



The Friends of Ukko-Koli Association

Friends Associations of European national parks in Koli, Finland

The representatives of friends associations of national parks from seven countries met in the Finnish national park of Koli 16-17 November 2015. The theme was the development of networks for the Parks' Friends associations, sharing best practice and looking to the future. The seminar discussed best practice from Austria, England, Germany, Italy, Latvia, and Wales, as well as from all six Finnish friends associations in the Archipelago, the Bothnian Sea, Koli, Leivonmäki, and Nuuksio National Parks and Liminka Bay bird sanctuary.

Co-operation with the 3rd sector is very significant in protected areas and the friends associations are important voluntary actors in the national parks. There is a shared concern across Europe over the shrinking resources for national park management.

Environmental education is common across all friends associations. The seminar was supported by the Central Finland Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. Tanja Tuulinen, the centre's expert on environmental education says: "The communicating of new innovative ideas on environmental education helps to strengthen our important work for the sustainable future, and this project is one of the tools for achieving this."

The Friends of Ukko-Koli Association in Finland has 15 years of experience of environmental education and services for visitors to the national park. The association was in charge of the customer service of Koli visitor centre in 2000-2012. "Today the association promotes better international awareness of Koli as a destination for sustainable nature and culture tourism" explains Lasse Lovén, the chairman of The Friends of Ukko-Koli Association.

Friends of the Lake District Society in United Kingdom has been operating for over 80 years. The Executive Director of the Friends of the Lake District National Park, UK, Mr Douglas Chalmers said that "the charity started 17 years before the Lake District National Park was established. Now Friends of the Lake District has successfully led the campaign to extend two National Parks and are part of the Lake District National Park Partnership supporting their bid for UNESCO World Heritage Site status."

In Germany, the nature park idea has had a Friends organisation since 1909. The national parks have co-operated with their supporting societies beginning with the Friends of the Bavarian Forest NP in 1970. The Network of Parks' Friends is partly under the umbrella of EUROPARC Germany, an independent network is still under development. New challenges arise when protected areas have different values such as National and Nature Parks, Biosphere Reserves and Geoparks.

The Friends Seminar decided to develop the co-operation of the Associations and Societies in all regional levels and especially in international development projects. They are going to organise a thematic European meeting, make common plans and report their progress in the next Conference of EUROPARC Federation in October 2016 in Switzerland. The Friends Seminar presentations shall be published later in the homepages of the Friends of Ukko-Koli (www.ukko-kolinystavat.fi).



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The seminar was organised by The Friends of Ukko-Koli Association in Finland together with the Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland. The latter has, since 2012, systematically contributed the work of the friends associations in Finnish national parks as a part of a larger partnership program of protected areas.

Additional information:

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