

Some progress has been made, but no regulatory solution has been found.

4.6. Support enabling villages to take advantage of the possibilities offered by Law No. 4/89

This process is well under way and we saw examples in different villages of work financed with funds made available under this law.

4.7 Extending the buffer zone in La Pineta valley

This is a proposal which should be given consideration under the general scheme to improve the valley.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The two-day visit revealed that the park continues to satisfy the criteria which earned it the European diploma. There is no reason why it should not keep the diploma for a further five years. Certain recommendations should be attached, however:

1. To speed up the project to reorganise La Pineta valley in order to limit camping in the central area and eventually relocate it.
2. To centralise decision-making power in the hands of a single authority in order to avoid repeating past mistakes.
3. To continue supporting socio-economic activities and helping the villages to make the most of the possibilities offered by Law No 4/89.
4. To extend the buffer zone in the lower part of the Añisclo canyon.
5. To publish the findings of the monitoring of the Ibex population.
6. To increase the areas in Ordesa valley which are closed to the public.

**EXPERIMENTAL SCHEME TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO ORDESA VALLEY
BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN SUMMER 1997**

1. BACKGROUND

One of the main problems facing the National Park is the making of arrangements for visitors to Ordesa valley. At present the only access to the valley is along the A139 road, which terminates in the area known as La Pradera, where the car park is located. On busy days this car park, which has room for 480 cars and 10 coaches, fills up completely between 9.30 and 11 am, obliging the park authorities to close the road to traffic at the Puente de Los Navarros bridge at the park entrance. This is in keeping with Section III-2-3 of the Use and Management Master Plan, which limits the number of visitors in the Ordesa sector at any one time to 1,500.

This causes large tailbacks to build up at the entrance to the National Park, as cars wait all along the roadway for the gates to open again.

This system has other disadvantages, some serious, such as the following:

- a. On busy days the park closes its gates at about 9.30 am, by which time the car park is already full. This is very unpopular, not only among would-be visitors who cannot get in, but also among the local residents of Torla.
- b. While this arrangement helps to "control" the numbers of visitors to the National Park, it does not control the numbers of vehicles, since the car park is always full on busy days.
- c. This arrangement offers no alternative to visitors unable to enter the park. And as there is nowhere to park in the village, they cannot wait there either.

2. COMPATIBILITY WITH THE MASTER PLAN

The only solution to all these problems is no doubt to build a car park in the village of Torla, outside the National Park, and to ferry visitors into the park by public transport.

This idea recurs throughout the Master Plan. It comes across as one of the main concerns of the plan, as in paragraph 1.3, which refers to "regulating use by the public and limiting the number of visitors in line with the park's capacity to receive them". The plan goes on to develop this idea in the section on public use of the park:

"III. – Public use. Since organising the use made of the park by the general public is the most immediate management problem facing the National Park, current arrangements for visitors must be revised and adjusted in keeping with the characteristics of the park, its capacity to receive visitors, and current and foreseeable demand, in line with the following principles:

- 1.– Impose the necessary restrictions on use by the public in order to protect the park's natural resources and the rights and traditional activities of local residents through appropriate measures:

- limit the number of visitors to each part of the park according to its capacity;
- provide and encourage access to the park by public transport;
- cater for excess demand by providing alternative services outside the perimeter of the park."

On the subjects of infrastructure for use by the public and organisation, the plan says:

"La Ordesa Pradera car park, Ordesa – to be reduced in size to a limited capacity satellite of the Torla car park.

a. Ordesa sector. During peak periods, which have yet to be identified for the purposes of the plan, coaches will provide a shuttle service between the Torla and La Pradera car parks.

At the same time, access to the park for private vehicles will be regulated, and the opening and closing times of the gate at Puente de Los Navarros bridge and the maximum number of vehicles allowed in the park at any one time will be displayed.

And during off-peak periods, if considered necessary for the conversation of the park, a limit could be placed on the number of private vehicles allowed in".

OBJECTIVES

The opening of the car park and the use of public transport into the park would have the following advantages *inter alia*:

1. The number of visitors entering the National Park could be controlled with greater accuracy and kept below the maximum figures set by the Master Plan.
2. It would put a stop to the queues of vehicles at the entrance to the park, thereby improving the park's image and reducing unnecessary inconvenience to visitors arriving by car.
3. The village would acquire a much-needed car park, and the queue for access to the park would form in the village rather than at the park entrances.
4. Thanks to the public transport service, the park would be "open" all day long, which would benefit the surrounding area and particularly the village of Torla.
5. The impact of motor vehicles on the park would be significantly reduced by closing the car park very early, as only about 50% of its capacity would be used.
6. The public transport service, under licence to the municipality, would lead to greater involvement of the village of Torla in the economic activity generated by the park.
7. The parking capacity of the zone would be increased by about 250 spaces.

GENERAL CONDITIONS

1. A maximum of three sixty-seater coaches will be authorised to transport visitors into Ordesa valley in the National Park.

The coaches will bear the following markings:

"ORDESA AND MONTE PERDIDO NATIONAL PARK"
ACCESS TO ORDESA VALLEY
TORLA MUNICIPAL COUNCIL.

2. The licence will be granted for the period from 1 to 31 August.

3. The service will begin at 6 am with the departure of the first coach, which will return to the car park at Torla at 7 am. From then on there will be a shuttle service every 20 minutes until 8 pm, when the last coach leaves.

COACH	CAR PARK	LA PRADERA
	DEPARTURE TIME	DEPARTURE TIME
1	6.00	6.30
1	7.00	7.30
2	7.20	7.50
3	7.40	8.10
1	8.00	8.30
2	8.20	8.50
3	8.40	9.10

The first return trip will leave La Pradera at 6.30 am, and from 7.30 am onwards coaches will leave every 20 minutes until 8.30 pm, and thereafter every 15 minutes until the last return trip at 10.30 pm.

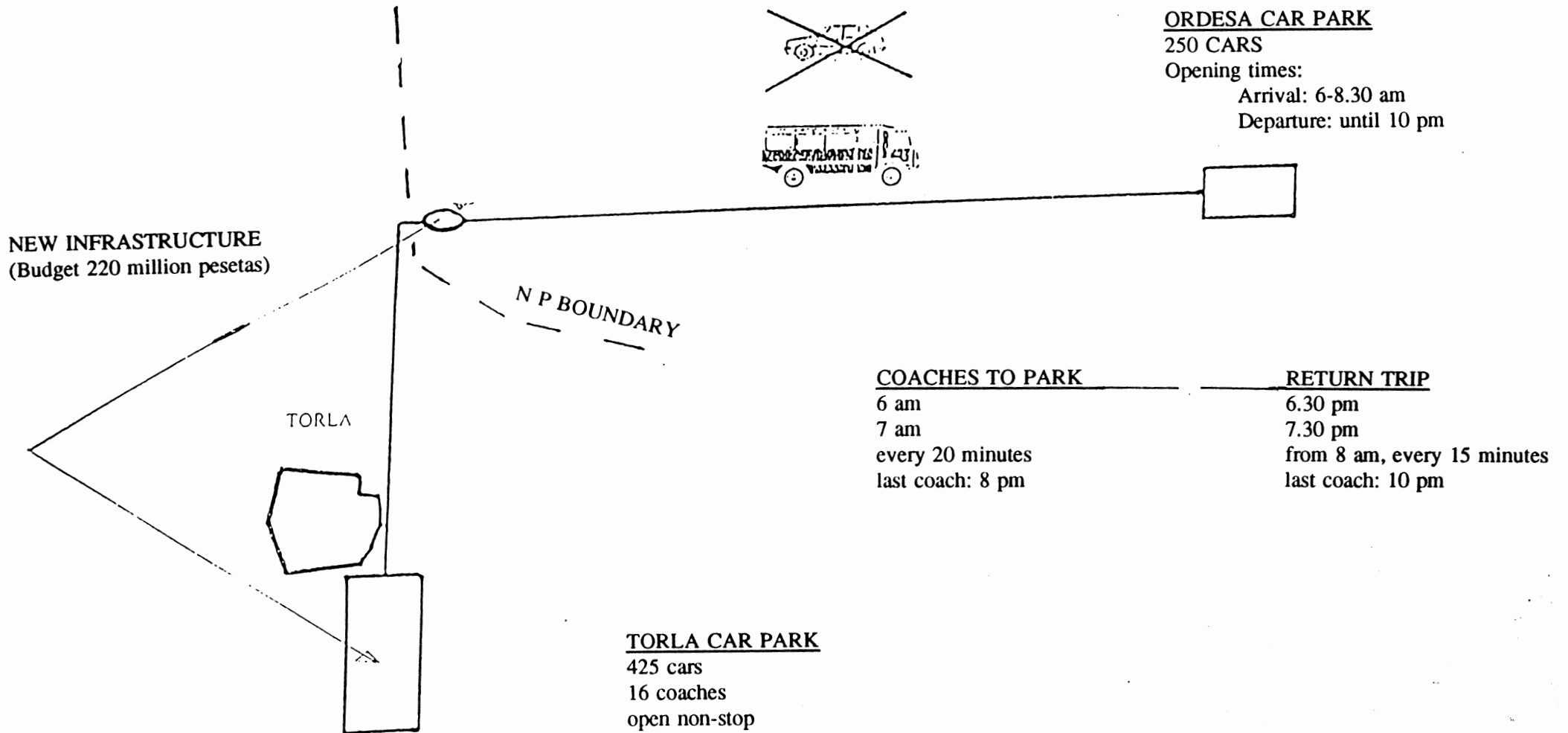
4. The coaches will make the following stops:

- Car park
- Ordesa Hotel
- Entrance to the Visitors' Centre (during opening hours)
- La Pradera.

5. In order to avoid overcrowding at the car park, the transport operator will sell tickets for specific days and times.

6. From 8 pm onwards the coaches will ferry passengers from the park back to the village, but not into the park, thus enabling coaches to leave La Pradera every 15 minutes between 8.30 and 10.30 pm.
7. The present car park inside the park will open at 6 am and close as soon as the number of cars parked reaches 250, or at 8.30 am if at this time there are still fewer than 250 cars.
8. At all times when access to the park is closed to the public, only the following will be allowed access:
 - a. Surveillance, security, management or rescue staff.
 - b. Holders of any right in rem in Ordesa valley, if the reason for their visit is related to the exercise of that right.
 - c. Herdsmen, to look after their herds.
 - d. The staff and management of the restaurant and vehicles supplying it.
 - e. Park employees.
9. The transport operator will provide the management of the National Park with information concerning the number of passengers transported and a report on the service provided, with proposals for improvements as appropriate.
10. The operator will comply rigorously with all the legislation of the municipality, the autonomous community government and the state applicable to the transport service to be provided.

ACCESS TO ORDESA VALLEY DURING PEAK PERIODS



COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (93) 16

ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA AWARDED TO THE ORDESA AND MONTE PERDIDO NATIONAL PARK

(Spain)

*(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 Resolution (88) 9 awarding the European Diploma to the Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park;

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 awarded to the Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park until 12 June 1998;

Attaches the following recommendations to the renewal:

1. control the use of the Pineta camp site by limiting the number of campers, and then by adapting the facilities and increasing the protection of the central zone of the park;
2. continue the effort undertaken to limit parking in the car park at La Pradera and all the recommendations made in Resolution (88) 9, paragraph 5.1;
3. continue the socio-economic development of the peripheral zone so as to stabilise the population and hence keep the villages alive;
4. stimulate research and take practical steps rapidly to save the remaining population of ibex (*Capra pyrenaica pyrenaica*);
5. amend the law so as to facilitate policing both within and on the periphery of the park;
6. support the villages to enable them to make the best use of the possibilities offered by Law No. 4 of 1989, concerning state financing of certain works;
7. consider to extending the buffer zone to include the lower Pineta Valley upstream from Bielsa.

APPENDIX II

DRAFT RESOLUTION

on the renewal of the European Diploma to the Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park

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 (88) 9 awarding the European Diploma to the Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park in Category A;

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 Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park until 12 June 2003;

Attaches the following recommendations to the renewal:

- The measures to reorganise La Pineta Valley to reduce the size of the camp-site and eventually remove it from the central zone should be accelerated.
- Decision-making power should be concentrated within a single authority in order to avoid repeating certain errors of the past.
- Support should continue to be given to socio-economic activities and to the villages in order to enable them to make the best use of the possibilities offered by Law No. 4 of 1989.
- The buffer zone at the lower end of the Añisclo canyon should be extended.
- The results of the monitoring of the ibex *Capra pyrenaica pyrenaica* population should be published.
- The areas closed to the public in Ordesa Valley should be increased.