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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES



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Committee of Experts - Protected Areas

RENEWAL OF THE DIPLOMA AWARDED
TO THE GERMANO-LUXEMBOURG NATURE PARK

On-the-spot appraisal

SECRETARIAT MEMORANDUM

prepared by
the Directorate of Environment and Local Authorities

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PURPOSE AND PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

On 10, 11, 12 and 13 November 1986, Mr W Plattner, acting as expert, and Mrs M Schortanner, representing the Secretariat, visited the Germano-Luxembourg Nature Park (1).

The purpose of the visit was to carry out an on-the-spot appraisal in order to consider the desirability of extending the period of validity of the European Diploma for another five years in accordance with the Diploma regulations (Resolution (73) 4).

It will be recalled that the GLNP received the Diploma on 26 October 1973, in category C, and that its award has already been renewed twice.

We paid special attention to developments in

- the landscape (especially woodland)
- tourism

over the last five years in the light of the nature park's aims and the recommendations made at the time of the last renewal.

The task was facilitated by the kind and able assistance of our Luxembourg and German hosts, who guided us during the visit and answered all our questions. We extend sincere thanks to the following:

Mr C Zimmer, Chief Forestry Engineer, Ministry of the Environment
Mr M Decker, Head of Wiltz Section
Mr F Trossen, Head of Diekirch Section
Mr R Zimmer, Professor, Ministry of Tourism
Mr N Welter, Inspector, Ministry of Tourism
Mr E Meyer, Director (Geschäftsführer), Vereinigung DLNP - Verein Naturpark Südeifel
Mr J Friedrich, Chairman, Vereinigung DLNP
Mr F Goebel, Forestry Board official
Mr P Kremer, Head of Northern Conservation District
Mr G Prim, official responsible for Echternach forest district
Mr N Gruneisen, official responsible for Diekirch forest district
Mr G Calteux, Chief Conservator, National Monuments and Sites Department, Chairman of Echternach Tourist Board
Mr L Michels, Secretary of Echternach Tourist Board
Mr Scholtes, technical adviser to the Südeifel Nature Park Association.

Of these, we should like to thank in particular Mr Kremer, who co-ordinated operations.

(1) Abbreviated to GLNP in the text.

A bibliography on the park, including a list of all the documents we used in our work, is appended.

Programme of the visit

We spent the evening of 10 November meeting with German and Luxembourg representatives and preparing for our stay. The 11th and the morning of the 13th were spent in the Luxembourg part of the park, and the 12th in the German part. We were invited to attend the meeting of the GLNP Management Committee held on the afternoon of the 13th.

SOME FACTS ABOUT THE PARK

The GLNP was founded in 1965, on an area of 78,500 hectares (42,610 in the Federal Republic of Germany and 38,880 in Luxembourg) used for tourism and recreation, under a treaty between the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the land of Rhineland-Palatinate. Rather than dwell on a description of the park (of which the first appraisals provide a very full picture), we should like to recapitulate some of the main points in order to put the problem in context.

The park's assets

The park's assets include landscapes and features of cultural and scientific interest:

- Attractive hilly landscape in which woodlands alternate with the patchwork formed by a still very traditional form of farming, and which is enlivened by the meanders of the rivers that cut across it; it creates an impression of peace and harmony in which the steep and weathered sandstone cliffs provide some contrasts.
- A region full of history: Celtic camps, Roman villas, castles, stately homes, etc.
- Varied environments where some high-quality biotopes still remain (calcareous grasslands, wetlands, maple stands on scree, etc) and where species associated with undisturbed environments and now extremely rare in Europe have survived (the dipper, black storks, various orchids etc).

These features are of all the more value in that they are located near large urban and industrial centres, and less privileged regions, and in a way answer an enormous "need for nature".

The problems

Nevertheless, management of this heritage within the park (and the Diploma-holding area) is made difficult by several factors:

1. the area of the park and large number of municipalities concerned (58): the fact that the 388 km² on the Luxembourg side account for about 1/7 of that country's total area gives an idea of the difficulties involved;

2. the park's huge tourist appeal: the disadvantage of this is overcrowding in the summer months and all the related problems;
3. problem of forest management:
 - a. a large area of woodland straddling the frontier was damaged by gunfire during the war.
 - b. a considerable proportion is privately owned (eg 80% of woodland in the northern part of the park in Luxembourg) and direct state intervention is impossible there.

The challenge at the time of the park's establishment, in accordance with the requirements of the European Diploma, was to exercise some kind of control over the development of this area and pursue a policy geared to care of the environment. This meant:

- allocating sufficient staff and operating resources to the park;
- drawing up a management plan, and if necessary a zoning plan, and laying down guidelines.

We shall see what form these various problems take and what the responses to them are. We shall also analyse the solutions found in response to the nine recommendations enumerated in Resolution (83) 4 concerning the second renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the GLNP. Their contents are summarised below:

- Recommendations 1-3: the development of tourism and its integration with the landscape
- Recommendation 4: the management plan for the area
- Recommendation 5: the forest problem (predominance of conifers)
- Recommendation 6: measures taken for the protection of sites of special interest
- Recommendations 7 and 8: cleaning up of the Hosingen site
- Recommendation 9: construction of the E42 highway from Luxembourg to Trier and care of its immediate environment.

We shall set out our report as follows:

1. Management of the park and the management plan (answer to Recommendation No. 4).
2. Tourism and tourist facilities (answer to Recommendations Nos. 1-3).
3. The special case of Hosingen (answer to Recommendations Nos. 7 and 8).
4. The forest issue (answer to Recommendation No. 5).
5. Nature reserves and special protection areas (answer to Recommendation No. 6).

As far as Recommendation No. 9 is concerned, we merely propose that it be renewed since the project has not yet materialised.

1. MANAGEMENT OF THE PARK AND THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The park's status and system of management have not changed since its inception. The main points are summarised below.

The treaty between the Land of Rhineland-Palatinate and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg provides for the establishment of a joint committee on which each country is represented by four members. This committee deals with the park as a whole and submits development projects to both governments. It is assisted by two international working parties, one dealing with the forestry services, the other with publicity. In Luxembourg, the Forestry and Water Board manages the park in conjunction with the Ministry of Tourism. On the German side, this function is performed by an association, the "Verein Naturpark Südeifel", assisted by the forestry services.

We have two suggestions to make in this connection, which we think would enable the effectiveness of this structure to be increased without any unduly large upheavals.

1. The status of the park: at present it has no real legal existence: its existence is based on an agreement, not a statute. This agreement lays down two altogether fairly limited requirements:
 - conservation of landscapes of exceptional beauty;
 - conservation of woodland areas.

In Luxembourg at least, the establishment of a protected area with legal status would mean the adoption, under the new Nature Conservation Act, of actual conservation regulations comprising in particular an ecological management plan (providing, eg, for the award of compensation to landowners who suffer losses).

2. Management of the park: we propose that a structure specific to the park, with a park director and a budget of its own, be set up in Luxembourg on the model of the arrangements existing in Germany.

The management plan

An initial management plan was drawn up in 1972 by G Friedrichs. It analysed the park's ecological, economic and sociological conditions and put forward a number of guidelines for its development.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, this plan is in the process of being revised and updated (Mr Bohn's team) and will probably be completed this year. Among other things, it will designate a number of undisturbed areas within the park.

This will then be done in the same spirit, and by the same consultancy firm, on the Luxembourg side (within a period of about two years). The final result will therefore be a coherent plan for both sides of the frontier.

2. CULTURE, TOURISM AND TOURIST FACILITIES

A. As regards culture (the term being used here in a broad sense), we must stress the vitality, imagination and involvement of those in charge and the quality of their achievements. By way of an example, we were able to visit the crypts, museum, watchtowers and paved square of Echternach town hall, Prüm Castle, which were recently restored or improved; in another field, the nature discovery trails and centres; and in yet another field, the new transfrontier bridge of the Sûre. Various cultural activities (music and drama festival in Vilks and Echternach, local fairs, lectures and guided tours, publication of brochures, etc) were mentioned.

These achievements and events are outstanding in several respects. We should note:

1. their variety;
2. the spirit behind them, which is lively and up to date, and their innovative character, reconciling traditional and modern aspects (the future Echternach museum, of which we were given a preview, is a great success) and adopting a certain utilitarian approach to the architectural heritage (for example, the towers in Echternach, where you can find temporary accommodation or hold meetings, are designed as living areas);
3. their originality: here we must quote the example of a geology and nature exhibition held outdoors along the route of an overhead power line, with hedgerows providing the setting for small workshops;
4. the social aspects of these activities, which have the dual virtue of providing work for the unemployed (in the Federal Republic of Germany) and of being accessible to sections of the population that are often forgotten (the physically disabled or parents with pushchairs); this is the case with a small nature discovery centre in the Federal Republic of Germany (Waldjugendlager) near the "Irreler Wasserfälle";
5. the concern to maintain and foster a European spirit (transfrontier footbridges, festivities common to both countries, "three frontiers" monument, exchange of experience between the two regions concerned, eg on management of the park, and other joint ventures.

Lastly, their great popularity confirms their success. For example, the tiny Lehrhütte hidden away in the forest of Enzen receives over 6,000 students a year.

B. Approaches

These various assets are accessible via an extensive network of footpaths, cycle paths and educational trails. The one small problem in this connection is the inadequacy of public transport, whose timetables and frequency are not tailored to holiday-makers' needs.

C. Facilities

The pressure from tourism is very great. It is chiefly "mass" tourism from nearby. As has already been stressed in the previous appraisals, however, saturation point has been reached and it would be unthinkable to increase the park's capacity. The number of campsites in particular is very high (for example, the village of Villigen, with only a few houses, has five campsites). Although the number of campsites has remained the same for five years, their area has increased.

These campsites clearly raise a problem as regards their integration with the landscape - a problem which is likely to affect the quality of tourism itself. This is the case even in the off-season on account of the mobile homes left there on a permanent basis and the caravans which are parked there in winter.

A joint committee composed of representatives of the German association and the Luxembourg Ministries of the Environment and Tourism has met to try and find satisfactory solutions to this problem. After a field study (tour of 52 facilities on both sides of the frontier), it called for a halt to campsite extension and the opening of any new campsites and decided to improve the existing arrangements by providing advice on management and granting aid towards the planting of trees and shrubs to lessen the visual impact of campsites, this aid being granted in the form of free labour or seedlings. To sum up, we think it desirable to comply with this committee's conclusions and support its action.

On the other hand, we did not see any holiday home developments and saw few weekend cottages scattered across the landscape. This is due to the enforcement of legislation on urban development (on the Luxembourg side) and nature conservation (German side). We feel that limiting their growth and restricting them to already built-up areas are two good measures.

The efforts made to modernise hotel tourism and encourage local people to offer accommodation are interesting.

D. Sporting and recreational activities and facilities

Three points attracted our attention:

1. the chance observation of a sports ground on a raised earth platform out in the country on the road to Vianden, with an adjoining car park. This location outside a built-up area, without any visual screen, seems inappropriate. We recommend planting and the integration of future facilities of this kind with existing built-up areas;
2. many artificial lakes have been created for recreational purposes, and they perform this function perfectly. Nevertheless, we think that their number is sufficient and would add that it would be possible to increase their aesthetic and ecological appeal by encouraging the growth of a belt of aquatic and alluvial vegetation on one of the banks (eg the furthest from the approach roads);

3. A new problem, boating on the park's main river, seems to have been resolved by the park's managers, who, among other things, set limits to this activity outside the nesting period.

3. THE SPECIAL CASE OF HOSINGEN

The Luxembourg state now owns the former Hosingen game park (area: 150 hectares), which comprised a whole series of buildings (dolphinarium, restaurant, skating rink etc). This park represented a large black mark for the Diploma-holding area.

The entire deforested area will eventually be restored through the planting of various native tree varieties, which is currently in progress. The buildings themselves will be razed to the ground or used for other purposes. It is the second idea which seems to have been adopted, according to a plan presented to us by Mr Zimmer. The aim of the operation would be to set up a dual-purpose centre devoted to sports and the environment. Broadly speaking, this would involve a multi-functional sports centre, a permanent nature exhibition comprising various workshops, and a park centre. The existing buildings would be restored and adapted to their new functions. They would be supplemented by a sports hall, small dwelling houses built partly underground and a kind of long footbridge flanked by a tower, whose function would be to create a degree of coherence and add an original note to the complex as a whole.

The following question arises: will this complex be attractive enough for people to visit it and for the operation actually to be profitable, given that the previous operating methods have failed? Without going into the problem of the management of this new area and of the success of the enterprise, we should like to emphasise the positive aspect of a park centre and of the educational role played by a permanent exhibition. But we must first consider whether the site and the existing facilities are well-suited to these functions.

The existing buildings are unsightly and currently a blot on the landscape. They are long shed-like structures without any architectural finesse. Their shape and appearance form a striking contrast with those of an older and more tasteful dwelling house located about 100 metres away.

We think it would be very difficult to derive any benefit from their presence and that an increase in the built-up area would be of doubtful aesthetic value. In our view, one should not take the risk of giving the entrance to the park a bad image. Furthermore, Hosingen, which is after all relatively isolated, does not seem to be the ideal place.

In conclusion, we think that the best solution would be to demolish the existing buildings. The reconstruction of a park centre of reasonable proportions and in harmony with its environment might be envisaged at Hosingen, although it would seem more sensible to us to move it to a less isolated site, at a crossroads, where its success would be more certain.

4. THE FOREST ISSUE

A. Predominance of conifers

Previous appraisals referred to the high proportion of conifers in the park's woodlands, which they say is incompatible with the quality of sites. Our impression was also that of a predominantly coniferous landscape, in both the Federal Republic of Germany and Luxembourg. This is particularly obvious in the north of the park, where the combination of three factors is favourable to conifers:

- poor climatic conditions;
- abundance of infertile soil;
- predominance of private land owners, who are more receptive to short-term economic arguments (in Luxembourg at least, where they own 80% of the total area in the north of the park).

Furthermore, the age pyramid of stands suggests that the situation will be perpetuated, and possibly even get worse, in the next few years at least. This is because the conifer plantations are relatively young (the under-40 age-group is very well represented) and are not due to be replaced in the near future. On the other hand, the deciduous woodland is either very old or (to a lesser extent) in the form of coppices, and hence reconvertible.

The 1981 appraisal resulted in the following recommendation: " a balanced forestry policy should be put into practice by endeavouring to increase the proportion of mixed and deciduous forests and the necessary means given to the forestry administration to realise an adequate management of the private forest". Some initiatives have been taken along these lines.

In Luxembourg,

- with regard to privately-owned woodland, reforestation grants are available under two new Grand Ducal regulations which came into force in January 1986 (they are appended to Mr Plattner's document).

It should be noted, however, that conifer planting also qualifies for a grant, which, although less than the grant for deciduous varieties, is nevertheless attractive given the short-term economic advantages of coniferous over deciduous woodland. Furthermore, the list of varieties qualifying for a grant includes more conifers (12) than deciduous varieties (9), and native varieties such as the hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) have been omitted from the latter. We think that these regulations, which are applied indiscriminately to the whole of the country, should be adapted to the specific problem of the park and that the grant for conifers should be discontinued in respect of woodland areas within the park. The savings achieved would make it possible to increase aid to the planting of deciduous trees.

- With regard to public woodland: the planting of spruce is totally prohibited in all state forests and forestry officials are advised to recommend mixed forest to municipalities. However, the ban does not affect other conifers such as the Douglas fir. We think it would be advisable to extend this ban to all conifers.

In the Federal Republic of Germany,

- in public forests: forest policy is moving towards a preference for mixed deciduous woodland, especially in the south of the country.

We propose that the 1981 Recommendation be renewed in an adapted form. The efforts made to bring the forest closer to its natural balance by increasing the proportion of deciduous trees must be continued in public woodland and intensified in privately-owned woodland. Various courses of action are conceivable, such as the award of grants, advice on planting and management, public information and training for forestry staff working in the park.

B. Protected forests

Some woodland areas adapted to extreme ecological conditions deserve a mention and should be encouraged in that they enable rare ecosystems to be preserved.

For example, we visited the ravine forests along the Our, the Gorges du Loups near Erelchen in Luxembourg, the Teufelschlucht in Germany and an alder stand located near the Irreler Wasserfälle in the forest of Irrel (Federal Republic of Germany).

C. "Christmas tree" plantations

Many grassland plots are currently disused and the Luxembourg Ministry of the Environment is receiving requests for reconversion to conifer plantations. The question is to what extent such requests should be granted.

An increase in the number of small plantations would obviously have a disastrous effect on the landscape and the ecology. Yet it is also legitimate to want to find economic solutions to the use of these areas.

In our opinion, this problem should be dealt with in a comprehensive plan which would limit such plantations to the bare minimum in the most inconspicuous places where the ecological impact would also be negligible.

5. PROTECTED AREAS

The Federal Republic of Germany has already granted protected status to a number of sites (about 300 hectares) in the form of nature reserves, landscape conservation areas or land reserves as part of land redistribution. The planned protected areas cover a total of slightly more than 1,000 hectares.

Of these, the Our valley will be a transfrontier reserve.

The prospecting of likely sites for designation as reserves is based in particular on the admirably detailed work of Mr Gobel, the forester and amateur botanist, who has catalogued the rare plant species in the park and thus been able to grade the sites and specify those which need protection.

These areas are constantly maintained and in some cases restored. Some outstanding trees have also been listed and are maintained at great cost.

In Luxembourg many projects exist; they were the subject of a declaration of intent in 1981. Further projects are under consideration. For example, we were able to visit an area of marshy grassland at the bottom of a valley near the source of the Bläess, which broke the monotony of a cultivated landscape; and a policy of land acquisition in woodlands was introduced in 1983. These projects would need to be translated into action.

CONCLUSION

A great effort has been made to orient the park's development along the lines of the recommendations issued in the previous appraisals.

We are in favour of the renewal of the diploma in 1987, but attach five recommendations to it.

1. Adoption of an overall plan for the development and management of the park, including the formulation of a policy for the establishment of nature reserves.
2. Maintenance of a firm attitude on the limitation of existing tourist facilities, and in particular camp sites, and continuation of activities to restore and improve inadequate facilities.
3. Search for a way of restoring the landscape of the Hosingen site, especially as regards the built-up part.
4. Continuation and intensification of the efforts made to encourage mixed forests consisting of native species as opposed to exclusively coniferous woodland particularly through the discontinuation of grants for the planting of conifers.
5. When the E42 Luxembourg-Trier highway is built, choice of a route that does as little damage as possible to the countryside around Echternach, and in particular one that does not cut across the Haard forest, does not run along the edge of the artificial lake and does not cross Tull Hill.