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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

BERCHTESGADEN NATIONAL PARK
(Federal Republic of Germany)

ON-THE-SPOT APPRAISAL

by

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1. Introduction and terms of reference

At the meeting of the Committee of Experts for Protected Areas on 29 and 30 April 1982, the Federal Republic of Germany applied for the award of the European Diploma on behalf of the Berchtesgaden National Park (see SN-ZP (82) 25 of 29 March 1982). The committee recognised the park's European interest and decided to have an on-the-spot appraisal carried out in accordance with Resolution (73) 4 of 19 January 1973.

I was subsequently instructed by the Secretary General to conduct this study in the presence of Mr P Baum, representing the Environment and Natural Resources Division.

The terms of reference were:

- a. to examine the present condition of the site and see whether it had remained stable or improved or deteriorated since the award or most recent renewal of the Diploma;
- b. to analyse the state of conservation of the flora, fauna and landscape (any increase or decrease of species);
- c. to examine any improvements (either material or legislative) effected or in progress;
- d. to study the impact of the public on flora, fauna and the landscape and make proposals for improving the situation;
- e. to examine the budgetary resources allocated to the area's management.

The appraisal took place on 25 and 26 August 1982. Besides the two Council of Europe representatives, various officials responsible for the management and planning of the park took part, either at given stages or throughout.

2. History, characteristics and general state of the national park

The protection of the area surrounding the Königsee and the Watzmann has evolved from the start with the idea of nature conservation in central Europe.

The protected area of the Berchtesgaden Alps, covering 8,300 ha, was established in the southern part of the present national park on the initiative of the Association for the Conservation and Management of Alpine Flora, inspired by the creation of the Yellowstone National Park in the United States in 1872. It was extended in 1921 to protect alpine flora over an area covering 21,000 ha around the Königsee. In 1959 the regulations on flora were supplemented by a series of landscape protection orders. However, forestry and agriculture - including alpine pasture and grazing rights, as well as authorised fish farming and hunting - were not affected at the time. The present "Decree concerning the Berchtesgaden Alpine and National Parks" came into force on 1 August 1978 by decision of the government of the Free State of Bavaria.

In the book "The Berchtesgaden National Park. History of a Protected Area", Dr H Zierl, Director of the park, writes: "The alpine and national parks were established by this decree. The national park, with an area of 21,000 ha, extends over the former Königsee nature reserve and contains the southern part of the great Berchtesgaden Alpine Park, which itself covers 46,000 ha. The park landscape is mainly marked by massifs: Reiteralm, Hochkalter, Watzmann, Steinernes Meer, Hagengebirge, Hoher Göll and Hohen Brett. The three deep valleys of the Königsee, the Wimbach and the Klausbach throw the structure of the various massifs into strong relief. To the north of the national park, the peripheral zone of the alpine park, also known as the "Vorfeld", comprises the densely populated municipalities of Markt Berchtesgaden, Marktschellenberg, Schönau am Königsee, Ramsau and Bischofswiesen, and the Untersberg and Lettengebirge massifs. Care has been taken to ensure great unity of development with the alpine park and thus respect the relationship between the national park and the surrounding landscape."

In the next chapter, "Some remarks on the early years of the national park", which is of outstanding quality, the author makes a number of observations on the general state of the park:

"Considering the conditions prevailing in central Europe, the Berchtesgaden National Park possesses all the assets required for nature conservation in a park of this type. About three quarters of its area are in a natural or nearly natural state. They include the rocky areas and screes, the alpine pastures, the tracts of dwarf pines and green alder bushes, many of the subalpine coniferous forests and the stretches of water.

Conversely, the mixed mountain forests on the middle and lower slopes have changed considerably. A comparison with similar regions elsewhere shows that the present uniform forests, rich in spruce, could be restored to a nearly natural management system. But this will take decades and considerable patience, since it involves the separation of forests and pastures and a numerical adjustment of the ungulate populations.

The park is not big enough for all the native fauna. The living space is either incomplete or too small for a viable animal population. It can support red deer, for instance, only during the summer - not during the winter. Nor is wintering possible within an accessible area outside the park. For the moment, there are no prospects of a practical solution for the management of red deer in a national park - without feeding or hunting.

Some game species which used to belong to the native fauna need extensive tracts of land. Reintroduction is feasible only if the interests of the neighbouring regions, including Austria, are taken into account as well as those of the park itself.

Both old and new German law on nature conservation offer a mass of possibilities to this end. The scope has been further widened by the introduction of the concept of national park, which undoubtedly reflects the most demanding form of nature conservation and therefore remains limited to a few areas, usually of small size.

Nature conservation may accordingly be considered to have been achieved by the creation of a few national parks. Other forms of landscape conservation are still, and always will be, justified."

3. Remarks based on on-the-spot observation and documentary material

3.1 Preliminary remarks

I assume knowledge of the reasons given by the Federal Republic of Germany for the award of the European Diploma to the Berchtesgaden National Park (SN-ZP (82) 25 of 29 March 1982).

The document discusses the following points in detail:

- a well-balanced ecosystem (2a)
- geology (2b)
- flora (2c)
- fauna (2d)
- research (2e)
- recreation (2f)
- cultural value (2g)
- European interests justifying the application (3).

The following account will therefore be confined to additional remarks based on on-the-spot observation and the study of the relevant literature, while complying with the terms of reference.

3.2 Diversity of the landscape to be protected

The park's most striking feature is the fact that it concentrates the entire wealth of an alpine region at this altitude into a relatively limited area, which makes it unique in the Federal Republic of Germany.

The strongly contrasted alpine landscape exhibits some impressive differences in altitude over short distances (Berchtesgaden 540 m - Watzmann 2,700 m), a remarkable variety of massifs (eg Watzmann), small glaciers (eg Blaueis, the Watzmann glacier, Eiskapelle), alpine lakes (eg Königsee, Obersee), alpine valleys (Klausbach - Wimbach - Königsee), rocks, alpine pastures and forests, and an extremely wide range of geological formations, fauna and flora. Known historical events date back to the 12th century and are closely tied to salt production and pilgrimages to St. Bartholomä's Church on the Königsee. So it is hardly surprising to find one of the first travel accounts of the last century referring to Berchtesgaden as "the Yellowstone Park of the German Alps".

3.3 Forests

The forests have clearly undergone profound structural changes over the centuries. Their natural state is described as follows in the "Expert report on the future management of forests in the Berchtesgaden Alpine Park" by J Köstler, Munich, and H Mayer, Vienna:

"a. At the bottom of cleared valleys, mixed forests of valuable broad-leaved trees still predominate, together with submontane beech groves. There are alpine riparian forests in places, whereas forests naturally rich in conifers, like pine forests with heather, only occur in extreme locations.

b. The mountain slopes exhibit the final forest stage of spruces, firs and beeches; there is a whole range of associations at the residual permanent forest stage, such as the dwarf pine forests at Wimbachgries and the savin junipers at Untersberg.

c. The forests on the subalpine plateaux are more varied in character. At the Lattengebirge and on the Untersberg a narrow band (100 to 150 m) of subalpine spruce forests is followed by an association with dwarf pines over an area 200 to 300 m wide; the subalpine spruce forest ends at about 1,600 m. In the centre of the park an upper subalpine larch forest overlooks the lower subalpine spruce forest. The former constitutes the tree line at an altitude of about 1,750 m, while the dwarf pines rise to 2,000 m. It is only in the south (Hagengebirge and Steinernes Meer) that the forests become typical of this nordic subalpine region, with a broad belt of spruce 200 to 300 m wide and a further belt of larch and arolla pine 200 to 300 m wide. The dwarf pine forests, however, continue barely 100 to 200 m further up. Here the tree line is situated at 1,900 to 2,100 m."

In all accessible areas these forests have undergone a profound structural change, as centuries of logging to make way for salt production have caused the monoculture of conifers to take over. As the experts Köstler and Mayer observe in their report, "It will have to be borne in mind that, where the slopes were suitable for hauling, the present spruce stands have been subjected to clear cutting four or five times in order to facilitate salt extraction. They are therefore far removed from their natural state, and may even be of poor stock." These trees in unsuitable stations are still periodically cut clear, the rationale being either natural catastrophes, as when trees are torn down by the wind or destroyed by the powder-post beetle, or the deliberate transformation of existing stands into mixed forests at suitable stations, composed of beeches, firs, sycamore-maples and larches. In places one cannot help feeling that forestry development is all-important, underpinned as it is by an extensive network of forest paths. It is all the more difficult to envisage a more subtle silvicultural system and the consequent regeneration leading to a mixed forest, since there are no regulations governing the acceptable quantity of game, especially red deer. Strikingly, regeneration takes place easily wherever the areas concerned are fenced in. In the alpine pastures livestock also causes damage. Progress in separating forests from pastures (as required under Article 10, paragraph 1 of the decree concerning the national park) is slow. The local practice of long-length logging might also stand in the way of a more subtle silvicultural system. On the other hand, praiseworthy efforts are being made to obtain plants suited to the habitat for forestry planting.

3.4 Dairy farming

Like the forests, the alpine pastures with their dairy huts are a typical feature of the park. Alpine dairy farming, after suffering a continuous decline for decades, now appears to be in a more settled state. The park authorities welcome this development, which helps to improve the alpine cultural landscape. The dairy huts increasingly serve as stopping places for park visitors. It is encouraging to see these huts, which blend into the landscape, being renovated here and there, obviously to illustrate the development of dairy farming on the spot.

However, as in the mountain regions which are not national parks, dairy farming in its present state also has unwelcome repercussions on the landscape - in the form of refuse disposal problems due to tourist use of alpine huts, over-grazing by sheep and goats, damage caused by grazing in forests and the use of mineral fertilisers and herbicides. Steps will have to be taken to curb this harmful trend.

In any event, suitable measures are needed to reduce the conflicts between nature conservation aims and dairy-farming requirements. This will entail eliminating alpine dairy-farming at high altitudes in the conservation campaign zone. Areas threatened by erosion or in special need of protection should remain partly free from grazing.

3.5 Recreation

Both the park itself and its peripheral zone, which also has tremendous appeal, have attracted tourists for decades. Mechanical transport facilities are confined to areas outside the park. Forest and alpine roads are used exclusively for carrying supplies to stopping-places, for alpine and forestry development and by the actual park administration. Spacious parking lots have been set up along the access roads. As a result, summer sports like walking or climbing and winter sports like ski-touring or cross-country skiing are the typical forms of recreation in the park.

There is no danger of the road network being extended, nor is there any likelihood of transport facilities being built.

The present rough network of paths satisfies existing needs. The construction and upkeep of a few more footpaths by the forestry service will be enough to offer park visitors a close, intense look at nature as well as an opportunity for relaxation. There are plans to take pressure off the park itself by laying out a circular footpath in the peripheral zone.

Conflicts between tourist activities and fishing on the Königsee on the one hand, and the requirements of landscape conservation in the park on the other, are now coming to light and will have to be eliminated in the future. Major problems are water pollution and, to a lesser extent, stocking with fish.

3.6 Military activities

The use of the national park for military purposes (accommodation, physical training, cross-country skiing) is kept within narrow limits. It is nonetheless essential that there should be no increase in such activities. Among other points, combat exercises and the construction of cross-country ski trails should be stopped. In my view, helicopter flights for military (and indeed civilian) purposes should be subject to clear restrictive regulations.

3.7 Information and research

Considerable efforts are being made to offer park visitors the best possible information, both general and specific, on landscape conservation.

The park administration has just moved into the building which used to house the regional court, now renovated in exemplary fashion, at Markt Berchtesgaden. The renovation work involved close co-operation between the authorities responsible for nature conservation and those responsible for the protection of monuments and sites - an example to be followed.

Three information centres are currently being set up at the main entrances to the park. One of them - located near the access road to the Königsee - is housed in a flawlessly restored old station building and was officially opened on 16 July 1981. For the two other centres, the park authorities have set a good example by purchasing two buildings in need of protection to mark the adoption of their "no construction" policy.

Guided tours for visitors have also just started.

The Königsee centre, which is already completed, offers impressive information facilities on landscape protection and a good range of documentary material. Exemplary use is made of an audio-visual display to highlight the importance of nature conservation.

Research quite rightly concentrates on cataloguing the various species. The park naturally serves as a stimulus to a number of scientific subjects like geology, botany and zoology. It also plays a considerable part in international research (the MAB project). In my view, however, it would be advisable to step up research more specifically geared to the park's own aims and draw the necessary practical conclusions from it. In this context it is particularly important to study the problems posed by all types of alpine or forestry activity, in order to bring about as soon as possible optimum, lasting conditions for the conservation of the natural and cultural landscape and the information of visitors.

3.8 Legal and institutional changes

Legal changes

Under present circumstances, the ministerial decree of 18 July 1978 concerning the Berchtesgaden Alpine and National Parks largely fulfils the requirements of landscape protection. For the moment it need give

rise to no objections, with the exception of Part III on organisation and Article 10, paragraph 2 which permits the use of mineral fertilisers and herbicides on pastureland.

Institutional changes

Article 14, paragraph 1 of Part III of the decree, concerning the park administration, states that "Responsibility for the development and management of the national park shall rest with the prefecture (Landratsamt) of the Berchtesgadener Land, as the state authority in charge of the park administration. The national park administration shall form a separate division within the prefecture and its director shall be appointed by the state Ministry of the Interior, with the agreement of the state ministries responsible for food, agriculture and forestry, regional development and the environment. The Free State of Bavaria shall pay the district (Landkreis) of the Berchtesgadener Land compensation for all those expenses incurred by the prefecture which arise directly from the administration of the national park, in accordance with Article 53, paragraph 2 of the district regulations".

The fact that four different ministries share responsibility for decisions concerning the park obviously gives rise to difficulties. National parks are normally the responsibility of the highest government authority in the matter of nature conservation, on account of their importance and their special terminology.

In my opinion it is therefore essential to revise that part of the decree which concerns administration and substantially increase the park authorities' powers, especially with regard to the state's various obligations towards the park and all the resulting measures. Of course these new regulations also imply that effective co-operation will be established in the future between the various authorities mentioned, as being the only way to fulfil the ultimate goal of lasting conservation.

Budgetary resources

The park's financial situation seems satisfactory, but must undoubtedly be subject to difficulties and delays on account of the complex institutional arrangements described above.

3.9 Difficulties and dangers facing conservation work

Apart from the still unsolved problems already listed, I see no noteworthy deficiencies.

4. Assessment

Three distinct sets of problems emerge from the above remarks on the general state of the park:

- the transformation of the unmixed conifer stands, still very widespread (especially spruces) on the middle slopes and in the valleys, into mountain forests reflecting the potential natural forest associations;
- the fact that regulations are ill-suited to the density of game being designed for a silvicultural system based on the principle of sustained yield;

- control of the use of forests for grazing.

An assessment of the arguments for and against the award of the European Diploma to the Berchtesgaden National Park can scarcely disregard the other deficiencies observed.

Despite these criticisms, it must be admitted, in the light of the documentary material and on-the-spot inspection, that on the whole both the legal conditions - with the exception of the above-mentioned problems - and the park administration's goals and efforts are designed to serve the concept of nature conservation as effectively as possible under present conditions. If work continues along these lines, the existing problems will undoubtedly find satisfactory solutions in the end.

Both the landscape as a whole and the vegetation, fauna and flora might justify the award of the European Diploma, Category A.

Other grounds for the award might include the park administration's firm resolve to fulfil, as quickly and effectively as possible, the requirements for an award-winning park in Category A, its decision to drop the construction of large-scale tourist facilities (except on the Königsee) and buildings serving purposes other than forestry or agriculture, the exemplary development of information on nature conservation for the benefit of park visitors and the intensive research work undertaken.

5. Conclusion and proposal

Bearing in mind all the above arguments for or against the award of the Diploma, I should like to draw the following conclusion and make the following proposal.

While the award seems probable, it must be subject to prior agreement by the Free State of Bavaria to fulfil the conditions listed under point 6 of this report.

Furthermore, I consider it essential that these requirements be met in order to forestall any impression that the Diploma is awarded merely for show.

6. Conditions

6.1 In the national park, as stated by forestry experts Köstler and Mayer in their report:

6.1.1 All natural or nearly natural forests must be fully protected.

6.1.2 Monoculture forests dating back to salt extraction days must be changed into mixed associations suited to the habitat. The change must be speeded up by fencing in the regeneration zones and, if necessary, introducing further tree species suited to the habitat and engaging in reforestation based on regular thinning operations.

6.1.3 Stand management and regeneration must be based on selection only, rather than on clear cutting. Likewise, a change will have to be made from long-length logging to shortwood logging.

6.1.4 No further forest paths must be made.

6.1.5 The density of game must be regulated and pastures must be separated from forests so as to prevent any hindrance or challenge to a silvicultural system based on nearly natural management.

6.2 Dairy farming

6.2.1 Dairy farming must be maintained in its traditional form but there must be no expansion of any kind and above all, no over-grazing by sheep and goats and no mineral fertilisers or herbicides must be used.

6.2.2 Conflicts between nature conservation and dairy farming must be eliminated by proper planning (see point 3.4).

6.2.3 Alpine dairy huts must systematically be renovated in the traditional style.

6.2.4 The forest-pasture problem must be solved to the best advantage of the landscape.

6.3 Recreation

6.3.1 There should be an absolute ban on any summer or winter tourist development in the park and on all the attendant facilities, apart from further footpaths, which should be kept to a strict minimum.

6.3.2 There should also be a ban on long stays by tourists in alp huts and alpine club cabins.

6.3.3 The renting of serviced accommodation and the construction of holiday homes must be prohibited both now and in the future.

6.4 Military activity

As noted under point 3.6, military activities in the park must take place within certain limits to be determined by agreement with the park authorities.

6.5 Information and research

6.5.1 Every effort must be made to pursue and develop the information service on nature conservation for park visitors, which has now made a promising beginning at the information centres. The guided tours for visitors must be developed likewise.

6.5.2 The drive to expand research must also be kept up. Research must concentrate on the park's own problems and aim to help devise effective solutions and make the best possible contribution to the information service mentioned above.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Institutional changes and budgetary resources

7.1.1 The current regulations governing the organisation of the park under Article 14 of the ministerial decree need reviewing in order to secure a substantial increase in the park administration's powers. This should enable the administration to gear its future decisions primarily to the interests and aims of the national park in compliance with the requirements of the European Diploma, Category A.

7.1.2 Every effort will have to be made to meet the park's needs in the event of state budget cuts.

CONCLUSION

I should like to extend my warmest thanks to all the officials in charge of the Berchtesgaden National Park for the valuable information supplied to me. I hope that the observations made in this report will arouse the desired response, so that the European Diploma may finally be awarded to the park.