



Hiding Old Traces

Old path leading hikers to the edge of the cliff



PIENI KARHUNKIERROS
HIKING PATH

OULANKA NATIONAL
PARK

HOSSA REGION

FINLAND

Applying new solutions in path management for safety and habitat protection

A new implementation plan was made for Pieni Karhunkierros Hiking Path in the Oulanka National Park, Hossa region. The path is 12 km long, and the plan included many construction and path building sites. As part of the plan, the old path was diverted away from a dangerous cliff edge. Hikers tended to follow the old path, and beyond, to have a look down at the river canyon at a scenic point. There were no railings or ropes to secure visitors in any way; the cliff edge in question was not a designated scenic point. Further to safety issues, erosion caused by hikers threatened endangered flora growing on the cliff.

As the rocky habitat, and flora depending on it, is very scarce in the area, it was felt important to protect it from getting more eroded than it already was. The old path also led to a long flight of stairs that was in a poor shape and in need of repair. Instead of replacing the stairs, the aim was that hikers would use the new path through a safer terrain straight into a newly built view point. With the stairs gone, it was no longer possible to continue on the old path.

Parks & Wildlife Finland (PWF), as the managing authority, was looking for a solution to overcome the abovementioned problems of safety and erosion. Inspired by the landscaping work done on Slieve Gullion by the Northern Irish ASCENT team, PWF decided to adapt some of their techniques on Pieni Karhunkierros. The landscape, as well as materials available, are very different on the two sites. However, the target was the same - to divert

visitors and to stop further erosion. Pieni Karhunkierros is situated in a forested area and materials needed to be collected from nearby. Pieces of rotten wood, leaves and moss were taken from the surroundings in such a way that it wouldn't disturb the landscape or threaten the flora. A barrier made with tree trunks was built to make the old path uninviting and to block passage to the cliff edge.

Outcome

Landscaping of the old path on Pieni Karhunkierros was a fairly straightforward exercise. The area that needed to be camouflaged was not big and materials were abundant in the vicinity of the site. Collecting material in an environmentally friendly way posed some challenges. It was important that this activity would not disturb the surrounding nature in any way and would not leave visible marks on the terrain. This activity shows that even a relatively small effort can make all the difference. Diverting visitors from using the old path and blocking access to the cliff edge is vital for the protection of habitat and flora, but it also protects visitors from a dangerous edge on a high cliff.

Once the work was done, some hikers were stopped to ask their opinion. They found the old path not suitable for walking and were not

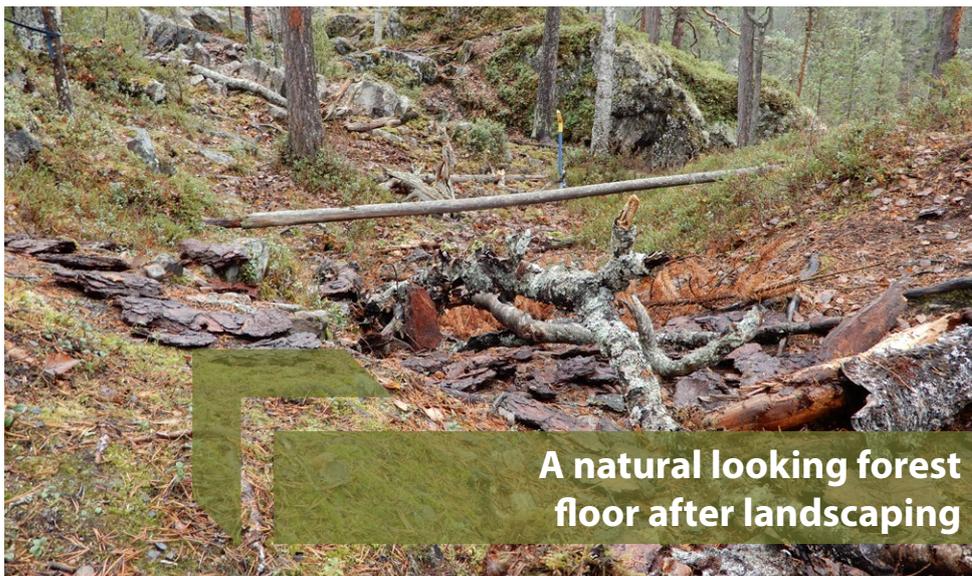
tempted at all to step off the new gravel path. Prior to landscaping, only tree trunks were placed to stop walkers from going to the cliff edge. However, hikers could see the old path, and the view point, and they were crossing the barrier. When the target is to completely divert people from going to a certain direction, no sign of previous use can be left visible. On top of the physical barrier and landscaping, there will be signs telling that the path is in a restriction area; there is no right to walk off marked paths. Signs showing the distance to the new view point will be erected, as well, to make it less tempting to walk to the cliff edge elsewhere. Hopes are high that this guidance, along with landscaping, would offer a method for keeping visitors away from hazardous spots.



Key Findings & Learning Points

There are many other spots along the Pieni Karhunkierros path that can potentially cause danger to visitors approaching cliff edges. When an unofficial path is formed, it tempts new visitors to check what previous hikers had wanted to see at the end of the path. Where ever there seems to be a spot with a view or anything of interest, paths will form.

Experience from this site shows that a clear barrier of some sort will have to be built to make it absolutely clear that access is not allowed over a certain point. However, a barrier alone will not keep walkers away and landscaping is necessary in order to make the forbidden path section uninviting. When done properly, this method is an efficient way of guiding visitors to a desired direction.



A natural looking forest floor after landscaping

FURTHER INFORMATION

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