



KOSTOMUKSHSKY
Strict Nature Reserve



Excursion route
'Runo singing sites and old settlements
at Lake Kamennoye'

The Village of Akonlahti

Kostomukshsky Strict Nature Reserve



Black-throated Diver



On pedlars' path



Cowberry amidst reindeer moss



Mother bear and a yearling

Kostomukshsky Strict Nature Reserve

Kostomukshsky Strict Nature Reserve was founded on December 14, 1983 with the conservation of boreal (taiga) forests and the wild forest reindeer population as its primary objectives. The reserve is situated in the immediate vicinity of the border with Finland, in the territory of the Kostomuksha Municipality, Republic of Karelia. The area of the reserve is 49 276 hectares.

Tasks of the reserve

The tasks for the reserve have been defined in the Federal Act 'On Protected Areas' (#33-FZ). They are to conserve the area, carry out scientific research, environmental monitoring and environmental education, to promote learning tourism.

Reserve's logo

The reserve's logo features an image of a forest reindeer mirrored in a lake against the background of a pine cone, which symbolizes the main local forest species. This image is designed to portray how favourable the environment is for the local fauna. Wildlife can enjoy transparent lakes, centennial pine forests and pure air.





Raised bog



Lichen patterns on stone



The Kamennaya River

The natural environment

The reserve lies in the northern taiga subzone of Karelia. Its major value is old-growth forests, habitats for the wild forest reindeer.

The reserve is home to north-taiga species of mammals: shrews, field mouse, mountain hare, moose, brown bear, gray wolf, lynx, wolverine, red fox, red squirrel and flying squirrel, pine marten, stoat, weasel, and others.

The watershed between the Baltic and the White Sea runs across the reserve. There are over 250 lakes in its territory. The biggest one is Lake Kamennoye, with over 105 km² of area and 98 islands. Average depth of the lake is 8 metres. The shores are heavily serrated, stretching for a total of 193 km.

The reserve comprises a 30-km stretch of the Kamennaya (Nogeujsjoki) River, which originates from Lake Kamennoye and empties into Lake Nyuk. There are 15 large and small rapids within this stretch. Especially scenic is the Tzarporog rapid, where the river branches into two.

The local climate features long mild winters and short cool summers. Quite lengthy cool spring and relatively warm autumn seasons are also common.



'Karelskaya Gornitsa' group singing the 'Kiitehenjärvi' song in the Karelian language during Petrunpäiva (St. Peter and St. Paul Day) celebrations in the Village of Akonlahti, 2014



Festivities



Cultural and historical heritage in the reserve

Kostomukshsky Reserve occupies an area formerly populated by a region's indigenous people – Karelians. Along Lake Kamenoye (Karelians used to call it Kiitehenjärvi) there were 17 settlements with around 1500 population. The biggest one was the Village of Akonlahti, which included nearby hamlets Tulliniemi, Shappovaara, Tetriniemi, Nykyttilä, Timola, Jehrimänvaara, Märkävaara, Munankilahti – some 600 people lived there. The life was calm and settled, in the midst of strikingly beautiful nature. This lifestyle has moulded the tradition of conserving the nature for future generations. Thus, hayfields and arable fields, berry-picking and hunting grounds, netting areas have been passed down across generations.

As the national border was rearranged, the population of the hamlets and villages around Lake Kamenoye were in 1958 moved to nearby settlements – Kalevala, Voknavolok, as well as to other districts.

Akonlahti

Akonlahti



Reciting the Kalevala epic on Elias Lönnrot's rock (theatric performance during Petrunpäiva festivities)



Kantele trio at Petrunpäiva celebration



Akonlahti village church, 1915

There was a time when the Village of Akonlahti (Babja Guba) was considered the wealthiest one. Houses were big and rich. There were a parish school, a shop and a church built in honour of Nativity of the Theotokos in 1888 with the money donated by merchant A. Savinov of Petersburg. Nearly all locals could read and speak Finnish. Literacy was more common than in other villages. Akonlahti is the runo-singing place of origin. The first collector of runo songs was Elias Lönnrot, who recorded after Soava Trohkimainen a series of songs and incantations that later formed the basis for several chapters of the world-famed Kalevala epic. Finnish folklore researchers have recorded a great number of runo songs and bylinas after Akonlahti people.

Petrunpäiva – the St. Peter and St. Paul Day – was the local patron saints day. By reinvigorating this old custom the reserve has contributed within its capacity to the preservation and revival of the local indigenous culture. That is why, like in olden times, every 12th of July people from all over the area gather together on the lake shore to sing Karelian songs, dance circle dances (kruuga), play traditional village games.



Map of the excursion route 'Runo singing sites and old settlements at Lake Kamennoye' (route №5)

The excursion begins with a visit to the place where Tulliniemi hamlet (within former Akonlahti territory) had been. It is there that the Petrunpäiva festival used to be celebrated and is now being revived.

The route continues from the festival ground along a scenic forest road towards the tip of a narrow promontory wedging into a bay of Lake Kamennoye. On the way, the excursion participants learn about the old tradition of making karsikko, and observe the basements of houses that once used to stand there. From the promontory the trip will continue on a motor boat. The first stop is the



Legend



Sight-of-interest



Parking



Toilet



Campfire site



Nature reserve territory



Kostomuksha city objects



National border



Motor road, border engineering facilities



Railway



Shappovaara hamlet, where the history of the settlement and the fates of its people will be recounted. The route then leads into Sappulahti Bay to a man-made canal used by locals as a shortcut when going to visit their neighbours. A roadside (traveler) cross that used to stand at the opening of the canal was re-erected in 2014 in its original place. There, the visitors will be told about the history of the Tetriniemi hamlet.

The next destination is Devichii (maiden) Island. Legends associated with the place will be told while touring the island. The water section of the route will end where it had begun – the promontory at Tulliniemi hamlet.

Neitisaari

Devichii Island (Neitisaari)

There is a legend behind the name of the island (Maiden Island in English). Swedes plundering the region often raided Kiitehenjärvi villages and hamlets. On one such raid they slaughtered the villagers (while all men were away fishing and only women and children were there).

Two young girls managed to unhinge a barn door and use it as a raft to get to the nearest island in the lake and then to the fishermen. Soon afterwards one of the girls got sick and died. To commemorate her, the island where the girls had found rescue was named Maiden Island, or Neitisaari in Finnish.

Another legend is also associated with this island. Lots of gold was plundered on a raid. The plunderers scuppered the boat with the trophies in a lakelet on Devichii Island. They say the boat shall emerge to the surface once a three-year-old boy and a colt only one night after birth walk on the ice that had formed on the lake just one day before.



*Devichii Island
(satellite image)*



Lake Kamennoye



*Devichii Island – a place favoured by
wild forest reindeer*

Shappovaara hamlet

It is believed this hamlet was founded in the mid-19th century by Petri Huotarinen, nicknamed Petri-rokka (rokka is translated from Karelian as soup). Petri made a large bowl out of a huge tree burl, and the entire

family ate out of this bowl, wherefore their household was called rokkala. Later on, the postfix rokka was attached to the names of all residents of the hamlet: sons Hilippä-rokka, Vasko-rokka, and Vasseli-rokka.



Canal at the Village of Shappovaara, 1894

Traveler cross by the Shappovaara canal was re-erected on August 12th, 2014

Shappovaara

Traveler cross. Sappulahti Bay



Hamlets Tetriniemi and Shappovaara are not so far away from each other. Yet, there was no road to connect them. Going by water, they had to go round Cape Polvisenniemi, making the route longer. Shappovaara people decided to cut the route short and dug a 120-metres long

boatable canal. Following an Orthodox tradition a roadside (traveler) cross was placed at the canal entrance. When leaving home one was supposed to bow to the cross and pray for a blessing of the way, when returning home one bowed and spoke a thanksgiving prayer.

Tetriniemi



Hay-mowing

Tetriniemi hamlet

Hamlet Tetriniemi (Black Grouse Cape) was founded earlier than Shappovaara, and had a bigger population. It consisted of 20 households. Its first settlers came from Akonlahti. Any mention of Tetriniemi has always brought to mind a huge spruce tree, which grew in front of the spruce-overgrown graveyard. The tree stood aside from the rest, but that was not the only distinction. It was a karsikko tree.

Tetriniemi used to be famed for its runo singers. Hilippä's wife from Shappovaara was a Tetriniemi native. There lived also a well-known runo singer of the Huotarinen family, originally from the Village of Lyttä.



A family from Tetriniemi



Making veniks (bundles of leafy twigs) for steam bath

Karsikko

Karsikko

People have always had the habit of 'tying knots' or 'making notches' to preserve the memory of certain events. People of Akonlahti and other villages in Northern Karelia used trees to this end, usually separately standing trees. Such marked out trees (either with branches cut off, or with notches on the trunk, or with various symbols carved out in bark) were called 'karsikko'. This phenomenon is largely associated with ancient mythological worldviews.

On a wedding day, branches were cut off a karsikko tree and put in the newly-wed wife's lap with the following accompanying words: a half of them be sons, the other one – daughters.

Karsikko trees in netting areas were believed to have power over water. Karsikko trees were made to point to spawning grounds. Once the first substantial catch was taken in spring, all lower branches were cut off a tree on the shore to secure luck for the rest of the fishing season.

Karsikko-making could be either a family tradition or specific to an individual. Sometimes the entire village would take part in the ritual. It was believed karsikko trees drew luck and happiness and helped in undertakings.



Karsikko were made where hunting has been good



A contemporary 'karsikko'

Karsikko were usually made of coniferous trees, which are more lasting than deciduous trees



What to expect of the route

Route length: 12 km.

Duration: 3 hours.

Season: 15.07 - 10.08.

Vehicle: motor boat.

Safety gear: life vests, helmets.

Wind direction may cause some modifications.

The site at the beginning of the route is facilitated with a fire ring, a shelter range, a pier, a toilet.

All garbage shall be burnt; incombustible wastes shall be carried away by the participants.

Max group size: 5 persons.

Max number of groups per season: 12.

Visitors shall be accompanied by a reserve staff member.

The deadline for applying for an excursion is 15.06.

How to get there

Kostomuksha can be reached by direct trains from Petrozavodsk and St. Petersburg. A taxi can be hired from the Kostomuksha railway station to 'Zapovednik' (the Reserve).

If going by car, the convenient way is via Finland, across the Vartius-Lyttä checkpoint. The distance from the national border to Kostomuksha is 38 km.



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