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*STEERING COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION AND
MANAGEMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL HABITATS
(CDPE)*

*Group of Specialists on Protected Areas
(PE-S-ZP)*

23-25 March 1994

*Gorge of Samaria National Park
(Greece)*

Renewal of the European Diploma

Appraisal Report

by

Mr Joan MAYOL
(Spain)

1. No member of the Secretariat accompanied the consultant during his visit.
2. Appended hereto are Resolution (79) 14 on the award of the European Diploma to the Gorge of Samaria National Park (Appendix I), Resolution (89) 7 on the latest renewal (Appendix II), and a draft resolution concerning its possible renewal in 1994.

1. Introduction

The Gorge of Samaria National Park - also known as the "White Mountains" - on the island of Crete (Greece), established in 1962, was awarded the European Diploma in 1979; the award was renewed in 1984 and 1989, which means that the Park is under the patronage of the Council of Europe until 13 September 1994.

The Diploma awarded to the Park is still a category A diploma, awarded unconditionally; four recommendations were, however, approved by the Committee of Ministers at the 427th Meeting of the Deputies (see chapter 7).

On 26 April 1993, the Secretariat of the Council of Europe asked me to carry out an on-the-spot appraisal in July with a view to renewing the Diploma.

2. The visit

I visited the Park on 22 and 23 July after first of all making contact with, and visiting, the offices of the Chania Forest Directorate. During my visit I was accompanied by Mr Basilis Kasiotakis, Director of the Park and Head of the Forest Directorate, Miss Hariklia Kargiolaki, Mr Joanis Fotakis and Mr Manolis Papadakis, technicians working for the Park, and a number of the Park's wardens.

I met Mr Christodulos Theo. Mavrovitis, Head of the Forest Environment, National Parks and Forest Recreation section at the Greek Ministry of Agriculture, and volunteers taking part in a work camp at Samaria.

I greatly appreciated the hospitality and kindness that I received throughout my stay.

3. Description of the park

The Council of Europe has published an excellent description of the Park (European Diploma Series, no. 19). I should like to emphasise the enormous importance of the National Park forest in the Cretan context. Masses of Pinus brutia, and the individual specimens of Cupressus sempervirens, Platanus, Quercus coccifera and others are quite remarkable. It should be noted that the Park is wholly state-owned.

I should like to say a few words about some of the species that characterise the park, such as the wild goat and the birds of prey, and also about the erosion of the footpath.

There appears to have been no great change in the situation of the wild goat, Capra aegagrus cretica, since the previous visit by the Council of Europe in 1987. In document SN-ZP(87)30, there is a reference to observations of domestic goats in the Park and the possibility of cross-breeding with the pure wild goats, of which there are only a few. I myself saw no domestic goats in the Park, the entrance to which is well protected by wire netting and fencing (across the valley leading to it). The pressure of grazing outside the park is extremely great. On the valley floor, large numbers of wild goats congregate around the old buildings, and it is very easy to observe them since they do not take fright easily; they even come close to the wardens and the houses to take food. It seemed to me that the pressure exerted by this herd on the vegetation could be quite significant locally. The goats are, of course, one of the Park's main attractions, especially for the volunteers and others who are lucky enough to spend some time there. The Park's estimated goat population is 1200 (as compared with only 400 in 1987, according to the appraisal made by the Council of Europe in that year); there is still a problem of poaching in the park on the high ground. In my view, the system for monitoring the goat population ought to be improved; what is needed is an accurate idea of their numbers so that consideration can be given to controlling the population beyond a certain level. At present the only predator of the wild goat is the golden eagle: this will hardly suffice to keep the numbers down.

The population of birds of prey is by no means negligible. I was able to observe a pair of peregrine or lanner falcons in Samaria, and also a large eagle (probably a golden eagle). The most significant species is the bearded vulture, Gypaetus barbatus, which seems stable in Crete, although its breeding performance is apparently poor, possibly because of poaching. Although there were an estimated 12-15 pairs of bearded vulture in Crete in 1987 (Doc (87) 31), including two in the Park, the number is now between 14 and 16 (B. Hallmann); information concerning the Park is not accurate as no-one seems to know where the nests are. It is important that the Park play a role in the conservation of this species, and I suggest that a specific projects be set up along the lines set out in the post-script.

The question of the erosion of the hiking trail, used every season some by 250,000 or 300,000 people, was mentioned in the annual report for 1992. It is discernible, certainly. The impact on the conservation of the site is negligible, but there could be an image problem for some visitors. If all visitors keep to the footpath, the problem may be seen as one of supervision. In this context, the Park's staff are to be congratulated for keeping the railings in good order and so preventing visitors from taking short cuts and carving new erosion gulleys. Perhaps certain stretches could be reinforced by stonework, using traditional techniques: this might improve the Park's excellent image in the visitors' eyes.

4. Visitors

The Samaria National Park is one of Europe's most popular parks: some 300,000 visitors come there to tramp along the 18 km trail. This excursion is described in all guidebooks and considered one of the island's most beautiful walks. Thus over a quarter of a million people use the trail every year (and the number grows steadily).

The Park charges an entrance fee of 1000 Drachmas, but students, scientists and the disabled are exempt. Part of the proceeds (30%) goes to the local communities, and the remainder to the state.

I did not notice any signs of overcrowding in the park: the state of the flora and fauna, even close to the hiking trail, seems similar to the rest of the Park. Because of the strict regulations (hours of opening, no smoking, no overnight stays etc) most tourists simply walk from one end of the trail to the other and do nothing that might affect the park adversely. However, it is clear that the number of visitors cannot go on increasing indefinitely without putting the Park, and themselves, at risk. One of the tourist guides I spoke to suggested starting very early and completing the descent rapidly to avoid the crowds.

I suggest that the management plan specify a maximum number of visitors per day.

The tourism industry that has grown up on account of the park is of great socio-economic importance. One realises after just one visit that without the Park there would be far fewer bars, restaurants and rooms to let at Agia Roumeli. There are even plans to build a harbour. This is not altogether undesirable, as the region's economic resources are very limited, but a better blend of conservation and development should if possible be achieved at Agia Roumeli. One suggestion that could be made is the establishment of a buffer zone at the south entrance where no planning permission would be granted or tourism facilities developed consultation with the park's administration (for example, in the form of a report to the local council or the authority responsible for granting permits). At present, the visitor cannot help being struck by the excessively strong contrast between the Park and the immediate vicinity.

5. Notes on management

5.1 Staff

In Greece, the administration of national parks is a sub-division of forest administration, at both central and local government level. We were able to observe what a high degree of motivation and professional dedication the Park's present authorities display, but we must also reiterate the comments made in document SN-ZP (87) 30 about the lack of specific structures for national parks and the shortage of staff with a biological background. On this second point, improvements are expected soon with the recruitment of two biologists on a contractual basis: the Greek government has already given its approval.

In 1989 the Park's personnel numbered 27, but today 34 people are employed (three technicians, seven wardens and 24 temporary staff). There are plans to increase the number of established staff and reduce temporary recruitment.

All temporary staff attend a first aid course. It is planned that the new technical staff should provide training in conservation (fauna and flora etc); this is an excellent initiative.

5.2 Surveillance

The trail is efficiently patrolled by established and temporary wardens. Hikers encounter one or two wardens every three kilometres to guide and advise them, remind them of the rules etc.

On the other hand, it is harder to police the high ground and the Park's approaches. The Director is hoping that matters will improve when the fire-watch helicopter comes into service outside the park.

5.3 Cleaning-up operations

We were pleased to find the Park remarkably clean and tidy. This, of course, is due to the efforts of the administration to cope with the number of visitors. The debris is cleared by the Park staff and removed from the Park by mule transport. With a good infrastructure, (rubbish bins at every rest area and wooden toilets at intervals along the trail) it is possible to keep the site in good order.

5.4 Park infrastructure

The infrastructures appear to have been improved since the Diploma was last renewed. Work on the information centre at the north entrance, which began in 1987, is now almost finished: the administration thinks that the centre will be opened this year.

The telephone link between Samaria and two entrances to the park was completed in 1990. At Samaria, three houses are now ready (wardens, volunteers, exhibition on olive oil manufacture). It is planned to install solar panels and improve radio communications. Terraces in the villages were restored in 1993 by European volunteers during a work camp, an extremely encouraging experience. On the other hand we have heard no comment on the restoration of the water mill mentioned in Document SN-ZP (87) 31.

Water from several springs is brought to the trail through invisible pipes so that visitors can have all the water they need for survival in this Mediterranean climate. There is very good equipment for use in the event of a forest fire (hydrants, hoses and tools) along the length of the trail.

Although it is not part of the Park's infrastructure, mention must be made of the PVC piping used to bring water from the gorges to Agia Roumeli, which previous Council of Europe reports (SN-ZP (87) 31) described as unsightly. Parts of this main should be withdrawn from service and another solution found.

5.5 Scientific research

Research facilities are not extensive. Recently, the university of Crete completed a study on invertebrates, and it is expected that this institution and the university of Thessalonica will assist in the execution of the management plan. The university of Crete has proposed a sophisticated system of remote fire detection for the Park, which hardly seems to require priority since outbreaks of fire are infrequent and there are people available on the spot to deal with them. Such a system might perhaps be more useful in the grazing areas outside the Park where fires occur very frequently.

6. Finance

I have examined the Park's budget, which is satisfactory. The aid which will be forthcoming from the European Community means that prospects in this respect remain good.

7. Recommendations made in 1989

When the Diploma was renewed in 1989, four recommendations were made. We shall now look at these to see how they have been implemented.

- 1. A management plan should be drawn up for conservation, use, maintenance and improvement of the National Park, to include clear short-term, medium-term and long-term guidelines on all the major sectors. This plan should include the inventory and regular monitoring of species (especially the wild goat), indicate the boundaries of the protected area and the status of each area within the Park, and cover such matters as administration, facilities and information policy.**

In document SN-ZP (87) 30, reference was made to a management plan already prepared but not approved (nor was it examined by the experts making the appraisal). The importance of this document was emphasised in the conclusions of the Group of Specialists on protected areas (PE-S-ZP (93) 51). This year, the technicians stated that the management plan should be drafted in co-operation with the universities of Greece and Thessalonica, following the application of the LIFE programme of the Council of Europe. We suggest that the Group of Specialists review the current situation during its meeting and take this factor into account when considering renewal.

- 2. An integrated information policy should be devised and put into practice in the information centre and along the present educational trail; educative material for foreign visitors should be published in the main languages and a botanical trail should be created.**

An eight-page booklet is handed out to visitors. It contains general information on the Park (the natural environment, history, regulations and a plan of the Park). It is available in Greek, German, French and English. It contains a reference to the European Diploma.

At both ends of the trail, magnificent information panels offer visitors full details of the Park's characteristics and byelaws. The Diploma is also displayed. In addition to these two panels, there are wooden signboards along the route reminding hikers of the byelaws. This keeps visitors sufficiently well informed.

On the other hand, the recommendation concerning the botanical trail has been implemented in a way which is impractical. A footpath to which the public is not admitted crosses the main hiking trail and was recently given the name of "botanical trail". Anyone wishing to walk along it needs special permission, which only four people have so far managed to obtain. The plants are not identified and no infrastructure has been put in place. In a word, this recommendation has generated only a small panel, and should be reformulated at the end of this document.

3. **The administrative structure needs to be strengthened, in particular by recruiting more specially trained wardens and more scientific staff to undertake conservation activities of an educational and technical nature.**

As mentioned earlier (5.1), some action has been taken on this recommendation and there is every prospect of its being fully implemented in the months following my visit.

4. **A long-term research programme should be drawn up, giving encouragement to contacts and research with Greek and other European universities and research centres, and also with international organisations.**

I have discussed the present research programme. The organisation of the work camp is a factor to take into consideration in the light of this recommendation. I consider that the recommendation has been implemented only in part, and that it should therefore be repeated.

8. **Conclusion**

Having examined the documentation after my on-the-spot appraisal, my conclusion is that the state of conservation of the National Park has not only not worsened since the category A Diploma was last renewed, but has been pursued under better conditions than before. However, the lack of any management plan is an important failing. I conclude that the Diploma should be renewed on condition that the Greek authorities show evidence to the Group of Specialists at its next meeting in the first quarter of 1984, that the work of drafting the plan has at least begun.

Such evidence could consist in the outline of the plan, the planned time limit for its production and the names and qualifications of those responsible for drafting it. The statement of intent given me by the Greek authorities during my visit suggests that this condition should not be difficult to fulfil.

9. **Recommendations**

1. The integrated information policy should be continued with the immediate opening of the information centre and the positioning of signboards at each resting place along the present hiking trail.
2. The administrative structure needs to be strengthened, in particular by providing special training for the wardens and recruiting scientific staff on a contractual basis to undertake conservation activities of an educational and technical nature;
3. A long-term research programme should be drawn up, giving encouragement to contacts and research with Greek and other European universities and research centres, and also with international organisations. The restoration work camps for European volunteers should be continued.

4. The local authorities should be involved in the management of the Park; in particular they should be consulted during the preparation of the management plan and also, if possible, when an advisory committee is formed with the participation of other interested administrative services, scientists and organisations.

References:

Council of Europe documents:

SN-ZP (87) 31 On-the-spot appraisal. M Broggi
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Other documentation:

Leaflet issued by the Samaria National Park

HALLMANN B. The birds of prey populations of Crete: an update. A preliminary report summarising results of fieldwork on the island between 1988 and 1992. Manuscript, 8 pages.

Guidebooks:

Palaska, H (undated): Crete. Adam editions. Greece

Pisalkis, K (undated) The Gorge of Samaria. Ed. Ketra Stampa. Crete

Hamon, H (1989): Crète. Ed. du Seuil. France

POSTSCRIPT

Proposed scheme for the conservation of the bearded vulture, Gypaetus barbatus.

The existence in Crete of one of Europe's largest populations of bearded vulture, and its presence in the National Park, requires that priority be given to this threatened bird species. Apparently, its breeding performance on the island is poor, and poaching remains a problem to this day.

It is the duty of the National Park to be well acquainted with and to manage this species, whose value both in biological terms and as a symbol is so important. Action for its conservation could include campaigns designed:

1. to increase public awareness;
2. to gain further knowledge;
3. perhaps also to provide a feeding place to facilitate observation.

On the first point, it would be possible to publish a specific document to motivate the population living in the neighbourhood of the park and in other mountain areas of Crete, in defence of the vulture and other raptors. One fairly simple method would be to adapt the "comic strip" published by the Corsican Nature Park to the specific situation of Crete, and circulate it to all schoolchildren and shepherds on the island.

In order to gain further knowledge, the Park's wardens should be able to identify the species and monitor its reproduction. An expert could be recruited to train the staff and even to conduct certain reconnaissance tours on the spot.

Although grazing is probably practised in Crete on a sufficiently wide scale to provide the vulture with a livelihood, it would be possible to give visitors a better view by installing a feeding point close to the Park's north entrance. Trotters, bones and other animal debris could be brought to the spot weekly. A number of other national parks in Europe do this, and so this is a possibility that an expert could examine in situ.

Experts to consult:

Rafael Heredia Armada. Camino del Túnel (Somio) 33203 Gijón. Asturias, Spain. Tel: 8 533 80 12 (Scientific Director of the Official Plan for the Rehabilitation of the Vulture in Spain).

Ben Hallmann. Rapsani 40008, Greece. Tel and Fax: 49 56 14 76

Michel Terrasse. FIR. Rue Mont Valérien 29, 92210 Saint-Cloud, France. CP. Fax 33-1-47712242.

Winfried Walter. WWF Austria. Box Post 1, A-1162 Vienna, Tel: 1-4091641, Fax: 409164129.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (79) 14

ON THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA TO THE GORGE OF SAMARIA NATIONAL PARK (GREECE)

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 September 1979
at the 307th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

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 the proposals of the European Committee for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources ;

Having recorded the agreement of the Government of Greece ;

After deliberation,

Solemnly awards the European Diploma, Category A, in accordance with the regulations for the European Diploma, to the Gorge of Samaria National Park (Greece) ;

Places the aforesaid park under the patronage of the Council of Europe until 13 September 1984;

Invites the Government of Greece to notify the competent authorities of the following recommendations of the European Committee for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources :

1. Signs should be erected at all entrances, displaying the park regulations in both Greek and English. It would be useful, in addition, to have a map for the public's use indicating in simple terms the principal tree species ;
2. Signs forbidding the making of fire in the park should be installed at the entrances and at various places throughout the park ;
3. Building, developments and other activities to do with tourism should be prohibited ;
4. Buildings required for management and supervision purposes should be constructed of local material so that they blend with the landscape ;
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. During the tourist season, the wardens should regularly inspect the park and ensure that the public abide by the regulations ;
7. All advertising should be strictly limited ;
8. The Council of Europe should be informed of planning, development and management prospects.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (89) 7

ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA AWARDED TO THE GORGE OF SAMARIA NATIONAL PARK (GREECE)

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 19 June 1989
at the 427th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

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 (79) 14 awarding the European Diploma to the Gorge of Samaria 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, Category A, awarded to the Samaria National Park until 13 September 1994, with the following recommendations :

1. A management plan should be drawn up for the conservation, use, maintenance and improvement of the national park, to include clear short-term, medium-term and long-term guidelines on all the major sectors. This plan should include the inventory and regular monitoring of species (especially the wild goat), indicate the boundaries of the protected area, and the status of each area within the park, and cover such matters as administration, facilities and information policy ;
2. An integrated information policy should be devised and put into practice in the information centre and along the present educational trail ; educative material for foreign visitors should be published in the main languages and a botanical trail should be created ;
3. The administrative structure needs to be strengthened, in particular by recruiting more specially trained wardens and more scientific staff to undertake conservation activities of an educational and technical nature ;
4. A long-term research programme should be drawn up, giving encouragement to contacts and research with Greek and other European universities and research centres, and also with international organisations.



Forty years
Council of Europe

A P P E N D I X I I I

DRAFT RESOLUTION (94) ...

**ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA TO THE
GORGE OF SAMARIA NATIONAL PARK (GREECE)**

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 (79) 14 awarding the European Diploma to the Gorge of Samaria 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, category A, until 13 September 1999, with the following recommendations:

1. The integrated information policy should be continued with the immediate opening of the information centre and the positioning of signboards at each resting place along the present hiking trail.
2. The administrative structure needs to be strengthened, in particular by providing special training for the wardens and recruiting scientific staff on a contractual basis to undertake conservation activities of an educational and technical nature;
3. A long-term research programme should be drawn up, giving encouragement to contacts and research with Greek and other European universities and research centres, and also with international organisations. The restoration work camps for European volunteers should be continued.
4. The local authorities should be involved in the management of the Park; in particular they should be consulted during the preparation of the management plan and also, if possible, when an advisory committee is formed with the participation of other interested administrative services, scientists and organisations.