

# COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION  
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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On-the-spot appraisal

Siebengebirge Nature Reserve  
(Federal Republic of Germany)

23-25 July 1984

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## 1. Introduction

The Siebengebirge Nature Reserve was awarded the European Diploma, Category C, in 1971. The previous appraisal preparatory to renewal of the Diploma was carried out in August 1979 by Mr S M Ten Houte (Lange, Netherlands) (SN-R-DP (80) 4). Pursuant to the regulations (Resolution (73) 4), I was asked to carry out an appraisal preparatory to a third five-year extension. I visited the reserve between 23 and 25 July 1984, accompanied by Mr Peter Baum of the Council of Europe's Environment and Natural Resources Division.

We first had discussions at the seat of the regional government in Cologne with MM Dette (Head of Department 5), Dinter (Head of Section 51 (landscape protection)), Richter (legal expert attached to Section 51) and Gallus (representing the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry, Biotope Conservation Section). We were accompanied on our visit by Mr Dinter (from Cologne) and by MM Elsbergen (Chief Conservator of Forests) and Schwontzen (Conservator of Forests), both representing the Siegburg Forestry Conservation Department. We also met Dr. Fassbinder and Mr Hilger, the President and Director respectively of the Regional Society for the Enhancement and Protection of Sites, and MM Lichtenberg and Bernart, representing the municipality of Wintersberg. We were taken to 16 different areas and thus had the opportunity of seeing the main parts of the reserve.

## 2. Brief description of the reserve and its resources

The Siebengebirge Nature Reserve covers some 4200 ha, over 92% of which is wooded, and is the oldest German nature reserve. It is characterised by its relief, to which its German name («Seven mountains») alludes, is situated on the ruins of a major, extinct volcano with a number of craters and has been shaped by eruptions and erosion. It was made a protected area because of its special geomorphological features. Beech stands constitute a large proportion of its relatively natural forests, a very interesting xerothermic feature of which is an oak wood with hornbeam and an abundance of wild service tree (*Sorbus terminalis*). The structure of the forests is imbalanced: following the conversion of the coppice stands into high forest and the speedy elimination of stands damaged in the war, young age classes predominate. The surviving coppice stands are of historical and cultural interest, as are the «Ralmhau» sections, where stakes were formerly produced by pollarding. Although a private organisation, the Verschönerungsverein für das Siebengebirge (VVS) (regional society for the enhancement and protection of the Siebengebirge), the owner of large tracts of the reserve, plays a special role.

## 3. Problems and dangers

Situated as it is at the gates of the capital, Bonn, and close to the urban areas of the Ruhr, the Siebengebirge has to contend with the conflicts of interest characteristic of nature reserves of its kind.

### 3.1 Forest destruction

The usual dangers are compounded by a new and very worrying one, forest destruction. The spruces are all in a fairly poor state of health, and even young beeches have already suffered serious damage.

### 3.2 Dangers associated with visitors

The irregular distribution of visitors in the different parts of the reserve is striking. There are large numbers in particular near the Drachenfels, in the vicinity of which a giant toboggan piste is planned. The 200 kilometres of paths mean that the reserve is well served, and in places perhaps even too well served. It would therefore be inexpedient to extend this network of paths. There are plans for refurbishing the disused St. Petersburg buildings as a residence for guests of the Federal Government.

### 3.3 Buildings in open spaces

The reserve contains a number of buildings, ownership of some of which is changing hands. Care must be taken to ensure that they are not altered and that, as far as possible, they are not put to different uses; no outbuildings or new structures should be erected.

### 3.4 Forestry and nature protection

The development of the reserve's forests has been very much influenced by man. Having regard to the objectives of protection, the present proportion of spruces (one-third) is too high. Every encouragement should therefore be given to a type of silviculture closer to nature, with special care being taken to ensure that management plans comply with this requirement. The essential recommendations are as follows:

- careful harmonisation of the requirements of silviculture and nature protection;
- reduction in the proportion of softwoods and encouragement, during regeneration, of the broadleaved species typical of the station;
- abandonment of exotic species (eg Douglas fir);
- preservation of the pockets of old-established trees;
- creation of parcels of «natural» forest where silviculture techniques are not used;
- preservation of some of the coppices;
- prevention of any extension of the forest and of any shortening of the forest fringes;
- abandonment of any extension of the forest road network.

### 3.5 Revision of the boundary of the protected area

We were informed during our visit of plans to incorporate the Dornheckensee in the reserve. The opportunity should be taken to consider whether the boundary of the protected area is everywhere the natural boundary.

### 3.6 Road building

In cases of doubt, the interests of nature and landscape protection should prevail within the reserve, even over plans for more important roads. In particular, a tunnel route is necessary in the Ennertstal forests.

#### 4. Conclusions

Resolution (81) 13 stipulated various measures to enhance the reserve's effectiveness. The authorities have complied with most of these, although the broad white stripe, visible from afar, on the front of the Drachenfels restaurant still needs to be rendered more discreet.

The visit confirmed the impression that the reserve is well managed. Special mention must be made of the excellent work done by forestry conservation officials from Siegburg and the Verschönerungsverein VVS.

In the light of what we saw during the appraisal, I propose, pursuant to Resolution (73) 4, that the validity of the European Diploma, Category C, be extended for a period of five years, subject to the recommendations below.

#### 5. Recommendations

##### 5.1 Revision of the reserve boundary

When the protection order covering the reserve is next reviewed, the responsible authorities are requested to consider whether the present boundary corresponds to the natural boundary.

##### 5.2 Silviculture and nature protection

When the management plans are revised, and regardless of ownership, it must be stipulated that the higher aims of nature protection are to be respected, entailing in particular the introduction of forest crops which correspond closely to those natural in the area and ensure ecological stability. The following steps are recommended:

- increasing the proportion of broadleaved species typical of the station;
- abandonment of exotic species;
- conservation of the pockets of old-established trees;
- creation of parcels of «natural» forest where silviculture techniques are not used;
- inviting the responsible authorities to establish a forest reserve on the Nonnenstromberg, which is still poorly served and presents very interesting phyto-sociological conditions;
- no further extension of the forest road system;
- conservation of the natural appearance of the St. Petersberg beech wood;
- preventing the natural or artificial reforestation of open spaces;
- conservation of a few coppice parcels by consciously abandoning their transformation into high forest;
- reducing the excessively large numbers of game so as to make natural regeneration possible.

### 5.3 Buildings in open spaces

Existing buildings in open spaces should not be altered significantly or put to different uses. The renovation of those on the St. Petersburg should take particularly careful account of the requirements of monument and site protection. We advise very strongly against the construction of the giant toboggan piste on the Drachenfels; the public is attracted by the sensational and spectacular aspects of such installations, which are of no great physical or emotional value. They are blots on the landscape and impair the recreational potential of the countryside, reducing it to a pallid Disneyland and depriving it of its typical regional flavour.

Should the plan to build this structure within the reserve nonetheless go ahead, we should have to suggest that the Drachenfels sector cease to form part of the reserve.