

Walking Route

In the shade of old-town secular trees



Route characteristics: The route takes the travellers around the most picturesque places of Old Town and the traveller will hear the tales that only the old trees of the Old Town can tell. You will hear about the first Latvian-born Pastor Jānis Neilands and his sincerity, this tale will be told by the secular oak tree near St. Simon's Church, yet another oak tree by the wall of the Livonian Castle ruins will highlight the oldest survived wooden building in Valmiera. The traveller will also be taken to the youngest linden (lime) tree which was planted in honour of Lady Elizabeth Hallart, the widow of General Hallart, owner of Valmiermuiža Manor and a great supporter of the Hernhut (Moravian Brethren) movement. The stories of other older and younger trees will be equally interesting.

Preferable time: all through the year

Length: ~1.5 km

Approximate duration: 30 min

Start/end points of the route: Valmiera St. Simon's Church

Route: Valmiera St. Simon's Church – Livonian Order Castle ruins– Luca Hill – Walter's Hill – Livonian Order Castle ruins– Valmiera St. Simon's Church.

Alternatives: You may combine the walking route with a cycling route "Tales of Valmiera Secular Trees".

Tourism information: Tourism Information Centre, Rīgas iela 10, home page www.visit.valmiera.lv, city audio-guide available.



Secular trees: are very big and old trees having a cultural historical, educational or scientific importance. They are very important for securing the general biological diversity. Their existence and diversity of species inhabiting the tree is a characteristic feature of environmental quality. A secular tree may be looked upon as an independent ecosystem and living space for many rare and threatened species of mammals, birds, insects, fungi and other living organisms. .

Minimum size of secular trees – girth sizes of secular trees according to the Regulations No. 264 (from 16.03.2010) of the Cabinet of Ministers, LR, are the following: white willow – 4.5 metres; oak - 4 metres; common silver birch (pubescent birch) - 3 metres; linden (lime) tree, maple tree – 3.5 metres, spruce - 3 metres, common pine – 2.5 metres.

1. Jānis Neilands (1840-1915) Secular Oak Tree has witnessed the vigour of the young pastor and heard the admiration of the people and members of the congregation when they talked about their beloved and highly respected **Neiland-Pastor**. When St. Simon's congregation became too big for one pastor at the end of the 19 century, it was divided, and Jānis Neilands was elected pastor of Valmiermuiža congregation – he was the first Latvian-born pastor in Valmiera. There are tales about his tolerance and unselfishness, and people told that he could take off his shirt and give it to the suppliant, apologizing to his wife: "But, dear Bertie, he needs it much more than me". He used to preach sermons both to churchgoers and prisoners. And before doing this duty, he always said to his family: "I am going to see my dear scoundrels again". GPS: 57.538279, 25.426652

2. Walking around St. Simon's Church, you can't miss a picturesquely bent **linden (lime) tree**, and one may only guess whether it is the humbleness or tiredness of the tree, or the Linden has just tilted its head to the shoulder to see further off across the Gauja River. Since 10 April, 2014, a new linden tree was planted in honour of Lady Magdalena Elizabeth von Hallart's (1683-1750) memory. Lady Hallart was the owner of Valmiermuiža Manor, a keen supporter of the Hernhut movement, supplier and distributor of literature. Lady Hallart is considered to be the first woman - personality in the history of Latvia. She organized the first Hernhut teachers' seminary for the Latvians, sponsored and organized publishing of the first significant edition in the Latvian language. The relationship of Lady Hallart with the linden tree began in 1727 when her husband General Hallart died. He was buried in the chapel that she built for him behind the sacristy, and three linden trees were planted next to the chapel. GPS: 57.538594, 25.427102

3. This **secular oak tree** growing next to the oldest wooden building in Valmiera, (dating back to 1735) and the first municipal pharmacy in the Baltics, will certainly be able to advise a tried and tested herb for your problem. However, the pride and loftiness of the tree was probably borrowed from the nearby red brick building (built in 1906). An Architect Karl Ludvig Marshner, whose wife's maiden name was Walter, built this house in honour to his first-born son. The family used to spend summers here, and any member of the Walter's family could stay in it. However, the house was nationalized and turned into an apartment building later, and the family had to leave Latvia. The person who benefitted most of this was a servant-maid, as Marshner's wife showed her the place where the jewellery, dinner sets and other family treasures were buried before the Marshners left for Germany. GPS: 57.539220, 25.427780

4. The two linden trees (4,87m and 4,40m) growing on either side of the road will willingly share their memories about the former dwellers of the manor. As the trees get to the period when the writer **Knuts Lesiņš** (1909-2000), came to live here with his parents at the age of about 13, the stories of his childhood, the Gauja and the summers, spent by the river, are touching to every listener's heart. "[...] The following 5 years in Valmiera have been the best ever in my life. [...] We ran the farm with the help of a cottar, arranged a bee-garden and a big vegetable garden, which actually sometimes was a bit of a nuisance for my idle cosiness, especially the large field of tomato plants, which were to be watered and tied up. I did not make friends with the bees either. But apart from this, I felt totally free in the summer. I had a boat and fishing rods, and the Gauja Rapids woke up very early in the morning. It was a paradise for the boys of Valmiera, and this paradise stretched upstream as far as the Steep Banks. To be an owner of a boat meant to be the master of the river, and I used to live in my boat as a Chinese in his junk, with supplies of bread-and-butter and a bottle of drinking water. Sometimes I even spent the night under an oak tree or a linden tree on the banks of the Gauja. [...]" GPS: 57.540083, 25.430937; 57.540065, 25.430973

In his later years when Knuts Lesiņš had already become a recognized writer, he pointed out a lone man, **Count Miķelis Amalia's Son Vanags**, as one of the dashiest and most striking characters among the locals in the 20ies – he was the founder and chairman of the Shana Fellowship, which had very peculiar habits. "When going to school in the morning, I often saw him take a plunge into the Gauja when there was ice in the water already. It seemed that the Shana Chairman took swimming seriously."

5. Walter's Hill and its neighbourhood has always been a favourite rendezvous and promenade place. You can only imagine how many bright personalities of Valmiera have walked past this **secular Linden (lime) Tree** and what interesting stories the tree has heard. **Pāvils Rozītis** (1889-1937) is now recognized as the author of the most famous literary work about Valmiera, it is the novel "The Boys of Valmiera"; but the linden tree saw him when he was young. At the beginning of the 20 century he frequented this place with his friends, Walter's Hill knew about his first love dreams and maybe even heard the first spoken words of love ... Who knows? It is possible that the inspiration of his famous words about Valmiera came while looking at the Gauja River from the top of Walter's Hill: "There are many cities with other rivers flowing through them, but the Gauja flows only through Valmiera!" GPS: 57.539244, 25.429147

6. The big secular **oak tree**, the rundown Walter's house and the well known explorer of the local history and museum expert **Laimonis Liepnieks** (1927-2001) made an interesting threesome. Liepnieks used to live there and always, when somebody asked him: "What does Valmiera mean to you?" the answer was the same: "Everything!" Laimonis Liepnieks' love of history and his eagerness to hear old stories and tales helped him to become a fascinating tour guide around Valmiera in the 40-ies (more actively from 1950 onwards) of the 20 century. An interesting fact in the life story of the researcher is that his birth date (the 13th April) was changed to escape the devil's dozen (number 13). The birth date given in the official documents was the 20th April. Maybe, this is not the only secret of his life, and if you listen carefully, you might hear more stories about Laimonis Liepnieks. GPS: 57.539580, 25.429157