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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF
NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Select Committee of Experts

European Diploma

Gorge of Samaria National Park (Greece)

On-the-spot appraisal by

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Introduction

At its meeting on 18-19 May 1978 the Select Committee of Experts - European Diploma examined the application from the Greek Government, for the award of the European Diploma to the Gorge of Samaria National Park. The committee, recognising the European interest of the site, decided to have an on-the-spot appraisal carried out by an independent expert.

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe entrusted this task to Mr Théo Hunziker (Switzerland) accompanied by Mr P Baum, Environment and Natural Resources Division.

The terms of reference for the survey were as follows:

- to study the state of the site and the planning, development and management projects carried out or in progress.
- to check whether the requirements for the award of the European Diploma are fulfilled.

In this connection, all the points mentioned in Article 1.5.4 of the regulations for the award of the European Diploma (Resolution (73) 4) were thoroughly investigated on the spot and discussed with the park authorities.

Particulars of the site and general information on the area can be found in the original application. This report deals with points of special interest in connection with the award of the diploma.

The on-the-spot appraisal was carried out on 5-6 July 1978. Present were five representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, including Dr. Cassios and Dr. Mavrommatis, four from the Ministry of Co-ordination and one from the Prefecture of Chania.

The national park was established in 1962 and is situated in western Crete. It has an area of 4,850 ha and its main feature is a wide range of altitudes. The natural beauty of the gorge is further enhanced by impressive plant-life. The wild goat (*Capra aegagrus cretica*) lives and breeds within the park. There is only one natural path, which follows the bed of the river fed by several streams into and across the park.

1. Analysis of the present situation

1.1 Vegetation

The vegetation is essentially composed of Kermes oaks, red pine, Mediterranean Cypress and oriental plane. A phyto-sociological map compiled in 1976 by Dr. Mavrommatis (forestry ecologist from the Ministry of Agriculture) describes 228 species of flora and

7 vegetation groups. This constitutes an excellent basis for any further phyto-sociological research. The map divides the area according to the principal forest formations and indicates the precise location of *Pinus brutia* and *Cupressus sempervirens*. These forests are pure, not hybrid, and seedlings are taken from them for red pine and cypress plantations in Greece and other Mediterranean countries. Furthermore, satisfactory natural regeneration of the trees has been ensured in the area visited by prohibiting grazing and establishing fire prevention measures. The impact of tourism is negligible, the paths having been developed in an exemplary way.

1.2 Fauna

The number of wild goats is estimated at 400. Although we did not see any of them, we do not doubt their presence in the park. In 1977 a few animals were given to the Hellabrunn park (Western Germany) and others have been taken to a small neighbouring island in recent years for the purpose of genetic regeneration of the breed.

The risk of crossing with domestic goats intruding into the park has not been eliminated despite the erection of 10 km of fencing around grazing areas close to the park. Every year domestic goats which have returned to the wild state are removed from the park. There has been no study on *Capra aegagrus cretica* and there is no other precise information on the local fauna.

1.3 Fire

There have been no fires since the park was created. At the entrance, near the village of Omalos and inside the park, there are signs prohibiting the making of fires. Smoking is allowed only at the picnic sites and we found that the visitors obeyed this rule.

The park administration plans 6 suitably equipped fire-fighting points along the footpath. The first one is under construction. The wardens (3 permanent and 3 seasonal) are required to ensure that the prohibition of fires is strictly observed. It is planned to increase the number of wardens and to equip them with walkie-talkies. In an emergency, helicopters carrying fire-fighting equipment can land on a small piece of ground inside the park, near the old village of Samaria.

1.4 Access

A metalled road leads to the park entrance (on the Omalos side). An unmade road runs from the parking area to a small restaurant built by the national tourist board.

A list of ten rules to be obeyed by visitors is posted up at this entrance. Buildings at the entrance and inside the park are in the local stone and wood. Litter bins have been provided in some places, particularly at the picnic areas, next to the water supplies. Two km from the entrance there is a sign prohibiting

visitors from crossing the gorge or walking on further after sunset. Nevertheless, despite the presence of wardens, we met several tourists 3-5 kilometers further on who were getting ready to spend the night there.

On the other side of the park, near the village of Agia Rumelis, there are no signs and visitors enter the gorge without knowing that they are in a national park.

1.5 Tourism

In the tourist season some 1,000 to 3,000 people cross the park every month. The total number of visitors is of the order of 50,000 per year and they appear to be well-behaved. Apart from a few places where we found some abandoned water pipes, the park is clean.

1.6 Existing facilities

Apart from the facilities already mentioned there are no other remarks to be made on this subject.

1.7 Planned facilities

An information centre is planned outside the park, near the village of Omalos, and two buildings in the village of Samaria are to be converted to provide shelter for the wardens. Apart from this, a project is being studied which would enlarge the zone and include a marine area.

1.8 Management

The manager is a forester who lives at Chania, 45 kilometers from the park. There are also three permanent and three temporary wardens. During our visit we met six at least, but we had the impression that they are normally less often to be found in the park.

1.9 Budget

The budget is of the order of 250,000 FF, which appears to be a satisfactory sum.

2. Biogenetic reserve

In our opinion three parts of the park should be designated as biogenetic reserves: the forests of *Pinus brutia* and *Cupressus sempervirens*, which are exemplary in the way they satisfy the standards and principles of the European network.

3. Comments and recommendations

As a whole the park is well laid out, managed and protected. At the present moment there are no major problems. The park authorities can be relied upon to maintain the park in its present state, indeed even to improve its statutory protection. They are open to all our suggestions and will do their best to put them into practice. The park management should fulfil the following requirements:

1. Signs should be erected at all entrances, displaying the park regulations in both Greek and English; other signs describing the measures to take in case of fire should be installed at the entrances and in the park itself. It would be useful, in addition, to have a map for the public's use indicating in simple terms the principal tree species and existing facilities.
2. Building, construction and other activities to do with tourism should be prohibited.
3. Buildings required for management purposes should be constructed with local materials so that they blend with the landscape.
4. During the tourism season, the wardens should regularly inspect the park and ensure that the public abide by the regulations. They should have the authority to exact fines.
5. The water pipe should be camouflaged with natural materials: concrete or other similar materials which spoil the appearance of the landscape should be prohibited.
6. The Ministry for Agriculture should publish a leaflet on the park in Greek, English, German and French for distribution to visitors.
7. All advertising, particularly by the national tourist agency, should be strictly limited.
8. It is recommended that the protected area should be enlarged and a marine zone included.
9. The Council of Europe should be consulted on all future planning, improvement and management prospects.

4. Conclusion

The Select Committee of Experts - European Diploma is invited to recommend the immediate award of the diploma, providing the above conditions are respected.