

The natural environment of the Świętokrzyski region is highly valued by naturalists and nature lovers. There are still many places with wilderness untouched by man's activities. Some 27.8% of the region's total area is occupied by forests and 60% of the whole territory is protected by law. The most valuable areas constitute a part of Poland's oldest Świętokrzyski National Park or remain under protection of the Świętokrzyski and Ponidziański Landscape Parks. In addition to that, the region contains 70 nature reserves and 647 monuments of nature.

The Świętokrzyski National Park.

It's Poland's second oldest national park, established in 1950 and occupying an area of 19 thousand acres. It encompasses the central part of the Świętokrzyskie Mountains and has taken under protection the highest range known as the Łysogóry as well as a part of the Klonowskie range together with valleys separating both of them.

There are special sections of the Świętokrzyski NP that are under strict protection: Chełmowa Góra, Święty Krzyż, Łysica, Czarny Las and Mokry Bór. The park is home of some 340 lichen species, 190 species of bryophytes

A legend tells us how the Świętokrzyskie Mountains acquired their name. One thousand years ago, King Boleslaw the Brave invited a Hungarian prince Emeryk to Poland. His father, King Stephen (later known as St Stephen), gave Emeryk relics of the Holy Cross to protect him from evil. A great hunt was organized in order to celebrate Emeryk's arrival. During the hunt, the Hungarian prince saw a big stag which got his huge antlers entangled in bushes. Prince Emeryk was just about to let an arrow fly and kill the gorgeous animal, when it turned its head towards him and the prince saw a gleaming cross right between its antlers. He knelt and joined his hands in prayer recognizing the event as a miracle. He promised God to have a monastery built in that place and enshrined in it the relics of the Holy Cross that he brought with him. Prince Emeryk kept his promise. A splendid monastery was built on the top of Mt Łysiec. The relics of the Holy Cross are still there, and the mountains have been called the Świętokrzyskie (Holy Cross) Mountains ever since then.

and 1,000 vascular plants. The floral world is represented by 35 species of trees and the animal wildlife by approximately 4 thousand species. Fir and beech stands prevail on the whole park territory.

The Góra Chełmowa nature reserve (351 meters above sea level) is an isolated forest complex situated in the Pokrzywiańskie range and close to where River Słupianka debouches into River Pokrzywianka; it's found in the north-eastern direction from the main Łysogóry range. Relatively small and on not such a high level, the reserve is considered one of the most valuable natural habitats in the Świętokrzyski NP. One of the reasons is the concentration of Polish larch stands that are found nowhere else in Poland in such great quantity. The Góra Chełmowa nature reserve let us get familiar with and see many plant and animal species. Very rare is the number of ant-heaps (500) found on the reserve area. From the viewing platform on Mt Święty Krzyż enfolds a splendid view over the Góra Chełmowa territory.

The Świętokrzyski NP is annually visited by approximately 200 thousand tourists. Most of them flock towards Święty Krzyż. In addition to the exhibition of the Świętokrzyski NP, there is a viewing platform from which one can see the largest boulder field in the region as well as the Benedictine abbey in which the relics of the Holy Cross are enshrined. The second most visited site in the Świętokrzyski NP is Mt Łysica (612 m), the highest peak of the Świętokrzyskie Mountains. In order to reach the summit one has to follow the Edmund Massalski trail with red markings, starting from Święta Katarzyna.

Exhibition of the Świętokrzyski National Park
Święty Krzyż 1, 26-004 Bieliny, commune Nowa Słupia
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Open: April – October, daily 9am – 6pm,
November – March, daily 9am – 3 pm.

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Świętokrzyskie and Nadnidziańskie Landscape Parks.

The whole complex encompasses 8 landscape parks occupying the total of 296 thousand acres, or 622 thousand acres together with their protection zones. They are situated within the territory of two geographic regions (the Świętokrzyskie Mountains & the Nidziańska Basin), each of them featuring special characteristics of landscape, natural environment, history and culture. Tourists can enjoy many didactic walkways and hiking trails crisscrossing the parks.

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Cisowsko-Orłowski Landscape Park – Power of Nature.

The park encloses the Orłowski, Ociesęckie and Cisowskie ranges as well as the Bardziańskie Hills, occupying the total area of 51 thousand acres. The nature is its greatest attraction, especially its vegetation mantle and forests; naturalists found here the majority of lowland habitats, from dry coniferous forest to alder carr. There are also habitats of peatland plants protected in such nature reserves as the Białe Ługi and Słopiec. The primeval forest characteristics are preserved in the Zamczysko nature reserve, which protects mixed beech forest, and in the Cisów nature reserve with approximately 200 years old stands of fir, beech and oak trees.

As far as the number of plant species is concerned, the Cisowsko-Orłowski Landscape Park is recognized as the most abundant in the whole Świętokrzyski region, even richer than the Świętokrzyski NP. It boasts 54 protected plant species, out of which 44 are under strict protection, among them such rare species as whortle-berry willow, globe flower, sundews and many varieties of orchids.

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Plac Staszica 6, 26-021 Daleszyce
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www.bialelugi.pl

The Jeleniowski Landscape Park – Boulder Fields on the Slopes.

The park covers the Jeleniowski range and the river valleys of Dobruchna and Pokrzywianka; its total surface area is 11,350 acres. Mountain forests and mixed mountain forests with predominance of Carpathian beech stands occupy nearly two thirds of the whole park's territory. A bit different in character is the vegetation mantle growing on the ravine slopes with many Devonian rock outcrops in the vicinity of Grzegorzewice and Skąła villages. Here one finds natural grasses and xerothermic shrubs with many varieties of xerothermic plant species such as hen and chicken house leek, Alpine aster, Siberian bell, yellow everlasting and many others. Similar associations of xerothermic plants are found on karstic soils in the neighborhood of Łągów and Piotrów.

Both the Jeleniowski and the Łysogóry ranges in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains have typical mountainous characteristics. Their distinguishing features are boulder fields (nature reserves) visible on slopes of Mt Jeleniewska and Mt Szczytniak.

The Sieradowicki Landscape Park – Witness of History.

Located between River Kamienna and the Bodzentyńska Valley, the park occupies 30 thousand acres and encompasses the Suchedniowski Plateau and the northern part of the Świętokrzyskie Mountains. Mixed forests with fir and larch prevail. They are home to elk and red deer. Wild bores and roe deer are often encountered, while the crystal pure waters abound in trout and crayfish. The most valuable parts are protected in such nature reserves as the Kamień Michałowski, Wykus and Góra Sieradowska.

The Sieradowicki Landscape Park is known to shelter many important historical events. The Siekierzyńskie woods were a refuge for the January Insurrection (1863) fighters and partisan groups during World War II. Major Jan Piwnik – Ponury, commander of the Home Army (AK) partisan groups chose the woods of the Wykus range for their camping grounds. Close to their encampment is a glade where the January Insurrection combatants commanded by general Marian Langiewicz camped out.

The Suchedniowski-Oblegorski Landscape Park – Primeval Forest and Industrial Heritage.

The western part of the park encloses the Oblegorskie range and its eastern part covers the Suchedniowska Plateau occupying the area of 56 thousand acres. The park's area constitutes an important regional hydrotechnical system and contains heads of such rivers as Krasna, Bobrza and Kamionka. The park's nature reserves include the Świętokrzyska Primeval Forest (Świnia Góra), outstanding examples of Polish larch trees (Dalejów), loessic gorges (Barania Góra), and outcrops and exposures of lower Triassic sandstone (Perzowa Góra, Kręgi Krzemienne). The nature reserve of Górna Krasna protects rare animal species of avifauna.



Bear's garlic



Jeleniowski Range



Herons in the Nadnidziański Landscape Park



Boulder field on Mt Szczytniak



Spring adonis

Forests that occupy 90.8% of the park's area are the greatest wealth of the Suchedniowski-Orłowski Landscape Park. Besides its natural values, the parks offers also a number of industrial heritage attractions. They are represented by former mining and ore smelting facilities. The most interesting are ruins of the blast furnaces in Samsonów and Bobrza as well as the remains of the blast furnace in Kuźniaki.

The Chęciński-Kielecki Landscape Park – Paradise for Geologists.

It's the most recently established landscape park (51,000 acres) located between Łośna and Bobrza Rivers in the south-western part of the Świętokrzyskie Mountains. Its sections of the greatest natural value are protected in such reserves as Jaskinia Raj, Biesak - Białogon, Chelosiowa Jama, Moczydło, Góra Rzepka, Góra Zelejowa, Góra Miedzianka, Wolica, Góra Żakowa, Milechowy, and Karczówka. Interesting are not only its geological features but also its rich floral life including over 1,000 plant species, which equals 50% of species on the national register. Out of 78 species protected by law, 68 were put under strict conservation.



St Rosalie Chapel on Mt Perzowa

Currently protected area was once intensively exploited for mineral resources. Thus, many rare visual aspects of inanimate nature were exposed. On the whole European continent there is no similar place where rocks representing nearly all geological periods are visible on a relatively small area. Covering the periods from Paleozoic to Cenozoic, the park's mineral resources let us review the last 550 million years of our Globe. No wonder the Chęciński-Kielecki Landscape Park is known as the paradise for geologists.

The Nadnidziański Landscape Park – River Nida Meanders in the Gypsum Land.

The park encompasses the central and lower part of the Nida River Valley, Solecka Basin, and the north-western part of the Pińczów Hummock of the total area of 57,000 acres. It protects a wealth of inanimate and animated nature in nine nature reserves: Skowronno, Grabowiec, Pieczyńska, Krzyżanowice, Skorocice, Skotniki Górne, Winiary Zagajskie, Przęślin and Góry Wschodnie. Noteworthy is the gypsum series featuring a unique complex of gypsum karst phenomena and formations.

The Nida River Valley is a characteristic element of the park landscape with its numerous meanders and old riverbeds creating an important ecological corridor as well as a habitat of mud and aquatic birds. Well-sunlit slopes of gypsum and lime hills are occupied by one of Poland's largest community of xerothermic plants. Following are the names of certain rare species: burning bush, *Cardina onopordifolia*, *Dorycnium germanicum*, *Serratula lycopifolia*, *Arabis recta*, *Sesleria uliginosa*, everlasting pea, *Reseda phyteuma*, *Veronica paniculata*, *Veronica praecox*, *Sisymbrium polymorphum*, *Linum hirsutum*, *Stipa capillata* and *Stipa joannis*.

The Szaniecki Landscape Park.

It occupies the central part of the Pińczów Hummock and the south-western fragment of the Połaniec Basin (Szaniecki Plateau) covering an area of 27,000 acres. The main objective of the Szaniecki Landscape Park is to protect picturesque lime and gypsum hills as well as stenothermal communities of xerothermic, peatland and halophilous vegetation growing over large meadows and fields. There is only one nature reserve in the park (Owczary), and it is home to natural inland community of halophyte plants.

Very characteristic are the outcrops of gypsum, especially of the multi-crystal gypsum formations found mainly on the Szaniecki Plateau in the environs of Szaniec, Gortatowice, Stawiany and Sędziejowice. Diversified forms of surface and underground karst such as sinkholes, valleys and caves are the result of karstic processes developing on the gypsum bedrock.

The Kozubowski Landscape Park

The park encloses the southern part of the Wodzisław Hummock and stretches over an area of 16,000 acres. Its territory is mostly covered by forests growing on the slopes of loessic elevations divided by gorges, ravines and canyons. The southern and south-western treeless slopes are occupied by stenothermal communities of xerothermic grasses. Among the endangered species the most noteworthy is the ground cherry, purple orchid, *Linum hirsutum*, and yellow ladies' slipper. The Polana Polichno reserve is home to the sole Poland's community of *Lathyrus pannonicus* and to stag beetle, Poland's biggest beetle species.

Once upon a time on the territory of the present-day Kozubowski Landscape Park stood the stronghold of Stradów, the biggest and the most powerful early medieval fortress that had been ever built on the Polish land. The castle proper called Zamczysko (3.7 acres) was surrounded by three boroughs: Waliki, Mieścisko and Barzyńskie (61 acres). The existence of the stronghold is often ascribed to the state of the Vistulans – people who lived in the Vistula River valley.

Legendary Oak Bartek.

The legendary oak Bartek is undoubtedly the most famous and admired monument of nature in Poland. Still at the beginning of the last century Bartek was believed to be about 1200-year-old, but



Stronghold in Stradów



Oak Bartek

the recent tests put its age at around 700 years. Standing in the village of Bartków near Zagnańsk, Bartek (30m tall, 10m girth, 3m diameter) spreads its eight main branches out to 20-40 meters. In 1906, the old tree suffered from fire consuming the nearby houses, and in 1920 its cavity was treated with concrete fillings replaced by more sophisticated materials in 1978. It was struck by a lightning in 1991, and its weakened branches had to be provided with special supporting structures. Next to it stands Bartek's son – a young oak planted during the celebrations of Poland's millennium.

www.zagnansk.pl

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ŚWIĘTOKRZYSKI REGION



NATURAL RESOURCES