

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg 22 December 1976

CE/Nat/DE (77) 3

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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Working Party - European Diploma

Krimml Falls
(Austria)

REPORT ON VISIT TO THE SITE (renewal)

23 - 24 July 1976

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(Switzerland)

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1. Background and terms of reference

In 1977 the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe will decide whether to renew the European Diploma awarded to the Krimml Falls in Land Salzburg, Austria, for a second time.

Before the first renewal of the diploma I studied the problems of this region (expert's visit of 8 November 1971); and subsequently, at the request of the government of Land Salzburg and independently of the Council of Europe, I investigated in general terms the question of the building of a surfaced delivery road in the neighbourhood of the falls, and submitted my report to the Land government (visit of 23 October 1972).

In a letter dated 9 June 1976 the Secretariat of the Council of Europe asked me to visit the site of the Krimml Falls once again with a view to the second renewal of the diploma, in pursuance of Resolution (73) 4 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The European Diploma Working Party defined my terms of reference as follows:

- to examine the present condition of the site to determine whether it is unchanged, improved or has deteriorated since the diploma was awarded or since the first renewal;
- to analyse the state of conservation of the flora, fauna and landscape (increase or decline of species);
- to look into the improvements (physical and legislative) completed or in progress;
- to study the impact of the public upon flora, fauna and landscape and make proposals to improve the situation;
- to examine the financial resources allocated for the management of the area.

In addition to Mr Peter Baum, the Council of Europe representative, and myself, the following took part in the visit and discussion on 23 July 1976: Mr K Breiteneder, Oberforstrat, and Mag. J Fischer-Colbric, of the Land Salzburg administration; Mr F Oberhollenzer, mayor of the village of Krimml.

2. Outcome of visit and final discussion

Introduction

The contents of the reports on my two previous visits remain valid except where I have subsequently made specific amendments or added or retracted statements.

2.1 From a purely visual point of view there has been no basic change in the state of conservation of the site since my two previous visits. In other words the site has suffered no serious damage which can be seen by an observer, nor has there been any major change in previous recommendations and proposals. For this reason, the detailed analysis of every item in terms of reference can be omitted without lessening the value of the report.

2.2 Nevertheless, the following observations should be taken into consideration:

2.2.1 According to information supplied by the representatives of the government of Land Salzburg and the municipality of Krimml the idea of illuminating the Falls by night, of which there was formerly much talk, has now been dropped.

2.2.2 Both representatives of the authorities agree with me that a new road service for the area in the form of a delivery road which can carry motor vehicles should be approached more rationally and with far greater caution than a few years ago; the idea that something which appears to affect a single aspect could in fact be most injurious to the landscape as a whole, and thereby to tourism, now seems to be much better understood. The authorities see that no solution can be considered unless it ensures the conservation of the landscape in the Falls area and Krimmler Achental.

2.2.3 Both authorities recognise the need for a thoroughgoing renovation of the "Schönangerl" restaurant and outbuildings in the interests of the landscape, hygiene and commercial operation, but without changing the present terms of ownership.

2.2.4 Both authorities were also anxious to open the question of official protection for the Krimmler Achental, which was proposed as part of the scheme for setting up the Hohe Tauern Austrian National Park. For the connection between the Krimml Falls protected area and Hohe Tauern National Park see 3.3.2.

2.2.5 One landholder was recently given permission to set up a booth and stand to sell chips at the side of the main access path to the falls, across from the Richter commemorative stone. Apart from the fact that any increase in the numbers of such stands is clearly incompatible with the protected status of the site, this precedent may encourage other landholders to apply for similar concessions.

2.3 The future institution of the Hohe Tauern National Park is most laudable and deserves every encouragement. However, the Council of Europe should stipulate, when boundaries are established and legislation prepared, that the Krimml Falls to which the European Diploma has been awarded should be given a special status protecting them from any action which might endanger the conservation of the landscape. Before renewal of the diploma, the Krimml Falls protected area should be clearly defined and some special and effective legislation enacted. See under 3.3.1.

2.4 During the visit and discussion of 23 July 1976 I and the Council of Europe representative attached great importance to the matter of road service in the region (see under 2.2.2). It was plain that a road open to general motor traffic in the neighbourhood of the falls and Achental would be wholly incompatible with the European Diploma. On the other hand, the problem of supplies delivery remains, and a plan and cost estimate must be prepared. See under 3.3.5. The idea of a tunnel railway, which I suggested, was rejected.

2.5 The future of the "Schönangerl" restaurant was discussed at length. No one questions the need to maintain a restaurant on the middle terrace, but the steadily growing number of visitors (now some 600,000 annually) make such demands upon the management that it cannot meet them without complete re-organisation and new equipment. In any event, the present situation cannot endure, and the Council of Europe can assume no responsibility. The radical re-organisation of the restaurant, carried out by degrees and combined with a new method of operating, is a necessity. Both projects must be carried out in keeping with the local style of architecture, of course, and will not extend to the sort of improvements which would be a matter of course in urban areas (respect for rural setting, Heimatstil). See under 3.3.4.

2.6 Since the European energy crisis began, the Tauern hydro-electric works (Zemm group) have increased their efforts to gain control of part of the hydro-electric power in the Krimmler Achental as well (by turning aside the Windbach and Rainbach in the Zillertal, Zillergründe). See under 3.3.3.

3. Recommendations and proposals to the Council of Europe regarding the renewal of the Diploma

3.1 I am in favour of renewing the Diploma, but propose that the following recommendations and proposals be included in the official text.

3.2 Recommendations

The authorities are expected to protect the Krimml Falls and surrounding area and to take all necessary steps to see that the points set out under 2 above are taken into consideration.

3.3 Proposals

When the Diploma is renewed, steps should be taken to ensure that the government of Land Salzburg take the following into account as well:

- 3.3.1 With a view to the conservation of the Krimml Falls the government of Land Salzburg should establish clear and legally recognised boundaries for the area.
- 3.3.2 When the Hohe Tauern National Park is instituted consideration should be given, as regards both territorial and legal aspects, and after consulting the Council of Europe, to a project which also deserves recognition and encouragement as a European initiative: the award of special status to the Krimml Falls as holder of the European Diploma.
- 3.3.3 The ideas of exploiting the water power in the Krimmler Achenal, whether directly or indirectly (by means of underground deviation channels), and illuminating the falls by night, should be permanently abandoned.
- 3.3.4 A plan for the renovation of the Schönangerl restaurant and outbuildings should be drawn up, offering the best possible solution in terms of landscape, hygiene and operating conditions; authorisation to proceed with this project must be obtained from the government of Land Salzburg, which should also advise and supervise those engaged on it.
- 3.3.5 To solve ~~the~~ problem of the service road, the government of Land Salzburg should plan a road (including cost estimate) which will interfere with the landscape as little as possible (ie it will be used for deliveries only, it will be of minimum width and it will follow the terrain as closely as possible). The plan should be submitted to the Council of Europe for examination and approval before any further decisions are taken. The road should extend from the Schönangerl to the foot of the upper falls, and the old supply path should be separated from the new one along the Ache. From that point until the road enters the Achenal the plan should provide for minimal improvement of the old roadway, particularly in the bends.

The government of Land Salzburg should also give an undertaking that the roadway will be used for deliveries only, and that general motor traffic will be prohibited from the outset and permanently. The plan should also provide for the laying of underground

electricity and telephone cables parallel to the road from Krimml to Schönangerl-Achental, and for the removal of rubbish and waste water along the same route. This will be an economical means of making the rational and effective improvements required in the interests of both landscape and tourism.

- 3.3.6 The recently built booth and chip stand opposite the Richter commemorative stone definitely constitute a precedent in the eyes of other landholders who might want to engage in similar activities in the falls area. They should therefore be removed.

4. Final remarks

I should like to make the following final remarks:

I am convinced that both the Austrian Federal Government and the government of Land Salzburg and authorities in Krimml are more than ever aware of the priceless value of the Krimml Falls to Europe. I want to thank them for all their efforts to afford greater protection to the falls, their neighbourhood and the outflow basin (Krimmler Achental). I am equally convinced that they will do everything in their power to follow up the recommendations and proposals contained in this report and my two previous ones.