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Research of Sacred Sites in Estonia

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**CENTRAL BALTIC
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lida cavities in Juuru Parish is an ancient sacred site and hideout

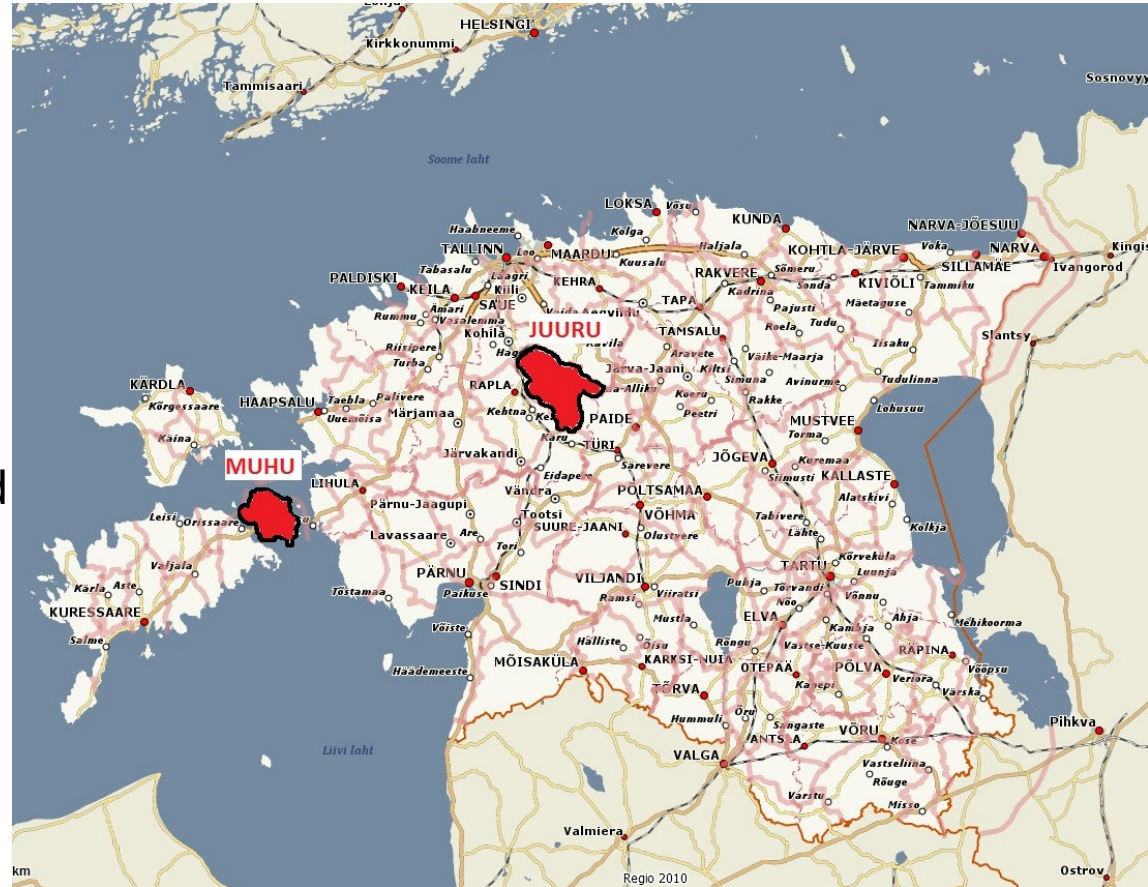
Research Area & Objects

Juuru and Muhu Parishes

676 km², 86 villages

Historic natural sacred sites of Estonia

In addition: cup-marked stones and sites related to mythical beings



Out of 102 Estonian parishes, Juuru ja Muhu were chosen as research area because there is enough pre-knowledge about sacred sites there to start research

Sites

- Stones: 48 (30 cup-marked stones, 7 healing stones, 7 cult stones, 3 stones connected to mythical beings and 1 connected to a special ritual)
- Sacred groves: 15
- Hills: 4 (sacred – 3, mythical being 1)
- Springs: 9
- Other: 2



Most sites researched so far are cup-marked stones. There is no information about the reason for making the marks ca 1,500 – 3,000 years ago. During the Soviet period it was assumed that they were used as cult stones.

Folklore

- Carried out mostly 2005-2008 in Muhu, 2009 in Juuru.
- Ca 300 hours of recorded folk tales
- Additional work:
- Healing on stones and in springs
- Mythical beings (*Vanapagan*, *kratt*, witches etc.)
- Toponyms (sacred, grove etc.)



A local person showing the former location of the Inglise Village healing stone to researchers, and talking about what and how was healed there.

Sensitive Sites

- 23 of the researched sites are extremely sensitive
- Not under natural nor heritage protection
- Endangered by treasure hunters
- Endangered species
- Plants and soil do not tolerate walking on them
- Rituals carried out in sites still in active use cannot be observed by strangers



Kadja healing springs is located in a marsh and its surroundings does not tolerate walking. As it is not under protection, it is especially endangered by treasure hunters.

Sites Already Opened for Tourism

- 12 sites have already been opened for tourism
- There are:
- Signs - 6
- Information stands - 6
- Parking lots - 4
- These sites have been included in local or national tourism routes.



Kallaste Eye Spring is one of the most well-known tourism destinations in Muhu.

Sites Suitable for Tourism

- Out of the researched sites - 48
- Suitable for hikers and single visitors mostly
- Tolerate up to moderate load mostly



Ancient Juuru sacred grove oaks are special because of their age and their size, they are easily viewable and accessible because they are located between a field and a village. As such, they are well suitable for opening to public.

Attractiveness & Accessibility

- Most sites are located on private property accessible during day-time only
- Most sites are situated on fields with a small path leading to them
- Most sites are not attractive to the public. E.g. some cup-marked stones have only 1 barely visible mark.
- ~ 10% of sites are beautiful or interesting from the outside
- Attractiveness of the others lies in meaning



Sacred Grove Hill in Mahtra Village is a bare hill in the middle of a pasture and carries a special meaning for the followers of historic traditions mostly.

Fascinating: Räsä lōkits

- A fire changing its size
- Moving or still
- At sea and on shore
- Many recordings from the 20th century
- Mysterious, enigmatic, somewhat dangerous



*Räsä Lōkits often appears as fire above water.
The photo has been designed according to descriptions.*

Fascinating: Järlepa crossroad

- Witchcraft
- Healing
- Making a *kratt*
- Public place
- Unexpected



Mysterious things have been done on this crossroad

Fascinating: Lalli Sliding Stone

- Sliding makes a person, his/her herd and field fertile
- Women go there secretly
- Playground for children
- Possibility to step into action



Children like to slide down from the Lalli Sliding Stone

Obstacles

- Some sites have perished or are hard to find – 17
- Difficult landscape – marsh, trees fallen down, young dense forest
- Other obstacles – unfriendly land owners, loose dogs
- Local people do not remember the locations of sites anymore



In order to reach this sacred spring one has to walk for an hour through forests and marshes.

Sad

- Many sacred sites in bad condition
- Reasons:
 - Lack of awareness
 - Soil improvement
 - Agriculture
 - Construction
 - Theft
 - Religious/ ideological hatred



During the Soviet time soil was improved in the sacred grove and the Sacred Spring was led into a concrete tube. Now, young unhealthy (cough, skin in bad condition) cattle are wondering around the site – an obvious sign that a sacred site is not suitable for a pasture.

Makes Us Happy

- Collaboration with historians and folklorists
- Volunteer helpers
- Helpful locals
- Unexpected findings



Around the sliding stone of Hõreda Village in Juuru Parish there was a dark green circle of grass. Enigmatic.

Thank you for your attention!

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Sacred Grove Stone in Juuru Parish by the Atla River