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Las Bielański Forest in the city center

ROUTE PL 2

Presentation of the route

Las Bielański [Bielany Forest], one of the two major reserves near the city, was created in 1973 from the surviving part of the former Mazovian Primeval Forest, which dates back to medieval times and occupies a surface area of 130 ha. From 2011, this site has been protected under the European Natura 2000 network (PLH140041 “Las Bielański”). The forest is home to rich fauna and flora. Here we can find oaks which are about 400 years old but were not planted by humans; they grew spontaneously. Those oaks, as well as many other plant species, have evolved here during the past centuries.

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Photo	Entrance to the forest
	<p>Las Bielański [eng. Bielany Forest] is one of two major reserves near the city, created in 1973 from the surviving part of the former Mazovian Primeval Forest surviving from the Medieval times, with an area of 130 ha. From 2011 the place is protected under the European Natura 2000 network (PLH140041 "Las Bielański"). The forest is home to rich fauna and flora. Here we may observe oaks of around 400-year-old that were not planted by man. The above-mentioned oaks, as well as many other plant species, have evolved here within the past several thousand years.</p>


Photo	Place of the playground. In the forest- be careful to take the right path
	

Photo	Place of the playground
   	<p>In the nineteenth century, Las Bielański became one of the most important recreational grounds for the residents of rapidly growing Warsaw. It was here where the entertainment and rest areas were placed side by side with spaces of silence created for ascetics and prayers. The park was so popular that the massive inflow of people turned out to be a danger to the natural environment. Although the forest remained intact, the intense presence of man and the construction of recreation facilities - benches, swings, etc. caused damage to the forest litter. In order to protect it, the area was turned into a natural reserve and only later in 1980s the recreational facilities were completely removed so as to create conditions for rebuilding damaged green areas. It is estimated that it will take many years to restore the natural state of the forest. However, the traces that remained in Polish culture will remain forever - these are memories and hits, such as "Karuzela na Bielany" or "Statek do Młocin" et al.</p>

Photo	Walk through the Masovian Forest
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		<p>We walk through a unique virgin forest, which is located almost in the city center. In the fourteenth century it was the edge of the Mazovian Forest, which covered most of the Mazowsze region. The numerous species of insects and wild animals are peculiarity of this place. We pass the Rudawka backwaters - currently in decline. 30% of Las Bielański area is subject to total protection and human intervention is limited only to the necessary conservation practices. In the remaining area, paths have been marked out for walking.</p>





Photo	View of a forest stream
   	


Photo	A spring at the foot of the Camaldolese monastery
	<p>After leaving the forest, we turn left on the sidewalk and after walking a few hundred meters we will see a pedestal made of red sandstone - material used to build a casing of the spring source at the foot of the Camaldolese Church and Monastery, once known for its perfect water. The casing was created in 1835 by students of the Agronomy Institute, which was located in Marymont. On the casing of the well we may see water level marks from the times of Vistula surges in 1888 and 1891. Currently, the spring is drying up due to low groundwater levels.</p>

Photo	Viewpoint- the Vistula River
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	<p>The Vistula River and right-bank Warsaw panorama which make up a unique landscape, might be observed from the escarpment on the banks of the Vistula. In the past, at the foot of the escarpment, there was a marina which was handling ships bringing people to the Camaldolese church, as well as those seeking respite in Las Bielański.</p>
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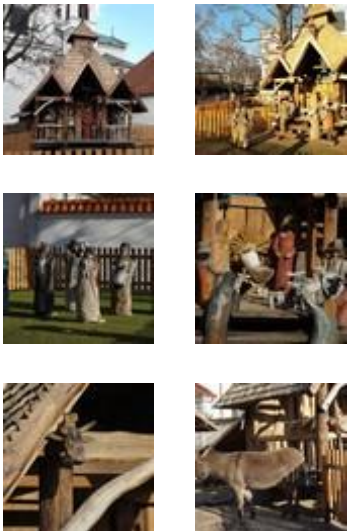
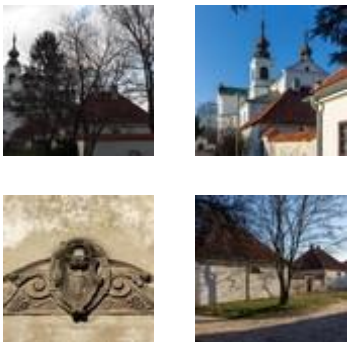
Photo	Year-round crib and donkey farm
	<p>Nativity scenes and Christmas cribs are an important element of Polish tradition. The Christmas nativity scene in front of Camaldolese Church in Bielany is displayed throughout the year. The crib created in 2004 comes from the hand of the prolific artist and outstanding creator Józef Wilkoń, a well-known illustrator of children's books. Wilkoń, inspired by his childhood spent in the hills of southern Poland, also this time referred to the motifs known from the Podhale tradition. All elements of the crib were made by hand - while using a saw and an ax. Live donkey Franio is an additional attraction.</p>

Photo	Hermit houses
	<p>The Camaldolese Order is one of the strictest orders in the Catholic Church. Monks get up at night, pray all the time, think only about God and eternity. They live in separate houses with small gardens and they are not allowed to visit each other as it is forbidden. Hermitages, that is, those houses with a garden at the front, were surrounded by a wall, each of which was dedicated to one monk, and were built according to strict monastic rules. In line with the regulations, houses of hermits consisted of a hall along the axis, a chapel on the right, a cell and a woodshed on the left. Camaldolese monks (eremitical order of the Catholic Church) came to Polkowie Hill in the 17th century. Las Bielański was then a fragment of the wild forest, so the monks of that time can be imagined as trappers, who were not afraid of wolves and bears. The forest stand guard their contemplative life and they protected the forest. Back then in 17th century, the monastery became a pilgrimage destination. One hundred years later,</p>

it was already the favourite entertainment place of the Polish-Lithuanian elite, and the parish festival in Bielany was known all over Warsaw. Las Bielański, also thanks to the presence of the monastery, quickly became one of the favorite recreational areas for the Varsovians, but thus ceased to be a suitable place for the contemplative order. In 1904, the Camaldolese monks left the monastery and the Marians took their place. The hermit houses have gained new functions. 13 of them have survived to this day.

Photo



A tombstone of Stanisław Staszic

Stanisław Staszic, a Catholic priest, was a leading figure in the Polish Enlightenment: he was an outstanding researcher and one of the founders of Polish education in the 19th century. When he lived in Warsaw, he served as a member of the State Council of the Duchy of Warsaw and after the fall of the Duchy, he served as the deputy minister of education and later as the minister of trade and industry in Congress Poland. Staszic liked trips to Las Bielański, where he could have a rest and read in the shade of trees. After death, pursuant to his last will, he was buried next to the temple: "My body is to be buried in the cemetery at the church of Camaldolese priests in Bielany. It is not to be in the catacombs, but it is to be buried in the back of the church in the ground. I leave PLN 10,000 in treasury mortgage obligations to the eternal fund of the Camaldolese priest's church in Bielany. My funeral is to be modest, not different from the funeral of a poor Christian, because by joining God we all become such. \ ... \ PLN 10,000 are to be distributed on the day of the funeral for the poor people". The tombstone located next to the Camaldolese church has been in the same place for almost 200 years.

Photo



Academic canteen - possibility to have lunch

It's a good place for a short rest! In the UKSW academic canteen you can eat an inexpensive meal ...


Photo	We are coming back to the forest ...
	




Photo	The Valley of the Bielański Stream
  	<p>Back in the day, a rapid river flowed this way. There were ponds and mills grinding on the river. However, the area suffered most during the 20th century. At that time Vistula River embankments were built, the neighboring academic institutions expanded into the forest, the Rudawka River was regulated and large buildings were built in the neighborhood changing the water table. The development of the city and changes in water management around the sources of the stream, as well as the lowering of the level of groundwater, caused the situation in which currently the Bielański Stream is a river flowing only periodically - in autumn, spring and after heavy rainfalls. In relatively soft glacial sedimentary deposits that are more easily eroded, the stream action carved the valley, gorges and winding ravines. The stream's waters were stacked up with a system of dams and cascades moving mill wheels and forming fish ponds. As a result of ongoing large-scale land development related drainage, the Bielański stream was canalized and connected to the collector, and the ponds ceased to exist.</p>




Photo	Robinia forest. Entrance to the University of Physical Education
  	<p>After the fall of the November Uprising (1831), the areas on the outskirts of Las Bielański were occupied by summer barracks of the Russian army, and nearby a training ground "Bielańskie Pole Wojenne" (eng. Bielański War Field) was created. The barracks ended with the bakery buildings at Dewajtis St. After 1883, the Russians built two forts nearby: Bielany and Wawrzyszew. It was only after the withdrawal of the Russian army in 1915 that Pola Bielańskie (eng. Bielany Fields) lost their military significance and were annexed to Warsaw. Flora of foreign origin has taken place after the former settlements. Mainly this is the robinia which grows here and which causes the drying of the deeper layers of soil, and creates favorable conditions in the forest floor for nettle and elderberry. This hinders the natural renewal of native species such as oak, hornbeam and lime.</p>

Photo	The Golden Circle Gloria Optimis and the monument of the University of Physical Education' patron
 <p>The first row shows the monument from a distance and a close-up of the top. The second row shows the monument with the dates 1990 and 1949. The third row shows the Golden Circle Gloria Optimis and a close-up of the monument's base.</p>	<p>"A healthy mind in a healthy body" - and just reborn Poland needed a healthy and physically fit society. Therefore, it is not a surprise that already in the first decade of independence, at the first meeting of the Rada Naukowa Wychowania Fizycznego (eng. Scientific Council of Physical Education) under the leadership of the Marshal Józef Piłsudski, it was decided to create an institution that was to educate physical education teachers for the needs of schools and the army. It was established as teachers college - Central Institute of Physical Education - in 1929. It held courses for men, women, and also a year-long officer courses. Following the death of Józef Piłsudski, Polish head of state, in 1935 the school resumed him as its patron and created the monument placed in the courtyard to commemorate him. Today, the cut plinth of the monument is decorated with two dates 1949/1990, which symbolize the period when Poland was dependent on the Soviet Union, and when the name of J. Piłsudski, as a symbol of independence, was removed from public life. Since 2005, next to the monument, in the central square of the University of Physical Education, the Golden Circle Gloria Optimis has been created, whose purpose is to honor those who, through their sporting achievements, professional career, patriotism, and sturdy character deserve the name of outstanding personalities of Polish sport. In the Circle we may find names of people who are not necessarily athletes, but all outstanding personalities related to sport and physical education in some way.</p>