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Illustrations, texts and design: Jutta Paso. Photo: Wikimedia Oy, 2002

NATURE TRAIL



METSÄHALLITUS  

Syöte Summit Trail

Iso-Syöte is commonly described as Finland's southernmost arctic fell. Although Iso-Syöte lies south of the arctic circle, and trees grow up to its rocky summit, typical arctic fell plants like the black bearberry certainly thrive on its uppermost slopes. A climb to the top will be rewarded by fascinating glimpses of the area's nature as well as marvellous views.

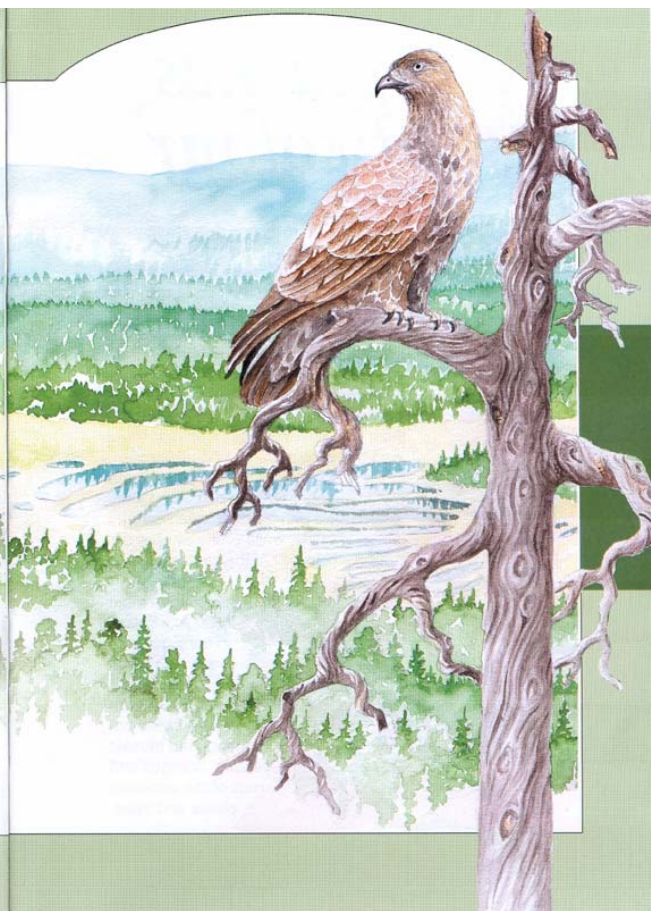
The panorama from a couple of hundred metres above the surrounding landscape encompasses the rolling wooded hills of the Syöte National Park to the north-west – and a little further south, almost in the shadow of the fell, the concentric pools of the Romesuo Bog.

The Syöte Summit Trail has been designed to familiarise visitors with the area's nature, geology and landscapes. The trail starts at a car park near the summit, and leads up to the highest point of the fell before winding back round to the starting point. Five information boards along the way describe Iso-Syöte's flora, fauna and landscapes.

This booklet contains useful information for those intending to visit the summit, including descriptions of the features highlighted on the notice boards along the trail. At the end of the booklet a special quiz tests your knowledge of the area's nature.

Welcome to the Syöte Summit Trail!

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Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*)

Splashes of colour

The arrival of the summer awakens delicate flowers from their winter slumbers on the rocky fell-sides. But the brightest splashes of colour on the hills are provided by dwarf-shrubs. The most common dwarf-shrub on Iso-Syöte is heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), whose small bell-like flowers blanket large swathes of the hillsides in late summer.

Twinflower (*Linnæa borealis*)

1

Other flowering plants are more prominent earlier in the summer – the first among them the bilberries (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and bog whortleberries (*V. uliginosum*) of the forests and marshes. In high summer Syöte's bogs are briefly tinged with delicate heath spotted orchids, while pretty twinflowers appear in the spruce forests.

Heath spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*)

But the fells are most filled with colour in early autumn, when the black bearberry's bright crimson leaves stand out among the mosaic yellows, oranges and reds of the withering plants and trees.

Black bearberry (*Arctostaphylos alpina*)

A snowy mantle

Syöte's snow-covered trees are a beautiful sight in the winter. But the cumulative weight of the densely packed snow can amount to thousands of kilos per tree, and many trees break under the strain imposed by their icy burden.

Northern trees are generally well-adapted to survive the snowy winters, however. Norway spruces on exposed fell-sides have unusually short branches, and are known locally as "candle-spruces".

Up on the fells, trees get a double dose of ice and snow: firstly from the falling snow; but also in the shape of the thick coating of frost that can form on their branches when warm air from lower areas rises up the hillsides, releasing condensation as it cools and can no longer hold as much moisture. Several centimetres of frost can form on trees in this way in just a few hours.

2

Syöte's changing landscapes

The landscapes visible from the summit of Iso-Syöte today consists largely of forests and bogs. But anyone standing here 9,500 years ago just after the end of the last ice age would have surveyed quite a different scene, as the bare land exposed from under the receding ice was then still in the early stages of colonisation by tundra plants. Over the subsequent millennia these landscapes have undergone many changes – due to climatic variations, the arrival of new plant and animal species, and other natural processes such as forest fires.

3

Test drillings into the peat of the nearby Romesuo Bog indicate that the area was earlier covered by pine woodland. The open peat bog only began to evolve some 8,300 years ago, when the water table started to rise gradually after a major forest fire had destroyed the area's trees.

The summit

The top of Iso-Syöte – Great Syöte Fell – lies 431 metres above sea level, and more than 200 metres above the surrounding rolling forested landscapes. Iso-Syöte is often justifiably described as Finland's southernmost arctic fell.

At the summit the bedrock is widely exposed to the elements. The powerful erosive force of the continental ice sheet removed all the soil at the peak, and left scratches and striations still visible today on the open rock. Even over the ten thousand years since the end of the ice age, high winds and extreme frosts have ensured that in exposed areas around the rocky summit nothing more than a few hardy lichens can establish a foothold.

Frost shattering has weathered the bare rock into piles of boulders and scree in many places, especially up at the top of Iso-Syöte and along the Vattukuru Nature Trail.

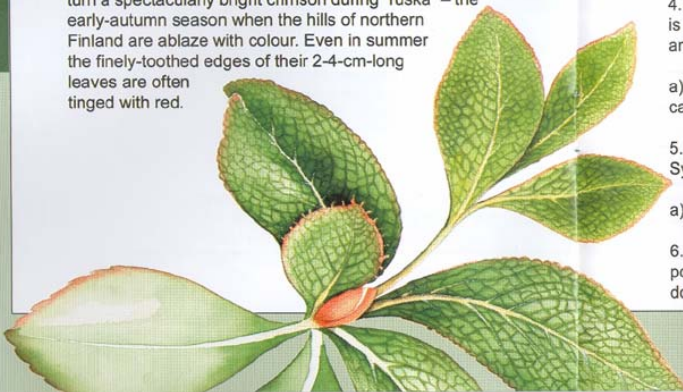
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Black bearberries

Black bearberries bring a taste of the true arctic fells to the top of Iso-Syöte, which marks the southernmost limit of the range of this arctic plant. This ground-trailing dwarf-shrub can be seen growing in patches here and there along the trail.

Its drupaceous berries are first pale green, but then gradually turn red and finally black as they ripen. They are not poisonous; but nor are they tasty enough to be picked commercially, although they are popular with birds like the willow grouse.

Black bearberries are easiest to spot when their leaves turn a spectacularly bright crimson during "ruska" – the early-autumn season when the hills of northern Finland are ablaze with colour. Even in summer the finely-toothed edges of their 2-4-cm-long leaves are often tinged with red.



Quiz

Answer the following questions to find out how much you know about life at the top of Iso-Syöte. If you get a low score, make another trip to the summit!

1. Which bird can be seen here scanning Syöte's landscapes for its prey?

- a) great northern diver, b) goshawk, c) golden eagle



2. What is first green, then goes red, and then finally turns black?

3. How do conditions for trees and plants on the fell-tops differ from those affecting species in lowland forests? How is this reflected in the vegetation at the summit of Syöte?

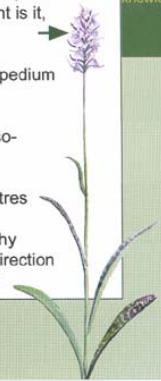
4. The plant illustrated here grows along the trail, but is difficult to spot when not in flower. Which plant is it, and when does it bloom?

- a) heath spotted orchid, b) lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium calceolus*), c) twinflower

5. How high above sea level is the summit of Iso-Syöte?

- a) 201.3 metres, b) 331.3 metres, c) 431.3 metres

6. Find Romesuo Bog, with its concentric marshy pools, from where you are standing. In which direction does the bog lie from the summit of Iso-Syöte?



5

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Test your knowledge