

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

Siebengebirge/ Germany Nature Reserve

Name of the area: Siebengebirge Nature Reserve

Year and number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas

Award 2021 **1 year** (until 09/2024)

Certifications/ **Nature Reserve Area**
Designations **FHH-Area**
 European Diploma of Protected Areas
 National Geotope

Date of delivery **DEC 12, 2022**

Central authority concerned:

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Authority responsible for its management:

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1. Conditions

To draw up a management plan within three years in order to guarantee the preservation of the reserve and its cohesion within the larger area of the nature park.

As mentioned in former annual plans, this condition was fulfilled in 2015.

Meanwhile quite a number of projects have been implemented, especially within the Large Scale Conservation Project Chance7 and in cooperation with the Biological Stations Rhein-Sieg and Bonn, the Regional Forest Authority Rhein-Sieg-Erft, NRW and the VVS.

During the period 2021-2022 (!) this refers to the following projects: we only mention three out of a bulk of projects.

- wild cat mapping (a combination of enticing bars and photo trapping) to find out whether the existent A3 crossings are actually used or should be improved with the A 3 reconstruction in 2024 (Logebachtal)
- Creation of an open space corridor of dry hot habitats along the Rhine river slopes from Oberkassel to Bad Honnef. This biotope network shall enable isolated wall lizard populations to spread unhindered. Dry-stone walls serve as stepping stone biotopes. The extensive grazing with goats at the beginning had the function to push back upcoming coppice shoots and blackberry bushes. A long term solution since 2022 is a change to sheep grazing to keep the corridor permanently and sustainably open (Rabenley-Menzenberg).
- A vineyard, abandoned for more than two decades, had completely been overgrown and was cleared from shrubs. After that a dry-stone wall was erected in the slope which beside being an erosion protection is especially further habitat for wall-lizards, wild bees and special flowering plants. In autumn 2022 the area was planted with vines. Flower strips with typical vineyard flora and a tailored cultivation concept will ecologically further valorize the slope (Rhöndorf).

Of outstanding importance in all ecological measures within the Siebengebirge Reserve are the competence and engagement of the Biological Stations Rhein-Sieg-Kreis and Bonn. It is especially the Large Scale Project Chance7 that profits from their commitment and performance.

2. Recommendations

2.1 In case of changes in the management of the area, the leading role of the VVS (Verschönerungsverein für das Siebengebirge VVS), whose work to date has been fully satisfactory in the eyes of the Council of Europe, should be maintained;

Realized

There is another reason still to improve the positive position of the VVS in the Siebengebirge Nature Park. With the creation of its officially acknowledged "wildernis area" it has a unique selling point for the nature park. That means it has a point that differentiates this nature park from others. This point has a special specific advantage, a special image that makes it easier to do promotions.

2.2 develop a new financial plan together with local communities and the Rhein-Sieg-District.

No changes

For 2023 there is a common plan of VVS, communities and District to invest ca. 120.000 € in building street bollards into the road entrances up to Drachenfels (ruin and hotel) to prevent illegal driving to the top.

2.3 continue the provision of financial support by the North Rhine Westphalia government

For more than 50 years there has been no end to the renewal of the 80 Drachenfels steel able anchors that hold the mountain top including its medieval ruin together. In 2019 this caused costs summing up to 3.5 million €. Inspections of the Geological Service NRW have revealed that now new anchors must be installed on the east-side of the mountain. Repair costs are cautiously calculated at 1.5 million € and at a duration of more than a year. The NRW government/Cologne District Government will bear the costs.

2.4 maintain great vigilance regarding the possible construction of new roads.

No changes

2.5 minimise disturbance caused by traffic on all roads crossing the Siebengebirge area and consider the setting up of a system of public transport for visitors;

After long discussions, in 2023 two bollards will finally be installed at different entrances to the Drachenfels road in order to block illegal driving, which has gradually increased.

New roads have neither been built nor are they planned. Yet there are increasing discussions whether to reduce the speed limit on the four east-west crossroads of the reserve to 50 km from presently 70 km, a decision the VVS would much welcome to reduce the number of accident victims, men and animals.

Beside improved daytime buses in summer and a special weekend bicycle bus there is no change.

2.6 continue investigating the possibility of extending the wilderness area so as to guarantee the preservation of the natural beauty, features, resources and biodiversity of the Siebengebirge as a protected area;

Germany is a densely populated country which has lost landscapes, untouched by human beings, long ago. But still our country can offer marvellous protected areas, in the Siebengebirge reserve in form of up to 150 year-old beech forests. As nearly a quarter of the world's beech forests grow in Germany, the country has a kind of international responsibility to preserve this forest type. That is why the Verschönerungsverein für das Siebengebirge VVS in 2010 decided – in agreement with the NRW government - to establish its private "wildernis area " with a size of 523 ha of its beech forests. Meanwhile the NRW Forest Authorities and the NRW Foundation have officially added another 301 ha, so that now it covers 824 ha, untouched by human influence.

In September 2022 the VVS got the NRW government confirmation on his proposition to enlarge its "developing wildernis" area by 50.9 ha. The compensation payment was correspondently adjusted by 6.874,05 €. Thus by now the wildernis area has an official size of 874. ha.

In the near future the government has envisaged an enlargement by another 31.1 ha of VVS forest. By then the Siebengebirge area would closely touch the recommended minimum size of 1000 ha in densely populated areas.

Noteworthy in connection with “our wildernis area” is that the VVS

- has installed an interdisciplinarily composed scientific advisory board of 12 members that in part has already done remarkable monitoring and is just working on a manageable overall monitoring concept. First results will be published in 1923.
- has opened a special “wildernis route” of 27.5 km in 5 specialized theme sections with 55 “windows” and has published an accompanying brochure (170 p) which sells pretty well.
- has organized a successful “wildernis camp” with 20 young people :As there was so much interest and an oversized demand – a camp will be repeated in 1923.

2.7 encourage the continuation and extension of scientific research

Though the Siebengebirge has been thoroughly described for more than 600 years, its nature yet offers multitudes of opportunities.

- *W.Meyer Geologie rund um das Siebengebirge Niederrheinische Bucht,Rheintal, Eifel, Bergisches Land Westerwald 01/2023.1. Auflage, 411 S*
- *Die Ofenkaulen – Digital Geology*
<https://digitalgeology.de/die-ofenkaulen> 15-08 2021
- *Wedeling-Dietrich-Rothenwöhrer: Erfüllen Amphibienleitanlage ihren Zweck?in Fallspiel von der K225 im Siebengebirge bei Bonn, ZS für Feldherpetologie 27,184, 2020*
- *Deckert-Dr.Fuchs-Lorenz: Wege zur Wildnis, Wanderratgeber durch das Wldnisgebiet Siebengebirge, 170 S. Königswinter 2021*
- *Dr.W. Hachtel, Holzbewohnende Pilze im Wald – faszinierend und vielfältig Teil 1 in: VVS Magazin „Siebengebirge“ 2020*
- *Dr. W. Hachtel, Holzbewohnende Pilze im Wald –Faszinierend und vielfältig, Teil 2 in: VVS Magazin „Siebengebirge“ 2021, 1*
- *Dr. W. Hachtel Flechten im Siebengebirge – Teil 1 Epiphytische Flechten in: VVS Magazin „Siebengebirge“ 2022, 1*

3 Site Management

The Siebengebirge Reserve has a forest area of 4.500 ha. Ownership structure is as follows:

State forest NRW	1.510 ha
City forest Bad Honnef	730 ha
VVS forest	840 ha
NRW Foundation forest	90 ha
Private forest	1.330 ha

This area has been divided into 4 sections. Responsible for these sections are 4 foresters of the Regional Forest Authority NRW, Rhein-Sieg-Erft. Each forester has his own section. All measures are coordinated and agreed on. Private owners are advised and informed by 2 special supervisors of the Regional Authority.

This construction turned out to be very beneficial to all partners in a coordinated reaction on measures in the spruce tree and bark beetle crisis.

4. Boundaries

No changes

5. Other information

5.1 Tourist pressure on the reserve and visitor channeling measures

As already described in our 2020 annual report, we also experience a big increase in the number of visitors in 2021 und 2022. Social distancing measures have certainly influenced man's desire for recreational activities outdoors in nature. When this desire is connected with the chance of experiencing a highly interesting point of attraction that is well advertised on TV all over the country, then such a point is the ideal destination of a day trip not far away (experiences up to 150 km)

Such a point in the densely populated Rhineland is the famous Drachenfels mountain in the Siebengebirge with its medieval ruin, its more than 130-year-old rack railway and its marvelously restored 19th century Gothic Drachenburg Castle, a spot that Germany knows from H. Lichter's very popular TV Antique Fair "Bares für Rares" There have been weekends with up to 50.000 visitors on the Drachenfels.

Unfortunately, these numbers on a small area, also involve traffic chaos and overcrowded parking lots. Nearby sensitive areas get littered and vegetation trampled. We are glad and thankful that the Siebengebirge enjoys such prestige. Part of this attraction, of course, also bases on the nearby magnificent natural surroundings in the Siebengebirge. That is why we have to continue our efforts to make touristic providers of attractions, that also rely on the natural environment for their attraction, induce tourists to respect nature protection concerns and mitigate negative impacts on natural heritage.

However, for the benefit of the Siebengebirge, and especially the Nature Reserve, we have primarily to think of measures to upgrade other parts of the area and render them attractive. We consider it as our task to intensify our efforts to decentralize the influx of visitors, manage visitor flows and create alternative attractions.

In part this has been succeeded by an improved signposting system, and above all by excellent modification and presentation of the 13th century Heisterbach monastery landscape/ by creating a skywalk high above the river Rhine and the 12.000-year-old archaeological site of a stone-age tomb/ by installing new theme trails to wildernis area-/ chapels /geology/activities/ a small but recognized VVS information centre in a former forester's house/ and a pretty small museum on Petersberg to Germany's political development after 1945, when the country was governed by 3 Allied Commissioners from Petersberg.

Yet these "inferior" offers are no real alternative to the powerful "threefold" Drachenfels attraction. A very positive alternative – especially for nature loving, ecologically interested people, active seniors and families with children could be a "wildernis-exhibition-Information-nature park centre" in cooperation of Nature Park and VVS on the Margarethenhöhe/Ittenbach with the substantial unique selling point "wildernis" at a distance of 3 km from the Drachenfels. The place is accessible by public transport, has large car parks and wildernis area immediately around the house. The building could be erected on nature protected VVS-ground, could replace existing garages und did not need extra land.

Thus the Siebengebirge could perhaps finally show an exhibition center that is normality in other nature/national parks.

5.2 Planning of the "Burghof" hotel in the Siebengebirge

The "Burghof", situated half way up to the Drachenfels ruin, 250 m away from Drachenburg Castle, originally served as a farmyard of the medieval castles of Wolkenburg and Drachenfels. Destroyed in the 16th century, it was a modest dwelling and in 1811 used as a wine and coffee serving guesthouse. In 1904 its private owner built a hotel in Swiss country style. After several owners- some of them used it as a hotel- in 1989 the proprietor's hotel concession expired. The

building was abandoned and has been vacant since then, i.e. for 33 years. In November 1997 it was classified as a historical monument and registered in the Königswinter list of protected buildings. In 2019 a private businessman bought the Burghof, lying fallow since 1989, and announced to renovate it and run it as a so-called "Siebengeburgsalm" guesthouse-café plus 6 holiday flats.

As the building is situated within the nature protected area each architectural step is bound to nature conservation legislation. A building application has been submitted in August 2022. In October the Königswinter municipal building control office stopped maintenance and repair works because of unapproved steps.

The restoration of this shabby building at this beautiful place is highly welcome, but the plan of its semi-economic use finds strong opposition from different sides. No decision on the further course has been taken so far.

Königswinter, December 12, 2022

Hans Peter Lindlar
(Chairman)

Klaus Breuer
(Member of the board)