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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF
NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Select Committee of Experts - European Diploma

ABRUZZI NATIONAL PARK
(Italy)

On-the-spot appraisal

by

Théo HUNZIKER

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General remarks

The European Diploma awarded to the Abruzzi National Park expires in 1982. In accordance with the Regulations in force (Resolution (73) 4 of the Committee of Ministers, January 1973), a further renewal of the Diploma must be based on an on-the-spot appraisal conducted by an independent expert in the company of a representative of the Council of Europe Secretariat. The Secretariat, in its letter of 21 May 1980, asked me to carry out this appraisal, with the following terms of reference :

- a. study the present state of the area and ascertain whether it has remained the same, improved or deteriorated since the date of the previous renewal ;
- b. analyse the state of conservation of the flora, fauna and landscape (progression or regression of species) ;
- c. examine any alterations (material or legislative) already carried out or in progress ;
- d. study the impact of the public on the flora, fauna and landscape and make proposals for the improvement of the situation ;
- e. study the financial resources assigned for the management of the area.

In accordance with the arrangements set out in the Secretariat's letter of 21 May 1980, Mr P. Baum of the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the Council of Europe Secretariat accompanied me on the visit.

The various points covered by the terms of reference were assessed on the spot and discussed in detail with those responsible for the protection of the two regions concerned.

The appraisal is also based on the annual reports and other published documents.

Introduction

The on-the-spot appraisal and discussions took place on 21 and 22 June 1980 in the presence of the National Park Director, Mr Franco Tassi and of his closest aides (MM Rossi, Di Felice, Cimini, Naviglio, Boscagli, Lovari). I wish to extend my warmest thanks to them all for providing me with frank and detailed information on the current state of the park and with an extremely wide range of documentation. Clearly, the park authorities are determined to eliminate the drawbacks from which the park still suffers, and to ensure its future protection.

I should like briefly to retrace the historical development of the national park, which is of considerable importance for a better understanding of the present state of the park and the efforts being made to protect it.

The Gran Paradiso and Abruzzi national parks, established in 1922, are the oldest in Italy. The fact that they had previously been royal hunting grounds was a major factor in maintaining the presence of game in both areas. The Abruzzi national park, which is especially dedicated to

the protection of the brown bear (*Ursus arctos marsicanus*) and of the Abruzzi chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra ornata*), was founded on 9 September 1922, though the relevant Act is dated 11 January 1923. The park then possessed an area of 18,000 ha, which was later increased until by 1926 it covered 30,000 ha.

The national park suffered its first setback in 1933 with a government edict abolishing the park management, which had been set up in 1921. It was not re-established until 1950, and even then received only very limited financial support from the state.

Later the slogan "tourist development", with its attendant construction of roads, buildings and sports facilities, had disturbing and even more serious repercussions on the park. With very limited financial resources and no director between 1962 and 1969, the park authorities were barely able to overcome the crisis. The consequences of that deplorable development are still felt today, as the following figures show ; more than 200 km of roads, 200 holiday cottages and 25 km of ski-runs and ski-ing facilities, all of which implied the devastation of approximately 120,000 beeches and one tenth of the park's surface (3,000 ha).

Gradually, as the threat continued to grow, public opinion veered, and scientific and cultural circles woke up to the problem.

In spite of all the damage, the park was awarded the European Diploma in 1967 on account of its international significance, but the official presentation only took place on 21 May 1972, after the Italian government had undertaken to put a stop to prevailing tendencies towards neglect of the park.

1. Current state of nature and landscape protection

At present, the park covers approximately 40,000 ha (about 60% forest and 40% mainly pasture) and is surrounded by a peripheral zone (pre-park or buffer zone) of about 60,000 ha. On 22 November 1976 the park was expanded by approximately 10,000 ha, incorporating the Monti Palombo, Marsicano and Godi NE Pescasseroli, and decreasing the peripheral zone by an equal amount. Renewed demarcation work between the two regions is under way.

The park is situated in the three regions of the Abruzzi, Lazio and Molise and includes or borders on 18 municipalities, five of which are integrated into the park itself (Pescasseroli, Opi, Civitella Alfedena, Villetta Barrea and Barrea). It cannot therefore be considered a fully protected area like the Swiss national park. Moreover, the major part of the land belongs to the municipalities (especially the forests and pastures) and the rest to private individuals (especially the fields and building land).

Work on a master plan and set of regulations for the park (Piano di assetto territoriale) was begun in 1976 and is nearing completion. The plan and regulations are intended to stabilise development in the interests of conservation by dividing the park into four zones with different degrees of protection.

Zone A : fully protected reserve (riserva integrale), an absolutely protected area modelled on the Swiss national park.

Zone B : general reserve (riserva generale), an area dominated by forests and grazing forests, more or less treated as a reserve. Traditional use of the forests and pastures under park supervision.

Zone C : landscape protection area (protezione), an area dominated by wooded pastures and agricultural land. Similar protection, but slightly less strict than in Zone B.

Zone D : restricted development area (sviluppo), where projects essential to the development of the park and municipalities may be carried out, so long as they are not detrimental to the protection of the park. Scope and layout supervised by the park.

The degree of protection decreases from A to D, while the degree of accessibility to visitors increases. The dominant feature of zones A and B is nature protection, and that of zones C and D, landscape planning.

Division into zones seems an obvious step, but is hardly applicable to other parks at international level.

Zone A contains two actual nature reserves of 1,000 ha each, one (il Feudo) under the jurisdiction of the Forestry Office and the other (Camosciara) under that of the park authorities.

The dangers facing the park as a result of tourist development cannot yet be considered overcome, though progress has been made in countering or at any rate channelling interference, as the following examples show :

- Some of the 200 km roads are closed to traffic and along some there is even a total ban on forestry and agricultural activities.
- The eccentric-looking weekend and holiday houses in the immediate vicinity of Pescasseroli, which date back to the '60s, are largely uninhabited.
- The 32 weekend and holiday houses in the picturesque district of La Cicerana (Zone B), Lecce nei Marsi, the construction of which was begun in the early '60s, still look quite literally like ruins. A guarantee was given in 1967 that they would either be demolished or relocated in scattered spots suitable for use by the park. The footpath leading to them, which is in a wretched state, is to be removed.
- Though there is a water-purification plant at Pescasseroli, the area itself has not yet been connected up to it. The problem of refuse collection has still not been solved. Refuse is piled up along a tributary of the river Sangro, a stream which crosses the area before flowing into the Lago di Barrea. A rubbish pit is planned along the mountain road to Forca d'Achero SE Opi, but as the road is remarkable for its scenic beauty and lies within the park itself, this is hardly a satisfactory way out in the long run. The only acceptable solution for the park is the regular collection of refuse both in the various municipalities and in the peripheral zones, and its removal to a waste disposal plant outside the park. Presumably the question of water purification and refuse collection is not much better dealt with in the other municipalities in and around the park ; at any rate I consider the solution of the problem to be crucial for the survival of the park.

- Unauthorised camping has not yet been entirely stamped out ; the park authorities are trying to put a stop to it by recourse to law.

It is quite clear that their efforts to protect the Abruzzi national park, the only one of its kind, are gaining increasing support from the population and press, and that they are resolutely opposing all forms of interference.

It remains to be hoped that the work to improve the water supply and refuse disposal will continue in a consistent manner and that the municipalities will also play their full part, since in the end it is greatly to their advantage to do so.

2. Protection of biotopes, flora and fauna

Efforts to protect the biotopes, flora and fauna have been stepped up considerably since 1976.

Control over forestry activities has been strengthened by means of leases and compensation payments. In particular, a contract has been signed with the municipality of Lecce nel Maris, in the north of the park, providing for the long-term protection of 1,800 ha of a magnificent, untouched, beech forest. Over an area of some 200 ha further downhill, restricted use of forest and pasture is still tolerated. However, 1,600 ha of forest and pasture situated above the present boundary of the forest are fully protected pending the transfer of the area, which still lies in Zone B, to Zone A. This is an especially important area for the protection of the bear. All the municipalities in the park have also received sizeable sums as compensation for having given up felling, especially in the case of old and remarkable beech trees.

The state of the vegetation in the park and its buffer zone can be clearly seen from the current vegetation map, which shows the beech forest to be typical of the vegetation in the area. The park is also well charted as to flora. Its 1,160 species include a few endemic varieties, such as the "Villetta Barrea" variety of the black pine (Pinus nigra) and the Iris Marsica, to be found at La Difesa.

Fauna in the park and its peripheral zone is also well inventoried. Known figures for some typical species of the area are as follows :

	<u>1976 expertise</u>	<u>1980</u>
Abruzzi brown bear (1)	70 - 120	70 - 120
Abruzzi chamois (1)	400 - 450	450 - 500
Apennine wolf (1)	15 - 20	20 - 25
wild cat (1)	30 - 50	30 - 50
otter (1)	8 - 15	6 - 10
deer (2)	100 - 120	200 - 250
roe deer (2)	10 - 15	60 - 80
wild boar (2)	-	10 - 20
royal eagle (1)	4 - 8	5 - 8
eagle owl (1)	10 - 15	10 - 12

(1) more or less unchanged
(2) on the increase

Apart from the first reference to wild boar, there is a particularly noticeable progression of reintroduced species like the deer and the roe deer, ascribed to the increased protection of the Feudo, Camosciara and Mainarde areas.

Under new fishing regulations in favour of the park, a fully protected water reserve designed to include water birds and the otter has been set up on the river Sangro between the nature reserves of Feudo and Camosciara. Angling is also restricted to certain parts of the Sangro (excluding the tributaries) and to the two artificial lakes.

Two other features of the park need mentioning. First, the drive to curb wild dogs, of which there appear to be a very large number, has been intensified ; over 80% of the damage to cattle turns out to be caused by wild dogs rather than bears or wolves. Secondly, to increase the food supplies available to wild animals, especially bears, and to prevent them from migrating, subsidies have been paid to farmers for the cultivation of maize.

3. Protective measures of a legal and administrative nature

In the first part of this report I mentioned a master plan containing a set of regulations. It seems that the Abruzzi regional authorities have now instructed a private association to draw up a master plan for the park ; this will give rise to considerable problems in terms of the park's protection, as well as constituting an unacceptable development for a recipient of the Diploma.

The legal problems facing the park authorities concern the protection of the park against the damage caused by the property speculation of past years, the effects of unauthorised camping, the threat posed to the beech forests by the use of power saws, and the dangers facing the fauna. Since the park municipalities lack the political will to apply existing legal means, all the park authorities' efforts to ensure protection remain ineffective.

It is therefore vital, in my opinion, that the outline law currently being drawn up on national parks and other protected areas throughout the country should guarantee effective protection and should prevent these areas, especially the national parks, from being placed under the jurisdiction of regional authorities. The law must come into force as soon as possible.

To reduce the pressures to which the park is subjected, land is being acquired within the park itself and in its peripheral zone - care being taken to fix reasonable prices. In the case of land owned by the municipalities, the prevailing tend is to lease extensive areas for long periods of time. There is a ban of approximately 15 months on felling by municipalities, though they receive compensation for the restrictions imposed on forestry activities.

As regards management, the current staff of about 100 includes employees recruited with work contracts and volunteers devoted to the park, who share out administrative work, research, supervision and information work. Management and research staff are still not employed on a stable basis, and the 20 wardens are numerically quite unable to cover an area of 100,000 ha (park and peripheral zone). It is essential that this situation should be put right. However, it is gratifying to note that in 1979, for instance, about 40 young people from the area itself and about 50 from other parts of Italy and from abroad were employed as volunteers for information purposes.

4. Number of visitors, tourism and landscape protection

In 1970 visitors to the park numbered some 120,000. The figure has now reached a million, and since the park is situated near Rome and Naples, the number is expected to grow steadily.

150 marked footpaths have been opened and are used by visitors.

Exemplary efforts are made to inform not only visitors, but also the whole population of the country and people abroad. Regular contact is maintained with the press and there are large numbers of well-designed publications. At the park centre, at Pescasseroli, as at other information points in the area, visitors are well orientated. A new model museum has been set up at Civitella Alfedena, providing information on the life, biotope and behaviour of the wolf, which can be seen in an open-air enclosure in the immediate vicinity. A similar, though smaller information point on the chamois has been established at Bisegna.

The problem of weekend and holiday houses has already been discussed at length.

In response to pressure to extend the camp site, the authorities have installed about 10 camping spots in the vicinity and another 10 at points with suitable panoramic attractions. The authorities are also using all available legal means to oppose the setting up of other camping sites - in my opinion, an equally crucial effort.

5. Financial resources assigned to the park authorities

Since 1978 the park authorities have received annual state appropriations of 1,000 million lire in the form of either ordinary funds (300 million lire) or extraordinary funds (80 million lire). However, payment of these sums is erratic and often subject to considerable delay. The park authorities consequently place great hopes, from the financial point of view, in the entry into force of the outline law on national parks. They estimate that at least 75% of the park's annual expenditure benefits the local economy, and especially its five municipalities. For many municipalities, this therefore constitutes "the major industry". According to the 1979 estimate, the above-mentioned expenditure of 1,000 million lire (100%) was divided as follows :

- 24% to the municipalities for the sale or lease of land, undertakings to give up felling, damage caused by protected animals and the cultivation of fodder by established farmers.
- 64% for wages and visitors' centres, the removal of visitors' refuse, the maintenance of real estate, purchases planned for tourist purposes, etc.
- 12% for the park's various development projects; contributions to local facilities, the purchase and renting of real estate and tourist facilities.

In fact, the park authorities should have access to much greater sums than those specified in the estimate.

Luckily they have other resources at their disposal (approximately 250 million lire), though they have not received contributions from the regional authorities, as is the case with the Gran Paradiso national park. These funds derive from self-financing activities undertaken by the park authorities, such as tourist information, guided walks, tourist activities organised in cooperation with local institutions (camping, accommodation in the municipalities), publicity and publications. Their efforts in this field deserve particular praise.

6. Research

I should like to draw attention to the brilliant account by Professor A. Noirfalise in the 1976 report, which I can only confirm on every point. The park's research work may serve as an example for other national parks and landscape protection areas.

Conclusions and proposals

My conclusions, drawn from on-the-spot observations and discussions summarised in this report, and from the considerable documentation placed at my disposal, are as follows :

I consider the renewal of the Diploma justified in principal

However, I suggest that it should be subject to the following conditions :

1. It is important that the outline law on Italian national parks, which provides for effective protective measures, should come into force as soon as possible. All trends towards the regionalisation of the park and its administration must be checked.
2. The park authorities' own master plan and the regulations included in it should be declared mandatory, and any parallel protection plans put forward by the regions should be rejected.
3. Efforts to improve the situation of the local population and to ensure the protection of the area, like those displayed by Civitella Alfedena under the guidance of its extremely active mayor (also Assistant Director of the national park), should likewise be undertaken - with state support - by the other municipalities within the park's confines.
4. In Zones A and B, a halt must be called to the extension of the camping site, to property speculation and to the construction of tourist roads. The park authorities initiatives in this field must receive full backing from the Italian Government.
5. A system for the removal of refuse and waste water must be established immediately throughout the park. Refuse from the different municipalities must be transported outside the park and either deposited in an orderly fashion in a suitable place or recycled.
6. The landscape protection area of Il Feudo, in the centre of the park, which still comes under the jurisdiction of the forestry authorities, must be joined to that of Camosciara, which is park property. This will allow the authorities to unify measures to protect and reintroduce the lynx, the black woodpecker and a number of birds of prey.

7. The park's budget must be increased for the following reasons :
- firm incentives must be provided for the purchase and leasing of land and setting up facilities to improve nature protection ;
 - compensation must be paid, since the park covers not only high mountain country but also land that could be used for farming and forestry purposes. For instance, the inhabitants of the area are paid unemployment benefit to compensate for the ban on felling ;
 - protective measures must be strengthened, both because the park is partly situated on land owned by five municipalities and because the number of visitors is constantly growing ;
 - the skilled staff, working to ensure effective protection in conditions that have been made difficult for them, are entitled to equitable and regular remuneration ;
 - adequate financial resources must be put at the park authorities' disposal, and paid regularly at the beginning of each year than with one or two years' delay ;
 - a solution must be found to the problem of under-staffing, especially where wardens are concerned. The park's management staff must be recruited on a permanent basis ;

When elections are held to renew the Park Commission and its Chairman, it is important that no member with anti-protection views should be elected.

Signed : Théo Hunziker