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Menhirs in Carnac (Brittany, France) | Photo: Agnieszka Sikora

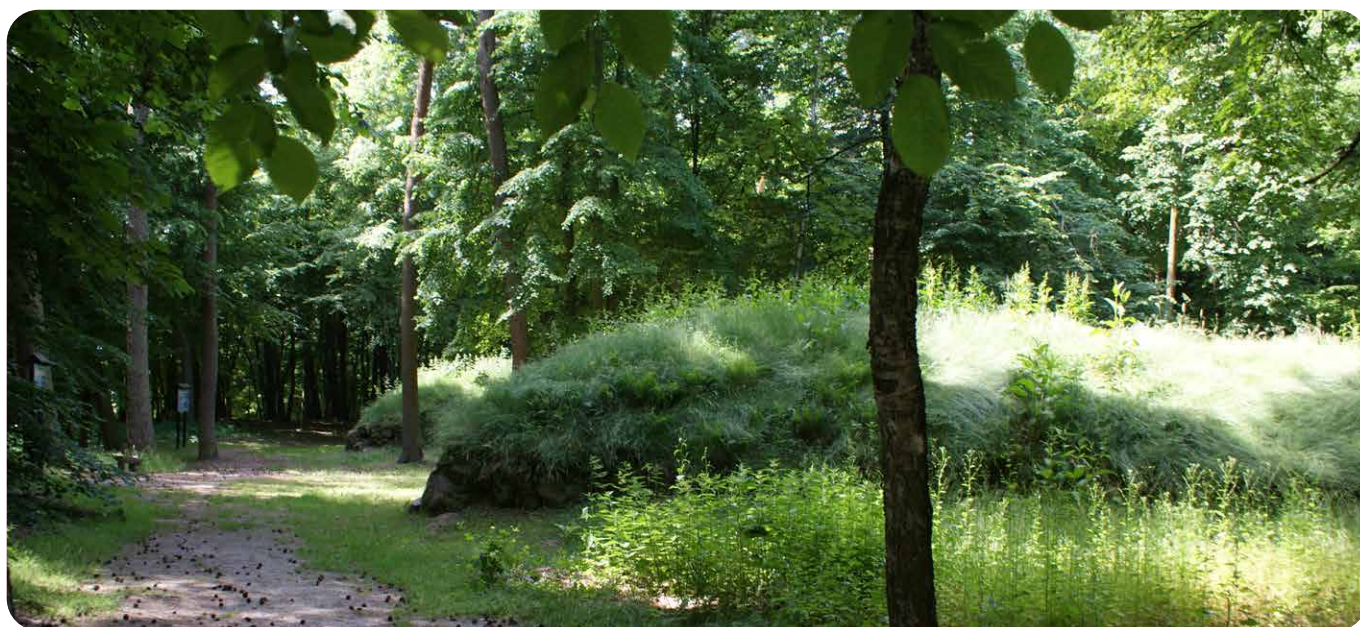
# NOT A STONE LEFT UPON ANOTHER?

The world of the future... It is certainly tempting to think about what kind of future awaits us. We might wonder what new opportunities or threats will emerge as a result of technological development. The scenarios proposed by masters of the science fiction genre fuel our imaginations. Let's turn the trend around and ask ourselves what we would like to preserve in our landscape despite the passage of time. Would there be a place on this list for the mysterious, several thousand years old megalithic structures?

They are some of the oldest cultural artefacts in Europe, dating back to the late Stone Age. They were built from rough or roughly hewn stones. The megalithic structures in question are various types of objects whose history goes back to the Neolithic period. The simplest form of megalithic structures is menhirs. These stone pillars can form avenues or rows, as in Brittany, in the famous Carnac, where several thousand have been preserved. They can also take the form of cromlechs, or stone circles, the most famous example being Stonehenge, which attracts over a million tourists from all over the world each year. This group of structures also includes various forms of tombs, stone boxes covered with stone slabs called dolmens, gallery and passage graves, and, finally, burial mounds and tholos tombs in the form of large domed chambers. They can be found on many continents. They often shared a common function. They were mainly burial sites, but many also served worship and ceremonial

purposes. For many, it was a taboo space. The place where the dead are buried is both forbidden and sacred even today. Perhaps this is why some elements of the megalithic landscape have survived to this day and have a chance to become part of the world of the future.

Examples of megalithic and later structures that refer to this idea can also be found in Poland. These are primarily tombs, burial mounds, and stone circles erected in the late Iron Age, particularly well-preserved in the north of our country. Many factors influence the condition in which they have survived to the present day and how they may look in the future. Let us consider various scenarios using the example of four such archaeological monuments preserved in Wietrzychowice, Leśna, Muszkowice, and Dolice. Anna Żemła-Siesicka, PhD, a landscape architect from the University of Silesia in Katowice, who has been researching megalithic landscapes years, tells us their story.



Wietrzychowice Cultural Park | Photo: Anna Żemła-Siesicka

## WIETRZYCHOWICE AND THE POLISH PYRAMIDS

We begin our journey in search of preserved megalithic structures in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship. It was there, in Wietrzychowice, in the 1930s, that the Polish archaeologist Prof. Konrad Jażdżewski began his research into large boulders neatly arranged in rows. The stones turned out to be elements of a grave surrounds and today they are among the oldest architectural monuments in Poland. Although not as impressive as the pyramids in Egypt, they are more than 1,000 years older. In the 19th century, the local population called them 'żale' or 'mogielniki' [lamentations or grave yards]. Some claimed that those were the tombs of giants who inhabited the Kujawy region in ancient times. It is not surprising, as a characteristic feature of this megalithic landscape was the elongated earth embankments, which could reach over 100 metres in length. Five such tombs have been preserved in the vicinity of Wietrzychowice. By the 1930s, several dozen boulders used in the

construction of the embankment had disappeared, most likely due to road construction. Only three of the five structures were intact. As soon as Prof. Konrad Jażdżewski understood what he was dealing with, he began to seek legal protection for the structures. The Kuyavian tombs were entered into the Poland's Register of Historical Monuments, and in 2006 the Wietrzychowice Cultural Park was established, providing a legal form of protection for these special architectural forms, sometimes referred to as the tombs of giants. Similar structures have been discovered in nearby Sarnów, where nine tombs have been identified.

'In the 20th century, excavations were carried out in both Wietrzychowice and Sarnów. These are examples of sites that have been reconstructed. Information boards were installed, tourist infrastructure was built, and cultural parks were created to ensure that the monuments would have a chance to survive in the future,' says Anna Żemła-Siesicka.

## LEŚNO, OR STONE CIRCLES VS. A TORNADO

Evidence of ancient settlements can also be observed in Leśno, a Kashubian village in the Pomeranian Voivodeship. In the local Bory Tucholskie forest, there are several burial mounds and stone circles, 20 box graves, and 7 pit and urn graves from the Bronze and Iron Ages.

'Archaeological research was carried out there in the 20th century. The burial mounds and stone circles were reconstructed, and the tourist infrastructure was also taken care of, including the creation of several interesting themed paths', the architect explains.

On the night of 11 August 2017, a storm passed through the Bory Tucholskie area, wiping thousands of hectares of forest off the face of the earth. The works to restore educational and tourist infrastructure in this area were completed in 2020, with one of its elements being the Kregi Kamienne (Stone Circles) cultural trail in Leśno.

'The storm, although tragic in its consequences, revealed the location of the historical objects. The forest disappeared, revealing distant views and allowing us to imagine what the burial ground from several thousand years ago might have originally looked like. This experience of the past has become even more authentic', emphasises the researcher.

## MUSZKOWICE AND BURIAL GROUNDS HIDDEN DEEP IN THE FOREST

Muszkowice is a small village located in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship. About a kilometre from its northern border, in an old beech forest, there are burial grounds with Neolithic long tombs. They were entered into in the National Register of Archaeological Monuments [Krajowa Ewidencja Zabytków Archeologicznych] in 1984.

It is an interesting example of a place where chamberless tombs can still be seen in excellent condition. As a result of subsequent research, several dozen sites with long tombs and medieval circular burial mounds have been identified in the area.

'These unique and monumental structures are difficult to spot with the naked eye. There is no tourist infrastructure there. Finding the burial grounds is not an easy task. They are situated in a densely forested area and it is precisely the reason why they have been able to survive in such excellent condition until today', says the researcher.

Are they monumental structures? Certainly. However, only invasive modern scanning or excavations can reveal their unique structure and confirm it. What is visible to the naked eye is not at all what it seems. It takes some effort to find them, and in the end, we can only see... long hills covered with trees and boulders sticking out here and there in the forest.



Sarnowo Cultural Park | Photo: Anna Żemła-Siesicka

## DOLICE AND THE GATES OF TIME

'I visited these and many other places in Poland and Europe where traces of megalithic landscapes have been preserved. Standing there, I knew that I was dealing with authentic artefacts of ancient cultures from several thousand years ago', says the researcher. However, what she observed differed from place to place. The objects in Muszkowice have been preserved because they were well-hidden in an old beech forest. In Wietrzychowice, valuable monuments have survived because measures were taken to grant them legal protection. In Leśno, megalithic elements were reconstructed twice due to the effects of an extreme natural event – a storm. All this to preserve them for future generations.

'Certainly, it is important to provide adequate tourist infrastructure, but only in such a way that the place does not lose its historical value. In my opinion, the architectural solutions used in Dolice near Stargard Szczeciński are worth taking a closer look at', emphasises Anna Żemła-Siesicka.

Dolice is another place where you can see numerous Neolithic objects. To promote the archaeological heritage of the region, the 'Wrota Czasu' [Gates of Time] open-air archaeological museum was built in Polana Wiśniowa in 2012, just a few hundred metres from the preserved tombs. It includes replicas of a megalithic tomb with a skeleton buried inside, as well as stone burial mounds from the Bronze Age.

Such an initiative serves, first and foremost, to educate. The information materials available there allow for a better understanding of the distant past and can be more attractive to tourists. The replicas stimulate the imagination. However, if you would like to experience the place in all its authentic self, you can go deeper into the forest to look for traces of the activities of the people who lived here several thousand years ago. Will those traces survive for a few thousand more? Only time can tell.