



0504
92/4509

Strasbourg 14 December 1992
APESZP39.93
0504-15/12/92-1-E

PE-S-ZP (93) 39

STEERING COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT
OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL HABITATS

Group of Specialists - Protected Areas

Strasbourg, 1-4 February 1993

Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve
(Germany)

On-the-spot appraisal
(14 and 15 September 1992)

Expert report

by

Dr. Charles STAUFFER
52, rue de la LUSS
68000 COLMAR

The expert carried out his visit to the Weltenburger Nature Reserve alone.

Appendix I contains Resolution (88) 7 adopted when the diploma was last renewed. The Secretariat is submitting a draft resolution for use should the diploma be renewed in 1993.

WELTENBURGER ENGE Nature Reserve

1. GENERAL POINTS

The Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve has existed since 1938. Its present boundaries were defined in 1970.

It is part of the ALTMUHLTAL natural park.

It was awarded the European Diploma, category B, on 3 March 1978; the diploma has been renewed every 5 years, viz in 1983 and 1988.

As the diploma was due to be renewed for a further five-year period, the Directorate of Environment and Local Authorities of the Council of Europe charged me with carrying out an on-the-spot appraisal, with instructions to check whether Resolution (88) 7 of 16 June 1988 (enclosed in Appendix I) had been implemented.

2. APPRAISAL OPERATION

The park was visited on 14 and 15 September 1992. I went to Kelheim alone because no Council of Europe representative was appointed to take part in the appraisal.

I was welcomed at a preliminary meeting which took place on the morning of 14 September. I was met by:

- * Mr LINDNER, the Director of the Reserve, responsible for nature protection in the KELHEIM canton.

Also present at the meeting were:

- * Mr BRENNER, from the Ministry of Regional Development and Environmental Problems, Bavaria.
- * Dr GRUNWALD, representative of the NIEDERBAYERN Government.
- * Mr HENKE from the Federal Department of Research into Nature Protection, BONN.
- * Mr FUNK, Head of the Forestry Division, KELHEIM, accompanied by Mr KAMMERMEIR, area head for the reserve.

In addition, the meeting was also attended by two representatives of the ASSMANN bureau, which had devised a management plan for the WELTENBURGER ENGE nature reserve.

At my request I was also able to meet:

- * Mr SENFT, member of the association for nature protection and the Alpine Club (ALPENVEREIN), commissioned to monitor the right bank of the reserve.
- * Mr SCHMALTZ, member of the Group of Bird Protection Leagues, responsible for the KELHEIM canton.
- * Mr REUDER, from the Federation for Nature Protection, member of the water and environment police.

3. MAIN FEATURES OF THE PROTECTED AREA

The nature reserve extends along both banks of the DANUBE, over a distance of 6 km to the south-west of REGENSBURG.

The reserve includes the DANUBE gorge, with its cliffs, plus surrounding farm land and forest.

The reserve lies where the ALTMUHL flows into the DANUBE. It coincides with the northernmost limit reached by the Alpine glacier during the last Ice Age.

It is also situated to the south of the ice-cap which covered northern Europe, which accounts for the existence of relic species of flora in the area. It was colonised very early on by vegetation and animals and inhabited by man very early.

The outstanding gorges are formed of alternating precipices and ledges, enhanced by impressive geological and geomorphological features.

The region includes a number of relics from human settlements from the Bronze Age to the present day, including Celtic, Roman and Medieval monuments.

The cliffs and river have served both as refuge and obstacle, forming a natural barrier against invasion by rival clans.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS OF THE PROTECTED AREA

The bulk of the protected area lies within state-owned forest, known as the HEINHEIMERFORST. Most of the area belongs to the Land, with land situated near the liberation monument and encircling the Weltenburg convent.

Consequently the reserve's relations with the landowners are greatly simplified.

FOREST covers 90% of the surface, making trees the dominant element among the various types of vegetation.

5. APPRAISAL

After the meeting on the morning of 14 September, we walked along the right bank from KELHEIM to the WELTENBURG convent, following the northern boundary of the protected area. On the way back we walked along the cliff edge via KLOESTERLE, crossing the WIPFELSFURTH farm land.

On 15 September, we walked along the right bank from FRAUENBERG as far as the eastern boundary of the reserve. In the afternoon we concentrated on the ALTMUHLTAL part of the reserve, which acts as the northern boundary (see Recommendation (88) 7, para 8).

5.1 Management plan

A preliminary draft management plan for the nature reserve has been drawn up by the applied ecology office, ASSMANN of FREISING. This study deals not only with the protected area but also with the ALTMUHLTAL.

It should serve as a basis for discussions when a final management plan is worked out.

The management plan for the development of the state-owned forest already takes ample account of the bulk of the recommendations contained in the ASSMANN draft.

The preliminary draft recommends extending the DANUBE nature reserve as far as the ALTMUHL and advocates gradual abandonment of forestry activity.

Comments:

In my view it is too soon to speed up the process, since all the preparations have been made for gradually establishing a balance among the species present in the woodland.

As mentioned above, this region bears signs of human presence dating back to very ancient times. It should not be unreasonable to think that man must continue to play an active part in environmental protection in the forest in particular, since a "leave-nature-alone" approach might lead, sooner or later, to a decline in the biodiversity which human action has favoured in the past, even though single-species plantations (spruce) may give the opposite impression.

The general view seems to be that people are co-operating by instinct, with the same aims, but only time will tell.

5.2 Forestry policy

As mentioned in the previous section, forestry policy is aimed at extending mixed forest by encouraging deciduous species.

It should be noted in passing that without human intervention the oak, which was once a species essential to the region would disappear from most of the area because the beech is so fast-growing that the light-loving oak would be smothered. The oak is only present because of what man has done (using acorns for animal fodder or oak-wood to build fortifications, eg in the 12th century). Recent action undertaken which we were able to see fully complies with paragraph 4 of Resolution (88) 7.

5.3 WIPFELFURTH

This farmland is currently planted with tall fruit trees. Upkeep takes the form of once-a-year grass cutting.

Without this grass cutting, one of the last open areas within the reserve would rapidly be invaded by woody vegetation and the forest would recover its original habitat. Now that intensive farming has been abandoned, it is therefore important to maintain extensive farming, bearing in mind the brooding periods of passerines which favour this habitat. Grass harvesting is imperative if the floral composition of the grassland is to be maintained.

5.4. Tourism

Annual visitor numbers are reported to average around 750,000. Exact figures are unavailable but the numbers of boat-trippers are used to calculate the total number of visitors to the reserves.

At present, around 500,000 people every year take boats along the river between KELHEIM and the WELTENBURG convent.

5.4.1 Visitors on foot

Every year, around 300,000 visitors walk along the left bank of the gorges from the liberation monument to the Danube cliffs, on the opposite side to the WELTENBURG convent (Langewand).

Such large numbers have led to heavy erosion of the vulnerable parts. It is the chalky downs atop the cliffs which pay the heaviest price.

Given the current situation, it is impossible to bar access to the viewpoints completely. Appropriate measures must therefore be taken to protect the cliffs to the maximum. Two or three viewpoints should be kept open, equipped in such a way as to avoid any damage as far as possible.

Gradually closing off other parts, blocking access with felled trees, seems to be the best solution. The situation should be monitored very closely. This does not seem to be quite the case at present, probably because of understaffing.

The right bank is now only frequented by rare connoisseurs. The removal of signposts deters ramblers from entering this sector.

5.4.2 Boat trips

The white fleet: this small fleet cruises up and down the river.

Technological research has improved the shape of boats. River banks are now less prone to damage caused by turbulent wakes. Unfortunately, the craft constantly use loud-speakers in the gorge, with extremely unpleasant results.

Flat-bottomed boats: as well as the five white-fleet vessels, two small flat-bottomed vessels cruise along the river. Although small, they churn up sizeable waves. We witnessed this phenomenon first-hand when the boatman was returning to the moorings at Kelheim.

Barges: local naturalists told us of the regular appearance of large barges used to host extremely noisy parties. It was universally agreed that this practice was not environment-friendly.

Private boats: because our visit took place late in the year, we were unable to see for ourselves the presence of large numbers of private boats on the Danube. The canoe club has its headquarters in a building next to the KLOESTERLE. Most of its members respect the boating instructions but individual canoeists (who are most difficult to control) treat the river as a playground and pitch their tents wherever they happen to stop.

Comments: we detected a general desire to have mooring banned on the right bank of the Danube. Such a ban would apply to the whole length of the reserve and gradually allow the river bank to be fully protected.

5.4.3 Rock-climbing

The large numbers of cliffs in the region offer rock-climbing opportunities. Amateurs flock to the reserve. Thanks to the active co-operation of the Alpenverein, the cliffs within the reserve are now used less for climbing. There is a plan afoot to ban rock-climbing on the right bank. This ban should be applied together with a ban on mooring boats (see previous section).

Rock-climbing could be stopped inside the reserve as there are opportunities for it elsewhere, eg near the PRUNN castle.

5.5 ALTMUHLTAL

The Rhine-Main-Danube canal has been built along the Altmuhl valley from Kelheim onwards. Large-scale work has therefore altered the site but compensation has been provided for the purpose of rehabilitating the former river bed and to lessen the impact on the countryside.

These ancillary developments are of most interest from a biological point of view. Ideally the measures already undertaken should be bolstered by integrating this sector into the protected area, especially since the bulk of the neighbouring forest already enjoys such protection.

Protohistoric man had already constructed a dyke as boundary to the west and south of the area. Traces of that dyke are still visible. The Altmuhl and Danube form the easternmost and northernmost limits.

This historic relic might serve as a basis for discussions when any extension is undertaken in the future, especially since the Assmann bureau study uses the same boundaries.

5.6 Dams on the DANUBE

During the two-day visit, reference was made to various projects to regulate the river course.

Human action along a watercourse will always have repercussions upstream and downstream. It invariably takes decades to redress the balance and caution will be called for when such action is taken upstream from the Weltenburger Enge. Actions which alter the site are unacceptable.

6. CONCLUSION

After the two days of on-the-spot appraisal, we can conclude that no outstanding factor stands in the way of renewal of the category B diploma.

I must congratulate all of those who are closely or indirectly involved with the site, and commend the various departments for their excellent co-operation, which makes it easier for all concerned to improve protection.

In a site of this type, the only outstanding question concerns the actual role man should play.

The Danube Gorge region has been coveted for many years and has been commercially exploited for several decades. At certain times in the past there has probably been as large a human presence, in relative terms, as there is today.

7. DRAFT RESOLUTION

1. To approve the development and management plan concerning the nature reserve and its surroundings.
2. To consider to what extent the forest must be modelled in such a way as to open up the landscape towards the liberation monument.
3. To contain the stream of ramblers on the left-bank cliff-top.
4. To ban mooring and rock-climbing on the right bank.
5. To take control of commercial boating on the river.
6. To pursue research with a view to integrating the Altmühltal into the protected area.

(Colmar, 7 December 1992
C STAUFFER)

APPENDIX I

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE
COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS**

RESOLUTION (88) 7

**ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA
AWARDED TO THE WELTENBURGER ENGE NATURE RESERVE
(FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY)**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 June 1988
at the 418th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe.

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to Resolution (78) 21 awarding the European Diploma to the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve;

Having regard to the proposals of the Steering Committee for the Conservation and Management of the Environment and Natural Habitats (CDPE),

Renews the European Diploma, Category B, awarded to the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve until 2 March 1993, subject to the following recommendations:

1. The construction and operation of the Rhine-Main-Danube canal and the possible Danube dam project upstream from the Weltenburger Enge must in no circumstances have adverse effects on the present condition and level of water in the reserve;
2. A plan for the development and management of the nature reserve and its surroundings should be drawn up, with the participation of all the parties concerned and in the framework of a management committee to be set up;
3. Particularly interesting zones should be designated as biogenetic reserves for inclusion in the European network;
4. The policy on forests should be maintained, but with speedier replacement of foreign varieties (conifers in particular) by native varieties;
5. The outstanding calcareous grasslands, especially on the rocky peaks, should be upgraded and developed by restricting public access and endeavouring to extend them by means of appropriate management;
6. The intensive farming currently practised in the Wippelsfurt area should be replaced by extensive agriculture, without chemical fertilisers or pesticides; an educational nature trail should be marked out;
7. A coherent medium-term research plan should be drawn up so that full benefit can be derived from the enormous potential in terms of fauna and flora;
8. The possibility of extending the nature reserve to include the Altmühletal, an outstanding, well-managed site adjoining the current protected zone and forming an integral part of the area as a whole, should be considered.

APPENDIX II

Draft Resolution (93) ...

ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA
AWARDED TO THE WELTENBURGER ENGE NATURE RESERVE

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15 (a) of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma:

Having regard to Resolution (78) 21 awarding the European Diploma to the Weltenburger Enge Nature Reserve;

Having regard to the proposals of the Steering Committee for the Conservation and Management of the Environment and Natural Habitats (CDPE);

Renews the European Diploma, category B, awarded to the Weltenburger Enge nature reserve until subject to the following recommendations:

1. The development and management plan concerning the nature reserve and surroundings should be approved.
2. Consideration should be given to the extent to which the forest must be modelled in such a way as to open up the landscape towards the liberation monument.
3. The stream of ramblers on the left-bank cliff-tops should be contained.
4. Mooring and rock-climbing should be banned on the right bank.
5. It is necessary to take control of commercial boating on the river.
6. Research should be carried out with a view to integration of the ALTMUHLTAL into the protected area.