



mammadaba

It means Mother Nature.
And it's true.



Latvia's State Forests and mammadaba welcome you!

THRILLER

SAPŅU ĶĒRĀJS*

LATVIA'S STATE FORESTS –
OPEN DAILY, NO ENTRANCE FEE

HE CATCHES WHAT WE
DO NOT DARE TO THINK

PRODUCER: LATVIA'S STATE FORESTS DIRECTOR: MAMMADABA STARRING: GREAT ANTLER STAG
SOUND: NIGHT SILENCE LIGHTS: MOON & STARS DRESS DESIGN: MAMMADABA

mammadaba

LATVIJAS VALSTS MEŽI

* DREAM CATCHER

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DABAS
STEREO

Dear Friends of Nature!

On the one hand, the task of JSC "Latvijas valsts meži" (Latvia's State Forests) is clear and simple – to manage the forests that belong to the Latvian nation. On the other, we want to contribute by bringing man closer to nature. Hence, Mammadaba – Mother Nature – a branch of "Latvijas valsts meži" whose aim is to acquaint both inhabitants of Latvia and visitors from abroad with the wealth of our nature, joining one and all with the primitive beauty of our surroundings.

Roberts Strīpnieks
Chairman of the Board, JSC "Latvijas valsts meži"



At Legendary Lake Zebrus

2. lpp

Recreation and Tourism Centre Spāre

6. lpp

In the Tērvete Nature Park

10. lpp

The Tērvete Reservoir

14. lpp

In the Reed Maze of Lake Kaņiera

18. lpp

Recreation in Ezernieki

22. lpp

Get Ready for a Ball at the Castle

26. lpp

Amid Unusual Trees

30. lpp

The Centennial Vijciems Cone Drying Facility

36. lpp

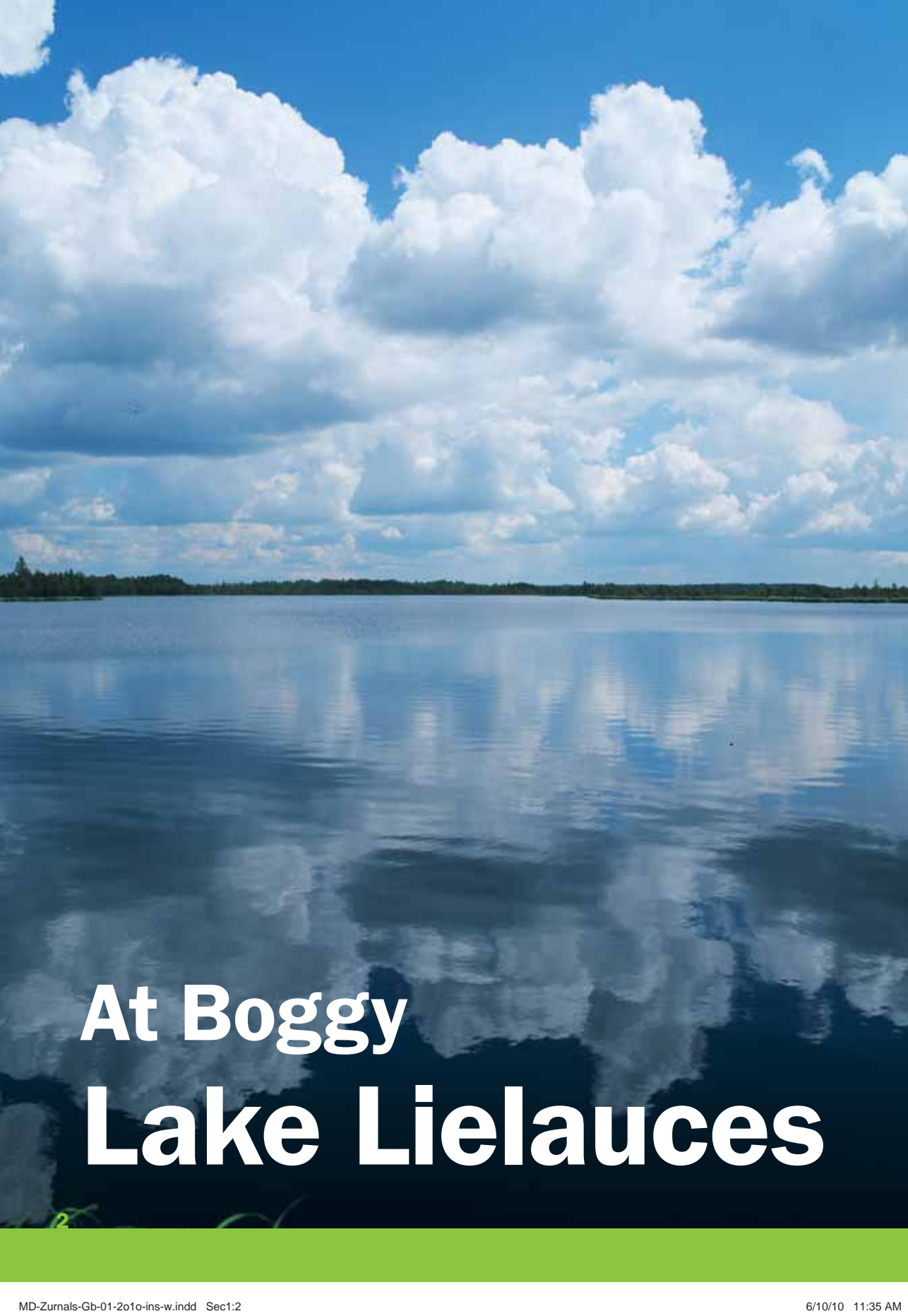
Mystery of Pokaiņi

40. lpp

White Dunes

44. lpp





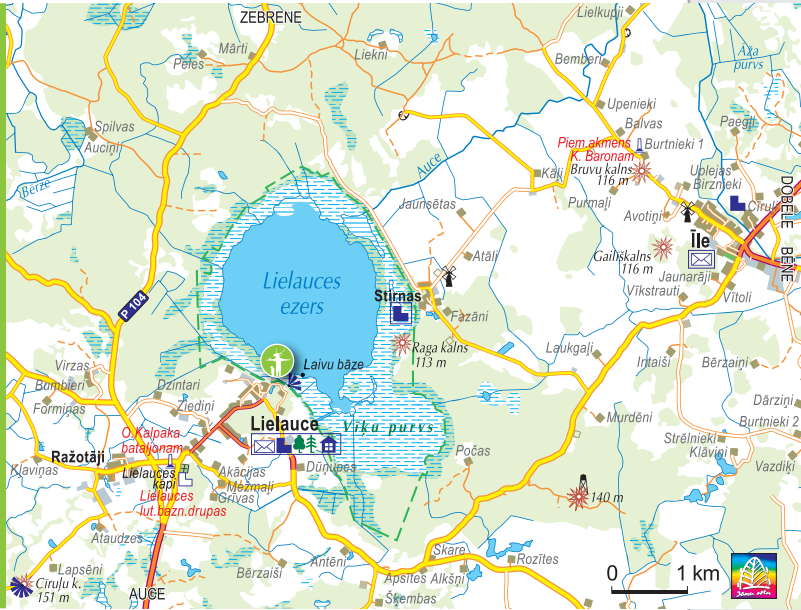
At Boggy Lake Lielaucis

Location



Lake Lielaucis is located in the nature reserve *Vīķu purvs (Vīķu Bog)*.
Rīga – 110 km
Dobele – 45 km,

Area – 372 ha,
length – 3 km,
width – 2.2 km,
average depth – 1.5 m,
max. depth – 3.5 m



Common residents:

in the water: perch, pike, tench, roach, rudd, silver bream, burbot, bream, crucian carp, ide, chub, ruff, eel etc., 16 fish species in total, as well as crayfish;

in the air: migratory bean goose, whooper swan, great-crested grebe etc., at least 24 bird species of Latvia or EU importance;

on the shore: large cranberry, fen orchid, yellow marsh saxifrage, black alder swamp woods.



Lake Lielaucis, nestling comfortably amid the surrounding Vīķu Bog, dozes peacefully and cherishes its treasures. It sure is rich in treasures! Lake Lielaucis may, however, seem unapproachable to strangers, as Vīķu Bog protects it from random visitors. As the lake became overgrown, a swampy and boggy zone reaching up to 1.2 km in width formed around it. The Dūņupe River brings water to the lake, while the Auce River carries water away.

The boggy Lake Lielaucis has no beach, and people can access the water and the boat rental station of JSC "Latvijas valsts meži" by taking the footbridge from Lielaucis Castle through the unusual and unsteady area of overgrown shores. This place is not exactly meant for passers-by, yet nature lovers are bound to find their paradise here. Just imagine a territory of almost 40 ha covered with cranberries! It's no wonder, as this area has been the cranberry bog of the nature reserve since 1987. Vīķu Bog with its specially protected plants is remarkable all over Zemgale and Latvia. This relatively small territory gives birdwatchers an opportunity to enjoy 21 bird species under special protection in Latvia. This is a very high diversity index for bird species.





The deck of the castle gives a fabulous view of Lake Lielaucis. Legend tells that the lake was never given its distinct name. The lake would have received its name if it had stood up, yet the bog always dragged it back. So the lake lies calmly down there and witnesses the transformation of the white Lielaucis Castle, which rises gracefully at the lakeside. The manor was originally owned by Duke Jacob, but it burnt down long ago. The castle was built in the 19th century and restored after the fire in the 20th century. By good fortune, the castle has been attended by woodcutters since 1922. Young foresters train here as well.

LVM started management of the lake in 2000. Since that time, the lakeside has been tidied up, a recreation site and a 20-boat rental station have been set up, a birdwatching tower has been built and licensed fishing and crayfishing have been organized. At least 150 thousand of young fish are released into the lake each year.

Lake Lielaucis has become particularly popular with perch anglers. Perch weighing 800 grams is not uncommon here, and catches of one kilo can also occur.

Legend of the Gurgler

A legend goes that Lake Lielaucis is home to a queer gurgling animal. Hence the name – gurgler. The gurgling sounds can be heard three kilometres away. It is believed that rye will cost as many roubles in the autumn as the animal gurgled in the spring. Some think the gurgler looks like a stork, while others imagine it as a small bird with a large beak. A whisper goes round that it was the devil who cast the gurgler into the lake. In the autumn, the gurgler turns into a noble gentleman and goes to Riga to see how big it has become. The gurgler plans to move to Riga as soon as the city construction is completed. Then Lake Lielaucis will close up, as the devil will seal it off. As Riga expands, Lake Lielaucis gets narrower and narrower. These days the lake is much smaller than in pre-war times.

Out and about the Lake

It's a good thing that the gurgler has not moved to Riga yet and Lake Lielaucis is still in place. If your trip brings you here, take a walk through the manor park, which features at least 60 unusual trees and shrubs planted during the times of Count Medem. You should definitely visit Kevele Springs (as well known as Swedish Springs or King Springs) located several kilometres from the castle. Tradition calls for drinking some water from all the nine springs, which flow out of the very top of Kambaru Hill and flow into the ravine. Each spring can treat a specific illness. King Charles XII of Sweden is believed to have been healed by drinking the water from the springs. Those who are impatient can quench their thirst in the stone basin where seven springs join together.

The historic Dobes (Incēnu) Hills are nearby. The hills were mentioned in the writs as early as in 1272. Ernests Brastiņš, explorer of hillforts, believed that the famous Sidrabene Castle was standing there in ancient times. These days, however, the impressive hill slopes are dotted with fragrant wild strawberries.

A site of more recent history in Lielaucis is a grey granite monument by the ruins of the church destroyed during the last war. The monument was unveiled in 1934 and is dedicated to the first battle of Colonel Oscars Kalpaks' battalion in January 1919.

Licensed Cray fishing

As the evening sets in, it's time to get ready for cray fishing. Lake Lielaucis is one of the few ones where licensed cray fishing is allowed. Crayfish can be caught with traps. In accordance with the lake rules, traps must be rented at the boat rental station in order to protect crayfish health. The traps that have been used in another lake may not be used here, as they can spread a dangerous disease called crayfish plague. You should make sure that you have some bait for the traps. Fish caught here in the lake and a small piece of meat or chicken can all be used as bait.

Catching crayfish is allowed from 1st July to 30th September, except for female crayfish with visible spawn. These should be released into the lake to lay eggs. And remember: no more than 50 crayfish!

The recreation area at the lakeside provides every opportunity for a late supper: a campfire pit, pots for cooking fish soup and crayfish and facilities for frying meat. Should you have any questions about boats, licences, fish, crayfish or others, the lake supervisor Guntis Zutis will gladly assist you.



Look out for Noble Crayfish

Crayfish belong to a very broad and diverse class of crustaceans, which also includes crabs, lobsters and shrimps. Only three species of freshwater crayfish can be found in Latvia: Noble crayfish, narrow-clawed crayfish and signal crayfish or American crayfish. Of these, only Noble crayfish is local, while narrow-fingered crayfish and signal crayfish are strangers. They are aggressive entrants who drive out Noble crayfish due to their rapid reproduction and ability to quickly adapt to environmental changes. Yet, delicacy properties are more pronounced in Noble crayfish. This is not only because they are high in protein and low in calories and saturated fatty acids. They also taste great.

Crayfish are nocturnal animals, which live on the bottom of water bodies and use hiding places on the shore. These animals have quite high demands for the quality of water: the water should not be too acidic and it must be rich in calcium, magnesium and oxygen. Perhaps this is why crayfish are found only in half of Latvia's water bodies.

Crayfish have many natural enemies (stork, grey heron, otter, mink, pike, perch and carp). Crayfish are very sensitive to chemicals and susceptible to infection, therefore at least people should be understanding and should comply with all rules of cray fishing. The key fact is that only licensed cray fishing and only in licensed crayfish lakes is allowed in Latvia. Please don't be angry about having to use rented traps, as the ones you have may be infected. Don't be surprised that some lakes have different (stricter) rules. Lake managers are entitled and even obliged to enforce such rules in order to protect crayfish and ensure reproduction of their population.

No matter how strange it seems, but large and mature crayfish can yield proportionally less meat than younger crayfish, as younger specimens have a more pronounced tail, where most meat can be found.

The shell makes crayfish a very fragile product, therefore they must be handled very carefully.

Before cooking live crayfish, it is advisable to keep them for a while in a refrigerator or freezer. And don't forget to stock up on dills.

At least seven kilograms of crayfish are needed to produce one kilogram of peeled crayfish tails.

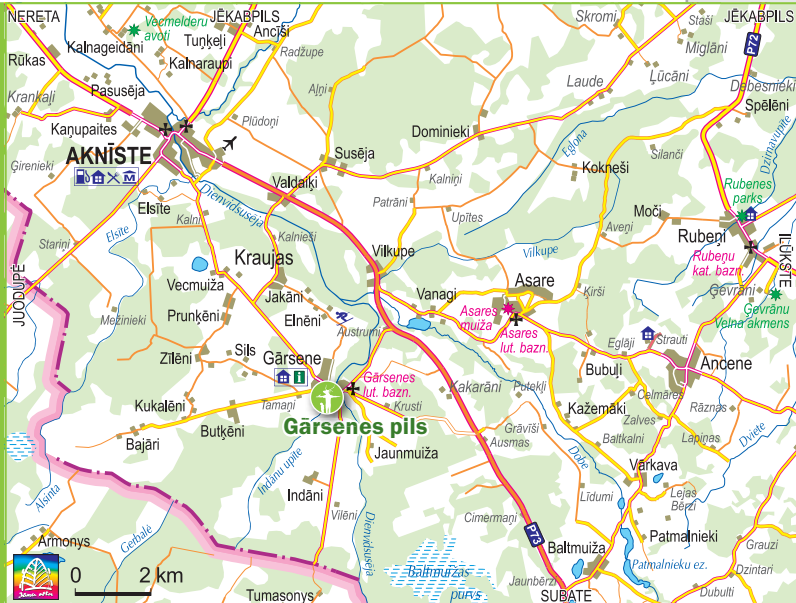


Gārsene – a Pearl of Sēlija

Location

Zemgales novads
Sēlija
Jēkabpils rajons

Rīga – 170 km
Jēkabpils – 55 km
Aknīste – 10 km



Gārsene, one of the most beautiful places in Sēlija, is located by the Lithuanian border. The Dienvidsusēja River, winding its way along the deep valley, Lakes Zuju and Vecmuīzas, where the first Gārsene Castle sunk together with the diamond rooster on top of the tower, small rivers, ponds, boulders and mighty trees make this place particularly picturesque. Yet, people of Gārsene do not rely solely on the glory of nature. The locals try very hard to maintain the beauty of this place. It is no wonder that Gārsene won two nominations in the contest for The Best-Tended Parish in Latvia held in 2006. Gārsene has also been included in the list of top 100 best-tended cultural monuments, while Gārsene Castle is among the best within the campaign Visit Castles in Latvia. Since 1997, the European Cultural Heritage flag has been flown at the castle. Finally, Gārsene has also been listed among the most welcoming places.

Gārsene Castle

The gem of the parish and its greatest pride is the neo-gothic Gārsene Castle, which is commonly referred to as the pride of Sēlija.

The history of Gārsene is closely linked with the eleven generations of the Boenninghausen-Budberg family of barons who were landlords of this place. The local counts took care of their peasants and built schools and homes for the disabled. They also constructed a parish house and a church. The peasants appreciated this care and formed a six kilometre long guard of honour to greet the count and his young and beautiful wife.

Gārsene Castle is special. Wrapped in romantic legends, this mysterious and beautiful building has adorned Sēlija Municipality since 1860. Since 1939, the castle has served as school premises for the children of Gārsene. The magnificent stove and the museum can be seen by all visitors by making prior arrangements with the tourist information centre located in Gārsene School. If you pre-arrange your visit, you are bound to have an exciting tour in the company of witty and knowledgeable guides. There you can also buy tickets for access to the hiking trails.



Gārsenes pagasts, Jēkabpils rajons, LV-5218



Gertrude's Church and Family Vault

In 1907, Baron von Budberg built a new spacious church with luxurious wood carved interior decor at the site of the old church. The new church was a tribute and a thank you gift to his prematurely deceased wife Gertrude Worth. The church houses two cultural monuments of national importance: two stained-glass windows with the armoury of the baron family and the organ installed by a German company E.F. Walker & Co in 1906 (by the way, the organ made by the same company pleases the ear of the audience of the Riga Dome Cathedral's concert hall). The baron family vault was built at about the same time. The vault gave rise to a number of stories and legends.



The Blue Lady of Gārsene

When the pompous family vault was ready, the Baron managed to rebury the mortal remains of his first wife in the new sepulchre and then he suddenly died himself. The Baron's second wife was very jealous and did not want her husband to be buried next to his first lady in the family vault. Therefore she ordered to remove the remains of Baroness Gertrude Worth-Budberg from the sepulchre devoted to her and rebury them at Gārsene Cemetery. Since that time, Baroness Gertrude's soul has been restless and has settled in the castle, where the Baroness once enjoyed a lot of lovely moments. At first, the ghost given the name of the Blue Lady scared the Baron's second wife, but since 1940, when the school was opened in the castle, it has appeared occasionally before the new occupants and visitors of the castle.

Trails, Short and Long

The Budbergs started construction of the park with its many distinctive and mighty trees, avenues, bridges, ponds and benches by the newly built castle in the 19th century. There are quite a few spots for romantic recreation remaining since that time. They have been tidied up and groomed to welcome visitors seeking a peaceful stroll, whose number is approaching four thousand a year.

Beautiful tourist trails have been set up on the bluff shores of the Dienvidsusēja River valley. The trails feature more than 40 unique natural objects and all the most remarkable architectural and cultural monuments of the parish.

The young generation of Gārsene treat their school in the castle and the surrounding landscape with great love. Schoolchildren and other people of Gārsene deserve gratitude for the excellently tended trails.

Gārsene trails wind along the merry and lively Dienvidsusēja River with its not so tranquil flow. Coiling playfully, it has wiggled its way through the dolomite layers, forming turnings and windings known as meanders. If you want to challenge yourself, you may choose the 3.7 km long trail – the small curve or the large curve (the Green Trail), which will take you on an unforgettable seven kilometre long trip for three hours. Walk the trails slowly, breathing quietly and deeply, as the local air is full of special freshness. Do not miss various miraculous creations of nature, trees and rocks on the sides of the trail.

The trails begin right at the castle. Climb Tējas Hill (Tea Hill) that was a favourite recreation spot of the baron family near Gārsene Watermill. Next to the hummock, which is now overgrown with mighty lindens and therefore also called Liepkalniņš (Linden Hill), there once was a pond with a cobble base, where the Baron used to swim. Walk along the old ash avenue to Dainu Stone (Folk Song Stone) and follow the signs to find Three Maidens, Witch's Broom, Chicken Leg, Altar Stone and Love Island. There is something to see and to touch on every step of your way in the park. You should definitely sit in the Baron's Chair, which is a seat artificially carved in the big stone one and a half centuries ago, where the baron couple liked to rest during their walks.

It's a good idea to look at the forest through Witch's Binoculars, which is an unusual formation in the tree from where a little witch observes the surroundings. The twisty and steep trail will take to the giant Lutausi and recreation sites situated nearby.

For the convenience of tourists, the trails have been equipped with steps, handrails and safety barriers. Recreation areas with benches, tables, canopies, campfire pits, direction signs and explanatory notes have been set up.

JSC "Latvijas valsts meži" also took part in the construction of Gārsene trails. Our cherished creation is the leisure area Lutausi situated near the bolder Lutausi (as well known as Broken Heart, Two Brothers and Latvia's Map). The mighty stone really heats the imagination, as it reminds of the contours of Latvia's map, as well as two brothers joining hands and a broken heart. Legend tells that the gardener of the manor fell in love with the Baron's daughter, yet the Baron didn't acknowledge those feelings. The pain of the loss of happiness broke the gardener's heart.



How Gārsene Got its Name

Baron Budberg owned a lot of land, so he decided to build a castle, as beautiful as nobody else had. He called together all the servants and peasants, and after a while the castle was ready. The Baron wanted people to praise his castle, but the castle had no name. Everyone started to think, but couldn't come up with anything sensible. Then the Baron ordered his coachman to drive along the road and ask every passer-by on the way. The first word said by the first passer-by would become the name of the castle. So the coachman and the Baroness set off. The first person they saw was a woman near the Lithuanian border. She carried an armful of plucked ground-elders. When the Baroness asked the woman what she carried, the latter replied 'gārsenes' (ground-elders). The Baroness, full of joy, exclaimed that was the perfect name and ordered the coachman to turn the horses back home. The name Gārsene has stayed ever since.



Ash Avenue

The ash avenue starts in the centre of Gārsene, 200 metres from the castle. It was created in the 1860-s as a walking trail for the Budberg barons. This 250 metre long avenue with 64 surviving ash trees, which are more than 150 years old, continues after the crossing of the twisty Dienvidsusēja River. Do not miss the remarkable Dainu Stone (Folk Song Stone). You should stop by this bolder and definitely sing a folk song.

Altar Stone

The peculiar stone band formation of Altar Stone (Altārakmens) makes believe that this was a sacrificial stone of ancient Latvians – a sacred stone where people swore loyalty.

Three Maidens

Three Maidens (Trejmeitiņas) is the name given to a mighty pine-tree, which has a circumference of 4.1 m and a height of 35 m. At the height of one metre, the pine-tree divides into three stems. Legend tells that the girls and women who run three times three circles around Three Maidens will become as slender and robust as Latvian pine-trees.



Witch's Broom

The pine-tree called Witch's Broom (Raganas slota) has as many as 7 tops.

The forest witch, who inhabits Gārsene Forest, has chosen this tree to be her next giant broom. She is eager to take visitors of Gārsene trails for a ride on this broom or give them a scare. It is advisable for the visitors to protect the beautiful tree and talk the witch into sparing the unusual seven-top pine-tree.

Mighty Elm

The third largest elm in Latvia grows in Gārsene. This mighty elm is sited to the east of the entrance to the leisure area Lutauši, 180 m from the road. The tree has a circumference of 7.8 m at the height of 1.3 m, and its total height is 18.5 m. At the height of 2.5 m, the trunk has diverged into four giant lateral branches. Although the middle of the trunk of the mighty elm is empty, the tree is still spreading and verdant.

- * In Gārsene, you can walk along several picturesque and landscaped nature trails and cognitive trails, which are 7 km in length. The trails feature more than 40 unique objects of nature and culture.
- * The small curve of the trail (3.7 km) will take you though the ash alley to Tea Hill, which was a favourite recreation place of the then owners of the castle. Next, the trail will lead you to the pond where the Baron used to swim, as well as to Folk Song Stone and the mighty elm.
- * The Green Trail winds its way along the valley of the Dienvidsusēja River past boulders, mighty trees and steep shores.
- * A branch of the heritage trail leads to Gārsene Church and the baron family vault. In 1999, the church and the family vault were awarded the European Cultural Heritage flag.
- * Before setting off, you can recover strength by a campfire in the specially fitted recreation areas.



Latvia's State Forests Warning

DON'T LITTER!
YOU WILL TURN INTO PIG!





Enigmatic Kaltene Stone Ridges

Location



Kaltene
Rojas pagasts
Talsu rajons

Rīga – 135 km
Roja – 10 km
Talsi – 45 km



These unusual stacks of boulders referred to as stone ridges (or kalvas in Latvian) are sited 1.5 to 2 kilometres from Kaltene seaside in a dense spruce forest. The stone ridges are 5–6 metres high, 35–60 metres wide and about one kilometre long. Similar formations are not found elsewhere in Latvia, therefore finding a key to this mystery has always occupied people's minds.

What Natural Scientists Believe

Natural scientists split over the actual origin of the stone ridge formation. Most likely, the stone ridges are hummocks formed as a result of moraine compression and shearing during the final stage of the Ice Age. Scientists believe that these rampart-like piles of stones started forming in the harsh glacial period thousands of years ago, when the Baltic Ice Lake retreated. During springtime storms, the sea ice reaching thickness of 2 metres shifted the stones covering the shallow sea floor. This area once had about 30 stacks of stones, each bearing its own name, such as Kārduškalva, Nablānītkalva, Dāriķkalva, Krapstīnkalva and Velna kalva.

Geologists consider Kaltene Stone Ridges to be a rare natural phenomenon. Similar stacks of stones are found only on the shore of the Labrador Peninsula in North America.



What Sacred Site Researchers Believe

There are also other theories about the formation of the stone ridges. Sacred site researchers Ivars Vīks, Guntis Eniņš, Sigurds Rusmanis and others claim that the T-shaped stacks of stones are human handiwork. They suggest looking at the stone ridges as at one piece. Who knows, perhaps the Devil's boat, "pointed at the top with pointed ends" and called the Big Stone Ship by the locals, was an ancient burial site. Or perhaps this place was once a home to the church of our primordial ancestors. The sacred site researchers believe that the unsolved mystery is the arrangement of the stone ridges in the NE-SW direction.



Once upon a time, the Devil wanted to get to the island of Saaremaa, so he decided to fill up the sea with stones. He took a huge bag full of stones to build the road across the sea. Yet, the bag was too heavy and broke apart near Kaltene. This is how the stone ridges were formed, but the road to Saaremaa hasn't been built to this day.



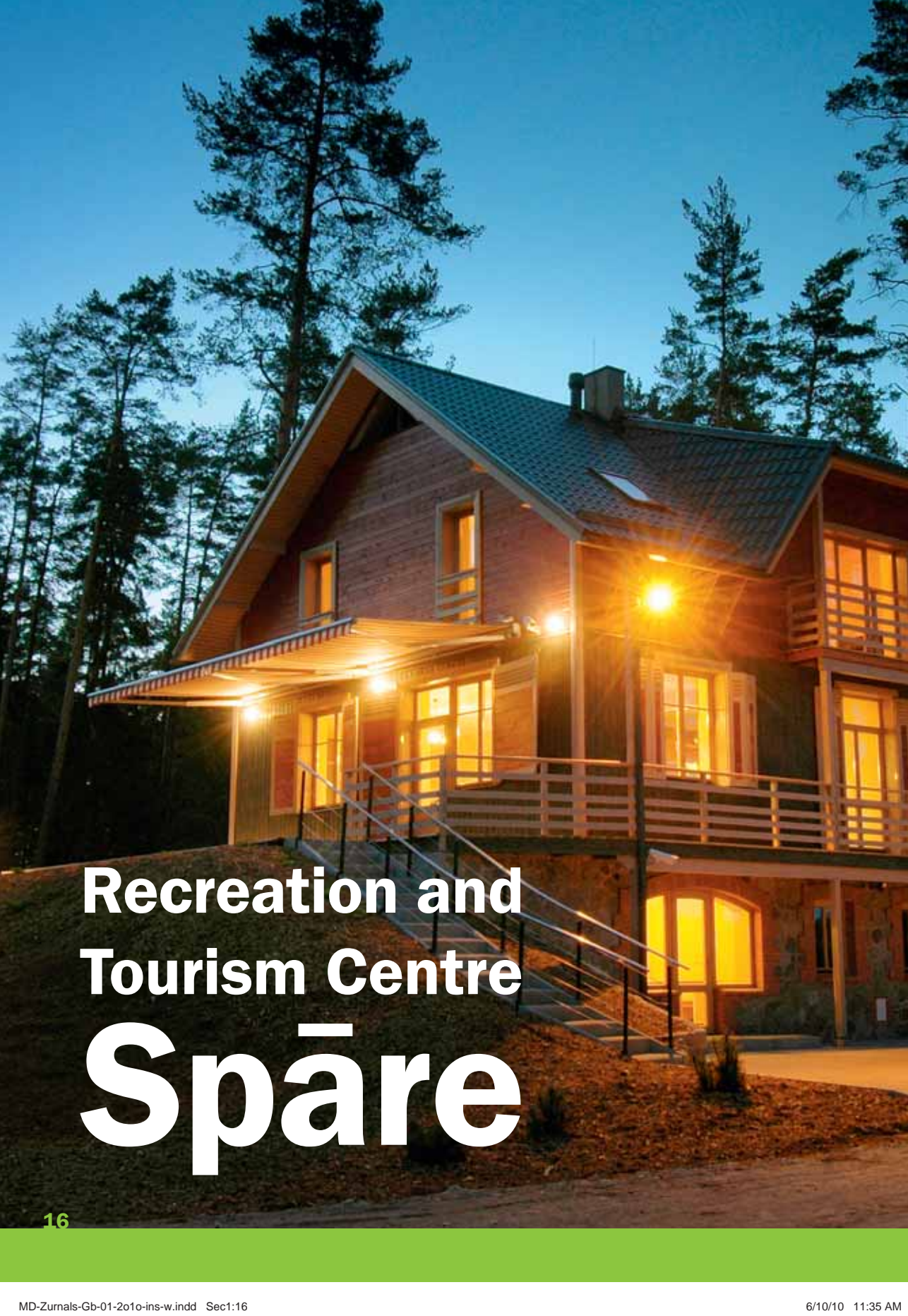
The Devil's Stone Ridge

The Devil's Stone Ridge (Velna kalva or Vellakalva in Latvian) is the largest stone stack. The ridge is about 3–6 metres high, 900 metres long and 35–160 metres wide. The Devil's Stone Ridge was once a pyramid-like stone hillock 7 metres long, which was made of beautiful small slate-coloured stones of various shapes. Seniors remember that the Devil's Stone Ridge used to have precise geometrical forms, with its proportions easy on the eyes. Unfortunately, the pyramid, as well as a part of the stone ridges, was destroyed in the post-war years, when the stones were crushed down for chippings. After the destruction, the site turned into a thickly wooded area and the stones quickly became overgrown with moss.

In former times, when a stone of the Devil's boat was hit with another stone, it produced a dull, heavy sound, such as that made by banging a huge drum. Therefore, the stone ridge is called Pagrabkalniņš (Cellar Hillock). When a stone was thrown into it, the sound of the rebound was heard only after a while, as if the stone had fallen down very deeply.

- * The stone ridges are stacks of boulders covering a territory of 85 ha. This is a specially protected nature monument of national importance. The total area of the stone ridges is 579 ha.
- * In 2006, special nature trails were set up for appreciating this unique natural formation. The longest trail is 1.5 km and the shortest trail is about 800 metres.
- * Please follow strictly the indicated route.
- * Try to identify the rare and protected plants growing amid the stone ridges: staghorn clubmoss, polypody and others.
- * Find a big stone with a cavity and toss a coin into it, thus ensuring you make a return visit to this place.





Recreation and Tourism Centre Spāre

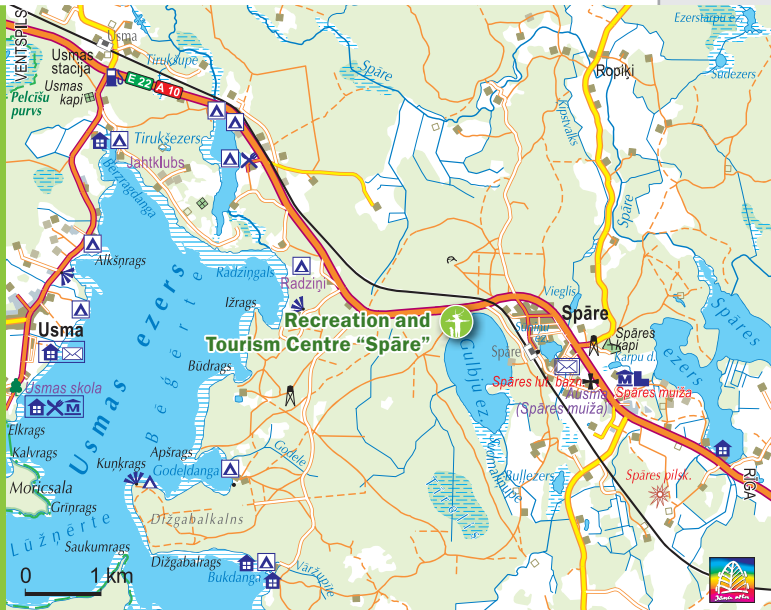
Location



Rīga – 140 km
Talsi – 25 km

Lake Gulbju

area – 115.5 ha
average depth – 1.5 m
max. depth – 2.1 m
reaching 4 m in separate places



For Active Recreation

The word recreation means refreshment of one's body and mind by some amusement and relaxation. Therefore the direct obligation of the recreation and tourism centre is to provide anyone attending with relaxation opportunities. Since tastes differ, the centre at Lake Gulbju caters to various needs. A lovely beach, eight boats and a pedal boat for rent, a picnic area, fishing and hunting opportunities, hiking and cycling trails, which are specially prepared around the lake – to name but a few. The manager Modris Jaunvalks will gladly tell you about other options.

According to the legends, in ancient times, when lake distribution was underway, Ģibuļi Parish was lucky enough to have received 23 lakes. The biggest is Lake Spāres, while one of the most favourite leisure sites is Lake Gulbju whose shores are home to Spāre Recreation and Tourism Centre.

This is a perfect place to break away from the bustling city life and enjoy some moments of quite repose amid nature and wildlife. Spāre has quite a few advantages: this tranquil and beautiful place close to the motorway and the railway gives you an opportunity to enjoy leisure in one of the cottages together with your loved one or with a large family. The big newly built modern three-storey house, which is notable for its high level of comfort and includes a banquet hall, a fireplace room, a sauna, a kitchen and bedrooms, is ideal for conferences, seminars, weddings and other big events.



“Dumbri”, Ģibuļu pagasts, Talsu novads, LV-3298, Latvia.





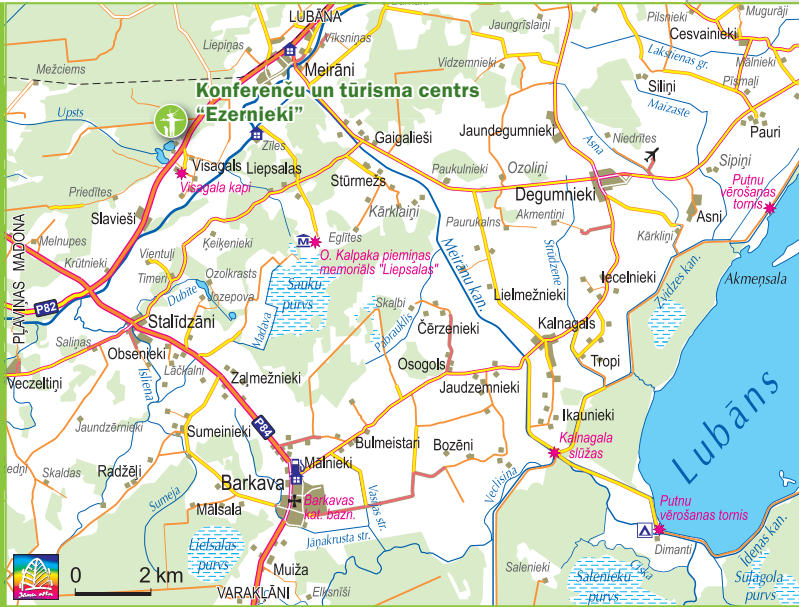
Where the Wind Plays Reed Straws

Location



Indrānu pagasts
Lubānas novads

Rīga – 200 km
Madona – 30 km
Lubānas – 20 km



Welcome to Ezernieki

Ezernieki Conference and Recreation Centre welcomes visitors with its usual charm and cosiness. In the evening, you can enjoy a swelter in the sauna, a refreshing swim in Lake Salas and a moment of idle rest by the fireplace.

At night, you are bound to have a tight and restful sleep in your room with a romantic view of the lake.

The morning in Ezernieki will greet you with freshness, lovely aromas and birds' songs. You can stay longer if you like. Lake Salas attracts visitors with footbridges for swimmers, boats and a pedal boat. Sports grounds await volleyball, basketball and football players. If you prefer to stay out of the comfortable rooms of the big or the small guest homes, you can put up your tent and stay in the lighted and facilitated camping area.

Yet we should hit the road, as our goal for today is to visit Lake Lubāns and Īdeņa Village, walk along Tīrumnieki (or Teirumnīki, as referred to by Latgale's people) nature trail, which is situated about twenty kilometres from Ezernieki.



Phones: +371 26671421, +371 27840643, +371 26666090

Great Lubāns

Lake Lubāns is so big that it seems we are actually at the sea. Linguists believe that the name Lubāns originated from its extensiveness, as it means 'open space' in Estonian.

Every spring, Lubāns tended to overflow, flooding an area much larger than its size. When water retreated, the meadows would overgrow with succulent one metre long grass, and people would come from as far as Rēzekne locality to mow it. Today, the wetland meadows may be seen not far from the locks of the Aiviekste River.

Attempts to tame Lake Lubāns have been made since the middle of the 19th century. Regulation of the lake water level was initiated in 1926. It was then that the bed of the Aiviekste River was deepened and the Meirāni Canal was dug. From 1929 to 1939 the effluent of the river was regulated and the water level dropped by more than two metres. Extensive and complex hydrological and hydraulic engineering works were carried out in the period between 1956 and 1981. Today, Lake Lubāns is contained in a system of intricate canals, dams and locks and is the largest dammed lake in Europe. Two sets of locks ensure regulation of the water level in the lake: the locks of the Aiviekste River in the north and the locks of the Meirāni Canal in the south. A total of 90 km of dams and 93 km of canals were built at Lake Lubāns.

Lubāns is the largest lake in Latvia. It has an area of 82 square km, its length is 15.6 km, its width is 8.4 km, the average depth is 1.6 m and the maximum depth is about 3.5 m. There are 21 fish species found in the water of the lake: ide, roach, carp, tench, perch, crucian carp, bream etc. Once Lubāns was also inhabited by wels catfish.

Allow two days for visiting the surroundings of Lubāna. You can stay for the night at Ezernieki Conference and Recreation Centre. We recommend you to see the following cultural and historical landmarks:

- * The burial place of Oskars Kalpaks, the first Commander in Chief of Latvian National Armed Forces, at Visagals cemetery near Ezernieki,
- * The open-air memorial museum to O.Kalpaks in Liepsalas, Ošupe Parish,
- * The museum Vecais Ceplis ('The Old Brick Kiln') to the opera singer Jānis Zābers in Meirāni, Indrāni Parish,
- * The locks of the Meirāni Canal.

You can hike Tīrumnieki trail in the company of a guide (phone +371 28301143).

Do not pick unripe cranberries, no matter how tempted you feel to do so right from the footbridge. Try fish soup in Zvejnieki, Īdeņa Village.



In the Wetland of Lubāns

The wetland surrounding Lake Lubāns include valley bogs and raised bogs, wet meadows and mist forests that have been forming for thousands of years.

Although the lake and its surroundings have been modified, this area is still unique. The local flora is very diverse. A number of rare and protected plants can be found in the lowland of Lubāna, among which are Baltic marsh-orchid, eastern pasque-flower, dwarf birch, swamp willow, as well as many representatives of other plant species.

The wetland of Lubāns has an area of 813 square km. 23.5 % of the wetland territory is taken by swamps and almost one fourth of the wetland is covered with water.

Forest Kitchen and Restaurant

The straight and smooth forest trail suddenly comes to a halt at an interesting place of recreation, which those in the know call Ķēķis ('Kitchen'). It seems that Mother Nature herself has turned one of her special trees into a canopy where forest hikers can recuperate.

Forest's Prayer to the Traveller

Dear Traveller! When you go by me and are about to raise your hand against me, think before you touch me.
I give you warmth on winter nights and a friendly shade in the heat of the summer sun. I am the beam that supports
Your house, I am the board in the frame of your bed. I am the handle of Your shovel and the door of your house, I am
The pole of your cradle and the lid of your coffin.
Hear my prayer and do not hurt me.
I feel pain and I have scars from your litter and wrong-doings.



This prayer adopted from ancient Portuguese writs can be read at the recreation places Ķēķis ('Kitchen') and Restorāns ('Restaurant') in the forests of Northern Latgale. It feels so good to spend the day in the forest picking berries or mushrooms and then find a table and some benches surrounded by pine-trees and fir-trees, where you can relax and snack on your forest sandwich. The hunters' resting place known as the Restaurant features a nicely equipped forest kitchen where you can prepare a delicious supper and enjoy it right there in the little gazebo.



How Lubāns Got a New Home

Lake Lubāns was once tired of swaying in one place, so it rose in the air and took off east towards the sun with a roar. A big marsh remained in the place where the lake once was. Now the marsh is known as Zlauga Bog. Lubāns looked back at its long-inhabited place and parted from it shedding three tears, which turned into three little lakes.

Lubāns continued its journey until it spotted a giant clearing at about noon on the next day. The lake began to wonder what would be the best spot for it to settle down.

That day, the Lady of the Big House sent her daughters to do laundry at the Aiviekste River. Once the girls saw the lake fly, they started singing:

Lubāns is coming, Lubāns is coming,
Across the hills, across the valleys!
Come right here, dear Lubāns,
Where a soft bed is waiting for you!

The harsh Lady of the Big House also heard the bubbling noise and said scornfully:

– This cloud has a bad roar, as if it were de-barking some trees!

As Lubāns heard the song of the girls and the grumble of the landlady, it came down at that very moment and poured over the whole lowland. The girls climbed their laundry tables to get ashore, and the landlady hurried into her room to save her coffer, but was caught in the whirlpool





Teirumnīki Bog Trail

Location



Rēzeknes novads
Nagļu pagasts

Rīga – 220 km
Lubāna – 20 km
Rēzekne – 30 km



Tīrumnieki Bog with the clean and deep Lake Tīrumnieku in the centre rests peacefully amid many other bogs on the right side of Nagļi – Īdeņa road, between the Lubānu Ponds and the Orenīšu Ponds.

Little lad of Tīrumnieki,
Don't make fun of forest lassies:
Long grass, abundant dew, –
Skirt hems lifted high.

This is what the folk song says. Nowadays, however, it is no longer relevant because for the past eight years people have been able to walk across Tīrumnieki Bog by using the boarded footbridge and not getting their feet wet. Yet, the stroll along the 800-metre long trail (and the same distance back) should not be rushed. People come here for peace and quiet and for experiencing the unique and incomparable scents and feelings, which overwhelm them at the bog.

The wind has already managed to scatter the white fluff, but the scent of marsh tea still holds over the bog. The scent has penetrated the needles of the small pine-trees and pervaded the leaves of the birch-trees. Locals often refer to bog bilberries as dizzying berries. This is because bilberries grow next to marsh tea and someone has decided that it was the berries that give dizziness, not the scent of marsh tea. On the side of the trail, sundew with its sticky leaves is drowsing and waiting for some reckless insect to be trapped for dinner. Poisonous cowbane and swamp cinquefoil, a valuable medicinal plant, reflect amicably in the water of the lake nearby. You can also spot bog-rosemary blooming late and helping you imagine the bog in the spring when cranberries are in flower. This is the time when the bog acquires a soft pink sparkle like a large pot of manna from heaven.



The Clean Lake

The little Lake Tīrumnieku is snoozing quietly in the middle of the bog. The water in the lake is so clean and gentle that your hair will become silky and your skin will feel very soft after swimming here. The water of Lake Tīrumnieku is safe to drink. It is no wonder that men used to take this water for brewing, while women rinsed linen here. Curiously, the lake was not named after the word 'tīrumi' (farm fields), as there are no fields in the vicinity. The name of Lake Tīrumnieku derives from the word 'tīrs' (clean).



Since Latvians built boarded foot-bridges across the bog according to the Japanese design and with the support of Denmark, people from near and from afar have come to one of the three platforms and dived into the refreshing water to escape the summer heat. It would be difficult to do so from the shore, as the edge of the lake is swampy, the water gets too deep very quickly reaching 3 metres right off of the shore, while in the middle of the lake its bottom cannot be felt at all. Perhaps the lake was formed by a falling meteorite? Scientists have not come up with a direct answer yet, but there are many different theories.

SPA lovers have more interest in the therapeutic mud than in the clean water, as the mud helps against cellulite and enhances beauty. It's a good thing that

Bog Princesses

Probably, the greatest attention catchers are cranberries, the red-cheeked beauties of the local bogs. They are known by many different popular names: crane berries, mossy berries, scarlet beauties and Latvian antibiotics.

Indians have a tradition: as a sign of reconciliation you should eat a handful of cranberries, and peace will come. At the same time, cranberries are a great source of vitamins. In the ancient times, when sailors went off on a long sea voyage, they always took giant vats of cranberries with them to ensure a good supply of vitamins during prolonged periods of time.

It is a pity though that in the recent time a simple truth has been forgotten: only red and ripe cranberries are valuable to eat, as only they contain hippuric acid, which has antibacterial properties and can fight off harmful viruses and diseases within the body. Cranberries picked prematurely and brought home to ripe on a blanket express their protest with a bitter taste.

- * Put half a litre of red cranberries into a bowl, put one or two pressed cloves of garlic on top and add two or three tablespoons of honey. Place the bowl into the fridge and wait for a couple of days until the honey and garlic have soaked through the cranberries. Use one teaspoon in the morning.
- * Make a glass of cranberry juice, add a glass of honey, a tablespoon of chopped walnuts and a tablespoon of cognac. Use one tablespoon in the morning and in the evening.



In the Dream Land of Birds



Many bird species inhabit the surroundings of Lake Lubāns. In the autumn and in the spring, thousands of migratory water birds settle by the water bodies – swans, geese and ducks. At such times, it seems that the whole immense surface of the water has suddenly come to life.

Birdwatchers have counted 224 bird species in the wetland of Lubāns, while others think that this area is home to 250 of the 335 bird species living in Latvia. The experienced birdwatcher Kaspars Funts has observed as many as 272 species here. Fifty of the bird species inhabiting the wetland of Lubāns have been listed in the Red Book of Latvia.

Six birdwatching towers have been installed on the shores of Lake Lubāns for bird study. You can always spot a friend of the feathered kind clasping binoculars up there. Each year, nature

researchers from all over Europe gather together here to participate in the so-called Tower Fights. The wetland of Lake Lubāns and Salas Bog is a true paradise for birdwatchers, as there is no other background noise than the lovely birds singing.

The Tower Fights have gained popularity with Latvia's birdwatchers as well. The Lubāns birdwatching towers also participate in the Tower Fights. This tournament not only contributes to the popularity of birdwatching, but also encourages people to get to know birds and therefore protect them.



Īdeņa, a Fishing Village in Latgale

Archaeological excavations show that the wetland of Lake Lubāns was one of the first inhabited areas on the territory of Latvia after the glaciers retreated to the north. 21 settlement places of the Stone and Bronze Age have been found here. The surroundings of Lake Lubāns have also gained attention due to the discovery of amber processing sites of the Neolithic Age. The amount of amber artifacts found in archaeological excavations is more than several thousand pieces. Amber processing workshops, which are attributable to the period of 5300-3700 years ago, have been located. Numerous findings of amber objects and their high quality indicate that a true amber processing centre was established and operated in the Neolithic Age on the territory of today's wetland of Lubāns.



Approximately 470 hillforts have been found in Latvia, but this number is subject to change, as hillfort researchers discover yet another witness of ancient times every three or four years. The little village of Īdeņa can boast of two ancient hillforts. One of Īdeņa's hillforts was measured and described by the researcher Ernests Brastiņš in 1925. A legend goes that gold coins brought during the war by the soldiers are buried in the hillfort. Old-timers say that a road built of thick oak snags used to run from the hillfort across Lake Lubāns to Elkšņi Tap House in Vidzeme.

A steep hillside overgrown with hazel-trees suddenly comes in sight at the edge of the hill. Before that we were in the lowland and now we are on a high slope. The misty water of Lake Lubāns can be seen in the distance. This spaciousness takes the breath away!

A hillfort is a type of earth-work fortifications. It was the central site of the area and had not only military and administrative functions, but also was an important economic and cultural centre.



Reed Roofs and Fishing Nets

Īdeņa is probably the only fishing village which is not situated by the sea. It is quite strange to see how fishing nets are drying next to a potato field, but Īdeņa is different from other places. Antiquity has merged with today in the most incredible way here. The reed roofs invoke the atmosphere of an open-air museum. Yet, if you look around, you will see a rooster scratching for corn, a cow mooing in the field and a farmer preparing new reeds for fixing the roof destroyed during the autumn storm. The old fishermen's houses have no windows facing the lake so that the cold winter winds do not blow out the warmth. The houses do not stand along the road, but on the steep lake shore. It is no wonder, as in the past people had to protect their houses from floods and mainly used boats as a means of transport. Imagine how in times past the people of Īdeņa would put on their best gowns and paddle across the lake to Varakļāni Church and Gaigalava Church. There was also a path across the swamp, but it was bad and not always passable. Boats provided much better transportation.

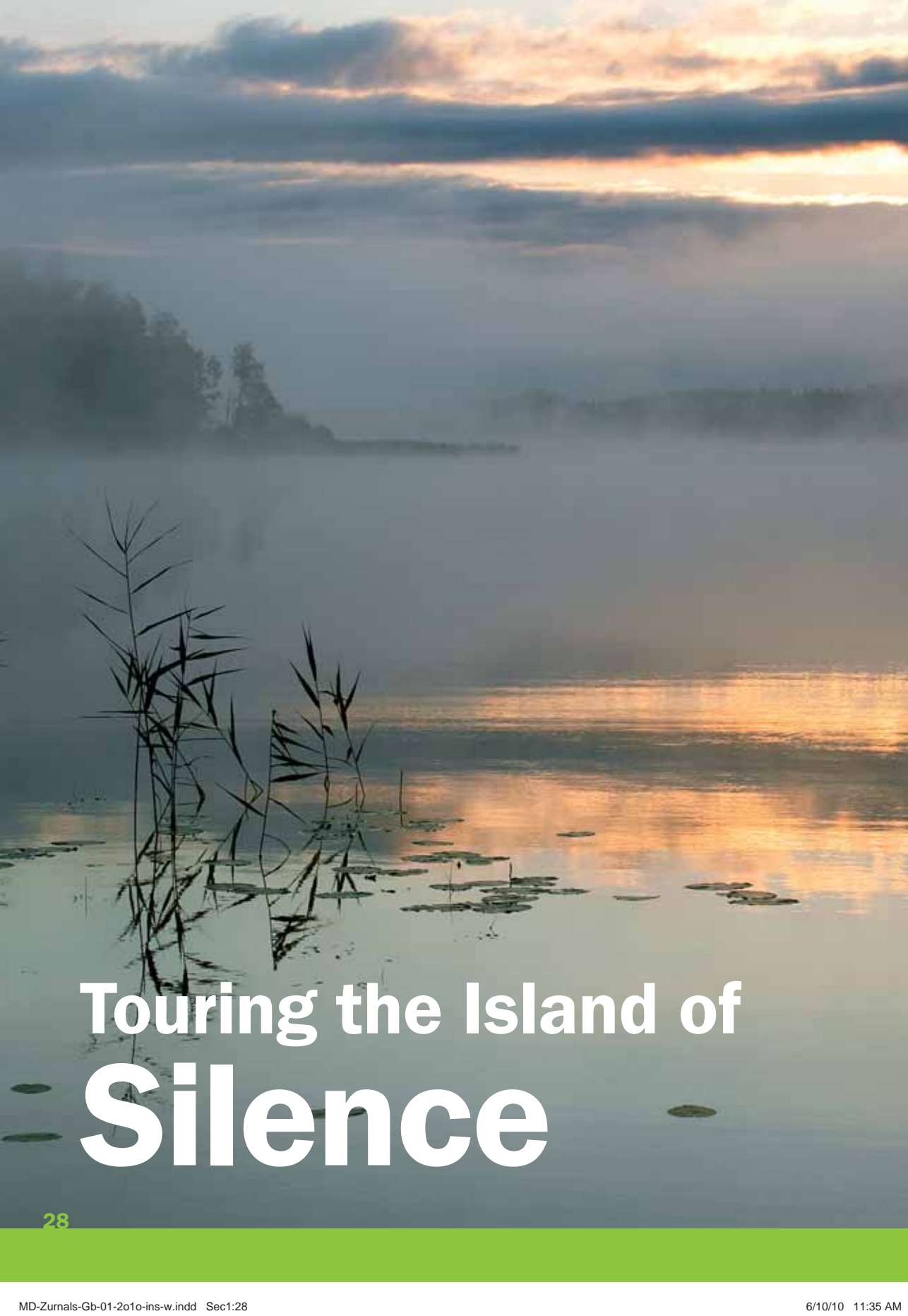
Visiting Zvejnieki House in the Fishing Village

Even today, when there are only twenty surviving houses in the fishing village, Īdeņa's men go fishing. Among them is Jānis, the head of the Macāns family. Then it's time to cook a delicious fish soup, smoke some fish and welcome some visitors. Visitors fall in love with everything here: the sunset above the lake, the hosts' stories of the history and surroundings of Lake Lubāns, the fish soup and the healthy beaver castoreum tincture. Yet, what visitors find the most exciting are Jānis' stories about the famous ancient history of Lubāns and his wife Anna's gaze, full of love for the picturesque landscape of the area.

Lubāns wishes to rise from the wetlands
And nestle close to the Daugava's banks,
Whispering to the river beneath the stars.

This is what the poet Andris Vējāns once said. We, however, want Lubāns to stay in its place forever and be just as big and beautiful as it is now.





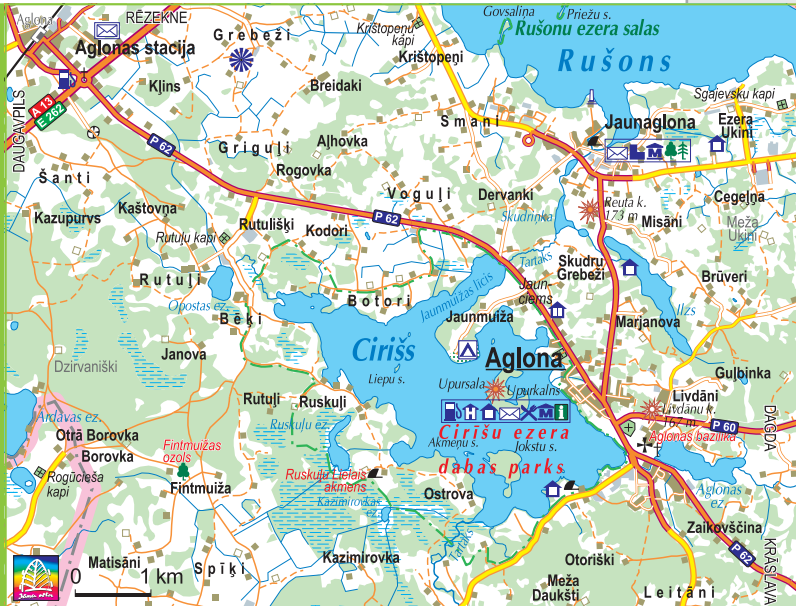
Touring the Island of **Silence**

Location



Dabas parks "Cīriša ezers"
Aglonas novads
Aglonas pagasts

Preiļi – 25 km
Daugavpils – 40 km
Rīga – 220 km



Although there are twenty-one lakes in Aglona Parish, Lake Cīriša can be proud, because its water reflects the white towers of the Aglona Basilica, while the largest of the eight islands of the lake – Upursala – keeps the unsolved secrets of Latvia's ancient history.



In the Shade of White Towers

Aglona's surroundings are unusually picturesque. It is no wonder that such a beautiful place was inhabited by the Balt tribes in time immemorial. According to historical sources, Aglona was referred to as a place of Christian cultural environment for the first time in the stories of 1263 when Mindaugas, the first King of Lithuania, and his sons were assassinated here. Aglona is a special place, and it has been even more special since 1700, when the first wooden church and a monastery were built here. "To honour God and to bless Latvians," said the local landlords, when allotting the land to the church.

When the wooden church and the monastery burnt down in the fire of 1766, the Dominicans built a new stone monastery and a church with two 60 metre high towers in the Baroque style. Today, the church has become not only a holy place of international importance, but also a part of Latvia's cultural and historical heritage. The famous icon of the Miracle-Worker Virgin Mary of Aglona, which allegedly has curative abilities, has been preserved in the basilica since the 17th century. This icon with the image of Mary gently holding the Christ Child with her right hand in her lap and a flower in her left hand can be viewed only on special festive occasions. All the rest of the time it is covered with the painting Mother of God in Heaven.

The icon is not the only thing worth seeing in the basilica. Interior decoration dates back to the 18th and 19th centuries. It has been highly appreciated by connoisseurs of art, as the basilica boasts a collection of paintings, sculptures and other art objects. The Aglona Basilica makes it possible to enjoy the special feeling of peace, which is inherent in this globally recognized centre of Catholicism. In 1993, Pope John Paul II visited and blessed the Shrine of Aglona. On the 15th of August every year, about 250 thousand pilgrims set out to make their way to the basilica to commemorate the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Holy Spring of Aglona

The shore of Lake Egles on the territory of the Aglona Basilica features a holy spring whose healing properties were confirmed by Vilnius Health Authorities and Saint Petersburg Academy in about 1820. Although experts consider that the healing quality has reduced over time, the spring has not lost popularity. The refreshing and tasty spring water gives rejuvenation to many pilgrims.



Sculptures of King Hill

In 2006, the entrepreneur Jānis Stupāns began to create a complex of sculptures on Karaļa Hill (King Hill) on the other side of Lake Egles. Over the next three years, the complex became a popular tourist sight in Aglona Municipality.

Ēriks Deplers, the author of the concept and the design, a former military aviator and now a wood carver and the author of many spiritual books, believes that in this place a person can feel contact with God and beauty. The lake, the clouds, the hill, the benches of secular oak basking in the sunlight in the ornamental garden and the sculptures carved in wood create a special mood and make your thoughts escape the mundane.

In Honour of Bread

Many other interesting places await visitors to Aglona, therefore it is time to have some nourishing Latvian rye bread and learn at the same time how bread is made. This can be done in the Bread Museum of Aglona, which exhibits a collection of hundreds of tools related to grain processing and bread baking: frails, bread-shovels, kneading troughs and other gear.

Visitors will watch a specially made theatrical performance, enjoy the candle-lit atmosphere and breathe in the aroma of the herbal tea in clay mugs and the loaf of rye bread on a linen tablecloth. Then a conversation about bread may begin. Before tasting the freshly baked bread, you should learn to distinguish and taste rye grains. Vija Ancāne, the head of the museum, has collected dozens of sayings, beliefs, tales and habits associated with the cultivation of cereals, as well as bread baking and eating. You can learn to play different games related to cereals and bread and try your hand at turning the mill or holding a seed drill full of grain.



Upursala Island in Lake Ciriša



Lake Ciriša
(also called Lake Ciriša and Cirišs)
Width – 600 ha
Length – 5 km
Width – 2.5 km
Average depth – 4.1 m
Max. depth – 10 m
There are 8 islands in the lake
with a total area of 39 ha.
20 fish species inhabit the lake,
including sturgeon.

Upursala Hillfort with the settlement
is a National Cultural Monument.

A Paradise for Hairy Agrimony and White-Backed Woodpecker

The landscape of Latgale Upland with many lakes seems unchanging, like something that has been around since time immemorial and will stay forever and ever. Nevertheless, the landscape with its natural values must be protected. The people of Latgale have realized this and take good care of their greatest value – the glorious nature. Lake Ciriša has been given the status of a nature park and the Upursala nature trail has been set up.

Beauty, however, must not be hidden. There should be ways to display it. Not many islands can boast of so many botanical values along with dwelling houses. Biologists have discovered 264 species of ferns and flowering plants on the island, of which four species are specially protected. The small territory features waterlogged broadleaf forests, hillside forests and gully forests. Cowslip lungwort blooms here early in the spring, followed by hairy agrimony. The magnificent red fruits of the spindle tree are a sheer delight to the eyes in the autumn. Club moss goes through its long life cycle without being disturbed.

Upursala Island has become very popular with birds, especially woodpecker family's representatives, due to its pristine forests and old trees. Here one can observe black woodpecker, which is the largest woodpecker in Europe, as well as middle spotted woodpecker and white-backed woodpecker, which can only be happy in the places with 200 dead trees per hectare of forest. Fortunately, Upursala Island abounds in old trees.



Cooperation Raft

Although Upursala Island is located only 300 metres from the lakeshore, it was not easy for visitors to access it until 19th September 2008. This is the day when raft connection to the newly established Upursala nature trail was open. It sets an excellent example of mutual cooperation, as the lake is the property of the municipality, while the forest on the island is managed by LVM. Therefore, a common language had to be found, which was done. The trail on the island was set up and the raft was built with the support of LVM, and the engine for the watercraft was supplied by Aglona Municipality. Further management of the island will be carried out in close cooperation as well.

A Trail through Silence

This is not the first nature trail established with the participation of LVM, yet it must be the most challenging one.

The original plan was to deliver the materials and the workforce to the island by the ice road. However, that winter the lake was too stubborn to freeze, so everything had to be transported by boats.

The hardships are now forgotten. The trail, or rather a system of footbridges with steps, small bridges and handrails, has been set up. Other facilities include viewing points, tables and benches for recreation, as well as information stands. Hardly elsewhere will you see a nature trail with a footbridge built over a moist ravine and bridges across fallen trees. The trail



makes a detour around the oak of a respectable age and runs gracefully around a mossy stone. Peace and quiet interrupted only by songs of the birds and the gentle breath of antiquity accompany visitors throughout the trail. A common language had to be found, which was done. The trail on the island was set up and the raft was built with the support of LVM, and the engine for the watercraft was supplied by Aglona Municipality. Further management of the island will be carried out in close cooperation as well.

Sacrifice Hill of Upursala Island

Latvia cannot boast of many hillforts on islands, therefore Upursala Island (literally meaning 'a sacrifice island') in Lake Ciriša deserves special attention. Sacrifice Hill ('Upurkalns' in Latvian) meets all the characteristics of an ancient hillfort. Archaeological excavations carried out in the hillfort show that this place was inhabited as early as in the first millennium BC. Some historians have put forward a hypothesis that this hillfort was a residence of ancient priests.

The unusual shape of the island, which resembles the crescent moon, has led to a number of interesting assumptions. Some researchers of antiquity believe that the hillfort served sacred purposes (related to a religious cult), as the water around the site forms a cleansing circle, while the crescent shape could suggest the location of the place for worshipping the Ancestress. Legend tells that in old time young girls and livestock were sacrificed to gods on Upursala Island. The priests would observe in which direction the wind blew: if it carried away the smoke towards Voguļi Village, the sacrifice was accepted, if it blew towards Aglona, the sacrifice was rejected.



Sighing on Love Hill

Love Hill ('Mīlestības kalniņš' in Latvian) evokes a romantic mood. You can only guess how many passionate kisses, sighs, whispers and tears it has witnessed, as this hill has been a favourite meeting place for the young people of Aglona since time immemorial. Hikers of the nature trail can sit down at the viewing platform and enjoy the panorama of Aglona, as the 1.8 kilometre long trail has almost come to an end. Now it's time to embark on the raft or the boat, which will do a lap of honour around the mysterious Upursala Island with its romantic bays and then take the visitors back to Aglona.



LATVIA'S STATE FORESTS -
OPEN DAILY, NO ENTRANCE FEE

OWLINATOR

PRODUCER: LATVIA'S STATE FORESTS DIRECTOR: MAMMADABA

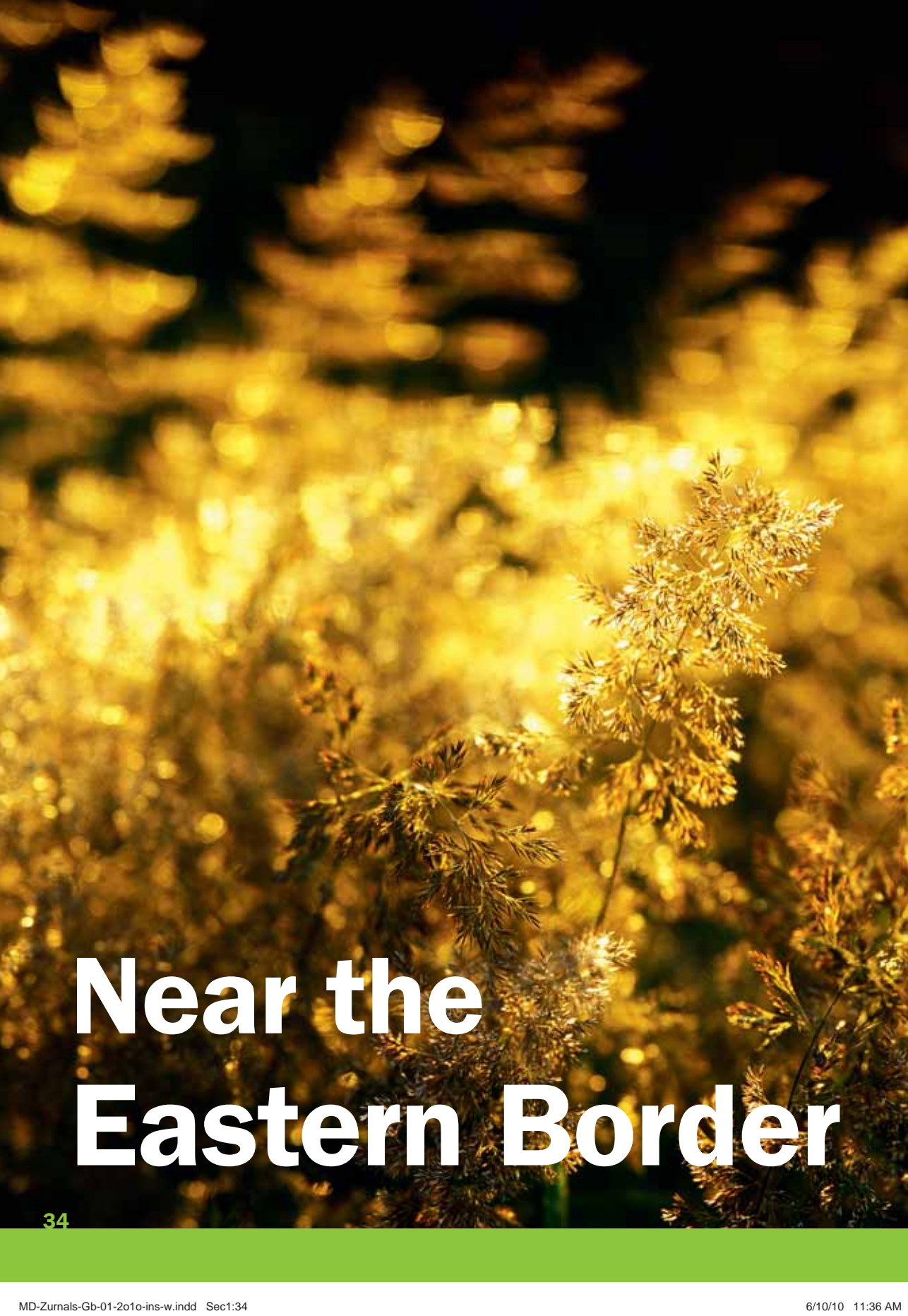
STARRING: EAGLE-OWL AND NIGHT ANIMALS

SOUND: NIGHT SILENCE LIGHTS: MOON & STARS DRESS DESIGN: MAMMADABA



WWW.MAMMADABA.LV





Near the Eastern Border

Location



Pasienes pagasts
Zilupes novads

Rīga – Zilupe 315 km
Rīga – Pasiene 330 km
Pasiene – Ludza 45 km
Pasiene – Rēzekne 75 km
Pasiene – Daugavpils 130 km



Where Three Lands Meet

Pasiene is an unusual parish, not least because it shares borders with two countries: Russia in the east and Belarus in the southeast. Zilupe, Sebezh and Osveja are all nearby.

Pasiene used to be much more populated: about 10 thousand people lived there years ago. In 2000, however, the population of this border parish was only 832 people, including 200 Latvians, 300 Russians and 263 Belarusians. Three years later, the population dropped to 775.



It is a pity that life takes people away from such a lovely place. Just like Latgale in general, this locality is blessed with unusually beautiful nature. There are rivers, lakes and hills here. The highest peak in Pasiene gives a view of all three neighbouring countries from the height of 180 metres (above the sea level, of course).

The centre of Pasiene is the starting point of the 25 kilometre long heritage trail, which includes the Mound of Friendship, the Tree of the East and the Grebļa Hill nature trail, which is a unique natural site featuring rare species of plants and animals.

The heritage trail starts at Pasiene Manor, which was built in the 17th century. Its destiny is similar to that of many manors: it has changed several owners and has gone through both good and bad times. The trail further leads to a gem of architecture: Pasiene Church, which should also be viewed from inside. Therefore it's recommended to book a tour in advance.

Arrange a border pass and do not forget to take your passport! You can expect a trip to the eastern border of Latvia, which seems long and exotic in the local context.



A Baroque Pearl

The art critic Boris Vipper referred to Pasiene Church, which stands majestically at the very Russian border, on the bank of the valley of the Zilupe River, as the artistically most perfect sacral building of the Baroque style in Latvia and one of the greatest architectural and artistic treasures. The church is considered one of the most impressive buildings designed in the Polish Baroque tradition in Latgale and throughout Latvia. Pasiene Church is also known as the pearl of the Eastern Europe. The temple, originally built as a Dominican monastery church after the first wooden church had burnt down, was the centre of Catholicism in Latvia for many years. The white two-tower church, almost unchanged in appearance, has adorned the local scenery since 1761. The effect of an unrealistic world is created by the reflection of the high skylight, the seemingly small flying angels with somewhat slanting eyes and the figures of the saints frozen in theatrical postures, which are endowed with delicacy and sentiment. There are several artistic monuments on display in Pasiene Church: the central altar, the side altars and the pulpit, which was built with the help of the local craftsmen.



Once God and the Devil met on Grebja Hill and started arguing. The Devil got very angry with God and was determined to frighten him, so the Devil triggered a heavy storm and lightning. God, however, did not even think of getting scared. He made up the fire, lit his pipe and sat there peacefully. The thunderstorm soon subsided, as the Devil realized that it was impossible to scare God.

The Devil came out of the forest and told God, "You weren't scared of me, but you won't scare me either."

God went into the forest, picked some birch bark and wrapped himself in it. Then he took two alder sticks and went on to scare the Devil. God struck the birch bark with the sticks, making a big rattle. It is due to this rattling noise against the bark that Grebja Hill got its name, literally meaning 'a gouge hill'.



Grey Grebļa Hill

Grebļa Hill (also called Šķaunes Esker and Kausas Hill) is a peculiar geological formation. It is a narrow esker range, about 5.5 km long and 30 m high, which stretches between Lake Pintu and Lake Šešku.

Imagine how 14 million years ago two enormous blocks of ice slid across Pasiene and, while trying to get closer to each other, depressed a narrow and high (150 metres above the sea level) ridge of land between them. Now a tourist trail has been set up on the grey hilltop whose width ranges from one to seven metres. It feels strange to walk along the narrow crest of the hill, with the sunrays falling almost perpendicularly on the steep slopes. One segment of the trail is especially nice, as the beauty of the sparkling lake envelops you on both sides.

Watch out when walking along the crest of the hill, not only for the fear of rolling down the steep slope, but also because here you can find the black-berried cotoneaster, a shrub, which grows in only three places in Latvia: on Grebļa Hill, on the Lake Ežezers islands and in the valley of the Daugava River. But why is it called the black-berried cotoneaster if it gives lavender and scarlet hues to the hill?

Hungarian sainfoin, a rare and protected plant, shines a nice touch of red, while northern dragon-head is distinguished by its blue flowers. Why are there so many rare plants here? This nature reserve has a distinct microclimate, which has helped preserve the plant species that were growing in Latvia 4500-2500 years BC.

Following the trail warmed by the soft rays of the autumn sun, the hiker comes to a kind of crossroads: to the left there is Lake Pintu, and to the right there is Lake Šešku with its inviting water. This is when the hiker needs to sit down for a while and listen closely to the caressing music created by the wind rustling in the slender pine-trees on Grebļa Hill, the synchronous murmur of the waves in both lakes and the warble of the birds across the water.

Recreation down at Lake Šešku may take a while, as the lake-shore is equipped with a log gazebo with a slatted roof and a fire pit with a rack for hanging a soup pot or cooking a more substantial meal, as there are many more sights to be seen here.

An esker (from the Irish word *eiscir* – a ridge or elevation) is a long winding ridge or a range of such ridges, which mainly consists of sand, gravel and pebbles. Eskers are sediments formed by the flows of glacier melting water.



Dances of Butterflies on Grebļa Hill



Grebļa Hill is beautiful in all seasons: in the early spring, when the soft green birch leaves are still too small to hide the view of the hazy horizon, and in the autumn, when the trees put on their bright robes. Yet, the most unusual sensations can be experienced on Grebļa Hill on a warm and peaceful day in July, as this is the time when butterflies start dancing. Sometimes you can see a real butterfly movie on a large white screen under the floodlights. Did you know that there are about 2400 species of butterflies found in Latvia? Grebļa Hill is home to fifty of them! This seems nothing compared to 140 000 species known in the world, however it's enough to feel like in a faerie land for a while. Large and small, night and day butterflies, brush-footed butterflies, cabbage butterflies, wall brown butterflies, gossamer-winged butterflies and silver-spotted skipper butterflies – they all gather together on Grebļa Hill. Why have the butterflies taken the fancy of this place exactly? It turns out that the winged beauties enjoy a big difference in temperature observed on the northern and the southern side of the hill. It's a good thing that butterflies have a place where they can gather and where all of them are safe, whether they are listed in the Red Book or are less splendid and famous. If this were not the case, our butterflies would think of hibernating in a warmer place, just like their beautiful counterparts from the Canadian Great Lakes, which overcome five thousand kilometres and reproduce three generations on their way to the Mexican Nature Reserve.

Watching the butterflies dancing on Grebļa Hill, think about how closely things are linked in nature. For example, Damon blue butterfly lays eggs only on Hungarian sainfoin growing on Grebļa Hill. If this plant disappears, one of the most beautiful butterfly species may be endangered as well. We often say that nature is powerful, but sometimes it tends to be very fragile and vulnerable. Like the wing of a butterfly.

East of Latvia in the Sun Sign

The sculptor Vilnis Titāns (1944-2006) devoted his creation Latvia in the Sun Sign to the 80th anniversary of independence of Latvia. The idea behind the design was to mark Latvia's farthest near-border points in the north, south, west and east with symbolic sun signs in a sculpture form. These signs bear the carvings of the letters LV (Latvijas valsts – Latvian State), the degrees of geographic latitude and longitude of the place and the name of the sculpture.

Meikšani Village of Pasiene Parish is the site where Latvia's farthest eastern point (28 degrees, 14 minutes) is located. One of Vilnis Titāns' sculptures – Austras koks (the Tree of the East), which marks the eastern border, is found here.



A Walk along the Linden Avenue



In 1959, the Mound of Friendship was erected at the junction of the borders of Latvia, Belarus and Russia to honour the friendship of the three neighbouring nations during the Second World War. The mound is actually a hill of about three metres in height. There are tree avenues leading to the mound from the three countries: the linden avenue from Latvia, the birch avenue from Russia and the maple avenue from Belarus. On top of the mound an oak has been planted as a symbol of friendship. Besides, it is also a symbol of boundless beauty, as proud oaks grow in all three countries and are visited by Grebļa Hill's butterflies, which know no borders.



- * When travelling in the border area, take your passport and border pass with you.
- * The permit for staying in the border area can be obtained at Rūdolfā iela 5, Rīga, and in Pasiene Division, Ludza Board of the State Border Guard.
- * If you prefer a guided tour, please book three days in advance in Pasiene Tourist Information Centre.

Vecslabadas virsotnē

Ja esam atbraukuši tik tālu uz austrumu robežas pusi, noteikti jāuzkāpj Vecslabadas virsotnē, ko mēdz saukt arī par Istras kalnu.

Acij tīkams ir šis tālais Latgales pagasts, kas atrodas 140–190 metru virs jūras līmeņa, kurā starp gleznainiem pauguriem ērti iekārtojušies sešpadsmit salām bagāti ezeri.

Dabas liegums “Istras ezers” ir krāšņa ezeru un pauguraiņu ainava ar bagātu augu valsti un retu putnu ligzdošanas vietām, un dabas parks “Istras pauguraine” 863 ha platībā – unikāls vēsturiski ģeogrāfisks komplekss ar tipisku Latgales augstienes sīkpauguraines ainavu, bagātu augu un dzīvnieku valsti.

Starp Audzeļu, Istras ezeru un Dziļezeru uz šauras zemes strēles izvietojies Vecslabadas lielciems – Istras pagasta lielākā apdzīvotā vieta (460 iedzīvotāju), kur no viena pakalna var saskatīt trīs ezerus, vairākas salas un bezgala daudz mākoņu.



Rundēnu Velna dobes

Rundēnu Velna dobes (latgaliski Valna dūbes), dabas piemineklis triju hektāru platībā, atrodas Latgales augstienē 3–4 kilometru attālumā uz ziemeļaustrumiem no Rundēnu ciemata pie Rundēnu-Lauderu ceļa. Kopš 1997. gada Velna dobes kļuvušas par aizsargātu ģeomorfoloģisko objektu, vienīgo tāda veida objektu Baltijā. Tās ir piecas dažāda lieluma nenoskaidrotas izcelsmes bedres, daļa no tām aizpildīta ar ūdeni, daļa aizaugusi ar avenu krūmājiem un aizbarikādējušies ar kritušiem kokiem. Ir hipotēze, ka bedres izveidojās meteorīta iespējamā krišanas vietā. Cits pieņēmums – Velna dobes ir interesanti veidojušās karsta kritenes, kad zeme iebrukusi, ūdenim izskalojot pazemes iežus.

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LATVIA'S STATE FORESTS -
OPEN DAILY, NO ENTRANCE FEE

Conecracker

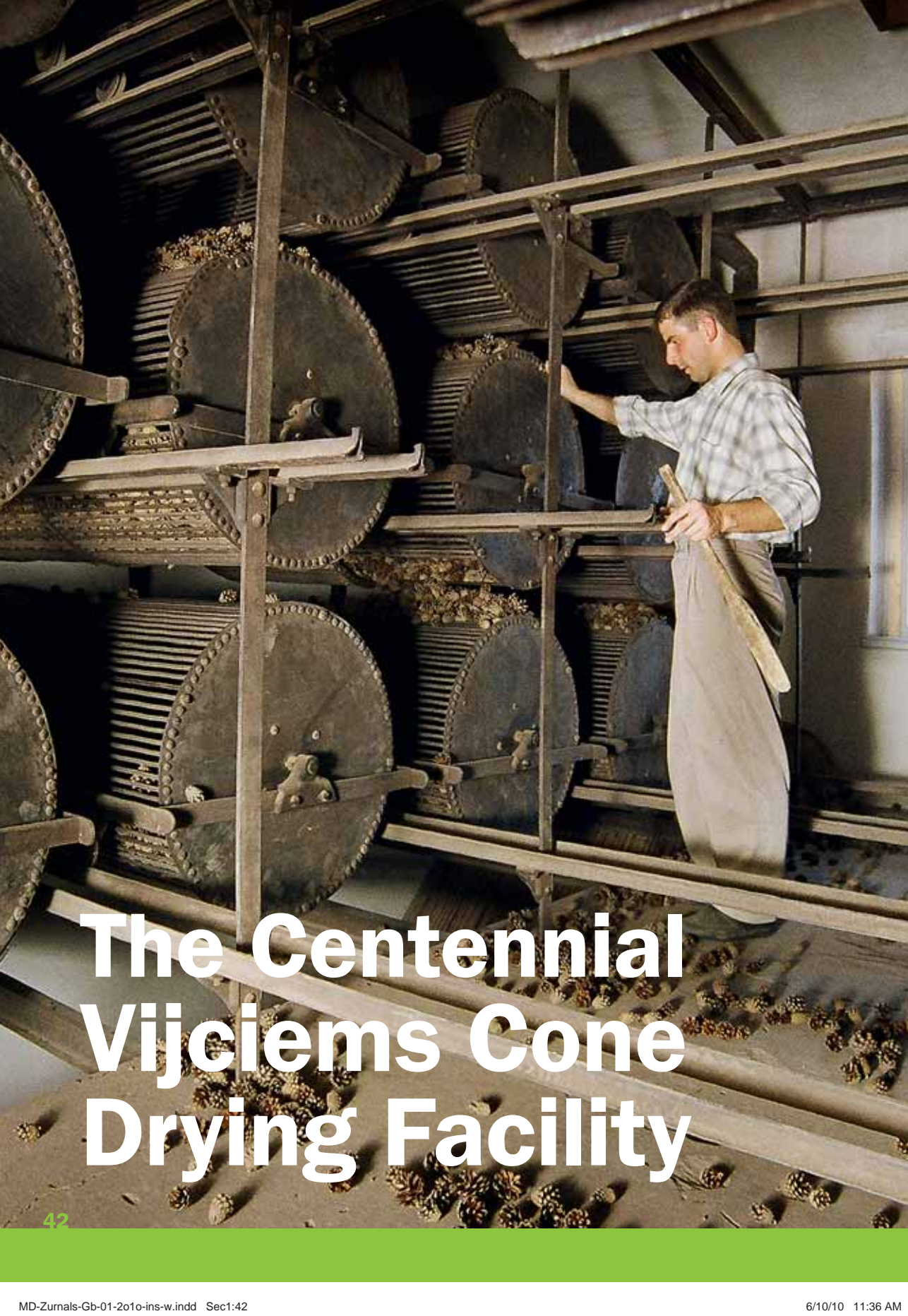
PRODUCER: LATVIA'S STATE FORESTS DIRECTOR: MAMMADABA

STARRING: SQUIRREL & CON SOUND: JUST CRACK LIGHTS: LATVIAN NORTHERN LIGHT DRESS DESIGN: MAMMADABA



WWW.MAMMADABA.LV



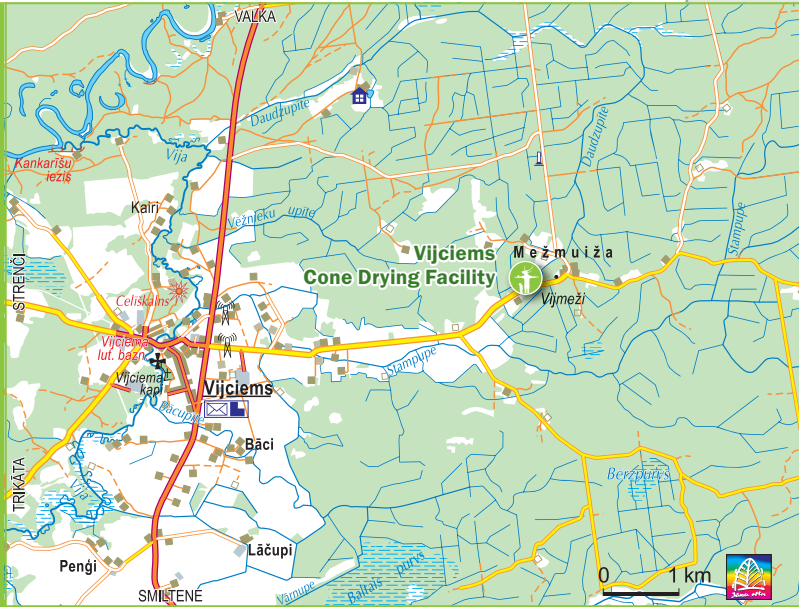


The Centennial Vijciems Cone Drying Facility

Location



Rīga – 150 km
Smiltene – 21 km
Valka – 23 km



Vijciems, a beautiful and interesting parish, is located halfway between Valka and Smiltene.

The fields, meadows and forests of this area are criss-crossed by the Vija River, which flows into the Gauja River by Kankarīšu Cleve. Vijciems has a Lutheran church dating from 1852 with a peculiar exterior trim: the lining is made of fish-scale-like wooden boards. The church exhibits valuable artistic objects of national importance: the altar and the altarpiece The Last Supper carved in wood. On your way to Valka, stop by the ethnographic farmstead Ieļīcas, which provides a glimpse of how a typical farm household in Vidzeme looked like centuries ago. Let your imagination run riot. This is the site where famous Latvian films *Pūt, vējiņi!* (Blow Ye Wind!) and *Vilkaču mantinieci* (The Heiress of Vilkači) were shot.





This time, however, our destination is Mežmuiža, which is located five kilometres from the centre of Vijciems.

Mežmuiža is famous for its historical Vijciems Cone Drying Facility, hidden amid shade trees and giving life to new forest trees for the whole century. The economic yield of the Vijciems Cone Drying Facility cannot be compared to the output of the modern and efficient drying facility in Kalsnava. In a good year, the Kalsnava Drying Facility yields 700 kilograms of high quality pine seeds and 600 kilograms of spruce seeds, while the annual output of Vijciems is only about 20 kilograms of pine seeds at best. Yet the small drying facility is preserved and cherished as a part of our living history. No wonder that in 2002 the Vijciems Cone Drying Facility was included in the list of cultural heritage sites of European importance and in 2008 it was awarded the status of the unusual cultural heritage in Europe.

The Forest School, unique to the Baltic States, was once built and functioned in Mežmuiža. After numerous fires, windfalls and pests raging in Vidzeme forests in the 19th century, the forests required immediate restoration, as there was a high demand for Riga pine-trees in the world. Although peasants gathered cones, dried them in drying barns, ground them for seeds, mixed the seeds with ashes and planted them in soil, the outcome was not encouraging. Therefore, in 1895, it was decided to build a cone drying facility for industrial extraction of seeds.

The drying facility was a witness to different times, but it always held up. During the revolution of 1905, the drying facility provided a hiding place for Vijciems foresters. Revolutionaries burnt down the Hunting Castle in Mežmuiža and the dwelling house of the estate, yet the thick walls of the drying facility survived both fire and bullets. In 1969, during the Soviet times, it was decided to close down the facility. The historical machinery, however, was preserved, and 1992 marked a new beginning for the Vijciems Cone Drying Facility.

The seed extraction process at the Vijciems Cone Drying Facility is totally different from that in Kalsnava. It is free of any electronic gadgets, and everything is done by human hands. The father and the son, Ilgarts and Ivars Palejs, both educated as foresters, determine it all. Lately, Ivars

has taken the lead, letting his father take a breath. The seeds are extracted here using exactly the same methods as 100 years ago. The original equipment from 1895, when the drying facility started its operations, has also survived. We cannot but admire to see how the human mind and hands created something so perfect and lasting, without using any sophisticated tools more than a century ago.

The renowned Latvian poet Imants Ziedonis and his son Rimants once visited the Vijciems Cone Drying Facility on a cold winter evening and later gave a vivid description of the drying facility in his book *Latvia: a Land of Forests*. "Standing there is a beautiful fairytale house, warm and neat. Two men in their shirtsleeves gather cones. And there are oh so many cones, so many cones, crackling and rattling in all sharps and flats. The cones are like living and breathing beings. No thought other than that comes to mind. Nothing has changed here for the last hundred years: it's the same old



process of warming and shaking the cones to cheat out the seeds. When the cones are brought here, the bags are attached to a chain and pulled up to the second floor though the hatch by rotating the wheel. Then they are attached to linen ropes and lowered again to the first floor in cylinders resembling squirrel wheels. Altogether there are twenty-four cylinders where the cones are dried, shaken and rolled for a week or so. The cones crackle, snap and swear, yet the cylinders are rotated several times a day to shake out the remaining seeds.”

When the seeds are extracted from the cones, they have to be dewinged. The drying facility provides a special historical gadget for this purpose. The Vijciems Cone Drying Facility, a truly unusual cultural heritage, attracts more and more visitors. More than a thousand people gained insight into the ancient cone drying methods in Vijciems in 2008. The centennial equipment astounds both men who have an understanding for technical things and young boys who are not yet strong enough to rotate the heavy cylinders.



What to do at the Vijciems Cone Drying Facility? _____

- * Take part in the cone drying process using methods that date 100 years back.
- * Take a walk around the neighbourhood and try to identify the trees by their leaves and needles.
- * Try your hand at the cone throwing contest.



On Augstroze Hillfort

Location



Augstroze
Umurgas pagasts
Limbažu novads

Rīga –90 km
Limbaži–Cēsis 45 km
Limbaži–Valmiera 50 km
Augstroze–Limbaži 20 km
Augstroze–Umurga 17 km



Umurga Parish, where Augstroze Hillfort stands, is located near Limbaži. The centre of the parish has been established at the junction of Limbaži-Valmiera and Cēsis-Limbaži morotways.

The parish is rich in forests, water bodies and bogs. There are nine specially protected natural areas, the integrated Augstroze Nature Reserve and different cultural and historical monuments on the parish territory.

Augstroze Church

Augstroze Evangelical Lutheran Church built in 1858 has witnessed crowds of parishioners, as well as wars and destruction. In the summer of 2003, for the first time in recent history, divine service was held at the altar, which was miraculously preserved since the times of the first wooden church built in 1795 and now brought here again.

When a mill was set up in the church in 1968, the unique altar dating almost 300 years back was rescued by Imants Lancmanis, director of Rundāle Castle Museum. The altar was stored in the museum and then brought back to the church following the request of Augstroze's people.





Augstroze Castle

Roze, Augstroze, Rožu Manor, the Rožupīte River, Rozbeķe, Rozula, Rozeni – there are many names of ancient origin in this area, which are based on roz-. Geographers think that the name Augstroze comes from rozas, which are ranges of hillocks. Among linguists opinions differ, but a legend tells of a girl Roze who was immured in the castle walls.

This territory is certainly boggy. Zaltene (Spalvene) Bog, Stopurs Bog, Madiešeni Bog, Godkalni Bog... All of a sudden, a hillock overgrown with old trees appears in the flat landscape. More hills follow: Gulotnis Hill, Piltiņkalns Hill, Lielkalns Hill, Lauvas Hill, Versmes Hill and Jāņkalns Hill with its 7.16 m thick oak. The local landscape is full of unusual contrasts. And now we have reached the hillfort on the shore of Lake Lielezers in Augstroze.

The ruins of the medieval castle built in 1272 are still holding up strong against time. The 6-7 metre high stone wall on the side of the yard and a fragment of the protective rubble wall has survived until today.

Back then, when Vassal Rosen of the Archbishop of Riga was building the castle on the high hill, its residents hoped that the steep slopes would protect them from invaders, however the castle was ransacked and burnt in 1601 during the Polish-Swedish War. Since then, the ancient ruins of the medieval castle have attracted local romance-seekers and tourists, because here one can give a free range to fancy and conjure a vision of how people lived in castles in those elder times.

What associations do we have with the Middle Ages? Some believe those were dark times when superstitions, inquisition and plagues were in full force and witches were burnt at the stake. Is that all? Certainly, not! Dante Alighieri created his Divine Comedy and Giovanni Boccaccio wrote The Decameron. Noble knights courted beautiful ladies, bards composed songs, while Robin Hood fought for justice and equality.

However, life in castles lacked comfort, and ladies were freezing in their gowns lined with animal skins. For centuries people wore unvaried clothes with impractical asymmetrical sleeves, with one side stretching nearly to the ground. It was later that more elegant fashion came from French castles to other places. Probably, the ladies of Augstroze wore evening gowns embroidered with gold threads.

Yet, passion was always the same as today. People worked hard, waged wars, fought for power and influence, loved, hated and loved again.

All residents of the parish were involved in construction of Augstroze Castle. However, the construction did not go smooth: what was built in the day fell down at night. Then the thought occurred that someone had to be immured in the castle walls. So the landlord asked who wanted to carry the keys of the castle. Roze, a young shepherd girl, volunteered and was immured. The castle stopped falling down and no enemy could occupy it. The name of the place – Augstroze (High Rose) – originated from those events.

Augstroze Hillfort Trail

The surroundings of Augstroze Hillfort are a part of the Augstroze Nature Reserve area of North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve.

Augstroze Hillfort gives a wonderful view of the lake, the old mixed and broadleaved forests and the swamps, where geese, black storks, lesser spotted eagles and cranes gather strength before long flights. In the autumn, this place is full of cranberry pickers.

To provide a better view of this beauty, the 30 metre high hill has been equipped with wooden footbridges, stairs and viewing platforms. Excessive bushes hiding the view of the mighty oaks and Lake Lielezers have been cut down.

Cross Hill

Many legends are told about Cross Hill (Krusta kalns) of Augstroze, an ancient place of worship, formerly known as Oak Hill (Ozolu kalns). One of them once caught the interest of the poet Rainis, who was going to write the play Augstrozes meitiņa (Augstroze's Daughter). It is a pity that Rainis never implemented this idea, and only the first draft has been preserved.

The legend goes that a very stern landlord once lived in Augstroze. His daughter fell in love with a peasant's son, and both liked to meet on the hill next to the manor. The stern landlord saw the young people and took them by surprise on the very hilltop. He killed the young man in rage, and the girl lost her mind out of grief and drowned herself in Lake Lielezers. Later, the landlord ordered to erect a large cross in that place. Hence the name: Cross Hill.

High Larches of Augstroze

It is strange indeed why larches are so popular in Augstroze. This place also features some mighty oaks, yet larches are something special here. This is where you can see the highest larch in Latvia. It is here that one of the largest larch groves with its 150-160 year old and 40 m high trees is situated. The road to the eternal home, from the church to the cemetery, is embraced by a two kilometre long larch avenue.

Umurga cemetery is the resting place for the poet Frīcis Bārda, his wife Paulīne and brother Antons. Frīcis Bārda's tombstone, which was created by the sculptor Teodors Zaļkalns, has been recognized as one of the most splendid specimens of memorial sculpture, not only in Latvia alone.



