

Diverse

The UNESCO World Heritage “Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe” reflects nearly the entire spectrum of beech forest types from the mountains to the sea.

Depending on climate, soils, and location, each component part features completely different forest patterns. It’s hard to believe that we’re talking about the same tree. The beech is multi-faceted:



Tall tree structures with columnar trunks and mighty treetops.
Structurally rich, multi-layered beech forest.
Stocky dwarf varieties in rocky habitats.

The five German areas are also of a fascinating diversity:

↓ Hainich: Flowering Corydalis
© L. Mäder

HAINICH | 1.573 ha

Thuringia | Hainich National Park | 7,500 ha | www.nationalpark-hainich.de

Hainich Forest – impressive and colourful splendour.
Spring’s first vibrant rays of sunshine weave magnificent blooming carpets of pinkish-violet Corydalis cava and white wild garlic blossoms onto the forest floor. Then the ancient beeches close their canopy. But autumn will return with radiant glow: The great variety of deciduous tree species makes for a spectacular display of colours.

Hainich National Park impresses with its great diversity of tree species, and the size, integrity and character of its unfragmented limestone beech forests are unrivalled. Highly specialised species, such as the European wildcat, Bechstein’s bat, the middle spotted woodpecker, highly endangered saproxylic beetles, orchids, and numerous species of fungi are found here.

SERRAHN | 268 ha

Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania | Müritznational Park | 32,200 ha | www.mueritz-nationalpark.de

In this hilly forest landscape, dotted with lakes and mires, early summer’s fresh green foliage is as enchanting as the vivid autumn colours and winter’s cool and frugal colour range.

↓ Jasmund: Beech forests meets the chalk coast
© I. Stodian



↑ Serrahn: Ancient beech forests, surrounded by lakes & mires
© B. Lüthi-Herrmann

The ancient beech forest that has been preserved in the Serrahn section, provides a glimpse into the past, what the primeval beech forests of Germany once looked like. Lowland beech forests on glacial sandy soils grow here.

The area intrigues with decaying ancient beech trees that offer shelter and subsistence to a wide array of uncommon fungi and insects. Rare bird species, such as the Eurasian bittern and the crane, impress the visitor. White-tailed eagles and ospreys are also at home here.

JASMUND | 493 ha

Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania | Jasmund National Park | 3,070 ha | www.nationalpark-jasmund.de

This stunning backdrop once enchanted the artists of the Romantic era: The contrast between the white chalk cliffs, the beeches’ green, and the blueish-green sea could not be more spectacular.

Here, the beech forest seems to plunge into the sea. Dead tree giants rock and sway in the waves on the rocky shore. Jasmund represents the beech forests of the lowland. Rare orchids, giant horsetail, and coralroot are typical

here. The limestone cliff face is a breeding ground for peregrine falcons, and house martins have established large colonies. White-tailed eagles soar the coastal skies as well.

KELLERWALD | 1.467 ha

Hessen | Kellerwald-Edersee National Park | 7,688 ha | www.nationalpark-kellerwald-edersee.de

Like in a fairytale forest, old gnarly trees cling to the steep rocky slopes and emphasise Lake Edersee’s blue glow deep down in the valley. From a bird’s-eye view, Kellerwald forest looks like an endless sea of beech trees. No road and no settlement cuts through its vast, exceptionally old woods. Around 1,000 of the purest springs can be found here, and even a few remnants of genuine primeval forests.

The Kellerwald hosts acidophilous beech forests. Flowers like the Cheddar pink and rare beetles considered primeval forest species, are just some of its outstanding features. Precious species, such as eagle owls, red kites, and black storks all breed here. Numerous species of woodpeckers and bats bear testimony to the structural richness of these forests.

↓ Kellerwald: Gnarly woody creatures
© T. Geisel



GRUMSIN | 590 ha

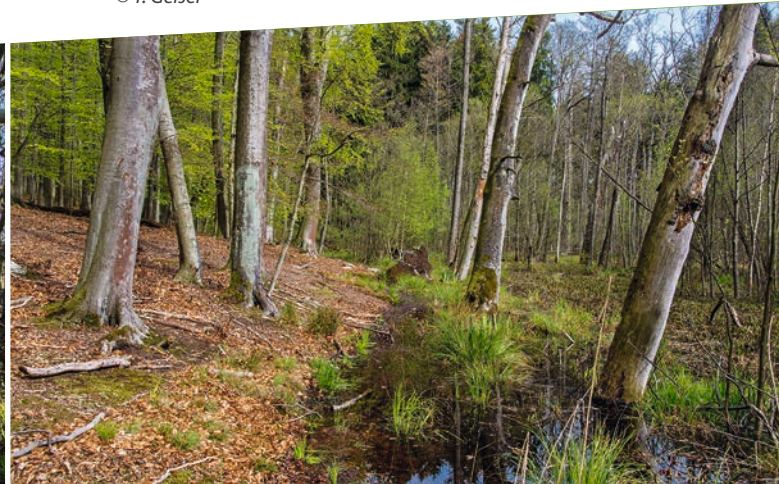
Brandenburg | Schorfheide-Chorin UNESCO Biosphere Reserve | 129.161 ha | www.schorfheide-chorin-biosphaerenreservat.de

The pronounced topographical relief reflects the events of the last ice age, when glaciers engulfed and transformed the face of the landscape with their massive ice sheets.

In Grumsin’s terminal moraine formations, the valleys are dotted with mires and small bodies of water, which are closely intertwined with the beech forest and create atmospheric forest landscapes.

Grumsin represents the lowland beech forests on glacial sand and loam soils. Such structural diversity in such a confined space provides the foundation for an unusual wealth of plant and animal species. The mires harbour sundew and cotton sedge. The blue-grey mating colour of the moor frog can resemble the colours of the sky. Bird-watchers can observe white-tailed eagles, black storks, and cranes.

↓ Grumsin: Mires & water bodies in abundance
© T. Geisel



UNESCO World Heritage

Some things are so precious and irreplaceable that their loss would be a tragedy for all of humankind and for planet Earth. To preserve them for all time, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) initiated the ‘Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage’. Adopted in 1972 and entered into force in 1975, it is the most significant international agreement on the protection of outstanding human cultural achievements and unique natural phenomena and landscapes.

The World Heritage Convention’s guiding principle is that uniqueness deserves unconditional protection and that World Heritage Sites are of intrinsic value and belong to all of humanity. “UNESCO World Heritage” status comes with the obligation to share and protect.

The universal value of World Heritage Sites is so exceptional that it is of global significance - today and in the future. Additional requirements are authenticity (historical authenticity) for cultural sites and integrity (wholeness and intactness) for natural sites, as well as adequate long-term protection of the site.



Land Brandenburg
Ministerium für Landwirtschaft, Umwelt und Verbraucherschutz

HESSEN
Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz

Mecklenburg Vorpommern
Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz

Freistaat Thüringen
Ministerium für Umwelt, Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz

www.europeanbeechforests.org

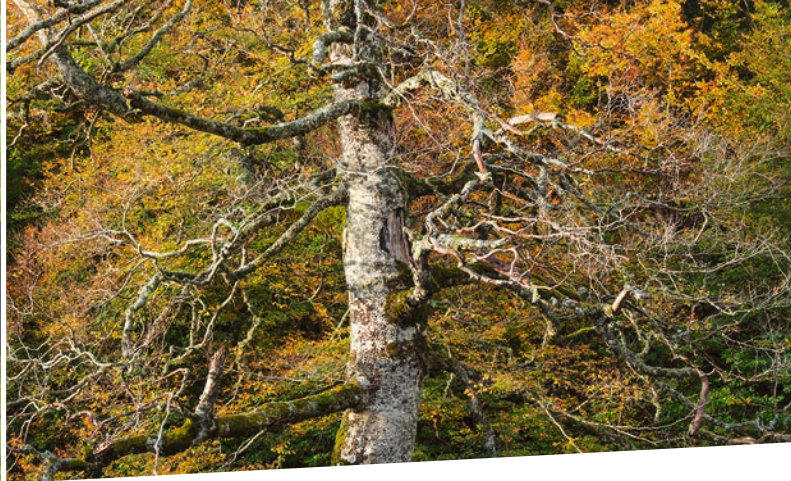
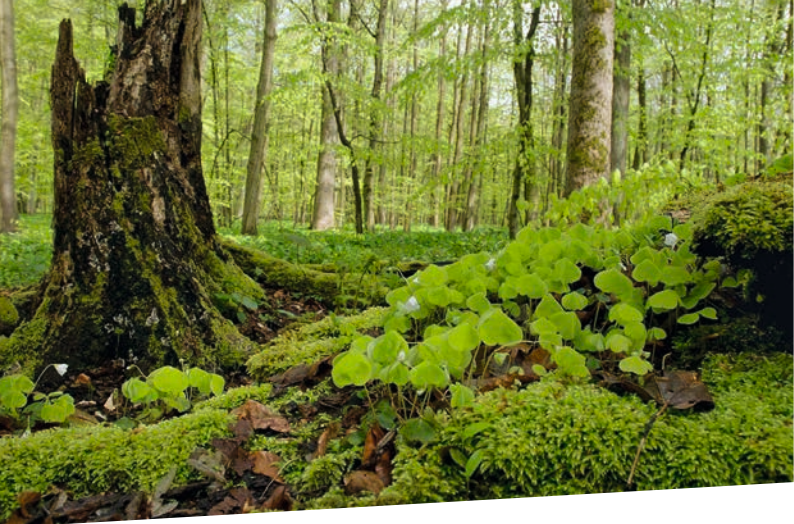
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EUROPE’S WILDERNESS

UNESCO-World Heritage Beech Forests

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Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe

WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE BEECH FORESTS



↑ Germany
© T. Stephan

↑ Italy
© B. D'Amicis

We are Europe's wilderness

"Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe"

Beech forests are Europe's natural wilderness. If it was left to nature, the beech would cover the central areas of our continent. However, all but the smallest remnants of European primeval beech forests have disappeared. Ancient, near-natural beech forests have become very rare these days. Which is why the most valuable of them belong to UNESCO's World Heritage.

A heritage of humankind that connects 94 unique beech forest areas in 18 countries and joins them like a jigsaw puzzle. Like a book with many chapters, where each single one has its own significance, but only together they form a story: the story of an extraordinary tree and its unusual expansion – the story of the European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*).



Fascinating

It only exists in Europe, nowhere else in the world. It is an extremely successful tree, which characterises an entire continent. Its success story begins 12,000 years ago, at the end of the last glacial period.

Back then, a thick layer of ice covered large sections of Europe. Beech forests had only survived as small remnants in Southern Europe. When the ice melted, the beech began to expand northwards from its isolated refuge areas.

This process is still ongoing today, even though the ice age is long gone. UNESCO regards this as globally unique and of such importance that it was the reason for the beech forests' inclusion in UNESCO's World Heritage List.

A tree that pushes its boundaries.

The re-colonisation of large sections of a continent by a single tree species is a globally unique phenomenon.

Beyond borders

In this still ongoing process of expansion, the European beech does not adhere to man-made borders. Thus, the World Heritage Site transcends borders and connects Europe in equal measure.

Initially, the World Heritage Site comprised of 10 forest areas in 2 countries (**2007**: Ukraine and Slovakia). In **2011**, it was extended by 5 German component parts. In the year **2017**, 64 forest areas in the Ukraine and in 9 additional countries were added. In **2011**, the World Heritage Site was extended by a further 15 component parts in 6 states parties.

*The World Heritage Site currently comprises a total of **94 forest areas** in **18 countries** and a surface area of about **100,000 hectares**.*

It is the only World Heritage Site worldwide that connects so many countries. And more precious forest areas in other countries could follow.



↓ Slovakia
© M. Hornschuh



Beech forests are Europe's natural wilderness. Today, near-natural beech forests are rare and must be protected.

700 BC



10 %
of Europe's surface
area was covered
by beech forests.



Today



Near-natural beech
forests are confined to
0,02 %
of their original
distribution.

Fragile

It is not just the rainforest that is at risk from logging, but also the few remaining primeval European beech forests.

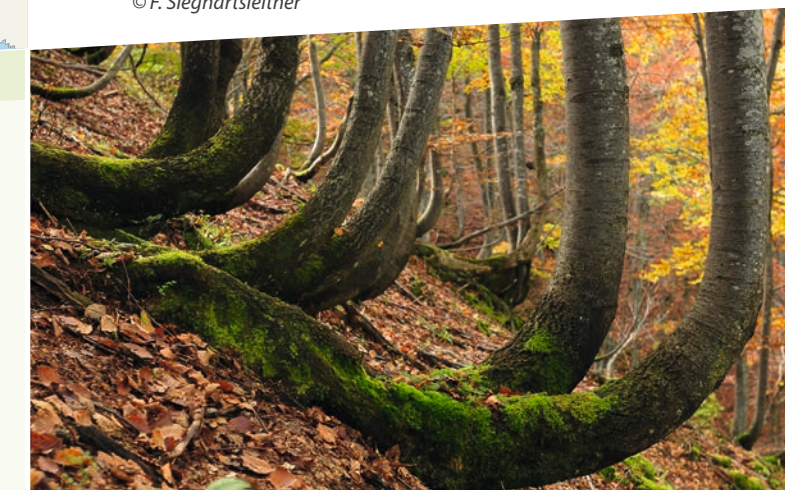
They are unique, beautiful, and fragile – and of particular biological diversity. Once cleared, their soul and original state are lost forever. The states parties to the World Heritage Convention have to guarantee the beech forests' protection and conservation as World Heritage. Thereby, they are held accountable.

World Heritage Beech Forests means:

**Let it be. Let the forest have its freedom.
Grant its peace.**

Through its recognition as World Heritage, UNESCO has reinforced protection efforts for the beech forests throughout Europe. This is an incentive for other countries to protect what remains of their unique beech forests.

↓ Austria
© F. Sieghartsleitner



↑ Germany
© L. Mäder

Unifying

But the World Heritage Beech Forests also tell another story.

The history of international understanding, of peaceful cooperation between nations, and of people who are passionately committed to preserving Europe's last precious beech forests.

ALBANIA, AUSTRIA, BELGIUM, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, BULGARIA, CROATIA, CZECH REPUBLIC, **GERMANY**, FRANCE, ITALY, NORTH MACEDONIA, POLAND, ROMANIA, SLOVAKIA, SLOVENIA, SPAIN, SWITZERLAND, UKRAINE

↓ Austria
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