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The ban will be in force from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. in the winter half-year, i.e. from 1 October to 31 March and applies to a 35-kilometer long section of the Inn Valley motorway between Wörgl and Hall in the Austrian Tyrol.

The Tyrolean regional government has decided to introduce this measure in order to reduce the level of air-borne pollutants in the Inn Valley. The monitoring points along the Brenner route show that NOx levels are in general higher at night than during the day even though night-time traffic volumes are only one tenth of the day-time totals. As temperatures drop at night the air forms stable layers at ground level, which trap the pollutants (causing up to six times higher pollutant immissions than during the day). This is also the reason why NOx levels are very high in winter compared with the rest of the year in spite of the lower traffic volumes. CIPRA drew attention to this fact two years ago (CIPRA Information no. 57).

Nor will lorries be able to take an alternative route in the Inn Valley as the other roads are already subject to a night-time ban on heavy goods traffic. Bavaria's economics minister Otto Wiesheu has voiced fierce criticism of the Tyrolean decision and called on EU transport commissioner Loyola de Palacio to scrutinise the regulation. The Tyrolean authorities are confident, however, that the measure is in compliance with EU legislation, all the more so as it is based on an EU Directive. That explains the interest shown by other regions in the “pilot project” in the Tyrol.

It was also announced last week that Italy is determined to go ahead with the construction of the Brenner basis rail tunnel. According to the Italian report, the finances have been earmarked and the actual work will begin in the second half of 2005. Following a ten-year construction period, the tunnel would be commissioned in 2015. Environmental organisations have voiced concern over a project that would have negative impacts on the environment and the quality of life for the local population for such a long period, quite apart from the fact that the volume of traffic is expected to increase in the meantime at a rate of 5% per year.

Sources: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 31.8.02, Alto Adige, 29.8.02.

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Drinking water shortage as a result of glacial retreat

(05.09.02) The retreat of the glaciers in the high mountains has consequences for the water supply in mountain regions – an aspect that has previously attracted little attention but has now been studied by a research team at the Bavarian Academy of Sciences. They have investigated the situation on the Vernagtferner in the Ötztal Valley/A. For 2001 alone, they recorded a 4 metre reduction in the magnitude of the ice at the lower levels of the glacier. These developments will have an impact on freshwater resources; in Switzerland, for example, one fifth of total water resources is stored in the glacial ice.

The névé layers on the glacier surface are also shrinking. That limits the ability of the glaciers to reflect the sunlight and also to absorb the summer rains in the porous top layer. The result is increased run-off.

In other mountain regions of the world, e.g. in Central Asia, the research community is predicting even more dramatic impacts of glacial retreat on water supplies.

Information: Glaciology Commission at the Bavarian Academy of Sciences <http://www.glaziologie.de> (de), Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 01.09.02

Aerial photographs to facilitate alpine research

(29.08.02) The European Union has approved HABITALP as a pan-alpine research project involving twelve major protected areas, with the Hohe Tauern National Park/A as project leader.

The objective of the project is to employ orthophotos (= rectified aerial photograph images) as a source of standardised information for the improved study of major living spaces like the Alps. Such developments as climate change, which can only be studied on the basis of precise long-term investigations, are among the research fields that will benefit from the HABITALP project.

The European Union is supporting the project with funds from the INTERREG IIIB programme.

Source: Press release of the Hohe Tauern National Park, further information: kristina.bauch@salzburg.gv.at

Aerial photograph of the Pasterze Glacier/A



© Hohe Tauern National Park

Alpine refuges and the environment

(14.08.02) An international scientific symposium on mountain refuges in the Alps is to be held in Bergamo/I on 18 - 20 October. The focus of the event will be on the interrelationships between mountain huts and the environment. The debates will relate to aspects of refuge management and infrastructure, to such problems as water and power supply, waste disposal, the length of the season and the type of operation involved, and certification on the basis of environmental impacts, mountain rescue services, and warden training. The symposium is being organised by the Central Commission for Mountain Refuges at the Italian Alpine Club (CAI) and the CAI's Bergamo Section with the support of the Universities of Turin/I, Chambéry/F, Innsbruck/A and Bergamo/I. Source: <http://www.montagna.org> (it/en)

The Alpine Club of South Tyrol (AVS) is running a project targeted at environmental education and awareness-building among tourists and walkers in a number of mountain huts in South Tyrol. Among other things, the project involves setting up small libraries with the relevant literature and the creation of nature trails.

Source: AVS press release, 05.08.02

International Conference on Protected Areas of European Mountains

(29.08.02) The map of Europe includes a number of very different mountain regions, but one thing they all have in common is areas and organisations established for the protection, conservation and sustainable development of a region that is of great importance in terms of both culture and nature. The conference is targeted at people who work in the mountain regions of Europe and also other continents. The objective is to identify common interests in the conservation of protected areas and to promote collaboration between the individual protected areas in the mountain regions of Europe. One main item in the programme will be a presentation and discussion of the measures employed for the conservation of mountain regions. The conference will be held in Chambéry/F on 13 - 17 November. It is being organised jointly by the Alpine Network of Protected Areas (sylvia.unterreiner@alparc.org), the Montanea organisation (<http://www.montanea.org> fr/en) and the Chambéry local authority. Source and information: Alpine Network of Protected Areas <http://www.alparc.org> (de/en/fr/it/sl)

Deteriorating state of the forest in Europe

(05.09.02) Following a few years of improvement, the state of the forest in Europe declined significantly in 2001 according to a report recently presented by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the European Commission (EC). 22% of Europe's trees are classified as damaged or dead, and the share of healthy trees decreased from 34.2% in the previous year to 32.6%. Forest die-back involves natural factors like extremes of precipitation or infestation with pests, but air pollution also plays a decisive role. At most monitoring points the sulphur load had declined. Thanks to the higher degree of accuracy of the 2001 study, it was possible to assess tree exposure to individual noxious substances. In the case of lead, for example, the critical load, i.e. the level at which significant damage can occur, was exceeded at 91% of the monitoring points.

Three wild pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) - healthy, deteriorating and dead



© UNECE and EC

The study also shows that the diversity of the flora is lower on acid soils and that the acreage of acid soils is increasing with higher levels of acidity. Intensively utilised mixed forests with trees in different stages of development as are to be found in some mountain forest areas are often characterised by a high level of biodiversity.

In addition to the current state of the forest, the study also includes models for predicting future developments. At today's levels of nitrogen immissions, for example, the diversity of the flora will decline and the health of the trees will be compromised at half of the monitoring sites.

The study, which was conducted in the framework of a long-term European monitoring programme, covered 7000 sites in 39 countries. The report is available at <http://www.icp-forests.org/RepEx.htm> (en).

The Alps and global solidarity – new partnerships

(14.08.02) In collaboration with the Italian NGOs OMID, Onlus and Shuhada, the virtual Alpine communities of Discoveryalps are promoting a project entitled "Mountains of Peace – Mountains of War". The objective is to construct twenty wells in Afghanistan at a cost of 800 dollars each. Discoveryalps is raising the money with the help of various local fundraising schemes. Further information: <http://www.discoveryalps.it/special/montagnedipace/index.htm> (it)

The Swiss Canton of Valais has signed a twinning agreement with Bhutan in order to improve the level of mutual knowledge. In the framework of the project, about forty youngsters from the Himalayas and Switzerland will have an opportunity to spend a period on an internship in their respective partner regions.

Source: <http://www.mountains2002.org/events> (fr/en/span)

Ravers and Easy Riders descend on the Alps

(22.08.02) The quiet has returned to Colle della Maddalena (Province of Cuneo/I) on the French border. Following four days of techno-beat, Teknival 2002 – the biggest rave of the year – has finally come to an end. A horde of some 17,000 ravers responded to the refusal of the French Minister of Home Affairs to approve the event by descending at the last minute on Italian soil just 200 m from the border, actually blocking highway no. 21 from Cuneo/I to Barcelonnette/F. The whole area now requires a major clean-up. The total cost in terms of damage, including damage to the environment, has not yet been assessed. Source: La Stampa 17.08.02 and 19.08.02

For the sixth consecutive year, the biker community converged on a site near Laax/CH for their annual beano. In the course of the four days dedicated to Easy Rider nostalgia, Alpe Plaun was inundated by some 3000 bikers and an additional 1500 visitors from the whole of Europe. Source: Die Südostschweiz, 19.08.02

New online sources for sustainability research

(14.08.02) The Internet site <http://www.environmentalsustainability.Information> (en) offers a useful collection of links on the subject of sustainable development. The site can be searched by topic (e.g. air pollution, ecology, rivers) or by region. The offering also includes daily news items and occasional specials (currently the Johannesburg global summit). The project is being run by Ecological Enterprises Inc. and Forests.org Inc. with financial support from the European Commission.

CAA calls for speedy implementation of the Alpine Convention

(29.08.02) Club Arc Alpin (CAA), the international umbrella of the various Alpine Clubs, has called on the chair of the Alpine Convention to ensure that the protocols to the convention are implemented as quickly as possible. The CAA is focussing in particular on the transport protocol, rural development and a discussion on the future of winter sports.

Miscellaneous

ARGE ALP: 30 years of cross-border co-operation

(29.08.02) Thirty years ago, on 12 October 1972, the Working Community of Alpine Regions (ARGE ALP) was established in Mösern-Telfs in the Austrian Tyrol at the initiative of the then Governor of the Tyrol Eduard Wallnöfer as the first organisation dedicated to cross-border co-operation in the Alpine space. The ARGE ALP membership today comprises eleven länder, provinces, regions and cantons. To mark the anniversary, the Working Community is organizing a little celebration and a symposium to focus on the conditions available in the Alps for life and economic activity, to identify hazards and opportunities for the future, to develop perspectives for sustainable development and to direct policymaking in the right direction. There will be presentations and discussions with politicians, experts, spokespersons and committed local citizens. Source: <http://www.argealp.org> (de, it)

Interreg IIB Alpine Space funds for Via Alpina

(05.09.02) The European Union has agreed to provide Interreg IIB funding for the Via Alpina project, a network of five long-distance walks linking all the countries of the Alps, complete with an information offering on the natural and cultural heritage of the various regions. This EU funding covers half of the project contributions to be borne by France, Italy, Austria and Germany. The budgeted funds for Via Alpina up to the end of 2003 total EUR 2.4 million.

Source und further information: <http://www.via-alpina.com> (de/en/fr/it/sl).

Solidarity among mountain regions

(14.08.02) The products of two international conferences held in June 2002 have generated great interest, namely the Declaration of Huaraz/Peru and the Declaration of Adelboden/CH. In the Declaration of Huaraz, the governments of mountain regions are called upon to support the principles of the joint management of water resources for mountain ecosystems, and biological and cultural diversity, as well as a more balanced approach to production processes in mountain ecosystems. The key message in the Declaration of Adelboden is that mountain populations should have better access to the marketplace and to financial services and should receive fair compensation for goods and services with an environmental function.

Sources: <http://www.mountains2002.org/archive/news/huarezdec.html> (en), <http://www.sard-m2002.ch> (de/fr/en/span)

Matterhorn made of refuse as a sustainability message for young people

(14.08.02) The Swiss artist Silvan Baer has created a twelve-metre high sculpture of the Matterhorn from litter left on the mountain to draw attention to the importance of sustainable development in the Alps. The litter mountain has already been exhibited at various festivals and is to finish up at the Johannesburg global summit at the end of August. There is also an accompanying sticker promoting the relevant website at <http://www.does-it-matter-horn.ch> (de/fr/it/en), which is designed to make the subject of sustainability attractive to young people and the young at heart. For the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) and the Swiss Federal Office of Spatial Development, the website is an infotainment approach to building awareness and promoting appropriate action.

Source: SDC, 10.07.02 <http://194.230.65.134/dezaweb2/home.asp> (de/fr/it/en/span)

Mont Blanc: protesting heavy goods vehicles in transit

(22.08.02) Every Thursday afternoon in August, starting at 4.30 p.m. the Mont Blanc Protection Association is running an information stand on the main square in Courmayeur/l followed by a peaceful demonstration beginning at 6.30 p.m. For 5 October there are plans to hold a big demonstration against heavy lorry traffic in transit in the framework of a conference organised by the Initiative Transports Europe. Information: <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/difesa-montebianco> (it) Source: Osservatorio parchi e ambiente naturale, 14.08.2002.

Agenda

International Conference on The Analysis and Management of Forest and Rural Landscapes, 12 - 15 September 2002, Florence/I; topics (with examples from the Alps): the role of history, landscape dynamics and energy flows, ecology and landscape system monitoring, policy and management, landscape restoration;

Information: http://www.geolab.unifi.it/landscape_meeting (it/en)

International Conference on The Path to Nature's Wisdom: Ecological Dialogue Himalayas – Alps, 9 - 11 October 2002, Schloss Seggau, Styria/A (de, en), Information: <http://www.kalachakra-kultur.at/paths2.html> (de).

Conference entitled "Aufbruch in den Bergen" (New Departures in the Mountains) plus Year of Mountains Action Day, 5 and 6 October 2002, National Park Centre in Molln (Nationalpark Kalkalpen/A) and Hinterstoder/A; conference agenda: presentations on innovative projects for the eco-friendly and socially responsible development of mountain regions (e.g. solar village, marketing concept for environmental protection measures in the Sölk Valleys, germicidal drinking water plant), lectures, presentation of a concept for the conservation of mountain agriculture in Lower Austria, etc.); action day: stands, events, workshops, presentations, supporting programme.