Imagining the Nation in Nature

*Landscape Preservation and German Identity, 1885–1945*

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"The German landscape seems very German to me," wrote the British author Stephen Spender on his journey through Germany in 1946, "because it is reflected in so many German poems and pictures, and often in the minds of the Germans." Commenting on the visual impact of this landscape, Spender noted that it was as varied as that of any other country, yet much of it has in common a mental quality, less sensuous and luminous than France, less earthy than England. It is possible to think of it abstractly and it is possible to imagine it as full of intensities, moods. It doesn’t suggest the gods and nymphs of Greece, nor is it haunted with the sense of individuals like England or France, but it is full of impulses, some warm and friendly, some sinister. It has been shaped and thought of and thought into, rather than civilized.¹

Spender’s words evoke one of the most powerful rhetorical means for grounding national identities in modern Europe: the assertion that there is an organic link between a people and its landscape. In Germany, the nineteenth-century Romantic cult of nature had saturated the landscape with symbolic meanings, creating a sublime naturalism running through the poetry of Heinrich Heine, the philosophy of Gottfried Herder, the visual art of Caspar David Friedrich, and the music of Richard Wagner. Romantic nationalists also used geographic features to endow the nation with a sense of longevity and perma-
benefit aesthetic and ecological results of these early movements' efforts to protect nature and to plan development were evident in the German landscape that Spender experienced in 1946, as they are today. They included nature preserves such as the Siebengebirge along the Rhine near Bonn and the Lüneburger Heath near Hamburg, the green belts and urban parks surrounding Cologne and Berlin that created "lungs" for the city, and the compact villages in Bavaria that were built around their medieval cores rather than being allowed to sprawl into the surrounding countryside. Despite the aesthetic and ecological benefits of these measures, however, their political legacy and cultural significance remain as problematic today as they were for Spender in the immediate postwar era. The same groups that supported environmental reform in Germany became some of the most ardent supporters of National Socialism in 1933, abandoning the perceived materialism and instability of liberal democracy in favor of a dictatorship that promised to return Germany to its roots in Blood and Soil. Unlike the American environmental movement, which looks back proudly on a century of progressive environmental reform, the German movement is thus burdened with an ambiguous political and moral legacy. Here environmentalism has appeared in shades of both green and brown.1 Landscape preservationists' support for Nazism poses a dilemma for German environmental historians: did preservationists' admirable efforts to set German industrialization on a more sustainable environmental path also help to push
the country on a "special path" (Sonderweg) that rejected modernity and rationality altogether in favor of Nazism's mystical appeal to Blood and Soil? Or were preservationists' efforts to protect their homeland environment a reflection of regional and local identities divorced from these larger political concerns, which modern environmentalists might applaud as harbingers of a greener future? By studying German nature protection between 1885 and 1945, this book shows that the contradictory "intentions" and ominous "moods" Spender detected in the German landscape found expression in these movements' varied reformist impulses, political aims, and popular reception during the period.

Landscape preservation movements first emerged in Germany in the 1880s as a form of cultural politics that articulated educated middle-class Germans' anxieties about their national identity, the pace and scope of industrialization and urbanization, and the aesthetic deterioration of the rural countryside. Their concerns were not "ecological" in a modern sense; these early defenders of nature rarely spoke about such environmental issues as acid rain, the health effects of unseen toxic pollutants, the resource strain caused by overpopulation, or the intrinsic value of nonhuman species. Instead, they interpreted environmental destruction through a nationalist lens, arguing that nature's aesthetic "disfigurement" (Verunstaltung) would surely erode Germany's distinctive national character, destroying the balance of nature within its borders and leading to its population's moral decline. German preservationists imagined the country's rural landscapes, scenic landmarks, and indigenous flora and fauna as "natural monuments" that anchored the organic foundation of national identity. They served as tactile and perdurable markers of the primordial homeland first settled by Germanic tribes and destined to hold the German nation.

Such evidence of national longevity was especially important to Germany, the so-called belated nation, which had been unified only since 1871 and whose pathway to modernity was punctuated by political instability. During the period between 1871 and 1945 Germans organized themselves into three different political communities, mobilized their natural and intellectual resources to become the Continent's leading industrial power, and provoked two world wars that resulted in millions of casualties and unprecedented destruction on the home front. Amid this turmoil, preservationists offered a stable and supposedly apolitical vision of German nationhood that was rooted in the natural landscape, even as Germans reinvented their political community as an authoritarian constitutional monarchy (the so-called Second Empire, the Kaiserreich of 1871–1918), a parliamentary democracy (the Weimar Republic, 1919–1933), and a racist dictatorship (the National Socialist era, 1933–1945). Behind the rhetoric of organic permanence were fundamental changes in the goals, practice, and meaning of both Naturschutz and Heimatschutz. The aims of landscape preservation—indeed what counted as natural in preservationist discourse—shifted radically as preservationists tried to articulate their vision of environmental reform in this ever-changing political terrain.

Landscape preservationists' attempts to imagine Germany in the natural landscape reveal the close ties between environmental perception and nationalism that existed during this period. As recent scholarship on the formation of national identities has demonstrated, European nation-states were products of cultural innovation and social engineering rather than autonomous collective identities that existed prior to their discursive and symbolic articulation. Initiated by Romantic intellectuals in the early nineteenth century and then "mass produced" between 1880 and 1914, the nation as a social identity soon transformed ordinary men and women, peasants and workers, bourgeois and aristocrats, into Germans, Frenchmen, or Italians. Eric Hobsbawm has characterized this period as the "heyday of invented traditions," a time when Europeans reinvigorated or even created new dynastic lineages, ancient rituals, and time-honored festivals. Such practices provided nation-states with cultural legitimacy and a sense of heritage in an age of rapid industrialization and social change. This study extends Hobsbawm's analysis to the organic world, arguing that landscape preservationists participated actively in the cultural construction of nationhood by envisioning natural landmarks as touchstones of emotional identification, symbols of national longevity, and signs of a new form of environmental stewardship. As Anthony Smith has argued, natural features "can delimit and locate a community in the landscape" by recalling symbolic crises, dramatic events, or turning points in the history of the community and by endowing the group with "foci of creative energy." German landscape preservation organizations, like parallel movements in Great Britain, France, and the United States in this period, helped to shape this cul-
ural nationalization of landscape. Preservationists argued that nature, unlike art works, historic buildings, or royal monuments, required no education, breeding, or taste to interpret; it was a cultural good whose aesthetic immediacy and accessibility were available to all Germans, regardless of class, gender, or religious background.

To popularize nature protection and outdoor experiences, preservationists published newsletters, wrote newspaper editorials, participated in school curriculum reform efforts, and established youth camps to train the masses in a new mode of seeing and experiencing natural features as facets of a shared homeland topography. Modern technologies that mechanically reproduced nature in postcards, journals, photographs, and stories also shaped ordinary consumption and recreation toward nationalist ends. Even ordinary practices such as hiking took on new cultural meaning after 1890. Natural vistas along walking trails above “Father Rhine,” for example, allowed wanderers to visualize the connections between local natural monuments and the far corners of the German fatherland. Preservationists’ efforts to set aside natural monuments from industrialization did not merely prevent environmental destruction but produced new political identities by naturalizing modern political borders and schooling local citizens in the aesthetic beauties of nature.

Of greatest concern to Germany’s landscape preservationists was the effect of industrial modernity on the character and contours of Heimat, a word that signifies a deep emotional attachment to place. Many German preservationists embraced the views of Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, a conservative social theorist of the mid-nineteenth century, who insisted that environmental stewardship and nature conservation were essential to preserving national character. In the first volume of Riehl’s monumental Natural History of the German People, which he titled Land and People (Land und Leute), Riehl disparaged the French Enlightenment view that nationhood was a product of written constitutions, abstract natural rights, or the protection of private property; instead he proposed that national character emerged organically, from the topography and culture of a particular territory. Like his intellectual predecessors Herder and Arndt, Riehl proposed that each landscape, be it national, regional, or local, reflected centuries of interaction between an area’s human inhabitants and their natural environment. The resulting cultural landscape mirrored the inhabitants’ unique settlement patterns and formed a repos-

itory of collective memory that anchored the Heimat community in space and time. Riehl’s “sociology of habitat” thus created a new moral geography that charged ordinary features of the Heimat landscape—including forests, rivers, rock formations, and heaths—with symbolic meaning. He argued that Germany’s strength lay in the diversity and health of its regional landscapes, and he elevated emotional identification with one’s local region to a form of national patriotism. Following Riehl, many nineteenth-century observers recast the aesthetic enjoyment of forests, meadows, and rock formations as a form of sacred patriotic devotion, arguing that such landmarks needed to be revered and protected as the very essence of Germanness. More important, they asserted that nature conservation served a real purpose: guarding the roots of national character and stabilizing the society. As Riehl once remarked, “We must retain the forest not only to keep our stoves from growing cold in winter, but also to keep the pulse of our nation beating warmly and happily. We need it to keep Germany German.”

Despite the politically conservative origins of Heimat discourse, the historian Celia Applegate has noted that the concept has been used in such a diverse array of political contexts and ideological debates in German culture that it is impossible to describe it as inherently reactionary. Though ethnic-racialist or völkisch discourses of Heimat flourished in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany, these potentially xenophobic understandings of homeland coexisted with local, regional, pluralist, and even democratic meanings, especially in the west-central Rhineland and parts of southern Germany. As Applegate’s research has shown, Germany’s status as a “nation of provincials,” a country forged by Bismarck’s agglomeration of once-independent provinces, cities, and kingdoms in 1871, led to a decentralized conception of homeland within regional Heimat movements. Heimat provided a framework for negotiating the differences between national, regional, and local identities in German society, in which Rhinelanders, Swabians, and Saxons retained their provincial distinctiveness while contributing to the German nation as a whole. Far from being antithetical to nation building, in other words, Heimat created what Alon Confino has termed a “common denominator of varietousness” that gave the newly created German nation the emotional accessibility of the familiar hometown, linking an individual’s lifeworld to Bismarck’s political creation.
cial Heimat advocates also proposed that homeland sentiments superceded political, social, and religious differences, providing common ground in the fractious political scene of Second Empire Germany and beyond. Most important, Heimat provided a touchstone of identity amid the maelstrom of change ushered in by rapid modernization, affixing personal memory to the mental map of the homeland.

Though Heimat provided a malleable “system of sentiments” that called for attachment to place amid the displacements of modernity, it was not an empty, sentimental metaphor used to divert provincial Germans from “real” political engagement or to buttress regional elites’ cultural authority. Heimat societies’ activities included the creation of local heritage and natural history museums, research into local folklore and dialects, the publication of regional histories, and historic preservation. Such endeavors gave the homeland a concrete existence that attracted a broad spectrum of German society to civic engagement in the community: urban professionals, the petite bourgeoisie, and white-collar workers. Nature- and landscape-protection activities linked such Heimat sentiments to a familiar topography, offering venues for bourgeois civic participation in this regional and local institutional milieu. Most landscape preservation organizations developed as branches of regional natural history groups, beautification societies, and hiking clubs; many even received funds from provincial officials interested in galvanizing regional loyalty. Landscape preservationists fortified the ability of Heimat to bridge the local and the national by envisioning German strength emanating upward from the country’s mosaic of unique regional landscapes, rather than downward from the Reich capital of Berlin. By hiking in the Heimat, studying a local bird species, or creating a plaque marking a unique natural landmark, individuals gave the nation a tangible, emotive quality that linked individual life stories to the collective memory of Heimat, enabling provincial Germans to visualize, touch, and even smell their particular region as part of a larger geographical entity: the German nation. Preservationists trusted that individuals would thereby experience the landscape as “Germans,” members of a community tied to a particular place, rather than as citizens of an abstract political territory.

To understand this regionalist inflection of Heimat and landscape preservation, this study focuses on one of Germany’s most recognized districts: the west-central Rhineland, particularly the former Prussian Rhine Province. This region provides an ideal site of investigation because of the tensions that emerged there between rapid industrialization and urbanization, on the one hand, and the desire to protect the area’s symbolic landscapes, particularly the scenic Rhine Valley, on the other. Though cultural historians have often identified the forest as the quintessential symbol of German identity, many Romantics saw the nation’s origins as fluvial rather than sylvan, with the Rhine serving as the lifeblood of German culture in much the same way that the Nile and the Ganges had nourished Egyptian and Indian civilizations. As the former border between the Roman Empire to the west and Germanic tribes to the east, the Rhine River was rhetorically cast in the nineteenth century as the geographic birthplace of German national consciousness. The German Volk had expelled Napoleon’s armies across Father Rhine, claiming both sides of the river as German territory and rebuffing French claims to the waterway as France’s “natural border.”

Not surprisingly, this history charged the region’s natural scenery with added emotional significance; as Simon Schama has aptly noted, “Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock.” In the case of the Rhine, nationalism shaped aesthetic experience by transforming the international Rhine into Germany’s quintessential river and envisioning the ruins of castles left by King Louis XIII’s troops in the Thirty Years’ War as proof that France had been Germany’s “eternal enemy” for centuries. The Rhineland’s scenic beauty, Roman and medieval ruins, and political significance also inspired the early nineteenth-century literary and aesthetic movement known as Rhine Romanticism (Rheinromantik) that included artists and writers as diverse as Lord Byron, Mary Shelley, Clemens Brentano, Caspar David Friedrich, and Heinrich Heine. English visitors who appreciated the natural contours of the informal eighteenth-century landscape garden portrayed the Rhineland as an open garden designed by God that merged divine nature with the humble efforts of human beings to toil in the valley's rich vineyards and fisheries. Rhine Romantic enthusiasm helped to create Germany’s first nature protection reserve in the Rhine Province, the Siebengebirge near Bonn, as well as the country’s oldest preservationist organizations.

Alongside this rich natural heritage, however, lay Europe’s busiest shipping corridor and its most productive coalfields, which soon transformed the Rhine Province into one of the Continent’s most
densely populated and industrialized regions. Three key events—the Congress of Vienna's creation of an international commission designed to remove commercial barriers to free trade along the river in 1815, the advent of steamship travel in 1816, and the inauguration of Baden engineer Johann G. Tulla's project to "tame" the meandering Rhine in 1817—transformed the river into an industrial canal shorn of its biological and visual diversity. The end of hundreds of river tolls, the introduction of mechanized transport, the removal of natural impediments such as the fabled Lorelei rocks, and the straightening of the Rhine's bed enabled freighters to move upstream with ease, making Rotterdam at the mouth of the Rhine the world's largest ocean harbor and allowing navigation as far as Basel, Switzerland, by the early twentieth century. Such "improvement" also enabled mining and manufactured products to move downstream and across the globe at an accelerated pace. The Rhine Province encompassed approximately one-third of the Ruhr basin's bituminous coal-mining region as well as the lignite coalfields known as the "Ville" near Krefeld, natural resources that helped to create Europe's densest concentration of iron and steel foundries. Basalt and trachyte mining in the former volcanic hills of the Siebengebirge provided weather-resistant materials for roads, bridges, and other structures. During the second industrial revolution, the Rhineland emerged as the center of Germany's booming chemical-pharmaceutical sector, with firms such as Bayer, BASF, and Hoechst settling along the river's banks to take advantage of freshwater supplies and transportation possibilities.

Natural advantages and industrial technology thus combined to situate the Rhineland as a catalyst for Germany's economic transformation from a largely agrarian society in 1850 into the Continent's leading industrial power on the eve of World War I, but the ecological results were devastating. As Mark Coci notes in his recent eco-biography of the Rhine: "The river's most celebrated features—its variegated landscape, quirky flow, and treacherous cliffs—were once the stuff of myth and legend. Now the river more resembles a canal—a monopoly of barges and ore carriers—than a fabled or mysterious stream; and it flows more like an industrial faucet than a natural river." The process of transforming the Rhine landscape into an industrial center involved bitter clashes between landscape preservationists, on the one hand, and state and commercial interests beholden to the myth of economic progress, on the other. The region thus offers unique insights into how private organizations and state planners tried to mediate between conflicting demands for natural resources and environmental protection.

Though landscape preservationists admired the natural balance and social cohesion of the preindustrial German homelands, they were not agrarian Romantics who panned the ideological path for the emergence of Nazi Blood and Soil. Until recently, many historians viewed the Wilhelmine and Weimar eras' back-to-the-land impulses as reactionary and protofascist, part of the "special path" of German bourgeois culture that shunned cosmopolitan Enlightenment values and Germany's emerging urban-industrial society in favor of völkisch myths and rural imagery. In this view, bourgeois elites' aesthetic preference for the supposedly unchanging countryside manifested a deeply conservative, "feudalized" social vision. Borrowed from the aristocracy that the German middle classes had failed to topple in the revolution of 1848, this vision clung to old-regime privilege in the face of new democratic demands from the masses. As more recent scholarship has shown, however, most Naturschutz and Heimatschutz advocates were urban professionals who saw industrialization as a necessary evil but believed it could be steered along more environmentally sustainable and aesthetically beautiful paths.

The cultural historian William Rollins, for example, has demonstrated convincingly that Wilhelmine Heimatschutz organizations showed a nuanced understanding of the causes and consequences of environmental degradation in the German countryside, calling for a "thorough-going reform of German land-use practices, including such things as the retention of hedgerows, a commitment to mixed forests, and a halt to excessive stream regulation." What scholars of the 1950s and 1960s viewed as antimodern, völkisch longings appear eminently practical given today's ecological concerns; as Rollins has remarked, "If these were irrational little games, it would appear that the standard of what is rational and what is not may need to be reconsidered." Though Rollins's revisionist work overstates landscape preservationists' commitment to liberal political reform and democratization, his work makes Wilhelmine Heimatschutz seem much more mainstream than did previous scholarship, animated by the same bourgeois and paternalist reform impulses as the American Sierra Club and the British National Trust. By creating nature conservation
regions and instituting land-use planning measures, preservationists sought to create a landscape that balanced tradition and industrialism; by reshaping the population's aesthetic sensibilities and stimulating Heimat feeling, they hoped to forge a more unified nation. Neither goal was in itself reactionary. Indeed, as Thomas Rohkrämer has recently argued, Germany's tradition of cultural criticism from its educated middle classes (or Bildungsbürgertum), which disparaged the leveling tendencies of capitalist Zivilisation on German Kultur, offered a creative response to the social and environmental crises generated by modernity. Bourgeois elites within the landscape preservation movement sought to tame technological development and the ever-increasing rationalization of everyday life, to bring modernizing processes into line with humanitarian principles and naturalistic insights. They sought a "different and better" modernity, not the rejection of modernity altogether.28

These scholars' revisions of previous approaches to landscape preservation and middle-class cultural reform have thus opened up new ways of conceptualizing landscape preservation. Their assertion that Naturschutz and Heimatschutz organizations were actively engaged in shaping modernity, not turning their backs on it, resonates throughout this study. Yet these new interpretations still leave open a crucial question: if landscape preservation and Heimat protection were creative, environmentally informed responses to the crises of modernization, why and how did many preservationists become ardent advocates of National Socialism? Landscape preservation leaders were early and enthusiastic supporters of the National Socialist regime. Many of them believed that Blood and Soil signified a commitment to reforming German society and the economy according to environmental precepts and natural laws, and they cheered the Nazis' destruction of liberal individualism in favor of a centralized, organic state. The Nazi movement, in turn, counted several leaders who had environmentalist sympathies, including Agriculture Minister Richard Walther Darré and Forestry Minister Walter von Kuckell. In 1933, the Third Reich even passed the world's most comprehensive piece of environmental conservation legislation, known as the Reich Nature Protection Law, which expanded the number of nature protection regions and created stringent new land-use planning regulations.

This right-wing radicalization of environmental politics was a product of a variety of historically specific factors. Among the most sig-

ificant reasons for radicalization were the militarization of Heimat rhetoric in World War I, the increasing reliance of Heimatschutz and Naturschutz organizations on state patronage in the early Weimar era, and preservationists' sometimes hostile response to mass society and cultural Modernism in the 1920s—which this study analyzes in the following chapters. The Nazification of Naturschutz was by no means preordained in the Wilhelmine era; Heimat was not, as some scholars have argued, an inherently "ominous utopia," nor did "back to nature" inevitably lead to racist nationalism and social Darwinism.29 Indeed, only by examining the entire scope of landscape preservation in the early twentieth century can we see the discontinuities between regional landscape preservationists' vision of Heimat nature and the National Socialist program of Blood and Soil. Their ideological and institutional rift made the National Socialists' "synchronization" (Gleichschaltung) of regional environmentalist groups far more uneven, contentious, and unfinished than many scholars of these movements have assumed.30

Despite notable achievements such as the Reich Nature Protection Law, the degree of National Socialist commitment to environmental reform remains a highly contentious issue. Adolf Hitler's highly publicized statements about the need to protect the German countryside and Agriculture Minister Darré's support of organic farming experiments have led several historians to speak of a "Green wing" within the National Socialist movement, drawing questionable connections between the environmental dimensions of Blood and Soil and modern Green sensibilities. Describing the Nazi regime's environmentalist commitment, Simon Schama has written that, "arguably, no German government had ever taken the protection of the German forests more seriously than the Third Reich and its Reichsforstminister Göring . . . It is, of course, painful to acknowledge how ecologically conscientious the most barbaric regime in modern history actually was. Exterminating millions of lives was not at all incompatible with passionate protection for millions of trees."31 In a similar vein, the historian Anna Bramwel described Darré as "Father of the Greens" in a series of polemical books and articles in the mid-1980s.32 Yet these bold assertions about the extent of Nazi environmental protection and its relationship to modern Green thought have not been followed up by concrete studies of the regime's implementation of the Reich Nature Protection Law at the regional and local levels, even though
landscape preservation remained highly decentralized despite the Third Reich's totalitarian aims.

This book examines the goals of Nazi environmental policy, its implementation in the Rhineland and other provinces, and the relationship between regime initiatives and existing Heimatschutz and Naturschutz efforts. Although the Nazis' effort to conduct their national revolution according to "natural laws" promised a greater role for landscape preservation in the state's cultural politics, the Third Reich systematically subordinated environmental concern to economic recovery and war mobilization, threatening decades of preservation efforts through Autobahn construction, rearmament, land reclamation, and dam building. The regime touted the "Aryan" race's will to reshape the landscape and conquer Lebensraum, a claim that offered little protection for the natural landscape and threatened preservationsists' vision of Germany as a diffuse tapestry of culturally and historically shaped landscapes.

Although this study focuses on the cultural and nationalist significance of German landscape preservation, its implications go beyond the German case to engage broader questions raised by environmental historians about the relationship between environmental perception, political change, and cultural symbols. In the past decade, the so-called wilderness debate has animated American environmental historiography, yet few environmental historians have considered whether the terms of this discussion apply outside the United States. In a recent critique of the American wilderness tradition, the environmental historian William Cronin argued that wilderness advocates such as John Muir and Aldo Leopold created a dichotomy between nature and civilization that placed human beings entirely outside the natural. This dichotomy depicted all human use as abuse, setting too high a standard for what counts as pristine, and encouraging individuals to escape the immediate environmental ramifications of their actions in distant preserves of sublime natural beauty. Cronin called for a new environmental ethic that values "a common middle ground...in which all of these things, from the city to the wilderness, can somehow be encompassed in the word "home." Cronin's perspective has triggered enormous controversy within American environmental history and environmentalism, with defenders of wilderness as a pristine site uncontaminated by modern civilization pitted against those welcoming a more human-centered form of environmental perception and stewardship.

The wilderness debate has not unleashed similar controversy among German and European environmental historians. As Mark Cioce noted in a recent review of German environmental history, "the impact of human activity over the past two millennia in Central Europe has been so conspicuous" that German environmental historians have always assumed that the object of their analyses is a cultivated "cultural landscape" rather than nature in itself. As Cioce's review makes clear, German environmental history, or Umweltgeschichte, has thus focused largely on the ecological problems unleashed by industrial development and modern technologies—air, water, soil, and noise pollution—as they affect human communities. My analysis of landscape preservation within the Heimat tradition bridges the two environmental traditions, offering comparative insights on the evolution of environmental stewardship in these two highly industrialized, consumerist societies. German preservationists' desire to protect the cultural landscapes of Heimat is noticeably similar to Cronin's environmental ethic of home, suggesting that American environmental historians interested in alternatives to the wilderness tradition in Western society will benefit from studying Germany's environmental history.

Unlike the American wilderness ethic, an ideal that has valued spaces devoid of human influence, the Germans' concept of Landschaft envisioned the ideal environment in a pastoral sense, as a cultivated garden that blends the natural, cultivated, and built environments in an aesthetically harmonious whole. Reinforcing this sense of Landschaft as a cultural and a natural space is the political meaning of the word, which refers to a unit of territorial administration, such as a province or region. The two meanings of the word were often intertwined, so that the visual state of the Landschaft was thought to mirror the spiritual condition of the community. The German trajectory of environmental preservation also placed the cultural landscapes of home, not the sublime places of the distant wilderness, at the center of environmental perception and care. German preservationists' attention to place focused on the surrounding vernacular landscape; historic oak trees, nearby waterfalls, even local species of salamanders and turtles were sometimes designated as natural monuments. This attention to one's immediate, familiar surroundings produced a less dichotomous view of nature and culture than did the wilderness ethic; German landscape preservationists valued "second nature" just as highly as the remnants of "first nature." Their vision of the Heimat...
nature as a working landscape rather than a mere refuge from industrial ills, moreover, offered a vision of sustainability over time rather than mere compensation for industrial destruction.

German preservationists' optimistic conception of home as a site of emotional identification and environmental care is undoubtedly appealing, especially in a postmodern world of "expanding horizons and dissolving boundaries." As wilderness loses some of its currency as both a symbolic place and a standard by which to judge human impact on the environment, an analysis of German landscape preservation offers environmental historians the opportunity to explore "home" as a middle ground between nature and civilization. Yet the recovery of this uniquely German environmental tradition must also confront the unsavory political appropriations of Heimat in Germany, demonstrating that "home" is an ideologically charged category whose meaning must be interrogated before it is offered as an alternative to the wilderness tradition. Although preservationists viewed their activities as apolitical, protecting a cultural good that transcended the petty squabbling of political parties and interest groups, German landscape preservation was never a neutral instrument of environmental reform. The movement shaped and was in turn shaped by the social values and ideological contradictions of Germany's transient political regimes in the early twentieth century. The result was a tradition of modern environmentalism that included an array of ideological positions—from the conservative paternalism of the Wilhelmine era to the racism of Blood and Soil ideology—that lay far to the right of the American progressive tradition.

In studying the trajectory of German landscape preservation between 1885 and 1945, we see that historically specific visions of nature and broader power relationships have shaped the goals of environmental reform. Chapter 1 of this volume examines the origins of landscape preservation in the Wilhelmine era (1888-1918) as a response to the environmental impact of and social tensions produced by rapid industrialization in the decades before World War I. In the campaign to protect the Siebengebirge, a scenic chain of hills near Bonn, Rhenish preservationists laid the foundation for the Naturschutz and Heimatschutz movements' bourgeois, aesthetic, and socially paternalistic approach to environmental reform. By protecting natural monuments and providing healthy recreation areas, preservationists hoped to re-integrate Germans of all political persuasions and social classes into the imagined Heimat community. Wilhelmine preservationists thus believed that environmental and moral improvement went hand in hand, with Heimat sentiments providing a bulwark against the leveling tendencies of modernity as well as a basis for new forms of environmental stewardship. Chapter 2 investigates the way landscape preservationists renegotiated the relationship between environmental protection, Heimat, and modernity in the contentious and often violent debates over German identity that surfaced in the wake of World War I (1918-1923). During the war, nature and Heimat protection became enmeshed in national and provincial efforts to secure the homefront in a cultural battle designed to mobilize the population's emotional loyalties. This attempt to use natural symbols to forge a mythic Heimat community mobilized against external and internal enemies continued in the Rhenish borderlands well into 1923, when Rhenish separatists, French occupation forces, and hyperinflation called into question Rhinelanders' sense of belonging to the German Reich. Preservationists' faith in the unifying power of nature to shape German character and dissolve political and social differences helped to resolve this cultural crisis, but not without a lingering undercurrent of anxiety about the character and boundaries of Germaness. This psychological unease ultimately made it difficult for preservationists to construct a pluralist vision of homeland that suited the Weimar Republic's liberal and democratic aspirations.

Despite these challenges, preservationists found new ways to articulate a modern vision of landscape protection amid growing economic rationalization, political democratization, and mass consumerism between 1925 and 1932. Chapter 3 shows that the Weimar era's streamlining and corporatist restructuring of industrial production processes encouraged provincial officials and landscape architects to develop parallel discourses about land use. These groups sought to link traditional Naturschutz and Heimatschutz to landscape conservation, or Landschaftspflege, a new, holistic, and functionally driven form of regional land-use planning. Amid lingering fears of worker unrest after the revolution of 1918 and public concern over the "superfluous" younger generation, preservationists referred to nature experiences as the most important "social healing method" in an era of unprecedented social dislocation and political unrest. By the end of the 1920s, preservationists had abandoned nineteenth-century Romanticism in favor of an objective approach that emphasized applied
science, not sentiment, to stem Germany’s environmental destruction and resolve its social woes.

 Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the Nazi era. Chapter 4 examines the Gleichschaltung of landscape preservation organizations and the Third Reich’s uneven attempt to incorporate Heimat and nature protection ideologically and institutionally into its emerging racial state. The synergy between Nazism and Naturschutz was based not on antimonarch agrarian Romanticism, but rather on a shared belief in the therapeutic power of nature and centralized landscape planning to effect far-reaching social change. Yet there were important differences between preservationists’ environmentalism and Nazism’s racist conceptions of social reform that caused Gleichschaltung to remain uneven. Chapter 5 analyzes the discrepancy between the Third Reich’s environmentally friendly image and the massive environmental destruction wrought by Nazi development projects. Rather than protecting the Heimat landscape, the regime favored a form of environmental mitigation pioneered by Autobahn landscape architects that used ecological restoration to regenerate destroyed natural areas. These so-called landscape advocates touted their efforts as a form of biological restoration, reflecting a faith in applied science that meshed well with the regime’s racial-hygienic policies.

 The conclusion reviews the key political, cultural, and environmental factors that precipitated the decline of regional landscape preservation in the postwar era and paved the way for the ecologically inclined Green movement to emerge in the 1970s. Though Heimat- and Naturschutz activities continued unabated into the 1950s, Germans faced intractable environmental problems in the postwar era that challenged preservationists’ aesthetic approach to environmental reform. Moreover, as Germans sought to overcome the Nazi past by identifying themselves with a “European” community that transcended national borders, Heimat rhetoric that described the landscape as a reflection of national character appeared suspect. The new environmental fears and transnational political context made landscape preservationists’ focus on visual aesthetics and the emotional appeal of Heimat appear outdated. The new environmental problems and the transformation of German political identities paved the way for the popular reception of ecosystem paradigms that superseded the cultural landscape at the center of the German environmental imagination.

 ❀ CHAPTER ONE

 Nature’s Homelands: The Origins of Landscape Preservation, 1885–1914

 Though nineteenth-century Romanticism revered nature as a source of divine inspiration and national character, the movement brought little in the way of concrete nature protection measures. Germany’s natural environment grew in importance as a site of refuge from the city and inspired artistic and literary works, yet little was done to maintain its features until late in the century. Technological optimism predominated in the Kaiserreich (1871–1918); as the noted author Stefan Zweig once wrote: “This belief in the uninterrupted, inexorable ‘progress’ truly had the power of a religion; people believed in this progress more than the Bible, its Gospel appeared irrefutably proven by the daily new wonders of science and technology.” Proof came in the form of steamships and street cars, electric telegraphs and electric lighting, artificial dyes and new tonics for minor ailments; change in itself appeared as an inherent good. During the second industrial revolution, between 1880 and 1914, Germany emerged as the European continent’s premier industrial power, making the decisive transition from an agrarian and rural society to an industrialized and urbanized one. By 1907, owing to inner migration, nearly half of the country’s citizens did not live in their place of birth. Though the size of the country increased by half between 1870 and 1900, cities grew twice as fast as the population as a whole; a country that was two-thirds rural in 1870 became two-thirds urban by 1900. As the pace of change accelerated, with new transportation modes making transcontinental
travel easier and novel communication technologies allowing real-
time long-distance messages, people's sense of time and space began
to collapse. The modern individual without an organic connection
to history or place was born. This process also led many to per-
ceive their natural and built environments in new ways. As intel-
lectual historian Thomas Rohkrämer has argued, "Even though human-
kind had already transformed its environment before, the creation of a 'second nature' achieved a new character. The world has since then
come ever more an artifact." The hand of humankind seemed to be
everywhere in Europe, making it difficult to locate an authentic natu-
real world that counterbalanced the forces of civilization.

Not all Germans celebrated these changes in their environment. During the 1880s, a growing cadre of individuals within educated
middle-class circles began to argue that industrialization and urban-
ization threatened to wipe out Germany's historic landscapes and to
destroy the last remnants of primordial nature existing within
the country's borders. These individuals bemoaned the spread into the
rural countryside of smoking factories, high-tension power lines, reg-
ulated streambeds, and crass billboards, which they argued "disfig-
ured" the national homeland. These nascent environmentalists
contended that the country needed a program of state regulations,
private initiatives, and public education dedicated to preserving the
landscape against the capitalist onslaught in order to protect the val-
ues of Heimat, or homeland, for future generations. Much of the
real work of nature protection and Heimat preservation began in Ger-
many's provinces, where local groups battled state indifference and
entrenched property interests to save endangered scenic areas.

One of Germany's first organized landscape protection cam-
paigns—the effort to save the Siebengebirge hill country near Bonn
from the mining industry—developed out of preservationists' Heimat-
centered and aesthetic approach to environmental reform. Rhinish preservationists recast the language of Rhine Romanticism
for a late-nineteenth-century urban audience, convincing Prussian
state and Rhenish provincial authorities that this natural monument
embodied the character and aspirations of the entire people. They as-
serted that the Siebengebirge deserved protection because, unlike his-
toric buildings or works of art, it emanated an aura of longevity im-
pervious to the flux of historical events, political debates, and social
unrest. Nature protection thus served a larger patriotic and socially

therapeutic purpose, anchoring the moral geography of Heimat and
linking individuals' subjective experiences in nature to the larger na-
tional community, regardless of class, religion, or regional origin. The
rhetoric of nature preservation and the promise to protect the imag-
ed contours of the Heimat landscape also articulated bourgeois cul-
tural anxieties about the pace, scope, and effects of modernization, fil-
tering ecological concerns through an aesthetic and nationalist lens.
The success of the Siebengebirge campaign made it a model of public-
private cooperation in nature protection and nature preservation, in-
fluencing the national environmental reform efforts that came on the
scene in 1904.

One wing of this national campaign for environmental reform, as-
associated with the Danzig botanist Hugo Conwentz, was known as
Naturdenkmalfpflege (literally, the "care of natural monuments"),
which I will refer to as natural monument preservation. Alexander
von Humboldt had first used the term Naturdenkmal to refer to un-
usual or historically significant trees.2 Natural monument preserva-
tion was closely associated with historical monument preservation, or
Denkmalfpflege, which protected and restored a broad array of me-
morials and commemorative sites, including intentionally constructed
monuments of battles or famous statesmen; historically significant
parts of the built environment, such as buildings, walls, or ruins;
and works of art from the past, especially pieces of sculpture and reli-
gious relics from the Roman and medieval periods.3 During the nine-
tenth century, several German states, including Prussia, Baden, and
Bavaria, had established monument preservation offices to inventory
and preserve such objects as part of a cultural-political effort to legit-
imate their monarchies and edify the public.4 When Conwentz estab-
lished the Prussian State Office for Natural Monument Preservation
(Staatliche Stelle für Naturdenkmalfpflege) in 1904, he transferred
the nationalist and educational goals of Denkmalfpflege to the natural
environment. The state office sought, with the help of private organi-
zations, to identify and preserve scientifically valuable natural ob-
jects, such as rare geological formations, as well as large-scale parcels
with characteristic plants and animals, known as nature protection
regions.

At about the same time, the Dresden music professor Ernst Rudolf
created the German Association for Homeland Protection (Deutscher
Bund Heimatschutz, or DBH) to protect Germany's characteristic his-
Historical landscapes from further destruction. In contrast to Conventz's natural monument preservation, which viewed protecting individual landmarks or conservation regions as its key task, the Heimatschutz movement viewed Naturdenkmalspflege as only one facet of a broader program of heritage preservation and environmental reform. In Rudorff's view, Heimatschutz encompassed the entire "physiognomy" of the landscape, including both the natural and the built environment of each regional or municipality. Within Heimatschutz organizations, therefore, protecting meadows and forests went hand in hand with restoring peasant cottages, researching rural customs, and publishing poetry and stories in regional dialects. The turn of the nineteenth century thus marked a watershed in Germans' perception and use of the natural environment. It signaled a shift away from considering the natural environment solely in terms of economic development, artistic appreciation, and recreation and toward actively preserving and managing natural features as part of the country's national heritage.

Central to Heimatschutz and Naturschutz alike was a belief that the landscape was both a product and an active shaper of Germany's unique natural character; German culture, they argued, was "closer to nature" than that of other European nations. Konrad Guenther's faith that nature's beauties would bring "joy" and "instruction" to the people reflected this sentiment. Guenther believed that such experiences would stimulate ordinary Germans' emotional attachment to the national homeland in a time of rapid economic development, social instability, and political divisiveness. Though both movements gradually broadened their activities to promote recognizably ecological concerns such as sustainable forestry, habitat protection for endangered species, and wetland conservation, their initial program reflected prevailing bourgeois notions of environmentalism. This form of environmentalism saw nature protection primarily as a form of social reform. Conventz, Rudorff, and Guenther all believed that there was a causal link between an aesthetically pleasing environment and an individual's proper moral and physiological development, as well as a close connection between environmental health, national character, and social stability. They blamed a variety of social and political ills—including working-class discontent and the incessant wrangling between political parties—on Germans' alienation from the natural landscape, the physical substrate of Heimat sentiment.

Landscape preservation thus transformed the idiom of Romantic nature aesthetics to suit the needs of a mass industrial society, providing a bulwark of ideal values in an age of material progress. Preservationists' message of national renewal based on a return to nature and Heimat was shared by a number of other cultural reform, back-to-the-land, and "life reform" (Lebensreform) movements that flourished during the Wilhelmine era, the political and cultural period marked by Wilhelm II's ascension to the throne in 1888 and the collapse of the Kaiserreich in 1918. The desire to locate German identity in an organic community of Heimat away from the city, for example, found expression in rural preservation organizations such as Heinrich Sohnrey's German Association for the Care of Rural Welfare and Heimat, as well as in the Heimatkunst movement in literature and art that rejected amoral realism in favor of sentimental motifs unfolding in rural settings. Nature preservationism also resembled the Garden City movement, which sought to plan cities with expansive green spaces, lower population densities, and factories located away from residential areas. In their attempts to promote outdoor recreation as a path to higher forms of spirituality and self-cultivation, Heimat enthusiasts also shared ideological affinities with youth hiking organizations such as the Wanderwürgel, founded in 1899, as well as with the growing numbers of vegetarians, nudists, and "natural healing" advocates. Taken as a whole, groups with such neo-Romantic reform tendencies believed that nature offered an authenticity that could not be found in the barrenness of urban life.

Back-to-nature discourses that envisioned nature as a source of healing for industrial society appeared especially urgent to bourgeois observers in the Rhineland during this period. In this region, the rise of new political and social movements, especially political Catholicism and social democracy, appeared to be unraveling the national consensus and enthusiasm that had accompanied the defeat of France and the creation of the Second Empire in 1871. Bismarck's "cultural battle" (Kulturkampf) against Catholicism, which the area's Protestant National Liberal Party had supported, had weakened the traditional alliance between liberals and Catholics against Prussian hegemony. Catholics' sense of alienation from Prussia and the national state had fueled the growth of the Center Party, which by 1914 had become the province's largest political party. Bismarck's attempt to destroy the nascent Social Democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische
Partei Deutschlands, or SPD) by outlawing it between 1878 and 1890 had also left a bitter legacy in the province, galvanizing the party’s appeal among the Rhineland’s industrial workers. In this context, preservationists appealed to nature as a unifier of Heimat and Volk, one that might integrate disparate social and political factions on the basis of shared homeland sentiment. Far from an “agrarian-romantic” strategy to pacify the masses through preindustrial imagery, however, preservationists’ desire to imagine Germany in the natural landscape articulated a form of middle-class paternalism designed to manage industrial and urban modernity through cultural reform, not to reject it altogether. They envisioned an alternative modernity in which landscape sustainability, industrial technology, and Heimat sentiment could grow together “organically,” ensuring the nation’s future through careful cultivation of its natural-historical past.

Rhine Romanticism and the Revolution in Nature Perception

The Rhineland’s cultural landscape became world famous in the early nineteenth century for its historical significance and scenic beauty, inspiring European Romantics to seek out the sublime in the meandering river, the striated cliffs of the Lorelei, the play of light and shadow caused by billowy cloud banks from the North Sea, and the ruins of medieval fortresses and cloisters. Rivers had an important place in the Romantic pantheon, for their ever-changing contours and constant flow of water and energy reminded visitors of nature’s ceaseless cycles of life and death. Born in the mountains of Switzerland, each drop of Rhine water crossed an array of natural and human frontiers on its way to the river’s delta in the Netherlands, where the waters joined the sea, perhaps to evaporate, mix in the clouds, and fall to earth again as rain. The Rhine had also shaped the many human communities that had occupied its banks, from the ancient Celts who gave the river its original name, Remes, to the Romans who brought viticulture to the region more than two thousand years ago, taking advantage of the soils enriched by prehistoric volcanic activity. Long before the advent of modern industry, outcroppings of rock provided an ideal terrain for medieval fortresses from which tolls could be exacted on river traders, and small flat areas along the banks offered just enough room for fishing villages to establish themselves.

Germany’s first nature protection efforts emerged as a result of Romantic fascination with the Drachenfels, a stony precipice south of Bonn. Named for a legendary dragon that was supposed to have inhabited a cave on the side of the mountain, the area is rich in natural scenery and classical and medieval artifacts, including a breathtaking panorama of the Rhine Valley from its summit, vineyards dating back to the Roman period, and twelfth-century watchtower ruins. The Drachenfels is one of the “Seven Mountains” that give the Siebengebirge region its name. This chain of more than forty hills, the remnants of volcanoes, is the highest point on the lower Rhine, serving as the gateway to the “Romantic Rhine” Gorge that stretches to Mainz.

The Siebengebirge’s unique combination of natural scenery and ancient human history helped to fuel the Romantic revolution in sensibility. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, English aesthetes, such as the poet Anne Radcliffe, descended upon the Rhine to find what Radcliffe termed in 1795 its “awful, sublime and picturesque” landscape. That Romantics sought out the painterly qualities of the picturesque Siebengebirge was not surprising, for the Drachenfels had appeared in the background of devotional imagery as far back as the twelfth century and was prominent in Dutch and Flemish landscape paintings and etchings from the seventeenth century onward. A more dramatic symbolism was also present in the river’s ceaseless flow and the ruins that manifested the insignificance of humankind in the face of divine nature. English aristocrats and upper bourgeoisie on their so-called Grand Tour of the Continent soon added the Rhine to their itinerary. In 1788, the Reverend John Gardnor completed a series of Rhineland portraits, Views Taken on or Near the River Rhine, which enumerated a compulsory canon of sites for elite tourists. Many English Romantics proposed that divine forces had created in the Rhineland those very features they valued in their own landscape gardens: naturalistic curves, winding paths, indigenous vegetation that spilled out into the countryside, and Gothic ruins. The taste for picturesque nature, in other words, followed aesthetic shifts in eighteenth-century garden design that favored naturalness over the formal rigidity of the French baroque garden.

The Rhine was thus “God’s garden,” an ever-changing panoply of natural and historical delights for those with a trained eye. Lord Byron was among the new visitors; he described the region as a “spectacle of the gods” and dedicated the opening lines of his 1816 Childs
Harold's Pilgrimage to the Drachenfels, writing, “The castled crag of Drachenfels, frowns o’er the wide and winding Rhine.” Byron’s fascination with the medieval Drachenfels ruins was another important motif in English Romanticism. Unlike Enlightenment intellectuals, who had viewed the Middle Ages as the pinnacle of superstition and barbarism, Romantics rediscovered the period as a repository of heroism, community, and sacredness. Byron’s visits soon prompted waves of English and other European tourists to visit the Rhineland, making the region one of the world’s first sites for large-scale tourism. Among the Rhineland’s hills and valleys, the emerging industrial bourgeoisie could escape the noise, pollution, and social discontent caused by industrialization and cultivate a taste for landscape that distinguished them culturally from their social inferiors.

The advent of standardized travel guides for the region and the introduction of steamship and railway service during the 1820s and 1830s hastened this “discovery” of Rhineland nature. Steamship travel shortened what was once a fourteen-hour trip from Rotterdam to Cologne to just over five hours. In 1840, only thirteen years after regular steamship service was introduced into the region, the Allgemeine Gasthofsführung reported that more than 400,000 passengers had used the new transportation service. The flood of visitors was so overwhelming that the engraver Karl Simrock noted in 1840 that “in all art and book shops ... picturesque views of the Rhine area ... can be purchased in such numbers that between Mainz and Cologne hardly a house, hardly a tree can be found which has not set in motion a pen or a gauge.” By the mid-1800s, the number of visitors had reached a plateau, and English elites were bemoaning the commercialization of the landscape. Having been discovered by ordinary vacationers, the Rhineland had become a cliché; it no longer tantalized the sophisticated traveler with its sublime aura.

German aestheticians and intellectuals had also helped to produce Rhine Romanticism, or Rheinromantik, though their observations of the area often combined aesthetic glorification with attention to the nationalist meaning of natural features. The poets Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim, for example, conducted a series of travels along the Rhine in 1802 that inspired their folk song collection Der Knaben Wunderhorn, in which they which claimed to have rediscovered the spirit of the Middle Ages embodied in the Rhineland’s castle ruins. The Wars of Liberation also led the Heidelberg scholar Joseph Görres to gather popular legends and myths among Rhineland peasants, whom he presented as the authentic voice of the German Volk, as part of the propaganda against Napoleon. Countering French claims to the Rhine as France’s natural border, the Bonn professor and nationalist Ernst Moritz Arndt’s 1813 Germany’s River but Not Germany’s Border imagined the Rhine flowing through the body of the Fatherland, with both banks firmly within the boundaries of the Heimat. This rediscovery of Rhenish cultural character later found expression in the writings and speeches of nationalist thinkers such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Gottfried Herder, who proposed that peasant cultures and landscapes formed the basis of national identity. Rhineland legends and myths that evoked the region’s Germanic character surfaced in popular collections such as Alfred Reumont’s Rheinland Tales and Stories (1837) and later Wilhelm Ruland’s Rheinsagen (1894), which would appear in fifty editions by the 1970s. The Rhine and its landscape inspired German literature, music, and poetry, including August Schlegel’s popularization of the Nibelungenlied, Heinrich Heine’s poem Lorelei (1824), and Richard Wagner’s opera Das Rheingold (1876). The popularity of these works was instrumental in constructing the Rhine as the mythical origin of the nation.

Following the Congress of Vienna in 1814 and 1815, both French and German nationalists continued to lay claim to the river, thereby extending the rhetoric of the Rhine as Germany’s birthplace far into the nineteenth century. In 1840, for example, French foreign minister Adolf Thiers threatened the Rhine in an attempt to defuse through nationalist enthusiasm his country’s discontent with the July Monarchy. The attempt failed, but not before Max Schneckburger had penned “The Watch on the Rhine” (“Die Wacht am Rhein”) and helped put it to music. The song became one of Germany’s most popular national anthems; its words would later ring out as young men marched to battle in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. The adoption of the Rhine as Germany’s quinennial national symbol, moreover, transformed the visual import of the historic sites and natural landmarks along its banks, inscribing these features with a new nationalist genealogy. Like many medieval ruins along the Rhine, the watchtower atop the Drachenfels had been destroyed by the French king’s troops during the Thirty Years’ War. In the wake of Napoleon, German nationalists such as Arndt claimed that such castle ruins symbolized the
ancient struggle between French and German "peoples," and that the Prussian victory over Napoleon's armies in 1813 represented a decisive step toward finally vanquishing the threat of Germany's "hereditary enemy." This process gave the Rhine and its medieval ruins an aura of national sacredness, marking Germans' primordial origins and commemorating their continuing struggle against the French.20

Because of its fame as a historical and natural landmark, the Drachenfels became the focus of Germany's first nature protection efforts, especially as the area was also a site of key natural resources. Underneath the mountain's surface were valuable deposits of trachyte and basalt, both important construction materials. Quarries had operated there since the Roman period, and builders had even used the stone to construct the Cologne Cathedral. Economic expansion in the Rhineland after the Napoleonic wars rapidly increased the demand for such materials for building and road construction. This led to a clash between mine owners and Romantic nature enthusiasts, because blasting holes in the mountainside was causing the rock layers under the ruins to subside and the ruins themselves to crumble. In 1828 the public outcry among citizens in nearby Cologne and Bonn led the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm III to issue ordinances banning mining operations in the area. The king commissioned the partial restoration and preservation of the ruins, and in 1836 the former watchtower and its surrounding landscape on the summit became Germany's first nature park. With its tower and its commanding view of the Rhine and the distant western border, also now restored, the Drachenfels appeared to contemporary observers as a symbolic guardian of the interior against further French aggression.21

By preserving the Drachenfels as a natural and historical monument, Friedrich Wilhelm hoped to use Denkmalpflege to justify the Hohenzollern monarchy's presence in the region by linking it to a romanticized medieval past and the popular nationalist strivings voiced during the Wars of Liberation. Prussia had annexed the Rhineland in 1815 as a result of the Congress of Vienna, where Metternich had tried to bolster Prussian power by expanding its territory to the French frontier. Though many Rhineland liberals welcomed the end of French hegemony, German nationalism did not necessarily transfer into Prussian enthusiasm. Many saw the Prussian annexation as a betrayal of the liberal-democratic goals espoused during the 1813 campaign, and argued that the Prussian three-class voting system was an affront to liberal aspirations. Rhineland patriots such as Joseph Görres had deep-seated reservations about "the Lithuanians," as civil servants from Berlin were often called.22 Cultural patronage was one path to overcoming such political divisions. The Prussian state's efforts to begin the restoration and completion of the Cologne cathedral, as well as its restoration of many Rhineland castles as Lahneck and Stolzenfels, are good examples of how monument preservation helped to naturalize Prussian hegemony.23

Prussia's defeat of France in 1870 unleashed a new wave of anti-French nationalism that spurred bombastic monument building to celebrate Germany's victory and national unification. Although Germany was not the only country to construct an array of national monuments in the late nineteenth century, its belated nationhood may have produced an overall greater need for such objects.24 Not surpris-
ingly, the Rhine Valley provided an important setting for many of these new memorials, such as the *Germania* monument overlooking the village of Rüdesheim (1877-1883) and the Kaiser Wilhelm statue (1897) in Koblenz. The Drachenfels site was among the finalists for the latter monument, though it was eventually erected at the confluence of the Rhine and Mosel Rivers.24 Such monuments further naturalized conflicts with the French through ethnic myth rather than concrete historical circumstances. The Rhineland was also one of the most important centers of Kaiser Wilhelm II’s campaign in the 1890s to promote the Romanesque as the authentic “Germanic” style by restoring medieval churches such as the Aachen and Trier cathedrals and commissioning new buildings with historicist designs modeled on this period.25 In short, through historical monument preservation, the Hohenzollern monarchy sought to exploit the Rhineland’s symbolic capital to imagine the Second Empire as the natural successor to Charlemagne’s Holy Roman Empire.

The Rhineland Environment in the Age of Industrialization

While the Rhine’s memorials articulated the monarchy’s conservative vision of German character, the area’s nature protection efforts began as a middle-class endeavor to broaden popular participation in nation building. In 1869 the Beautification Society for the Siebengebirge (Verschönerungsverein für das Siebengebirge, or VVS), an association composed mainly of urban professionals from nearby Bonn and Cologne, took over control of maintaining the Drachenfels monument from the Prussian state. The VVS embraced a nineteenth-century faith in nature appreciation as an instrument of moral improvement, and undertook a far-reaching campaign to beautify the Siebengebirge and increase visitors’ access to the region. The society planted trees and shrubs, picked up trash and debris, created hundreds of kilometers of walking paths and roads, erected hiking shelters, and placed benches and platforms at scenic lookoutst.26 Such efforts were designed to accommodate the Rhineland’s foreign visitors as well as urbanites from the surrounding Rhineland and Ruhr regions. Once the Drachenfels became a popular national symbol after the defeat of the French in 1870, the VVS helped to make room for a new wave of visitors by building roads and hotels in the region and even financing the construction of a funicular railway up the side of the mountain that whisked tourists to the Drachenfels summit. From the precipice, visitors enjoyed a panoramic view of the Rhine’s left bank; the height enabled them to visualize the distant Eifel hills to the west, the Cologne Cathedral to the north, the Westerwald to the east, and the Rhine islands to the south as elements of Fatherland topography.27

By the 1880s, the accelerated industrialization and urbanization associated with the second industrial revolution had begun to take their toll on the Rhineland landscape. The Rhineland was at the center of Germany’s rapid late-nineteenth-century economic transformation and population growth. The province’s population doubled between 1870 and 1914, rising from approximately 3.6 million to 7.9 million inhabitants, many of whom were immigrants to the Ruhr area from the eastern Polish-speaking provinces of Silesia and West Prussia. By 1875, more than 116 chemical production plants were located in the Rhineland, and the construction of the famous Bayer pharmaceutical works in the town of Henkel, now known as Leverkusen, marked the development of the Cologne-Düsseldorf region as Europe’s largest pharmaceutical manufacturing center. The Rhine Province also contained a third of Germany’s most important coal mining and steel-manufacturing districts, the Ruhr industrial complex, within its borders. The use of steam-powered water pumps and the development of the railway network in the region increased coal production from 70,000 metric tons in 1774 to an astounding 115 million in 1913, a 1,600-fold increase.28 As this area developed, towns such as Duisburg and Essen became some of Germany’s most valuable industrial centers. The Rhineland’s cities and factories attracted immigrants from the province’s own rural areas. Declining agricultural prices in outlying districts such as the hilly Eifel on the Belgian border and the Hunsrück on the Rhine’s left bank had led to chronic poverty in these regions. Many rural workers left the agrarian life in search of higher wages in nearby cities; others emigrated to the United States, leaving Germany altogether for farmsteads in the Midwest or factory work in Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Louis. The result was that the Eifel district barely grew in population during this period, despite the overall increase in the province’s population.29

Nature lovers were especially concerned about the growing sprawl of urban civilization and technology into the rural landscape caused by these socioeconomic changes. Railways connecting the Rhenish cities of Aachen, Bonn, Cologne, and Düsseldorf with other major
European cities, for example, soon created the most dense railway network in the world. Dams, which destroyed wildlife habitat, woodlands, and watersheds, were also increasingly commonplace in the decades before World War I. In 1889, the Ruhr Dam Association was founded to "improve the quantity and quality of water levels on the Ruhr through the construction of dams in the Ruhr's watershed." The first dams were built in the nearby Sauerland between 1901 and 1904; as the Ruhr's water needs grew, so did the number and size of such dams, until nearly all upstream water was captured. Since most German rivers flow north to south, east-west canals were eventually built to link the entire system together; one historian has compared the resulting network of mechanized waterways to an "autobahn of water transportation."

The Rhine itself became more like an organic machine than a natural monument during the nineteenth century, transformed into the river most modified by human hands in the world. The Rhine that early Romantics had experienced contained thousands of islands, uncertain currents, underwater cliffs, acres of wetlands, and abundant salmon and mayfish populations. Then in 1817 the Baden civil engineer Johann Gottfried Tulla, the so-called Tamer of the Wild Rhine, took charge of straightening and digging the river for flood control. Tulla was followed by hydraulic engineers in other riparian states who oversaw the dredging of the channel, the removal of natural barriers, and the construction of ports and bridges for easier two-way shipping. Such "improvements" reconstituted the river as a navigational canal to benefit industrial production, reducing its length between Basel and Mannheim by a staggering 100 kilometers.

This "correction" of the Rhine did indeed make navigation easier, and it decreased the incidence of malaria and typhus along the Rhine's banks, but it also produced a host of other, unintended ecological effects, including the loss of rich alluvial soils that were deposited along the river's banks during periodic floods, a lowering of the region's water table owing to the deeper stream bed cut by the river, an increase in sediments and pollutants in the waterway due to deforestation and erosion, and the destruction of floodplain forests and biotically diverse marshes used as nurseries for fish and bird species. The Rhine also refused to be tamed; preventing floods in upstream cities such as Strasbourg merely displaced the problem to downstream sites such as Koblenz, which were inundated by higher waters and sediment levels.

Some of Germany's most significant ecological degradation during this period occurred in the Ruhr coal-mining region, which was afflicted by water pollution, air pollution, and overdevelopment. To secure water for the Ruhr region's coal mines and factories, German engineers pioneered the practice of siphoning freshwater from the Ruhr River, using the water for manufacturing processes, and returning it, untreated, into tributaries such as the Emscher River. The resulting mass of slow-moving, reeking black sludge in the Emscher prompted one Prussian parliamentarian to call it the "river of hell." The Rhine also suffered from the dumping of industrial and municipal waste; one parliamentary deputy in 1901 declared the river a "sewer" in which it was no longer possible to bathe and whose flooding posed a risk of infecting drinking water supplies with typhus and cholera bacilli. Even the threat of disease did not lead government to restrict industrial effluents, however. Instead, scientists argued that certain stretches of a river could be sacrificed to industry (the so-called Opferstrecke) without damage to the river's entire length. Air pollution also plagued the Rhineland's environment. In the 1880s, Julius von Schröder and Carl Reuss identified sulphur dioxide from smokestacks and the resultant acid rain as major causes of "forester death," while public health officials recognized the deleterious effect of coal smoke on the human respiratory system. The Ruhr region developed one of the highest concentrations of polluting factories, thanks to the legal criterion of the "district norm." Once an individual town or village welcomed a factory that brought jobs and economic growth, judges and bureaucrats often designated the zone surrounding the manufacturing facility as an industrial region and used that fact as grounds for licensing more industrial facilities in the same area. Just as the "sacrificed stretches" of rivers kept getting longer until they included the Ruhr's entire watershed, so did the patchwork of industrial districts grow in the Ruhr area until air and water pollution constituted the "district norm" for the entire region. In 1915, for example, a judge ruled that a local farmer did not deserve compensation for smoke damage to his orchard because it was "unreasonable" to expect to grow fruit trees in the Ruhr Valley, even though such agricultural practices had been commonplace only fifty years previously. Companies usually responded to lawsuits by building higher chimneys, which merely blew the toxins farther away from their origin, making it more difficult to pinpoint their source and hold a factory owner liable.
Ordinary citizens did not need scientific studies to show that something was terribly amiss in the Ruhr's environment. Hans Klose, who later became a provincial nature protection commissioner in Brandenburg, had spent his childhood in the region and described its transformation in personal terms. In 1890, he noted, "We had a certain right to feel proud of the American-style development of our local Heimat and its neighboring area and felt ourselves to be members of a goal-oriented community full of work tenacity and creative zest." Environmental changes occurred stepwise, with rows of houses pushing into fields and wastewater canals crisscrossing the countryside. Gradually, wrote Klose, "after we had taken off our children's shoes," came the realization of a "dreadful tragedy" taking place in the landscape: a "death sentence for the colorful woodlands, followed by the loss of the coming of spring; here Heimat nature died without hope." Environmental degradation thus produced not only the death of nature but also a loss of memory, destroying the ties between selfhood and Heimat deemed necessary for emotional and physical development.

Individuals' ability to avoid the worst impacts of pollution depended largely on social class. When the steel magnate Alfred Krupp could no longer bear the smoke and noise from his Essen factory, he built a spectacular villa on a hill outside the city with its own private park and transplanted trees. Such permanent refuge was not possible for ordinary laborers and foreign immigrants, however; they had to learn to cope with the existing air, water, and noise of modern Essen. Government officials in the Wilhelmine era were reluctant to intervene legislatively to ameliorate such problems, because it would mean placing restrictions on industries considered vital to the nation's economic growth, political stability, and military superiority. Given such government indifference, it is not surprising that many German workers turned to radical political alternatives; class consciousness was a product of the home environment as much as the factory floor. By 1914 the SPD, whose platform called for the overthrow of capitalism through a workers' revolution, had more than one million members and an electorate in excess of four million, making it the largest socialist party in Europe.

While allowing the state and private firms to sacrifice the Ruhr region to the needs of industry, many middle-class observers hoped that the Rhine Gorge and other scenic areas would remain sanctuaries from the evils of materialism. Yet the tourists and Sunday visitors who came to inundate natural areas on weekends and holidays led to increasing anxiety over the commercialization of the Rhine's Romantic landscapes. Nature preservationists bemoaned the railway lines, billboards, hotels, souvenir shops, "Father Rhine" pubs, and other amenities established to accommodate the growing number of tourists in the region. While these venues were the life's blood of many Rhenish towns, Heimat advocates complained that they cheapened nature, debasing its symbolic power and further damaging the natural environment. The future Heimatschutz movement founder, Ernst Rudorff, for example, wrote the widely cited 1880 essay "On the Relationship of Modern Life to Nature" to protest the VVS's plan to build the funicular railway up the side of Drachenfels. Rudorff claimed that tour-
ists’ sightseeing in the area was merely “barhopping in an altered form,” and satirized visitors’ consumption of natural scenery. In an outdoor restaurant, he asserted, the waiter might ask if guests preferred their soup first, then the sunset, or the other way around. Rudorff demanded that instead visitors be mindful of the “genuine, living piety for Nature” and not treat it as a mere curiosity or souvenir. As a repository of ideal values, nature was to be strictly separated from commercial impulses. Concerned Rhenish citizens and provincial officials soon echoed Rudorff’s concerns, claiming that nature protection, rather than beautification and expanded recreational development, was the key to securing the area’s future.

Saving the Siebengebirge

This aesthetic perception of environmental problems, which focused especially on the loss of outstanding scenery while often neglecting the mounting ecological costs of pollution and hydraulic engineering, was characteristic of bourgeois landscape preservation in the decades before World War I. Despite the massive transformation of the Rhine’s entire watershed that occurred during the nineteenth-century industrialization of the river, nature protection campaigns selected sites enshrined in the Romantic pantheon as subjects of concern, as was the case in the campaign to save the Siebengebirge from the mining industry. In the early 1880s, mining operations near the summit of the Ölberg peak in the Siebengebirge opened an enormous gash on the side of the mountain. The scar was so large it was visible to strollers on the Rhine’s banks in Bonn and steamship passengers gliding toward the Drachenfels, the gateway to the Rhine Gorge. Mining had resumed in the Siebengebirge with a vengeance in the 1880s, since the construction of modern streets, waterways, and river embankments had led to an unprecedented demand for the weather-resistant basalt found in local mines. While the Drachenfels remained a protected area, the remaining peaks in the Siebengebirge were vulnerable to further incursions, as the mining industry had plans to excavate the stone at several sites in the region.

The Bonn attorney Josef Humbroich, leader of a group of Bonn citizens outraged by this disfigurement (Verunstaltung) of the local landscape, first turned to the Hohenzollern crown prince Wilhelm II in 1884 to solicit his help in protecting the area. That appeal failed; the state, he was told, lacked the funds to purchase land parcels in the area. Then, instead of stepping in to aid Humbroich and his followers in their preservation effort, the Rhenish Provincial Association (Provinzialverband) in Düsseldorf enraged the group when it purchased the basalt mines on the nearby Petersberg peak in April 1886. The Provinzialverband hoped to line its own pockets with the profits from the mine. Although the VVS had taken control of the Drachenfels monument in 1869 and had been responsible for efforts to enhance the Siebengebirge’s beauty for visitors, it was embroiled in internal disputes at this time that rendered it unable to assist Humbroich in his campaign.

Faced with a complete lack of state and private support, Humbroich founded the Society to Save the Siebengebirge (Verein zur Rettung des Siebengebirges, or VRS) in May of 1886, an organization dedicated to preserving the area from further development. The VRS passed a resolution, signed by key political, educational, and commercial figures in the region, calling on the Provincial Association to stop its mining operations in the area. Focusing on the aesthetic impact of mining, the petition claimed that the “broad, powerful, and magnificent Petersberg” was an essential part of the region’s beauty, and that damage to it would ruin the “wonderful and uniquely beautiful panorama of the entire mountainous area from Bonn to Godesburg.” Within a few years, the resolution continued, quarry activities would produce so many “deep wounds” in the landscape that it would disfigure the entire series of Rhine-facing hills. Anyone taking a short hike from Bonn to the mountains could already see the results of such activity. “Crippled plum trees” and “thin grass and desolate weeds” showed the futility of planting over the rubble heaps produced by extracting rock; the landscape offered a “sad melancholy” in comparison to the wonderful forests and orchards that once covered the base of the mountains. After a bitter public campaign, provincial officials bowed to popular opinion and sold the Petersberg mine in 1889, stipulating that no future mining operations be conducted there.

VRS members saw themselves as stewards of the province’s natural heritage, and in the process of agitating to save the Siebengebirge they helped to nationalize the landscape, transforming the Romantic experience of nature into a celebration of national cohesion. Whereas the 1836 Drachenfels preservation had focused on nature as a scenic frame for the twelfth-century watchtower ruins, the 1886
Siebengebirge campaign proposed that nature itself deserved protection, offering concrete traces of a primordial territoriality that had existed in the mists of time. To demonstrate the site's national significance, the VRS created an organic history of the nation that anchored German identity in the Siebengebirge's natural and cultural heritage. The Siebengebirge's defenders noted that the area's basalt and trachyte were the result of volcanic activity millions of years ago, with rare species of indigenous plants later inhabiting the rich soil produced by eruptions. Natural history then became the substrate of human settlement, and archaeological digs provided evidence of the Celts, Germanic tribes, and Roman occupiers who had made use of nature's bounty and formed fishing villages and agricultural communities. The Romans were the first to mine the Drachenfels, and the vineyards that dotted the region and thrived in its rich volcanic soil were first planted by those occupiers from southern Europe.49

The result was a palimpsest of nature and history, a "unique garden of God" with fertile earth, fruit orchards in the valley, and vineyards clinging precipitously to the sides of mountains. Nowhere else in Germany, claimed the VRS, could visitors find such diversity in such a small space; "every minor high point, every pathway brings constantly new images, never of the same form, each equipped with its own attraction." The stories and legends about the region, such as Roland, the knight who had slain the Drachenfels dragon, anchored the Siebengebirge in popular memory, further bolstering its significance as a national monument. "Thousands upon thousands make a pilgrimage there every year," noted the VRS, "furnished from everyday trials, to expand their heart and chest, to get new energy and new spirit for the strains of their daily occupations through fresh hiking excursions and Rhenish cheerfulness." Nature's beauty was available to all; it required no special education to enjoy a hike along a Siebengebirge path or to relax on a picnic in one of its meadows. The region was thus truly an "ideal possession of our people," a "holy property of the Fatherland" rather than a place of quick profits for few greedy investors. Having so often been called to defend the Siebengebirge with their "hearts' blood," the people laid claim to the region as one of the "holiest and dearest possessions of the nation . . . to be preserved in the magic of its forests and in the undiminished beauty of its mountaintop."50

The VRS's depiction of the Siebengebirge as a popular site of national pilgrimage echoed the middle-class belief that nature could heal social divisions. As Germans young and old, elite and poor, male and female experienced the natural landscape, they found a common ground unavailable in the city or any other historic venue; nature subsumed difference in its immediate emotional appeal. Noting the cultural-political significance of nature's social function, the VRS wrote: "Especially in our time, with its sharp social differences, the ideal goods of the nation represent a conciliatory, balancing moment; it would be a sin to rip them out of the heart of the people!"51 Such nationalist rhetoric emphasized nature protection as a fight to protect ideal values against the leveling forces of materialism and factionalism. The effect of the VRS report was thus to nationalize natural features, creating a portrait of Germany as a nation rooted in the organic world, rather than one produced by contingent political compromises.

The VRS's portrayal of Siebengebirge protection as a patriotic campaign eventually found resonance among Prussian state and Rhineland provincial officials. One of the organization's most effective rhetorical strategies was to portray the Siebengebirge as a "natural monument," on a par with or even more essential than the historic and artistic objects of traditional state Denkmalpflege. An 1887 petition to Prussian officials declared that, while "our laws protect old built monuments of historical or artistic value, they should also protect hilltops which through their form and beauty give the landscape a special character, such as the Petersberg and the Ölberg. Monuments of nature deserve as much protection as the monuments of art." In this view, natural monument protection was a logical outgrowth of the state's ideal role as the guarantor of national heritage. The state would lead the people in subsuming materialistic impulses in the name of higher ideals. "Even down-to-earth America," the petition noted, "has declared the Niagara Falls and other regions as national parks and does not allow any industrial exploitation and disfigurement there."52

Despite the VRS's success in saving the Petersberg, several sites within the Siebengebirge region remained in jeopardy. The Ölberg was threatened anew, as the mine owner Franz Merkens announced plans to build a railroad to the summit for transporting stone down the mountain. The need for a united front against such destruction soon prompted the VRS to merge with the VVS, creating a new VVS
organization dedicated to ending mining operations in the region and securing the natural landscape for future generations. For the first time, nature protection, rather than recreational development, would dominate VVS concerns. Whereas the VVS's 1869 charter had stated that the organization was dedicated to "creating and maintaining roads, riding paths, and footpaths, as well as facilities, that could contribute to the comfort and convenience of the Siebengebirge's visitors," its 1899 statement declared its primary goal to be "the lasting preservation and protection of the Siebengebirge against destruction and damage."

This shift from beautification to preservation brought the VVS new participants and added prestige; by 1902, the organization counted 730 members. Although the VVS included members from as far away as Berlin, most came from nearby cities, such as Bonn and Cologne, as well as communities near the Siebengebirge, such as Königswinter and Honnef. Most VVS members were educated and well-to-do, including civil servants such as university professors and judges, professionals such as lawyers and doctors, and representatives from the commercial, financial, and industrial sectors, such as bankers and factory owners, many of whom carried the honorary title Kommerzierrat, conferred by the government only on distinguished businessmen. The society's emphasis on the aesthetic and nationalist meaning of the Siebengebirge's cultural landscape undoubtedly reflected the predominance of classically educated urban elites in the VVS, individuals for whom Romanticism and its glorification of nature represented a distinctively German contribution to world civilization. Yet the VVS did attract members from more modest economic and educational backgrounds, including small business owners, state employees such as teachers and foresters, and a high number of retirees, whose income varied from person to person. The organization had no manual laborers as members, however, and only a small number of women, many of whom had joined in conjunction with their spouse. The VVS nevertheless provided a venue for a broad cross section of the province's middle classes to engage in reformist, civic-minded activities designed to improve the local environment, a far cry from the bourgeois escapism or reactionary "cultural despair" that scholars once used to characterize middle-class Heimat activities.

This view of nature protection as a duty for the enlightened state convinced the Rhineland's Prussian-appointed head president (Oberpräsident) Berthold von Nassau to support VVS efforts, and his vocal backing for the preservation campaign was indeed crucial to its success. In a speech in the presence of Kaiser Wilhelm II, Nassau called for an end to the mining industry's "nature vandalism" in the Siebengebirge, and he admonished Berlin to assist regional officials in
preserving the entire area. Such language had an effect. After a survey of the area led by the Prussian Ministry of the Interior, according to one account, “All of the participating officials were of one mind that active assistance needed to be given, if the most beautiful and important points of the Siebengebirge were to be preserved for posterity.”9 As a result of Nasse’s mediation, the Prussian Cultural Ministry granted the VVS the right to conduct a series of lotteries to raise funds for purchasing land within the Siebengebirge. Held in 1899 and 1906, the lotteries brought the VVS approximately 2.4 million marks, a crucial sum that allowed the organization to secure the area.9 With these funds, the VVS was able to purchase a number of key parcels from the mine owners, including the ölberg summit.

In addition to the right to hold lotteries, the state granted the VVS the right of eminent domain (Enstiegnungsrecht) for any part of the area that “as a consequence of present or expected use might spoil the beauty of the Siebengebirge.”90 Aesthetic ideals thus provided the legal basis for land expropriation; the protection of the “landscape beauties of the Siebengebirge” against disfigurement became the key criterion for determining which parcels of land were threatened and thus subject to eminent domain. By the 1890s, the spread of vacation facilities, such as hotels and weekend cottages, was also of growing concern, and the VVS was permitted to apply dispossession rights to areas that might be developed in this manner. The state did not sanction the use of eminent domain, however, in areas in which “expected uses”91 did not involve activities that destroyed the area’s aesthetic beauty, such as forestry, or where the VVS could convince owners to restrict their use voluntarily.92 The granting of dispossession rights nonetheless marked a significant step in the evolution of German nature preservation policy, for it asserted the state’s right to infringe on private property rights in the name of protecting natural areas.

Prussian officials were not the only government representatives to take an active interest in preserving the Siebengebirge; the Rhineland’s own provincial and local authorities stepped in to help secure the area as a nature reserve. In 1899 the VVS received grants of 50,000 marks from the city of Bonn, 100,000 marks from Cologne, and 200,000 marks from the Provincial Association for purchasing or leasing land in the area.92 These regional and municipal grants reflected the Siebengebirge’s growing importance as a regional symbol and a refuge for urban denizens from Bonn and Cologne. Remarkably, some officials even placed nature protection above historic preservation in securing Rhenish identity. The mayor of Cologne, for example, claimed that the Siebengebirge ought to be more cherished than the Cologne cathedral; if the cathedral were to collapse, he noted, it could be rebuilt, whereas the Siebengebirge was irreplaceable.93 In recognition of the role of state and provincial officials in supporting VVS activities, the organization named several of the region’s leaders to its board of directors, including Head President Nasse as the organization’s permanent honorary chairman, the mayor of Bonn, the Prussian-appointed Cologne district president (Regierungspräsident), the county heads (Landräte) from the Bonn and Siegkreis counties where the Siebengebirge is located, and elected representatives of the Provinzialverband, the city of Cologne, and the city of Bonn.94 This combination of state support and private initiative reflected state authorities’ belief that it was most expedient to encourage private organizations’ cultural activities through grants and administrative assistance, rather than by taking over their financing and administration directly.

Despite the fact that a combination of Prussian-appointed officials, provincial authorities, and municipal representatives were involved in the Siebengebirge preservation effort, the Rhinens Provincial Association’s support proved the most substantial and enduring in the organization’s long-term development. The Siebengebirge was an important national symbol, but regional sponsorship ensured that the locale also remained a repository of Rhenish cultural heritage and identity. Provincial officials “could not fail to recognize that, just as the Siebengebirge is a general good of the population in the heart of the province, the Provincial Association has without a doubt an essential interest in preserving [its] landscape beauties.” Major newspapers, such as the Bonner Zeitung (Bonn Newspaper) and the liberal Kölnische Zeitung (Cologne Newspaper) echoed such sentiments, arguing in favor of the plan to preserve the “Rhineland’s Pearl” from destruction.95 Stressing nature protection’s ability to overcome social and political differences, the Kölnische Zeitung’s editors honored the VVS as “speaker for the Rhenish population of all classes and parties.” The Provincial Association chastised the mining industry for its greedy pursuit of financial profits, which had replaced the Siebengebirge’s “natural beauties” with “barren cliff surfaces and
ugly heaps of rubble." Such rhetorical strategies enabled provincial officials to fashion themselves, not distant Berlin bureaucrats, as the moral guardians of their population’s long-term interests. In the years to come, the VVS would receive numerous additional monetary grants from the Provincial Association, making it the major beneficiary of provincial nature protection funds during the early part of this century.

Such provincial cultural patronage had evolved during the course of the nineteenth century along with regional demands for greater autonomy. The VVS received its provincial funds under the conditions specified in the Prussian Endowment Laws from 1873 and 1875, which had granted the Prussian provinces an annual lump sum of money and the right to tax their population for the purposes of managing their internal affairs. The Endowment Laws helped Prussian authorities to streamline their administrative tasks and accommodate regional demands for greater independence from Berlin. This devolution of control onto the Rhine Province had led in the 1880s to the creation of the office of provincial governor (Landeshauptmann), who became the highest elected official in the province; the formation of the Provinzialverband, the official agency of Rhenish self-government in the province; and the creation of the Provincial Committee (Provinzialausschuss), a thirteen-member commission that was charged with carrying out the Provinzialverband’s administrative and budgetary tasks. In addition, the Endowment Laws specified that the provincial administrators should take control of a number of activities, including street building and public health administration. The scope of provincial self-administration increased throughout the Wilhelmine and Weimar periods, becoming a cornerstone of Germany’s decentralized administrative approach.

One of the areas that fell under provincial control was Kulturpflege (the “care of culture”), which included supervision of key cultural institutions, such as universities, theaters, museums, and music societies, as well as Denkmalpflege activities. This devolution of administrative and cultural authority onto the province helped to lessen some of the traditional conflicts between Prussia and the Rhineland’s liberal and Catholic factions. Provincial control over cultural affairs afforded Rhinelanders the freedom to shape their own sense of regional heritage and culture, yet at the same time ensured their ultimate loyalty to Prussia and the national state. Provincial control nevertheless contributed to a decentralized vision of national culture, one in which regional diversity, rather than central control from Berlin, was seen as the keystone to national character. When the Provincial Committee approved funds for the VVS to protect the Siebengebirge, it recognized that natural monuments provided a bridge between provincial identity and national consciousness, stating that “the diversely formed basalt and trachyte mountains and the lovely valleys attached to them, to which manifold memories from sagas and stories cling, are known to every Rhinelander. The region of the Siebengebirge has become dear to the hearts of the Rhenish as well as German people.” Sites such as the Siebengebirge, in other words, offered a popular venue for provincial Rhinelanders to envision their local surroundings embedded within the larger German nation, and for German nationals to recognize regional diversity as the key to national strength. Nature provided a bridge between local, regional, and national conceptions of homeland, even in a province with a traditionally ambivalent relationship to Berlin. This regionalist inflection of national identity reflected the reality of the German Empire, which was a loose federation of regional states whose territorial boundaries and historical referents lay in the Holy Roman Empire, rather than a centralized nation.

While the Siebengebirge’s defenders and public officials designated nature protection as a communitarian goal above “material interests,” they recognized the economic advantage of nature protection for the area’s tourism industry. In 1886 alone, the VRS claimed that eighteen trains and steam ships had stopped daily in Königswinter at the base of the Siebengebirge, along with twenty-six additional trains in Mehlme across the river, bringing thousands of visitors to the region. These visitors had an enormous economic impact on the region; as the VRS’s 1886 petition to the Provincial Assembly in Düsseldorf noted: “The Siebengebirge with its wonderful and uniquely beautiful mountaintops draws thousands of foreigners annually into this area of the Rhine, and it is to this tourism that the numerous surrounding localities owe their blossoming prosperity,” adding that it was “natural beauty,” first and foremost, that attracted the guests to the Siebengebirge. The decisions by the city of Bonn and the Rhenish Provinzialverband to grant funds for securing the Siebengebirge area were also based in part on economic calculations. “It must be expected,” noted Rhineland officials, “that the richly
endowed Rhine Province, which expects to accrue considerable material advantages from the landscape beauties of the Siebengebirge and through the growth of tourism,” should also make sacrifices to protect the area.46 By comparison, the mining industry employed a “relatively small” number of workers; its pernicious form of “temporary profit” and “overexploitation” (Raubhut, literally “activity built upon theft”) left a sterile landscape of worthless rubble heaps and gashes in the sides of cliffs, a “wasteland” that could never again be used productively.47 Aestheticism did not blind nature lovers to economic realities in a capitalist system. Siebengebirge advocates did propose, however, a different calculus of costs and benefits, one that recognized the long-term social cost of industrial exploitation of non-renewable natural resources.

Despite the VVS’s success in galvanizing popular support for Siebengebirge protection, local business and political leaders challenged the organization’s claims about the preservation campaign’s economic benefits, in an effort to reclaim local autonomy and private property rights. In an October 1900 resolution, the city council in Königswinter asserted that dismantling the mining industry in the area would result in economic disaster for the region. Rejecting the VVS’s populist claim that all Rhinelander were behind the preservation effort, the council argued that ordinary manual workers, “Christian and loyal to the emperor,” feared the loss of employment opportunities. The council believed that the region needed sources of income beyond tourism, which was restricted to the summer months. Angry at Prussian authorities for granting the VVS generous financial support and dispossession rights, the council accused the district president in Cologne of a “lack of objectivity and love of the truth” in depicting environmental threats in the area. It was the municipalities, they claimed, not Prussian state leaders, who best understood the region’s needs. The council asserted that private ownership, not state control, had made the region great and would remain the key to the area’s future. “It is absolutely necessary to present to the public the current conditions in the region clearly and correctly, since on all sides . . . the view has been widespread, that the whole Siebengebirge finds itself in the clutches of people who exploit the realm both above and below with a merciless hand out of monetary interest and are gradually transforming the hills into a heap of rubble.” According to the council, this perspective was completely false, as private owners had created magnificent villas that gave the region its notoriety and cared for the long-term economic sustainability of their property through careful land management.48

Nothing revealed the gap between urban elites’ preservation goals and local ideals of land stewardship more than the groups’ conflicting conceptions of landscape beauty. The council noted sarcastically that it did not wish to fault the “sense of beauty” among the “influential gentlemen of the VVS,” but that “such points could be debated . . . one can have different opinions about [what constitutes] landscape beauty.” The council claimed that the VVS’s reports about the destruction of the landscape were exaggerated: “Of the 100,000 visitors to the hills perhaps only 100 have even seen the Öllberg stone quarry.”49 More important, in the council’s eyes, the aesthetic views of a few elite gentlemen should not be allowed to override economic development and the state-guaranteed primacy of private property. As one mine owner noted bluntly: “We share the enthusiasm for this charming little piece of German soil, but even more highly do we estimate the idea of property and the right to do with this as we see fit.”50

These debates over the relative value of aesthetics versus economic development soon resulted in lawsuits challenging the VVS in Germany’s courts. While the state had allowed the VVS to hold lotteries and had granted the organization funds to purchase or even dispossess land in exceptional cases, the VVS had no secure legal basis for restricting property owners from opening new mines or otherwise economically developing their lands within the Siebengebirge. To stop economic development in the region, nature protectionists relied on an 1899 police ordinance issued by the Cologne district president, that placed stringent restrictions on commercial development in the Siebengebirge region and on land directly across the river. The ordinance forbade the construction of new factories or additions to existing ones, as well as the establishment of stone quarries or brickworks, “which by regular operations are known to cause dangers, disadvantages, or disturbance for the public.”51 The ordinance relied on a broad interpretation of the police’s right, established in 1850, to restrict activity “which had to be regulated in the interest of the community and its inhabitants.” The ordinance made no mention of authorities’ primary concern of protecting the Siebengebirge’s scenic beauty, however, because such aesthetic arguments could not withstand legal scrutiny, as an earlier case had shown. In an 1882 decision, the Prussian Upper Administrative Court (Oberverwaltungsgericht) in Berlin had voided a police ordinance that would have prevented the con-
struction of a building blocking residents’ views in the Berlin-Kreuzberg neighborhood. Referring to the Prussian General Property Law of 1794, the court stated that the police were allowed to regulate only construction projects that disturbed public order. They could not issue ordinances for general welfare purposes, which is how landscape-aesthetic goals were defined. The Oberverwaltungsgericht’s 1882 decision provided a legal wedge for mine owners to dismantle local ordinances restricting mining operations. The owner of the Petersberg mine was the first to use this decision to challenge the 1899 Cologne district ordinance by announcing the opening of a new mine in the Siebengebirge in 1901. The highest Prussian court, the Kammergericht, decided that the ordinance restricting such a move was indeed invalid, using reasoning similar to that of the Upper Administrative Court in the Kreuzberg case. The Kammergericht stated that the district president was permitted to issue such ordinances only in cases where the “dangers and not merely disadvantages or annoyances for the public . . . were to be averted.”  

The Cologne district president relented the Siebengebirge ordinance in May 1902, following the letter of the court’s rulings about the scope of its purview by stating that mining constituted a danger to the public. However, when the state tried to prevent the reopening of a mine at Leyberg in 1913 based on this ordinance, the Prussian Upper Administrative Court once again declared the Siebengebirge ordinance invalid. The court noted that the operation of a mine was not a danger to the public, as evidenced by the many mines outside the Siebengebirge that had never required police intervention.

While the Siebengebirge ordinances were successfully challenged in court, the VVS’s dispossession rights, granted in 1899, withstood legal challenges. In 1912, the Prussian Commission for Municipal Affairs considered a petition from one mine owner who sought to end or place a time limit on the VVS’s right to eminent domain in the Siebengebirge. Angered by the VVS’s infringement of his property rights, the owner claimed that the VVS’s privilege had not been granted through appropriate legal channels, and that he had never learned why his property had been taken away from him. Although in practice the VVS had used the right to eminent domain sparingly (the society had forced the sale of only two parcels of land, totaling 2.62 hectares, and no dispossession had occurred since 1900), the claimant argued that the VVS’s expropriation right functioned as a “never-end-

ing threat, through which property in the Siebengebirge had become insecure” and even unsaleable. In this case, the Prussian government decided that the VVS could continue to exercise eminent domain until it had secured the necessary parcels for maintaining the Siebengebirge in its “characteristic beauty,” which it interpreted as the full 1,100 hectares it had intended to set aside as a reserve in the area. Since it had purchased only 750 hectares, the state reasoned that the VVS could continue to use its dispossession rights, but noted that if an owner agreed to preserve the land in its characteristic beauty, then purchase or dispossession was unnecessary. Confirming the state’s commitment to protecting the Siebengebirge’s unique character, the committee concluded: “Although it cannot be argued that the possibility of expropriation limits the free disposal of property in many respects, it should not be underestimated that certain obligations to the population as a whole accrue to the owner of a piece of property in a place that is especially beautiful and for which there is barely anything similar to be found in Germany.”

The commission thus confirmed the state’s willingness in certain cases to counteract an infringement on property rights for the sake of nature protection goals.

The use of aesthetic, nationalist, and educational criteria to judge areas deserving of state protection continued in the first half of the twentieth century, a reflection of bourgeois elites’ belief in nature’s ability to elevate individuals morally and to stimulate their emotional attachments to Heimat regardless of their social background. Finding a legal basis for nature protection that would enable the state to restrict private property nonetheless remained a key problem for the Naturschutz movement. Despite these challenges, the Siebengebirge preservation campaign met its goals. Mine owners for the most part remained unclear about the legal status of the ban on mining operations, or felt pressured by public opinion to halt their operations. These factors kept the region stable until the bitter disputes of the Weimar era.


Despite uncertainty about the Siebengebirge protection ordinances, nature protectionists viewed the campaign to save the region as a success and used it as a model for similar state and private efforts in
the decades before World War I. A visit to the Siebenberge in 1898 convinced Breslau schoolteacher Wilhelm Wetekamp that Germany needed nature parks comparable to those established at Yosemite and Yellowstone in the United States. As a member of the Prussian Assembly, Wetekamp called on the state to assist in the "protection of monuments of the developmental history of nature that are indispensable to scientific research and nature study instruction, as well as the declaration of untouched natural areas as state parks similar to the national parks of the United States." Echoing the VVS's conception of state-sponsored nature protection as a guarantor of ideal communitarian values, Wetekamp noted that "none of us could imagine that these types of beauties should be destroyed for such [materialistic] purposes in a civilized state [like Germany]." One of Wetekamp's listeners in the assembly was Friedrich Althoff, the head of the Prussian Cultural Ministry, who responded with enthusiasm to Wetekamp's suggestion and began to investigate the possibility of creating such parks in Germany. Althoff commissioned Hugo Conwentz, the head of the West Prussian Provincial Museum in Danzig, to publish a report outlining the causes of the destruction of national landmarks and the measures needed to protect them.

The result of Conwentz's three-year effort was The Endangerment of Natural Monuments and Recommendations for their Preservation, published in 1904. This report became the cornerstone of Prussian nature preservation policy in the years before World War I. Based on Conwentz's suggestions in the report, Althoff sponsored the creation of the State Office for Natural Monument Preservation in 1906 within the Cultural Ministry. Althoff placed the State Office under Conwentz's leadership; it was first located in Danzig and was moved to Berlin in 1911. Conwentz was a good choice for heading up the new agency. A pragmatic scientist rather than nature romantic or völkisch nationalist, Conwentz was willing to work within existing parameters to protect Germany's natural monuments. As one historian has noted, a "sense of exactness and soberness and a certain tendency toward meticulousness characterized him already during his time in primary school and furthered his interest in natural science." Also in 1906, Bavaria established its own State Agency for the Care of Nature, which was followed by the creation of a similar state office in Württemberg. Given Prussia's dominance in the German Empire, the founding of the State Office proved to be a milestone in the country's development of a legal and institutional framework for environmental affairs. The National Socialists transformed this office in 1935 into the Reich Office for Nature Protection, Germany's first national nature protection office, which survived World War II to become the Federal Republic's initial environmental protection agency.

Although Wetekamp saw the American national park system as a model for Germany, Conwentz recognized that large-scale reserves such as Yellowstone were inappropriate, given Germany's size and population density; one park the size of Yellowstone would have encompassed the entire kingdom of Saxony. The Nature Park Society, a private organization founded in Stuttgart in 1908 that counted 14,000 members by 1918, was successful in raising money to secure the first parcels for national parks in the Austrian Alps and the Lüneburger Heath near Hamburg, but such large-scale reserves remained the exception rather than the rule. Conwentz envisioned the State Office as an umbrella agency for a decentralized array of regional and local efforts to secure individual natural objects or smaller conservation regions. He referred to his program as natural monument preservation (Naturdenkmalspflege), whose linguistic affinity with historic monument preservation (Denkmalspflege) was a pragmatic attempt to extend the idea of heritage preservation, as well as its cultural-political aim of building national identity, to the natural world. Conwentz distinguished national monuments as works of creation not influenced by human hands, whereas the traditional historic and artistic objects of Denkmalspflege revealed the workings of human artifice. Recognizing that most of the German landscape was not pristine like that of North America, Conwentz made room in his definition of the natural monument for areas where human influences were visible. "Here and there the concept [of natural monument] will need to be somewhat broadened," he wrote, "since completely untouched landscapes, as in other developed countries, hardly exist anymore."

To implement natural monument preservation at the regional and local levels, Conwentz urged Prussia's provinces to form provincial and district nature preservation offices composed of state officials and leading members of private natural history and Heimat organizations. The Rhineland's provincial office, the Rhineland Provincial Committee for Natural Monument Preservation, was established in 1906. It included five district committees representing different geographical regions of the province, including the Bergisches Land (the "hilly re-
igion" on the Rhine’s eastern bank south of Düsseldorf) and the left-bank lower Rhine, as well as offices in Cologne, Koblenz, and Trier. Like the VVS, the Rhineland Provincial Committee included a cross section of Rhinelander officials and elites, including the Prussian head president Clemens August von Schorlemer, who replaced Nasse in 1905; the Rhenish provincial governor Ludwig von Renvers; the Bonn art historian Paul Clemen, the provincial conservator of monuments; and the Cologne district president Eduard zur Nedden, who was also commissioner of the Rhenish Association for Monument Preservation and Homeland Protection (Rheinischer Verein für Denkmalpflege und Heimatschutz, or RVDH); as well as university botanists, forestry officials, and mayors of the major cities throughout the region. In addition to the state agency, private organizations such as the Eifelverein, dedicated to hiking and tourist promotion in the remote Eifel region along the Belgian-Luxembourg border, and the Rhineland-Westphalia Natural History Association often received state help for local nature protection efforts. The public-private cooperation first established at the Siebengebirge thus became a model for the state’s subsequent nature protection activities.

By the early 1900s, observers began to refer to these combined state and private efforts as a new social movement: the Naturschutzbewegung (nature protection movement). The Naturschutz campaign drew strength from Germany’s existing networks of middle-class hiking, beautification, natural history, and outdoor recreation clubs, which often added nature protection activities to their repertoire of activity areas. New organizations devoted entirely to nature protection also emerged during this period of back-to-nature reform. For example, Lina Hähnle’s German League for Bird Protection, founded in 1899, enjoyed rapid success in the Second Empire; its membership rose from 6,100 members in 1902 to 41,233 in 1914. Arguing against the traditional division between “useful” and “harmful” birds, the group encouraged Germans to view both types as part of the overall balance of nature and thus worthy of protection. This effort was among the first to link aesthetic insights with broader ecological understanding. Bird protectionists successfully petitioned the Reich government to pass a law in 1888 that sought to stem the loss of bird diversity by limiting the hunting of targeted species and eliminating hunting methods deemed to be especially cruel. Bird protectionists also pioneered new ways of lobbying for public support, including selling postcards and photographs, and showing films. They instituted practical measures for bolstering bird populations as well. These measures included establishing copes, building nesting boxes, establishing winter feeding schedules, calling for an end to the use of exotic bird feathers in the women’s fashion industry, and encouraging rural families to abstain from using songbirds in their cooking, a practice still common in the late nineteenth century. Unlike the VVS and other nature protection and Heimatschutz protection groups, Hähnle’s leadership enabled women to play a significant role in the organization; they made up 40 percent of the organization’s local branch heads. The nature protection movement could thus muster support from a variety of sectors in German middle-class society for protecting the flora, fauna, and landscape of the Fatherland.

Reflecting his training as a botanist, Conwentz’s 1904 report focused its recommendations on protecting nature for scientific study, education, and recreation. Science, rather than sentiment, would guide his efforts at natural monument preservation. Through annual nature preservation conferences and the office’s journal, Contributions to Natural Monument Preservation, Conwentz established a professional forum in which preservationists from across Germany could coordinate their efforts. Through these venues, a scientific understanding of conservation based on the emerging field of plant geography became increasingly influential within Naturfreunde circles in the decade before World War I. Whereas preservationists during the Siebengebirge campaign had relied primarily on aesthetic, historical, and cultural criteria to argue in favor of protecting the area, Conwentz tried to establish scientific and presumably objective standards for identifying and preserving natural features. This scientific perspective was especially evident in the designation of so-called nature protection regions (Naturerlebnisgebiete), such as bogs, moors, meadows, and forests. Using insights from plant geography, Conwentz envisioned these areas as characteristic parcels of the vegetation that had once dominated Germany’s different regions. Plant geography gave Conwentz’s work a holistic focus that was lacking in the conservation of individual natural forms, and it prepared the way for broader ecological insights about the relationship between floral or faunal communities and their external environment.

Plant geography traced its roots to the early nineteenth century, when the noted German geographer Alexander von Humboldt exam-
ined the way the natural environment shaped the distribution of plants in South America and beyond. Humboldt broke with the natural-historical traditions established by Carolus Linnaeus, who had focused on the taxonomic classification of plants and animals based on similarities and differences in their form and structure. Such an enterprise, Humboldt proposed, could never lead to what he termed physique générale, a universal science that he hoped would discern the underlying unity of all of nature. Humboldt proposed that the earth’s vegetation formed itself into discrete plant associations, whose distribution was determined by environmental factors such as temperature, rainfall, sunlight, and soil conditions. He viewed these vegetational communities as superspecific, ontological units of study with unique properties akin to individual organisms. In his 1807 essay “The Geography of Plants,” Humboldt presented the results of his research on vegetational distribution in South America’s Andean cordillera. He correlated plant distribution with the earth’s isotherms, areas following lines on a map of the earth that connect the regions having the same annual mean temperature. In this manner, Humboldt grouped all of the earth’s vegetation into about fifteen general categories identified by the major plant type in each community: palms, firs, cacti, grasses, and so forth. Humboldt even noted that an individual mountain contained its own patterns of zonation, with lush rain forests flourishing in the damp, sunny, and rich soil areas near the base of the mountain and mosses and lichens in the extreme conditions of the mountain’s peak. For Humboldt, the physiognomy of landscape revealed an ideal biological order that undergirded empirical data in a wide range of environments.99

Subsequent nineteenth-century biologists and geographers shunned Humboldt’s quasi-theological belief that the close relationship between organisms and their environment revealed a divine plan in nature. Yet Humboldt’s environmental analyses and holistic focus remained prominent in the work of such botanists as August Grisebach, Andreas Schimper, Joachim Schouw, Eugenius Warming, and Oscar Dude, who continued Humboldt’s inquiries into the relationship between vegetational communities and their conditions of life. In his 1872 work The Vegetation of the Earth, Grisebach used the term vegetational formation to refer to meadows, forests, and moors as phytogeographic associations linked by shared environmental conditions and relationships with one another. In the wake of Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection, Dude and other plant geographers emphasized the adaptive significance of the vegetational formation, retaining a holistic focus even though Darwinian analysis clearly posited the individual species as the only real unit of biological study.100

Despite its relative insignificance within German botanical studies at the university level, plant geography gave Conwentz the scientific basis he needed to establish natural monument preservation on a supposedly objective footing. The theory that plant formations were unified, stable communities uniquely adapted to particular climatic regimes led nature preservationists to advocate setting aside entire representative tracts of Germany’s major biogeographical regions, including heaths, bogs, mountain forests, and lake regions. Such thinking guided preservationists’ efforts to protect the Lüneburger Heath, for example, which they viewed as an example of the heath formation associated with northern Germany’s climate and soils. In those regions where the landscape was damaged by economic activity, plant-geographical ideas were also applied as guidelines for restoration efforts. In the Siebenengebirge, the VVS commissioned Bonn University botanists to help restore the areas destroyed by mining. In a protected reserve within the nature park, the group planted or transplanted species that were once “probably native” to the Siebenengebirge. In addition, club members maintained in a plot near the town of Bad Honnef specimens of the area’s famous orchid varieties, as well as an artificially created marsh for growing bog plants such as ferns and mosses, which they hoped to transplant later into the nature park.101

While Conwentz sought to establish scientific criteria for preserving and restoring the landscape, his writings nonetheless filtered environmental concern through a national lens that reinforced the close connection between the natural environment and national character. Conwentz’s belief in the importance of preserving or reintroducing Germany’s indigenous species, for example, reflected concerns about the porosity of national borders, rather than merely the dictates of environmental factors. In a 1913 letter to the VVS, Conwentz underscored the negative impact of introducing foreign species into the native homeland. “How wrong it is,” he noted, quoting one letter, “when the gardener smuggles into stands of trees . . . foreign forms from the Asiatic and American Heimat without thinking of the indigenous character of the [German] forest, [or] when he plants between
our [own] oaks ash or elm species that do not at all fit the nature of our Heimat.” In a similar vein, Conwentz criticized the VVS’s practice of using American red oaks in areas of the Siebengebirge designated for commercial forestry. “Although for economic reasons it is only in a few cases possible to preserve the forest in naturally growing stands and [to promote] natural development,” Conwentz wrote, “one should nevertheless in general avoid bringing exotic species into the forest as well as into the landscape scenery.” While VVS members touted the brilliant fall color and rapid growth of the American red oaks, arguing that they had become “native” through cultivation efforts, Conwentz insisted that the society could achieve similar “picturesque” results using native German hardwoods. Though couched in terms of neutral scientific observations, the preservation of natural monuments mapped national borders onto the physical landscape, shaping the natural world for the purpose of consolidating nationalist feeling.

Though Conwentz envisioned natural monuments as symbols of national pride, natural monument preservation also helped to produce a new sense of environmental stewardship at the regional and local levels. Unlike North American national parks, Germany’s natural monuments and nature protection regions remained first and foremost local landmarks, cared for by local clubs and accessible to nearby residents. Rhineland Heimat advocates envisioned the region’s juniper trees, red deer, extinct volcanic craters, and Rhine tributaries such as the Ahr as fellow members of the homeland, not distant, exotic experiences. They wrote poems to these natural monuments using the familiar second-person Du, organized hikes to describe their features to local schoolchildren, and created picturesque etchings that blended bucolic hills and forests with cultivated fields, church steeples, and half-timbered houses.

In contrast to popular obsession with “charismatic megafauna” in the United States and on the African continent, Heimat environmentalism found a place for species not usually seen as majestic, beautiful, cute, or cuddly. Nature protectionists in the Rhineland, for example, sounded the alarm over the precipitous decline in the populations of local reptiles and amphibians, creatures that had suffered horribly in modern society’s “war of destruction against primordial nature.” As one preservationist noted in the pages of Conwentz’s Contributions to Natural Monument Preservation, these animals were especially sensitive to changes in their habitat, such as the draining of bogs and ponds for agriculture, the straightening of streams for transportation, and the dumping of polluted wastewater. Unlike birds, who could in some cases escape such destruction by flying to a different habitat, reptiles and amphibians “cling to the soil of Heimat to a much greater extent, and for them a change in their habitat caused by development means in most cases not the signal to migrate, but rather certain death.” The closeness of these animals to the lakes, streams, and soil of the Heimat also made them indicator species for wider changes in the landscape’s overall ecological health. When turtles’ shells wrinkled or peeled away due to habitat loss and pollution, preservationists maintained that it meant a much deeper disturbance in the balance of nature had occurred that would affect animals and humans alike.

To make their case for protecting reptiles and amphibians, preservationists had to overcome individuals’ revulsion for such animals, redefining concepts of beauty and value to encompass such creatures within Heimat sentiment. Among the animals most favored by nineteenth-century preservationists were birds, which bourgeois Germans admired for their freedom in flight, their cleanliness, and their careful attention to their young. In contrast, many observers found creeping amphibians and slithering reptiles “disgusting”: when touching a frog, children often cried, “How cold and wet!” and they believed erroneously that holding toads caused warts. Learning to recognize these fauna, as well, as members of a Heimat community required observers to recognize other types of sensory experiences. One author reminded readers of their childhood joy in collecting newts, salamanders, and tadpoles, or in hearing the “stupendous concert” emitted by frogs in a nearby pond. The author bemoaned his own hometown’s decision to fill in a pond, located on the road leading to the town center, which had once supported a lively chorus of bullfrogs and other wildlife. In place of the “stimulating magic” of the old pond he now found the “sterile soil” of park benches and walkways, where sparrows took “baths of dust.” Though the townspeople spoke with pride of their new “big city facilities” and the “sanitary value” of the new improvements, the town “was no longer the warm, cozy place I had preserved in my memory.” Heimat memory could thus at times work to reinforce ecological concern, transforming ordinary animals into symbols of childhood innocence and linking environmental destruction to a loss of identity itself. Far from ignoring “real” environ-
mental problems in favor of Romantic effusion, Heimat discourse was capable of fusing subjective nature experiences with a nascent vision of ecological interdependency.¹⁰⁶

To counter Germans' ignorance about their country's flora and fauna, Conwentz devoted a majority of the State Office's resources to public edification. Reflecting his educated middle-class background, Conwentz attributed the endangerment of natural monuments to the population's "lack of education," rather than to industrial capitalism per se. He recommended that district offices create inventories of endangered natural monuments and raise public awareness about them. He furthermore urged primary schools to pay more attention to Germany's natural treasures in their science curricula, for "knowledge of the homeland and the Fatherland is the most important means to promote love of the Fatherland."¹⁰⁷ And just as bourgeois self-cultivation required the ability to control one's sensual appetite, so too did Conwentz propose that a highly cultured nation must curb its population's materialist impulses in order to attain the ideal goal of long-term environmental stewardship. Bemoaning the visual effects of such materialism among the masses, Conwentz condemned tasteless infractions such as walking paths bordered by makeshift railway tracks, brightly painted signs in scenic areas, and gaudy billboards in the countryside. He also denounced visitors' lack of respect for nature reserves, decrying the disposing of trash in protected woodlands, the plucking of rare flowers for bouquets, and the maiming or killing of small animals.¹⁰⁸ To counteract such actions, Conwentz encouraged outdoor clubs to print guidelines for hikers on postcards, pamphlets, and signs. While such efforts contributed to a heightened sympathy for nature protection, they nonetheless reflected nature preservationists' increasingly ambivalent attitude toward the general public, whose support they needed if they were to realize comprehensive environmental reform.¹⁰⁹

Preserving the Landscape's Physiognomy: Ernst Rudorff and the Heimatschutz Movement, 1904–1914

Conwentz's concerns about the spread of urban culture into the countryside reflected the growing influence of another wing of the landscape protection movement: the German Association for Homeland Protection. Founded in 1904 by Ernst Rudorff, the DBH dedicated itself to comprehensive landscape protection, including both historic and natural monument preservation, to save what Rudorff termed "the entire physiognomy of the Fatherland, as it has developed in the course of centuries and millennia."¹¹¹ Rudorff's focus on the face of the landscape infused the Heimatschutz movement with a holistic vision, a sense of moral purposefulness, and a conservative anticapitalism largely absent in Conwentz's more limited program of natural monument preservation. Romantic in temperament and broad-ranging in his abilities, Rudorff was equally adept publishing collections of Chopin's works and studying the plants and animals near his family's estate in lower Saxony.¹¹² His groundbreaking 1880 essay "On the Relationship of Modern Life to Nature" described for the first time the environmental damage to the German countryside caused by rapid industrialization in the years after national unification. Like Herder and Riehl, Rudorff viewed the landscape as an aesthetic totality that manifested its inhabitants' history, customs, and character and thus deserved protection and care. He once remarked that "in the inner and deep feeling for nature lies the actual roots of Germanic character."¹¹³ Whereas the harmonious preindustrial cultural landscape had balanced human activities with natural processes, Rudorff feared that industrialization had irreparably disrupted this equilibrium. Through tasteless architecture, the straightening of waterways, the ever-expanding railway network, and the creation of tree farms in place of diverse woodlands, the proponents of industrial progress were "doing their best to make the pleasant and variegated countryside into a schematic plan—one that is as bare, clean-shorn and regularly parcelled out as possible."¹¹⁴ In Rudorff's view, this disfigurement of the German landscape reflected the lamentable moral condition of the German people, whose materialism had cut them off from their natural roots in the landscape. Rudorff also linked the aesthetic harmony of the preindustrial landscape to a deeply conservative social vision that feared the leveling tendencies of the liberal era, even arguing that alienation from nature was partially to blame for the "red menace" in Germany's cities.

To counteract these tendencies, Rudorff founded the DBH as a "gathering of all like-minded individuals who are concerned about preserving the German people [Volkstum] unweakened and unspoiled, as well as that which is inseparable from this, to protect the German Heimat with its monuments and its nature from further
denigration. Because here and nowhere else lie the roots of our strength.”106 In the case of Heimatschutz, these “like-minded” individuals were from far more elite and educated backgrounds than most members of local Heimat and beautification societies and included prominent architects, art historians, lawyers, university professors, civil servants, and natural scientists.117 Yet the club also attracted members from more modest backgrounds, including teachers and pastors, doctors and health care workers, and artists and journalists, as well as a considerable number of businessmen. Women accounted for only a small proportion of Heimatschutz members; many joined alongside a husband or other relative who was already a member. Rudorff’s holistic vision of landscape protection led the DBH to endorse a broad range of preservation goals of which Naturschutz was only one component. The group pledged to carry out activities that might stop or redirect all forms of landscape disfigurement, including natural and historic preservation, saving the indigenous animal and plant world, and researching and preserving local folk art, morals, festivals, and costumes.118

Despite Rudorff’s lofty goals and the DBH’s high-profile membership, its record of concrete achievements at the national level remained disappointing in the years before 1914 because of the German state’s unwillingness to infringe on property rights or economic development in the name of environmental protection. Among the fledgling group’s first campaigns was the unsuccessful 1904 push to save the Laufenburg rapids on the upper Rhine in Baden from a hydroelectric dam. According to one DBH pamphlet, the dam promised to destroy a highly scenic series of rapids, “one of the most beautiful landscape scenes in Germany, or indeed the world.” The DBH managed to convince such intellectual luminaries as Max Weber, Ernst Troltsch, and Werner Sombart to support the campaign, arguing that the benefits of hydroelectric power and the lure of jobs at the electric plant did not outweigh the losses to the area’s tourist industry.119 Such advice was ignored, however, and a regional advisory board and then the Baden government approved the dam project in short order and let the rapids be obliterated. Commenting on the environmental significance of this loss, the architect Paul Schulze-Naumburg noted bitterly:

A time will come when it will be recognized that man does not live from horsepower and tools alone . . . because when man has gained every-

thing that can be gained using his technology, he will realize that the resulting easy life on a disfigured Earth is no longer worth living; that we have torn up everything that our planet has handed to us, that this subservient activity has destroyed [the planet] and thereby ourselves. Every person should do his part, so that a transformation comes before it is everywhere and forever too late.120

Such rhetoric demonstrated that local preservation battles had global significance. Only by protecting the natural environment could Germans turn their backs on a merely materialistic culture; real Heimatschutz would result only from a fundamental change in cultural values.

The DBH was also active in rural and town preservation; here the results were mixed. Heimatschutz pressure was instrumental in encouraging Berlin lawmakers to consider broadening Prussia’s 1902 Disfigurement Law, which forbade advertisements in picturesque regions such as the Rhine Valley, to include areas that were “scenically beautiful” rather than “exceptionally scenic,” as the law specified. DBH leaders rightly concluded that such a change in the law would give communities the power to protect a broader array of historic and natural monuments and to direct development along more aesthetically pleasing lines, goals that echoed Rudorff’s desire to preserve the land’s entire physiognomy. Unfortunately, the revised law, passed in 1907, fell short of their expectations, owing to pressure from property rights advocates who demanded compensation for any infringement on their exploitation of land. The law did enable local authorities to intervene in building decisions that could lead to the “gross disfigurement” of town streets and squares, and exceptionally scenic rural areas. Heimatschutz members serving on local advisory boards were thereby able to have some influence on building projects and historic preservation efforts in their municipalities.121 Yet the 1907 law did not create new provisions for protecting “merely scenic” portions of the vernacular landscape, leaving numerous landmarks without regulatory protection. District presidents, moreover, found it difficult to develop criteria for designating an area “exceptionally scenic” according to the 1902 law’s provisions, creating a wedge for property owners and commercial interests to challenge the law’s statutes, as they had done in the case of the Siebengebirge.122

Like Convewitz’s State Office for Natural Monument Preservation, the DBH remained a loose amalgam of regional affiliates and local
clubs, each pursuing its own program of heritage preservation. In the Rhineland, the RVDH quickly developed into a semi-official arm of the Rhineland Provincial Administration’s cultural affairs division, depending predominantly on administrative grants instead of membership dues or private donations to sustain its preservation mission. This organizational fusion of the RVDH and provincial cultural affairs ensured that the RVDH channeled its preservation and educational activities toward the Provinzialverband’s goal of asserting the province’s autonomy from Prussia and promoting the Rhine Province’s special place within the newly unified German nation.

Securing this special place for the province meant that the Württemberg RVDH focused primarily on historic preservation rather than natural landscape protection. The Rhine’s former role as the boundary between the Roman Empire and the Germanic tribes had left the Rhineland with the largest share of Germany’s archaeological objects and structures dating from classical antiquity, including the famous amphitheater ruins in Xanten and the thermal baths in Trier. RVDH art historians and conservators assisted the province in maintaining these Roman artifacts as well as the province’s Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, and baroque structures. Provincial officials and the RVDH viewed these ruins as proof that the eighty-year-old Rhine province had had its own “culture” a thousand years before the rest of Germany. The American writer Grant Allen’s comment in his 1899 book The European Tour, that “the Rhineland alone is the real and original civilized Germany,” echoed the sentiments of many Rhinelander who saw the river as a dividing line between themselves and the “barbarians” to the east. The cultural landscape did, however, lead the RVDH to expand the field of preservation activities to include objects outside the traditional realm of churches, palaces, and bourgeois homesteads. Whereas the Hohenzollern monarchy focused on preserving artifacts of throne and altar, the RVDH saw the Heimat landscape as an aesthetic totality in which historic buildings and the natural landscape were part of a coordinated ensemble. The RVDH’s attempts to research and preserve folk customs and dialects spurred efforts to preserve the Rhineland’s vernacular peasant architecture, including entire rural villages, in the belief that the peasantry best represented the Kulturlandschaft ideal of culture and nature coexisting in aesthetic harmony. Many preservationists believed that destroying such architecture would also obliterate the traditional agrarian life that anchored German identity.

Toward an Alternative Modernity: Industrial Society and Environmental Reform

While Naturschutz and Heimatschutz groups displayed a deep ambivalence about the environmental, social, and psychological effects of mass society, they were by no means “agrarian-romantics” who were hostile to all forms of technological development or economic progress. Preservationists instead developed a nuanced approach to diagnosing modernity’s environmental ills, one that focused predominantly on reshaping cultural values rather than restricting industrial production. Most landscape preservationists did not condemn the process of industrialization itself but believed that state oversight and public education could curtail its most damaging effects. In his 1904 report, for example, Conwentz identified tourism, personal irresponsibility, and a lack of education—not industrial capitalism or business interests—as the critical reasons for environmental destruction. Conwentz listed several economic processes that were especially harmful to maintaining animal and plant habitats, including agricultural reclamation, the destruction of moors for peat exploitation, and the regulation of streams for flood control and power generation. He noted that industrial gases had a detrimental effect on forests and other vegetation, and that industrial pollutants such as lead oxide had destroyed aquatic life in streams. Yet he never once suggested that industrial growth be curtailed in any way, only that certain features “here and there” be set aside as examples of scenic beauty or for scientific interest. Rather than calling on the state to turn back the clock on economic development, Conwentz, like the majority of his contemporaries, considered industrialization and technological development as necessary evils.

Conwentz’s conciliatory attitude toward industry also reflected the political realities faced by the State Office for Natural Monument Preservation at the time. Most representatives in the Prussian State Assembly rejected any attempts to infringe on private property ownership for the sake of nature protection; both conservatives and liberals blocked the passage of a 1912 law for the protection of natural
monuments.125 Persons designated as district nature protection commissioners were not considered state employees but served in an honorary capacity. Their main tasks consisted of identifying the natural monuments in their area and entering them into a centralized registry. The State Office also had no legal basis for preventing property owners from developing their land. Provincial and district committee members relied on persuasion to convince property owners to restrict development voluntarily or to request that planning officials consider the need to protect natural monuments in the issuance of building permits. The State Office did not provide funds for purchasing endangered sites, nor did it create rights of eminent domain for securing parcels of land. Conwentz left financial matters and legal issues to local groups, who had to raise the funds and popular support necessary for purchasing or leasing the land to create nature reserves. On the whole, therefore, the establishment of the State Office for Natural Monument Preservation provided neither the regulatory means nor the personnel for creating an extensive network of nature protection reserves.126

The Heimatschutz movement also moved toward a more conciliatory stance with industry in the decade preceding the First World War. When Paul Schultz-Neumburg became chairman of the DBH in 1904, he abandoned Rudorff's stern antiurbanism, directing Heimatschutz organizations to seek out ways to balance technological development with historical tradition and environmental stability. A founding member of the German Werkbund and the Secessionist movement, Schultz-Neumburg was well known as a vocal critic of nineteenth-century architectural historicism. He argued that the "Babylonian stylistic confusion" and "decoration insanity" of buildings in the period since unification, which borrowed from classical, Romanesque, Gothic, and baroque motifs, had created an unappealing mélange of styles. Schultz-Neumburg claimed that this eclecticism was unsuitable for a modern age that demanded sleek, tacit, and functional design. Unlike more radical modernists such as Otto Wagner and Paul Behrens, Schultz-Neumburg maintained that architects could achieve these goals while still preserving the historical ambience of a town or the character of a natural landscape. His architectural tastes tended toward the "around 1800" movement, which argued that the clean lines and bourgeois simplicity of the Biedermeier era of design (1815–1848) could serve as a model for contempo-

rary architecture and furniture. Crucial to his reevaluation of Biedermeier style was the belief that such architecture melded seamlessly into the contours of Germany's landscapes. It was this insight that gave Schultz-Neumburg interest in the ecological health of the landscape and the possibilities for naturalizing the built environment of modern life.127

Like Rudorff, Schultz-Neumburg's interest in harmonizing the built and natural environments began in his childhood. He spent long hours armed with a sketchbook or watercolors, depicting the harmonious balance between historical churches, roads, walls, and houses and the surrounding hills, orchards, wheat fields, meadows, and streams of his Thuringian Heimat. After studying painting and then architecture in Karlsruhe, Schultz-Neumburg moved to Munich in 1893, where he quickly joined the emerging Secessionist movement there, and he continued his ties to the movement when he moved to Berlin in 1897.128 Between 1901 and 1917 he published his immensely influential Cultural Works series, which pioneered the use of modern photography and clear, nontechnical language to popularize Heimatschutz ideals among a broader reading public. "The books are not exclusively directed to those who call themselves 'the educated,'" he wrote, "but rather it is our hope to win over the entire people, the lower middle classes, the peasants, the workers, everyone who over time has been active in transforming the countenance of our land."129

The Cultural Works volumes covered nearly every detail of architectural, landscape, and urban design, which Schultz-Neumburg referred to collectively as the "environment," or Umwelt, a word that would become common in environmental circles only after World War II. Using side-by-side photographs of "good" and "bad" design to popularize Heimatschutz aesthetic tastes, Schultz-Neumburg condemned the "appalling disfigurement of the physiognomy of our country" that had taken place in the previous fifty years. He set out with missionary zeal to reform the entire "culture of the visual": houses, monuments, bridges, streets, forests, machines, and defense installations. Driven by a nineteenth-century faith in the power of environmental reform and public education, Schultz-Neumburg believed such photographs demonstrated to all—from the businessman to the gardener, from the street cleaner to the old woman placing flowers in her window box—the advantages of Heimatschutz principles. In his view, such aesthetic judgments were wholly objective and
accessible to everyone, regardless of class or status. Since all Germans had contributed to shaping the environment, each person needed to participate in setting it on a more beautiful and sustainable footing.130

To a far greater extent than Rudorff, Schultzze-Naumburg believed that planners and landscape designers could ensure a harmonious balance between industrial technology and the natural environment in the countryside. Just as Biedermier style provided a blueprint for twentieth-century functional design, he reasoned, pre-1850 manufacturing facilities that were close to the land—windmills, paper mills, mines, artisans’ workshops—also offered prototypes for modern factories. He believed it was possible to naturalize new technologies in the landscape; even the railroad, which early observers had often depicted as a steam-spewing monstrosity, was now an “old friend . . . which has captured a place in our emotional life.” Schultzze-Naumburg proposed that railways had become part of the organic landscape, but that more recent technologies, especially the dams, power lines, and transformers of the hydroelectric industry, disturbed the “changing rhythm” of the countryside.131 In a similar vein, Schultzze-Naumburg proposed that modern city planning had “sacrificed” the cozy squares, irregular streets, and hidden courtyards of older cities to the “Moloch of bureaucratism,” the rationalizing tendencies that placed accelerated traffic circulation above the sociopsychological needs of urban dwellers. Cities, too, could be made more organic, by reducing their size and density, by creating extensive and accessible green spaces, and by retaining the irregular contours of the natural topography.132 Such perspectives were welcome in the heavily industrialized and urbanized Rhineland. Schultzze-Naumburg’s vision of organic development led to numerous RVDH projects that blended factories and apartment houses into the surrounding landscape and led Cologne city planners to advocate new green spaces and the preservation of medieval squares.133

Schultzze-Naumburg’s view of city and countryside as unified organisms led him to investigate the broader ecological significance of environmental changes. He disparaged foresters who transformed the “holy cathedrals of German freedom” into “conifer factories,” noting that the loss of species diversity destroyed the forests’ value as animal habitat and left them vulnerable to insect infestation. Schultzze-Naumburg also noted that modern farmers’ tendency to remove the hedgerows separating their fields destroyed the habitat of birds, who are natural insect eaters, leaving the cultivator no choice but to rely on artificial insecticides. “This is how it goes in most cases,” he lamented, “that whenever the terribly clever person takes a small wheel out of the great clockworks . . . [he] . . . does not think that then the entire mechanism comes to a halt.”134 Heinatschutz was by no means agrarian-romanticism; instead, advocates argued that proper planning and design could mesh technological development and environmental concerns into an organic whole. Far from being a cultural pessimist, Schultzze-Naumburg believed in the possibilities of an alternative modernity in which, as one of his biographers has noted, it was possible “to combine the beauty and idyllic nature of the still preindustrial and still highly cultivated time around 1800 with the prosperity, comfort but also unprecedented growth in power of an industrial society.”135

Despite Schultzze-Naumburg’s ability to create a modern vision of landscape planning, both the Naturschutz and Heinatschutz movements remained unable to articulate a program of environmental reform that appealed to broad sectors of German society. Preservationists continued to view nature as common ground and a site of social reconciliation, yet they tended to see this symbolic power as a way to quell political discontent and stem growing demands for a further democratization of Wilhelmine politics and society. This view grew in its scope and intensity in the years just before World War I, when the Social Democratic Party became the largest party in the Reichstag, the Imperial Parliament. In his widely read treatise Der Naturschutz (1912), for example, the noted botanist Konrad Guenther asserted that the goal of the nature protection movement was “to preserve the richness and beauty of the nature of our Heimat, so that the people can draw from her joy and instruction.” In patriotic language much stronger than that of Conwentz or Rudorff, Guenther described how his own experience of Germany’s natural beauty in travels “from the North Sea to the districts of Silesia” had stimulated his emotional attachment to the nation. In Guenther’s view, the German Volk had a unique and primordial connection to nature, as evidenced by the ancient Germanic tribes’ worship of nature, by folk songs that evoked the sounds of local birds, and by towns and places named after plants and animals. Such examples fostered Guenther’s belief that “love of nature is the root of love of the Fatherland,” and that the “roots of the people’s strength” lay in the landscape itself.136
In Guenther’s view, the destruction of natural features was the result of the alienating effects of a “relentlessly advancing [modern] culture,” symbolized by the technologies and intellectually barren en- ticements of the city. “It has become very quiet in Nature,” wrote Guenther, “but the noise of machines and the enjoyments of people ring all the louder.” With people seeking leisure-time amusement or killing time in pubs, modern individuals failed to recognize that “true joy” did not come without “understanding” and “work.” Though Guenther held scientific understanding to be the best form of nature appreciation, he also spoke of the immediate aesthetic appeal of nature as a remedy to urban superficiality. “Only under green trees and in clear air,” he wrote, “is the ordinary man able to gain contentment and joy.” Echoing the VVS’s earlier emphasis on the egalitarian quality of nature experiences, Guenther stressed that nature offered a more powerful means for stimulating emotional attachments to Heimat than such high art forms as painting, music, and poetry. While these cultural productions were reserved for urbanites with leisure time and money, in nature, he said, “there is no difference between the high and the low, the poor and the rich. Nature is the mother to all persons in the same way. She demands no costs, and is available to everyone.” More sacred than art itself, he said, “the forest is a cathedral more magnificent than anything that a human hand has ever built.”

Given the growing strength of the labor movement and the SPD in 1912, Guenther’s populist characterization of nature carried deeper political significance; in his eyes, contact with the landscape could mitigate class strife. In an attempt to discern the reasons for industrial laborers’ rejection of the existing system, Guenther portrayed alienation from nature as the root cause of class conflict. “The worker’s walk through the park and over the meadows on his way home from the factory,” he wrote, “pours into his heart a content- ment that he cannot achieve elsewhere.” Like many nature preservationists, Guenther viewed urban workers’ alienation from the land, which had left them “rootless” and without bonds to community and Heimat, as the source of their social unrest. “Modern times have brought a terrible change,” he argued: “It is above all industry that draws the Volk into the city and alienates them from nature. A large part of the discontent that holds sway among the factory workers can be explained by this change, because while the healthy joys of the forest and field are open to all regardless of their status, the plea-
message. Nature preservationists worked hard to win young people to their cause, organizing school presentations and public lectures at youth club meetings to popularize environmental protection. They expected a sympathetic audience; after all, *Wandervögel* clubs shared nature preservationists' belief in the spiritual healing powers of nature as well as their critique of urban life and tourism. These clubs affirmed preservationists' belief that a return to the land was a path to social and cultural reform. Yet young people's focus on individual authenticity and self-cultivation clashed with preservationists' attempts to promote group identities based on nation and *Heimat*.

Heimatschutz lectures were often greeted with "impatience" and youth club members found the self-important "posturing and affectation" common among bourgeois orators tiresome. Young people were willing to support individual nature protection campaigns when their own hiking activities were placed in jeopardy, but few permanent ties developed between middle-class hiking groups and youth organizations.

Guenther's *völkisch* tirades against urban life and his idealization of nature have often been viewed as proof of a growing xenophobia within preservation circles on the eve of World War I, a protofascist tendency that equated the purification of land with the purification of the race. There were voices within the nature preservation movement around 1912 and 1913 that criticized Conventz's *Naturschutz* and sought to shift the movement's goals in more radically nationalist and racist direction. The Association for Nature Protection, founded in 1909, for example, disparaged the older preservation organizations and the State Office for Natural Monument Protection for their lack of success and limited conception of preservation. The popular children's writer Hermann Lönns, a key member of this group, demanded more comprehensive preservation and planning for the entire cultural landscape. Criticizing natural monument preservation for its lack of vision, Lönns remarked that "the destruction of nature is working 'broad scale,' nature protection 'on the details.' It is bureaucratically organized, has official recognition, yet has to avoid confrontation because industry, trade, and transportation [interests] have powerful semiofficial and official connections." In Lönns's eyes, state nature protection was "insignificant" (*Pritzelkram*) and stood in the way of a more broad-based movement focusing on the landscape as a whole. "The work of natural monu-

ment preservation has no meaning for the general population," he concluded. For Lönns, the significance of environmental reform was to protect the race; as he remarked: "The nature protection movement has often been thought of as a purely scientific movement. This is, however, not the case; on the contrary, it is a battle for the preservation of the health of the entire population, a battle for the strength of the nation, for the well-being of the race." Such social Darwinist language was a striking departure from earlier *Heimat* rhetoric, which emphasized local civic participation and spiritual well-being, not racial struggle.

Despite Lönns's popularity as a writer, his racist conception of *Naturschutz* was never more than an undercurrent within the Wilhelmine landscape preservation movement. It never successfully displaced preservationists' local, cultural, historical, and geographical understandings of *Heimat* and nation. The majority of Wilhelmine preservationists remained traditional conservatives, wedded to the didactic notion that aesthetic training would create better Germans. Guenther, for example, maintained the optimistic faith that educational and educational reform would enlighten the population and lead them to take better care of the natural environment. The Kaiserreich's humanistic ideal of *Bildung*, he asserted, was partially to blame for Germans' lack of understanding for nature, because it had created a school system that remained averse to scientific instruction. In a similar vein, Schulze-Naumburg, in the last volume of his *Cultural Works* in 1916, indicated that environmental destruction had slowed since 1900 and that public edification efforts had achieved noticeable results. He remained optimistic about the possibility of environmental reform, remarking that "one may not say that it is merely fate, that it cannot be otherwise. We humans are the ones who have caused the transformation of the earth's surface. It depends on our will to shape it in a different way." Like that of so many preservationists, Schulze-Naumburg's optimism would soon fade. World War I and the Weimar period—a bloody four years of conflict and then continued political turmoil in the early 1920s—helped to recast *Heimat* ideals and nature sentiment along xenophobic and racist lines alien to environmental reformers in the long nineteenth century.

Landscape preservationists have often been overlooked in studies of the formation of German national identity in the Kaiserreich, yet they
played an essential role in promoting the idea of landscape as the symbolic and emotional center of Germany’s imagined national community. Middle-class preservationists fashioned a narrative of national development that went beyond the medieval past promoted by the Hohenzollern monarchy, locating Germany’s origins in a natural world outside the flux of history. Their efforts reflected the Wilhelmine era’s search for unifying symbols that stood above political factions. Germany’s formal unification had not yet fulfilled early nineteenth-century hopes for a cohesive and stable nation; the newly unified German Reich remained “unfinished” in a number of ways. This unfinished quality was the product of lingering regional and religious fragmentation, as well as the new social and political anxieties produced by mass industrial society. By locating the nation’s creative energy in nature, preservationists believed that they had found a way to mitigate the environmental consequences of industrialization and resolve the social tensions of modernity. Nature’s accessibility and immediate aesthetic appeal provided a visual and tactile reminder of the nation’s perdurability, signifying national solidarity in an era of cultural and social fragmentation.

Landscape preservation during the Kaisereich was neither agrarian-romantic nor reactionary, as demonstrated by the diversity of political and social goals within the organizations from this period. The Siebengebirge’s defenders believed that protecting this natural monument would ensure a recreational resource for the province’s industrial workforce and believed that tourism would expand the local economy, not stem its growth. Conventions’ attempt to balance development by setting aside nature reserves and Kulturpark Naumburg’s faith in organic industrial design were not intended to turn back the clock on economic growth. Both Naturfreunde and Heimatschutz, moreover, also achieved broader ecological insights in the process of advocating for landscape preservation. Though their aesthetic approach to environmental reform overlooked issues such as pollution and urban hygiene, preservationists recognized the interconnection between the landscape and all forms of life, from human communities to the salamanders in local creeks. They also realized that environmental transformations in one area often had rippling and unintended consequences, such as an upsurge in pests as a result of hedgerow destruction or a decline in fish species owing to river regulation. Though preservationists often idealized the period before 1850, they recognized that there was no going back to an agrarian society. Germans had the power to steer technological development along more environmentally sustainable paths that would protect the ecological and sociopsychological foundations of their local world. But they first needed a vision of an alternative modernity in which technological forces would be subsumed under environmental needs and ethical precepts.

Despite their noble goals, nature preservationists could only partially resolve the German Reich’s many environmental, political, and social challenges. Germany remained a loose conglomeration of diverse states, provinces, and landscapes, despite preservationists’ assertion that local Heimat protection was simultaneously a form of national patriotism. The fusion of regional and national identity therefore remained contested. The competing Reich, Prussian, Rhenish, and local definitions of Heimat and environmental reform that emerged in the years after World War I called into question any easy connection between local and national homelands. Despite the unifying rhetoric of Heimat, moreover, class distinctions continued to permeate the nature preservation movement, as most members remained wary of the “masses” and envisioned themselves as stewards and educators, rather than co-creators, in the project of Heimat cultivation. Instead of mobilizing Heimat sentiment “from below,” landscape preservationists relied on the state to secure their place as regional cultural stewards. As the next chapter shows in greater detail, preservationists’ goals evolved in tandem with the state’s cultural-political needs; when the state needed Heimat sentiments to secure public loyalty and disparage perceived “enemies,” preservationists developed a far more rigid and xenophobic vision of nature’s homelands.