

Medal of Honour from the Republic of Austria for Mr. Christian Schuhböck

On the 21st of January 2009, Mr. Christian Schuhböck, Secretary General of Alliance For Nature, an organisation dedicated to the preservation and protection of heritage sites of natural and cultural interest was awarded a medal of honour for his services to the Republic of Austria with the resolution of the President of Austria at the Festival Hall of the government building. The basis of the President's decision was as follows:



Mr Christian Schuhböck's active involvement in the preservation of the Europe's natural and cultural heritage began already during his time as a young student, for the purpose of which he founded „Alliance For Nature“, an organisation of which he is Secretary General.

In 1988/89 Mr Schuhböck organised the „Save Dorfertal“ initiative, which was launched on the one hand to prevent the largest reservoir power station from being built in the Eastern Alps and on the other hand, to extend the Nationalpark Hohe Tauern to the province of Tyrol. He also earned his merits in the 80s and 90s during the campaign to prevent the erection of the Danube power plant at Hainburg and for the preservation of the Nationalpark Donau-Auen east of Vienna.



Since 1990, Mr Schuhböck, an ecologist by profession, has been engaged in the UNESCO-„Convention concerning the protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage“ and has made a substantial contribution to the membership of Austria to the World Heritage Convention in 1993. In the 90s for the first time in the history of nature conservation in Austria, he made reference to 'world heritage' rather than 'national park' as an instrument of environmental protection so as to protect a natural and cultural landscape from large-scale industrialisation. At the time, the construction of a 22 km base tunnel was being planned for the area of „Semmering-Rax-Schneeberg“, a major conservation area, which would replace the Semmering Railway. He ensured the project and the potentially harmful hydrological impact was given wide media coverage which resulted in a lawsuit and court proceedings against him. This did not deter him, however, and he continued his struggle against the controversial project.

In 1998 Mr Schuhböck succeeded in having the Semmering Railway and its surrounding fluvial landscape inscribed in the World Heritage Sites. The Semmering Railway is the first railway in the world to have been declared 'World Heritage of Mankind'. In 2000 the Wachau region was also declared a World Heritage Site. Having launched these two world heritage sites, he has securely placed them under the protection of the international community.

Mr Schuhböck has been involved in the protection of natural and cultural sites beyond the borders of Austria as well. In 2001, he was actively involved in the having the mountainous region around Aletsch glaciers including Jungfrau, Mönch and Eiger in the Berner Alps declared as World Natural Heritage Sites and in 2007 succeeded in having these extended to include the mountains of Blümlisalp and Wetterhorn.

With his initiatives Mr. Schuhböck has set a precedent. In 1999, the Indian Darjeeling-Himalaya-Railway was the second railway to be declared a World Heritage Site and in 2008 the Rhätische Railway in the Swiss cultural landscape of Albula/Bernina was declared the third railway to be declared a World Heritage Site. In 2002 Germany's fluvial and cultural landscape of the Upper Middle Rhein Valley was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List thanks to his involvement.

Alliance for Nature's office has received several congratulatory letters, including those from Austria's Minister for Environment DI Josef Pröll, from Governor of Lower Austria, Dr. Erwin Pröll, from the Darjeeling-Himalayan-Railway-Heritage-Foundation, Foundation for Landscape Conservation of Switzerland, United Citizen's Initiative of Schwarzatal – Region Semmering (Lower Austria), Citizen's Initiative „Grüner See – Natur“ (Tragöß/Styria), Citizen's Initiative Gruibert – Protect World Heritage (Weiden am See/Burgenland), Union of Friends of Grinzing and the Austrian Society for the Protection of Cultural Assets.