



# **The Green Bridges Project**

## **Treasures of the Forest** **Metsän aarteet**

**28th August 2021**

**Sastamalan Opisto - Sastamala Community College - Finland**

# Course description

"A couple of hours walk in Ritajärvi during which you get acquainted with the well-being effects of nature and the use of different herbal plants.

Please note the appropriate equipment, suitable shoes, raincoat in case of rain. The hike will also take place in light rain."

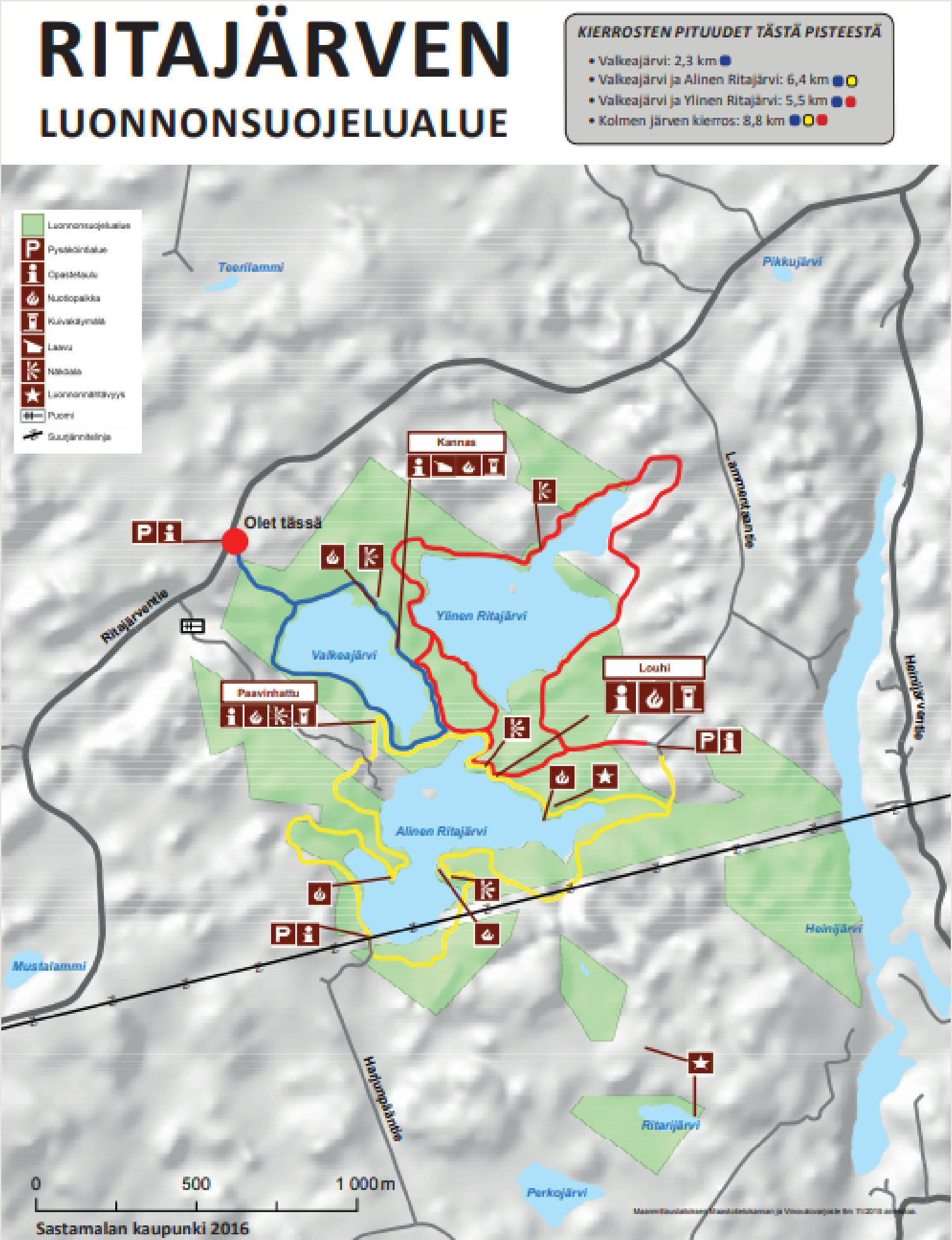
**Instructor:**  
Pauliina Salminen

**Location:**  
Ritajärvi conservation area,  
Sastamala, Finland

**Description about the environment:**  
Ritajärvi area is protected as part of the forest owners' voluntary METSO nature conservation programme. In terms of its natural environment, the area is a cohesive and varied habitat of small wilderness forest lakes and their streams. There are versatile biotopes of natural forests, rocky areas and huge boulders.



# Sastamala, Finland, Ritajärvi conservation area







# Task for the day: Find the nature's well-being effects

The course included a walk in the Ritajärvi conservation area around the lake Valkeajärvi. Valkeajärvi route (blue line on the map) is 2,3 km long.

The course aimed to help the participants to deepen their relation to the surrounding nature. They learned how to get closer to nature, about well-being effects of the forest and how to identify and utilize a variety of forest plants.

Instructor Pauliina Salminen (enviromental educator, natural mindfulness guide and herbalist) led the course. There were ten participants with age varying from 34 to 71 years.

The ground is partly uneven and in some places there are duckboards along the route. Several stops were made during the course to explore the treasures of the forest.



# Pauliina talks about the well-being effects of the forest

Negative ions are the opposite of positive ions. Negative ions have a positive effect on your health, mood, and energy levels.

We inhale negative ions in environments such as the ocean, mountains, forests and waterfalls. Once they reach our bloodstream, negative ions are believed to produce biochemical reactions that increase levels of the chemical serotonin, helping to alleviate depression, relieve stress, and boost energy. The easiest way to experience the benefits of negative ions is to spend more time outdoors - for example in forests.





Phytoncides are volatile organic compounds or “essential oils” given off by trees. These chemicals have natural antimicrobial and insecticidal qualities that protect the tree from germs and parasites. Phytoncides refresh the activity of natural killer cells paralyzed by human stress and even destroy virus-weakened cells. In addition, phytoncides remove anxiety as well as pain and restore a stress-weakened immune system.

At home, you can take advantage of the well-being effect of phytoncides by using essential oils such as cedar oil. Cedar essential oil can be placed for example in a diffuser to bring out the beneficial effects.







**At times we stopped for a break  
to feel and sense the nature.**

***"Let all your senses feel the forest!"***





# Exploring the treasures of the forest..



**Wild rosemary**  
**(*Rhododendron tomentosum*)**  
**Stone bramble (*Rubus saxatilis*)**  
**Lingonberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*)**  
**Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*)**



**..and some more  
treasures of the  
forest!**



**Common polypody  
(*Polypodium vulgare*)  
Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*)  
Heather/Calluna (*Calluna vulgaris*)  
Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*)**





# Getting a huge amount of information on how to utilize naturally occurring plants for different purposes

The beard lichen (*Usnea*) can be used for making a fire.

Common polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*) is a species of fern known as a mucus-removing herb, to increase sweating and urine output. It can be used for liver problems as well.

Wild rosemary (*Rhododendron tomentosum*) can be used as a herb, spice and disinfectant. Externally, it can be used as a wrapper to treat rheumatism and skin diseases, or internally as an ingested tea. It has a strong scent that can easily cause headaches for some people.

Calluna/heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) can be made into tea.

Juniper (*Juniperus*) can be used as a part of a birch whisk used in sauna!





# How to use Raspberry - *Rubus idaeus*

Raspberry leaves are tastiest when they are young, it is a great tea ingredient.

**For food:** Try the young leaves in a salad and simmer or ferment the large leaves for a tasty evening tea. Raspberry leaf tea can be drunk without worries for long periods of time.

**Herbal:** Raspberries have always been recommended for pregnant women. Raspberry leaf is said to relax the uterus muscles and speed up and facilitate child labour. It is said to relieve painful periods, inflammation of the mucous membranes, as well as increase sweating and urine output. Herbal tea made from raspberry leaves acts as a toner, it softens the skin and relieves skin irritations.

**Tip:** Raspberry leaf tea gets new aromas when you ferment the leaves.



# Fermenting

By fermenting the wild herbs give richer and more delicious flavors in the herbal tea. Plants intended for medicinal use should not be fermented, as the active substances will be lost. Fermenting requires a bit of work, but is definitely worth the effort. Fermenting is ideal especially for berry plants of the genus Rosaceae (strawberry, honeysuckle, stone bramble, milk thistle, raspberry, apple, rowan leaves and rose bush leaves). Their taste and aroma are greatly improved. By fermenting the bitter tannins, it decomposes and is replaced by tasty and fragrant substances.

Fermenting steps:

1. Collect full-size leaves from a clean spot in the morning after the dew has evaporated. Remember that the leaves are the sweetest and best before the plant blooms.
2. Allow the leaves to set for a few hours in room temperature. Before that, remove the thick leaf stalks.
3. Rotate the leaves in the palms of your hands, rubbing vigorously into a spherical shape, so that the structure of them breaks down. The purpose of this is to break the leaves so that the cell fluids moisturize the plant mass.
4. Place the leaf balls loosely in clean glass jars and close the lids lightly, so that some oxygen can get in.
5. Keep the jars warm at about 40-50 degrees (celcius). The heating time varies from a few hours to a day. For the heating you can use a plant dryer, sauna, oven or cooler bag with hot water bottles placed on the bottom. Constant steady heat is important! The heating continues until the colour of the leaves turn little bit brown/darker, the jar is sweating and you can smell a slight “herbal” scent.
6. Open the tanned herb balls carefully and apply to dry. Dried leaves are packed in clean glass jars and stored dry and protected from light.





The weather was perfect; it was a sunny and warm end of the summer day in the August. All participants were well prepared with good shoes, clothes and deer ked repellents. It was luckily also little windy so we did not see (or feel) any deer keds.

*We had a super cute dog with us!*



# **In total the course succeeded very well!**

## **Feedback from the participants:**

"I learnt about different wild plants - their advantages and disadvantages. The course was about the beauty of nature combined with interesting and expert teaching."

"Exercising in nature has a positive effect on health, which was the most important thing I learnt. I liked a lot to move in the beautiful Ritajärvi area."

"Pauliina teach that natural plants can be used to make tea-like drinks and herbs for various ailments. Most interesting thing i learnt was the effects of plants and nature on human."

"I hope that Sastamalan Opisto will organize a similar course for a different time of year, with different plants on display."

"Many thanks to the Sastamalan Opisto and the teacher. Coffee would be wonderful to drink there in nature."



# ***This course was part of the Green Bridges Project funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union***

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**SASTAMALAN OPISTO / SASTAMALA  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE, FINLAND**

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Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



Pictures and text: Elina Männistö  
Maps: Google Maps, Visitsastamala.fi