



The Vijciems Cone Drying Facility



The area which around the Latvian village of Vijciems can be seen as unique open-air museum features the history of forestry work. A living witness to this history is the Vijciems Cone Drying Facility. For more than 100 years now, during the winter, the facility has been saturated with the warm scent of resin and smoke, helping spruce and pine cones to open up and their seeds – their soul – to see the light.



In the late 19th century, when the northern parts of Latvia were hit by major storms and vast forest fires, thought had to be given to the issue of reforestation. It was decided to build a cone drying facility in the area so as to ensure the necessary supply of seeds.

In 1895, at a site called Mežmuiža, the job was done. The facility operated without interruption until the 1960s, when bigger cone drying facilities were built in Latvia. Running on electricity, they were appropriate for much larger volumes of pine and spruce cones. In 1970, the historical building was shut down for 22 years.

In 1992, thanks to the dedication of people at the Strenči Forestry Department and at the Association of Forest Workers, a fire was once again lit in the old facility's kiln. Ever since that time, each winter – usually from January until April – the fire crackles in the kiln, where 24 cylinders of pine and spruce cones turn.



At the Vijciems Cone Drying Facility, the entire process is environmentally sound. Dried cones from which seeds have been extracted are used as fuel. Everything at the facility is authentic, just as it was 100 years ago. There's an original lift to the third floor, which is used to bring up bags and boxes of cones. Then, through a special hatch, the cones are dropped into the drying drums. The drums are turned twice a day, and the drying process takes an entire week. The cones crackle when they open, and the seeds drop out. The entire building is full of the magical aroma that cannot be repeated anywhere else – the scent of dried cones and the forest itself.

Since 2000, the Vijciems Cone Drying Facility has been managed by the state-owned stock company "Latvijas valsts meži" (Latvia's State Forests). The basic operations of the kiln have successfully been merged with the need to preserve Latvia's historical heritage. The Vijciems facility also operates as a museum. In 2002, the building was put on the European list of cultural heritage, and the flag of that programme was raised beside it. We Latvians can be proud of the fact that this is the only cone drying facility of its kind in the whole wide world.

In the spring of 2004, the roof of the building was renovated – the first capital repairs to the building in its 110 years of existence. In 2012, the hoary edifice gained new windows. Just how sturdy is the structure? Well, during the passions of the 1905 revolution, the noblemen of Vijciems barricaded themselves behind the drying facility's doors. Their mansion and their hunting castle were both burned down, but the thick walls of the drying facility survived both fire and the bullets of revolutionary guns.



The Vijciems Cone Drying Facility is a unique cultural and historical object. Its employees do their basic job, but they also run a museum in the building. Tourists will enjoy this site – the only place in the world where everyone can see the way in which coniferous tree seeds were extracted in the past.

The Vijciems Cone Drying Facility offers:

- Tours for groups and individual visitors
- A demonstration of the cycle of processing pine and spruce cones
- Information about the historical Mežmuiža estate
- Special offers for schoolchildren and group tours



Mežmuiža, Vijciema pagasts, Valkas novads, LV-4733, phone to organise visits: +371 26478620.