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STEERING COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT
OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL HABITATS

Group of Specialists on Protected Areas

1-4 February 1993

APPLICATION FROM THE
ARGENTERA NATURE PARK
(Italy)

for the European Diploma

Expert's report

by

Dr. Alfred FROMENT
Liège University
(Belgium)

A representative of the Secretariat accompanied the expert during his on-the-spot appraisal. His comments appear in point 5.

A draft resolution on the award of the European Diploma appears in Appendix I.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Having examined the application submitted by Italy, the Group of Specialists on Protected Areas recognised the European interest of the Argentera Nature Park (A.N.P) and decided to carry out an on-the-spot appraisal in accordance with the regulations governing the European Diploma (Resolution (91/16)).

This visit took place on 10, 11 and 12 August 1992. The expert was accompanied by Mr H. HACOURT, Principal Administrative Officer in the Council of Europe's Environment Conservation and Management Division.

Mrs P ROSSI, Director of the Park, accompanied the delegation throughout the visit, and the resulting dialogue greatly contributed to a good understanding of the area's features and problems.

The expert would therefore like to thank the Park Director and the Head of the Park Council for their welcome, for the quality of the organisation and programme of the visit and for introducing him to a remarkably comprehensive range of people.

Dr. M GOBBI, an official from the Ministry of the Environment in Rome, was also present over the three days.

1.1 PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

Monday 10 August: Excursion in the Valasco valley and visit to the botanical garden at Terme de Valdieri, with:

- . Park staff: Mrs P ROSSI, Director, and Mr M DALMASSO, Mr D D'ALIMONTE and Mr P FANTINI, wardens;
- . Park Council: the President, Mr R MUCCIARELLI and committee members, Dr. B VIGNA and Mr A CAMPERI, representing the district of Aisone and a nature conservation association respectively.
- . Outside collaborator: Miss E MEI, researcher at Pisa University.

In addition, there was a meeting in the late afternoon with, amongst others, local elected representatives:

- . Park Council: the President, Mr R MUCCIARELLI and Vice-President, Mr M BERTOLDI; committee members, Mr G ROSTAGNO, Mr B VIGNA and Mrs L MASSOLO, representing the districts of Entracque and Aisone and a nature conservation association respectively; Mr R GROSETTO and Mr I DI GIAMBATTISTA, representing the districts of Entracque and Valdieri.

- . Mayors: Mr G PEPITO from Entracque (also member of the Park Council) and Mr A FORTENIS from Valdieri.
- . Mountain communities (Comunità Montana): Mr U BOCCACCI, from the Gesso valley and Mr L QUARANTA from the Stura valley.
- . Directors of Regional Parks: Mr M BAUDINO, from the Valle Pesio Park, and Mr G PELLEGRINO from the Palafrè Nature Reserve.
- . Cuneo Province authorities: Mr G CIRAVEGNA, inspector of hunting, fishing and nature parks.

The main subjects of discussion were: the views of local people and elected representatives on the establishment of the A.N.P, the problem of the heavy influx of tourists and plans to develop improved public reception facilities, fishing reserves, the perimeter of the future buffer zone, the value of the small cultural heritage, the need for a land policy (Valasco valley) and the labelling of Park products.

In the evening Mrs ROSSI presented videos on the ibex project.

Tuesday 11 August: Excursion to the Rovine valley and visit to the ENEL electricity power station.

- . Park staff: the Director, Mrs P ROSSI, wardens, Mr M RABBIA, Mr G BIGLINO and P FANTANI and Mr A DEVALIS, conscientious objector;
- . Outside collaborators: Prof. E MARTINI from the Botanical Institute at the University of Genoa and Mrs M BOCCARDO, researcher; Prof. T BALBO and Prof. L ROSSI, from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Turin, members of the Regional Scientific Committee and Dr. G BOANO, an ornithologist;
- . Administration: Mr E DOTTA, the Forestry Commission officer for the province.
- . ENEL (Ente nazionale per l'Energia Elettrica): Mr PANICUCCI, engineer.

Tour of the underground power station and information centre; growing collaboration with Park officials is leading to the removal of unnecessary pylons and the rehabilitation of sites damaged by the construction of the hydroelectric station, artificial dams and rubble from the excavation of underground water conduits.

In the late afternoon there was a meeting with representatives of various nature conservation associations, attended by the following members of the Park Council: the

President, Mr R MUCCIARELLI, committee member, Mrs A ZARA and the Deputy Director of the Park, Mr G CANAVESE.

- . Italian Alpine Club: Mr E ALLARIO;
- . Environmental League: Mr G PEANO;
- . W.W.F.: Mr I DE MARCO;
- . Italian League for the Protection of Ungulates: Ms A GAZZOLA and Mr F BERGESE;
- . PRO NATUA: Mr and Mrs COSCIA.

The main topics of discussion were: the perimeter of the Park, changing the status of the Park from a Regional to a National Nature Park, the Cireglia-Mercantour motorway tunnel project, the relationship between the large wild fauna and grazing for sheep; the need for management to maintain biodiversity (coppicing of beeches, cropping of turf); the Park's importance as a natural laboratory for academic research, the need to control sporting activities in the high mountains, particularly climbing, so as to protect birds such as the eagle and peregrine falcon.

In the evening, Prof. E MARTINI gave a talk, with slides, on the flora of the Maritime and Ligurian Alps.

Wednesday 12 August: Visit to the Stura valley and the Aisone archaeological site, the Park Centre and the "Messenger" exhibition at Entracque as well as the cross-country ski centre run by the LOU BAUS co-operative.

- . Park staff: the Director, ~~Mr~~ P ROSSI, and wardens Mr M RABBIA and Mr D D'ALIMONTE;
- . Park Council: the President, Mr M MUCCIARELLI and Mr M BERTOLDI, Vice-president and agronomist at the Stura valley Mountain Community, Mrs L MASSOLO, committee member and Mr G PEPPINO, Mayor of Entracque;
- . Outside collaborators: Dr. L MANO, archaeologist at the Cuneo Civic Museum and Mr M STEFANO, cultural administrator with the Stura valley Mountain Community.

In the late afternoon there was a meeting with Mrs A FRANCO, a journalist from la Stampa.

1.2 DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

- Piano naturalistico del Parco naturale dell'Argentera (1983) - Regione Piemonte - Assessorato alla Pianificazione Territoriale - Istituto per le piane da Leguo e l'Ambiente - Turin - 379 pp.

- Piano dell'area del Parco naturale dell'Argentera e della Réserve naturelle speciale del popolamento di *Juniperus Phoenicea* di Rocca San Giovanni - Saben (- sans date) - Regione Piemonte, Assessorato alla programmazione economica e alla pianificazione territoriale - Settore Parchi naturali - 211 pp.
- Piano di gestione forestale del parco naturale dell'Argentera per el periodo 1990-2004 - (1990) - ibidem - 145 pp.
- Piano gestione ungulati (1989) - rapport 18 pp.
- Relatione sulle attivita 'didattiche, scientifiche, turistiche e recreative promosse e realizzate nel Parco natural dell'Argentera (1992) - 5 pp.
- Relatione di fine anno 1991 - 8 pp.
- Giardino botanico alpino "Valderia" e sentiero naturalistico (1990) - 5 pp.
- Riserve di pesca e tutela della fauna acquatica nel Parco naturale dell'Argentera (1989) - 13 pp.
- Proceedings of the International Conference "The Alpine ibex: current situation and prospectives", Argentura Nature Park and Mercantour National Park (1987) - 160 pp.
- Rapporto sui primi 6 anni di attivita (1983-1988), - Regione Piemonte, Parco naturale Argentera - 32 pp.
- Parco Naturale dell'Argentera - Itinerari natura, par P ROSSI et G CANAVESE (1986) - ed. Pruli & Verlucca - 247 pp.
- Application for the European Diploma from the Parco naturale Argentura (Italy) - Council of Europe PE-S-ZP (1992-47) - 43 pp.
- Parco Naturale dell'Argentera - Itinerari natura, by P ROSSI and G CANAVESE (1986) - published by Pruli & Verlucca - 247 pp.
- Maps, brochures and various educational publications.

2. THE ARGENTERA NATURE PARK

2.1 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The A.N.P covers an area of approximately 26,000 hectares. It shares 30 km of common border with the Mercantour National Park (Figure 1).

It is the largest regional park in Piedmont and one of the largest in Italy. The Park lies within three communes which own most of its territory:

Entracque	11,868 hectares
Valdieri	8,910 "
Aisone	1,580 "

There are no permanently inhabited villages within the Park except for the hamlet of St Anna di Valdieri, with fewer than one hundred residents.

The protected area ranges in altitude from 800 m to 3,297 m, the height of the southern peak of Argentera after which the Park was named.

The territory of the Park encompasses the upper basin of the Gesso torrent, with its characteristic fan shape and numerous small valleys cutting deeply into the northern slopes of the Maritime Alps. From West to East the main massifs are the Monte Matto, Argentera and Gelas, all with peaks of over 3,000 m; the Gelas massif has many glaciers of the Pyrenean type which are the southernmost in the Alps.

2.2 THE PUBLIC ESTABLISHMENT

2.2.1 Legal framework - aims - operation

1. Creation

The Park was officially established on 30 May 1980 by Regional Law No. 65 implementing Regional Law No. 43 of 4 June 1975; its work actually began on 1 June 1983 its Council was set up.

The special nature reserve of 228 hectares for the juniperus phoenicea population was added to the Park by the Regional Law of 3 September 1984. It is managed as an integral part of the Park but is situated north of Valdieri, about 3 km from the Park itself.

The objectives of the Nature Park are defined in Article 3 as:

1. to protect and safeguard the natural, environmental and scenic features of the Park;
2. to guarantee the safeguarding and protection of immovable property within the Park;
3. to organise the territory for recreational, educational, scientific and cultural purposes;

4. to promote agricultural, forestry and pastoral activities.

Regional Law No. 16 of 30 March 1987 laid down specific rules for the use of the A.N.P. and penalties for infringements of the rules on traffic, cleanliness, noise, picking flowers, fruit and mushrooms, collecting amphibians, molluscs and insects and bringing in dogs, while permitting exceptions for management or study purposes.

Regional Law No. 36 of 8 June 1989 covers the restoration and preservation of the ecological and environmental balance in nature parks and reserves. It lays down specific rules on selective culling for the regulation of animal populations and on the capture and reintroduction of species.

2. Staff

In addition to its Director and Deputy Director, the Park has 4 administrative staff and 21 wardens.

Staff numbers are regularly boosted by the appointment of conscientious objectors doing their civilian service.

The forest lodge (Foresteria) in St Anna di Valdieri can accommodate 12 researchers and students and was full at the time of our visit.

3. Park Council

The Park Council has 27 members, 7 of whom sit on the Executive Committee ("assessors"). There are 3 representatives from the Piedmont region and 15 from the various communes, while the two mountain communities and agricultural and nature conservation associations have 3 representatives. As far as the Executive Committee is concerned, the President and Vice-President both represent the Piedmont region, 3 of the assessors represent the three communes with land inside the Park (Entracque, Valdieri and Aisone) and 2 represent nature conservation associations.

4. Headquarters

The headquarters of the A.N.P. is in Valdieri, one of the Park communes. The proximity of the headquarters is an advantage, as is the fact that the management and entire staff are in the same place.

2.2.2 European interest of the Park

It is worth recalling the historical and geographical links between the Argentera Park and the Mercantour Park which bear witness to their long-standing European function. To quote some extracts from the application:

"They both derive from the old hunting reserve of King Vittorio Emanuele II of Italy, which was created in 1857 and covered vast portions of the two sides of the Maritime Alps until 1860, when the Treaty of Turin gave the County of Nice to France. However, under the terms of the agreement King Vittorio Emanuele II was able to keep his traditional hunting grounds, thus preserving the reserve through the creation of an artificial frontier which maintained around 30,000 hectares of the Mercantour massif under Italian sovereignty.

After WWII, on both sides of the border, the French and Italians used the old transfrontier hunting reserve as the basis for the territories which were to become the two parks.

The spirit of co-operation linking the two parks therefore goes back a long way, although the principles underpinning the conservation of the two territories have changed. They are no longer protected in the name of a private, albeit royal right, but in the name of French and Italian national sovereignty in order to make the patrimony available to all European citizens. It must also be stressed that the inhabitants of the Argentera-Mercantour massif had established close links long before the creation of the hunting reserve and already shared common customs, language and traditions. The Alps were not a barrier. On the contrary, trade and commerce flourished through their mountain passes from the establishment of the first human settlements. The Bronze Age shepherds who left extraordinary traces of their presence in the rock carvings of Mont Bégo and the Vallée des Merveilles also lived on the slopes which are now on the Italian side of the border, as recent discoveries in the Vallone del Vej del Bouc have shown. Later, economic exchanges developed along the salt route. Cultural and religious affinities between the French and Italian sides of the massif are still evident in the architectural style of the buildings and their frescoes which were often painted by the same artists.

History is not the only tie linking the Argentera and Mercantour parks. From a geographical point of view they are the two complementary sides of one structural entity, the northern and southern sides of the same alpine massif.

There are huge variations in climatic conditions due to the two sides' different levels of exposure to the sun, the high altitude of the peaks (3,300 m) and the area's proximity to the Mediterranean (less than 50 km as the crow flies). These climatic conditions favour the development of a great variety of species of flora, from Mediterranean scrub to alpine tundra. For the same reasons, botanists consider the Maritime Alps to be the most significant area of endemism in the Alps, both because of the large number of endemic species such as Saxifraga florulenta and Primula Allioni and the presence of very rare species.

Animal populations also treat the area as a single massif. Many ibex have their summer range on Mercantour and their winter range on Argentera, and vice-versa for a number of the moufflons. As for chamois, there are large numbers living on both sides."

3. MANAGEMENT OF THE PARK

3.1 MANAGEMENT PLANS

Regional Law No. 12 of 22 March 1990 laid down rules for protected areas.

With regard to management, it stipulates that there must be:

1. an area plan (Piano dell'Area) focusing on spatial planning aspects;
2. an environmental plan (Piano naturalistico);
3. a forestry management plan regulating lumbering and grazing.

These three documents exist, but have not yet been approved by all the relevant bodies.

3.2 CONSERVATION OF THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

The application details what is involved in managing the Park, underlines the importance and uniqueness of the high mountain heritage it has been set up to protect and also mentions research and co-operation.

We feel it is important to emphasise the excellent co-operation between the Park and the academic world; we were able to see it at first hand on the second day of the visit.

This co-operation takes several different forms: the studies by the Park staff on the development of the populations of certain species are followed by professionals and the universities. The latter have also been involved in collaborative projects such as the organisation of practical courses and field trips and the writing of dissertations and theses in several fields, including geology, parasitology and animal and plant biology.

As mentioned above, the Park has a lodge which can accommodate researchers and students.

Data banks have been set up, and are being added to, on amphibians and reptiles, birds (particularly eagles), mammals (particularly the large ungulates) and flora and vegetation.

One recent Park project, namely the setting up of the botanical garden, deserves to be highlighted.

3.2.1 The "Valderia" alpine botanical garden

The botanical garden is situated near the recently completed parking area and the Information Centre which is being constructed at Thermes de Valdieri. It is without a doubt one of the Park's strong points. The educational dimension of the botanical garden and the adjoining nature trail is set to grow with the opening of the Information Centre in 1993.

Work began on the botanical garden in 1987 and it was opened to the public on 14 July 1990.

Valderia was conceived in a different and more ecological way than traditional alpine gardens. It was decided to recreate the various different plant environments in the Park as exactly as possible, using the main botanical species for each.

Some biotopes were already partially present on the site while others, such as the meadow, spring, rocks and scree, grassland, peat bog, stream, bushes and undergrowth types have been artificially created.

There are wooden panels describing the general features of each biotype, but only the most important and typical individual species, over 400 in all, are actually labelled.

The organisation of the garden according to biotypes is its most innovative and original feature and highlights its educational aim. The nature trail, which runs through the mixed conifer wood bordering the garden, is aimed at complementing the presentation of the Park's natural features and at providing information on its geology, zoology and ecology in the form of a walk-through investigation of the natural environment. Each observation point is marked with a number corresponding to a description in a trail leaflet.

3.2.2 The fishing problem

Fishing, which takes place in the streams, rivers and natural and artificial lakes, brings in a substantial income to the communes.

Local councillors and the provincial administration have reached agreement with the Park management on joint efforts to improve the current situation. The Province is to invest 200 million lire in the creation of a fish breeding centre.

Emphasis must be placed on selecting hardy native species of trout (such as the "queen's trout") and replacing

the current practice of releasing adult trout into the rivers by the release of young trout only. This represents a shift towards a kind of fishing which shows more respect for the "torrent or mountain lake" ecosystem. In addition, there is to be an experiment with "sporting" fishing, where the fish is put back into the water after being caught.

It might ultimately be possible to refrain from restocking the rivers and streams, thereby achieving an ecological management and a reduction in the number of people fishing.

This qualitative change in fishing practices might also have a positive effect on the banks of rivers, streams and lakes and encourage the rational introduction of fishing huts as in the Valasco valley.

The steps which have been undertaken should be followed up and developed, and the fishing issue deserves to be included in a Diploma recommendation.

3.2.3. Perimeter of the Park

The regional law on protected areas (No. 12 of 22 March 1990) (Nuove norme in materia di aree protette: Parchi naturali, Riserve naturali, Aree attrezzate, Zone di preparco, Zone di salvaguardia) is important for the A.N.P. because it envisages the creation of peripheral zones for nature parks and reserves.

These zones must be established and managed with two things in mind: to create an ecological transition towards the Park (buffer zone) and to promote the balanced development of recreational and tourist activities on its periphery.

From the point of view of the natural environment, it must be added that the possible extension of the Park and the creation of pre-park zones would make it possible to protect biotopes which are either rare or absent from the Park itself. These zones could also link up the A.N.P. and the nearby Special Nature Reserve (Phoenician juniper) and Palafrè Nature Park, so as to serve as a biological corridor making it easier for animals to move between the three protected zones.

3.3 INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Apart from the recent creation of the Botanical Garden and the forthcoming inauguration of the Information Centre at Terme di Valdieri, the A.N.P. is planning a series of activities to receive, inform and educate young people and the public at large (cf the application).

Mention should also be made of a culture trail (the "Viol di Tait" at St Anna di Valdieri) which enables people to find out about the specific features of mountain life and

traditional houses. The first "rye festival" also took place in St Anna di Valdieri on 9 August 1992 and was a great success.

The visitors centre at Entracque, well-placed in the centre of the town, could do with a face-lift so as to fully match up to its role of informing people and preparing them for the visit to the Park.

4. CONCLUSIONS

With regard to the protection of the environment and conservation of its natural and cultural features, it is clear that the Argentera Regional Nature Park is governed by strict regulations comparable to those in force for the central zone of the Mercantour National Park.

The two Parks have been twinned since 1987 and this has promoted active collaboration, particularly in management of the large animals and the development of high-profile projects such as the reintroduction of the ibex and the bearded vulture.

The on-the-spot visit has enabled us to verify the efficiency of the management and the excellent team spirit of the Park's directors and staff, and the constructive collaboration between individuals with different backgrounds and interests on the Park Council.

In addition, the existence of three complementary management plans is evidence of medium-term and long-term thinking, which augurs well for the future.

It can therefore be said that the A.N.P. has all the necessary characteristics to qualify it for a type A European Diploma.

The managers have good reason to be worried about the new motorway link between Italy and France. It would therefore be wise to pay particularly careful and critical attention to this project, which could threaten the integrity of the Mercantour-Argentera massif as a protected natural entity.

The current perimeter of the Park should be extended so as to increase the range of protected biotopes and ensure optimal ecological relations between the various areas of natural interest which are already protected.

Steps to bring about fishing practices more in tune with the Park's objectives must be pursued.

5. SECRETARIAT COMMENTS

The Secretariat agrees with the conclusions of Dr. Froment, the expert appointed by the Secretary General to visit the Argentera Nature Park.

However, it would like to emphasise one point concerning developments on the outskirts of the Park. There is intense tourist pressure on the Park and uncontrolled car parking is leading to traffic problems on certain stretches of the road to Thermes di Valdieri and picnicking all along the river which runs alongside the road. Mrs Rossi and those working with her are aware of the problem and are trying to find a solution, even if it is only a stop-gap. The only proper solution is to create car parking and picnic areas for visitors. A large car-parking area near the Botanical Garden is now nearing completion. Others are planned in the relatively near future, but it is a question of money.

APPENDIX 1

Draft Resolution (93) ...

**CONCERNING THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA
TO THE ARGENTERA NATURE PARK
(Italy)**

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 Steering Committee for the Conservation and Management of the Environment and Natural Habitats (CDPE);

Having deliberated,

Formally awards the European Diploma, category A, in accordance with the regulations for the European Diploma (Resolution 91/16), to the Argentera Nature Park; places the aforesaid park under the patronage of the Council of Europe until 1998;

Attaches the following recommendations to the award:

1. The present perimeter of the Park should be extended so as to add to the fauna of the protected biotopes and ensure better ecological links between the various zones of national interest that are already protected. Any alterations to the current boundaries must be notified immediately to the Secretariat;
2. The necessary funds should be found to create an adequate infrastructure (car parks, picnic sites) on the outskirts of the Park so as to channel the visitors more effectively;
3. Particular attention should be given to the project for a new motorway link between Italy and France which could threaten the integrity of the Argentera-Mercantour massif as a protected natural entity. In any event, impact studies must be undertaken and the Secretariat must be informed as rapidly as possible of the conclusions and decisions.
4. Steps to regulate fishing in a way that is more in keeping with the aims of the Park should be pursued.