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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION  
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Select Committee of Experts - European Diploma

Weltenberger Enge Nature Reserve

On-the-spot appraisal  
by  
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## 1. Background

The Secretariat representative informed the Committee of Experts for Protected Areas when they met on 3 and 4 June 1986 that the on-the-spot appraisals to be carried out in 1986 under the Regulations for the European Diploma (1) would include one concerning the second renewal of the European Diploma, category B, to the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve in the Federal Republic of Germany, when the current award expires in 1988.

In a letter of 24 September 1986, the Secretariat asked me to undertake this on-the-spot appraisal.

The appraisal took place on 22 and 23 September 1986. I was accompanied by Mr J P Ribaut, Head of the Division of the Environment and Natural Resources at the Council of Europe.

We were welcomed and briefed by the following:

- Mr Brenner, Ministerialrat Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen (STMLU)
- Mr Pfeiffer, Leitender Forstdirektor, Bayerischer Landesamt für Umweltschutz
- Mr Sturm, Dipl. Biologe, Regierung von Niederbayern, Höhere Naturschutzbehörde, Zoologischer Naturschutz
- Mr Werres, Dipl. Biologe, Regierung von Niederbayern, Höhere Naturschutzbehörde, Zoologischer Naturschutz
- Mr Ritzinger, Forstdirektor, Forstamt Kelheim, Behördenleiter
- Mr Kammermeier, Revierförster, Forstamt Kelheim
- Mr Kreitziek, amtierender Landrat, Landratsamt Kelheim, Behördenleiter
- Mr Lindner, Landratsamt Kelheim, Amtsleiter Umweltschutz

## 2. Characteristics of the protected area (2, 4)

- Nature reserve since 1970, 560 ha, lying on the Danube between Weltenburg and Kelheim, 20 km south-west of Regensburg
- European Diploma, category B, awarded on 3 March 1978
- European interest: extremely impressive gorge scenery with considerable diversity - cliffs up to 100 m high alternating with forests and very varied farmland - encapsulated in a very small area, no more than 6 km in length; distinctive geological features (Kelheim limestone) and paleontological interest (abundant fossils): of primordial importance for the protection of species and biotopes,

since this stretch of the Danube is one of the few remaining areas along the river as it passes through Bavaria which have remained very close to the natural state (transitional zone between plant species: relicts of the alpine region and south-east Europe within a very small area); variety of archaeological remains in the area (from the Neolithic period to the early Middle Ages), monuments of outstanding historical and cultural importance (Klößterl cave chapel, Weltenburg monastery, liberation monument).

### 3. Results of the appraisal

#### 3.1 General

Since my last on-the-spot appraisal on 1 and 2 July 1981, the situation has certainly not changed for the worse in any way. On the contrary, the authorities at all levels are fully aware of the reserve's European importance as summarised in section 2 above, and have made every effort to comply with the recommendations of Resolution (83) 6 (5). As a result, progress in certain respects has been very striking, as we shall see under 3.2. Nevertheless there are still some problems outstanding (see sections 3.2 and 4 below) which must be solved if the reserve is to retain its present character or improve on it.

#### 3.2 Specific

##### 3.2.1 Management of the Danube

From the European point of view, conservation efforts are obviously focused on the Danube gorge itself, and therefore include both quantitative and qualitative conservation of the waters of the Danube as well as conservation of the river banks and regions adjoining the gorge.

So far construction of the Rhine-Main-Danube canal for inland shipping in the nearby Altmühltal does not appear to have had any harmful effects, nor does water engineering work upstream from Weltenburg.

It must however be repeated that any changes prejudicial to the Danube in the Weltenburger Enge will mean withdrawal of the European Diploma. (See also the Appendix)

##### 3.2.2 Hunting and fishing

No change since 1981.

##### 3.2.3 Forestry

For years the forestry department has been trying to keep woodland in and around the reserve as close to nature as possible, by for example:

- encouraging natural regeneration;
- replacing species foreign to the habitat and even creating natural forest reserves (eg the Ludwigshain natural forest reserve, outstanding in spite of its extremely small area and strictly protected from any form of exploitation. As a matter outside the scope of this appraisal,

we recommend that this reserve be included in the Council of Europe's network of biogenetic reserves). However the forestry department would prefer it if the very remarkable ash and oak forest covering some 5 hectares near Hohlenstein/Wipfelsfurt, were not treated as nature reserve. This area of woodland is now very close to the natural state, though in fact it was designated as a reserve 150 years ago. On this the forestry department is at variance with Recommendation 5 of Council of Europe Resolution (83) 6 (5). Nevertheless the authorities intend to make every effort to ensure that even in the future this area is subjected to no more interference than is absolutely necessary. It is estimated that under these conditions the trees in question will reach an age of 200 and 300 years. Major changes to the ecology or the landscape are therefore unlikely. It follows that we may reasonably accept the statement made by the Bavarian Forestry Directorate at Regensburg on 14 April 1986: "Das Forstamt Kelheim wird selbstverständlich die sehr eindrucksvollen Bestände auch weiterhin in guter Hut halten". ("The Kelheim forestry office will of course continue to take good care of the extremely impressive woodland".) Under the circumstances, the Council of Europe need not insist on this area being treated as a strictly protected reserve for the time being.

Something which does demand priority, here as elsewhere in the Weltenburger Enge reserve, is the need to press ahead with efforts to protect fauna and flora. It is not enough simply to observe general guidelines, eg composition of woodland: so many % of broadleaved species, so many % of conifers, woodland management close to the natural state, etc. For more than in the past, forestry methods will have to take account of phytosociological research and also of the demands of wildlife protection. An agreement must be reached between the forestry authorities and the nature protection agencies which will ensure that forestry management will continue to respect these principles. The need for this is most pressing on the rocky spurs of the gorge, the slopes of which are extremely interesting but also extremely vulnerable to ecological damage. Ways of implementing this recommendation are detailed in section 4 below.

#### 3.2.4 Agriculture

The findings and recommendations set out in my last report (3) still hold good. The forestry authorities have ignored the experts' instructions it contained regarding the area of farmland under their control in the centre of the reserve, which were to use it for an experiment in alternative agriculture. Instead, they have rented out the land for intensive farming. In line with the general tenor of discussions during the on-the-spot appraisal, I must insist that this land be reconverted to alternative farming methods, the most appropriate here not only because of their compatibility with nature and landscape conservation but also because they afford an opportunity to educate the many visitors to the reserve about the value of such farming methods. (Ideally an educational trail would be laid out parallel to the path running along the river.)

### 3.2.5 Tourism

Annual visitor numbers average around 500,000, a figure which has not changed since five years ago. The figures are highest in the areas around the Weltenburg monastery (700,000) and the liberation monument (300,000). Relatively few visitors go into the heart of the reserve lying either side of the gorge. Most leave directly by boat down the Danube from Weltenburg to Kelheim or take the road upstream.

Observations and discussions at the on-the-spot appraisal, as well as examination of the documents, confirm that damage to very valuable vegetation by the large number of visitors to the rocky spurs on the south-west slopes of the Wipfelsfurt is still a problem. All the flat limestone summits used as viewing points present very obvious signs of damage to the edges of the adjoining forest, in spite of the improvement over the situation as it was five years ago, brought about by the erection of barriers of horizontally laid tree trunks as recommended in point 4 of the resolution (5). More areas should be designated out of bounds to visitors in the conservation and management plan proposed in section 4 below. It would go some way towards solving the problem if, in addition to increasing supervision, a wooden platform were built to give a better view of the gorge and provide visitor information. Such a platform should be close to the rocky spurs and linked to the existing footpath along the crest of the gorge, and should blend into the landscape. It would have to be put up before the Diploma is due for renewal again. This would in my view be an effective and lasting solution to the problems posed by the extremely conflicting demands of nature protection and tourism in a particularly sensitive area of the gorge.

Existing restrictions and checks on climbing the limestone cliffs of the gorge do not appear to satisfy the demands of nature conservation, which should be paramount here. It is worth considering whether climbing should be forbidden throughout the gorge, when the conservation and management plan referred to in section 4 is drawn up.

### 3.2.6 Cultural aspects

Restoration of the Klösterl chapel, which is proceeding rapidly and in complete accordance with the recommendations under point 3 of Resolution (83) 6 (5), deserves particular praise.

### 3.2.7 Research

Discussions during the on-the-spot appraisal have shown up a paradox. The reserve has been studied by scientists from a variety of disciplines, but little appear to have been done to take advantage of the potential benefits to conservation and management of the area which would be afforded by a comprehensive approach to pure and applied research. This should be corrected in the conservation and management plan referred to under section 4.

### 3.2.8 Information

Let us start with the credit side: well-designed panels describing the reserve and the rules applying within it have been put up at four of the sites where visitor numbers are highest.

On the debit side, there are still no information stands (kiosks) providing documentation about why the reserve is important, what it aims to achieve and what rules have to be enforced in consequence. These would probably be best sited next to the ordinary kiosks which already exist near the liberation monument and the Weltenburg monastery, and possibly at two other sites where there are already information panels, at the entrance to the Klösterl chapel or near Strausacker.

### 3.2.9 Supervision; legal and financial status

It is clear from the above that the present system of supervision, leaves something to be desired, in spite of all that has been done to improve matters. The system should be reviewed in the light of the work which will be required under the conservation and management plan proposed in section 4.

The on-the-spot appraisal found no sign of any legal or financial problems.

### 4. Reserve management committee/conservation and management plan

Considering the reserve's European importance (see section 2) and the findings reported in section 3, there is clearly a need for:

- a co-ordinating committee composed of representatives of the various groups with an interest in the reserve, whose aim would be to make conservation and management of the reserve as effective as possible and to reconcile other legitimate interests with the principles of nature protection - in short, a committee responsible for the reserve;
- a mandatory conservation and management plan, based on the principles of nature and landscape conservation set out in sections 2 and 3, and on all other relevant guidelines issued by the Council of Europe to date.

### 5. Conclusions and conditions

The literature (see bibliography) and more importantly the on-the-spot appraisal have convinced me that renewal of the European Diploma is justified. I would like to thank the various parties concerned for their positive attitude and their support for the protection of the reserve.

However I consider it essential to attach the following conditions to the renewal of the Diploma:

1. Construction and operation of the Rhine-Main-Danube canal, as well as any alterations to the Danube upstream from the Weltenburger Enge, should under no circumstances have harmful repercussions on either water quality or the water level as compared to the present state of the reserve.

2. In order to ensure that the reserve retains its present character or indeed even improves on it, a committee responsible for managing the reserve should be set up and a conservation and management plan adopted, as recommended under section 4. The first stage in this will entail:
  - 2.1 Listing all research already done on the reserve, so that the findings can be exploited as a matter of priority for conservation and management purposes. In future research should be co-ordinated to avoid duplication of work.
  - 2.2 Mapping plant communities and ecological features, the details shown and the scale used being such as to make a practical contribution to conservation and management planning.
3. The conservation and management plan should take account of the comments and suggestions under the various headings in section 3.
4. The plan must also take account of any conditions laid down in earlier Council of Europe resolutions on the reserve which have not already been put into practice.

#### Bibliography

1. Regulations for the European Diploma Resolution (73) 4 of 19 January 1973
2. Europadiplom - Broschüre 17. Naturschutzgebiet Weltenburger Enge. Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Strasbourg 1978
3. Report by Theo Hunziker (Switzerland) of the on-the-spot appraisal of the Weltenburger Enge nature reserve for the Council of Europe. 8 February 1982  
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4. Secretariat memorandum concerning the on-the-spot appraisal of the Weltenburger Enge. 10 February 1982  
SN-ZP (81) 30
5. Council of Europe Resolution (83) 6 concerning the renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the Weltenburger Enge nature reserve (Federal Republic of Germany) 26 May 1983
- 6(a)-(c). Annual reports on the Weltenburger Enge nature reserve for the past few years
- 7(a) and (b) Secretariat memoranda concerning the meetings of the Committee of Experts on Protected Areas on 13 and 14 May 1985 (SN-ZP (85) 40) and 3 and 4 June 1986 (SN-ZP (86) 44)

A P P E N D I X

Further suggestions by the expert to benefit nature conservation, supplementing the report on the Weltenburger Enge

1. Extending the area designated as protected landscape towards the Altmühltal

It might well be worth extending the area benefiting from landscape conservation measures by creating a further reserve reaching as far as the Main-Danube canal, adjacent to the Weltenburger Enge landscape conservation area and including any areas already protected. This would bring out more clearly the genetic similarity between the Altmühltal (original valley of the Danube) and the Weltenburger Enge (the present Danube valley).

2. Possible alterations to the Danube upstream from Weltenburg

Various projects are currently under study which would stabilise or even exploit the waters of the Danube upstream from Weltenburg by constructing ramps or hydroelectric dams (eg near Eining).

I believe it should be made clear that in all such projects top priority must be given to the following considerations:

- the Weltenburger Enge reserve should not be affected in any way (see section 5.1 of the expert's report);
- the riparian biotopes still existing near Eining and further upstream along the Danube are extremely rare at European level. Consequently every effort should be made to prevent construction of a hydroelectric plant at any point along the river and to stabilise the course of the river by other means, eg rock sills or ramps.