

# Leeleva Online Map

## Forests

The forests were a very important aspect of village life in Leeleva Village. Several of the German Mennonite villages' names allude to aspects of the forest and the current name of Leeleva, Lisna, is itself derived from the Ukrainian (ліс) and Russian (лес) words for forest. The village of Leeleva was surrounded by forests in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century; the large Ostrog Forest to the north and east and the Kunoff Forest to the north and west<sup>1</sup>. The Ostrog Forest, surrounding the area to the south of the Town of Ostrog, may have also been known at the turn of the century as the Nikitin or Nikitsky Forest<sup>2</sup>.

Europeans early recognized the importance of forest protection and conservation. As early as 1347 statutes were put in place to manage the forests in Poland and by the mid-1850s German forestry management methods were installed in parts of Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine<sup>3</sup>. Legislative acts concerning conservation of forests were passed in Ukraine in 1852 and 1888.<sup>4</sup>

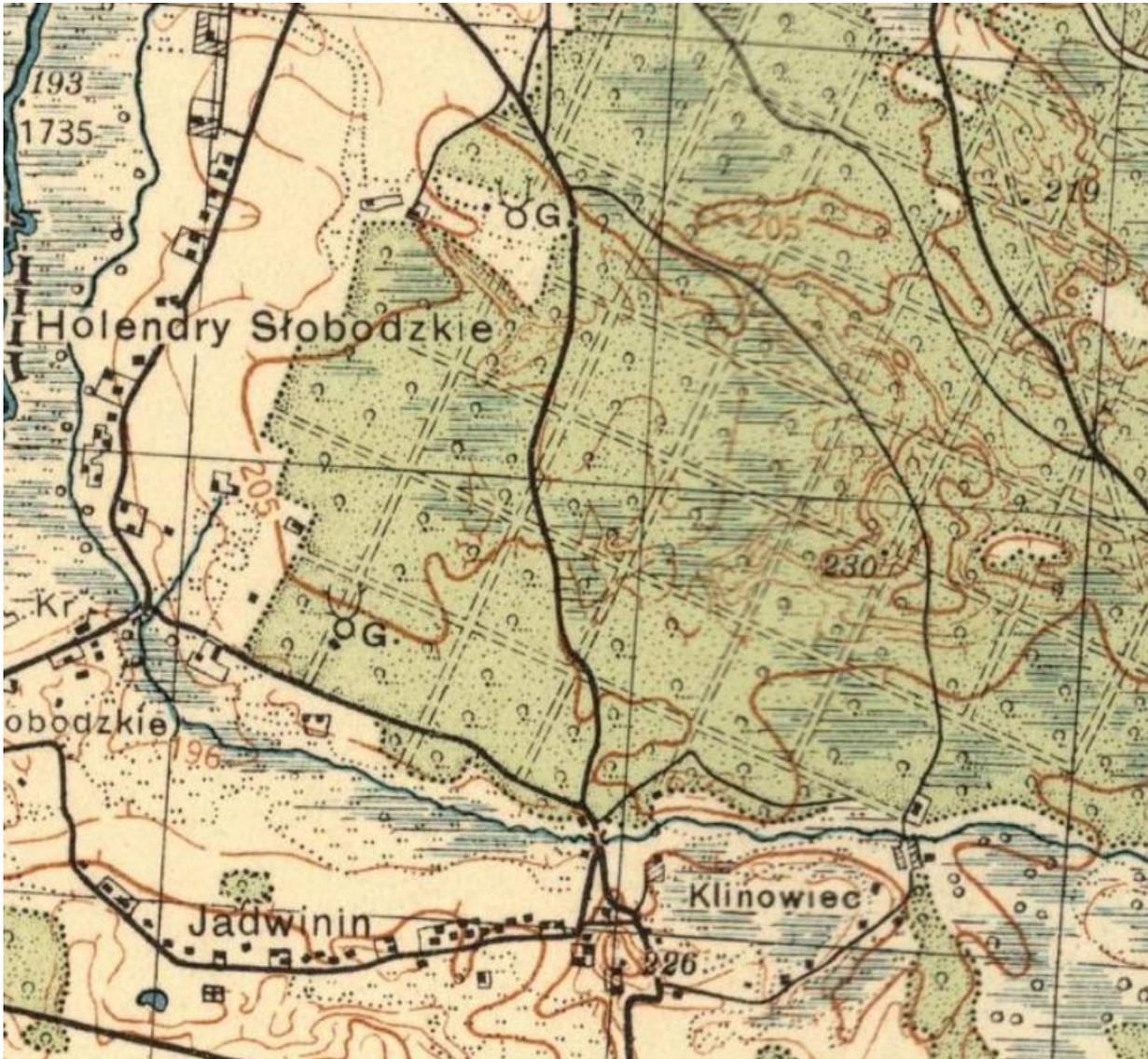
In large areas of Poland and Ukraine, forests were divided into three different classifications. 1) Crown forests; those forests owned by the king or the state, 2) Privately owned forests; those forests owned by private landowners or estates, and 3) Communally owned forests; those forests held communally, probably by a village or a town. In Ukraine crown forests were surveyed, charted, and divided into blocks, divisions, and compartments by the mid-1800s.

Avenues and paths bounded the compartments and trees were classed into 15 different age groups. Trees were to be felled when they were between the ages of 120 and 150 years old. The number of trees to be felled was to be consistent from year to year and saplings were planted after older trees were cut. Forests and the trees growing in them were generally seen as crops; the managing and care of which was just as vital to the local economy as they were to the local ecology<sup>5</sup>.

Forestry personnel were assigned to manage these carefully charted forest divisions. Foresters were well-trained in the care and conservation of the forest. They oversaw the marking of trees for felling, the planting of young saplings, as well as the enforcement of the laws pertaining to the use and protection of the forests. Forester lodges were built throughout the forests and these forestry-men were placed under the authority of the Russian Army. In 1859 all crown forests had been brought under the authority of the Forest Department and Foresters were tasked with a threefold objective: 1) to protect the forests from destruction, 2) to extract from the forests the most revenue, 3) multiply forests in areas of need<sup>6</sup>.

In 1869, Foresters ceased being subject to the military, and the various forester positions fell under the Forest Department of the Ministry of State Property<sup>7</sup>.

Forester lodges and the forest division boundaries can clearly be seen on this map of the forest south of Ostrog<sup>8</sup>. The village of Karolswalde, named here Holendry Słobodzkie, can be seen to the left and the village of Jadwinin is seen at the bottom. Two Forester lodges, marked by the symbol  appear toward the left of the forest. The boundaries in the forest can clearly be seen as the dotted lines forming rough squares in the green forest area.



**Western Edge of Ostrog Forest, 1920s**

A Forester in Russian was called Lesnicliy (Лесничий) or Lisnychuŭ (лісничий) in Ukrainian. In Polish, the term was Leśnik. The Polish term Gajowy, meaning Gamekeeper, was also applied to this position as these foresters were also responsible for the forests in regards to fishing and game-hunting<sup>9</sup>.

This photo shows a Gajowy and his wife, along with a driver, in the Lubomelski District in the early 1930s.<sup>10</sup>

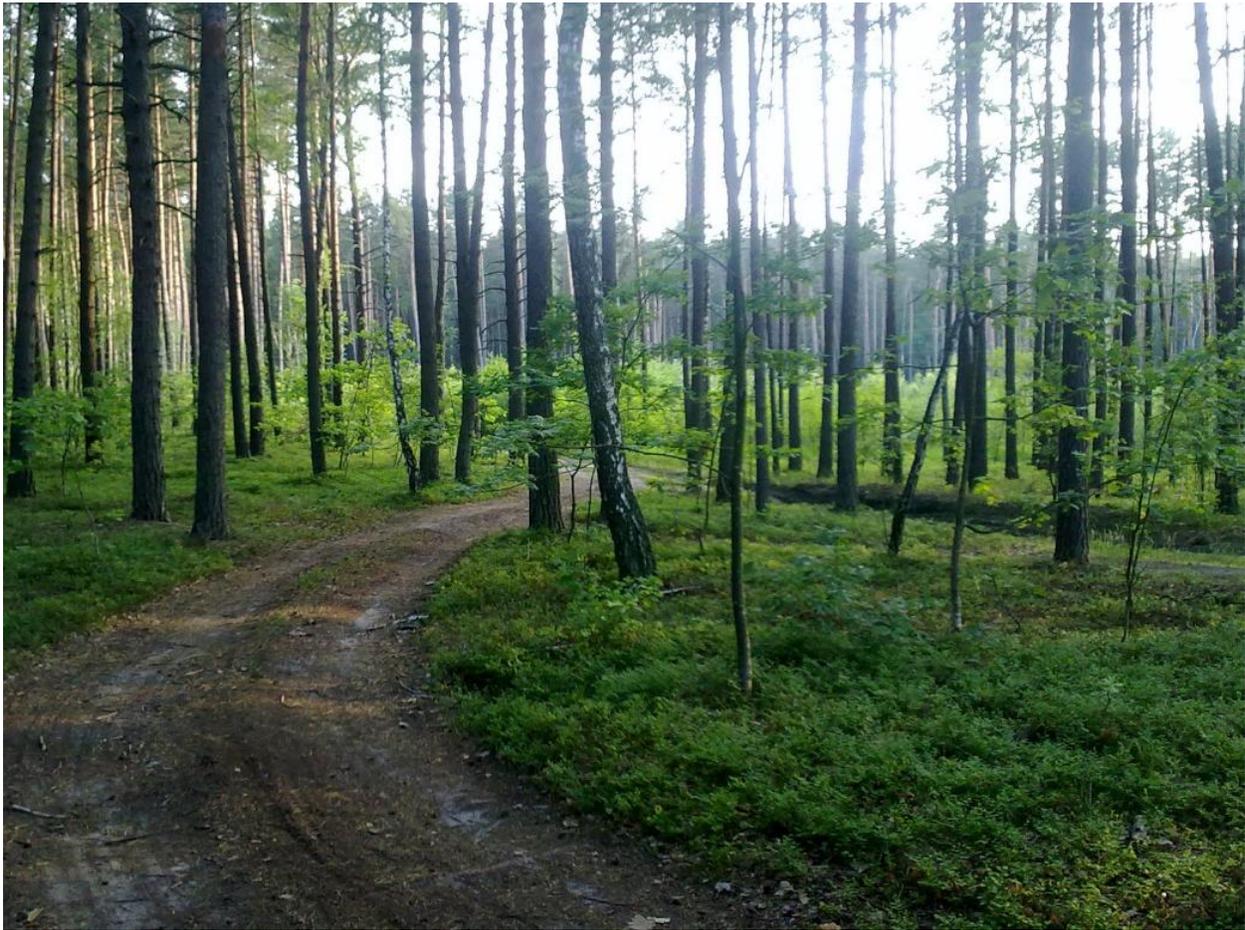


**Volhynian Forester, 1930s**

In Volhynia, the land was generally fairly flat, sandy, and intersected by marshes and bogs which were covered by vast forests. These forests abounded with wildlife; bears, wolves, boars, wild ox (urus)<sup>11</sup>, elk, badger, fox, marten, etc, and the trees were generally pine, oak, and elm. Although laws were in place regarding the management of the forests, by the mid-1800s Volhynian forests were poorly maintained, overgrown and neglected<sup>12</sup>.

2,733,000 dessiatina of Volhynia was covered by forestland in 1885 (a dessiatin was roughly equivalent to 2.7 acres). 374,639 dessiatina of these forests were owned by the Crown (the government) and managed by Foresters. A very large percentage of forestland was owned by estates (privately owned) and the very small remainder were held communally<sup>13</sup>. Around the year 1900, 30% of Volhynia remained covered by forests.<sup>14</sup>

*Continues . . .*



**Ostrog Forest east of Karolswalde, 2013<sup>15</sup>**

Forests products were an important industry in Volhynia and provided many people with their means of livelihood. Products like potash, pitch, tar, and charcoal, as well as lumber in the form of logs, planks, and staves, were produced. Tree bark was used extensively in the hide-tanning industry. However the forestry industry in Volhynia the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was far under-exploited<sup>16</sup>.

Prior to the 1870s and the advent of the railways, forest products were generally transported by waterways. In Volhynia, as part of the Pripjat River basin, rivers took a long, northerly loop before finally joining the Dnieper River and turning southwards. This meant that Volhynian products would generally have been exported to the north. However, the large price of working, felling, and carting lumber to any river ports was greater than the market value for wood, meaning that any exportation of wood products from Volhynia was a profitless undertaking. Wood products therefore were only produced for the local market<sup>17</sup>.

With the introduction of the railway, wood products were more easily transported and could also more readily be shipped to the south and east. By this time, however, wood was better used as fuel for foundries, brick or ceramics works, or other industrial applications<sup>18</sup>. The flow of technology and commerce therefore was not kind to the inhabitants of Volhynia.

Locally, some Volhynians did make their living from forestry-related industry. Many Germans who did not hold any land for crops cut logs and timber for a living. Some Germans would remain in the forest for a week at a time cutting trees<sup>19</sup>. The village adjacent to Leeleva to the east today known as Choten Druhyi, was in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century known as Balyary. The village took its name from the fact that its Polish residents were highly skilled in making staves and barrels, derived from wood from the forest<sup>20</sup>.



Ostrog Forest east of Karolswalde, 2012<sup>21</sup>

Another important product of the forest was wild game. However, hunting was a very difficult undertaking in Imperial Russia. In Volhynia, owning a firearm was prohibited except by those holding license. Licenses were actually sealed onto the stocks of guns. This was a quiet environment with no cars and few machines, but a high density of people. Therefore a gunshot could easily be heard from a great distance. If the Forester heard a gunshot he would soon come to investigate. If the gunshot was produced by one not licensed to hunt, “the life of the poor sportsman...would not be worth five minutes’ purchase”<sup>22</sup>.

Fishing was also fairly important, but the constant muddiness of the streams damaged the taste of the fish. Fish as food were in great demand as a high number of inhabitants of the area were Roman Catholic<sup>23</sup>.

Jake Unruh indicates that guards (Foresters) patrolled the Ostrog Forest by the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but that villagers were allowed to gather fallen sticks or logs and cut branches low enough to reach with a pruning hook. The Kunoff Forest to the “south” (it was actually to the west and north) was not guarded, but was infested with wolves and boars<sup>24</sup>. Foresters checked children for matches near the Ostrog Forest and those holding licenses were permitted to cut trees which had been marked by the Foresters<sup>25</sup>. If a person were to take firewood without a permit, the local police or Forester would issue a stern reprimand<sup>26</sup>.

In addition to resources, the forest also provided a dark, mysterious, and sometimes dangerous element to the lives of the Leeleva villagers. Wolves lurked in the forests and those traveling the roads through the woods at night did so at their own peril. Maria Ratzlaff Penner tells of an encounter with wolves in the forest. Travelers returning home late at night from Ostrog were suddenly surrounded by wolves and their horses became spooked. If not for a quick-thinking, friendly Polish neighbor who invited the travelers onto his yard, the short excursion into Ostrog could have ended very badly.

Aside from dangerous animals, mysterious folk lived deep in the forests and legends surrounded the dark, poorly traveled areas of the woods. People called Old Believers (also known as Ruske) who were long ago expelled from the Russian Orthodox Church, lived deep in the woods<sup>27</sup>. Several thousand Old Believers may have lived in Volhynia. These mysterious folks avoided public contact for fear of religious persecution and therefore preferred to live in out of the way places like the forests. Therefore, they became wild and unkempt<sup>28</sup>. Communities of Old Believers were said to gather near the mythical Holy Lake<sup>29</sup>.

The Holy Lake, located several miles east of the German village of Fürstenthal (Kustarna), was shrouded in local legends. Many strange and wonderful tales have been associated with the Holy Lake; monstrous creatures, lost royal treasures, natural cataclysms, and rejuvenating miracles were all said to appear at or near the Holy Lake. The lake, which has a depth of up to 9 meters, is filled with clean, clear water which is infused with minerals from the surrounding clay-like soil. An abundance of water-lilies grow at the water’s edge which is surrounded by pine and birch trees of the forest<sup>30</sup>. One legend says that a village used to be located near the lake. One night there was an earthquake which created an abyss into which the village church fell. The abyss thereafter filled with water, creating the lake. Another legend tells of a beautiful girl who lived in the village. While the village was being attacked by bandits, the girl began to cry which created a dense fog around the area. When the fog cleared, the bandits, as well as the village church, were gone and the lake stood where the church had been<sup>31</sup>.

By other accounts, there was an old lady who laid a curse on the nearby village causing it to fall into the abyss. Old-timers spoke of Cossacks who had supposedly spirited away the Tsar’s treasure and hid it at the Holy Lake. One myth even tells of red demon-monsters living in the village near the lake and of human sacrifices occurring on its shores. Even today, some people still believe that a yearly dip in the lake will bring good fortune and health<sup>32</sup>.

This map shows the forest cover in Ukraine in 2007. Ostrog is marked by the red flag. Although deforestation has taken place, a large portion of the Ostrog forest still stands south of the town<sup>33</sup>.



Forest Cover, Ukraine, 2007

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Photo via Panoramio.com; Izyaslavs'kyi district, Khmel'nyts'ka oblast, Ukraine  
50° 18' 5.00" N 26° 32' 23.14" E, April 24, 2012, © All Rights Reserved by DRVMI

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<sup>2</sup> Levin, V, “Ostrog”, The Center For Jewish Art; Architecture

<sup>3</sup> Forests and Forestry in Poland, Lithuania, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Rural Development and Land Use, Ingrid Karlsson and Lars Ryden, editors

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<sup>7</sup> Forests and Forestry in Poland, Lithuania, etc.

<sup>8</sup> P47 S43 (alt. A47 B43) Ostróg

<sup>9</sup> Forests and Forestry in Poland, Lithuania, etc.

<sup>10</sup> Wołyn Naszych Przodków; Powiat Lubomelski

<sup>11</sup> Forests and Forestry in Poland, Lithuania, etc. This author clearly refers to the auroch although Wikipedia article indicates the auroch became extinct by 1627.

<sup>12</sup> Forests and Forestry in Poland, Lithuania, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Forests and Forestry in Poland, Lithuania, etc.

<sup>14</sup> Anonymous, What is Ukraine?

<sup>15</sup> Photo via Panoramio.com: Izyaslavs'kyi district, Khmel'nyts'ka oblast, Ukraine  
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<sup>16</sup> Forests and Forestry in Poland, Lithuania, etc.; Anonymous, What is Ukraine?

<sup>17</sup> Forests and Forestry in Poland, Lithuania, etc.

<sup>18</sup> Forests and Forestry in Poland, Lithuania, etc.

<sup>19</sup> Unruh, Abe J., The Helpless Poles; Unruh, Velma Penner, “Leeleva Village”.

<sup>20</sup> Romanchuck, Alexander [Романчук О.], “Balyarnyy Fishing Village of Balyary...”

<sup>21</sup> Photo via Panoramio.com; Izyaslavs'kyi district, Khmel'nyts'ka oblast, Ukraine  
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- <sup>22</sup> Forests and Forestry in Poland, Lithuania, etc.
- <sup>23</sup> Forests and Forestry in Poland, Lithuania, etc.
- <sup>24</sup> Unruh, Jacob, "From Village Life to Kansas Plains".
- <sup>25</sup> Unruh, Velma Penner, "Leeleva Village".
- <sup>26</sup> Schultz, Eva and Nichols, Martha Schultz, "Lena From Russia". Lena Ratzlaff memoirs tell of a time when Eva Ratzlaff Nightingale was reprimanded by local police for taking firewood, presumably without a permit.
- <sup>27</sup> "Old Believers in the 18-19 centuries", Russian Orthodox Old Believers' Church website
- <sup>28</sup> Bauer, Yehuda, Death of the Shtetl
- <sup>29</sup> "The Holy Lake" "[ОЗЕРО СВЯТЕ]"; Legend of the Holy Lake
- <sup>30</sup> "The Holy Lake" ["Озеро Святе"], Nedaleko
- <sup>31</sup> "The Holy Lake" "[ОЗЕРО СВЯТЕ]"; Legend of the Holy Lake
- <sup>32</sup> "The Holy Lake" "[ОЗЕРО СВЯТЕ]"; Legend of the Holy Lake
- <sup>33</sup> United Nations Environment Programme - World Conservation Monitoring Centre. Forest cover digital data ([www.unep-wcmc.org/forest/](http://www.unep-wcmc.org/forest/)).