



# Itsenäisyydentie Road



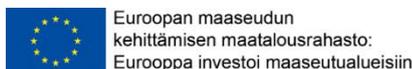
Stretching ten kilometres from the corner of Kangas graveyard to near Sarvilahti on the Salpausselkä ridge in Luumäki, there seems to be nothing special about Itsenäisyydentie road. It is just one of the many roads in Finland that have been constructed on a ridge. Rural areas, housing, industrial operations, forests, and waterways can be found nearly everywhere. However, this road is different in that it is linked to several important events in Finnish history. Its name, Itsenäisyydentie road (Independence Road), is no coincidence: it reveals a layered story about the history of the Jurvala area, Luumäki, and the whole of Finland, and about the important events that have affected the development of independent Finland. Over the centuries, the alignment of the road has changed, as it developed from a trail running along the top of the ridge into a winding dirt road, and finally into one of the most important main roads of its time, a historical connection between the east and the west. The nearby railway and waterway add further depth to the story.

We all have seen how new roads are made. First, heavy machinery is used to remove the surface layers of the soil in order to reach the subsoil. The various structural layers of the road are then laid on top of this. A distributing layer is made of more coarse soil materials to bear the load of the traffic, while finer soil materials are used to form a bearing layer underneath the surfacing. In a similar manner, history has created various layers on Itsenäisyydentie road. The foundation consists of the naturally formed Salpausselkä ridge, Lake Kivijärvi in the north, and the low-lying lands in the south, which have been turned into fields. The distributing layer covers the past centuries, the early phases of history in Luumäki, changes of rule, and movements of the armies. The bearing layer tells the history of our independence, how it was achieved and what was done to defend it. The visible part, the surfacing, is the present day. The story of Itsenäisyydentie road intertwines around the remains of these various layers and the present. Some parts of this story are better known than others, and some have been lost to time.



It is easy to interpret the visibility of these layers as a sign of the poor condition of this historical road. Instead of potholes and patchy surfacing, the road invites the visitor to slow down and take some time to learn more about the history of the road, to stop along it, or to leave the main road to spend some time in peace and quiet, explore the fortresses, or to have a cup of coffee. The story of Itsenäisyydentie road can be explored either layer by layer (that is, era by era) by following the alignment of the road, or by picking out individual destinations.

**Enjoy your exploration of the story of Itsenäisyydentie road! Map on the brochure.**



## KOTKANIEMI

Kotkaniemi, the home of President P.E. Svinhufvud and his wife, Ellen Svinhufvud, is one of the most significant destinations along Itsenäisyydentie road. Built in the late 1800s, the Art Nouveau -style mansion has been renovated and is open to visitors. The mansion introduces the life of Mr and Mrs Svinhufvud and the history of Finnish independence. P.E. Svinhufvud, or “Ukko-Pekka” as he was fondly known, was a central figure in the struggle for Finnish independence. He was also President of Finland between 1931-1937.



P.E. Svinhufvud bought the Kotkaniemi farm when he was appointed district judge of Lappee in 1908. With its gardens and estate, Kotkaniemi was the beloved home of the family, where they were happy to return to whenever they could. Ukko-Pekka’s final journey, to the burial ground on Luumäki church hill, started from Kotkaniemi in 1944 when the Continuation War was still ongoing.

The main building of Kotkaniemi stands on a pine-covered headland beside the clear waters of Lake Kivijärvi. Renovated in the 1930s style, a visit there is like entering the home of an old-time country official. The many attractions include the garden of Mrs. Svinhufvud, the President’s private shooting range at the tip of the headland, and the old artillery batteries dating from the period of fortification. A walk to the tip of the Koppolniemi headland to enjoy the

beautiful sceneries of Lake Kivijärvi offers an escape from everyday life. In addition to exploring the museum and the area, the café is well worth a visit.

Kotkaniemi and its surroundings are being developed in phases by the Kotkaniemi Foundation into a diverse events venue. Here visitors can either become actively involved in the activities, or simply enjoy the atmosphere of the location. The renovation of Kotkaniemi will be completed by summer 2018.

The museum is open in summer, during peak seasons, and subject to reservation. For more information about Kotkaniemi and its services, please go to [www.kotkaniemi.fi](http://www.kotkaniemi.fi).

## SALPA LINE

Salpa Line is a defence line built between 1940 and 1944 on the eastern border of Finland. The structures of the Salpa Line extend from the Gulf of Finland to Lapland. The fortification was strongest between the Gulf of Finland and Lake Kivijärvi. North of Lake Kivijärvi, only isthmuses and main roads were fortified. However, peace was made before the armies reached the Salpa Line, leaving the fortifications intact. Today the Salpa Line is a monument to the most recent wars, and is comparable to other European fortifications built during the Second World War.

In total, the defence line includes over 700 reinforced concrete bunkers, 25 caves, over 3000 wooden field fortifications, around 350 km of battle and communication trenches, 225 km of anti-tank rock barriers, and 130 km of excavated barriers.

Luumäki is one of the most strongly fortified localities. Of the over 120 structures built, most are reinforced concrete machine gun bunkers and machine gun pillboxes. Building started here in autumn 1939, and was continued during the Interim Peace and in 1944. The direction of Main road 6 and the railway line were especially strongly fortified. All in all, fortifications were built in an area that is roughly 20 km in length. The depth of the frontline post alone is three kilometres.

The area also includes excavations that are part of fortifications made by Russians during the First World War. At the time, German troops were expected to invade St. Petersburg through Finland. Some of these structures were left underneath the Salpa Line.

### Salpa-asema

The bunkers of Salpa-asema are on the Salpausselkä ridge, in sandy heath forest terrain. There are a total of 33 reinforced concrete structures in the area between Lake Kivijärvi and Lake Suur-Urpalanjärvi. Four different types of structures can be studied at the introductory site: a combined anti-tank artillery and machine gun bunker, a machine gun bunker, a machine gun pillbox, and an accommodation bunker. There is also a reinforced fighting position, made from a tank tower, in front of the machine gun bunker. The main defence direction was towards the Lappeenranta-Kouvola road in the east.



### Kivijärvi dam



Kivijärvi dam is part of Salpa Line. Even though waterways were generally used as barriers, only a few dams and flood areas were constructed. The flood area in Luumäki is the largest, extending roughly eight kilometres from Lake Kivijärvi to the southern side of Lake Suur-Urpalanjärvi. The plan was based on the 15-metre surface level difference of the lakes, on a sewer constructed through the Salpausselkä ridge, and on five regulating dams between the lakes. Kivijärvi dam is the uppermost dam of the flood system. The dam was used to regulate the volume of water released from the lake.

## MONUMENT TO THE LEGAL BATTLE



The monument was erected to commemorate the legal battle against oppression towards the end of the period of Russian rule in Finland. Although the monument commemorates the fight for Finnish independence, the location relates to the banishment of President P.E. Svinhufvud to Siberia. The legal battle ended when Finland gained independence in 1917.

The original intention was to renovate the old Luumäki courthouse, from where P.E. Svinhufvud, who at the time was the local district judge, was taken in 1914 and exiled to Siberia for two years. The reason for this was court sessions that the ruler considered to be illegal. However, the building could not be renovated, and a decision was made to erect a monument at Luumäki station instead, using funds raised from private citizens.

A design competition was organized in summer 1937, which was won by the sculptor Wäinö Aaltonen. The seven metres tall monument is made from the red granite of Vehmaa. The figures and texts of the monument symbolize the power of justice. The monument was unveiled with great ceremony on 5 December 1937. In addition to a couple of thousand citizens, there were several honoured guests present, including President P.E. Svinhufvud.

## MONUMENT TO THE LAST BATTLE OF THE FINNISH CIVIL WAR

The Finnish Civil War, or the Finnish War of Independence (27 January - 15 May 1918), took place right after the country had gained independence from the Russian empire. The unstable situation led to a political and military crisis that escalated into a war between the Reds and the Whites. There were various battles and skirmishes in Luumäki also.



One of the last battles of the Finnish Civil War was fought in Kiurula. At the turn of April and May, the army of the Reds had been dispersed and started to retreat towards Kymenlaakso. The Whites approached Luumäki from various directions. The Reds stopped at Kiurula, but were forced to continue their retreat. The reason for this was that the location of their artillery battery at the church hill was disclosed to the Whites by a local woman, who trekked through the Kiurula wilderness to tell the news. The Whites managed to destroy the artillery battery of the Reds, causing them to flee towards Taavetti. The Reds left Luumäki the following day.

A monument was erected at the location of the last battle by the Luumäki civil guard. The monument, designed by a local jaeger captain, Taavi Taina, was unveiled with great ceremony on 1 May 1938.

## LUUMÄKI CHURCH HILL

The road leading to Luumäki church hill branches south off of Main road 6. The church hill can be seen on the other side of an open field. Closer by, graveyards can be seen on the slope of the hill, with the church and belfry rising behind them. Luumäki was ruled from the church hill since 1642. Today, it is the centre of spiritual leadership only.



The first church was built on the church hill in the mid-16th century, at which time Luumäki was part of the more extensive Lappee parish. The second church, built in 1731, was destroyed in a fire. The present church, designed in the Empire style by C. L. Engel, was completed in 1845. The shape of the church is a cross with inclined inner corners and a large dome in the middle. The church is bordered by a stone wall.

The buildings on the church hill also include a belfry built in 1876 and a parish hall built in the 1920s. There are also two graveyards on the hill. These contain various

monuments, such as a soldiers' graveyard, a memorial to President P.E. Svinhufvud, and a monument to the Finnish Civil War.

The Luumäki church hill is an excellent place for enjoying the beautiful historical setting, and for enjoying the calm and restful atmosphere.

## TAAVETTI FORTRESS

The fortress in the centre of Taavetti, next to the community hall, is part of the chain of fortresses built during the period of Russian rule in the late 18th century to protect St. Petersburg. The fortress consists of two parts: the outer fortress was built in the 1770s, and the inner fortress in the 1790s. General Suvorov oversaw the construction of the inner fortress and the fortification of the outer fortress as part of the construction of a fortress chain in south-eastern Finland. There was a small fortress town inside the outer fortress, with dozens of wooden and stone buildings.



The fortress was in use for a short time only, and was discontinued immediately after the Finnish War in 1809. The area was not taken into use again until the late 19th century. At first, dwellings were constructed in the fortress for the reserve company, and later municipal functions were moved there.

The outer fortress measures roughly 800 x 650 metres. The bastions at the northern edge have been preserved whole. The inner fortress has been even better preserved, and was renovated in the early 21st century. Next to the inner fortress are the community hall, a red cottage, the fortress and local history museum, and two monuments commemorating the most recent wars.

### **LEARN ABOUT THE NEW ATTRACTIONS**

Itsenäisyudentie Road was extended in 2020. The new attractions are located on the western and northern sides of Taavetti. Information boards provide information of the events of the Second World War and of the scope of fortification work in the Luumäki area. The boards also introduce the Välliväylä log floating routes and the events of 1918 on River Huopaisenvirta.

### **INFANTRY REGIMENT 16 IN LUUMÄKI**

Infantry Regiment 16 (JR 16), founded in Tampere, participated in fortification work in Luumäki before the Winter War. JR 16 was part of the 6th Division, which was placed in the reserve of the military base. The 6th Division was stationed in the Luumäki area in late October 1939.

The Infantry Regiment 16 was founded in Tampere between 14 and 18 October 1939, after which it was transferred to Taavetti by train. The regiment included around 3,000 soldiers. Lieutenant Colonel Aaro Pajari acted as the commanding officer of the regiment. At first, JR16 settled on the southern side of the railway and started battle practice. At the turn of October and December, the regiment marched to the northern side of the railway and settled in the area between Lake Kivijärvi and the Village of Hietamies.

The regiment started fortification work on the dirt roads leading to the north and on the isthmuses in the water area. The defence line faced south. The main focus was in constructing anti-tank obstacles and in establishing fighting positions by the roads. Roughly one third of the regiment participated in fortification work whilst others were engaged in training and practise. When the Winter War broke out, the regiment received, on 5 December, an order to move to Värtsilä by train and to march directly to Tolvajärvi to participate in the battle.

The monument was erected in its current location in summer 2019 to the memory of JR 16's actions in the Luumäki area before the Winter War.



### **HUOPAISENVIRTA, HUOPAISENVIRTA LEAN-TO**

Huopaisenvirta is one of the sites along Itsenäisyudentie road. It is where three aspects of local history intertwine, namely the Välliväylä log floating route, fortification work carried out during the most recent wars, and the events of the Finnish Civil War in 1918.

The Välliväylä log floating route that passed through Lake Kivijärvi is part of the history of the Finnish forest industry. The sawmill industry started to grow in the late 19th century, and timber was purchased from the

Lake Saimaa region for sawmills in Kotka on the coast. W. Gutzeit & Co, a timber company, established a log floating route in the 1890s. The route was roughly 110 km long and wound its way from Rutola in Lappeenranta to River Kymijoki. In narrow sections, the natural flow of the river moved the timber along, whilst in lake areas, special vessels were used to float the timber to its destination tied into rafts.

The two-kilometre long River Huopaisenvirta was one of the problematic sections of the route, as timber rafts could not be floated through it. For this reason, rafts coming from Lake Kivijärvi were dismantled at the mouth of the river and floated freely through it. Over a million logs were floated through the route every year. The floating continued for 70 years and only ended in the early 1960s, when the surface level of Lake Kivijärvi was lowered by around 60 cm. River Huopaisenvirta was dredged at the time and a new bridge and a regulating dam were built.

Fortification work related to the most recent wars was started in Luumäki before the Winter War in 1939. The Infantry Regiment 16 participated in the fortification work on the western side of Lake Kivijärvi. After the Winter War, field fortifications were built on the northern side of River Huopaisenvirta and fortification work was started on the islands of Lake Kivijärvi. The log floating route was utilised as a water obstacle.

Huopaisenvirta monument was erected to the memory of the events of the Finnish Civil War. Two women and eight men captured by the Reds were shot in this location in March 1918. Their bodies were thrown into the river from a bridge, to be discovered later in the spring. The monument was unveiled in 1961.

