The approximately 19-kilometre-long section of the protected area has, all in all, 43 sandstone outcrops, which are eye-catchingly picturesque with their layers of different colours, shading from yellow to purple-brown.

### **TAEVASKODA**

For ages, the sandstone outcrops have been called "taevaskoda/-kojad" (Heaven's Halls) by local people, as the high outcrop walls with the primeval forests on the top and the sky hanging above remind "shrines of the nature". The Taevaskojad belong to the most beautiful places in Estonia. The highest outcrop (about 20 metres at the highest point) with its length of 150 metres is called Suur Taevaskoda (Small Heaven's Hall). The height of Väike Taevaskoda (Grand Heaven's Hall) reaches ten metres. Spring waters have eroded two caves into the rock. One of them is the spring of Emaläte (Mother's Spring), while the other is called Neitsikoobas (Virgin's Cave) – according to the legend a pretty towheaded young girl, who is weaving cloth on her golden loom, lives there.

Near the Taevaskojad, you might come across Ahja's most famous birds – the kingfisher and the white-throated dipper. Although the kingfisher seems to be brightly coloured, it has, however, a splendid camouflage – seeing it from upside down it fuses with the sparkling river water, and from downside up with the sandstone outcrops.

# **HIKING TRAIL**

The Taevaskojad hiking trail, which starts at the Saesaare car park, is three kilometres long. The trail runs on both riverbanks, winding its way up and down along the valley, in places close to the edge of the outcrop, producing extraordinary views to the forest and river below.



## DOS AND DON'TS FOR VISITORS

- Keep the forest, river and river banks tidy.
- Do not engrave on the outcrops.
- Walk only on the roads and trails.
- You can pick berries, mushrooms and other forests goods in the protected area.
- You can put up a tent and make a fire only in the prepared and marked places. At the time of wildfire hazard, making an open fire, even on special grounds, is forbidden.
- You can move about on private land from sunrise to sunset unless you do damage to the landowner. In case the private land is fenced or marked, you will need the landowner's permission.
- Drive your motor vehicle only on the provided roads and leave it only in the car park.
- You can use only non-power watercraft on the bodies of water.
- Keep your dog on the leash while moving about in the nature.

When you see damage done to the nature or visiting objects, inform the Environmental Inspectorate by phone 1313.



### **ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITY**

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ENVIRONMENTAL BOARD

### ARRANGEMENT OF VISITS

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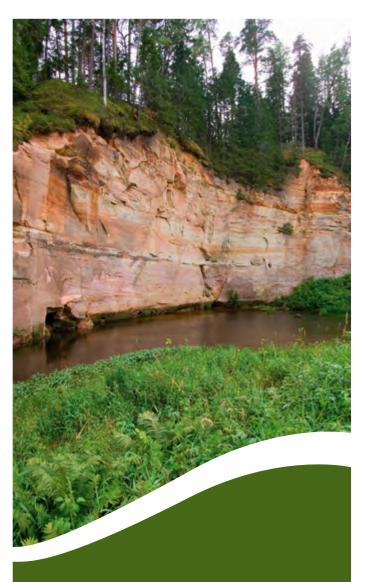
> Compiled by: M. Kala Front page photo: Suur Taevaskoda, L. Michelson Layout by: Akriibia Ltd Translated by: K. Nurm Printed by: Actual Print Ltd

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Publication supported by Environmental Investment Centre





AHJA
River Ancient
Valley Landscape
Protection Area



The Ahja River Ancient Valley Landscape Protection Area is located between Koorvere and the Otten (Valgesoo) bridge. The protection area, established in1957, is one of the oldest protected areas in Estonia.

The "trademark" of the protection area is the Ahja River Ancient Valley together with the river, the sandstone outcrops towering on the riverbanks, the forests growing on the slopes and the meadows on the valley floor. Several rare and endangered species occur in the protection area, such as the Austrian rippensame, dwarf scouring rush, stagshorn clubmoss, flat-stemmed clubmoss, creeping lady's tresses, lesser butterfly orchid, Scottish wood ant, clouded apollo, kingfisher and white-throated dipper. The following river inhabitants are under protection: the sea trout, grayling, spined loach, bullhead, and thick shelled river mussel.

**THE AHJA RIVER** finds its beginning from Lake Erastvere and debouches into the River Emajõgi. The relief of the Ahja River Ancient Valley is at its most diverse in the 19-kilometrelong section of the protected area. The gradient of the river at the end of the protected area is up to 1.6 m/km, lending the river its mid-course mountain river character. On some floors without rapid currents the river creates plenty of crooks and bends. The river mostly flows through forests, which dominate in the local landscape; there are light and dry heath and boreal forests as well as more fertile primeval forests.

The section of the river between Kiidjärve and Taevaskoja meets Saesaare Mill Pond, which formed in 1951-1953 as a result of the construction of a hydroelectricity station here – falling victim to which were the largest and the most beautiful cascades in Estonia at that time, the Saesaare rapids.

On the slopes of the Ahja River Ancient Valley, sandstone outcrops dating back to the Middle Devonian Burtnieki Regional Stage (about 380 million years ago) are denuded.

