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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

WELTENBURGER ENGE
Federal Republic of Germany

ON-THE-SPOT APPRAISAL

by

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(Switzerland)

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1. Background situation

In Resolution (78) 21 of 3 March 1978 the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe awarded the European Diploma, category B, to the Weltenburg Gorge Nature Reserve (Weltenburger Enge). Thus, the "Donaudurchbruch" a passage forced by the Danube between Weltenburg and Kehlheim, roughly 30 km to the west of Regensburg, was recognised as a landscape of exceptional European value (details available in the existing documentation).

The diploma will expire in 1983. An on-the-spot appraisal has to be made according to the regulations in force (Resolution (73) 4), to determine whether the diploma should be renewed for a period of five years.

In a letter dated 10 June 1981, the Secretariat requested the author to undertake this mission, with the following terms of reference:

- a. to study the present state of the site and ascertain whether it has been maintained or has improved or deteriorated since the award of the diploma;
- b. to analyse the state of preservation of the flora, fauna and landscape;
- c. to examine the changes (physical or legislative) that have been made or are under way;
- d. to study the impact of the public on the flora, fauna and landscape and to make proposals such as to permit improvement of the situation;
- e. to ascertain what funds are devoted to management of the area.

The appraisal was carried out on 1 and 2 July 1981 in the company of Mr P Baum, representing the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the Council of Europe.

We were welcomed and shown around by the following persons, who facilitated our task:

Ministerialrat Dr. Lang, Bay STMLU
Dr. Braunhofer, Landesamt für Umweltschutz
Mr Chaborski, RR Landratsamt
Mr Lindner, RA Landratsamt
Mr Senft, Naturschutzwacht

In addition, Mr Kammermeir of the State Forestry Service placed himself at my disposal on 2 July for any information we required.

1. The integrity of the landscape has been preserved;
2. Only one derogation from the relevant regulations has been allowed (for a farm road leading to Wipfelsfurt);
3. Forestry activities have been modified in accordance with the protected nature of the reserve;
4. The few farming areas have been maintained;
5. There has been no extension of the network of forest roads;
6. The management and supervision of the protected area appear to conform to the objectives of category B;
7. No new structures have been built; renovation work is under way near the Klösterl;
8. A number of information boards drawing attention to the protected nature of the area have recently been put up, some of them on a temporary basis. The signposting as a whole is utterly inadequate. Above all, there is a lack of signs showing the main entrances to the protected areas (near the port of Kehlheim, on the path leading to the liberation monument, near the Michelsberg car-park, and on either side of the bank of the Danube in the vicinity of Weltenburg monastery).

There is a general lack of information for visitors concerning the size of the protected area, the relevant regulations, and the problems and aims of nature and landscape protection in general. This is all the more regrettable since the protected area is particularly amenable to a large-scale information campaign, from both the nature conservation and cultural standpoints. During our inspection, we were given assurances of an immediate improvement in the situation.

2.2 Particular observations

Water levels in the Danube

Work is going ahead in the Altmühltal region on the construction of the Rhine-Main-Danube canal for commercial inland navigation. It is premature at this stage to say whether the drawing off of water below Kehlheim once navigation begins, or the construction of power stations above Weltenburg, will affect the water level in the Weltenburg Gorge. The conservation authorities do not believe that there will be a substantial change. Moreover, the condition of the water does not appear to have deteriorated in any way so far. It is clear that a radical change in the regime of these waters and hence in the very nature of the gorge would compromise continued European diploma status.

Fishing and hunting

No change since 1976.

Forestry

Apart from the protected area, the State Forestry Service has created three forest reserves in the cliffs on both sides of the Danube (forming part of the 103 natural forest reserves in the Free State of Bavaria). They are fully protected from any form of exploitation. There is an impressive stand (oak, ash, beech) situated at the north-west boundary of the agricultural area of Wipfelsfurt, which has grown up as a result of natural regeneration in a former vineyard, and provides seed.

The rest of the forest in the protected area has been thinned out, thus promoting hardwood species (indirect transformation); up to now the proportion of deciduous trees has been 45%. Apart from an area of about 1 hectare in which spruce has been directly replaced by oak, lime and hornbeam, there is no more felling.

Agriculture

The few agricultural areas are deliberately left open by deliberate farming practices. This applies in particular to the Wipfelsfurt, which belongs to the State Forestry Service and has been leased very commendably to a farmer, on a non-profit basis, which has prevented the land from being laid fallow or reforested. It has proved necessary to authorise the Forestry Service to develop an existing forest road, running from the north towards Wipfelsfurt, for agricultural purposes. In this way it has been possible to avoid widening the road along the Danube from Klösterl. With a view to protecting the area, it would be desirable henceforth to practice a system of alternative agriculture and to turn to good account the results achieved from both the economic and ecological points of view (experimental station).

Tourism

The number of visitors has barely increased, standing at roughly 500,000 persons per year; there has been no increase in seasonal visitors.

There are five big tourist boats crossing the Enge and a further five small boats with outboard motors used by families. This number should be maintained.

There has been no increase in the trampling of vegetation on the rocky spurs in order to obtain views of the gorge, and in my opinion the present situation can be tolerated without any great damage to the "Steppenheide" and the "Steppenheidewald". The steep rocks apparently form a natural obstacle to excessive trampling.

Climbing on the walls of the gorge has been restricted to one wall on each bank of the Danube, near the Weltenburg monastery, and even here climbing is prohibited during the nesting season. Only one authorisation has been given, to the Kehlheim section of the German Alpine Club, which in return helps with the supervision of the protected area by providing two rangers.

There are no unauthorised tourist installations or landing stages to report.

The use of the Kehlheim access road as far as Klösterl is reserved exclusively for the manager and staff of the local restaurant, and for delivery vehicles.

In the port of Kehlheim there has been an increase in the number of stalls catering to tourists (kiosks, fish and chip stands).

There has been no increase in the amount of refuse deposited by tourists. The maintenance staff carry out regular cleaning operations during inspections.

Cultural aspects

Weltenburg Monastery is an important landmark in the history of civilisation and culture. The creation of an archeological information trail nearby underlines the great importance of the entire region for the history of civilisation, *inter alia* because of its ramparts dating from Celtic and medieval times and its remarkable Roman remains.

Moreover, the Klösterl, with its chapel carved out of the rock, upstream from Kehlheim, is unique on the banks of the Danube and deserves our attention. It should be restored by the state, the region (Landkreis) and the town. The renovation of the chapel is a priority task. In order to maintain the Klösterl as a small inn for visitors to the protected area, the footpath leading to it should be improved so as to make it usable all year round, even during the period of high water. On the other hand, no improvement to the road between Kehlheim and the Klösterl is required. It is also advisable not to change the current regulations concerning road use and lighting.

Vegetation

A vegetation map has been prepared since the award of the diploma.

Legal and financial observations

There has been no change in the legal status of the reserve since 1976. The funds needed to protect the landscape come from the ordinary resources of the state, the region and the town. The cultural aspects are handled by the Monuments and Sites Protection Department.

3. Conclusions and proposals

3.1 Renewal of the European Diploma

The renewal of the diploma is fully justified. We should even be grateful to the management for their willingness to apply the conditions in Resolution (78) 21 governing the award of the diploma. Those conditions have proved to be well founded, and could also serve as a basis for the resolution on the renewal of the diploma.

3.2 Supplementary proposals

Effective signposting of the protected area and adequate information

Prior to renewal, measures should be taken to cover this point satisfactorily (see 2.1.8 above).

Forestry

The remarkable stand of trees bordering the agricultural area of Wipfelsfurt to the north-west should also be made a nature reserve; the production of seed should be maintained.

Agriculture

The agricultural area of Wipfelsfurt should be developed as an experimental station for alternative agriculture.

Tourism

In the event of increased trampling of vegetation on the rocky spurs beyond the present limits, the flow of visitors will have to be regulated by means of barriers, without detracting from the aesthetics of the landscape, eg by means of tree trunks laid horizontally.

It is essential to prevent any increase in the number of large or small tourist motor-boats admitted to the area or in the number of stalls existing prior to the award of the diploma (eg at the Michelsberg car-park, and near Weltenburg Monastery).

Unauthorised camping and landing stages should continue to be prohibited.

The existing parking areas in the port of Kehlheim must form the strict limit for road traffic heading towards the Weltenburger Enge.

Klösterl

Restoration work in the protected area of Klösterl must be speeded up and completed in the near future under the direction and with the support of the state department of monuments and sites.

All road traffic in excess of the current volume must be strictly prohibited. At the same time, there should be no lighting of access roads.

On the other hand, the footpath leading to Klösterl should be improved so as to make it usable even during periods of high water.

4. Final observation

The expert wishes to end his report with a word of thanks to all those responsible for protecting the Weltenburger Enge. At the same time, he expresses the hope that his proposals will contribute to the success of their efforts.