Well this is embarrassing

26 Apr 2012 by Jancis Robinson

***27 Apr** - See latest news from Sarah Washington below.*

You may remember that the likes of Erni Loosen, Katharina Prüm, Hugh Johnson and Stuart Pigott, organiser Sarah Washington and I did our best to mount a campaign against the building of a hideous and unnecessary massive high road bridge over the Mosel near Ürzig right through wine country. All seemed lost when the local politicians refused to reconsider the project which had long ago been voted upon (see Greens wilt).

You may also remember how simplistic the planned bridge looked (see above left). Well, to our delight, it looks as though those plans were just too simplistic to work. The indefatigable Sarah Washington sent this report on Tuesday:

'Rumours are building up thick and fast into a chaotic picture of management and planning of the bridge building, and a forced building freeze seems to be taking place! Workers are certainly leaving, and are extremely pissed off with the situation. Some offer a very interesting analysis: Planning was done on a computer but does not fit reality, only the first pillar had complete plans, there are not enough pillars to do the job properly. Some predict the cock-up will take a year to sort out. The construction company Porr is privately blaming the RLP government.

'It's turning into quite an amazing story. And it ties in brilliantly with the presentation from Feuerbach at the Kloster Machern event here on Wednesday - the expert geologist who will speak publicly for the first time about the problems of the bridge site and the lack of correct planning. (He previously stated it was the worst-planned construction he had ever come across.)'

This morning there were a number of reports in the German media such as here and here about the lack of proper planning for this highly controversial project.

This aerial image of the lovely local landscape was taken by paraglider Philipp Pertermann, and has the bridge and motorway route superimposed on it.

Let us hope that this setback may provide eternal pause to this madcap scheme.

Sarah Washington in Germany adds:

Hochmoselübergang fiasco - construction company stops its activities until further notice

Construction cranes have been dismantled, demonstrably angry workers have been sent away. According to witnesses, the building company Porr have suspended their activities on the construction of the Mosel bridge until further notice. It has been reported that static calculations are missing, and that only the measurements for the first bridge pier have been reliably calculated. Officially, the contractors refuse to confirm this information.

In contrast to this, local newspaper the *Trierischer Volksfreund* reports that the Rhineland-Palatinate Ministry of Infrastructure confirms the absence of important documents for the final check of the structural analysis. Therefore building permission will be delayed. 'There are differing views on construction methods between the State Mobility Office (LBM) and the companies which were issued the contract for the construction of the High Mosel Bridge.' (*Trierischer Volksfreund*, 24 Apr)

Possible problems with statics have been stated often in the past by the critics of the construction project. In August last year, on the basis of its own investigations, the advisory body Geo-international produced a report which criticised a lack of exploration of the subsoil, in particular in the area of the bridge. From a geological point of view the Mosel region is problematic due to landslides. On the Ürzig side, with the tall supporting piers planned to reach up to 160 meters in height, there is a particularly high risk of instability of the structure. Surprisingly, exploratory drilling has been underway in this area in the past few months, whilst on the opposite side of the Mosel construction preparations are already visible (see left).

A remarkable restraint of information is typical of the current situation in both the government and among the construction companies. Until now the magnitude of the evident problems remains obscure. One thing is certain, neither the construction time-frame nor the budget can be kept within reasonable limits. 'If the planning of the bridge must be completely revised, a major part of the planning work carried out to date is useless,' according to geologist Dr Johannes Feuerbach of Geo-international.

Heidelind Weidemann of the BUND (Friends of the Earth) Rhineland-Palatinate: 'It is anticipated that costs for the construction project will in reality exceed the billion euro mark, as was often assumed, and that would be at least a tripling of the originally planned cost.' However, it is difficult for the Rhineland-Palatinate state government to speak about an 'unexpected development', because there was already a report which should in fact have signalled an early warning. During the planning approval process in 1999, geographer Dr Elisabeth von den Hoff pointed to a lack of inadequate soil testing, and confirmed this once again in 2006 by her objection to the supplemental project approval procedure. These issues were again raised and clearly addressed in extensive documentation included in a petition to the federal government. There has been ongoing correspondence between the responsible authorities and the geophysicist Helmut Körlings, for whom the answer was invariably a brush-off. Finally, there were discussions between the geologist Dr Feuerbach and representatives from local government, in which merely 'differing views' were the stated outcome.

Georg Laska of the citizens group Pro-Mosel: 'Now the Federal Government has the task of deciding whether it wants to finance this reckless adventure further. Is it justifiable to once again empty many hundred million euros from the pockets of national German taxpayers to fulfil the insane fantasy of some local politicians? However the decision is made - citizens of Germany have a right to know how much they must yet pay for the monster project on the Mosel.'