



# mammadaba

It means Mother Nature.  
And it's true.

## ROAD STORY

How, where and why forest roads are built

## TOP 10 ROADS

Forest roads to reach the nature treasures

## NATURE NOTES

Stories behind the species





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# How This Guide Works

IN THIS GUIDE, YOU'LL FIND 10 SUGGESTED FOREST ROADS TO VISIT, ALL OF WHICH ARE FOUND ON LAND OWNED AND MAINTAINED BY LATVIA'S STATE FORESTS (LVM). WE'LL EXAMINE FIVE OF THESE FOREST ROADS IN DETAIL AND ANOTHER FIVE IN A SHORTER FORMAT, WITH A FEW OTHER NEARBY POINTS OF INTEREST THROWN IN AS WELL.

This is a selection, not a comprehensive list. In addition to its forest roads, Latvia's State Forests provides 300 sites all over Latvia that are free to use, plus several with paid-for accommodation and other services.

With so much to choose from, it makes sense to plan your trip in advance at the dedicated LVM recreation and tourism website: [www.mammadaba.lv](http://www.mammadaba.lv).

Every effort has been made to ensure the information in this guide is up to date, but the nature of forestry and tourist infrastructure in wild and challenging locations is that there will be changes over time.

LVM monitors and maintains all its sites, but it may be that when you visit some things are not exactly as described: for example, a forest road may be closed due to adverse weather conditions, because of road construction, ongoing logging work or if hunters are operating in the area. Please always defer to the conditions and information provided on the ground:

if a sign says something is closed or off-limits, please respect that.

The law says you are welcome to venture onto LVM land wherever and whenever you like, provided you respect a few basic rules. LVM land is usually clearly marked by the LVM logo on a yellow background.

Protected nature zones are off-limits and are signposted accordingly. Similarly, avoid areas where active logging, peat extraction, hunting or other commercial operations are in progress for your own safety. Pay attention to warning signs and information boards, and the advice of any LVM employees, park rangers or other officials you encounter to help maintain a safe and beautiful environment for everyone to enjoy. ▲

## MIKE COLIER

The author, journalist and writer



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# Why Build Forest Roads?

## HAVE YOU EVER STOPPED TO THINK WHY FOREST ROADS ARE WHERE THEY ARE?

According to the definition in Latvia's State Forests (LVM) "Forest Encyclopedia", "forest roads are internal forestry roads that connect with state roads, municipal roads and others. Forest roads are used for complex forest management, i.e. simultaneously for timber transport, forestry, forest protection and for carrying out protection works, as well as for the needs of hunting and recreation... an appropriate network of forest roads designed and built for transport and properly operated, provides efficient and economical road transport capability for complex forest management."

In the regulatory documents approved by LVM, forest roads must meet strict technical parameters. These are too complex to go into in detail here but essentially, they need to be big enough and strong enough to safely handle the heavy machinery that is used in modern forestry and be durable enough that they can withstand the rigours of the Baltic climate as long as they receive regular maintenance.

The construction of forest roads is justified from an economic point of view if the potential benefits after construction are greater than the funds invested in construction and operation – a common sense metric, most would agree. Factors such as timber prices, fuel prices and gravel prices must all be factored into the equation.

Put simply, it's not worth constructing a forest road

if it's going to involve a lot of outlay but little income, though it's worth noting the "benefits" also include non-monetary items such as increasing tourism or recreational opportunities – which is what we are mainly interested in on these pages.

It's also worth noting that LVM does not have its own in-house road construction capability – all of its roadbuilding and road maintenance needs are carried out by other companies who have won open tenders for contracts. ▲

### Some Benefits of Forest Roads

- Possibility of supplying timber all year round
- Reduced timber delivery costs
- Better forest fire protection and firefighting access
- Increased value of forest real estate
- Construction of forest roads provides jobs
- Better access for hikers, wildlife watchers, berry pickers, mushroomers etc
- Better access for hunters



# The Wilderness is More Accessible Than You Think

WELCOME TO 2024'S FAST TRACK TO ADVENTURE AND  
NATURE, COURTESY OF LATVIA'S STATE FORESTS (LVM)  
AND ITS AMAZING NETWORK OF FOREST ROADS.

Forest roads can seem a little intimidating at first glance. For a start, there's the question of whether ordinary members of the public are allowed to use them, and if so, for what?

Maybe you're worried that you might encounter a huge logging truck or tractor thundering towards you, and by their very nature forests tend to be in remote and unfamiliar locations – so what if something unexpected happens?

This guide attempts to answer these questions and set your mind at ease. Hopefully, by the time you finish it, you will be confident enough to take full advantage of the wonderful opportunities forest roads provide to explore some of Latvia's wildest and most beautiful locations.

In compiling this guide, I have travelled on forest roads all over Latvia, and at each one I've visited I have thought to myself: "I wonder where this one

leads...". In most cases the answer was a pleasant surprise.

The entrances to many forest roads appear very modest – some might even call them boring. But a general rule is that the further you follow them, the more interesting they become – and the feeling of having a huge slice of forest all to yourself becomes more and more intense – except perhaps during mushroom season, when even the most remote location can seem as busy as Riga's central train station!

At the moment, Latvia's forest roads remain unexplored by most people, even within Latvia itself. Latvia's State Forests is doing good work in upgrading and extending them in 2024 I invite you to take advantage of them and experience sights, sounds, and sensations that until now were just a green blur on a map.

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## WHAT IS LVM?

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Latvijas valsts meži (Latvia's State Forests, LVM) is a state-owned joint stock company established in 1999 and started its work on 1st of January, 2000. LVM manages commercially usable state-owned forests and, alongside its forest management for the timber industry, develops other kinds of activities as well. It also provides hunting and recreational services, produces selected seeds and saplings for reforestation, offers subsoil resources and land leases for subsoil resource extraction (for example peat), and provides geospatial IT development services. LVM is a founder and active member of the European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR). In total, LVM has more than 1.6 million hectares in its care.

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# How are Forest Roads Made?

AS YOU WOULD EXPECT, THERE IS CONSIDERABLY MORE TO BUILDING A FOREST ROAD THAN DECIDING TO MAKE ONE ON MONDAY AND SENDING IN THE TRACTORS ON TUESDAY.

There are a whole range of rules and regulations that must be met, as well as stringent technical specifications. According to Ingus Barvikis, Latvia's State Forests (LVM) head of forest infrastructure operation and maintenance, it typically takes around three to four years to see a forest road construction project to completion. Here's a ten-point summary of the different stages.

But even this is not the end of the process. Once the forest road exists, it will require regular maintenance, including grading, verge cutting, drainage monitoring and more. LVM expects to get a lifespan of 40-50 years out of one of its properly constructed forest roads.

## A NEW TYPE OF FOREST ROAD

Though LVM is already hugely experienced in constructing forest roads, there's always room to learn more and try new techniques. That's exactly what it has been doing in Limbaži municipality where an innovative technical solution is being tried for the first time – using log piles to support the road

surface, ensuring that the full range of forestry work can continue even in particularly difficult, deep peat conditions.

This section of forest road is dubbed “Tēvgāršas ceļš” and 550 metres of its 1.6 kilometre length is built in deep peat conditions using 4,281 wood log. With an excavator and a special driving head, the 5.4-meter and 4.2-meter-long coniferous sawnlog piles with a diameter of 20-24 centimetres were driven deep into the soft ground.

“The challenge of this construction site was the installation of a large diameter culvert in the drainage ditch. In order to be able to build this culvert in the intended place, steel grooved walls were used. At the place where the culvert was built, the depth of the peat was 4.80 m, so it was not possible to build the culvert without removing the peat from this place. In order to do this, these grooved walls were necessary so that the embankment would be safe after construction, would not lose its bearing capacity and would not mix with the neighbouring peat,” explains Ivars Caune, LVM's forest road infrastructure expert.



This has been a long-term project. As far back as in 2011, design work for a 2.5 km forest road were started. However, while the necessary documents were being compiled, a rare black stork's nest was found along the route, so the length of the planned road was reduced by almost a kilometre so as not to disturb the distinguished local resident. First-stage road construction works were completed in 2014.

The constructed forest road provided access to the forest but did not allow the management of the entire forest massif. Therefore, in 2016 design works for an extension were started – while again making sure the route did not affect the black storks!

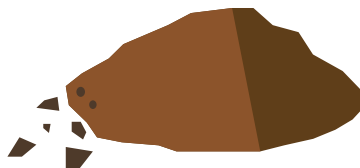
In 2018, when road construction works were started again, it was found that the ground was particularly soft, so an additional engineering study was carried out which revealed that the depth of peat was significantly deeper than was initially estimated, posing a real challenge to completion of the project. “Analyzing the proposed solutions, we came to the conclusion that natural building materials should be used, so road construction on wooden piles was chosen,” explains Ivars Caune. “The idea was to drive wooden piles to the ground, then build a road structure on these piles. In Latvia, the construction of such a road structure has not been tried until now, but based on the experience of other European countries, this type of construction has been used to stabilize the ground cover and then build the road surface. Before organizing the road construction works, an expert review of the construction project was carried out, which confirmed that this solution is safe and practical.”

Construction work got going in September 2021, and was scheduled to finish within a year but external shocks significantly increased the prices of construction materials and fuel, so the deadline for the completion of the construction works was extended to October 31, 2023.

Because this is the first time such a solution has been put into practice in Latvia, it is an obvious opportunity for LVM to collect important data that might help with similar projects in the future. Special equipment and measuring instruments have been installed which, both during the construction works and for two years after completion will collect data about any possible horizontal and vertical deformations, the groundwater level, the pressure of the road structures and trucks on the wooden piles and more. The monitoring period ended in the spring of 2024.

## FOREST ROAD STEP BY STEP

- #01 Setting technical parameters – a general scheme is prepared containing length, width, and other parameters of the project.
- #02 Environmental impact assessment – an estimation of the likely changes road construction will cause.
- #03 Road survey in nature – a precise survey of the route, planned exits, passing places etc.
- #04 Preparation of design tender – assuring procurement rules are in place and followed.
- #05 Design procurement – announcing tender, evaluating submissions and announcing a winner.
- #06 Design agreement – signing a design contract with winning bidder, coordination with municipal planners.
- #07 Acceptance of the project – signing off the design project, final chance to make necessary changes.
- #08 Approval of forest road construction or reconstruction project – all parties are in agreement.
- #09 Submission of project to the building board – local municipality and other statutory planning approval is required.
- #10 Construction can begin – and usually takes just one season.





“Interim monitoring reports indicate that this type of structure is safe. After construction, a small amount of settlement occurs, which is related to the tension of the geotextile between the wooden piles, then the settlement of the road structure stops. Such a road structure could be used in the future in places where there are very low-level load-bearing soils and it is not possible to change the course of the road,” concludes Ivars Caune.

## TURNING POINTS

At the beginning of October 2023, the turning point of the 1.8 kilometre “Kardedžu ceļš” (Kardedžu road) was put into operation in Madona municipality, to allow vehicles to easily turn around in the middle of the forest. The construction works started in July and were completed by mid-September.

It's just one of nearly 3,400 turning points to be found on LVM forest roads. The ability to turn around is extremely important – if it's not possible, timber trucks or other vehicles will have to cover an additional distance until they do find a turning place, or risk getting stuck or causing damage by turning at a less than ideal location.

There are three basic types of turning point used by LVM, which can be described as ‘T-shaped’, ‘Circular’ and ‘Drop-shaped’. T-shaped and Circular types are the most common.

Usually, the construction of turning areas takes much less time than the paperwork and coordination required to start construction.

“Mostly, it takes two years from the idea to the finished object, of which the construction takes just a few months. Before we can start building the turning area itself, we need to prepare documents, carry out design, and also assess and cut the track. Finding the builder in the procurement procedure and concluding the contract is the final stage, before the start of construction work,” says Aivis Holkins, LVM's senior forest infrastructure specialist for Zemgale region. ▲

## If it's Good Enough for Venice

Using wood to provide a stable platform in difficult conditions is nothing new. Did you know that Venice is actually built on larch piles driven deep into the lagoon upon which the famous city stands? Larch was chosen because of its water-resistant and rot-resistant properties. So next time you gasp at Venice's wonders, spare a thought for the humble larch trees that prevent it sinking beneath the waves.

# ‘Timber Shield’ Forest Roads

A particularly innovative solution developed by Latvia’s State Forests (LVM) since 2011 is the so-called ‘timber shield road’. This differs from an ordinary forest road in that it is a temporary rather than permanent route into the forest and is a way of gaining access to remote locations for logging while minimising the environmental impact along the way.

In principle, it’s a pretty simple concept and involves placing strong wooden ‘shields’ on level ground, each one being 3.5 metres wide and 1 metre long. When they are butted up against each other, almost like a line of giant dominoes, a sturdy wooden road is created that is able to bear logging trucks of up to 52 tonnes moving on top of it.

Timber shield roads have the advantage of being relatively simple and quick to install and remove, minimising the disturbance for local residents as well as reducing the impact on the soil.

“After the use of these wooden structures, almost no traces of economic activity remain in the forest,” says LVM’s Forest Infrastructure Executive Director Indris Stulpāns.



They also have the advantage of being re-usable, with each shield section likely to see service around ten times. Though forest shield roads are usually fairly short with a couple of hundred metres being a typical length, LVM used one as long as 880 metres beside the “Mežsargi” forest road in northern Kurzeme. ▲

## SAFETY FIRST!

Sometimes LVM employees have to deal with off-road drivers and motorcyclists in forest road zones. Of course, there is no problem with driving sensibly on the forest road itself, but taking a vehicle off road without a special permit is strictly prohibited. As well as causing erosion and damaging nature it is particularly dangerous in very dry weather when a single spark or discarded cigarette can have catastrophic consequences.

## While in the Forests, It is Prohibited to:

- drop burning or smouldering matches, cigarettes or other objects
- light fires (except at specially designated sites)
- leave fires unattended
- burn waste
- drive motor vehicles off-road
- perform any other action that may cause a fire or damage the environment



# WHAT DO WE DO AT LATVIA'S STATE FORESTS?

-Birds-

**LATVIJAS VALSTS MEŽI**  
PLANTS • WOOD • RECREATION

## WE EXPLORE

**7,000**

NESTS OF LARGE BIRDS  
HAVE BEEN RECORDED  
IN LATVIA'S  
STATE FORESTS  
TO DATE

**~2800**

NESTS OF  
PROTECTED SPECIES

**~400**

NEWLY FOUND NESTS  
(ANNUALLY)

## OBSERVATIONS OF THE BIRDS\*



**~18 500**

OBSERVATIONS OF  
WESTERN CAPERCAILLIE

## RECORDED BIRDS OF OTHER SPECIES

**~50**

SPECIES

**~1900**

OBSERVATIONS

\* essential for assessing the environmental  
requirements of species and for conservation  
planning

**30%**

30% OF SEA EAGLES AND OSPREYS  
RECORDED IN LATVIA'S STATE FORESTS  
NEST IN **ECOLOGICALLY IMPORTANT  
TREES** IN REGENERATION CUTTINGS

LARGE NESTS (+/- 50 centimetre diameter) ARE MADE BY:



EAGLES OF  
ALL SPECIES



COMMON  
BUZZARD



BLACK  
STORK



NORTHERN  
GOSHAWK



EUROPEAN  
HONEY  
BUZZARD



KITE



RAVEN

## BIRD MONITORING



JSC Latvia's State Forests  
monitors **7** protected  
bird species



The number of pairs of  
golden eagles,  
white-tailed eagles and  
ospreys has been  
**increasing significantly**



The **population of  
capercaillies** is stable in  
the short term



The **population of  
lesser spotted eagles** is  
stable in the medium to  
long term

## WE PROTECT

**37 300 ha**

**MICRO-RESERVES HAVE  
BEEN CREATED**

for the protection of the habitats  
of large birds and capercaillies in  
compliance with legislation

IN ADDITION TO THE LEGAL  
PROVISIONS,  
**LATVIA'S STATE FORESTS**  
HAS DEDICATED

**~7800 ha**

to protect the habitats of **birds  
nesting in large nests**

**~109 000 ha**

for the protection of  
**capercaillie habitat**



## WE MANAGE

THE QUALITY OF  
CAPERCAILLIE HABITAT  
HAS BEEN IMPROVED

IN AN AREA OF

**~1100 ha** INCLUDING:

**~60 ha**

at **Kreiču purvs (Kreiči Bog)**  
nature reserve, by performing  
biotechnical measures

**9 km of filled ditches**

at two capercaillie lekking sites to  
create an optimal hydrological regime  
in the **Eastern Vidzeme region**

**x130**

**130 artificial nests** have been installed to  
date by LVM ornithologists to promote  
the nesting of ospreys, golden eagles,  
black storks and Eurasian eagle-owls



**~90 %**  
Golden eagles



**~50 %**  
Ospreys

**90% of the known golden eagles  
and ~50% of known ospreys  
are nesting in artificial nests**

# What's in a Name?

ONE OF THE JOYS OF LATVIA'S STATE FORESTS (LVM) FOREST ROAD NETWORK ARE THE NAMES GIVEN TO THE INDIVIDUAL ROADS THEMSELVES. SOME ARE ORDINARY, SOME ARE SURPRISING AND A FEW ARE JUST DOWNRIGHT PUZZLING.

Commonly, forest roads get their names from old maps, forestry documents or names of nearby farmsteads. But as LVM senior forester Jānis Grīslis, and photographer, folklorist and historian Elīna Kursīte have revealed, the naming process is often helped by local residents, who provide historical evidence. For example, there is an interesting story about the recreational area "Stāvais krasts" (Steep bank) beside the River Ogre. Talking to the local chief forester, who spent his childhood in this area, it was revealed that this was what it was known as in the days when log rafts floated down the river and even then was a popular spot for rafters to celebrate on payday. ▲



## A FEW NOTABLE NAMES

Berlīnes krustojums – Berlin crossroads

Krodzinieku ceļš – Pub landlord's road

Cielavu atzars – Wagtail branch

Stūrīšu trase – Corner track

Kliķu ceļš – Clique road

Slīpais ceļš – Slippery road

Telefona trase – Telephone track

Ziedu ceļš – Flower road

Miltiņu ceļš – Flour road

Sporu atzars – Spore branch

Kaķu ceļš – Cats' road

Armijas ceļš – Army road

Lielo plaužu ceļš – Great bream road

Garā līnija – Long line

Skudru līnija – Ants' line

# What do Tree Marks Mean?

WHILE EXPLORING FOREST ROADS IT IS COMMON TO SEE DISTINCTIVE MARKS SPRAY-PAINTED ONTO THE TRUNKS OF SOME OF THE TREES. KNOWING WHAT THESE STRANGE HIEROGLYPHS MEAN IS NOT ONLY INTERESTING, BUT IT CAN HELP YOU UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THE FOREST AROUND YOU AND WHAT FORESTRY WORKS MIGHT BE TAKING PLACE.

Usually, you will find three different colours used: orange, green, and red. High-visibility orange is most commonly seen. Generally, the symbols mark the boundaries of areas to be felled, access points for felling operations, and specific instructions relating to particular trees.

A single line on one side of a tree marks the edge of a felling area. A double line marks the corner point of a felling area. It is forbidden to cut these trees and the trees behind them (when looking directly at the marks on the trunk).

You might see the word 'NOST' (NO MORE) on a tree. This means the trees behind it are on another piece of land and cannot be touched. 'NOST' is particularly used when it is not possible to mark other boundary trees individually because they belong to another landowner.

If you see a tree with a single or double line on the trunk with an extra line through it (this often resembles a 'hashtag' symbol), it means the previously marked boundary has been cancelled or changed. You might also see 'NOST' crossed out, which is also a cancellation mark.

Trees with a large letter 'K' are used to mark the 'Krautuve' or storage area where felled trees are to be piled up. Trees marked with the K are not themselves felled.

Trees marked with a 'P' show where an access road (Pievešanas ceļš) needs to be put in. An access road needs to be 5 metres wide, and trees marked with a 'P' are on the centre line of the road and will be felled.

Very commonly you will see a red or orange dot of 5-10 cm in diameter on a tree. This denotes an individual tree that will be felled but also means adjacent, unmarked trees must not be felled. A red line running around the entire circumference of a tree trunk denotes it as a special 'ecological' tree that must not be cut down. On average there will be about 10 trees marked this way for every hectare of trees cut down. These ecological trees help with regrowth, diversity and forest health.

A red 'T' is often visible on a large dead, dry stump of 3 m to 5 m in height. The T shows the stump has been left for ecological purposes, for example, to maintain habitats for insects. There will be around 8 such stumps left on each hectare felled.

When you see a pile of logs by the side of a forest road, several of them will typically have a red or orange 'X' on them. These are logs that have been deemed to be substandard (though they can still be used for secondary purposes).

So there you are – next time you notice marked trees in the forest, see if you can decode what has happened already and what's marked for the future! ▲



# Four Seasons on the Forest Road

EACH SEASON BRINGS SOMETHING DIFFERENT TO LIFE IN THE FOREST –  
AND GIVES YOU A DIFFERENT REASON TO MAKE A VISIT.  
AND A FEW ARE JUST DOWNRIGHT PUZZLING.

## SPRING

Early spring can be extremely wet (logging operations are generally suspended when this is the case to avoid damaging the forest roads), so caution must be exercised if venturing down a forest road, particularly if you are in a two-wheel drive vehicle. We recommend scouting on foot first.

Later in the spring things are much easier and the freshness of the forest is a real tonic after a long, hard winter, while the return of migratory birds breathes fresh life into the forest.

## SUMMER

Undoubtedly the best time to explore Latvia's forest roads as they will be firm and easy to travel on. However, be aware that logging activity will be high and you can also expect to see plenty of other people including large numbers of berry pickers and mushroom hunters.

Hazards to bear in mind are forest fires and ticks – take suitable precautions to ensure you do not fall victim to either of these!

## AUTUMN

Again, logging operations will be on hold during very wet weather, but during a dry autumn period the changing colours of the forest make for a stunning sight. While large numbers of people are taking day trips from Riga to places such as Sigulda to watch the leaves change colour, LVM forest roads provide a perfect escape route from the crowds!

## WINTER

It can be difficult to negotiate forest roads in the winter time, but if you do, the peace and quiet is intensified with snow dampening all sounds. A pair of off-piste forest skis or snow shoes really come into their own at this time of year and when the big freeze is in place you will even be able to access areas that are too boggy or waterlogged at other times of year. With all the leaves down from the deciduous trees and bushes, you also get a completely different picture of the topography and landscape. Visiting the place in summer and winter is like visiting two different places. ▲

# Forest Roads in Winter



It may come as a surprise to learn that forest roads are not off-limits during the winter, despite the harsh weather conditions. However, Latvia's State Forests (LVM) does call on drivers to exercise special caution when driving on forest roads in the colder months of the year.

Forest roads are sometimes sprinkled with anti-slip materials or grooved to improve traction, but even then ice, snow and water can sometimes win out. Drivers of timber trucks must frequently resort to the use of snow chains, or simply suspend operations if it is not safe to continue working in the forest.

"Driving conditions also have a very significant effect on the driving speed, as a result of which the total delivered volume per day is much lower, because safety comes first," says Ivars Korsaks, head of LVM's wood product deliveries department.

An extra hazard is created by trees loaded with snow which can lean over forest roads and footpaths and eventually fall. LVM clears such trees where it can, but this often requires coordination with nature protection agencies before it can take place.

LVM's forest experts explain that trees bent over in the snow are more often observed at forest edges and near roads and paths, because in these places the trees form asymmetric crowns, with significantly more branches on the sun-facing side of the trunk. A tree with snow and ice accumulated on its branches leans towards the more branched side and if the tree trunk cannot support this extra weight, it breaks.

So be cautious if you are going for a walk in a 'winter wonderland' via a forest road. All those snow-laden trees look beautiful, but pay attention to where you park your vehicle and avoid disturbing any dubious-looking trees. ▲







# Forest Roads Help Natural Diversity

Some might assume that building a road – even a low-impact road – in the forest is always a net loss for nature. But it's not as simple as that. As Latvia's State Forests (LVM) Forest Infrastructure Planning Manager Jānis Buņķis pointed out in an interview with the 'Latvijas Avīze' newspaper, the effect on local flora and fauna can even be beneficial.

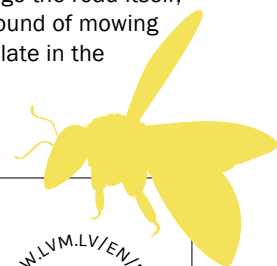
"Our forest roads with their parameters and low traffic intensity do not affect animals. There are ditches and forests on both sides of the road, and any animal can safely cross the ten meters of the road. The edges of the road, where there is shade on the side of the forest, and the sun on the side of the road, are very interesting for both plants and animals. Over time, new ecosystems can even form in these places," explained Buņķis.

The view is supported by Mārtiņš Kalniņš, head of environmental planning at LVM, who points out that

roadsides and verges are often the places where there is a great diversity of plant species where they can bloom longer than in meadows and pastures. Therefore, verges are also a special place for many insects including important pollinators. For example, wild bees and bumblebees that pollinate apple trees, cherries, strawberries, and other crops all benefit from having access to the long lines of forest roads.

"When mowing roadsides and other places, we ask not to mow areas rich in flowering plants or to mow later, after these plants have flowered. Even small 'islands' of flowering plants matter!" explains Kalniņš.

For this reason, while it is very important for the verges of forest roads to be managed to prevent a build-up of moisture that can damage the road itself, LVM usually restricts itself to one round of mowing per year, and that generally comes late in the season, July at the very earliest. ▲



## AN EXPLOSIVE FIND

Building a forest road comes with some particular hazards. While rough weather and dangerous trees might be expected, one LVM construction team faced a more unusual scenario in 2020 when they noticed suspicious objects in the ground along a section of former railway which they were converting into the new "Grudze" forest road. Putting safety first they informed the police, and the objects were found to be unexploded projectiles, presumably from some long-ago military event. Sappers made all the objects safe and once a thorough search of the surrounding area had been made, construction of the 2.85 kilometre road was completed. Happens from time to time.



# From Firefighting to Navigation

FOREST ROADS IN LATVIA ARE CRUCIAL FIREBREAKS AND PROVIDE WATER SOURCES FOR FIREFIGHTING, ASSISTING WITH NAVIGATION AND SAFETY TO PREVENT GETTING LOST.

## HELPING STOP THE FOREST FIRES

At the end of 2023, the 1.4 kilometre long “Aizkraukles purva ceļš” (Aizkraukle swamp road) was put into operation in Jaunjelgava municipality, providing an excellent example of one of the benefits of forest roads – protection against forest fires.

The road crosses a nature reserve and ends at a water reservoir of approximately two hectares created in the 1970s. After the reconstruction of the forest road, it will now be possible to take water from this reservoir in the event of a fire, and the road itself acts as a fire brake which would help stop the spread of a forest fire.

## FOREST ROADS TO THE RESCUE

One of the best things about forest roads is the way they can be used to prevent you getting lost or – if you do lose your bearings – to help you find your way back again. Forest roads tend to be straight (though not always). They provide a clear line of orientation in a landscape that is often otherwise uniform. In navigational terms this is known as a ‘handrail’ or ‘backstop’ and put simply this means a forest road is a fixed feature to which you can always refer to locate yourself to some extent.

For example, if you know a certain forest road runs generally north to south for several kilometres and you start walking away from it in a general easterly direction, you know that if you have not crossed that forest road (and if there are no other FRs in the area to confuse you) then heading generally west will eventually bring you back the forest road you started from. Even if it is not at the exact same point along the road, it is simple enough to follow the FR north or south to regain your starting point.

However, effective use of a backstop requires you to take a general look at the topography before you set out on a map, and it also requires you to take a compass. If you have no physical map to hand, make a sketch map on a piece of paper noting any landmarks (lakes, rivers, hills, roads, power lines etc.) and approximate distances. Keep it in your pocket just in case.

Do NOT rely only on your mobile phone alone for mapping and geolocation. Mapping apps tend to suck a battery quite heavily and you might be only one dropped cellphone away from having no idea where you are.



## PARK PROPERLY IN THE FOREST

One of the main questions anyone driving a car along a forest road will ask themselves at some point is: "Can I park here?" Happily, the answer is very likely to be "Yes" – as long as you use some common sense.

The main thing is not to obstruct or inconvenience the movement of other vehicles, which means not only other cars but potentially large tractors, trucks and other items of forestry technical equipment, plus fire engines.

Also, think about whether it will be as easy to drive out of a parking place as it was to drive in. Is it on a steep incline? Is it icy or muddy? Is there a tree with dead branches overhead? Might there be deep ruts or a ditch hidden under snow or leaves? It's always worth checking on foot before parking up.

LVM forest highways are one-lane, two-way roads for economic purposes, and are equipped with passing places and turning areas as well as clearly signposted entrances and exits.

"Improperly parking a car can interfere with the implementation of forest works, forest fire protection, as well as other forest visitors and road users. You can temporarily park your car at one of the exits or interchanges. To make sure that you can get to the parked car quickly if necessary, we recommend that you leave your phone number in a visible place in the car," suggests Ivars Ozols, head of forest infrastructure of the LVM Kurzeme region. ▲

## Caution and precautions

We've all heard tales about mushroom pickers or hikers getting lost in the forest. It can be a genuinely scary experience and panic, pride or embarrassment can make a bad situation much worse. Visitors to the forest should be wary in several different ways.

**#01** Make sure you have told someone where you are going and when you expect to return, particularly if you are venturing into the forest alone.

**#02** Make sure you are properly dressed and equipped. That doesn't just mean walking boots, a raincoat, and a fully-charged mobile – in most cases, it should also mean water, snacks, and a first aid kit as a bare minimum, and for longer trips it might also mean a pocket knife or multitool, map, lighter, extra clothing and an emergency covering such as a poncho or space blanket.

**#03** Item worth its weight in gold in the forest is a good compass, as it is extremely easy even for experienced hikers to lose their bearings. With a little basic knowledge, a compass is the most reliable way of navigating your way out of trouble, as the ability to walk a straight line in a known direction is usually enough to return you to a forest trail – and there are no batteries to wear out.

**#04** Any time you stop under a large tree you should look up to check there are no 'widowmakers' (large dead branches ready to fall off) overhead. In winter, trees can deposit a large amount of snow onto you if shake them even gently. In the warmer months, there is the persistent threat of ticks.

## Beware of Ticks

Beware of ticks in Latvia's forests, particularly in grasslands and meadows. To prevent bites, wear long clothing and check warm skin areas often. Seek medical advice for vaccinations and safe tick removal. Be cautious in all areas as ticks are prevalent and can carry diseases like tick-borne encephalitis and Lyme disease.





# Let's go to the forest!

Overall, Latvia's State Forests (LVM) provides more than 300 freely available recreational areas



1. Vasenieki Bog Trail
2. Seaside Recreation Site Užavas Bāka
3. Jūrkalne Seashore Bluffs
4. Kaltene Stone Ridges
5. LVM Tourism and Recreation Centre Spāre
6. Ūdrkalns Observation Tower
7. Lake Zilonis Recreation Sites
8. Kalnansi Bog
9. Lake Kaņieris
10. Jaunmokas Palace
11. Āži Hill Trails
12. Bojas Palace Park
13. Pape Nature Park Seaside Recreation Sites
14. Remte Manor Park
15. Zaņa River Recreation Site
16. Krievkalni Hills
17. LVM Nature Park in Tērvete
18. LVM Nature Park Glamping Site
19. Ložmetējkalns Observation Tower
20. Hare Meadow Recreation Sites
21. Lake Leja Recreation Sites
22. Ogre River Recreation Site Stāvais Krasts
23. Surroundings of Lake Kalnmuīža
24. Koknese Park
25. Alaine Manor Building Complex
26. Aklais Bog Nature Trail
27. Lake Timsmales Baltezers Recreation Site
28. Recreation Site Gustiņkalns
29. Steķi Forest Recreation Sites
30. Nicgale Great Stone
31. Sudmaļi Castle Mound
32. Rušenica Castle Mound
33. Lake Pelēči Fen Observation Deck
34. Daugava River Recreation Site Priedaines Loks
35. Priedaine Observation Tower
36. Recreation Site Miera Avots



51. Lake Niedrājs Recreation Sites
52. Lake Klievezers Recreation Site
53. Cērtene Castle Mound
54. Lake Kaupēni Recreation Site
55. Lake Riebiņi Recreation Site
56. Lake Pīlezers Recreation Sites
57. Planči Bog Trail
58. Seaside Recreation Sites Vasas
59. Daugēni Cliffs
60. Skaņaiskalns Cliff
61. Gauja River Recreation Site Spicu Tilts
62. LVM Vīciems Cone Drying Facility

37. Numerne Ridge Nature Park
38. Lake Kovšežers Recreation Sites
39. Teirumnīki Bog Trail
40. Lake Dzilūts Recreation Site
41. LVM Tourism and Recreation Centre Ezernieki
42. LVM Kalsnava Arboretum
43. Driksna Forest Lakeside Recreation Sites
44. Balvi Old Park Recreation Sites
45. Stompaki Partisan Settlement
46. Tilža River Recreation Site Krīšjāņu Staburags
47. Lake Ādmiņi Recreation Site
48. Lake Kalnis Recreation Site
49. Lake Vaidava Recreation Site
50. Lake Meistars Recreation Site



An aerial photograph of a vast, dense forest. The forest is composed of many tall, thin trees with green foliage. A light-colored dirt road or path winds through the middle of the forest, curving from the left towards the right. The foreground shows a denser layer of lower vegetation and shrubs. In the far distance, a flat horizon line is visible under a cloudy sky.

# **10 Forest Roads Leading to Nature's Treasures**






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#01 E-LĪNIJA

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#02 NUMERNES VALNIS

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#03 NĪCGALES LIELAIS AKMENS

---

#04 AIZUPJU VALKS

---

#05 VIESATAS UPESLOKI

---

#06 PIEMINEKĻA CEĻŠ

---

#07 MOLLĪTES STIGA

---

#08 ZIEDU CEĻŠ

---

#09 MUIŽUĻU STIGA

---

#10 KUILIS-DAUDZEVA CEĻŠ

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# #01 E-līnija

“E-līnija” forest road  
Length: 6.66 km



## GETTING THERE

“E-līnija” can be accessed from the west (via the E264 Valmiera-Valka road) or from the east (via the P24 Smiltene-Valka road). Following the full length of E-līnija will take you from one of these main roads to the other.

## ON SITE

Despite its very unassuming name – “E-līnija” really just means “Line E” – this long forest road opens up a huge swath of forest territory that belongs to the Northern Gauja (Ziemeļgauja) protected landscape territory.

The forest here is typical of north Latvia’s borderlands with spruce and pine predominating and delicate mosses, heathers, and fungi covering the forest floor.

The central focus is a crossroads roughly halfway along E-līnija. Here the east-west road intersects with another forest road called “Bulvāris” (Boulevard) which runs north-south and means a vast area of forest can be reached using these four points of the compass.

The presence of the forest roads has allowed LVM to restore around 100 hectares of historic water meadows that had become completely neglected and overgrown. There are several protected bird nesting sites here, too.

One hidden gem towards the eastern end of E-līnija is beautiful Silezers, a small forest lake that has a picnic spot, table and fire ring. It’s well worth the short walk and makes a perfect lunch spot if you have spent the morning picking mushrooms, with whom the surrounding area of is particularly well stocked.

## NEARBY

You can turn a day trip into an overnight stay very easily at LVM’s nearby “Spicu tilts” (Spici bridge) rest stop which is suitable for both car and boat traffic. Located just a couple of kilometres south of the eastern end of E-līnija, here you’ll find a wide area for camping with several fire rings and shelters, all right beside the River Gauja. There are numerous hiking routes of all distances to explore in the surrounding forest. 🌲



## LVM GEO APP

Extremely useful online tool is the LVM GEO Mobile app. It provides very precise maps showing when and where you are on LVM land, what its status is, and many other functions. It is free to download, and we strongly recommend its use.



### DO YOU KNOW?

Latvia's State Forests constructs or reconstructs around 300 kilometres of forest roads every year. Natural gravel (63%) and crushed gravel (32%) roads are most common in the forest, roads made using dolomite chips and concrete slabs are less common.

## Ratings (out of 10)

ACCESSIBILITY: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 FACILITIES: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 WILDLIFE: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 FORAGING: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 INTEREST: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 WOW FACTOR: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲



### PROS

Spectacular and distinctive northern landscape

### CONS

Access becomes tricky in very wet or snowy conditions



## #02

## Numernes valnis

“Numernes ceļš” forest road

GPS: 56.848936, 27.490627

Length: 1.93 km



### GETTING THERE

Numernes nature park can be accessed from the “Numernes ceļš” forest road or from the “Štraubes ceļš” forest road, both of which join the P48 road between Kārsava and Tilža. Though this is a main road, it is unasphalted. If parking by the side of the road, make sure it is where your vehicle is clearly visible to oncoming and passing traffic.

### ON SITE

Numernes valnis or Numerne ridge is an example of one of the rarest forest biotopes in Latvia, an eskar, or winding ridge of stratified sand and gravel formed by glacial melt, which represents just 0.02% of Latvia's territory. Consequently, it is home to many rare and protected species and LVM in recent years has been carrying out concerted works to protect and preserve local habitats which are particularly notable for aspen forest.

Such forests need natural disturbances – wind action, fire or regular ground cover disturbances that maintain open areas of sand and gravel. If these

disturbances are missing, the forests gradually overgrow and the living conditions necessary for various plant and animal species disappear.

As far as visitors are concerned the result is a place with a definite feel of its own, subtly different to many other forests in Latvia. On top of the you can enjoy wonderful views across Lake Nūmiernā (the spelling variations are accounted for by the local Latgalian language) and the smaller Lake Kugreņš. There you'll also find a perfect picnic spot and photography spot.

### NEARBY

While walking downhill from the viewpoint, don't miss out on an amazing art installation tucked away just a couple of hundred metres from the main path. Titled 'Uguns' (Fire) it's a tall wooden structure you can walk inside that references not only the natural world but local building and craft traditions. It is the work of artist Didzis Jaunzems and is a perfect place for a few minutes of meditation, listening to the sounds of nature. 🌲



### LVM ANYWHERE



Thanks to the webcams operated by Latvia's State Forests, you can make a virtual visit to a Latvia's forest or bog from anywhere in the world. Take time out from a stressful day in an urban environment to soak in the sights and sounds of the trees.

See more at LVM's YouTube channel!



## Ratings (out of 10)



ACCESSIBILITY: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 FACILITIES: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 WILDLIFE: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 FORAGING: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 INTEREST: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 WOW FACTOR: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲

### PROS

Spectacular and far-reaching views

### CONS

Remote location requires an early start

#03

# Nīcgales lielais akmens

“Mežvidi – Lielais akmens” forest road

GPS: 56.154101, 26.458535

Length: 2.73 km



## GETTING THERE

From the main A6 road (Rīga-Daugavpils) take the P64 towards Nīcgale village. Along the way, you will see a signpost directing you towards the stone via the “Mežvidi – Lielais akmens” forest road.

## ON SITE

Nīcgales lielais akmens (Nīcgale great stone) is the largest single boulder in Latvia, and while that's a reasonable excuse to make your way here (even if it is not exactly huge by international standards) there is much more to this location than just an outsized pebble.

The stone itself is quite interesting, being 10 metres wide by 10 metres long, by 3.5 metres high, and according to local legend, it was a popular place for nobles from far around to meet for picnics on top of its flattish surface. However, don't blame the barons for the three steps cut into the side of the stone – that was the work of a forest ranger in 1938 when a less enlightened approach was taken to natural wonders than LVM employs today.

Unlike many 'great stones' in Latvia, this one is in a prominent position at the broad and regular junction of several forest roads, not hidden deep in the shadows. You could say it dominates a broad avenue of forest road in almost the way the Arc de Triomphe dominates the Champs Elysees in Paris.

The surrounding forest is notable for being home to several protected bird species including the Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) bird of prey. While another LVM site at Pokaiņi in the west of the country is renowned as a place that exudes a mysterious atmosphere, here in the deep east you'll find something strangely similar. Don't be surprised to find yourself walking in circles or even starting to suspect that the smaller stones you'll occasionally find might have changed position while you were looking the other way...

Near the stone you'll find that LVM has provided a parking place, an information board about the surrounding forest, a shelter and picnic tables.





### NEARBY

Around 15 kilometres east of Nīcgale great stone, you'll find a little-known but lovely small bog landscape, Pelēču ezera purvs (Lake Pelēči bog). A 200-metre boardwalk leads to a 3.5-metre viewing platform with an amazing view over the bog and adjacent lake. This is another LVM site, with information boards at the start of the trail. Excellent for families. 🌲

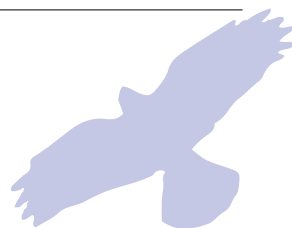
## Ratings (out of 10)

ACCESSIBILITY: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 FACILITIES: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 WILDLIFE: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 FORAGING: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 INTEREST: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 WOW FACTOR: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲



### DO YOU KNOW?

LVM's network of forest roads includes around 90 bridges of varying sizes.



#### PROS

Makes an interesting stop on the Rīga-Daugavpils route

#### CONS

In winter it can feel a bit too remote

# #04 Aizupju valks

“Usmas c. - Stendes upe” forest road

GPS: 57.297414, 22.201588

Length 3.4 km



## GETTING THERE

It is possible to reach this location from several directions, though all are quite challenging and require negotiating several different forest roads. The most straightforward approach is to head north from the main A10 (Rīga-Ventspils) highway at Usma railway station and keep heading north until you reach the “Usmas c. - Stendes upe” forest road signpost and turn right. Alternatively, you can try the “Aizupju dambis” forest road. The recreation area is located where the two forest roads meet.

## ON SITE

“Aizupju valks” is a recreation site located deep in the Grīņi forest, which is characteristic of the pine-rich forests of western Latvia where, even some 38 kilometres from the coast, the maritime influence can always be felt in climactic conditions that are usually a few degrees warmer than in the east of the country. “Aizupju valks” is the name of a water course that is a tributary of the River Stende, which also flows nearby. The recreation site was renovated in 2023

and makes a great base from which to explore the wide range of rivers, bogs, swamps and forests all around.

Latvia’s State Forests has constructed some very attractive wooden shelters, benches, fire pits and a dry toilet, and there’s ample space for tents and hammocks, too. Given the effort required to reach the location, many people will choose to make a weekend of it here, or even longer. Out of the summer season, you are almost certain to have the whole place to yourself and will feel like king or queen of the forest. There are plenty of berries and mushrooms to forage, and wildlife enthusiasts will relish the chance to spot a wide range of species. Be warned that it is quite easy to get lost – and here the forest roads again come into their own. As long as you stay within sight of one of them (they head roughly north, south, east, and west at the crossroads), you’re guaranteed to find your way back to base. Perhaps you can find the impressive ‘Tiltiņu priede’ (Bridge pine tree) on the banks of the River Stende?



### NEARBY

Some 7 kilometres to the northwest of the Aizupju vāls recreation site is another of Kurzeme region's natural gems – Vasenieku purvs (Vasenieki bog). About 20 km from Ventspils on the E22 highway turn north towards Valdemārpils. After another 17 km you will see a sign on the right. It's just a few hundred metres to the bog.

After extensive renovation works by LVM in 2021, the Vasenieki bog trail reopened with upgraded facilities, including a 6-metre-tall viewing platform and a sturdy boardwalk that makes it much more accessible. Vasenieki bog trail is located in the "Stiklu purvi" nature reserve, which is the largest expanse of high bogland in Kurzeme. ▲

## Ratings (out of 10)

ACCESSIBILITY: ▲▲▲▲▲  
 FACILITIES: ▲▲▲▲▲  
 WILDLIFE: ▲▲▲▲▲  
 FORAGING: ▲▲▲▲▲  
 INTEREST: ▲▲▲▲▲  
 WOW FACTOR: ▲▲▲▲▲



### PROS

A longer camping stay is very practical

### CONS

In early spring and late autumn, floods can seriously hamper access



## #05

## Viesatas upesloki

“Spunņu ceļš” forest road  
GPS: 56.817267, 22.947161  
Length 1.63 km

**GETTING THERE**

“Viesatas upesloki” is accessed from the V1153 (Viesatas village – Vaski village) minor road via the “Spunņu ceļš” forest road. However, in adverse conditions it may not be possible to travel the full length of the forest road by vehicle, so please take care and park in a suitable spot if this is the case and complete the journey on foot.

**ON SITE**

“Viesatas upesloki” (Viesata meanders or Viesata river bends) is a fairly lengthy trail that, as its name suggests, follows the tight and picturesque meanders of the River Viesata. There are two routes to choose from, one of 6 kilometres and a shorter option of 4 kilometres, or you can combine the two into a challenging hike of nearly 11 kilometres. Be aware that there is a surprising amount of ups and downs for a part of the world that is famous for being flat! Unlike many Latvian river walks, the routes are designed so that you can complete them as loops, meaning you don’t have to retrace your steps, and

the trails are well-marked with colour-coded paint on trees and information boards at the start.

One of the main attractions of these particular trails is a chance to experience forests of many different ages in one walk – from one-year-old saplings to mature century-old specimens and everything in between, which really adds to the feeling that you are walking through a living, breathing forest, not some abstract timber plantation.

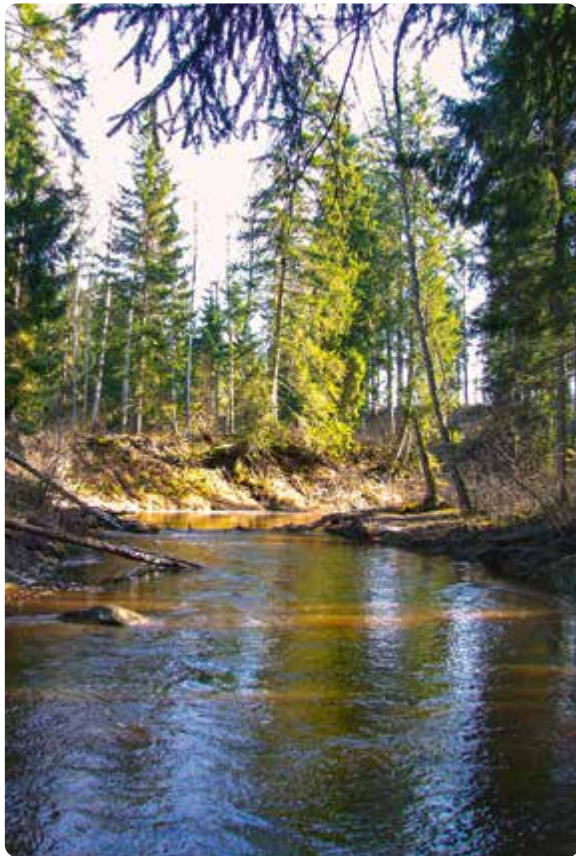
The River Viesata is particularly picturesque, seeming at times to be a lively stream of rushing water and at other moments a placid river with deep pockets and pools. One short section of the trail even has water on both sides where another little river called the Prūsene flows into the Viesata – which itself will eventually flow into the River Abava.

There are several benches to rest on along the banks of the Viesata as well as some fire pits if you fancy cooking something tasty.



### NEARBY

Just 3 kilometres to the southwest of the trail at Struteles muiža (not Strutele village, which is to the southeast) you'll find Struteles Dievu kalns (Strutele holy hill or God's hill). It's rather overgrown but may have been an ancient site of significance. Another 3 kilometres south and you'll come to another impressive ancient hill site, Elles kalns (Hell hill) which has a parking place and a trail to the top where



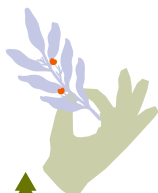
you can "descend into hell" in the form of a 30-metre-long grotto. It has even given its name to an adjacent forest road – "Elles kalna ceļš" (Hell hill road)! 🌲

### FUN FACT

As a general rule of thumb, in Latvia the optimum ratio of forest roads to forest area is about 1.5 kilometres of forest road to 100 hectares of forest.

## Ratings (out of 10)

ACCESSIBILITY: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 FACILITIES: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 WILDLIFE: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 FORAGING: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 INTEREST: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲  
 WOW FACTOR: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲



### PROS

Ability to do various lengths of walk without repeating yourself.

### CONS

May be necessary to walk an extra kilometre from the access road.







## #06 Pieminekļa ceļš (Monument road)

Full of history

Of all the things to be found by the side of LVM forest roads, perhaps the most unique is to be found in northern Latvia just off the main A3 highway between Strenči and Valka. Following the appropriately-named Pieminekļa ceļš (Monument road) for about 1 kilometre will bring you to a smallish monument. Look closely and you'll see that carved into the stone in both Russian and German is testimony to the fact that Russian Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich enjoyed a couple of days' excellent hunting around here on December 16 and 17 in 1882.

The Grand Duke was the guest of local Baltic German landlord Karl Dietrich von Lowenstern whose hunting expeditions and hospitality were much in demand by the upper classes of the Russian Empire.

But that's not the only memorial to be found here – close by is a less happy plaque dedicated to opera singer Rihards Veide who died in a hunting accident nearby in 1964.





## #07 Mollītes stiga (Mollīte trail)

Till the border

How far north can you go on a Latvia's forest road? Find out by visiting the Mollītes stiga forest road! This is the northernmost forest road in the country, located not far from the village of Ipiķi and the end of the road – which has a handy turning around place – is just 300 metres from the Estonian border.

In fact, the absolute northernmost point of Latvia is about 4 kilometres to the east, but it's not on LVM land (or easily accessible).



## #08 Ziedu ceļš (Floral road)

Short, but effective

If you fancy adding the Latvia's forest road at the opposite end of the country to your list, you'll need to head south – 270 kilometres south, to be precise. Down towards the Belarusian and Lithuanian borders, if you look really carefully, you'll find the charmingly-named Ziedu ceļš forest road. It's only 560 metres long and all on its own, but dotted around it are many of the famous "blue lakes" for which Latgale region is justifiably famous.

The "Ezertaka" (Lake trail) long-distance hiking trail passes quite close by.



LVM's rules state that the speed limit for timber carriers and other heavy machinery on forest roads is 30 km/h, while their maximum permitted weight is 52 tonnes. But you won't see actual timber harvesting machinery driving on forest roads. To prevent damage to the roads they are carried in and out of the forest on flatbeds.



## #09 Muižuļu stiga (Muižuļu trail)

Connecting the roads

The transition from the sea to the forest in just a few paces courtesy of the Muižuļu stiga forest road. It starts right by the Baltic Sea where you'll find a large beach-side car park adjacent to the main Rīga-Pārnu Via Baltica route (A1).

But while everyone else heads into the waves, you can carefully cross the road and explore this lengthy forest road which in fact connects to a couple more forest roads (Sila ceļš and Saulīšu stiga) to create a considerable network within the beautiful-smelling seaside pine and spruce forest.

About halfway along Muižuļu stiga, you'll come to a side path which is a 200-metre trail leading to Muižuļu akmens, a large boulder believed to have been an ancient religious site. Surrounded by a guard of spruce trees, the stone itself is 2.3 m high, 7 m long, 5.7 m wide and carved on the side is the date "1913.16 IV". Who carved it and why? No one seems to know, which suggests carving it was a bit of a wasted effort.



## #10 Kuilis-Daudzeva ceļš (Kuilis-Daudzeva road)

Choose some rest

This is one of the longest forest roads in the country at over 7 kilometres, is as straight as an arrow running roughly north-south and is very centrally located, about 80 km east of Rīga. However, if you want to check it out, you're advised to hurry, as much of the surrounding area is due to be incorporated into a large new military training zone and is therefore likely to be off-limits soon.

The army's gain will be hikers' loss, as there are a couple of interesting rest areas along its route. One, called "Pie kuļļa" (By the boar) looks a bit like a sort of crazy bus stop with benches and a fireplace, while towards the southern end of the forest road is the "Vigvams" (Wigwam) rest area with similar facilities – you can probably guess what this one looks like! ▲

### FUN FACT

LVM currently maintains around 12,000 kilometres of forest roads. That's roughly equivalent to the distance from Rīga to Darwin in northern Australia. Stretch!





## Latvia's European Tree of the Year

A few minutes of conversation with a Latvian nature lover will be enough to see that this country has a very special relationship with trees which goes far beyond economic considerations. Ancient trees are venerated and many have the status of national monuments.

There is even a European tree of the year and that honour is currently held by the 'Kaņepju' great oak in Jērcēni parish, Valmiera municipality, which was named the European Tree of the Year for Latvia in December 2023.

It has been included in the list of protected natural monuments since 1977 and in the list of archaeological monuments since 1994. The oak has even survived being struck by lightning, though it made a hollow opening in the middle, with three entrances on the sides. You could combine a visit to the Jērcēni oak with a day exploring the nearby Seda bog, a large nature preserve and peat extraction site operated by LVM and which contains several marked hiking trails as well as opportunities for fishing and bird watching.

## Tree Species of the Year

While walking or driving in the forest in 2024, keep an eye open for a very special type of tree. The Latvia's Society of Dendrologists has selected the shrubby birch (*Betula humilis* Schrank) as the tree species of the year.

The shrubby birch is one of four birch species found in Latvia and does not at all resemble the tall white or silver birch trees one usually associates with this part of the world. The shrubby birch is more common in the eastern and northern parts of Latvia in marshes, wetlands, as well as in damp forests.

The shrubby birch can reach up to 2 meters high – giving it the Latvian name, low birch. It is characterized by steep branches, brown bark, and elongated, slightly leathery leaves with a toothed edge and a rounded end to the leaf. The shrubby birch blooms in May. So if you see one, congratulate it on being the tree of the year!





## Bird of the Year

Listen carefully and you might hear a special sound in 2024: the song of the bird of the year! This year it is the turn of the little tern (*Sternula albifrons*)! This small bird (a fully grown little tern reaches only 21 to 25 centimeters in length and 45 grams in weight) is found relatively rarely in Latvia, due to natural predators and the actions of man. Few eggs hatch each year, says the society, as the nests are endangered by wildlife and especially by humans and dogs going on beach walks. So if you do stumble upon a little tern's nest, leave it well alone.



## Moss of the Year

Did you know that more than 30 different species of moss can be found in the Baltic states? In Latvia, there is even a 'moss of the year' decided by Latvia's Botanical Society and for 2024 it is *Campylopus introflexus*, or the heath star moss.

It originated in the Southern Hemisphere but in the 1940s, heath star moss was introduced to the British Isles and soon spread across Europe, reaching Latvia in 2005. It is considered an invasive species but so far has not caused significant damage in Latvia because it is mostly found in degraded areas. However, botanists will be keeping an eye on it in 2024 to see what impact it has on local flora. You can find out more about mosses at Latvia's Botanical Society's Facebook page "Sūnas Latvijā" (Moss in Latvia).





**Do not litter in the forest!**  
Take out what you bring in!



Campfires may only be lit in **specially designated areas**. Before you leave, make sure the fire is extinguished.



**Respect nature!**



Motor vehicles are not permitted **off the roads**.

*Act responsibly  
when in the forest!*



**Do not drop or leave**  
any lighted match, cigarette  
or anything burning.



**Park your vehicle** so as not to interfere  
with the free movement of forestry  
machinery and other vehicles!



**Keep pets under control** so that  
they do not destroy the natural  
environment or disturb others.



**Do not damage** roads, ditches, or  
educational and recreational  
signs and facilities!



Stay safe – **wear bright and visible clothing**  
when in the forest or on roads, especially in  
low-visibility conditions.



Do not approach areas where you can  
see or hear **hunting taking place**.



**Respect others**, do not disturb,  
annoy or put other visitors at risk.



**When in protected areas**, observe  
additional requirements and restrictions  
to protect the environment.



Heed warning signs; do not approach  
**forest work sites!**

Use **LVM GEO** when  
planning a walk in the  
forest – the app indicates  
roads, recreation areas and  
other natural attractions as  
well as protected areas.  
The app is free of charge.



Forests cover **more than 50%** of Latvia and almost all national and municipal forests  
**are open to the public**. Exceptions include individual protected areas, military zones,  
and private property, all of which are marked as prohibited areas.