



NATIONALPARK
Thayatal

*The Nationalpark
from A to Z*

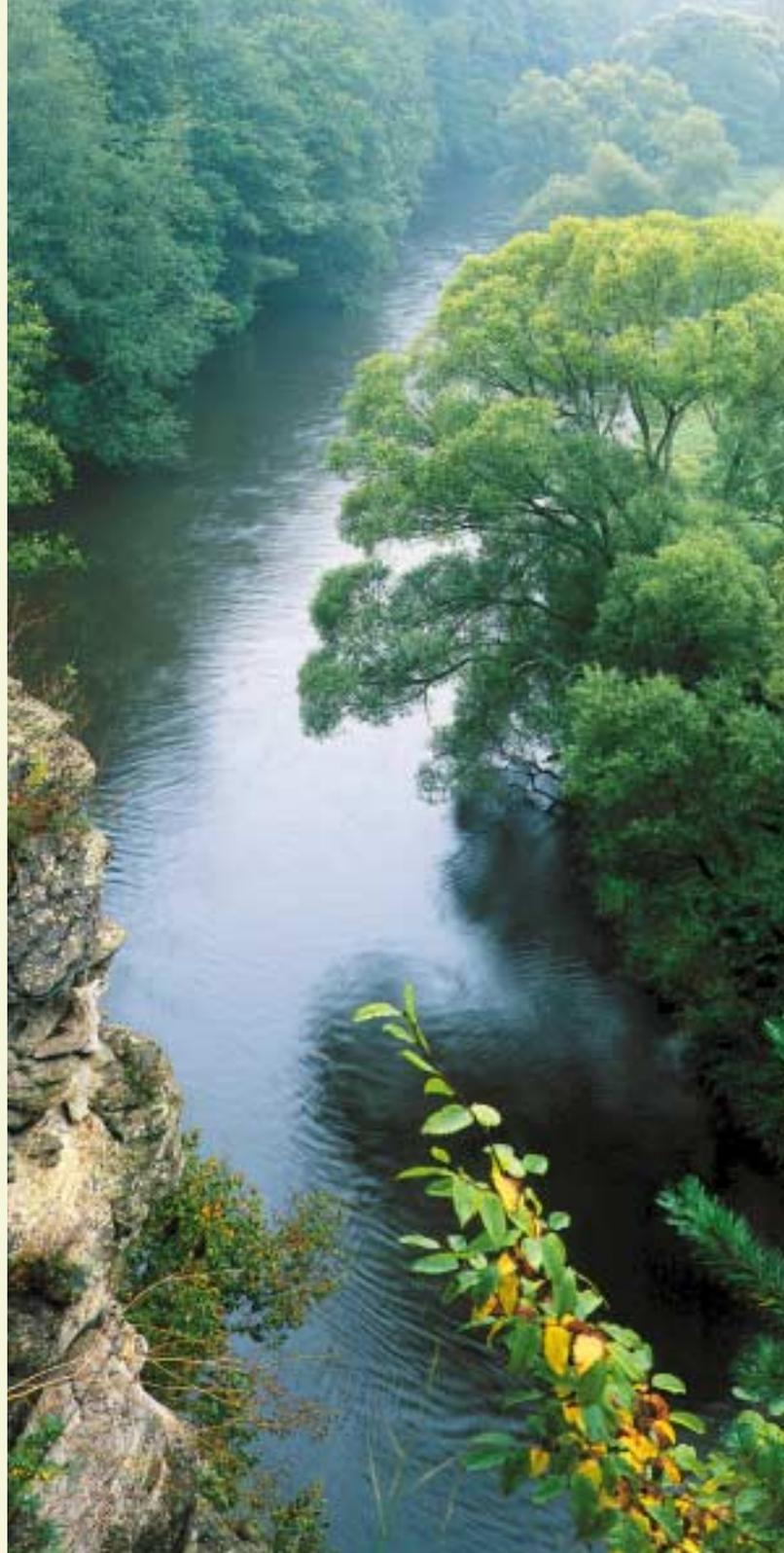


On the border between East and West, between the plain and the highland, a river created a world of its own. A world still intact, where nature may develop undisturbed. The National Park Thayatal.

The Thaya broke into the geological formations of the Waldviertel down to 150 metres. Because of the different hardness of the stones, characteristic meandering valleys originated which mark the Thayatal today. Along the river banks, there is a tight net of various habitats: meadows, forests, dry grassland and rocks provide room for numerous rare animals and plants such as the black stork, the green lizard, the praying mantis, the eagle owl, the burning bush or the variegated iris.

Its inaccessible situation and its bordering the Czech Republic widely spared the valley from human interference. Thus, one of the most beautiful European break-through valleys could be preserved in its naturalness. Besides the impressive natural landscapes, the area of the National Park is also fascinating with its ruins and castles and the stories woven around it.

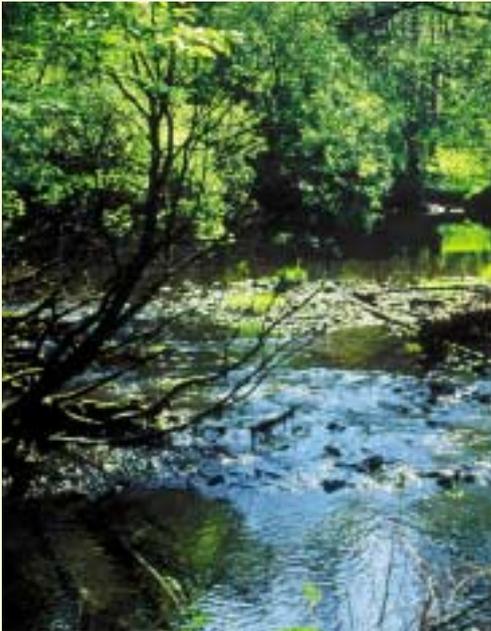
The National Park Thayatal is indeed a park of borders. It is the gate between the smooth, rounded hills of the Weinviertel and the rough, primal, mystically attractive Waldviertel. It is a part of the Retzer Land and the Znaimer Land regions. And it overcomes borders. As nature is equally precious and worth protecting on both sides of the Thaya.





Definition

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) defines national parks as natural areas designated to protect the ecological integrity of ecosystems for present and future generations, exclude exploitation inimical to the purposes of designation and provide a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities. All of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible.



In national parks, the commercial utilisation of natural goods must be avoided on a long-term basis. The law and the World Conservation Union only allow interference when it does not conflict with the main aim of protection of the area.



The general objectives of our National Park:

- ▶ protect and perpetuate the unique natural features of the area and promote the diversity and self-regulation;
- ▶ eliminate or reduce the negative effects of former and current human interference, in particular in the forests and on the Thaya;
- ▶ offer an opportunity to experience nature and relax;
- ▶ raise the quality of life of the inhabitants of the national park region and of the park visitors, and thus directly and indirectly improve the economic situation in the region;
- ▶ develop the knowledge of the interactions of natural cycles through research and verify the results of the measures taken through scientific observations;
- ▶ appear in public as A JOINT NATIONAL PARK in two countries in future.

Figures

The Austrian part of the National Park covers 1.330 ha, 1.260 ha are a nature zone, on 70 ha of nature zone with management permanent interventions for the protection of the ecosystem are permitted. The outer zone covers less than one hectare.

The Czech Národní Park Podyjí covers 6.260 ha, of which 2.220 ha are the core zone, 2.260 ha the conservation zone and 1.780 ha the outer zone.

On 25 km of river-length, the Thaya constitutes the common state border. However, the river-length differs a lot from the bee-line. The latter is only 10 km long.



The Národní Park Podyjí stretches between Vranov and Znojmo on a 45-km river-length. Above the town of Vranov lies a storage power station, the operation of which causes one of the main ecological problems in the Thayatal. During the daily flood peaks, the river flow increases from 1 m³/sec. to 30 - 40 m³/sec. A smaller storage lake above Znojmo is used as a drinking-water reserve for the 45.000 inhabitants of the town.

On the Austrian side, Hardegg is the only village directly inside the National Park. With its 80 inhabitants, Hardegg is the smallest town in Austria.



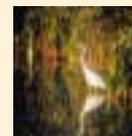
A national park of great diversity

The National Park Thayatal lies on distinctive climatic border. While from the East there is an influence of dry Pannonian climate, on the highlands of the Waldviertel predominates the wet Atlantic climate. This is why continental and central European flora and fauna mix in the National Park.

The magic of the Thayatal near Hardegg lies in the particularly large diversity of plants in a close area. Along the meandering river bands, the exposition changes constantly. This reflects in the plant cover.

On the warm and dry southern slopes oak and hornbeam forests dominate with staphylea, spindle and burning bush whereas the shady northern slopes are favoured by beech forests. There martagon lilies, mezereon or white helleborine also grow.

On shallow rocky areas, the forest clears and turns into a diverse dry grassland. The variegated iris, skullcap or pulsatilla make use of these arid spots. In both Thayatal National Parks almost 1.300 plant species could be registered so far. As a comparison: in the whole of Austria there are about 2.900 of them.



The same diversity applies to birds: in the Austrian part alone over 100 bird species were recorded, almost 80 of which breed in the Thayatal. And if the disturbing factors can be reduced further, the sea eagle, so far a winter guest only, may breed here again too.

What happened so far

The precursors of the National Park Thayatal were the nature reserves Thayatal I and Thayatal II, which were established in 1988 and 1991.

Since it had been possible to stop the construction of the Byci Skala power station in 1984, thanks to the efforts of the municipality of Hardegg and the citizen's initiative for the conservation of the Thayatal, nature protection reached a higher status in the Thayatal.

The setting-up of the Národní Park Podyjí in 1991, shortly after the fall of the "Iron Curtain", was another big step towards keeping the nature and landscape of the Thayatal intact. With the signature of the treaty between the Federal Government and the Province of Lower Austria in 1997, the National Park was agreed, with the regulation coming into force on 1st January 2000 it became a reality.

In the summer of 2001 experts from the IUCN asserted that the National Park Thayatal met the international criteria for national parks. The international designation took place on 18th August 2001.



Transborder co-operation

Until the fall of the "Iron Curtain" in 1989, the Thaya was the border between East and West. But nature and ecosystems do not recognise the limits set by man. The state border in the middle of the river does not separate natural habitats, it only divides states.

For an efficient nature protection, transborder co-operation is necessary. Already before the creation of the National Park Thayatal the Environment Ministers of both countries and the Head of the Province of Lower Austria signed a declaration of cross-border co-operation. This contract is the basis of the future common development of this precious natural area at the former strict border.

For important issues of common interest, there is a bilateral commission, which consists of representatives from the relevant ministries and nature protection departments, the national park administrations and the advisory committees.

Important transborder co-operation issues are

- ▶ co-ordination in the protected area management
- ▶ common rules for fishing and game regulation
- ▶ concerted offers for visitors
- ▶ efficient supervision and reduction of disturbance.

Because the National Park must become a common entity.

Management and management plans

The National Park administration must perform its tasks after providing a plan. This plan, called management plan in our business-orientated time, has two parts.

The 10-year management plan sets the long-term objectives and visions. This concept was elaborated jointly with the administration of the Czech Národní Park Podyjí. There are not many transborder protected areas, which elaborated in such a short time, if at all, a basis for a joint management plan.

The long-term objectives are turned into yearly management plans. These yearly plans must also be approved by the National Park advisory committee and they determine precisely the measures regarding natural habitat management, visitor guidance, information and the necessary infrastructure.



Zoning

The zoning of the National Park should help allocating measures clearly to nature protection or visitor facilities. Austria determined three zones in the National Park Thayatal:

- ▶ The nature zone, in which any economic intervention is forbidden on over 90% of the total surface in the long-term.
- ▶ The nature zone with management procedures, in which measures in conformity with nature protection may be applied in future on meadows and at the edge of woods, e.g. the mowing of meadows.
- ▶ The outer zone with buildings such as the historical site of the Kaja Ruin, in order to ensure the preservation of such objects.

With this large proportion of intervention-free nature zone the National Park Thayatal takes up a leading position at least in central Europe.

Visitors to the National Park have access on marked tracks. But not all areas are made equally accessible. Nature also needs places of rest.



Useful information:

► National Park Administrations

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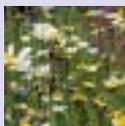
► Border-crossing Hardegg

From 15. 4 to 2. 11, between 8.00 and 20.00, open to pedestrians and cyclists who do not need a visa for A or CZ.

► Border-crossing Mitterretzbach

Open all year from 6.00 to 22.00.
Crossing of private cars for all EU citizens, as well as Czech and Slovak nationals. Also for pedestrians and cyclists who do not need a visa for A or CZ. No bus crossing!

Please do not forget to take a valid passport.



Hiking in the National Park

The National Park likes to present itself to its visitors from its nicest side. For this however there is one thing you need: time. A few quiet minutes of nature watching are a significant enrichment to your hike in the Thayatal.

A network of hiking trails will take you to the prettiest spots in the Thayatal both on the Austrian and on the Czech side. This system of trails will be extended over the next few years and adapted to the needs of nature and visitors. The trails were already partly rehabilitated and are constantly being kept in good condition.

As of 2001, the following trails are available:

- the Thayatalweg 1 / 1A
- the Einsiedlerweg 2
- the Hardegger Rundwanderweg 3 / 3A
- the Merkersdorfer Rundwanderweg 4

Over the Thaya bridge in Hardegg you may join the Czech trail network. For a more detailed description of the hiking trails, please see our hiking guide.

Cycling routes can be found solely in the Czech Národní Park Podyjí. Boat rides on the Thaya are prohibited in both national parks.

For nature's sake, please observe the National Park regulations!

Should you require a competent interpretation of the natural phenomena, then trained rangers will explain to you why the Thayatal is so precious that it deserves continuous protection. For more details, please see our visitor programme.



National Parks Austria

The National Parks Austria made it their business to ensure a lasting protection to selected representative areas in Austria, from the highest summit in Austria - the Großglockner - to the plains along the Hungarian border. This means to guarantee and promote the natural development and to deliberately reduce human utilisation. Thus, the next generations should inherit a piece of intact nature, of wilderness even.



The National Park Hohe Tauern stretches across the Provinces of Carinthia, Salzburg and Tyrol and with its 1.800 sqkm, it is the largest protected area in Central Europe. The wilderness of the high mountains with its glaciers, mountain lakes and numerous summits as well as its cultural landscape, maintained for centuries by mountain farmers, form a unique harmony. The highest mountain, the mightiest waterfall, the longest glacier: a National Park of superlatives.



The National Park Oberösterreichische Kalkalpen retains the largest unsettled woody mountains with the longest primal brook system of the Eastern Alps. The "Reichraminger Hintergebirge" and the "Sengengebirge" are the home of the capercaillie and the black grouse, two particularly endangered species.



The National Park Donau-Auen is often compared with the ecosystems of rain forests. Here the dynamics of the alluvial forest is still intact, the alternation of accumulation and erosion still effective. Water is omnipresent in this landscape. Not hidden behind dams, but free flowing.

The National Park Neusiedlersee-Seewinkel is a mosaic of diverse habitats, water surfaces, reedbelts, salt ponds and rare meadows. It is an invaluable stepping stone for the bird migration from Europe to Africa. The flight of the geese in autumn is one of the most terrific spectacles at this most western steppe lake in Europe. Together with the Hungarian National Park Fertő Hanság, the first Austrian transborder national park was founded here in 1993.



Nature deserves consideration and peace!

- ▶ Only walk on the marked tracks!
- ▶ No cycling or driving!
- ▶ Boating on the Thaya is prohibited!
- ▶ Dogs must be kept on a short lead!
- ▶ Please keep off the meadows!
- ▶ No camping or camp fires.
- ▶ Please take your trash back with you!
- ▶ It is forbidden to pick flowers or mushrooms.



Numerous rare and shy animals live in the National Park Thayatal! Only if you follow the rules will they get used to human presence.

INTER-NATIONAL PARK **Thayatal Podyjí**

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Photos: Ch. Übl, Nationalpark Thayatal, Government
of the Povince of Lower Austria
Design: kroiherr-spitzer-werbewerkstatt-retz
Printing: Hofer, Retz, 1st edition: Aug. 2001
Translation: C. McQuiston

Printed with the support of

