

DOS AND DON'TS FOR VISITORS

- Keep the forest, river and springs clean.
- You can pick berries, mushrooms and other forest goods in the protected area.
- Put up your tent and make a fire only in the prepared and marked places; on private land, ask the landowner for permission.
- You can stay on private land from sunset to sunrise, at other times with the landowner's permission.
- Drive your motor vehicle only on the provided roads.
- Only floating vessels without engines can be driven on the river.

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



ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITY

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ENVIRONMENTAL BOARD

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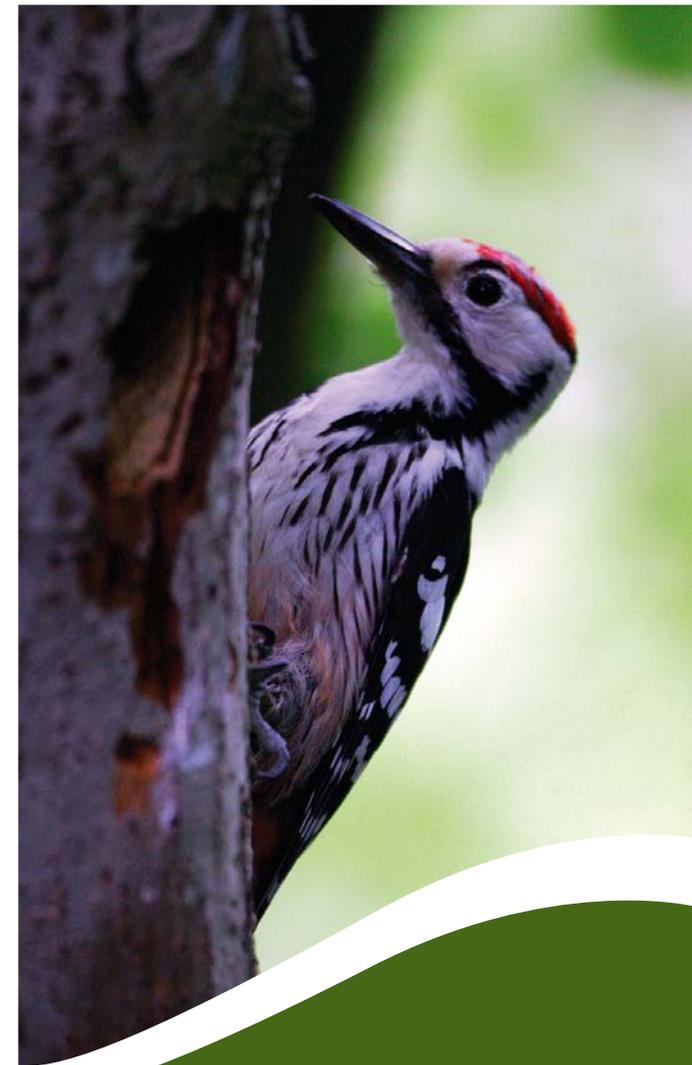
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TILLEORG
Landscape
Protection Area

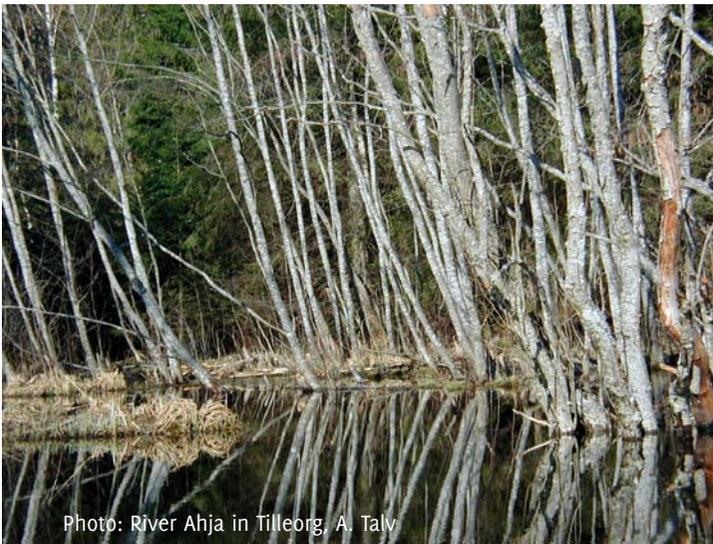


Photo: River Ahja in Tilleorg, A. Talv

TILLEORG LANDSCAPE PROTECTION AREA

The Tilleorg Landscape Protection Area is located in the area between the former Tille and Mõksi mills, in the middle course of the River Ahja, in Kanepi, Põlva and Kõlleste Rural Municipalities, Põlva County. In this part, the River Ahja is called the River Tille. The Tilleorg (Tille valley) Landscape Protection Area was established in 1957 and is one of the oldest protected areas both in Põlva County and in Estonia. Its aim is to protect the ancient valley of the river's middle course and its adjacent valleys, the sandstone outcrops dating back to the Devonian period, the springs and river, the biotic communities of woods and meadows as well as the habitats of the protected species.

To the south of the protected area, the historical Tartu-Võru postal road runs and by its side lies the former Varbuse postal station, which now accommodates the Estonian Road Museum.

LANDSCAPE

A small rill which runs out from Lake Erastvere has, after arriving in the valley of Tilleorg, developed into a young river, ten metres wide and two metres deep in places. The riverbed twists a lot, forming numerous bends and crooks. The valley flat is rich in terraces with springs and veins of water, and small spring mires have evolved in some places. The primeval valley is up to 300 metres wide, the valley flat being 150 metres wide. The slant of the steep slopes of the valley is partly more than 30 degrees. The primeval valley is the deepest with its 35 metres at Tille and becomes shallower closer to Mõksi.

TILLEORG OAK AND CROSS PINE

On the western slope of the Tilleorg Valley an oak tree is growing, which has also been called Kuningatamm (the King's Oak). According to the folk tradition, the tree has grown from a walking stick of a Swedish king. The tree is 20 metres high and its diameter is 4.3 metres. Near the Merioone Cave, the ancient Cross Pine towers. The diameter of the pine at breast height is 3.6 metres; at the height of 1.5 metres the trunk is divided into seven powerful arms. At old times, the road to the cemetery ran past the tree. A cross was graved into the trees to prevent the dead from haunting their homes.

SANDSTONE OUTCROPS

With regard to their location, the outcrops at Tilleorg belong to the Koorküla bed of the central part of the Burtneki Regional Stage,



Photo: Merioone Spring, M. Saks

Middle Devonian. The Merioone outcrop with its length of 15 metres and height of five metres on the western slope of the valley on the steep bank of the Brook Varbuse is the most spectacular and best-known outcrop in the Tilleorg Landscape Protection Area. From the vertical crack in the back of the 1.5-metre-deep cave in the outcrop, the clear-watered Merioone Spring streams out. It is one of the most water-abundant springs here: the discharge in different years and seasons amount to 16–23 litres per second. The Ojaveere Cave, which lies upstream of the Brook Varbuse past Merioone, is a small sandstone outcrop with a round-mouthed spring inside it. The Jääraku outcrop, the Patrioja cave and the Mõksi Mill outcrop also lie on the steep banks of the River Ahja.

PROTECTED SPECIES

The River Ahja with its clear, cool and oxygen-rich water is a suitable habitat for the bullhead (*Cottus gobio*) and the grayling (*Thymallus thymallus*). The rare plants here include sedge (*Carex rhizina*), Northern firmoss (*Huperzia selago*) and greater butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*).

AVIFAUNA

The diverse forests of the protected area offer home to many species of birds, quite common in Estonia. The Eurasian three-toed woodpecker (*Picoides tridactylus*), white-backed woodpecker (*Dendrocopos leucotos*), hazel grouse (*Bonasa bonasia*), honey buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*), Eurasian pygmy owl (*Glaucidium passerinum*), grey-headed woodpecker (*Picus canus*), black woodpecker (*Dryocopus martius*), lesser spotted woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*), white-throated dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*) and woodlark (*Lullula arborea*) have been observed here.

Due to the abundance of suitable habitats, there are plenty of woodpeckers in the area. Varied woods, plenty of dead trees in the older forests, old and partially dying alder groves on the river dam, and old spruce woods lead to the existence of six species of woodpeckers (out of eight species in all Estonia) in Tilleorg.

TILLEORG HIKING TRAIL

The best way to look around the protected area is to walk the 4.4-kilometre-long Tilleorg hiking trail, which starts at the bridge on the postal road, runs along the river's left bank through the woods until the Merioone spring, then goes up the valley slope on the left side of the Brook Hurmi as far as the road, and then returns to the starting point at the bridge.