



Photo: Vorstimägi Hill, M. Muts

## HAANJA NATURE PARK

The Haanja Nature Park was established in order to protect the landscapes and the cultural heritage of the Haanja Upland. The formation of the nature park started in 1957 when the restricted areas for the hills of Suur Munamägi and Vällamägi and the Rõuge Primeval Valley where founded. Today, the Haanja Nature Park covers approximately 17,000 hectares in the highest and most jointed part of the upland. The Haanja Nature Park belongs to Natura 2000, the EU-wide network of nature protection areas. All in all, 36 species of birds, significant in Europe, 19 types of habitats, and eight endangered species of plants and animals, such as the great crested newt and the thick shelled river mussel, occur in the nature park. The diversity of habitats results from the varied relief and the mosaic landscapes.

The Haanja Nature Park includes several protected natural monuments:

- primeval trees – Mustahamba Oak, Haki Pines, Rõuge Oaks and Sinisilla Oak;
- erratic boulder – Kõrgõmäe Ivannikivi;
- protected parks – Uue-Saaluse Manor Park, Rogosi Manor Park and Viitina Manor Park.

## HILLS AND VALLEYS

The landscape of the Haanja Upland, or Haanjamaa (*Haanja Land*), is dissected – the hills of different size, shape and origin are separated by hollows and valleys. This varied surface was formed at the end of the last glacial age.

The difference of heights in Haanjamaa is 220 metres and the average height above the sea level is 200 metres. The hill of Suur Munamägi, the highest elevation of the Baltic countries, is as high as 318.1 metres above the sea level. By its relative height of 62 metres from foot to top it is, however, lower than the hill of Vällamägi (303.9 metres above the sea level) a couple of kilometres to the north. The latter has the biggest relative height – 84 metres – among Estonia's natural hills. The lowest place with its 98.6 metres above the sea level is located on Lake Kahrila in the Rõuge Primeval Valley.

Ten highest peaks in the Haanja Upland (as for Estonia's basic map, 1996)	
Suur Munamägi	318.1 metres
Vällamägi	303.9 metres
Kerekunnu	295.8 metres
Tsälbämägi	292.6 metres
Rohtõsuu mägi	289.1 metres
Haragamägi	288.6 metres
Kivestmägi	288.1 metres
Papisõodü	288.2 metres
Mustikmägi	286.2 metres
Vänni Kõrgõmägi	285.3 metres

Suur Munamägi is a unique hill. Its base is a large moraine which is covered with a knoll of ice lake sediments. At the end of the glacial age a lake was located here, the bottom of which filled with sand and clay from its icy slopes. After the surrounding ice melted, a hill remained.

The water flowing down from the melting ice fields carved significant deep and wide valleys, such as the valleys of Kütiorg, Pärlijõe, Rõuge, Piusa, et al.

The depth of Kütiorg, the grandest primeval valley in Estonia, is up to 70 metres. This approximately 5-kilometre-long primeval valley is characterised by its steep slopes and relatively narrow

## BODIES OF WATER

Haanjamaa is justifiably called the land of lakes because even in the centre of the upland alone there are more than sixty lakes. The number used to be bigger but by now many lakes have overgrown and swamped. In Haanjamaa, there is both Estonia's deepest lake, Rõuge Suurjärv (38 metres deep), and the highest located lake, Tuuljärv (257 metres above the sea level).

The lakes in Haanjamaa have a peculiar history of origin. At the end of the glacial age, huge ice banks did not melt because they were covered with a layer of moraine. When the climate warmed and the ice banks finally melted, deep bodies of water were left. The moraine layer sank into the lakes, which explains why the bottoms of the Haanja bodies of water are mostly hard and gravelly. The lakes, e.g. Vaskna and Kavadi, which arose in the place of the former valleys, are characterized by a strongly dissected shoreline, which makes the scenery even more beautiful.

The Haanja Upland is a source of several rivers. The Piusa River, which has the greatest drop of all Estonian rivers (2.1 metres per kilometre), starts from Lake Plaani Kälajärv. On some rivers, such as the Rõuge and the Iskna, currents have shaped and deepened sharp-sloped gullies. Due to the peculiarity of the surface forms, the Haanja Upland also has such rivers and brooks, e.g. the Vorstioja Brook, which fade away, bringing water from higher to lower, rather than debouch into another body of water.

Haanjamaa is rich in springs, which is promoted by the relief. The hills often contain watertight layers, along which groundwater flows downwards to emerge as a spring on a slope, in a valley or in the bottom of a lake. The largest and best-known springs are located on Lake Liinjärv in the valley of Tindiorg and near the Hinni Canyon.



Photo: Lake Kaussjärv, L. Michelson

bottom (250–600 metres). The slopes of Kütiorg are intersected by numerous gullies, called 'tsoris' in the local dialect.

The Rõuge Primeval Valley with its length of 10 kilometres and depth of up to 52 metres in the north-west – south-east direction was formed into sandstone before the ice age. The seven lakes located in the Rõuge Primeval Valley – Liinjärv, Valgjärv, Suurjärv, Kaussjärv, Ratasjärv, Tõugjärv and Kahrila – date back to the glacial age. Due to the activity of waters, several gullies, or 'tsoris', have come forth into the slopes of the Rõuge Primeval Valley. The largest of them is the 300-metre-long and 13–15-metre-deep picturesque Ööbikuorg (*Nightingale Valley*). The terrace-like slope near Lake Liinjärv, formed from the sediments of the lime-rich springs, is also remarkable.

The approximately 200-metre-long Hinni Canyon on the northern shore of Lake Kahrila is a unique gully for being cut 15–20 metres deep into the Devonian sandstone.



Photo: Lake Kavadi, R. Reiman



Photo: Haki Pines, R. Reiman

## FORESTS

Forests dominate in the local landscape, covering about half of the territory of the protected area. Due to the varied soils and humidity resulting from the big difference in heights, the Haanja forests are relatively diverse.

The main type of woods here is the spruce forest. The remarkable height and diameter of the trees testify the favourable conditions for their growth. For example, in the old natural forest on Vällamägi there are numerous so-called six-log spruces, the height of which is at least 36 metres and the girth of the thickest ones amounts to three metres. By frequency, the spruce forests are followed by birch, pine, alder and also some aspen woods. Some stands of limes, elms, maples and oaks have preserved in the river valleys, which are not easily accessible, and on the steep slopes of the knolls. As for other deciduous trees, the grey alder has begun to sprawl, intruding into the neglected fields and grasslands.

## WETLANDS

The wet hollows between the hillocks and numerous lakes without outlets have promoted paludification. Marshes cover approximately 2.4 % of the protected area, most of them being small low-lying swamps. On the eastern foot of Vällamägi lies a small bog, where the thickest peat layer in Estonia – 17 metres – has been measured. As a result of the overgrowing of lakes, swamping is a continuous process.



Photo: Corn crane, M. Kose

## FAUNA

The mammals who prefer diversified landscapes, such as foxes, raccoon dogs, wild boars, roe deer and European hares, enjoy their habitats in Haanjamaa. An animal who is connected with bodies of water and who has become quite numerous is the beaver – they can be found on any bigger river or lake. Also the American mink and the European otter are pretty frequent. The Laxmann's shrew, very rare in Estonia, has twice been found in the local forests. Six species of bats occur in the protected area, all of them belonging to the protected species of category II.

Waterfowl are not very numerous. Only on the bigger lakes that offer better breeding and feeding possibilities the number of nesting bird species amounts to about five or six. The common species who make their nests here are the sedge warbler, the reed bunting, the common gull and the mallard. In fens and at small forest lakes, common cranes can be seen. All most common species of woodland birds are represented here. The spotted nutcrackers and the red-breasted flycatchers are quite numerous in the local spruce woods and mixed forests. The rare three-toed woodpecker is a typical species in the old spruce woods. The wild birds in the cultural landscape, fields and meadows are, in general, the same as in other Estonia's places, although the number of corn crakes is significantly bigger than the Estonian average. Some amphibians, such as the rare common spadefoot and the great crested newt, can be found in the farm ponds in Haanjamaa.

## FLORA

A unique herbaceous plant – the spiked rampion – is characteristic of the woods in Haanjamaa but rare elsewhere in Estonia. Some other rarities, such as the *Jovibarba*, narrow-leaf bur-reed and Braun's holly fern, occur here (the latter has not been found anywhere else in Estonia). In the damp hollows between the hillocks, about ten species of orchids grow. Even the lakes have their own rarities. The alternateflower watermilfoil, which grows only in South-East Estonia, has been found in seven lakes hereabouts.

## WEATHER

The big height, articulate relief and location of the Haanja landscapes have created good conditions for the weather with prevailing high precipitation and big differences in temperature. Here the amount of precipitation is bigger than in the surroundings: the annual average is 750–800 mm, which is 100–150 mm more than Estonia's average.

Haanjamaa is one of the areas in Estonia with the lowest average air temperature. Only Pandivere has the same annual average temperature as low as in Haanja: +4° C. In both places, the average temperature of the coldest period (January-February) is the lowest in Estonia: -7.7° C. That is why there are not many thaw periods in winter and the snow cover is extremely thick, which makes Haanjamaa especially loved and numerously visited by skiers.

Because of the low temperature and high amount of precipitation, the Haanja Upland makes a 'kingdom of snow' – here almost all the indicators related to snow are the biggest in Estonia. The time when the snow cover appears in Haanjamaa is the earliest and the period of its persistence is the longest, about 125 days. Snow has even been found in the shade of forests on the northern slopes of the knolls just before Midsummer Day.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TRADITIONAL WAY OF LIFE

The settlement in Haanjamaa prevalently consists of smaller villages. The bigger hubs are located in the former manor centres – in Rõuge, Haanja, Ruusmäe and Viitina. Rõuge, a parish centre with its church, inn, schoolhouse and shop, has been regarded as the neighbourhood's most important place since the old times. On the other hand, the village of Uue-Saaluse has, to a great extent, lost its former central role.

Both the natural conditions and the existence of manors have contributed to the birth of small villages in Haanjamaa. A so-called state manor was situated in Haanja, the lands of which were divided among former soldiers and civil servants. As a rule, the plots were not big enough to live on. So the Haanja men had to earn more as skillful artisans, horse dealers or pedlars. The spinning wheels, smoking pipes and other fine woodwork made by the local men were demanded goods also far outside Haanjamaa's boundaries.

The farmer's bread has never come in too easy in Haanjamaa. Because of the diversified landscape, the different degrees of humidity from foot to top, the openness to the sun, the big amount of precipitation, and the deep slopes, the soils may vary even on one and the same knoll. All this has affected the appearance of the cultural landscape. The local fields are small and often dissected; the land has been cultivated where possible. Too dry (the tops of knolls) and too wet (the valleys) areas have been left for forestation.

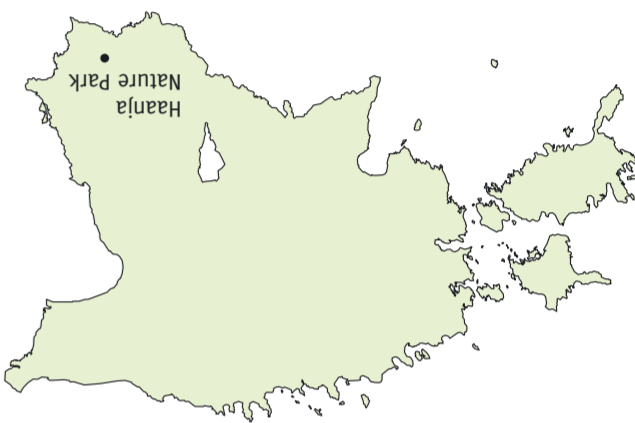
However, the singular landscape of Haanjamaa has also been beneficial – the water of the rivers with big declinations has been used for launching water mills. The mill of Mäeveski, which has been working in the valley of Kütiorg since 1869, is often queued up by customers, because nowadays there is a lack of working mills.



Photo: Common spadefoot, M. Kose



Photo: Lake Rõuge Suurjärv, L. Michelson



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## DOS AND DON'TS FOR VISITORS

- You can move about on private land from sunrise to sunset unless you do damage to the landowner. In case the private land is fenced or marked, you will need the landowner's permission.
- Drive your motor vehicle only on the provided roads and park it only in the car park. Cycle only on the roads and trails.
- Put up your tent and make a fire only in the prepared and marked places. At the time of wildfire hazard, it is forbidden to make an open fire, even on special grounds.
- You can use only non-power driven watercraft on the bodies of water.
- Fishing is allowed with one simple hand line on all public water bodies or water bodies designated for public use. For fishing with other fishing gear, you should buy the recreational fishing rights.
- Keep your dog on the leash while moving about in the nature.
- You can pick berries, mushrooms and other forest goods in the protected area.
- Try to act without leaving traces in the nature.

When you see damage done to the nature or visiting objects, inform the Environmental Inspectorate by phone 1313.



Photo: Beaver, I. Muusikus

# HAANJA Nature Park

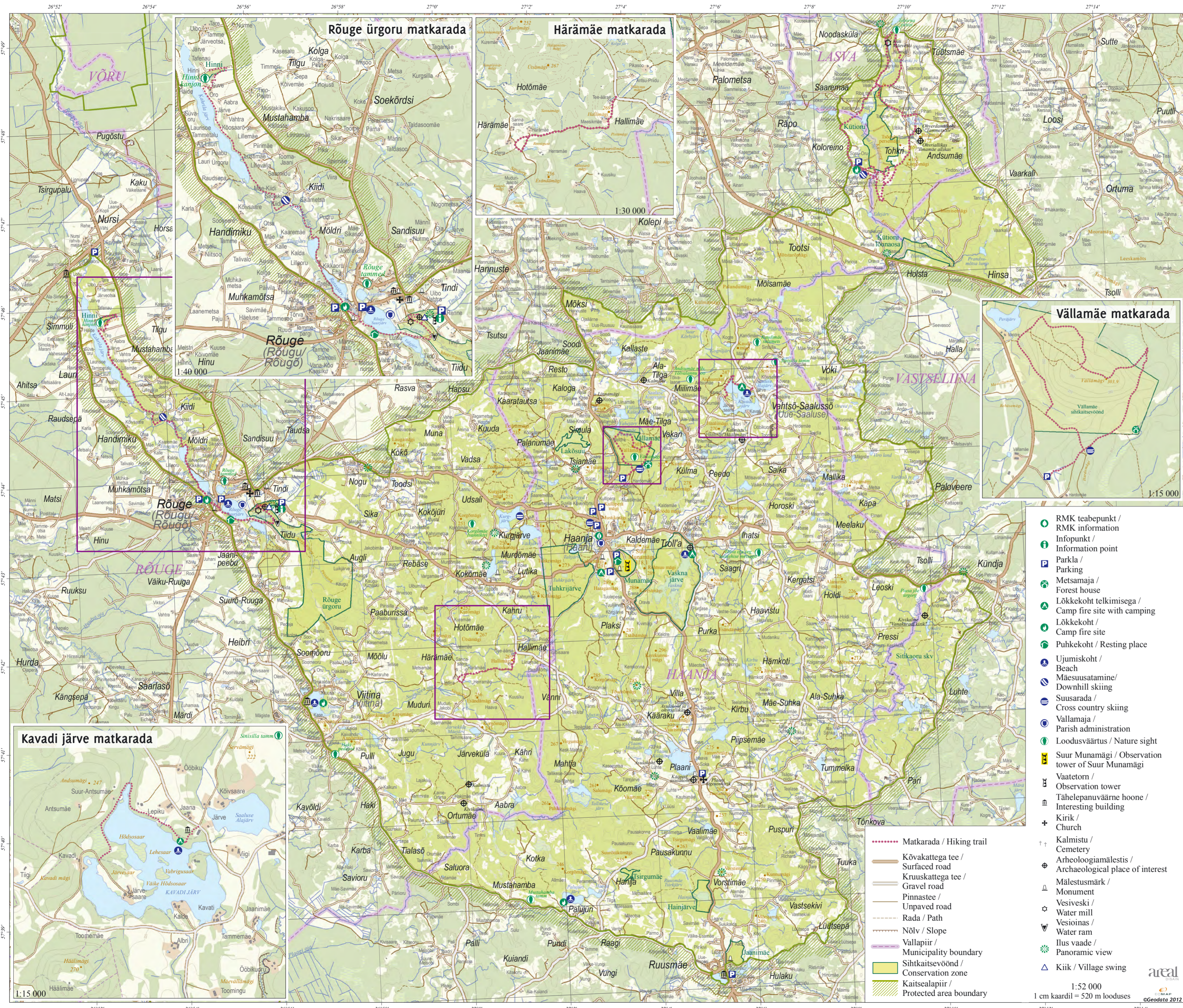


Photo: Winter in Haanja, P. Saarnits

### FOR HIKERS

#### THE HIKING TRAIL OF THE RÕUGE PRIMEVAL VALLEY (10 km)

offers the opportunity to see how the valley was formed and affected by the ice age. The trail starts at the picturesque valley of Õõbikuorg and runs along the chain of lakes to the Hinni Canyon. Although there are no public fire-making and camping sites on the trail, there are numerous tourism farms in the surroundings which offer these services. A special attraction is the Õõbikuorg small hiking trail (about 450 metres), where you can see the short and deep gully – a 'tsori' – cutting into the valley.

#### THE HIKING TRAIL OF LAKE KAVADI (2.2 km)

enables you to examine one of Estonia's most picturesque lakes with most dissected shoreline. The trail starts in the Uue-Saalu Manor Park and runs back and forth along the lakeshore. You can swim, camp and make a fire at the camping site in the Uue-Saalu Manor Park.

#### THE VÄLLAMÄE HIKING TRAIL (2.2 km)

gives you a great experience of different heights. The trail runs through an old swamp forest, passes by the deepest peat layer in Estonia and rises to the top of the hill with the biggest relative height in Estonia. On the trail you can observe an old grove wood with its powerful, up to 42-metre-tall spruces. The final part of the trail provides a good comparison of places of growth as it goes through a forest plantation on one side and a natural forest on the other. On the foot of the hill of Vällumägi there is a forest house of the State Forest Management Centre (RMK), which can be rented for a fee.

#### THE KÜTIORG HIKING TRAIL (9.6 km)

is varied but arduous. You should allow at least 4-5 hours for walking the trail, but it is worth the time! In addition to good exercise you can get a nice overview of Estonia's deepest primeval valley as well as of several old mills and places of sacrifice, such as Tammetsoõr, a ring of old sacred oaks, and the spring of Ilmamäe. The trail passes by a powerful ancient pine tree of Toborna, and rises and falls up and down the steep slopes of the valley of Kütiorg. You can also choose the shorter, 2-8-kilometre-long Kütiorg short hiking trail. There you can see the deep gully of Suurtsoori.

#### THE HÄRÄMÄE HIKING TRAIL (3.4 km)

takes you from Hallimäe to Härämäe. You can enjoy the typical Haanja rural scenery and examine the ponds, restored under the LIFE – Nature Programme for the habitats of the rare amphibian, the great crested newt.

You can find camp fire places for public use in Haanja, Kütiorg, Viitina (in the peninsula Järvesaar), and at Lakes Vaskna, Kavadi and Palujüri.

Tourism farms and holiday homes offer fee-charging camping places with tents.

To spend active holidays in winter, you can use the Haanja and Kurgjärve ski tracks and visit the Haanja Ski Centre and the Kütiorg Recreation Centre.



Photo: Lake Liin järv, L. Michelson

- RMK teabepunkt / RMK information
  - Infopunkt / Information point
  - Parkla / Parking
  - Metsamaja / Forest house
  - Lõkkekoht telkimisega / Camp fire site with camping
  - Lõkkekoht / Camp fire site
  - Puhkekoht / Resting place
  - Ujumiskoht / Beach
  - Mäesuusatamine / Downhill skiing
  - Suusarada / Cross country skiing
  - Vallamaja / Parish administration
  - Loodusväärtus / Nature sight
  - Suur Munamägi / Observation tower of Suur Munamägi
  - Vaatetorn / Observation tower
  - Tähelepanuväärne hoone / Interesting building
  - Kirik / Church
  - Kalmistu / Cemetery
  - Arheoloogiamälestis / Archaeological place of interest
  - Mälestusmärk / Monument
  - Vesiveski / Water mill
  - Vesiojano / Water ram
  - Ilus vaade / Panoramic view
  - Kiik / Village swing
- 1:52 000  
1 cm kaartil = 520 m looduses

- Matkarada / Hiking trail
- Kõvkattega tee / Surfaced road
- Kruuskattega tee / Gravel road
- Pinnaste / Unpaved road
- Rada / Path
- Nõlv / Slope
- Vallapiir / Municipality boundary
- Sihikaitsevoond / Conservation zone
- Kaitsealapiir / Protected area boundary

