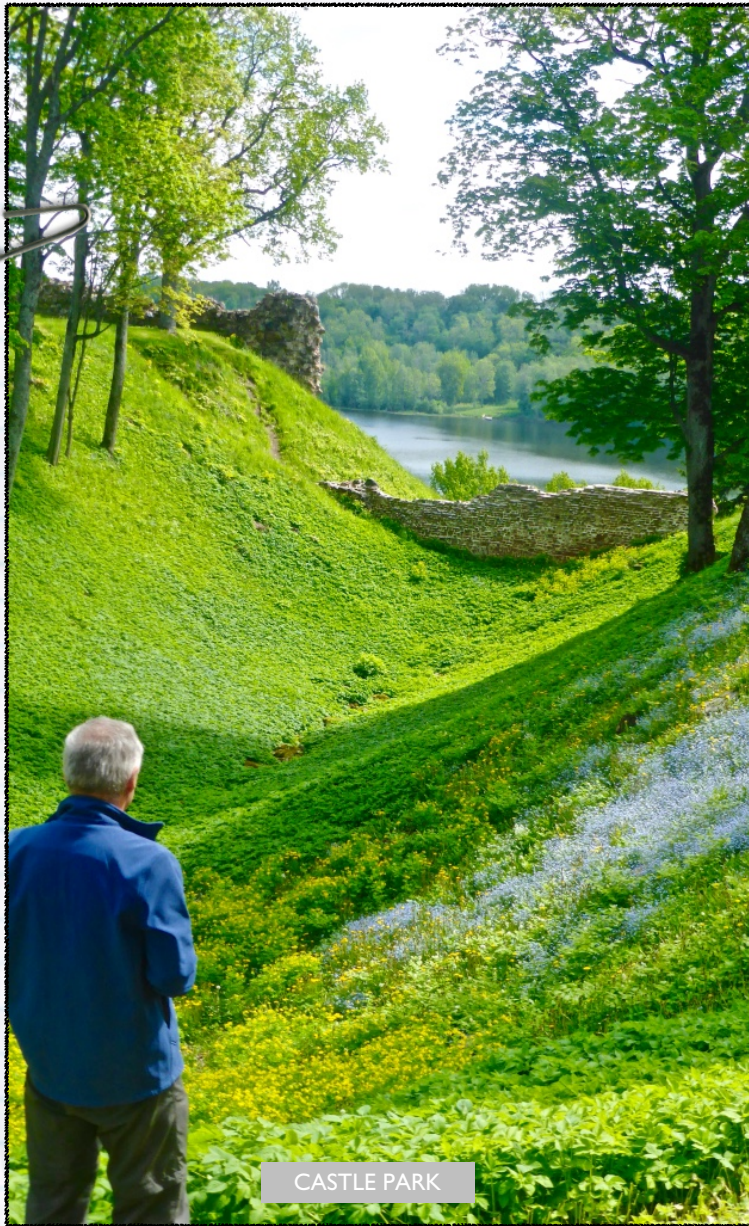




ESTONIA

SIGGY AND HEATHER | EUROPE 2015 | TUESDAY, 2 JUNE 2015



CASTLE PARK

Estonia

We started off the day by travelling through the Latvian countryside. It was very pleasant with lovely sun and good company. Each time we passed through a forest we scanned carefully for a glimpse of elk or deer. The entry into Estonia took us by surprise. We were driving through a small Latvian town one minute and on the outskirts we viewed a sign telling we were entering another country! One end of the street was in Latvia and the other was in Estonia.

Estonia is very small - it can be traversed from one side to another in four or five hours. People were living here when the first pyramids were being built. Just like it's two baltic neighbours, it has had a turbulent history. It has been invaded and ruled by Germans, Danes, Swedes, Poles and Russians. Estonia only became a country in 1918 and even since then has had 50 years dominated by Germany & Russia.

The place looks bright and cheery now. The roads are better than its neighbours and obvious work is happening in the little towns we passed. Our first port of call was Viljandi. It is a town of about 20,000 people and was a very relaxed location to stop and collect info from their very helpful tourist office. The highlight in this town was Castle Park. We got on our bikes and rode around a very picturesque park surrounding the ruins of a 13th to 15th century castle. It is located spectacularly on a slope above the lake.



ELK We looked long and hard into the forest to spy one. To no avail. Heather has photos of all kinds of signs but this one takes the cake. Only a mother elk could love the sight of something this ugly.



BIKE TRACKS We have been very impressed with the emphasis Europeans place on the bicycle as a mode of travel and as a form of recreation.

Here is a sign we found in Estonia - directions not only for vehicles but for bikes as well. There is always someone riding a bike - whether that be an elderly person or a young child - no matter where we are - even in the most remote of places. The other thing that has caught our attention is the courteousness of drivers who automatically give riders the right of way. And finally, **NO HELMETS!!**

Soomaa National Park



We believe the mounds are the remains of dual moats that once surrounded the castle. We continued our ride around the older part of the town. It does not have particularly special architecture, but has a comfortable, gentle feel to it. There were lots of timber houses, some with a lot more colour than we had previously seen. Many workers were out preparing the town to host a most prestigious event - the world Hanseatic League celebration. That is apparently a very big deal. We hope some of that will rub off on Tallinn when we visit in a few days.

After having lunch we headed to our major site for the day - Soomaa National Park. This park was set up to protect the country's largest flood plain and bog area. As we entered the park we saw forest landscape right up to the road. We knew there were lots

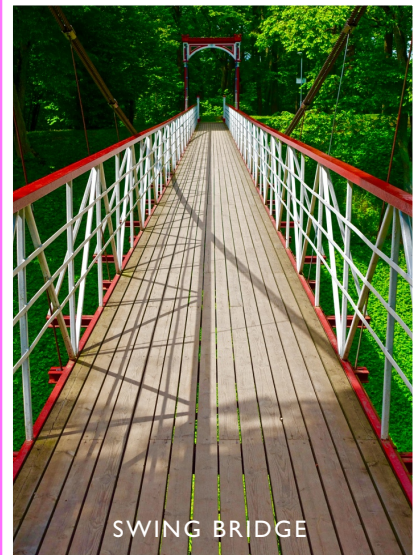
of bogs and fields but we saw little from our van. We eventually came upon an information centre and a place we could park (for free!). From here we took a long walk via wooden walkways. This particular path passes by ponds and waterways inhabited by beaver. Information boards explained their antics and habits and we watched intently hoping to catch a glimpse of one of these secretive creatures. No such luck. We did see a stuffed one at the information centre however. They are much bigger than we imagined.

We mused about whether to go on to other locations in the park but decided that they would probably not offer more than we have here. So here we are, stopping fairly early. We have both set about a little van cleaning and later on will enjoy the free internet supplied by the park office.

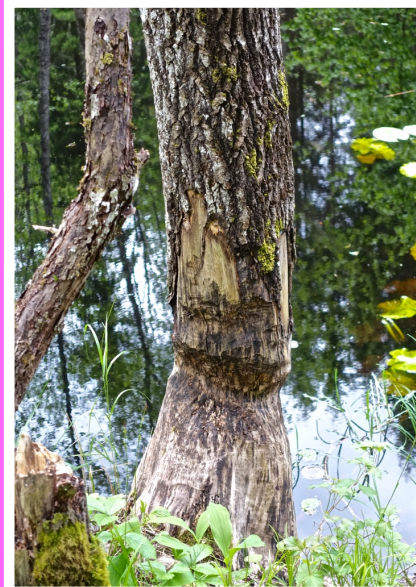
SIGHTS



VILJANDI WATER TOWER



SWING BRIDGE



BEAVER MARKS



BEAVER COUNTRY

24th July
1991 - The C
October 21

PHOTOS



CASTLE RUINS



RED SQUIRREL



CLEVER PUBLIC STATUE



CASTLE RUINS



TRADITIONAL ESTONIAN HOUSE

