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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION  
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Working Party on Flora, Fauna and Landscapes

RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA AWARDED  
TO THE KRIMML WATERFALLS NATURAL SITE  
(Austria)

On the spot appraisal

by

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Expert opinion on the renewal of the European Diploma  
awarded to the Krimml Waterfalls, Austria

In 1972 the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe is to consider whether the European Diploma awarded to the Krimml Waterfalls (Austria) should be renewed for the first time. Austria's interest in the matter was made clear on 1 July 1971 in the request for renewal sent by the Provincial Government of Salzburg to the Council, whose Secretary General instructed the present author to undertake the requisite expert appraisal to this end, as laid down in the rules. Accordingly, on 27 and 28 July 1971, I made an on-the-spot study, in the company of Mr. H. Hacourt, Administrative Officer in the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the Council's Secretariat.

The group taking part in the visit to the site and in the related discussions included: Mr. H. Voithofer, Deputy Mayor of Krimml, Oberforstrat G. Scheffbänker, Ing. Dipl., Oberförster H.G. Muhr, representing the Bundesforste (Austrian Federal Department of Forestry), Oberforstrat K. Breiteneder, Ing. Dipl., Mr. H. Schmid, representing the Provincial Government of Salzburg and Mr. W. Richter, Director of the Krimml section of the Austrian Alpine Club.

On the basis of two visits to the site, discussions and examination of relevant information, I should like to present the following remarks and conclusions:

1. The Krimml Waterfalls are undoubtedly of supranational and European importance

- in view of the immense volume of water which, in summer, rushes down from the Krimmler Achental to the foot of the valley, roughly 400 metres below. This is not an isolated mountain valley but inhabited and now made accessible to tourists by a good road;
- because the fall is divided into a series of very distinct steps, thus permitting endless variations in the interplay of water and spray and producing amazing effects;
- because the Falls are encased in wooded surroundings reminiscent of a virgin forest (spruce), whose dark green enhances still further the primitive beauty of the Waterfalls (description inspired by Adalbert Stifter's stories).

The importance of the Krimml Waterfalls is made even clearer by the list below of the largest waterfalls in the world, compiled by Mr. H. Russegger, Krimml:

1. Angela Falls, 1100 m., Venezuela
2. Yosemite Falls, 740 m., USA
3. Sutherland Falls, 580 m., USA
4. Mardalsfossen, 505 m., Norway
5. Krimml Falls, 400 m., Austria
6. Staubbach Fall, 300 m., Switzerland
7. Gersoppa Falls, 253 m., India
8. Triberg Falls, 163 m., Germany
9. Victoria Falls, 110 m., South Africa
10. Iguazu Falls, 64 m., Argentina-Brazil
11. Niagara Falls, 48-60 m., Canada-USA
12. Rhine Falls, 21 m., Switzerland

2. The tremendous general impact of the Krimml Waterfalls, described in para (1), is achieved not only by a protected belt on both sides, roughly 200 m. in places, but by a much wider vista comprising the source (Krimmler Kees), the Achenal, the village of Krimml, the houses and the Ober-Pinzgau mountain range facing the Falls. If the beauty of any of these sites were damaged, the impression made by the Falls would undoubtedly suffer. Consequently, unrestricted building in Krimml or on the slopes overhanging the village and/or defacement of the Achenal by scattered holiday or country cottages put up by anyone who wished to spend a longer time in the region would soon cause the visitor a severe disappointment and the presence of the Falls in themselves would not be sufficient compensation.

3. Present situation in the area as a whole  
(Assessment based on visit of 27 July 1971)

### 3.1 The Falls:

It was a beautiful day, in the height of the tourist season. There was therefore a particularly large number of sightseers (5,300 people on the footpath to the west of the Falls) which emphasised the congestion in the area (sightseers on the path, scattered throughout the forest and in clearings near the path, at the restaurants and kiosks). According to the Deputy Mayor, Mr. Voithofer, a maximum of 7,158 sightseers a day had been reached the previous week. In the middle of summer, a peak figure had to be expected, especially in unstable weather when many tourists preferred to make an excursion to the Falls rather than to drive to the Grossglockner or go swimming.

The footpath is well kept and, with viewing points arranged at appropriate places, fulfils its purpose perfectly. The toll charged by the Alpine Club for upkeep (2 schillings for adults, 1/2 schilling for children), is moderate and quite justified.

The Alpine Club deserves praise for its efforts. Unrestricted access to the area, away from the path, gives some cause for alarm and there is a danger that eventually picnic spots will spring up at random, resulting in damage to the ground vegetation and trees as well as haphazard disposal of rubbish. It therefore seems vital that clearly-marked stopping places should be organised near the Falls, as part of plans to protect and safeguard sites and scenery (see 4.2). The motor transport system used by suppliers to restaurants near the Falls and in the Achenental, which operates during the day and also conveys tourists (means of transport: motor tricycles and jeeps) is an intolerable nuisance and obviously upsets sightseers (especially when they have to leave the path to make way for these vehicles).

Conditions around the "Schönangerl" restaurant, on the terrace overlooking the lower and middle Achen Falls should certainly be improved (a mass of ugly buildings, unacceptable arrangements for sewage and waste disposal (rubbish simply thrown into the Falls), inadequate lavatory facilities, haphazard deposit of rubbish near the path, etc).

### 3.2 Achenental:

This high valley is particularly striking for the wildness of its scenery: small-scale Alpine economy, an unassuming small village with an old inn, a few chalets, spruce and arrolla (pinus cembra) forest, pine plantations, mud avalanches, the winding course of the Krimml, cattle-paths ideal for family outings and high mountains forming a backcloth. Improved access would be unlikely, in the long run, to stop the decline of the Alpine economy, nor is it an absolute necessity for non-industrial forestry, which in order to preserve the beauty of the scenery is the only system permitted. Moreover, better communications would undoubtedly make the area accessible to tourist car traffic and result in the random construction of holiday cottages. Not only would these buildings be exposed to the definite threat of mud and snow avalanches but the valley would lose everything which today makes it worthy of conservation.

### 3.3 Krimml:

The unrestricted development at present discernible must be counteracted by rational local planning which is legally binding, combined with a scheme for expansion of tourism that takes account of the value of the site (see 4.5).

4. The remarks made in paras (1) to (3) should be accompanied by the following conclusions which are intended to apply to the whole Krimml natural site:

4.1 In the area shown on the attached map, the forest should retain its present character, similar to that of virgin forest, i.e. as far as possible it should remain untouched (except for measures necessary to make the path safe, clearing of viewing points near the path and removal of trees in the event of natural disasters). As regards forestry, attention should primarily be paid to the preservation of scenery on the grounds of nature conservation and tourism. At the same time, this area should be used for research into virgin forests.

I would like to address an immediate request to the Oesterreichische Bundesforste to take note of the importance that their forest in this area represents for the conservation of nature and scenery and to provide a good example by accepting the solution put forward without making any claim for compensation.

4.2 Scenic and tourist problems related to the Falls area (e.g. stopping places for sightseers, inns, information, the motor transport service used by suppliers, sewage and waste disposal) should be examined and a solution found as part of the plans to protect and safeguard sites and scenery on which all future action and authorisations should be based.

4.3 A scientific committee will collect all documentary material required to prove the importance of conserving the area as well as for information purposes.

4.4 In future the attention of sightseers will be drawn to the importance of the Falls by means of information booklets stressing the nature conservation, natural history and scientific aspects. The restaurant and kiosk ought to be pleasant incidentals and not the main object of the excursion; they should include an information service and signposts.

- 4.5 The Achental with the Krimml basin, should be incorporated into the protected site of the Falls. Forestry will continue as before, with a few improvements to the pastures but without a road leading from the valley.
- 4.6 Rational local planning will be introduced for Krimml itself and the tourist development area, combined with plans for the infrastructure necessary to tourism.
- 4.7 For more effective co-ordination of the various interests involved and to ensure conservation of the area, it is suggested that a "Krimml Falls Commission" be set up, on which landowners, the local authority, the Federal Province of Salzburg, the federal authorities, the Alpine Club and friends of the area would be represented.
- 4.8 Any ideas of illuminating the Falls by night as a possible means of launching tourism at Krimml, can and should be abandoned (even if harsh colours are avoided) for the following reasons: in the first place, this "cheap solution" would be quite insufficient to persuade the more wealthy tourist who seeks distraction rather than rest to spend a long time in the area. To achieve this, far more expensive tourist facilities such as swimming pools, entertainment amenities etc. would have to be constructed, since without them illuminations could hardly be expected to have lasting success. Moreover, now that the proposal that the Falls should be used to provide hydro-electric power at night has been rejected - and rightly so - it is quite logical that the idea of exploiting them for tourist purposes should be viewed with misgiving.

Should ideas of illuminating the Falls not be dropped entirely, despite our recommendation to this effect, the Council of Europe should in any event be consulted in time, before any decision is taken, since such a decision would directly affect a site which has been awarded the European Diploma.

- 4.9 Any plans for widening and restoring the old Tauern path on the east side of the Falls with a view to making it into a road that could be used by suppliers should be definitely abandoned since this step would eventually make the Falls and Achental (see 3.2) area accessible to general car traffic. Previously, when building the Gerlos road, plans for continuing this panoramic route up to the vicinity of the Falls were deliberately

rejected and there should therefore be no question of trying to do the same thing subsequently with another road. Even if precautions were taken during construction, intolerable damage to the forests surrounding the Falls would be unavoidable (for details of the importance and yield of these forests, see paras (1) and 4.1). The suppliers' transport system, which can no longer be allowed to continue in its present form, ought, as hitherto, to use the path to the west of the Falls and the cattle-path in the Achenal and be strictly limited to the delivery of provisions and waste removal (no tourists should be transported, except in certain specific urgent cases) and the service should operate only early in the morning or late at night.

Lastly, I should like to convey my sincere thanks to those who took part in the visit for the excellent way in which it was organised, for the frank exchange of views and for their hospitality. I trust that these discussions and the present report will help to conserve the beautiful scenery of the Krimml Waterfalls on a lasting basis and in places where tourist development can be permitted, that as far as possible the environment will be spared. The time must never come when it can be said of Krimml that tourism - by defacing the landscape - has killed tourism. On the contrary, the scenery of the Krimml Waterfalls should provide an example and starting point for the Hohe Tauern park shortly to be set up. In this way, Austria would contribute significantly towards saving the landscapes of Europe which are genuine pearls and threatened today as never before.

### Proposal

My suggestion is that, on the basis of the present report, the Council of Europe should renew the European Diploma for the Krimml Waterfalls in 1972. It should be stressed that the partial suggestions given in para. (4) of the Conclusions must be complied with between now and the next renewal of the Diploma in 1977.

Bern, 8 November 1971.

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