

## Snow guns galore for skiing regions

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## Milestone for the Alpine Convention

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## The smog-bound Alps

Severe air pollution is currently affecting several alpine regions, with urban areas and heavily frequented transit routes particularly badly hit. Last weekend a number of cities and regions in northern Italy were forced to impose traffic bans to protect public health, with traffic completely halted in Milan, Bergamo, Brescia, Como, Pavia.....

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## Snow guns galore for skiing regions

(10.01.03) The Christmas and New Year skiing holidays are now over. For several days the issue of artificial and natural snow made all the headlines, and snow-gun sales figures indicate there's been a run on this high-tech equipment. In the early 90s Switzerland's National Research Programme NFP 31 on the climate and tourism had shown that by 2050 only 63% of skiing areas would be able to guarantee snow, compared with 85% at present, a finding that applies likewise to Austria and Bavaria. A current study by Graz University/A shows that by 2050 no less than half the ski resorts in Austria will have to contend with a dearth of snow. One main reason is the comparatively low altitude.

After a good start to the 2002/2003 skiing season warmer weather conditions between Christmas and New Year meant that it was no longer possible to create artificial snow. The cost of installing and maintaining snow guns will certainly weigh heavily in the accounts of small cable-car companies in medium-altitude mountain regions in particular. Absurdly the run on snow guns has become a vicious circle. The argument goes that artificial snow-making installations have to be installed because all our neighbours at the international level are doing it. Meanwhile public-sector funding is slowly drying up. In response there are more and more calls in France demanding that the production of artificial snow be declared a "public service".

According to figures released by the French Institute for Mountain Tourism (*Service d'études et d'aménagement touristique de la montagne*, SEATM), French skiing regions invested EUR 46 m in artificial snow production in 2002, 24% up on the previous year. In addition EUR 25 m was spent setting up water storage basins and slope levelling. The SEATM has forecast that the total surface area requiring artificial snow over the next ten years is set to triple. Sources: <http://www.tourisme.gouv.fr/pdf/bilaninvestissements2001.pdf> (fr), Le Monde 21.12.02

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During the United Nations International Year of Freshwater 2003 all alpMedia contributions on this subject will bear the official logo.



## Milestone for the Alpine Convention

(19.12.02) The Alpine Convention's nine Implementing Protocols have been in force in Germany, Liechtenstein and Austria since 18 December. As a set of agreements under international law they provide a framework for sustainable development in the Alps in such areas as regional planning and sustainable development, the protection of nature and landscape conservation, mountain farming, mountain forests, tourism, soil conservation, energy, traffic, and dispute settlement.

For the very first time the Alpine Convention and its Protocols provide an integrated concept for preservation and sustainable development in a large European region. For the Alps and its inhabitants they afford an opportunity for development based on the principles of Agenda 21 and sustainability.

Bavaria's *Bund Naturschutz* and CIPRA Germany have called on politicians to proceed with implementation: those contracting parties who have yet to ratify the Protocols should do so immediately. Alpine countries need to push ahead with work on a Population and Culture Protocol. In keeping with the contents and statements set out in the Protocols, technical planning and legislation need to be co-ordinated at all levels. With large sections of the population and political circles still inadequately informed about the Alpine Convention a great deal of ground still has to be made up in public relations work.

NGOs in Carinthia/A are also advocating a rapid implementation with the "Carinthian Declaration on the Alpine Convention". Sources: *Bund Naturschutz*, CIPRA Germany 11.12.2002, Carinthia Climate Alliance 17.12.2002

## France: Proof of provenance for the forests of the Chartreuse

(16.01.03) In future timber from the forests of the Chartreuse Massif is to bear the designation of origin *AOC Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (protected designation of origin). Private and public-sector players have resolved to make the appropriate application to the National Institute for Designations of Origin. It is the first time such an application has been made for timber in France.

It comes in the wake of close co-operation between the timber industry, local and regional authorities, and those in charge of the Chartreuse Nature Park. The Chartreuse is well suited for such a move, for several reasons: it covers a well delimited area, the timber industry is a very dynamic sector, and forests are a characteristic of the area's landscape. These factors mean that the players involved identify strongly with the forest landscape. A designation of origin would lend added value to the harvested timber to be marketed and to the handicraft products manufactured from it, and the timber's provenance would be more easily traceable.

The Chartreuse Nature Park between Chambéry and Grenoble encompasses 52 communities and covers an area of 69,000 hectares, almost 40,000 hectares of which are forested. 14 sawmills process more than 34,000 m<sup>3</sup> of essentially coniferous wood a year. Source: *Le Monde*, 14.01.03, Information: <http://www.parcs-naturels-regionaux.tm.fr/lesparcs/charb.html> (fr), <http://www.aoc-igp.ch> (de/fr)

## Graz, European Capital of Culture 2003

(16.01.03) The programme of the European Capital of Culture Graz/A 2003 officially got under way on 11 January under the motto "Graz flies!". The capital of the federal province of Styria is the first Austrian city to bear the title of European Capital of Culture. A comprehensive cultural programme featuring more than 100 projects and some 1,000 events including plays and concerts is to be scheduled throughout the year.

An artificial island has been created in the River Mur, with a café, children's play zone and amphitheatre attracting visitors. New buildings include a concert hall, a house of literature and a museum. Other buildings and squares are being renovated and redesigned as part of the overall concept.

Graz expects its status as "European Capital of Culture" to boost developments. The tourist industry in particular is anticipating an upswing during the "year of culture". Overnight stays for example are to rise by 15% to around 700,000. A question mark remains, however, over what happens with the Island in the Mur in the event of another "flood of the century".

Sources and information:

<http://www.spiegel.de/reise/metropolen/0,1518,229059,00.html> (de), <http://www.graz03.at> (de/en)

The Island in the Mur



© E. Klammeringer

## The smog-bound Alps

(23.01.03) Severe air pollution is currently affecting several alpine regions, with urban areas and heavily frequented transit routes particularly badly hit. Last weekend a number of cities and regions in northern Italy were forced to impose traffic bans to protect public health, with traffic completely halted in Milan, Bergamo, Brescia, Como, Pavia and Varese, among others. During the days that followed, the inhabitants of these regions were again asked to leave their cars at home. The Environmental Agency for the Province of South Tyrol also raised the alarm. As a result the provincial government called upon the population of Bolzano, Bressanone and Merano to refrain from using their cars and to switch to public transport.

A number of contributing factors is currently aggravating the pollution: an increase in traffic after the Christmas holidays, calm weather, and a dominant inversion pattern in the weather. Rising high pressure is expected over the next few days, which means the air quality will remain precarious. A study by Ökoscience has demonstrated and quantified the relation between air pollution in alpine valleys and HGV traffic. Sources: Press Office of the Province of South Tyrol 16.01.03, Die Südschweiz 20.01.03, study: <http://www.alpeninitiative.ch/d/fa-b0-d.html> (de)

Smog situation in the mountains



© Bernhard Mühr, Karlsruher Wolkenatlas  
<http://www.wolkenatlas.de> (de)

## The "Living Rhine": Getting to know the alpine stretch of the Rhine

(23.01.03) Five environmental organisations from three countries have seized the occasion of the UN's International Year of Freshwater 2003 to promote the alpine stretch of the Rhine with the project "Living Rhine". Its aim is to heighten awareness of the Rhine's alpine course as a habitat, a life line and as a link between cultures and countries along the Rhine valley.

A Web site and a busy calendar of events will provide an opportunity to find out more about the development of the alpine stretch of the Rhine, and to actively experience it. From 23 to 27 June for instance a hike is being organised from Chur/CH to Bregenz/A so participants can experience life on the Rhine first-hand. Other focal points during the excursions, nature experience days and children's camps include the fauna, flora and hydraulic engineering.

The project organisers WWF Grisons/St. Gallen/Appenzell (CH), the Pro Natura St. Gallen/Appenzell (CH), the Liechtenstein Association for Environmental Protection, and the Nature Conservation Alliance Vorarlberg/A hope to draw the public's attention to the need for reinstatement and a return to near-natural conditions. These measures are currently being carried out by the Alpine Rhine development concept. For more information visit <http://www.lebendigerrhein.org> (de)



## Conference participants' call for nature conservation to be included in European Constitution

(19.12.02) The international "Natura 2000" conference held on 12 December ended with an appeal to the European Convention to include nature conservation and bio-diversity as fundamental elements in a future European Constitution. The conference, attended by more than 650 participants from the EU and the acceding countries, was organised by the Green Faction in the European Parliament in Brussels to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the EU Directive. EU states were called upon to fully implement the Habitat Directive – the only European instrument for the protection of flora, fauna and habitats. Attendees issued a manifesto which called for experience to be passed on to acceding countries, for adequate networking corridors to be set up between protected areas and buffer zones, and an independent "European Help Desk" on Natura 2000. Source and information: <http://greens-efa.org> (fr/en)

## Chestnut plantations in southern Alps to help promote sustainable development

(19.12.02) The current issue of *Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen* features Oliver Bender's article on revitalisation of chestnut plantations in the southern Alps. In the course of the year the feature is to focus on four other alpine regions where stands of sweet chestnut play a significant role in the cultural landscape and the economy: Styria/A, Slovenia, central Switzerland and the French Alps.

Although much of the traditional plantations were abandoned in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the past 10 to 15 years have seen a resurgence in stand conservation and replacement, in marketing strategies, landscape preservation and the portrayal of their cultural and historical significance (chestnut festivals). As chestnut plantations are particularly widespread in the southern Alps, this is seen as an opportunity to revitalise chestnut plantations as a sustainable development. Article: <http://land.heim.at/waldviertel/240203/publik.htm> (de)

Chestnut trees in Grisons/CH



© Oliver Bender



## Miscellaneous

### (10.01.03) **Concrete dams: voluntary demolition**

In Oregon/USA the Portland General Electric Company has pledged to demolish two concrete dams over the next five years, even though they are still used to generate electricity. There are approx. 70,000 such dams in the US. Around 250 smaller structures, used mainly for flood control, have been demolished in the past three years. Environmentalists are hoping that this move is part of a general trend towards demolition, citing the disruption which dams cause to natural cycles such as fish migration, and the sludge deposits. As the demolition of larger dams represents new ground for all the players involved, it is not yet possible to say what the repercussions on nature will be. Source: NZZ, 29.12.02



### (10.01.03) **Architectural tours for tourists in French skiing regions**

This season tourists in the main French skiing regions in the Savoie will have an opportunity for the first time to go on guided tours to find out about the resorts' architecture. The tours are being organised by members of the association for international cultural activities in mountain regions (*Fondation pour l'action culturelle internationale en montagne*, FACIM). On walks through ski resorts such as Les Arcs and Trois Vallées tourists will be able to gain a better understanding of the resorts' origins and developments. The tour guides will point out concepts such as uninterrupted views of the mountain scenery from all apartments or the integration of the buildings in the surrounding landscape. Source and information: <http://www.savoie-patrimoine.com> (fr)

### (10.01.03) **Plans for an energy-saving residential area in Flerden, Switzerland**

The community of Flerden in Grisons/CH is planning to build an energy-saving residential area for houses with low energy consumption. The appropriate resolution has already been unanimously adopted by the community meeting, and endowed with a planning subsidy of CHF 20,000.-. Low or zero-energy houses are to be built in the allocated area. In conformity with the project an energy-saving trail with information on energy-conscious building is to be set up between the existing village and the energy-saving residential area. The Flerden community hopes the idea will attract new residents to the village, and its chairman expects the number of residents to increase from 170 to 200 as a result of the project.

Source: Die Südostschweiz, 21.12.02

### (16.01.03) **Swiss glaciers still shrinking**

Initial results of measurements conducted by the Glaciological Commission of the Swiss Academy of Natural Science SANW 2001/02 show that the volume of Switzerland's glaciers is still diminishing. Of the 64 glaciers already evaluated, 58 had receded while only two had advanced, with four remaining unchanged. The measurement network covers 121 glaciers.

Source: [http://www.sanw.ch/root/presse/pk03/030110\\_d.pdf](http://www.sanw.ch/root/presse/pk03/030110_d.pdf) (de)



### (16.01.03) **Smog: partial traffic ban in Turin**

Between 15 January and 27 March a partial traffic ban has been imposed in the Turin/I metropolitan area on Wednesdays and Thursdays. It is in force between 7.30 a.m. and 7 p.m. on odd-numbered days for vehicles whose number plate ends in an odd number (last digit), and on even-numbered days for vehicles with plates ending in an even number. Cars not equipped with catalytic converters or running on Premium fuel are banned on both days.

Certain exceptions are in place for transports of urgent goods, subject to the relevant permits. Entirely excluded from the alternating traffic ban are public service vehicles such as municipal buses, ambulances, police cars, fire fighting appliances, etc. Also not affected by the ban are vehicles belonging to car-sharing companies, and those used by at least three people as part of a car pool. Alarming levels of air pollutants are regularly measured in Turin in the months of January, February and March.

Source: <http://www.provincia.torino.it/speciali/traffico> (it/fr/en)

### (23.01.03) **Court appearance for transit opponents in France**

Bruno Rebelle, head of Greenpeace France, and Eric Lanoé, president of the environmental organisation *Réagir*, appeared in court in Albertville/F on Monday, 20 January. They are charged with taking part, along with some 1,000 other demonstrators from different countries, in a transit blockade of the Maurienne motorway in October 2001. The environmentalists took part in the blockade as private individuals. Judgement is to be pronounced on 10 February. In July 2002 the European Court had dismissed a charge brought by a German haulage company following the blockades on the Brenner motorway on the grounds that the fundamental right of assembly took precedence over the free movement of goods.

Source: Greenpeace France [http://www.greenpeace.org/france\\_fr](http://www.greenpeace.org/france_fr) (fr) 20.01.03