

Media Information
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Unspoiled nature is a myth. You can't leave a river to its own devices.

Eckart Witzigmann talks to Mick Hucknall, winner of the ECKART 2014 for "Art of Living", and his friend, Chris De Margary.

Mick Hucknall received the ECKART 2014 for "Art of Living" from the Witzigmann Academy and the BMW Group at the BMW Museum in Munich in October 2014. In spring 2015, Eckart Witzigmann visited Mick Hucknall in northwestern Ireland, where he and De Margary own the River Finn.

Eckart Witzigmann: *Mick, where did you get the idea to buy the River Finn?*

Mick Hucknall: It's not every day you get the chance to buy a river. It was a unique opportunity. The River Finn is the most prolific in the north of Ireland. I just couldn't say no. Of course, nobody really owns a river. But it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to preserve something major and be the person who takes care of it. I enjoy the responsibility.

Eckart Witzigmann: *What exactly are you doing here on the River Finn?*

Chris De Margary: We're basically running a nature reserve. In recent years, we have mainly been fighting for fishing regulations. The most important thing for Mick and me is that the river is doing well. That is what sustainability means to us.

Eckart Witzigmann: *What state was the river in when you took over?*

Chris De Margary: This region was experiencing major economic difficulties. Environmental protection was not that big around here. I felt like we had to do something to secure the future of river and the declining salmon population.

Eckart Witzigmann: *How did people here respond to your activities?*

Chris De Margary: It was really interesting. When we first arrived, we were called into the town hall to explain to all the farmers why we were here and what we wanted to do. Everyone was friendly and made us feel very welcome – they are really nice people who understood that we are trying to do something important here. We are very close to the local community.

Mick Hucknall: It is really interesting to hear what people here think. They tend to have a very romantic idea of nature. They think that nature is pristine and unspoiled. But that's a myth.

Eckart Witzigmann: *At the Eckart 2014 award ceremony at the BMW Museum in Munich, you said you wanted to give back through your actions. You want to lay the foundations so that people can get actively involved themselves. How have you done that here?*

Mick Hucknall: Well, we are really just following in others' footsteps and keeping the river clean so that it can continue to be used in the future. That is the only way to maintain a large stock of salmon over the long term. That is why we are only taking out very few fish currently. We want to help local people increase salmon numbers to promote and fund sustainability. Our ancestors a thousand years ago lived on fish and game. This region has more game than you can imagine. But the idea many people have of leaving a river entirely to its own devices just doesn't work. If you leave a river alone, salmon numbers actually fall. You have to remember that people have a major impact – and many of the spots we are talking about were created and shaped by people over the years. Nature doesn't do that on its own. The river landscape is nature and people together. That is the reality.

Eckart Witzigmann: *How often are you here?*

Mick Hucknall: I'm not here that often. Our business here is to preserve the river. For me, it is more important to follow developments – and the fish population is now actually increasing from year to year.

Eckart Witzigmann: *Chris, you're in charge of the day-to-day running of things. What does that entail on a daily basis?*

Chris De Margary: There's a lot to be done. We measure water quality and PH levels and ensure there is a good balance of minerals. But the main thing is regular monitoring of spawning sites – which we loosen up or aerate so the fish can breed more easily.

Eckart Witzigmann: *How has the river developed?*

Mick Hucknall: We are happy with how it is doing. Our reports show that we are making significant progress – and salmon numbers are steadily rising.

Eckart Witzigmann: *You received support from the Witzigmann Academy. Has that been helpful?*

Chris De Margary: For the first time, we feel like our work is truly appreciated. We tend to get forgotten out here! This region never really attracted a lot of attention and didn't get many tourists. On the one hand, that's good for the river; on the other, it's not good for the local economy. Our involvement here combines the two. Investors are now taking an interest, money is coming into the region and the river is doing well. That's the direction we need to be headed.

Mick Hucknall: There's a lot more that needs to be done: regular tourism, yes, but in a way that is good for the environment, too. Sometimes mistakes are made – lots of mistakes, in fact – in the name of being green. We want to avoid that. We want people to understand how beautiful this wilderness is – for example, for hiking. Awards like the ECKART are certainly very useful in that respect.

Chris De Margary: Yes, the award has helped us a lot. It's great that we won it – it brings us a little bit closer to Germany.

Eckart Witzigmann: *What are your plans for the future?*



Chris De Margary: To continue doing what we're doing!

Mick Hucknall: As I said already, we want to increase the fish population. That is the benchmark for water quality and the environment.