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France ratifies all Alpine Convention protocols

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Snowcats and man-made snow as a threat to plant diversity

The number of plant species growing on mountain slopes used for ski trails in Switzerland is eleven percent lower than on adjoining sites. [more on page 3](#)

Alpine transit exchange – a feasible, efficient and cost-effective solution

(02.06.2005) An Alpine transit exchange is seen as a viable option for promoting a shift from road to rail for transalpine heavy goods vehicle traffic. A report commissioned by the Swiss Ministry of Transport has confirmed the technical feasibility and economic acceptability of such a solution. It is now up to the Swiss government to take the political decision as to whether a transit exchange should be established and if so in what form.

The proposed Alpine transit exchange would work on the principle of limiting the number of transalpine lorry journeys where a system of individual transit rights that could be traded on an Internet-based exchange. The idea was put forward by the Swiss environmental group Alpen-Initiative, who see trading in transit rights as an intelligent instrument for reducing the volume of goods transported by road over the Alps. The independent report confirms this assumption.

In their work, the experts studied two systems, which are both considered practicable. The first employs a slot management model, which is a basic reservation system in which carriers acquire transit rights for a certain time window or slot. This system does not support the goal of a modal shift but simply helps avoid congestion resulting from an excessive number of HGVs on the main Alpine corridors at any one time. The cap-and-trade model, on the other hand, corresponds to the idea of an Alpine transit exchange as proposed by the Alpen-Initiative organisation, with a limited number of transit rights to be auctioned and then traded freely among carriers. That would permit the desired shift from road to rail to be targeted with maximum precision. In the case of the cap-and-trade model in particular, the authors of the report recommend that the system be introduced as a concerted action involving Switzerland's neighbouring countries in the Alps so as not to generate detour traffic.

At the present time Switzerland still has a long way to go in achieving its modal shift target, namely a reduction in the number of HGVs crossing the Alps to 650,000 by 2009, which is half the figure for 2003. According to the Swiss Ministry of Transport, the idea of a transit exchange is to be further pursued at the national and international level.

Sources, infos and the report for downloading: <http://www.verkehr-schweiz.ch/dokumentation/medienmitteilungen/artikel/20050519/01769/?lang=de> (de), <http://www.alpeninitiative.ch/d/Aktuell.asp> (de)

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France ratifies all Alpine Convention protocols

(19.05.2005) Following the decision taken by the Chamber of Deputies on 10 March, the French Senate approved ratification of the remaining protocols to the Alpine Convention in a unanimous vote with just one abstention on 12 May. France had already ratified the Alpine Convention protocols on Mountain Agriculture and the Settlement of Disputes on 15 November 2003. The decisions taken in the two chambers of the French parliament clear the way for the French government to proceed with ratification of the protocols on Nature Conservation and Landscape Management, Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development, the Mountain Forest, Soil Protection, Tourism, Energy and Transport.

This means that more than half of the signatory states of the Alpine Convention have ratified all the protocols completed to date, namely Liechtenstein, Germany, Austria, Slovenia and now France. Monaco has ratified five of the nine protocols. Switzerland, Italy and the European Union have not yet ratified any of them.

Source: CIPRA-International, infos: http://www.cipra.org/d/alpenkonvention/offizielle_texte/uebersicht_stand_protokolle.htm (de/fr/it/sl)

Research into environmental impacts along the main Alpine traffic arteries

(04.05.2005) This spring saw the launch of ALPNAP, a new project in the framework of the EU's Interreg IIIB Alpine Space Programme. Eleven research institutes, universities and public institutions in Austria, France, Germany and Italy are collaborating on a programme to monitor and reduce noise and air pollution caused by vehicles using the main Alpine traffic routes and in the process to create a pan-Alpine network of experts in the fields of mountain meteorology, air pollution, noise and the impacts on public health.

Work within the project is concentrated on two main traffic axes, namely the Fréjus route between Turin/I and Chambéry/F in the Western Alps and the Brenner corridor between Rosenheim/D and Verona/I in the Eastern Alps. New measuring and simulation models will be tested along those routes to demonstrate their applicability to questions of air quality, noise and the impacts on public health. The main objective of the project is to establish a reliable and internationally harmonised tool in support of political debate and decision-making by policymakers and the regional authorities. The project has a total funding requirement of almost two million euros and will run for three years.

Source and infos: <http://www.alpnep.org> (de/fr/it/en)

Conference to mark the 70th anniversary of Passo Stelvio National Park

(21.04.2005) This year marks the seventieth anniversary of Passo Stelvio National Park in Italy. To celebrate the occasion the management of the National Park is organising a big weekend event with three scientific conferences on 8-11 September 2005. The first will address questions of biodiversity in connection with ongoing changes in mountain areas, eco-processes and human impacts. The second conference will focus on the protection and management of wildlife in protected areas with special reference to the red deer. The subject of the third conference will be the roots, values, goals and problems of protected areas. The conference languages will be English, German and Italian.

The three conferences will be followed by a general assembly with a festive note to be attended by representatives of the regional and local authorities in addition to the representatives of the National Park. On Sunday the new park gate at Rabbi/I will be officially opened, and visitors will be able to join two guided tours – one with a focus on the cultural assets of the National Park and the other to an area of particularly diverse flora and fauna.

Infos and registration: <http://www.stelviopark.it/PNS70/Eng/Default.htm> (en)

The mountain road over Passo Stelvio was built 180 years ago.



© <http://www.stelviopark.it>

Ski area for the Himalayas

(21.04.2005) The highest ski slopes in the northern hemisphere are shortly to be built in Gulmarg on the slopes of Mount Afarwat in the Indian part of Kashmir. With a budget of 2.5 million euros, a French company is planning to build ski lifts and a 2.5-kilometre-long ski run at an altitude of over 4500 meters above sea-level. Gulmarg's hotel capacity has already been increased through the addition of 500 new rooms to accommodate the expected influx of tourists from abroad. A one-day ski pass in Gulmarg will cost less than five euros. How many winter sport holidaymakers will want to travel 8000 kilometres to escape the impacts of climate change and a lack of snow in ski areas in the Alps, however, remains to be seen. Experts are concerned that visitors unused to such high altitudes could have physical problems.

Source: La Repubblica, 01.04.2005

Snowcats and man-made snow as a threat to plant diversity

(04.05.2005) The number of plant species growing on mountain slopes used for ski trails in Switzerland is eleven percent lower than on adjoining sites. The reduction is especially striking in the case of woody and early flowering plants. That is the result of a field study into the vegetation cover at twelve ski areas in the Swiss Cantons of Grisons and Valais conducted by scientists of the Swiss Institute of Snow and Avalanche Research in Davos/CH and the Universities of Zurich/CH and Potsdam/D. The investigations show that, in spite of the revegetation measures taken, many slopes built thirty years ago – especially at high altitudes above the timber line – have still not completely recovered. Groomed ski slopes today constitute almost one percent of the total area of the Swiss Alps.

The use of artificial snow also impacts the flora. The drop in the numbers of early-flowering plants and the increase in species with a high nutrient uptake are due to the later snowmelt on the ski trails and changes in the chemical composition of the snow. In the context of climate change, researchers are concerned that ski areas will be tempted to build ski runs at increasingly higher altitudes and to make more and more use of snowmaking systems. Their conclusion is that areas of great ecological value should not be employed for such purposes and no new ski trails should be permitted.

Bibliography: "Effects of ski piste preparation on alpine vegetation" in: Journal of Applied Ecology, vol. 42, April 2005, p. 306

Artificial snow melts more slowly than natural snow.



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Dolomites of Peace – debating peace today at yesterday's scenes of war

(02.06.2005) "Dolomites of Peace" is the name of a series of nine events devoted to the subject of peace to be run by writers, philosophers, actors, church representatives and experts between 1 July and 24 August. The participants will include the author Alessandro Baricco, the head of UNICEF Italy Roberto Salvan, and Ali Mohamed Gedi, Prime Minister of Somalia.

"Dolomites of Peace" can be expected to generate a high standard of debate on subjects of concern in the world today such as poverty, hunger, health, the environment, education, and peaceful coexistence between different peoples, cultures and creeds. The events will be held along the Peace Trail – a special attraction of the Trentino in the form of a path over 300 kilometres long leading through the Dolomites from the Marmolada to Passo Stelvio and marking the front in the First World War. The meetings will be held in a simple setting in the open air and will all start at 2 p.m. In spite of the Great War backdrop – complete with fortifications, trenches and fortresses – the talks will focus not on the past but on the problems of today and visions for the future.

Time and place: http://www.trentino.to/home/cartella_stampe/lartedellavacanza/dolomiti.pdf (it)

Infos: <http://www.trentino.to/home/themes.html?area=themes&lang=de> (de)

New book: the good alpine air

(21.04.2005) A new publication in the series "Revue de géographie alpine/journal of alpine research" is devoted to the subject of the air in the Alps. The mountain air has played a major role in the history of the Alps since the end of the 18th century. The book, which is in English and French, comprises six scientific articles on the medical, meteorological and tourism aspects of the mountain air. One of the authors also considers the architectural impacts of "healthy mountain air" in an analysis of the design of Swiss sanatoriums built between 1880 and 1914. In total, the book addresses the historical debate on the role of the mountain air in the Alps but without neglecting the present and the future.

Bibliography: La revue de géographie alpine/Journal of alpine research, vol. 93, no. 1, March 2005, Le bon air des Alpes/The good alpine air, Grenoble, ISSN 0035-1121; 126 pages. 18.30 euros.

Fewer glaciers, more earthquakes?

(02.06.2005) According to the results of research carried out by the Universities of Münster/D and Berne/CH, the advance and retreat of glaciers and lakes can trigger earthquakes. The research teams studied changes to the glaciated area during the last Ice Age and related the results to palaeo-seismological data. They found that increases and decreases in the loads acting on the Earth's crust can encourage or delay the occurrence of earthquakes.

The research also shows that increased seismic activity develops some one thousand years after the unloading effect on the Earth's crust and can continue for about 10 000 years. This is particularly evident in the case of the Wasatch Fault in the USA. There the crust of the Earth was covered by huge saline lakes and glaciers at the height of the last great Ice Age 20 000 years ago. According to the authors of the report, the disappearance of the lakes and glacial retreat explain the rise in seismic activity in that region.

Infos and study: <http://www.geo.unibe.ch/medien/erdbebenhaeufigkeit/pra050502erdbebenhaeufigk.pdf> (de); Hetzel, R., Hampel, A. (2005): "Slip rate variations on normal faults during glacial-interglacial changes in surface loads" in: Nature 435, Seiten 81-84

Miscellaneous

Breakthrough in the Lötschberg railway tunnel

(04.05.2005) 28 April saw the breakthrough right in the middle of the almost 3-kilometer-long Lötschberg rail tunnel under the Swiss Alps. The holing-through ceremony was attended by the Swiss Minister of the Environment Moritz Leuenberger. Lateral deviation between the northern and the southern sections of the tunnel was thirteen centimetres, while vertical deviation was just a few millimetres. The Lötschberg base tunnel, which is part of Switzerland's New Alpine Rail Axis (NEAT), is due to be commissioned in 2007.

Source and infos: <http://www.blsalptransit.ch> (de/en/fr/it)

2005 European Solar Prize announced

(02.06.2005) Eurosolar is again awarding the German and European Solar Prizes in 2005, with 31 August as the deadline for submissions. The awards are made in eight categories, including municipalities, corporations, associations and media with an interest in renewable energy as well as private individuals. The German Solar Prizes will be presented on 29 October 2005 in Mainz/D and the European Solar Prizes on 7 December 2005 in Berlin/D.

Infos and registration: www.eurosolar.org (de/en)

2005 Junior Ranger Camp – Protected areas and cross-border co-operation

(19.05.2005) From 31 July to 6 August the Gesäuse National Park in Austria is hosting an International Junior Ranger Camp. Junior Ranger is the name of a European pilot project co-ordinated by EUROPARC which is targeted at young people from the affiliated protected areas and the regions bordering on them. The objective of the project is to familiarise young people with the work and the importance of the protected areas in their respective countries so as to generate increased acceptance of such areas in the various regions. Participants from fifteen European countries can look forward to a wide range of activities, from observing life in the natural environment and practical biotope management work to participation in specific workshops.

Source and infos: <http://www.nationalpark.co.at/nationalpark/de/aktivitaeten-schule-junior-ranger.php?navid=78> (de)

Italy: mountain peak to be illuminated during the 2006 Winter Olympics

(04.05.2004) During the 2006 Winter Olympics the local authority for Valli Po, Bronda e Infernotto plans to illuminate the summit of Monviso, the mountain that is the hallmark of the Piedmont. The contract for the work has been awarded to S.O.L.E. s.r.l, which is owned by the Italian national utility ENEL. The scheme is expected to cost 10 000 euros in the trial phase and 74 500 euros during the actual Olympics. Opponents criticise the use of public funds for such a purpose, and the high energy consumption and resulting light pollution. In addition, Monviso is located in an area that merits special protection under EU legislation (area of Community importance), which means that an impact assessment must be performed for such a project. Source and protest letter to the local authority in English, German and Italian: <http://www.mountwild.it>

Agenda

International Congress: **Local endogenous development and urban regeneration of small alpine towns**; 09.-10.06.2005, Milan/I; conference language: English; organiser: AlpCity Project;

infos: <http://www.alpcity.it> (en)

International workshop in the framework of "Convention on Biological Diversity - Ad Hoc Open-Ended Working Group on Protected Areas": **A Vision for Biodiversity in the Alps and Carpathians**; 16.06.2005, Montecatini/I; working language: English; organiser: Mountain Partnership;

Infos: <http://www.biodiv.org/doc/meeting.aspx?mtg=PAWG-01> (en), Harald.Egerer@unvienna.org

Transnational Workshop: **Transport in the Alpine Space Area**; 16.-17.06.2005, Venice/I; conference language: English; organiser: Interreg IIIB Alpine Space Programme, Italian Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, Regione Veneto;

Infos: <http://www.alpinespace.org/view+M5292673710c.html> (en)

Symposium on Mountain Community Development: **Planning for Tourism, Amenity Migration & Resorts**; 28.-30.06.2005, Smithers/Canada; conference language: English; organiser: School of Environmental Planning at the University of Northern British Columbia;

Infos: www.res.unbc.ca/smitherssymposium2005 (en)

Oh!...

...Maybe Venice, Yellowstone National Park and Austrian charm will soon have something in common. The first two are already listed by UNESCO as world heritage sites, and Austria's tourism chiefs would like to see the latter added to the list. The Chairman of Tourism and Leisure at the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, Johann Schenner, says: "In order to preserve this unique cultural asset, the charm of the people in Austria's hospitality trade should be classified as part of the world's cultural heritage." Austrian charm is obviously a threatened species!

Source:

http://portal.wko.at/dst_SZ_Details.asp?SNID=339297 (de)