

BASQUE NEWS

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The quality of Basque beaches is one of the Basque Country's main tourist attractions.

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The Basque coast returns to life

Over the last ten years, the coastline and rivers of the Basque Country have undergone a spectacular recovery

The recovery of the Basque coastline over the last ten years can only be described as spectacular. At least that is the picture painted by the various research projects carried out over recent years on the Basque rivers and coastlines, that have now been published as a book co-ordinated by various marine researchers. According to the results of these studies, it seems life has finally returned to the coasts and rivers of the Basque Country.

This spectacular turnaround of an area considered not that long ago as one of the most polluted coastlines in the world, is mainly due to the disappearance of polluting industries and the gradual introduction of purification networks which include waste water treatment farms. The results of this effort are reflected in the recovery of the fish and bird colonies, as well as in the increase in oxygen levels and the reduction of pollutants in the water.

Although there are still a few zones that have a higher level of pollution,

such as Pasaia Bay and the mouths of the Nervión and Deba rivers, gone are the years in which the waters of certain rivers were filled with foam from the paper factories and it was virtually impossible to find any signs of life in the estuaries or even in the middle of the river basins. Now, in light of the spectacular results of the various marine environment protection policies that were set in motion, it is not uncommon to see young boys fishing in Bilbao estuary or catching sea bass and red mullet in Abra Port. To give just one example: in 1995 there was no life in the River Nervión after Altos Hornos de Vizcaya in Baracaldo; today, however, the marine community has increased by between 10 and 15 kilometres to well past the Guggenheim Museum, in the very centre of Bilbao.

Furthermore, the future seems bright, or at least that is the conclusion reached by the scientific studies of the Basque marine environment carried out over the last three decades by a total of 62

researchers from all over the world, which have recently been published in a book entitled 'Oceanography and Marine Environment of the Basque Country'.

Proof of local concern and determination not to slip back into a situation similar to the one experienced prior to 1995 was provided some months ago when Basque fishermen managed to eliminate the thousands of tons of oil which washed up in Basque waters after the sinking of the Prestige oil tanker off the Galician coast. Although the impact of this ecological catastrophe on the coast has been minimised now, studies carried out by the Aranzadi Society nevertheless point to the very serious consequences that the oil spill has had on the marine ecosystem; consequences that will last for many years to come. The studies particularly highlight the low reproduction levels of some species of birds that are considered bioindicators of the environmental quality of the Basque coast. ➔

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The Basque Country commits itself to environmental protection

The commitment of the Basque institutions to the environment and sustainable development and the increasing awareness of these issues among the various production sectors, groups and population in general constitute key factors in making the Basque Country one of the most advanced regions in the field of environmental protection.

The Basque Country is the only Autonomous Region in Spain to have provided the European Union with a list of the potentially contaminating companies operating in its area. Furthermore, as of just a few weeks ago, all Basque citizens can now access this list through two websites, which also offer information regarding the composition and quantity of the waste material these companies produce. The list features 119 industrial companies, all of which are included in the European Pollutant Emissions Registry, which enables the Basque Government to keep them under strict, ongoing control. Being included on this list does not necessarily mean that the companies fail to comply with current legislation. Rather, it indicates that their emissions are dangerous and could pollute the environment, and should therefore be closely supervised.

At the same time, a new initiative on sustainability has been presented recently under the name Izaite. This initiative has been developed by a business organisation constituted by nine Basque companies, including Acería Compacta de Bizkaia, Grupo Eroski, ITP, Euskaltel, Fagor Electrodomésticos, Iberdrola and BBK and aims to serve as a key association for the promotion of sustainable development, with the objective of reconciling business activities with environmental protection and social wellbeing. To this end, the companies will focus their efforts on promoting areas such as human resources, health and safety in the workplace, training and participation of workers, quality management and environmental management.

Basque businesswomen take part in the World Summit in Seoul

A total of fifty Basque businesswomen participated in the World Summit of Women, held in Seoul recently. In addition to outlining their professional experiences, they also presented to an audience of over 800 delegates Bilbao's candidature for the next summit meeting, due to be held in the year 2006. This is the first commercial mission carried out by businesswomen from the Basque Autonomous Region, who, in addition to participating in the workshops and debates of the summit, also had the opportunity of gaining a first-hand knowledge of the business opportunities offered by South Korea, a country that has become an important springboard for selling products to the new market currently opening up in China. According to the Bizkaia Association of Businesswomen and Directors (AED), there are currently around 5,200 businesswomen operating in the Basque Autonomous Region.

A Basque company launches a novel mobile phone translation service

The Gipuzkoan company Dualia has launched a new mobile phone-based simultaneous translation service, which is the only one of its kind in the world. This novel system overcomes the language barrier that often prevents businessmen and women from carrying out commercial transactions in foreign countries. The system is simple: using headphones which have two inputs and two outputs and which are connected to a mobile telephone, two people who speak different languages are able to communicate thanks to a third person who translates the conversation over the telephone. The offer currently encompasses around thirty different languages, including Basque.

Gamesa installs its first wind farm in the USA

Gamesa, or more specifically, its subsidiary in the United States, Mendota Hills LLC, has recently installed its first wind farm in the North American state of Illinois. The farm is equipped with a total of 63 wind generators whose electricity will supply the Chicago metropolitan area. The setting up of this farm coincides with a boom in wind power in the United States, a country in which there is great potential for development. For this reason, in addition to Illinois, Gamesa Energía is currently involved in projects in a number of other states such as Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Iowa and the south western area of the country.

Bilbao Port makes an offer to Japan

The Port of Bilbao has offered its services to Japanese businesses as a key Atlantic port and container centre. High-ranking officials from the Port Authority recently visited Tokyo on a commercial mission which also included a number of companies from the private sector, with the aim of promoting this major Basque port and increasing the volume of goods coming from Japan to Europe. Currently, Bilbao Port handles a total of 100,000 tons of goods from Japan per year, one fifth of the total amount of goods from this Asian country handled by Spain.

The company Escoriaza to guard the Olympic City of Athens

The Gipuzkoan lock manufacturing company Talleres Escoriaza has just closed a major deal in the face of stiff competition from another 12 companies. The result is a contract which includes access control and security in part of the residential complex contained within the Olympic City of Athens. In specific terms, the company will be responsible for controlling access to the rooms of the 1,600 apartments, employee entrances and communal areas during the course of the Olympic Games. To this end, it will supply electronic locks, power cut off switches and bars and locks for escape routes.

Miren Azkarate visited Mexico and the USA with the aim of promoting Basque culture and Basque language use



Miren Azkarate (third on the left) with the directors of the Cenarrusa Center for Basque Studies in Boise.

The Basque Minister for Culture and spokesperson for the Basque Government, Miren Azkarate, visited the United States and Mexico recently with the aim of consolidating and developing Basque language teaching in those countries, and signing collaboration agreements with Basque organisations in the United States (NABO), the Euskal Etxea (Basque House) in Mexico and a number of Mexican universities. Similarly, the visit also aimed to lay the groundwork for the creation of a library collection in the Mexico National Library, which would include material in Basque for those studying university courses.

The HABE Institute and, through this, the Basque Government Department of Culture, is currently developing the Euskara-munduan programme, which focuses on the development and standardisation of Basque language courses for adults run outside the Basque Country. The United States is a key player in this task. Its Basque community is one of the largest in the world and is extremely potent in a number of states in the western part of the country (Idaho, Nevada and California) as well as in the city of New York. Arising out of the mass emigration which took place at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, American Basques, who are completely integrated into North American society, have nevertheless preserved their roots and kept the Basque language alive, although just barely in some cases. Now, in collaboration with the NABO (the Federation of North American Basque Organisations),

the aim is to develop an articulated system of standardised Basque language classes, given by North American teachers and supported by the Basque Country by means of new technologies and Boga, the new online Basque language learning system.

The Minister's visit to the United States included two main ports of call. Firstly Boise, the capital of Idaho, the American state which, proportionally, contains the largest Basque community. There, Miren Azkarate met the Mayor, Dave Bieter (of Basque origin and a Basque speaker), the Secretary of State for Idaho, Dave Ysursa (also of Basque origin) and the former Secretary of State and patriarch of the Basque community in the USA, Pete Cenarrusa. Proof of the importance of the Basque language and the Basque community in Boise is the fact that the city has a Basque infant school, the only school which teaches subjects in the Basque language outside the Basque Country. The other major port of call during the visit was the Californian city of Beaconsfield, in which the NABO annual meeting was held.

In Mexico, Azkarate's visit aimed to develop and promote the Basque language classes given by the Euskal Etxea in the Mexican capital, and to sign agreements for the setting up of Basque language and culture courses in two Mexican universities: the Autonomous National University of Mexico and the Latin American University.

With the aim of supporting Basque language and culture courses, a Basque language library collection was set up

in the Mexican National Library. This collection will be fleshed out in the future by the Basque Government, which undertakes to provide a service to both the university itself and all those who wish to learn the Basque language.

European Elections

Galeusca, the third largest political force in Spain

The coalition Galeusca, made up by the Basque Nationalist Part (PNV), Convergencia i Unió (CIU) and the Galician Nationalist Block (BNG), became the third largest political force in Spain, when it won enough votes during the European parliamentary elections on 13 June to send three Euro MPs to Brussels. Furthermore, the PNV won by a significant majority in the Basque Country, obtaining 35% of the votes in an election characterised by a high level of abstention (in the Basque Autonomous Region, the abstention percentage reached 55%, the highest ever). The triumph of the PNV consolidates its position as the most important political party in the region, demonstrating that it has a wide electoral base and sufficient capacity to overcome any electoral challenge.

The Basque Socialist Party (PSE) gained its best result ever in a European election, with an increase of almost 10% in comparison with the 1999 elections. Thanks to this result, the Socialist Party won the elections in Alava and came second in both Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia. The right wing PP party continued the downward trend of recent years, coming third. Eusko Alkartasuna (EA), which ran with a number of other groups in Spain, gained no seats and the banned Herriarren Zerrenda (HZ), which encouraged its supporters to vote in blank, obtained the highest percentage ever of all banned groups.

In the rest of Spain, the Socialist Party (PSOE) won the elections, obtaining 25 Euro MPs, with the PP party coming second with 23 seats in the European Parliament.

The cyclist Joane Somarriba wins the 2003 Universal Basque Prize



The Basque President awarding Joane Somarriba one of the many prizes she has earned.

The cyclist from Bizkaia, Joane Somarriba, has been awarded the '2003 Universal Basque' prize in recognition of her professional and personal dedication and the 'extremely positive' image she has projected throughout her sporting career.

The first Basque sportswoman to receive the Universal Basque prize, which is granted by the Presidency of the Basque Government and Caja Laboral, Somarriba will receive her award from the hands of

the Basque President during a ceremony in October, once she has fulfilled her obligations in the forthcoming Olympic Games in Athens and the World Championships.

Despite her youth, Joane Somarriba epitomises women's struggle to reach the top of the sporting podium and her list of achievements is impressive: three Tours de France (2000, 2001 and 2003), two Giros d'Italia (1999 and 2000) and one World Championship against the clock (2003).

The London Symphony Orchestra in San Sebastián

According to an announcement made by the British Ambassador, Stephen Wright, during a recent visit to the Basque Country, the London Symphony Orchestra has chosen San Sebastián as its summer base for 2006. Wright took advantage of his visit to announce that the prestigious orchestra will run a summer school in San Sebastián, providing brief musical training for 110 young musicians from all over the world.

The Gipuzkoan capital was chosen from among another 129 cities as the venue for this first summer school held outside the United Kingdom. In addition to the traditional links the Basque Country has always maintained with the UK, the quality of the facilities offered by San Sebastián and, above all, its commitment to music as evident in the annual Musical Fortnight held in the city, all contributed to the Orchestra's choice.

The Basque Language can now be learned on-line

The Basque Government has set up a programme called Boga, designed to enable anyone to learn the Basque language, even if they do not live in the Basque Country. All potential students need is to have an Internet connection and be registered in an Euskaltegi (centres dedicated to teaching the Basque language to adults), which will be responsible for providing them with a password for accessing the programme and the CDs corresponding to each course. The programme encompasses all levels of Basque language learning and is divided into five courses. Each course is made up of a series of units, which are in turn subdivided into various sessions which the student must 'pass' by taking a number of different tests. Boga, which can be found at the following Internet address: www.boga.habe.org, is already available in some Euskaltegis in the Basque Country as well as in various Euskaltegiak (Basque Centres), including the ones in Wyoming, Boise (Idaho), Chino (California) Elko (Nevada), Caracas, Mexico, Valencia (Venezuela), Barcelona and Madrid.

The Basque Committee for Olympic Promotion is set up

The gymnast from Vitoria, Almudena Cid, will be one of the Basque sportspeople participating in the forthcoming Olympics, due to be held this year in Athens. Cid earned her place on the Olympic team after coming seventh in the European Gymnastic Championships held recently in Kiev. This will be the third time this young sportswoman has participated in the games. And indeed, encouraging and promoting the participation of Basque sportsmen and women in the Olympic Games is one of the main objectives of the recently created Basque Committee for Olympic Promotion, which will start its work next autumn. A body dependent on the Basque Government Department of Culture, one of the committee's tasks will be to promote the Olympic movement and values among sportsmen and women, as well as to foster traditional Basque sports.

New prize for the renovation work being carried out on Vitoria's Old Cathedral

Queen Sofia recently awarded the Santa María Cathedral renovation project yet another international prize to add to the long list of awards it has received since it was first set up in the year 2000. This time, the cathedral received the Europa Nostra prize, one of the most prestigious European prizes for works of this kind, in recognition of both the archaeological excavations and the other restoration work being carried out in the building, which has now been visited by over 250,000 people, including a number of Nobel prize-winners, prestigious writers and architects and experts from all over the world. All this has helped turn Santa María Cathedral into an obligatory port of call for quality tourism, thanks to its original programme of guided tours.