



HARAKKA



The island of Harakka (the name means ‘magpie’), which is very near the city centre, carries a rich archipelago flora and fauna. Harakka was formerly used by the military, and bears the imprint of both Russian soldiers and the forces of nature.



How to get there; restrictions

The way to Harakka takes you through Kaivopuisto park. When the sea is open the ferry leaves from Ullanlinna jetty, next to a rather posh waterside café. The ferry operates from the beginning of May to the end of September, or longer still in some years.

Ask the ferry timetables ☎ 622 1406, 7312 2916 or 687 22090

http://www.hel.fi/ymk/eng/organisation/Harakka_eng.html

In mid-winter you walk across the ice at your own risk. Remember the ice tends to be weak close to the shore.

It's not very far to walk from the city centre to the jetty (2 km from the railway station). Using public transport you get closest to it by tram 3B or 3T (get out by the catholic church) or by bus 17 to the terminus, at the junction of Merikatu Street and Neitsytpolku Path. If you are driving, the nearest parking area is next to the ferry jetty, beside the café. Parking is free, but for a maximum of four hours. You can park free along Ehrenströmintie Road (without restrictions).

There are three protected vegetation sites and a nesting site on the southern tip of the island (protected between 1 April and 15 August). Access is restricted to the marked out pathways in order to preserve the fragile archipelago nature. Dogs are not allowed on the island.

The building which dominates the island serves as an artists' studio. It is open to the general public only for exhibitions at various times of the year.

Services

Helsinki City Environment Centre has converted the old Russian barracks into Harakka Nature Centre. Part of the centre is given over to a nature school, which includes an exhibition on nature in the archipelago. The underwater life of the Baltic is displayed in new facilities set into casemates and in aquaria in an outbuilding next to the jetty. In the yard of the nature centre is a nature study house for small children: 'Vellamo's World', after a mermaid of Finnish mythology. Harakka Nature Centre is open from May till October. A helpful staff is on hand to answer questions on nature in the islands. The nature centre tel is ☎ 622 1406, fax 278 4606 from 1 May to 30 Sept., and ☎ 7312 2916 from 1 Oct. to 30 April.

From June to August guided nature tours normally set out daily at midday from the jetty on Harakka. During the one-hour guided tour, which also presents the exhibitions, the participants gain insights into nature on the island. This tour is free. The island is skirted by a nature trail which you can, if you wish, explore on your own. Right next to the jetty is a roofed poster where people waiting for the ferry can take shelter in bad weather. The poster displays information and pictures illustrating the island's nature and history.

Nature

Harakka lies on a part of Helsinki's coastline which projects a good way into the open sea. Its total area is only some nine hectares (a little over 20 acres), but for its size the island carries the richest fauna of all Helsinki's islands. Even though the city is but a stone's throw away, on Harakka life seems to go on unperturbed by all the hassle.

On the west coast of the island you face the open sea; there you will find the most impressive outcrops of bare rock. It's well worth making the effort to view these rocks, worn smooth during the Ice Ages. The action of the sea keeps the surface exposed, revealing the admixture of different minerals in beautiful patterns.

Harakka is one of the most sought after sites for plant lovers. No less than 360 species of vascular (chiefly flowering) plants have been identified on the island; at present 312 can be found. In rocky meadows clumps of wild chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*) burst into mauve in early summer, while warty cabbage (*Bunias orientalis*), a casual introduced by Russian soldiers, gives a riotous golden, sweetly scented show a little further back from the shore. These are followed later in the summer by sheets of heartsease (*Viola tricolor*). Rarer species include white sticky catchfly (*Silene viscosa*) and rest-harrow (*Ononis arvensis*), which latter occurs in Finland in less than ten localities. It grows on shore meadows along the west coast, and flowers in July.

In late summer various butterflies migrate to the island. On 24 August, 1991, a record number of individuals, 280, were counted. During the 1990's, 415 species of butterfly and moth were observed, about half of which are permanent residents.

The commonest mammal is the bank vole, often found diving into grassy spots, especially in autumn. Numbers of the brown hare vary considerably.

About 40 species of bird nest on Harakka each year. The most interesting part of the bird population is the archipelago element, restricted to the southern part of the island. During the nesting season, a good place to observe the birds is from the hideout on the edge of the protected area on the east shore. From there, one can follow (without binoculars) the antics of terns and five species of gull that nest, and even catch the piping of the occasional wader. Barnacle geese nest here, too. On this southern area is the only real patch of woodland on the island, a fine clump of black alders which attracts several smaller bird species. The thrush nightingale nests here.

Harakka is an important nesting site for the endangered lesser black-backed gull. The island is also the breeding ground of the largest colony of mew gulls in greater Helsinki. Some of these birds have become quite tame, and build their nests less than a metre from the nature trail. Beware of the angry warning dives of some broody parents! They calm down when you make a detour away from the nest.

The route of most migratory birds follows the coastline, and passes over the island. In autumn, some of the birds stay south of the mainland peninsula, and land up on Harakka.

The winter on Harakka is profoundly quiet. Every year the great grey shrike may be seen surveying the icy landscape from the tree-tops, and the northern goshawk patrols. Even so, the arctic aspect of the archipelago landscape can make a lasting impression on the visitor.



Arto Nironen

History

Harakka emerged from the sea-bed about 3000 years ago. In bygone times it served as a home base for fishermen and a summer grazing ground for the cattle farmers of the town. In 1748 Sweden-Finland started to build the fortifications of Suomenlinna. Harakka is the westernmost outpost of these works. On Harakka, though, work on the defensive walls only began in earnest after the Russian occupation. To protect their canons, early in the 19th century the Russian empire built high sand embankments and casemates, which still

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give their own stamp to the northern parts of the island. Nowadays you may search the canons in vain; the Russians made off with them when they left. Over the years some sections of the defensive walls have collapsed onto the rocks below. This has created habitats for some botanically interesting rocky meadows. The rock faces near the shore bear inscriptions chiselled out by the Russians; for instance, by the bird-watchers' hideout. The Russian-built wooden huts date from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

In 1918 Finnish soldiers took over from the Russian ones. The main building on the crest of the island was built in 1928, and has served as a chemical laboratory for the defence forces. A figure who was to play a vital role in Finland's war of defence worked in this building; General Nenonen carried out ballistic experiments which proved crucial to the military effort, incidentally blowing up his office. In 1988 the building devolved from the defence forces to the city of Helsinki, and the building was rented out as a studio for artists.

Birds which nest regularly

(average number of pairs in brackets 2003-2004):
 barnacle goose (60),
 tufted duck (4),
 eider (17),
 Eurasian oystercatcher (3),
 mew gull (250),
 lesser black-backed gull (9),
 great black-backed gull (1),
 common and arctic tern (5),
 thrush nightingale (1),
 northern wheatear (4),
 common whitethroat (5).

Nesting occasionally:

common shelduck,
 ringed plover,
 little plover,
 common redshank,
 marsh warbler,
 Blyth's reed-warbler
 redbacked shrike,
 hawfinch.

Other plants:

sea mayweed (*Tripleurospermum maritimum*),
 purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*),
 devil's-bit scabious (*Succisa pratensis*),
 hoary alison (*Berteroa incana*),
 alpine cinquefoil (*Potentilla crantzii*).

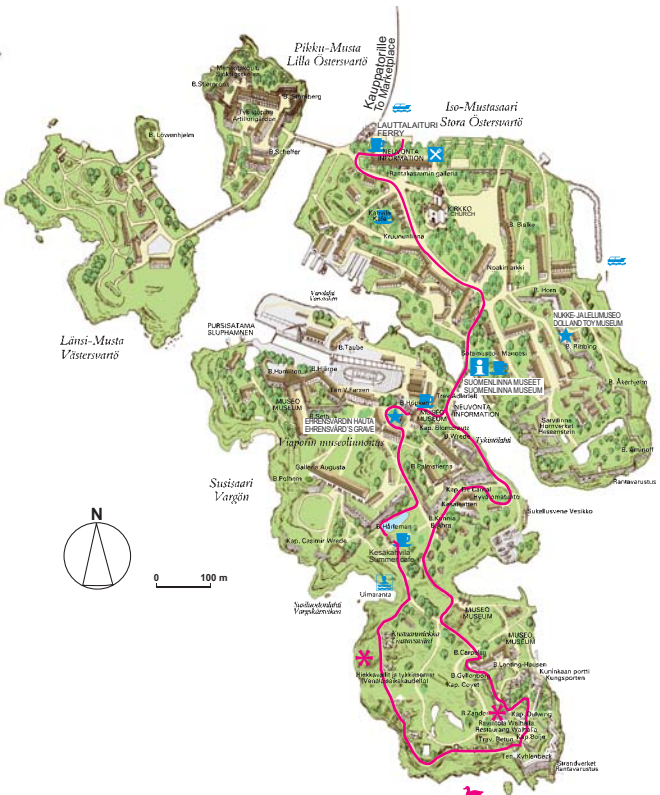


Jari Kostel

SUOMENLINNA



Suomenlinna, or Viapori, is an extensive series of fortifications built over a group of islands just off the coast of Helsinki. Some of the islands are interconnected by foot-bridges. If mainland Helsinki no



longer boasts the remains of the old city or castle, the wild beauty of Suomenlinna more than makes up for this deficiency. In 1991, Suomenlinna was added to Unesco's list of the world's cultural sites, as a unique example of military architecture. Likewise, the numerous plants, many of them casuals from the faraway steppes of Russia, tell their own history of the fortifications. Birdwatchers, too, will enjoy the spectacle of sea-birds and the odd winter visitor.

The name Suomenlinna translates as 'Finnish Castle'. Interestingly, its Swedish name, Sveaborg, means 'Swedish Castle'.

How to get there

You can take the ferry, which operates the year round from a jetty by the main market place, on an ordinary bus ticket. For most of the day, the ferry goes twice an hour, on the hour. The crossing takes about 15 minutes. The island of Pikku-Musta ('Little Black') to the west of the landing jetty is still used by the military, and except for an access path is closed to the general public.

Nature

On the ferry crossing the keen naturalist will have spotted the small bird nesting isles to starboard. These isles are important breeding sites for barnacle geese and lesser black-backed gulls in the city area. There are several dozen of these gulls' nests. A particularly black-backed race (*Larus fuscus fuscus*) of this species is considered to be the most essentially Finnish of birds, and predominantly nests within Finnish territory. In the main, populations of the species have plunged alarmingly, but on these rocks the black-backed gull seems to be holding its own. The same islets also carry thriving colonies of eider and even breeding caspian tern during some recent years.

The northern part of Suomenlinna, where the ferry lands, is the densely built island of Iso Mustasaari ('Great Black Island'), where most of the isles' thousand or so inhabitants live. The residents are used to tourists, but hope these will not stray into the yards of private homes. We advise nature-lovers to go on up past the large church (which also serves as a light-house), bear right and cross the footbridge over the narrow straits

point, Kustaaanmiekka, commands fine views in all directions. The southern tip of Susisaari is surrounded by old defensive embankments, now overgrown with steeply sloping meadows. Behind the embankments, a little further into the island, are flowery meadows and ponds remaining from former reservoirs. Down by the shore, Russian inscriptions were chiselled into the smooth rocky surfaces prior to Finland's independence. At one time, conservationists condemned these graffiti as an act of vandalism; nowadays they are protected!

During the winter and in the migrating seasons, you may spot a twite or, in some winters, the horned lark. In peak vole years, owls and other birds of prey will linger here; you may even see the snowy owl. Spring migrants arriving from over the sea often orient themselves towards the heights of Kustaaanmiekka. The autumn migration along the coastline also passes over and just south of the peak. The high ramparts command wide views out to sea, and offer a fine vantage for following migrations or spotting sea birds. When the sea freezes, winter storms pile up ever-changing works of glacial art along the shore. The sea stays open here longer than closer to the mainland; in mild winters it stays unfrozen. Long-tailed ducks and geese, may then reside here in winter.

During the nesting season, a telescope will discern black guillemots, a small colony of which nest on the break-water off the islet of Harmaja, which bears a lighthouse. Close to the summer theatre on Susisaari, for instance, one will see the swifts, house martins and sparrows that nest in the stone walls of the fortress. In springtime these merry residents lighten the military aspect of these grey walls.

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If you take a torch with you, you can explore the underground part of Suomenlinna and trace the extensive system of long and dark, vaulted passageways under the fortifications. Children in search of excitement have always enjoyed such forays.

Plants

The history of Suomenlinna shows in its flora. Deliberately or otherwise, troops have brought unusual plants here. Perhaps the showiest is the rampant warty cabbage (*Bunias orientalis*) whose flowering covers the defensive embankments with brilliant gold and fills the summer air with its heady scent. This plant can be found elsewhere in Helsinki, usually on sites once occupied by the Russian army. The similarly distributed but smaller, white-flowered hoary alison (*Berteroa incana*) tells a similar story, as does the white- or pale pink-flowered lesser bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*) that creeps and twines among the grass. In July and August, the deep pink flowers of the greater willow-herb (*Epilobium hirsutum*) glow in moist channels between the rocks. This is another Russian immigrant that has invaded other parts of Helsinki, via Suomenlinna. Botanists from western Europe even make "pilgrimages" to Suomenlinna to see two other Russian invaders: the Russian dock (*Rumex confertus*) and the sedge *Carex praecox*. The former may be found on the way to the doll museum on Iso Mustasaari, the latter by the ponds of Kustaanmiekka.

The highly poisonous but impressive henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*), used in medicinal and magical potions in ancient times, springs up every year on building sites on Suomenlinna, wherever the ground is disturbed. Its tiny seeds have remained viable for centuries in the soil's "seed bank".

History

Building started on the islands in 1748 after Sweden-Finland lost its eastern territories to Russia, whereupon Sweden wished to confirm Finnish rule. The decision to embark on this construction work resulted in Helsinki's expansion into a major city. The prime mover for the construction of the fortress was the Swedish officer Augustin Ehrensvärd. In addition to military technology, he also introduced architectural and gardening influences. Soldiers under Swedish command on

Suomenlinna learned to blast rock with dynamite, and later spread into the countryside their skills in building stone barns. Likewise new gardening styles - and lilac bushes - made their way into the rest of Finland via Suomenlinna. Ehrensvärd also protected large trees, of which there were many on Suomenlinna at the beginning of the 19th century. On the other hand, the construction work consumed much of the forest. The influence of the fortifications radiated into the country around Helsinki in the form of the many manor houses and manor parks (see Herttoniemi Manor, p. 22).

The seaward fortifications of Suomenlinna were of no avail when the Russians suddenly invaded Helsinki overland in the late winter of 1808. The fortress, designed to stall an invasion from over the sea, was surrounded from mainland Helsinki. After a few months of coercive negotiations Suomenlinna surrendered, after which its commander, Cronstedt, was granted a pension by the Tsar of Russia and branded a traitor by the Finns.

Viapori fared no better as a defensive fortress in the hands of the Russians. During the Crimean war in 1855, the French and British nonchalantly bombarded the fortress from their war-ships from beyond canon range. After this, the fortress served as barracks first for Russian soldiers and, after independence, for Finnish forces, but no longer in any defensive capacity, upto 1973. After Finland's civil war in 1918, the island held a prison camp where thousands of 'Reds' (socialist or communist sympathisers) languished. About a tenth, or a little under a thousand of the inmates perished, mainly through disease and hunger.

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Services

The Suomenlinna museum is on Iso Mustasaari, at the foot of the bridge leading to Susisaari. From 8 January 30 till April it's open Mon-Sun from 10am to 4pm, from 2 May till 30 September daily from 10am to 6pm, and from 1 October till 31 December daily from 10am to 4pm. The entrance fee is 5 € for adults, 2.50 € for young people. There are kiosks, restaurants, museums, an art gallery and a small but pleasant public beach. For tourist information call Helsinki City Tourist Office ☎ 169 3757. Further information on museum opening times, guided tours etc. from www.suomenlinna.fi

Other plants introduced from Russia:

White campion (*Silene latifolia*, in rampart meadows), awnless brome (*Bromus inermis*, west walls of Länsi-Musta), leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*, steep embankments on west coast of Kustaanmiekka).

Other birds:

Eurasian oystercatcher, common tern, arctic tern, meadow pipit, northern wheatear, whitethroat.

Other animals:

Northern bat, Daubenton's bat (water bat), whiskered bat, common toad.

