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**COMMITTEE FOR THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
IN THE FIELD OF BIOLOGICAL AND LANDSCAPE DIVERSITY
(CO-DBP)**

Group of specialists – European Diploma for protected areas

28-29 January 2002
Room 15, Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg

**Krimml Waterfall natural site
(Austria)**

RENEWAL

Expert report
by Mr Daniel DASKE (France)

*Document prepared
by the Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage*

The European Diploma for protected areas was awarded to the Krimml Waterfall natural site in 1967, in category C, and has been renewed since then.

The Secretariat did not accompany the expert on his visit to the site.

Appendix 1 reproduces Resolution (97) 12 adopted when the Diploma was last renewed.

Appendix 11 sets out a draft resolution prepared by the Secretariat for the purpose of extending the period of validity.

Krimml Waterfall – Hohe Tauern National Park (Austria)

Expert's visit carried out from 25 to 28 June 2001

Programme

I would like to begin by emphasising the warm welcome I received from my Austrian hosts, their close partnership providing a guarantee of their shared determination to manage the Krimml Waterfall natural site in the best possible way.

Monday 25 June: journey and arrival in Krimml.

Tuesday 26 June:

9 am Welcome and introduction by the main participants, in particular Mr Oberhollenzer, mayor of Krimml, and Mr Kremser, manager of the Hohe Tauern national park.

10 am Visit to the *Wasserwunderwelt* ("wonderful world of water") centre.

12.30 pm At the entrance to the falls, presentation of management and maintenance activities by the Austrian Alpine Club (ÖAV).

1 pm Lunch.

2 pm Falls discovery trail in three successive tiers.

7 pm Supper in Rechteck, impressive "*Alpenglühén*" on the Grossvenediger massif

Wednesday 27 June:

8 am Visit to the Krimmler Achental. Visit and lunch in the Krimmler-Tauernhaus, at 1600 m altitude.

8 pm Participation in the inauguration of the exhibition "A century of mountain rescue in Krimml".

Thursday 28 June:

9 am Closing discussions. Brief national park centre tour in Neukirchen and Hollersbach.

Participants

Throughout the appraisal visit I was accompanied by: Ferdinand Lainer, of the Hohe Tauern national park, and Josef Fischer-Colbrie, responsible for nature protection for the *Land* of Salzburg. I had frequent dealings with Ferdinand Oberhollenzer, mayor of Krimml, Monika Staffl, public relations officer of the Hohe Tauern national park, and Harald Kremser, manager of the Hohe Tauern national park. I also met Christian Heu, manager of the water centre, Peter Hasslacher, manager of the Austrian Alpine Club in Innsbruck, Sepp Maier and Sepp Nussbaumer from the Alpine Club who carry out all the work on the falls path on a day-to-day basis, Hubert Ellmanthaler, Hans Hirschbichler, Johann Peter Gruber, botanist specialising in the study of mosses, Siegfried Wartbichler, Friedrich Geisler, owner of the Tauernhaus, Kurt Trenka, Hermann Hinterstoisser, Hans Lorch.

I was provided with a wealth of documentation (videos, books, various publications) on the falls, the national park and the water centre.

Images of a visit

- the horny hand of a South Tyrolean shepherd holding a fragrant brush of juniper
- shared and unanimous determination to serve an exceptional environment
- fleeting glimpses of the rainbow in the foaming, pounding white waters
- the effective healing of the scars left by unauthorised walkers' short-cuts through adding earth, logs and oats which germinate quickly and cover the ground
- the careful tending of root systems laid bare by "erosion" by tourists
- the extraordinary diversity of mosses - 328 species – thanks to the ambient humidity
- a clump of moss sparkling at the bottom of a scree slope
- the European diploma displayed pretty well everywhere

- the omnipresence of elderberries in Austria in the form of jam and an exquisite-tasting drink
- attentive and warm hosts

Broad outlines of the site

Let us add one final image, that of the mayor, Mr Oberhollenzer, at his post for 37 years, whose office overlooks the falls as if to keep a constant eye on them.

At a height of 400 m, the Krimml waterfall ranks fifth in the world behind:

1. Salto Angel falls, Venezuela, 1100 m
2. Yosemite falls, United States, 740 m
3. Sutherland falls, New Zealand, 580 m
4. Mardasfossen, Norway, 505m

They lie about 50 km from Zell am See, at the heart of the Hohe Tauern national park, and comprise three tiers, ranging from 1,000 m to 1,400 m in altitude. The hidden source of these constantly renewed masses of water lies in the long steep-sided Krimmler Achental valley which is fed by Austria's third largest glacier in terms of surface area. Visitor levels are around 400,000 paid entries per annum. The Austrian Alpine Club took things in hand a long time ago by tracing and consolidating the falls path and then maintaining it on a day-to-day basis, which is no mean feat. All the credit for this goes to Sepp Maier and Sepp Nussbaumer, who monitor, clean and patch up the path, carrying out never-ending landscape restoration work on the most eroded sections. When climbing the 400 m leading to the top of the falls, the impression is barely one of a heavily frequented path, and there is no unsightly litter lying around. In fact, apart from the constant roar of the water, one has the impression of following a mid-altitude forest path punctuated with alpine flora: with the end of June approaching, this included twin-flowered violet (*viola biflora*), round-leaved saxifrage, star saxifrage, alpine colt's-foot, the beautiful blue alpine clematis, rhododendron and even a few isolated arrolla pines in the higher reaches. The shops by the point of access to the falls have not been extended, and a new reasonably sized car park has been built above the water centre. The overall aesthetics are acceptable and, short of placing car parking underground, it would not be conceivable to fully mitigate the impact of an average 400,000 visitors each year. The previous report on the Krimml falls drew attention to a pipe by the Schönangerln inn. This is in fact a 10 cm-diameter rubber tube crossing the torrent behind the inn and visible only from a short distance away. The solution in the medium term would be a connection via the upper bridge. However, since the toilet facilities are for use only by the inn's customers, the question of facilities open to all walkers in this central section of the falls arises.

Scientific aspects

Suzanne Stadler has produced an ornithological survey of the diploma area covering 390 ha, of which 355 ha are relatively undisturbed forest habitats providing breeding grounds for certain groups. These include picidae (great spotted, black and three-toed woodpeckers), raptors including goshawks, but also golden eagles and kestrels looking for food, tetraonidae – hazel grouse, black tetras, capercaillie and ptarmigan to a lesser extent and on the higher ground, and nocturnal raptors including the eagle owl. Sixty-two species have been inventoried, 43 of them known to be nesting. Johann Peter Gruber from the University of Salzburg has given us an insight into the fantastic variety of mosses in the Krimml falls sector. This is largely due to the high degree of ambient humidity. His study describes 328 species. In the seeping scree, we were privileged to see *Schistostiegia pennata*, the phosphorescent moss, which glints at certain times of the year. This quasi-confidential detail could usefully be made more public, as it results from the enormous mass of water that constantly falls at Krimml. Generally speaking, it is highly desirable to further develop scientific surveys of the site.

***Wasserwunderwelt* – the wonderful world of water** **A high-quality learning centre**

Designed by scientists, technicians and architects and opened on 2 July 2000, this facility comprises an indoor learning centre and an outdoor "aquapark". Looking at water from every angle and penetrating its every mystery, it is both original and captivating thanks to its fun approach, which includes a three-dimensional cinema, taking visitors from desert to glacier in the space of ten minutes. One of the presenters, Eva Brauer, tested our knowledge with some of the questions normally put to the public. A few examples:

- *Are you as strong as a tree?*

Trees absorb groundwater through their roots, with the rate of suction varying considerably. Try to draw water from the ground up to the highest point just by using your muscles.

- *How many litres of water does an elephant drink on average?*

130 litres a day.

- *... And a mouse?*

5 g of water a day.

- *How much water comes down the Krimml falls in ten hours?*

Some 108 billion litres – enough to fill New York's Empire State Building right to the top.

Fifty or so questions are put to visitors in this engaging manner. The outside "aquapark" includes:

Aquamystica, a silent water jet that does not exist in nature,

Aquatist, a water jet capable of holding a ball in the air, even when at an angle,

Aquabryll, which shows that water can also roar, sob or sing.

Visitors can also create a geyser effect and, upstairs, contemplate the falls through an excellent Austrian-made (of course) Swarovski telescope.

Now in its second year of operation, the complex already receives some 15,000 school visitors. It is an original facility nicely complementing the natural spectacle of water. *Wasserwunderwelt* is close to the toll booth (Gerlochplatte Strasse) and also houses an information point for the national park. Given its location, it has next to no impact on the landscape and can only be praised. It might be a good idea to make the vast assortment of purely decorative plant-beds of the outdoor aquapark more consistent with the water theme and the surrounding environment. Possibly an alpine rockery, with plants such as bog moss (capacity to absorb water), soapwort or different rushes, whose purifying qualities are well known. An effort might also be made to explain the rainbow, as this fascinating phenomenon is visible in the different tiers of the falls.

Close partnership

The Krimml falls are the highlight of a landscape ensemble beginning at the Krimml Kies glacier and ending at the confluence with the river Salzach. This geographical coherency incites the visitor to discover the water catchment area constituted by the beautiful upper valley, the Krimmler Achental. We saw, among other things, a national park chalet for researchers, cheese-making, local livestock breeds (particularly the Pinzgau), the Krimmlertauernhaus, at just over 1,600 m and open all year round, and fine arrolla pine woods.

The success of managing this exceptional natural site is the result of excellent partnership between the Hohe Tauern national park, the municipality of Krimml, the Austrian Alpine Club, the forestry authorities, the Grohag (Grossglockner Hochalpenstrassen) which sponsors the water centre, private owners, excursion vehicle drivers who drive slowly and carefully around the Krimmler Achental, certain other local authorities and so on. There are no notes of discord, other than Mr Richter perhaps, a private owners representative who would like "fewer restrictions". I see this as a sign that those responsible for the park are steering a firm course and that their management of the Krimml Falls is optimal.

Recommendations

- Ban any further installation or extension of shops on the road leading to the falls.
- Take all necessary measures to ensure that any application to install shops or other buildings within sight of the falls is subject to the approval of the competent authorities.
- Restrict shuttle bus services to those run at present.
- Study the possibility of installing public toilets in the central area of the falls owing to the high number of visitors.
- Pursue scientific research and secure funding to carry out studies along the lines of those covering the area's bird-life and mosses.

A P P E N D I X I

RESOLUTION (97) 12

ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA AWARDED TO THE KRIMML WATERFALLS NATURE SITE (Austria)

*(adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 30 September 1997,
at the 602nd 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 (67) 23 awarding the European Diploma to the Krimml Waterfalls natural site;

Having regard to the proposals of the Bureau of the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the field of Biological and Landscape Diversity (BU-DBP);

Renews the European Diploma awarded to the Krimml Waterfalls natural sites in category C, until 27 October 2002;

Attaches to the renewal the following recommendations, that:

1. every effort be made to ensure that the Environment Department is consulted about any applications for planning permission for additional facilities, business or other constructions within sight of the Krimml Falls;
2. any further installation or extension of business on the road leading to the falls be definitely banned;
3. the number of motorised shuttle services be limited to the two or three already in existence;
4. the landscaping of the car park, which is still an eyesore, be improved;
5. the water pipe carrying drinking water to the Schönangerln Inn be buried;
6. the possibility of extending the boundaries of the protected area be considered, so that activities in the peripheral areas can be better controlled.

A P P E N D I X I I

Draft resolution on the renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the Krimml Waterfalls natural site (Austria)

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 (67) 23 awarding the European Diploma to the Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site;

Taking into consideration the expert's report presented at the meeting of the Group of Specialists - European Diploma for protected areas on 28 and 29 January 2002;

Renews the European Diploma awarded to the Krimml Waterfalls Natural Site until 27 October 2007;

Attaches the following recommendations to the renewal:

- Ban any further installation or extension of shops on the road leading to the falls.
- Take all necessary measures to ensure that any application to install shops or other buildings within sight of the falls is subject to the approval of the competent authorities.
- Restrict shuttle bus services to those run at present.
- Study the possibility of installing public toilets in the central area of the falls owing to the high number of visitors.
- Pursue scientific research and secure funding to carry out studies along the lines of those covering the area's bird-life and mosses.