



Friends of Leivonmäki National Park Association in Finland

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1. Leivonmäki National Park in Finland

Leivonmäki National Park is located in Central Finland in the municipality of Joutsa. The law for NP designation was accepted in the Finnish Parliament in 2003.

The Park can be called the small giant of Central Finland environment, since in a relatively compact area of 30 square km, the diversity of different landscapes is remarkable. There are peatland mires and bogs, ridge eskers and rich diversity in forest nature, stone fields as memories of the glacier period and ancient shorelines, typical Finnish lakes, ponds and creeks with rapids. During one day the park visitor can easily see very diverse landscape.



Figure 1.

15 000 people visit the Leivonmäki NP every year. It's a popular destination for day trips for both local and non-local visitors of different ages. There are a 28 kilometres of clearly signposted walking trails in the park.

The terrain is not very demanding. It's possible to stay over-night on camping sites and lean-to shelters with bonfires.

Photo: Lea-Elina Nikkilä.



Figure 2.

In the winter, there is a traditional 10 km cross-country ski trail in Leivonmäki NP, which is maintained by Joutsa municipality.

Photo: Lea-Elina Nikkilä

2. The Friends of Leivonmäki National Park Association – a positive initiative

Three years after the start of the National Park the Friends of Leivonmäki NP association was organized (2006) to support the Park's recognition as a valuable natural environment and a good place for recreation, with good and versatile facilities. Nowadays the Association has 100 members, of which some are very active in voluntary work and some just want to support the activities through membership.

Main activity of the Friends is to organize guided walks and excursions in different parts of the Park. On one mire-esker landscape the Park has built an easy-access boardwalk trail, which helps also physically disabled people to enjoy the authentic mire environment. On the shore of Lake Harjujärvi (= "Esker lake") there is also a campfire shelter especially designed for the disabled visitors.

On guided walks we try to make the visitors to become familiar with local biodiversity of ecosystems and species, like meadow flora, birds on mires and the European nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), a bird which is the symbol of the Park and breeds in Haapasuonharju (= "Aspen-mire-esker") inside the National Park. In the autumn the Friends organize a mushroom excursion; people may bring their own mushroom findings and experts of the Friends help them to recognize the eatable and possibly poisonous species. We also have a bird-expert team participating in an annual national bird watching

competition (“Battle of Bird-watching Towers -competition”). The Leivonmäki tower is located on a pine-mire wetland, so the number of observed species is not very high and most of the species are birds living on Finnish peatland environment .



Figure 3.

In Syysniemi (=“Cape of Autumn”) meadow the Friends organize one traditional mowing day every summer to maintain the traditional flowering heritage flora on the area. Plenty of local jolly volunteers join us there on the meadow with scythes and rakes.

Photo: Leila Backman

Special work is needed in weeding of the lupines that have started to blossom by the main parking lot of the Park. We want to ensure that the invasive plant won't continue spreading inside the park and thus decrease ecological diversity.

One key idea in Friends' activities is to enable people of different age and from different social groups to make interesting visits to the park. The Friends of Leivonmäki NP Association has several local schools as partners that we sponsor in making educational excursions to the Park. From local old people's residences we have brought the elders to spend a joyful day in the park's campfire shelter with singing and music played. The Friends want to keep organisation sustainable – we want to organise trips and events that motivate seniors but also younger people to join our activities in the future as well.

The Friends of Leivonmäki National Park has many partners: Metsähallitus has participated in organising voluntary work and lead us to excursions on restored swamp areas. Our other partners are Päijänteiden luonnonperintösäätiö (The Foundation of Päijänne Nature Conservation), local village organisations and clubs, municipal library, several local schools, some local SME enterprises and Friends of other Parks.



Figure 4.

The Friends Association finances the activities on bases of small membership fee but mostly on voluntary basis of work, such as building of birdhouses and selling them on market place and in a local summer cafe.



Figure 5.

Volunteers against invasive species in the Leivonmäki NP.

Work is needed in weeding of the lupines that have started to blossom around the main parking lot of the Park. The Friends are going to dig them out of the Park.

Photo: Lea-Elina Nikkilä.

See more:

The Friends of Leivonmäki National Park Association home page: <http://leky.suntuubi.com/>

The Foundation of Päijänne Nature Conservation home page: <http://www.plups.fi/>