

BEAR'S PATH (KARHUNPOLKU) HIKING TRAIL

Bear's Path hiking trail is located in the small town of Lieksa, Finnish Karelia, near the Russian border. It is part of the extensive Karelian Circular Trek, a thousand kilometre-long route network for outdoor activities. Parts of it follow the banks of canoeing routes, the Ruunaa Rapids and the River Jongunjoki. This makes it possible for you to canoe part of the trail. The trail can be walked, bicycled or skied either partly or entirely – in either direction. On the route you can meet canoeists, hikers, bikers, horse-back riders, cross-country skiers, sleddog teams and snowmobile drivers. Remember to respect the rights of your fellow trekkers!

Length

The trail is 133 km long and connected to several other trails: Wolf trail (Susitaival), 90 km; Nature paths of Patvinsuo National Park; Tour of Lake Pitkäjärvi; Tour of the Ruunaa Rapids; The old church road in the village of Nurmijärvi and the paths round Änäkäinen II World War battle fields. From Rapid Aittokoski there is a connecting path to the Tour of Lake Mujejärvi and the recreational fishing area of Saramo located in the town of Nurmes.

Route

The trail runs along paths of varying quality, duckboards and forest roads. You should take into account that most of the trail runs through uninhabited wilderness areas.

Marks

The trail is marked with orange spots on tree trunks.

Accommodation

There are several lean-to forest shelters, wilderness cabins and tourist accommodation services along the trail. A tent is not necessary.

Campfire

Campfire may be built only in special sites marked for this purpose. Please, use firewood sparingly. If there is no firewood left in the storeroom, use only wood lying on the ground. **Remember that a real camper does not rip off bark from birch trunks for kindling.**

Food

You can replenish your supplies in Ruunaa Hiking Area.

Water

Water in the area's natural water bodies is drinkable as such. However, do not use standing water near the water's edge or that in puddles.

Equipment

Take sturdy hiking boots or wellington boots with you because of some damp places. Otherwise you have to take off your shoes for some crossings. Pack along enough warm clothes. Those made of natural materials are the best. During a period of forest fire warning (metsäpalovaroitus), you need a camp cooker. Remember to take matches and an axe with you. Carrying along some kindling may also prove worthwhile. Do not fill your backpack with unnecessary plastic waste. Remember to pack basic first aid equipment and an insect repellent. A compass is not essential for this route. GSM mobile phones work considerably well along the route.

Fishing

You can fish with hook and line in lakes and ponds, where it has not been specifically prohibited. For other types of fishing those over 18 years of age need a national fishing licence and a permission from the holder of the waters. Those under 18 years of age need only the permission of the holder of the waters. Along the trail you need mainly a national lure fishing permit issued by the Finnish Forest and Park Service, or that of Eastern Finland. Ruunaa and Änäkäinen are exceptions: for these areas you need a special fishing permit issued by the Service www.kalastusluvut.net

Time

Reserve enough time for the hike. Admiring beautiful landscapes and examining sights takes time. Along the trail there are restored battlefields, fisheries, an Information Centre and tourist attractions, which can only be reached by turning off the path. Allow 6 – 8 days for the entire hike.

By mountain bike

Driving mountain bike is prohibited along the paths of Patvinsuo National Park. Pass the Park along a sand road and enjoy the scenery by foot. Otherwise you can drive your bike along freely with the exceptions mentioned in the route description. Drive carefully to save the delicate nature. Please, wheel your bike steep uphill.

By ski

Bear's Path suits cross-country skiing fairly well. Use special skis designed for deep snow. Make use of ponds and swamps beside the path and ski along them. Parts of Bear's Path are used for snowmobile tours during wintertime, which makes skiing along the snowmobile tracks easy. However, remember to watch out for the actual users of the tracks, i.e. snowmobile drivers.

If you encounter a bear...

... it usually takes to its heels. If not – keep still.

BEAR'S PATH ROUTE DESCRIPTION from Patvinsuo National Park:

0 km Spend a whole day at Patvinsuo National Park. Walk the Tour of Lake Suomujärvi, climb the bird watching tower, and enjoy a lakeside sauna bath at the Information Centre. Dormitory accommodation at the Centre (9 beds, possibility for cooking). See the nature exhibition of Patvinsuo National Park. Canoes and boats hired, the Finnish Forest and Park Service.

3 km Kurkilahti, campfire site, beach for swimming (2.8 km from Information Centre). The trail runs through beautiful old pinewoods. Mountain bikers: keep to the sand roads.

14.8 km Campfire site at Kangas-Piilo. The route runs along duckboards.

16.8 km Lean-to forest shelter at Ahokoski.

21.3 km Campfire site at Hukkalampi. Hilly scenery.

23.7 km Lean-to forest shelter at Kirkisensalmi.

25.8 km Wilderness cabin at Lake Pitkäjärvi, about 20 beds, sauna. Marked trail round Lake Pitkäjärvi. Magnificent hilly scenery and a lean-to forest shelter in a wonderful spot right behind Kirkisensalmi.

28.5 km Restored battlefield at Lake Valkealampi. Campfire site, restored dug-outs (closed, danger of the collapse) and tank barriers. The trail runs partly along a narrow road.

29.5 km Path leading to Loma-Kitsi (7.8 km). Twenty beds, rental cabins, sauna bath and meals available. Mountain bikers: continue either via Vilponkangas and Pitkäkangas along a forest road or take the Heinävaara road, along which there is an interesting forest fire area.

30.5 km Campfire site at Lake Kaatiinlampi. Beautiful hilly scenery, bridges over log chutes, forestry work performed in the area.

36.1 km Campfire site and a lean-to shelter by the River Särkkäjoki. The route runs first along a road and then on top of the magnificent ridge of Särkkäjoki.

41.6 km The route descends the ridge, crosses a road and a gravel pit and runs then towards Ruunaa Hiking Area. The trail runs briefly along a village road before descending to the shore of Itkiinpohja and Lake Ruunaanjärvi situated in Ruunaa nature conservation area. Duckboards along the shore. (Mountain bikers: follow the old route that runs along the road.)

49.3 km Campfire site at Rantakangas.

51.8 km Campfire site at Marinkangas.

55.3 km Suspension bridge at Rapid Haapavitja and lean-to shelters on both banks of the river. Here you can hop into a rapids shooting boat, if you have booked the tour in advance.

56.0 km A lean-to shelter at Rapid Haapavitja II.

61.0 km Neitikoski Hiking Centre. Vending machine for fishing permits,

restaurant, kiosk, rental cabins and sauna. The surging Rapid Neitikoski is fascinating to watch. The route continues along duckboards and paths, watch out for some damp places.

64.6 km Path leading to Ruunaan Matkailu (4.5 km). Rooms and rental cabins, restaurant and sauna.

68.8 km River Naarajoki, Ruunaa Nature Centre.

Cafeteria Ruunaan Tupa. On the other side of the bank there is the farmhouse of Sillankorva, where accommodation in a renovated farmhouse and two outbuildings, sauna. The trail has been rerouted up to the next campfire site. Mountain bikers: follow the old route along the road.

73.8 km Lean-to forest shelter at Niskalahti. A tough climb to the top of the hill is rewarded by a magnificent stretch of ridges.

83.3 km Lean-to forest shelter by Lake Piilonen.

88.3 km Path leading to Eräkeskus (accommodation) Mountain bikers: turn off the road at the cabin of Koskilampi to a road leading to Kivivaara and Änäkäinen.

92.3 km Campfire site at the shore of pond Jynkkälampi. Hilly scenery.

95.5 km Path leading to Jongunjoen Matkailu Inn & Cottage, where restaurant, rooms and sauna. => Old church road. + 358 (0) 400 949 215

97.5 km Änäkäinen, restored II World War battlefield. Trenches, a dug-out (500m from the parking lot, on the left), tank barriers and a large cave with three levels. Torch required. Take small candles with you and lit them around the cave. Try the cave's magnificent echo by singing.

You can spend a night at the uppermost level of the cave or in a dug-out. At Änäkäinen there is also a fishery maintained by the Finnish Forest and Park Service. Boats hired. Fetch keys from Annukka's cafeteria. There is a lean-to shelter at the end of Lake Saarijärvi and a permanent wooden Lapp-style hut at the isthmus of Lake Änäkäinen and Lake Saarijärvi. Spend at least three hours at Änäkäinen. The route continues along a ridge. Mountain bikers: follow the sand road up to the home of bear hunter Väinö Heikkinen.

104.0 km Campfire site and a lean-to forest shelter by the River Jongunjoki.

104.5 km Home of bear hunter Väinö Heikkinen at Kaksinkantaja. Small entrance fee. Accommodation in a separate building and sauna. The route runs first along a village road and then along a path through primeval forests to Rapid Pälvekoski to the shore of the River Jongunjoki. At Pälvekoski there is a nice two-part lean-to forest shelter on a beautiful spot by a suspension bridge. Marked spring on the north side of pond Hömönlampi, guidance from the trail.

115.5 km A wilderness cabin by the River Valamajoki. Five beds, campfire site. Mountain bikers: continue along the forest road up to the wilderness cabin of Aittokoski. Follow the snowmobile marks.

120.7 km Rapid Aittokoski, two-part lean-to forest shelter and a campfire site. The route runs along the shore, where some damp places. Mountain bikers: follow the road and then the snowmobile route up to the wilderness cabin of Otroskoski. Another Karelian Circular Trek hiking trail runs on the opposite side of the river towards Lake Mujejärvi and the recreational fishing area of Saramo.

125.3 km Lean-to forest shelter at Rapid Viharinkoski. Marked spring.

127.3 km Wilderness cabin at Rapid Otroskoski, 20 beds, sauna. The route runs first along a path and then along a forest road.

133.0 km Teljo. Teljo bridge and a campfire site 0.5 km towards Lieksa. It is possible to return you to Nurmijärvi by canoe (canoes for rent from Erästely Canoe & Outdoors).