



# DEFENSIVE HERITAGE



## IN THE LAZDIJAI REGION



### Defensive heritage in the Lazdijai region

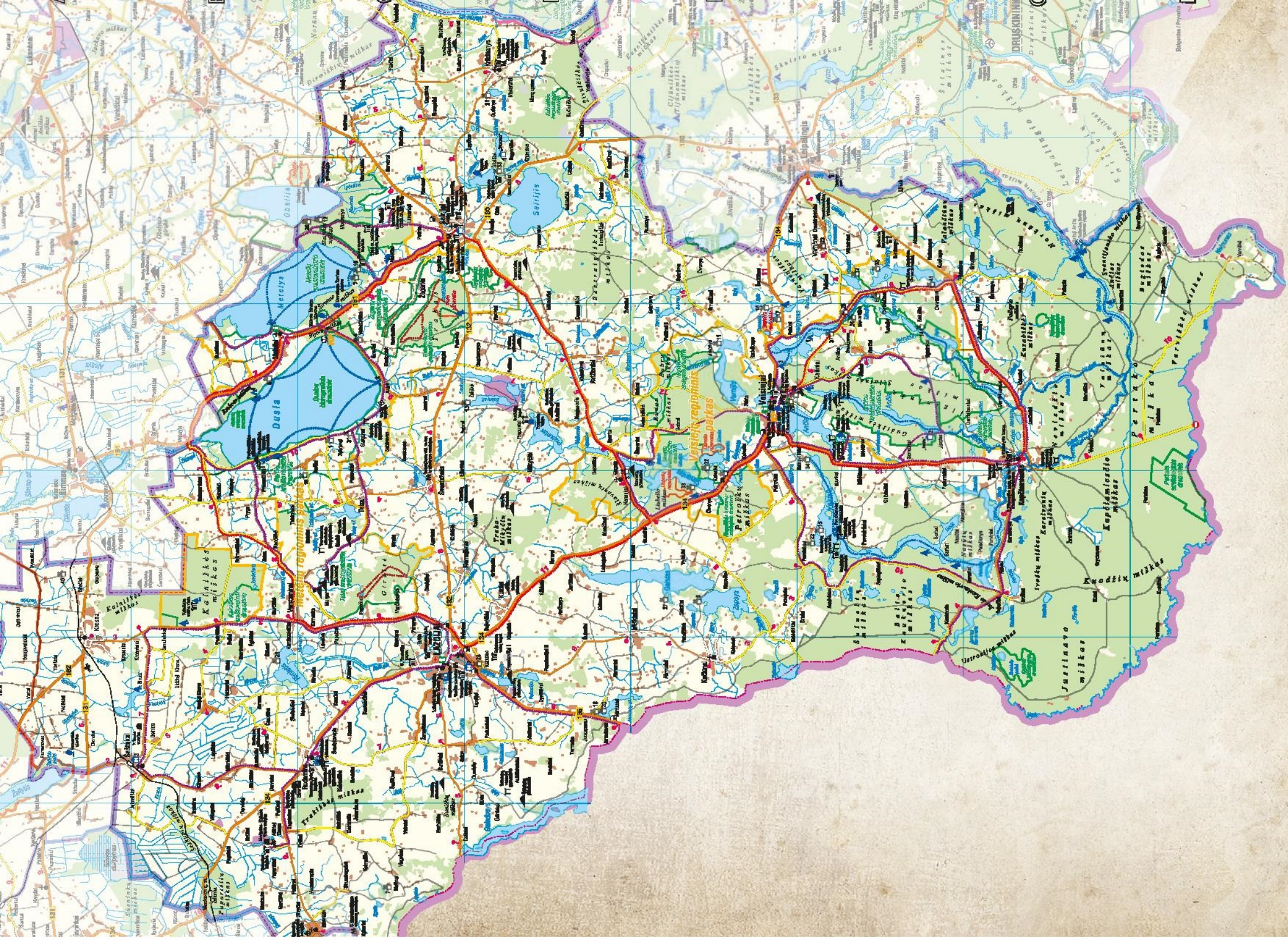
Defensive heritage monuments are one of the most impressive types of cultural heritage monuments in Lithuania. Hill fort mounds, hill forts, brick castles, defensive city walls, tsarist fortifications, Soviet-era military bases, defensive installations from Lithuania's period of independence and its armed resistance, and the Seimas' blockades all reflect the entire region's history<sup>1</sup>.

The defensive heritage sites remaining in the Lazdijai region include hill fort mounds and outdoor fortification structures.



<sup>1</sup>Material from the State Monument Preservation Commission and the Academy of Cultural Heritage's Defensive Heritage in Lithuania international conference; 26 September 2003, Kaunas









## **Lazdijai regional hill fort mounds**

The Lazdijai region, like the formation of the rest of Lithuania's land surface area, was greatly affected by the glaciers, which finished melting in about 16,000-17,000 B.C. As the glaciers melted, lakes and river valleys formed. As dry land area grew, tundra vegetation expanded, animals accustomed to colder climates moved in from the south, and many different types of birds began arriving in the summer. Groups of people who had hunted northern elk in already inhabited areas further to the south and west wandered into the area. Over time, they settled these areas as well.

During that time, husbandry and agriculture grew more and more economically important and inhabitants began quarrelling over the most convenient agricultural areas. They also had to protect their communities' wealth – their herds and their harvests. Therefore, at the end of the Bronze Age, fortified homesteads began to form in difficult-to-access areas on lake and river banks. The tops of these hills were surrounded by double fences, and long, pole-framed structures were built inside these enclosures. These structures were separated into small cells or small square houses with dirt floors and fireplaces. Animals would be herded into the yards inside of the enclosures. This led to the rise of hill forts as a new type of settlement. Hill fort mounds' slopes were levelled or piled up to form higher mounds. Even well-organised armies found it difficult to overcome such fortifications<sup>2</sup>.

There are 22 hill fort mounds in the Lazdijai district: Buniškiai, Buteliūnai, Druskininkėliai, Elveriškės, Ežerėlis, Giraitė, Krikštoniai, Kukliai, Maišymai, Mikyčiai, Paliūnai, Papalazdijai, Paserninkai, Paveisininkai, Prelomčiškės, Rudamina, Šlavantai, Ūdininkai, and Verstaminai 1, 2 and 3. The Rudamina, Prelomčiškės and Paveisininkai mounds are the most popular hill fort mounds and are frequently visited by tourists.



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<sup>2</sup>Text by Lazdijai M. Gustaičio high school geography teacher and guide J. Malinauskas.



# Rudamina -

## the largest hill fort mound in the Lazdijai region



The Rudamina hill fort mound, with its ancient settlement, is one of the most famous monuments to the former Yotvingian inhabitants of the Užnemunė region. The mound has an area of 22.8 ha. It was built on the bank of a former lake on the top of a high hill, occupying 2 ha and rising to 195 m above sea level. The hill is surrounded by meadows and swamps, and the eastern and northern sides at the foot of the hill are especially swampy. The hill fort was built in an especially secure location well protected by natural obstacles. The hill is crowned by an oval area about 80 m long from north to south and 60m wide that is surrounded by an embankment on all sides. From inside the flat space, this embankment is only between 1.25 m and 3 m high. From outside, however, the embankment is between 5 m and 8 m high, blending in with the hill's slope and making it seem especially tall and steep. Many shards of hand-moulded pottery with smooth or rough edges were found at the foot of the hill fort mound along with thrown pottery and other finds. Therefore, in 1965, archaeologists from the former Lithuanian SSR Academy of Sciences and Vilnius State V. Kapsukas University began investigating the area. An expedition led by R. Kulikauskienė and P. Kulikauskas excavated a 220 m<sup>2</sup> plot on the top of the mound. They encountered a cultural layer with shards of hand-moulded and thrown pottery, animal bones and other finds. They also found the remains of former fireplaces with the remains of burned grains next to them. They determined that the people who had lived in this hill fort had grown not just millet, oats, wheat and barley, but peas and beans as well. The materials and metallurgical tools they found showed that iron tools were both made and used at the hill fort. The handiwork of the craftsmen of the time could also be found in the silvered copper eyed brooch found on the site, which had been broken and repaired.

After taking a cross-section of the embankment, the archaeologists identified 4 stages over which it had been formed. Rocks, logs and clay had been used for the embankment. The researchers determined that the Rudamina hill fort had existed at least since the beginning of the 1st millennium. At the turn of the millennium, it was rebuilt to increase the size of the flat area at the top. The slopes were paved with stones, the embankment was raised, and



defensive walls might have been built as well. The hill fort became a formidable fortification to defend itself from crusaders.

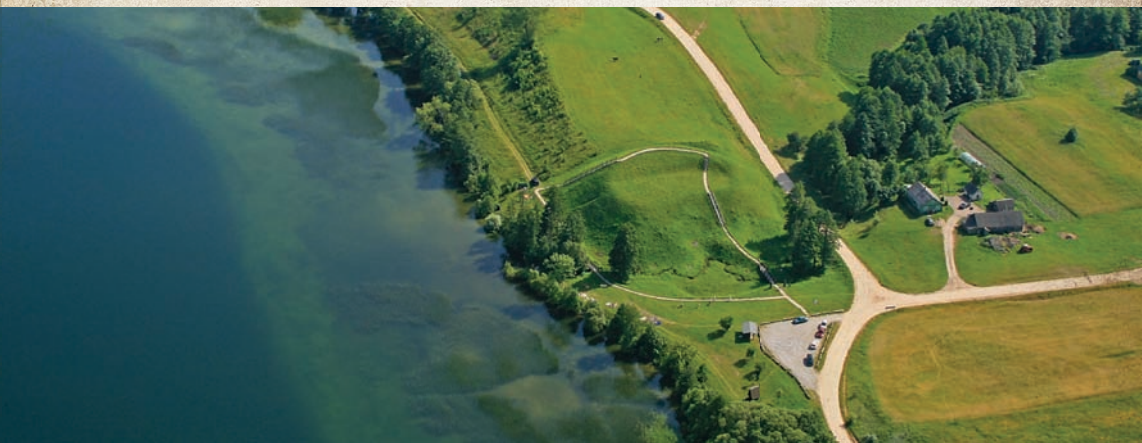
The arrowheads found at the embankment bear witness to their assaults. The fort standing on this mound was burned down by enemies on numerous occasions. The fort that had stood here was last inhabited by the Yotvingians between the X and XIII centuries.

Many older historians, like T. Narbutas, later followed by J. Basanavičius, J. Totoraitis and others, claimed that duke Ringaudas built Rudamina hill fort on this mound in 1240 and that Mindaugas had been crowned king of Lithuania at this location. This fort was destroyed in 1381 by crusaders who used a new weapon for the first time during their assault – gunpowder bombards. In addition, J. Basanavičius associated the Rudamina hill fort mound with another fort as well – Naujapilis, which had been mentioned in Vygandas Marburgietis' chronicles.

There are two more hill fort mounds just a couple of kilometres away from the Rudamina mound. To the north-west lies the Elveriškės mound, also known as Eglynkalnis. To the north of the Rudamina mound lies the Gumbeliai-Maišymai mound. Both the Elveriškės and the Gumbeliai-Maišymai mounds are much smaller and much less fortified than the Rudamina mound, but it is believed that they all formed a single defensive system. The Elveriškės and Gumbelių-Maišymų hill forts, raised at the end of the first millennium, were forward fortifications for the Rudamina hill fort.

The hill fort mound has been tidied up and prepared for tourism. A pedestrian path called the Yotvingian Path has been laid from the mound to the Blessed Trinity church. Every year, the Lazdijai Cultural Centre hosts a celebration of King Mindaugas' coronation day on the mound.

## Yotvingian legacy – The Prelomčiškės hill fort mound<sup>3</sup>



On the western shore of lake Dusia, barely 20 m from the water, stands one of the largest hill fort mounds in Meteliai Regional Park. The steep slopes of the mound, which rise at an angle of 60-70 degrees to a height of 12 m, terminate with an open area at the top

<sup>3</sup>From a publication released by the Meteliai regional park's directorate – Aplink Didžiųjų Dūkijos Ežerų





that's almost 40 m wide. A nameless spring creek that dries up in the summer flows for less than half a kilometre from the mound's northern side. The remains of an old public road can be seen between the lake and the mound. <...>

Archaeologists who surveyed the Prelomčiškės hill fort mound's territory found the remains of settlements and shards of pottery with ornamentation characteristic of the Yotvingian culture in a several-hectare area surrounding the mound. The mound itself was determined to date back to the first millennium and to the XIII century. <...>

The remains of a XVI-XVIII century manor can be found near the mound on the right bank of the creek near the residential homestead. Fragments of ornamented tiles and shards of glass and thrown pottery can still be found in the cultural layer to this day. The remains of numerous manors and even older settlements, which could have been home to the Yotvingians and their descendants, can be found near lake Dusia. This land became part of Lithuania after the Treaty of Mellno was signed with the Teutonic order in 1422. <...>

Older residents of the Padusio and Prelomčiškės villages still believe in a legend about the appearance of the beautiful mound next to lake Dusia. Once upon a time, a large manor stood nearby that employed a beautiful girl. Rumours of her beauty spread throughout the surrounding region. Many young suitors came to ask for her hand in marriage but she refused them all. The rumour reached the devil himself, who lived in a part of lake Dusia





## Prelomčiškės hill fort mound

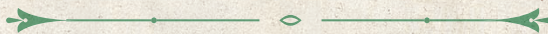




called Pekla. He transformed into an elegant young man and asked for the young woman's hand in marriage, who agreed to wed him under one condition – he would have two days to raise a beautiful mound on which they could dance their wedding dance. After one night, the majority of the mound had been piled up. The girl began to suspect that she had made a deal with the devil himself. She decided not to tempt fate, grabbed a young rooster by the wing and ran to the lake. Hidden in a stand of trees, she awaited the night to see how her betrothed was working on his task. She saw him emerge from the water and continue his work with his helpers. Right before dawn, before the sun had risen, the impatient rooster sang out and the devil with his helpers sank right through the lake. People call that place the Devil's Pit and say it's bottomless. The hill remained, however, unfinished.

The hill fort mound has been tidied up and prepared for tourists. Because of the beautiful panorama presented by the mound, it is a very popular location among tourists and residents of the Lazdijai area. On the shore of lake Dusia near the Prelomčiškės mound, the Lazdijai Cultural Centre organises a traditional Ann name day celebration every year.

## Paveisininkai hill fort mound on the shore of lake Veisiejas



The Paveisininkai hill fort mound and its ancient settlement are located on the top of a separate hill located on the peninsula on lake Veisiejas. The hill is surrounded by the lake and a swamp. The mound's slopes are steep up to a height of 20 m and were made even steeper for a further 4-5 m. A small square, 30 m long and 25 m wide with a 1-3m-high embankment surrounding it, crowns the mound. During archaeological excavations, it was determined that the hill, before the mound and hill fort had been installed, had been a crematory grave site. 27 graves were found there. The hill fort was twice fortified by embankments that were reinforced with stones and logs. In addition, two moats were dug out at the foot of the mound that separated it from the nearby elevated area. The remains of ancient settlements were found at the foot of the mound to its north and east. During the archaeological excavations, archaeologists found fireplaces, pole foundations, the remains of agricultural pits, and shards of rough pottery. The items found on the mound and in the nearby settlement were dated back to the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. The Paveisininkai hill fort mound and its settlement occupy an area of 3.6 ha.

Earlier on, it had only been possible to visit the mound from the lake Veisiejas side with a row boat or kayak. Now, the mound has been tidied up and prepared for tourists. A wooden path has been laid through the swamp to reach the mound.





## Partisan structures

A partisan war of the scale and duration of that which occurred in Lithuania between 1944 and 1953 is rare throughout world history. A small, primarily unsupported and unaided nation maintained a decade-long organised resistance against a powerful totalitarian state. Lithuanian partisan structures can be separated into the following categories: forest camps, bunkers and hideouts.<sup>4</sup>

The Dainava district encompassed the modern-day Alytus, Lazdijai and Varėna regions and the edges of the Marijampolė, Prienai, Trakai and Šalčininkai regions – or almost all of Dzūkija. As in the rest of Lithuania, it was only after the front passed in the early autumn of 1944 that men prepared to fight the second Soviet occupation and began to gather in the forests of Dzūkija. Their companies were led by former Lithuanian military officers, paramilitaries, riflemen, teachers – anyone who commanded some degree of authority within society.<sup>5</sup>

According to accounts by freedom fight participant Gediminas Karauskas (his father, Juozas Karauskas, had been a partisan liaison), the Lazdijai region contained many Dainava partisan bunkers and hideouts. Their primary deployment areas were the current elderships of Krosna, Šeštokai, Būdvietis, Lazdijai, Teiziai, Šventėžeris and Seirijai. The freedom fight participant remembers that there were about 5 bunkers in the Kalniškės forest and Miškiniai village and 2 bunkers in the Bestraigiškės village near the Rudamina settlement in the Giraitė forest, where 5 partisans were shot in an encounter with the NKVD. The former freedom fight participant knew of the following hideouts: in an agricultural building on Juozas Karauskas' homestead, at the Vaitkevičius homestead in the village of Mikniškės, at the Urmanavičius homestead in Naujoji Kirsna, and at the Janulevičius homestead in the village of Delnica. There was a campsite in Kalniškės forest that was home to about 120 partisans. This campsite was the site of the great Kalniškės battle (16 May 1945). Today, the site of the battle has been prepared to receive tourists and the Lazdijai Cultural Centre holds an annual event at the location to commemorate the anniversary of the battle.



<sup>4</sup>Material from the State Monument Preservation Commission and Cultural Heritage Academy's Defensive Heritage in Lithuania international conference; 26 September 2003, Kaunas.

<sup>5</sup>Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, "Už laisvę ir tėvynę"; 2004.





# Field fortifications in the Lazdijai region

Fortified structures are usually separated into stable or long-lasting structures and temporary field structures. Field fortification structures have a few differences from stable structures: their construction times, the materials used and their designs all differ. Field fortifications are often built during military operations using materials that are available in a location where combat is under way or is expected to occur. The structures themselves are rarely very complex and involve simple construction elements <...>.<sup>6</sup>

Some noteworthy field fortification installations include the early modern-period (mid XVI century – mid XIX century) Vainežeris historical defensive fortification, also known as the Okopka, and several WWII-era bunkers.

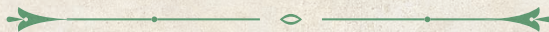


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<sup>6</sup>Material from the State Monument Preservation Commission and Cultural Heritage Academy's Defensive Heritage in Lithuania international conference; 26 September 2003, Kaunas.



# Vainežeris historical defensive fortification, also known as the Okopka



Experiences from the war in the Netherlands prompted the development of field fortifications. There, castles were strengthened using various fortifications and fortress garrisons were blockaded by surrounding them with inward-facing siege lines (circumvallations) and external lines (contravallations). These lines included various fortified structures: redoubts, redans, hornworks, crownworks and other structures that were built using earth and wood. In Lithuania, field fortifications were not used as frequently – the region had a lower population, less finances were used, and the objects being defended weren't as important – with the exception of the fortifications in Smolensk and Riga. Fortified camps form the largest group of field fortification structures that have survived from or were built during this time period<sup>7</sup>. These primarily include various trenches and oval or rectangular squares surrounded by earthworks, which in rare cases were designed for flank defence. There are several such fortifications in Lithuania – Belvederis in the Jurbarkas region, 1.5 km from Serežius, Volai (Biliūnai), 1.25 km from the Kaunas – Klaipėda highway near the Biliūnai manor, Vainežeris in the Lazdijai region at the southern corner of lake Ančia in Veisiejai Regional Park, and Mirabelis in the Kupiškis region, 5 km to the south-east of Kupiškis in Mirabelis village.<sup>8</sup>

The historical defensive fortification at Vainežeris, which the local people call the Okopka, consists of fortified installations from the XVII-XVIII centuries that were often referred to as “šančiai.” The hill fort can be found on the south shore of lake Ančia. The mound is surrounded by the lake on the north and east and a meadow from the south and west. The Okopka is an oval-shaped flat area surrounded by 6 m-high and 8-15 m-wide sloped embankments. The square surrounded by the embankments is more than 60 m long and 40 m wide. There is a pit of up to 3 m in depth in the square's larger area and one of up to 5 m in depth in the square's eastern end. The embankment and the square are overgrown with large trees. During Lithuania's bourgeoisie period, scouts excavated a rectangular foundation made of red bricks. A local landowner took apart the foundations and used the bricks for their own construction. The bricks were hand-made and not of any standard size. Local resident Bolesius Grabauskas, who was born in 1892, explained that, in 1812, the location had been home to a French entrenchment called the Okopai, which is why the location is called Okopkos Hill. He also said that, in 1863, rebels used the location as a hideout, though they retreated to the forests of Ilgininkai as the tsar's army approached. The Vainežeris Manor Park can be found near the Vainežeris defensive fortifications. Together, these objects form a contiguous complex of tourist attractions.

The Vainežeris Manor Park consists of a body of valuable cultural and natural elements: a manor site with 700 years of history (from the XVI to the beginning of the XX centuries) and a 100-year-old park.

The Vainežeris manor's managers have included V. Kapočius, M. Oginskis, J. Masalskis, M. Žinevas, I. Tiškevičius, I. Ablamavičius and his dynasty, and E. Murauskas. The main Vainežeris manor building was built in the XVIII century. A park and gardens

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<sup>7</sup>(mid XVI century – mid XIX century)

<sup>8</sup>Material from the State Monument Preservation Commission and Cultural Heritage Academy's Defensive Heritage in Lithuania international conference; 26 September 2003, Kaunas





were grown nearby. In that same century, people began referring to the manor as Justinavas. After WWI, it was once again referred to as Vainežeris manor. None of the manor's buildings have survived to this day. Parts of the territory have been included in the Republic's list of explanatory monuments for cultural objects. Vainežeris park is split in half by lake Vainežeris. The entire park's area is about 10 ha.<sup>9</sup>

The park, which was planted by people more than 200 years ago and was left to nature for about 60 years, still delights visitors to this day and reminds them of Emilija Pliaterytė.<sup>10</sup> Emilija Pliaterytė, a captain leading the 1st company of the infantry regiment, a countess, a participant of the 1831 uprising and a Lithuanian Joan D' Arc, died at the Justinavas manor. The deceased's remains were secretly transported by row-boat from the manor along lake Ančia and the Baltoji Ančia river to the church in Kapčiamiestis. Her funeral service was performed at night in secret in a closed church and she was buried in the Kapčiamiestis graveyard. Both the Vainežeris Manor Park and Kapčiamiestis currently have monuments erected to Emilija Pliaterytė, a hero of the 1831 uprising in Lithuania.

The Vainežeris defensive fortification, known as the Okopka, and the Vainežeris Manor Park are both suitable for tourism. This is one of the most popular and frequently visited tourist locations.



<sup>9</sup> The Vainežeris brochure published by the Veisiejai Regional Park Directorate.

<sup>10</sup> Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.



# Bunkers – xx century fortifications



A bunker is a defensive underground military fortification. Bunkers are a type of fortification from the XX century. They were usually built of reinforced concrete.

During WWII, the Soviet Union began to build its fortified Molotov line. This line ran through the annexed territories of Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Poland.

The defensive line was poorly designed and installed hastily. Out of more than 1,500 casemates planned in Lithuanian territory, only 101 were ever constructed. In many of them, only concrete work had been completed, and none of them were fully equipped for defensive action. This is why the Molotov line failed to withstand the Wehrmacht's sudden assault and was broken in just a few days.<sup>11</sup>

Today, the Lazdijai regional municipality includes about 41 bunkers. Most of them are located in the Kapčiamieštis eldership, which includes about 19 bunkers. Other locations



include the Lazdijai eldership with 10 bunkers, Būdviētis with 5 bunkers, Kučiūnai with 4 bunkers, the Lazdijai city eldership with 2 bunkers and the Veisiejai eldership with 1 bunker. These bunkers have received a great deal of attention from both tourists and local residents. None of them have been prepared for tourism and most of them are located on private land.

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<sup>11</sup>Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.







Field fortifications – bunker





# VAINEŽERIO PARKO IR GYNYBINIŲ ĮTVIRTINIMŲ SCHEMA







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