

THE KAMPINOS FOREST – THE EASTERN PART

VISITING THE ELK'S LAND

The direct neighbourhood of a large protected area of high value and a big city is a rarity in the world. The Kampinos Forest (Puszcza Kampinoska), lying just beside the capital city, is not only one of the biggest wood complexes in Mazovia, but also the only national park in this region. Established in 1959, the park has almost 38,500 ha under protection. The Forest landscape is formed by an inland dune complex - unique in Europe, natural communities of over seventy entirely protected plant species and a rich fauna. The most environmentally valuable areas have been included into twenty two areas of strict protection (former strict reserves). The Kampinos Forest (Puszcza Kampinoska) does not mean only woods; its landscape is interspersed with meadows and agricultural areas with traditional farms. The described terrain is closely connected with the history of Poland. It was through that forest that King Władysław Jagiełło went with his army towards Grunwald; it was here that the January Uprising battles took place. In the Kampinos ground the bodies of many Warsawians, murdered by the Nazis, have been buried.

The proposed route, which goes around one of the most valuable parts of the park, enables you to become acquainted with the mosaic of forest landscape of the Kampinos. The cemetery–mausoleum, a sad memento of the last war, induces contemplation.

From the bus stop and car park by the paediatric hospital go along a sandy track deep into a forest, following the red and green trail marks.

In case of heavy rain you can take advantage of a rain-shelter. The green trail turns off to the left. Keep to the red trail marks. A forest track runs through a young pine wood. Pay attention to the roadside birches; beside the common white birch, you can see isolated rare dark (black) birches. They are distinguished by their almost black colour of bark,

Length of the route:
17 km.

Marking:
red, yellow, blue
and green trails,
consecutively.

Difficulties:
In early spring some
stretches of the route
may be flooded
with water; from
May to September –
mosquitoes.

Transport:
"Ł" bus from
"Plac Wilsona"
(Wilson square)
in Warsaw.

0.0 km
Dziekanów Leśny

0.7 km
Szczukówek
nature reserve

2.2 km
"Młynisko" Forester's
Lodge
(Gajówka Młynisko)

5.0 km
Grave Bridge
(Mogiłny Mostek)

resulting from the lack of the white dye - betuline, typical for other birches. However, the bark of the specimens growing here is grey, or even greenish, because of the lichen and algae which cover them. Further on the trail enters the marshes. The route runs along a narrow causeway. During the spring thaw it is sometimes wet here, but in the high summer the water almost completely dries up. In spring the marshes are covered with blooming yellow clumps of irises and kingcups.

Behind the settlement of the Kampinos National Park begins a particularly beautiful part of the route. Now you walk along the border of two worlds, between dry dunes and marshes. By the trail lies a beautiful mixed forest. Several-trunked birches attract tourist's attention. In spring, from the marshes, you can hear the hubbub of hundreds of birds. In early morning the fanfares of cranes can be heard.

The trail turns left, onto the Sejmikowa Road. (The yellow trail turns here northwards, to Palmiry). Follow the red trail marks. After a while you will go across a little bridge over the Wilcza Struga stream. Water appears here only in spring and after heavy rainfall. The place name refers to a gloomy legend of a crime committed here ages ago.

Now the route goes along the Sejmikowa Road to the south. Imperceptibly you enter "Sieraków", a large (covering over 1,200 ha) area of strict protection. It was established in 1937 by the efforts of Professor Roman Kobendza, an advocate for protection of the Kampinos Forest (Puszcza Kampinoska). Then it covered over 614 ha. A mix of Forest landscape is protected: classic parabolic dunes, peat bogs and the valley of Młynisko. On the local marshes grows an inconspicuous leather leaf (*chamaedaphne calyculata*), a post-glacial relic which is very rare in Poland. This area, protected continuously for almost seventy years, is a large sanctuary. Probably nowhere else live so many wild animal species near a city of two-million inhabitants. Most of them avoid contact with humans, but if you set off on the trail in the early morning or the evening, and best on a weekday, you can enjoy more than one interesting meeting.

The Sejmikowa Road goes along the cuttings through the sandy arms of the White Mountain (Biała Góra). The name of the hill refers to the colour of the dune sands. They are covered with a splendid, dry, coniferous forest. It is estimated that the tall, so called "mast", pines are 180 years old.

After 1.5 km the trail leaves the Sejmikowa Road, cuts across the dunes and leads onto the former railway track by Long Marsh (Długie Bagno). In the 1920's peat was exploited on a large scale, but after the creation of the national park, nature healed its own wounds unexpectedly quickly.

A forest of white crosses shows through the trees. The cemetery in Palmiry is one of the symbols of the martyrdom of the Poles during the Second World War. The Cemetery – Mausoleum of Martyrdom of the Polish Nation was set up to the design of Ewa Śliwińska and Romuald Gutt in 1948. On the vast clearing over two thousand people, murdered by Germans from December 1939 to July 1943 in the Kampinos Forest (Puszcza Kampinoska) and other sub-Warsaw woods, have been buried. Their bodies had been exhumed from mass graves in the Kampinos Forest (Puszcza Kampinoska) and in the Warsaw surroundings, including Chojnów Woods (Lasy Chojnowskie). The cemetery in Palmiry is a very important place for Warsawians since, above all, the inhabitants of the capital city are buried here. In the cemetery there are graves of such well-known people as the Vice President of Warsaw Jan Potoski, a leading activist of the Polish Socialist Party Maciej Rataj and the Olympic champion Janusz Kusociński. Some of the graves are only symbolic, because not all the locations of atrocities have been found.

The exhibition in the pavilion beside the cemetery is devoted to the history of the battles in September 1939, the underground activity and partisan fighting in the Kampinos Forest (Puszcza Kampinoska) region (contact: tel. (022) 794 42 56; the museum is open every day – except Mondays and post-holiday days 9.00 am to 2.30 pm). The most impressive are the documents and objects found during the exhumations.

8.5 km
Palmiry cemetery

10.1 km
Pociecha

From the cemetery head to the south east, following the blue trail marks. The trail runs along the paved Palmiry Road (Droga Palmirska) and then near it. Pass by a dune embankment, called Ćwikowa Mountain. It is covered with an ancient pine wood.

The shelters on the forest car park invite you to rest. In the 19th century there was an inn here. Notice the cross standing at the edge of the forest. It commemorates the "Jerzyki" troop of the Polish Home Army, which fought in the vicinity in 1944.

Keep following the green trail marks. The route runs near the favourite sanctuary of elks. These mighty animals are a symbol of the Kampinos National Park and it is really hard to believe that for 150 years there was no single specimen of this species here. The last Forest elk was shot at the beginning of the 19th century. In 1951 five animals were brought to the Forest from across the eastern border. At first they inhabited a purposefully enclosed area. The animal pen was to the right of the track, along which you walk now. When the herd began to expand, the fence was pulled down and elks settled in many spots of the Forest. For years the Kampinos herd has consisted of about one hundred beasts. The success of the experiment with elks encouraged the Park employees to try further to reconstruct the original fauna of the Forest. In 1980 beavers were successfully reintroduced, and in 1992 lynxes were brought into the ecosystem.

13.4 km
Sieraków settlement
(Posada Sieraków)

Another opportunity to rest. Near the settlement of the Kampinos National Park a nice resting place with rain-shelters has been established. On a clearing grow several splendid sessile oaks. The largest of them, called the Old Oak, is about 200 years old and has a girth of 340 cm.

Once again you enter the area of strict protection – "Sieraków". At first you go through a dry coniferous forest, and then you walk across marshes covered with alders. Nearby beavers build their dams. To the left of the trail stretches "Cichowąż", regarded as the most beautiful and the wildest marsh in the Forest. The inaccessibility of the marshes stimulated the imagination of our ancestors. They used to say that in the backwoods of the reserve rose a castle of the king of snakes.

An intersection of tracks and trails. The stone commemorates professor Witold Plapis – an architect, organiser and director of the Warsaw Urban and Architecture Institute (Instytut Urbanistyki i Architektury), a distinguished member of the Scientific Council of the Kampinos National Park. All around grows a forest of oaks and hornbeams. This forest formation – once typical – is now relatively rare, because it was replaced with pine plantations. You may rest under a rain-shelter. From here the yellow trail marks turn towards Warsaw (7.5 km to Wólka Węglowa). Keep to the green trail. A causeway goes across wetland to the north. In 1944 this single passageway across the marshes was mined by the Germans; hence the name of the reserve. In spring the forest resounds with the hubbub of birds. Among other species, crane and black stork nest here. It is a bit hard to get used to the presence of the smallest representatives of fauna – from spring to autumn as many as 31 species of mosquitoes buzz in the air.

Here the Forest loop closes. Now you only have to walk less than a kilometre along the already known route.

We hope that soon you will again set off on a trip to the Forest.

14.9 km

"Towards the Mines"
nature reserve
(Uroczysko Na Miny)

16.1 km

Szczukówek nature
reserve

16.8 km

Dziekanów Leśny

Practical information

Łomianki, Croatia restaurant,
ul. Kolejowa 15, tel. (22) 751 32 91

Truskaw, Dziupla restaurant,
ul. Falińskiego 6 a, tel. (22) 722 65 43

Łomianki, Ronin hotel,
ul. Szpitalna 36, tel. (22) 751 18 69

Łomianki, Malwa hotel,
ul. Wiśłana 35 b, tel. (22) 751 17 72

