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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION  
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Committee of Experts for Protected Areas

LÜNEBURG HEATH NATURE RESERVE  
(Federal Republic of Germany)

Category B

ON-THE-SPOT APPRAISAL

by

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Secretariat memorandum

prepared by the  
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## 1. Introduction

The protected area of Lüneburg Heath covers approximately 20,000 ha, about 6,000 of which belong to the Verein Naturschutzpark (VNP). Approximately 5,000 are heath and 12,000 woodland. The rest consists of farming land and a few wetlands. About 5,000 of the 12,000 ha of woodland belong to the state and 3,000 to the Soltau Klosterkammer. About 4,000 are private property.

The European Diploma awarded to the protected landscape of Lüneburg Heath was presented to Dr. A Toepfer, Chairman of the VNP, on 29 May 1968. I quote from CE/Nat (71) 68: «the Diploma seems to have been presented to the VNP rather than to the authorities responsible for managing the NSG (= Naturschutzgebiet) because that association owns ... most of the heather-clad moors. Indeed, ever since 1909, the VNP had never ceased to do its utmost for the conservation, protection and publicity of Lüneburg Heath.»

The annual reports addressed to the Council of Europe were drawn up by the VNP and concerned only the land owned by the Verein! Since 1968 the European Diploma has been renewed several times, so all appeared to be well on the reserve.

However, on a visit to the protected area in 1984, I became aware of tension between the VNP, especially its Chairman, and the administrative and political authorities, particularly the Lüneburg Nature Conservation Department. According to the local press, the conflict could have had highly adverse effects on the protected area. Fortunately, the two parties reached an agreement in time to avoid serious harm being done.

Being aware of the situation, I was keen to hear the views of all concerned during the on-the-spot appraisal from 3 to 6 September 1985, and also to take a very close look at all the areas of the heath, not only those owned by the VNP. I therefore made a somewhat longer stay than scheduled. Before the visit, Mr J P Ribaut, who shared my view, telephoned or wrote to all the administrative and political authorities involved in the management of the Lüneburg Heath protected area.

I made an initial tour of the area, alone and with Mr Lux, the VNP forestry official, and Mr Handstein, Head of the Lower Saxony Forestry Board, before Mr Ribaut's arrival, with the intention of taking a closer look at the interesting parts with him.

## 2. Meeting with management

Our joint work schedule began with a meeting attended by all the parties involved in management of the reserve:

- a. the VNP, represented by Mr Jüttner, Secretary General, and Mr Lux,
- b. the Lüneburg Bezirksregierung Nature and Landscape Conservation Department, represented by Mr Burget,
- c. the Lower Saxony Forestry Board, represented by Mr Handstein.

Mr Burget also represented the Soltau-Harburg Landkreis authorities.

## 2.1 Conservation and management plan

The Lüneburg Nature Conservation Department currently has a staff of 29. In consultation with the VNP, it is drawing up a new plan which was shown to us in draft form and impressed us very favourably.

The alterations to be made are discussed jointly by all the management authorities.

Briefly, the plan provides for conservation of the historic heath, reconstitution of natural woodland, preservation and reintroduction of wetlands and a return to extensive agriculture.

## 2.2 Exploitation of hydrocarbons

The political authorities have authorised the oil company which has been working in the region for years to carry out a seismological survey.

## 2.3 Water pumping

In 1974 the city of Hamburg was authorised to pump up to 25 million m<sup>3</sup> of water per year over a period of 25 years. All the supply points are located outside the protected area and water is tapped at a depth of 125 m. There are 300 monitoring stations in the region, some of them in the protected area. The developers say the surface rate of flow should not change much because there is an impermeable layer between the supply points and the surface.

Nature conservationists, however, are not convinced of the effectiveness or adequate extent of the layer, so the pumping of 25 million m<sup>3</sup> is causing very serious concern.

## 2.4 Hunting and shooting

There is no hunting or shooting on the heath owned by the VNP, but the same cannot be said of the forests and farming land. Properties in excess of 75 ha automatically carry hunting rights. Unlike hikers, hunters are not required to remain on paths or signposted trails. Game is plentiful, as evidenced by the hunting figures for 1984 in the 5,000 ha of state forests:

- 275 roe deer
- 40 stags
- 44 boar
- 12 foxes.

There is a danger that farming land may cease to be profitable, in which case it would attract wealthy hunters who are not necessarily interested in nature conservation.

## 2.5 Scientific research

Scientific research to improve management of the natural heritage in the protected area has already yielded some interesting results. Appended to this report is the inventory of nesting birds, which includes more than 100 species (available from the Secretariat).

Research on vegetation is also making steady progress. The following 1:10,000 maps of the region near the Jugenddorf Ehrhorn have already been published:

- 2a Standortstypenkarte
- 2b Karte der Natürlichkeit
- 2c Karte der Vielfalt der Vegetation
- 2d Sonderbiotope, seltene Arten und Waldgesellschaften
- 2e Forstl. Landschaftsplan
- 2f Potentiell natürliche Vegetation
- 2g Betriebskarte
- 2h Zielbestockungskarte (available from the Secretariat)

## 2.6 British tanks

The area used by the British army belongs to the VNP, but is not included in the area awarded the European Diploma, so it is not absolutely essential to discuss it here. However, I believe that with goodwill on both sides something could be done to improve the situation. The Council of Europe might play a very useful part as an intermediary between the British army and the Lüneburg Heath reserve authorities.

## 3. Field inspection

### 3.1 Heath

The summer of 1983 was very dry and the first half of 1984 was also marked by drought. In many places the *Calluna* suffered to the extent of drying up completely. In 1984 and especially 1985 the grass species *Dechampsia flexuosa* grew in the available space. In some spots the heather was almost completely hidden by grass. Many visitors who had hoped to see the heather in flower reported finding little more than a steppe. A few photographs showing the change in the state of, say, the Totengrund between September 1984 and September 1985 are available from the Secretariat.

This is not necessarily an accurate picture, however, because in 1985 there was a remarkable regeneration of the *Calluna*; but of course the young shoots have not yet flowered. It is hoped that they will do so over the next few years, particularly as the management plan provides for more judicious use of sheep, which often eat the young shoots. The number of sheep will be reduced and brought into line with the amount of food available, and special attention will be paid to the regeneration of the *Calluna*. Various techniques such as cutting and patching will also be tried.

A few tracts of heather which were not unduly affected by the drought have flowered satisfactorily.

Birch and to a lesser extent pine are causing much concern and expense, as they have done for years. There again, however, the management plan provides for the necessary measures to save the heath.

### 3.2 Paths

Paths are very well kept and generally very clean. Visitors observe the instructions on the notice boards at the «entrances» to the reserve and use the many rubbish bins for refuse. Very few stray from the paths.

### 3.3 Forests

In the company of Mr Handstein, we were able to view at first hand the results of the current campaign to recreate natural woodland. Mr Handstein's primary aim is not financial profitability, but a return to natural forest. Obviously, however, a pine forest cannot be converted into natural woodland in a few years.

Just after the war Germany had to supply large quantities of wood to the British. The areas of Lüneburg Heath subjected to clear felling for the purpose were immediately reafforested, but in the 1940s only conifers were used.

### 3.4 Wetlands

The VNP concentrated for quite a long time on the upkeep of the actual heath. For the past few years it has also paid attention to wetlands - in my view, a most beneficial development for the protected area.

The Piezmoor, which used to supply peat, is dotted with fairly shallow ponds which have once more filled with water over the past ten years. Pond life is developing at a pleasing rate.

### 3.5 Non-native plants

In some parts of the reserve the American cherry (Prunus serotina), apparently introduced to provide food for particular bird species, has become a downright scourge. The trees are now being cut down and the stumps painted with Round-up to prevent the formation of shoots. The spread of this invasive tree must be halted.

### 3.6 Fauna

I have already mentioned the figures for hunting and shooting in the state forests for 1984. Obviously, the large quantities of game hamper forest regeneration and hunting needs to be well organised. I also mentioned the study of nesting birds. The list is highly satisfactory. Less so is the disastrous drop in the population of black grouse (Lyrurus tetrix), with only four males and three females counted this year near Wilsede and six males and four females at Wümmemoor, where eight young were also sighted this year. This brings the total to ten males, seven females and eight young. Ten years ago the reserve numbered about 200 males. What has happened?

Many eggs have failed to hatch over the past few years. A possible cause is said to be the strong vibrations from aircraft noise, which may kill the embryos.

## 4. Information and education

The VNP has made a commendable effort to improve information facilities for the many visitors. I have already mentioned the notice boards at the entrances. There are two nature trails and others are planned.

At Wilsede, the tourist centre, the long-standing Heath Museum (Heidemuseum) receives many visitors, but is rather old-fashioned in design. It is more like a small history museum.

Three information centres have recently been set up at Niederhaverbeck, Undeloh and Döhle. They are modern, educational and well worth a visit. One might say they deserve more visitors. As they are not right next to a car park, many tourists are in fact unaware of their existence.

#### 5. Summary and conclusion

The VNP, which owns about a quarter of the protected area, has a mandate from the Land of Lower Saxony to manage the nature reserve in co-operation with the Lüneburg Nature Conservation Department, which is drawing up a modern conservation and management plan.

The Lower Saxony Forestry Board is working very hard to convert the forest, which currently has a high proportion of conifers, into a natural forest in which oak, beech and other native trees will be restored to their rightful places.

Equally praiseworthy efforts are being made to recreate the wetlands, which were disregarded in the past.

The annual reports which hitherto concerned only the VNP will henceforth be drawn up in co-operation with the Lüneburg Nature Conservation Department and will cover the entire protected area. In 1985 the grass species Dechampsia flexuosa invaded much of the heath, but the regeneration of the Calluna has been absolutely remarkable.

The reserve authorities are taking all the necessary steps for the regeneration of the heath, including the removal of birch, cherry, etc. Commendable efforts have been made to improve the information of the public.

Farming land is causing concern because profitability calls for the use of large quantities of chemicals such as fertilisers and biocides, some of which are certainly carried away by the wind and deposited on the heath.

A major problem is the pumping of water for Hamburg. Underground tapping, even at a depth of 125 m, is liable to affect soil humidity on the surface.

A further problem is the rapid drop in the population of the black grouse. However, the overall impression derived from this on-the-spot appraisal is highly positive.

I do not hesitate to recommend renewal of the European Diploma.

However, the Diploma should not be renewed if the state authorises the exploitation of hydrocarbons inside the nature reserve.

I fully endorse the conditions and recommendations set out by the Secretariat in SN-ZP (85) 46; they were the outcome of joint discussion.

The Council of Europe might make a useful contribution by asking the British army to limit - ie reduce - its training ground.