

VUOKSI

CULTURE ROUTE

Imatra



IMATRA

CITY ON THE RIVER VUOKSI



1. The genesis of the River Vuoksi was a vast natural spectacle



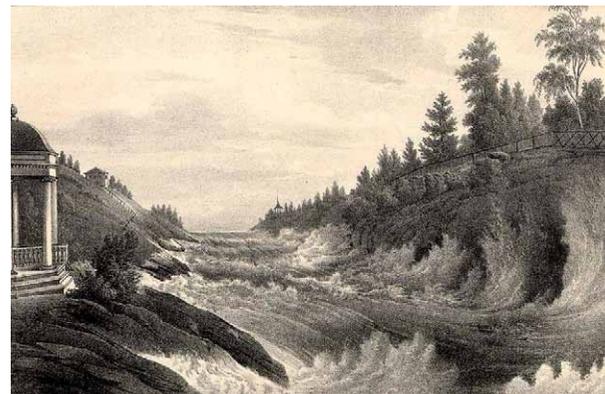
On the banks of the River Vuoksi, you sense the important geological past of the Saimaa region. During the Ice Age, enormous ice sheets up to three kilometres thick pressed down the surface of the earth. Created by receding glaciers,

the enormous fringe formations of moraine soil, the Salpausselkä ridge system, are the only geological landforms in Finland visible from space. The genesis of River Vuoksi approximately 5,700 years ago was a unique geological spectacle: the earth freed from beneath the weight of the ice slowly tilted the water body of Lake Saimaa against the Salpausselkä ridge, finally breaching it. The water masses cascaded on a wide front from Lake Saimaa flooding onto dry land, seeking an outflow into the Gulf of Finland and Lake Ladoga. The level of the Saimaa watercourse dropped by approximately three metres. The genesis of River Vuoksi then caused a major flood in Lake Ladoga, which approximately

3,300 years ago contributed to the genesis of the River Neva.

Initially, Imatra Rapids was a wide stream flowing over the present Kruununpuisto area, drilling a number of giant's kettles which are relatively rare phenomena in river geology. Over time, the rapids carved through bedrock forming the present impressive river bed. Echoes of the roaring Imatra Rapids, the largest rapids of River Vuoksi, are also heard in epic folk poetry, such as the Finnish national epic Kalevala, which refers to the rapids as the ultimate challenge that no man can cross.

Other important rapids on the River Vuoksi included the Vallinkoski, Pikku Imatra and Tainionkoski rapids. Most of the rapids in River Vuoksi were situated in the upper reaches of the river, over the first 25 kilometres. Within the boundaries of the present City of Imatra, which covers a 13-kilometre-long stretch of River Vuoksi, there were nine important rapids in all.



What does 'Imatra' mean?

What does this ancient word mean? Although this is not known with any certainty, it may have its origins in the Sami language, and would thus denote a string of inter-linked streams. The Imatra Rapids drop over 18 metres from top to bottom over a distance of 1.3 kilometres.

Image: The Imatra Rapids in the 19th century. Drawing by P.A. Kruskopf.

2. Peasants and princes – people on the River Vuoksi



The first inhabitants arrived in the Imatra region following the receding glaciers over 10,000 years ago. Settlements were also established on the banks of the River Vuoksi shortly after its genesis. The first written records, dating from

the 16th century, depict how the peasants cultivated land, husbanded cattle and engaged in fishing along the River Vuoksi. The manors along the river were formed in the latter half of the 17th century, when the Swedish monarch granted landed estates on the banks of the River Vuoksi to loyal subjects in reward for their war service. In Imatra, such estates, granted under either allodial rights or feudal tenure, led to the formation of the Neitsytniemi and Siitola manors, and, subsequently, the Sienimäki manor also became an independent estate. From the 19th century onwards, the Vuoksi riverbanks attracted increasing numbers of Russian nobility. In the Vuoksi estuary, for example, General Astascheff built the



The Princess's pastry delicacies

Prince Aleksei and Princess Olga Obolenskij (in the image) were long-time residents in Saimaanhovi. The Princess also wrote the popular *Young Wife's Pastry Delicacies*, and the new edition of the pastry cookbook entitled *Delicacies from Princess's Kitchen*, published in Imatra in 1991, reveals some of the secret recipes favoured by this noble family.

Image: Imatra City Museum of Cultural History.



great house of Harakanhovi, and Prince Aleksei Obolenskij built his stately Saimaanhovi. Before undergoing major renovation, Saimaanhovi was intended as the summer residence of the Finnish president.

The longer the veil, the greater the wife

Along the River Vuoksi, the habit of wearing region-specific folk costumes persisted for an unusually long time. The regional costumes are known to display features dating from prehistoric times. The image depicts a married woman wearing a late 19th century veil from Ruokolahti, today part of Imatra.

Drawing: Severin Falkman.



The Tainionkoski Brooch

Discovered at the Tainionkoski rapids, this penannular bronze brooch from the Viking Age (800-1025 AD) was used to fasten a cape or cloak over the shoulder, for example.

Image: Finnish National Board of Antiquities, Markku Haverinen.

3. The Imatra Rapids acquire world-wide fame



The Imatra Rapids started acquiring fame world-wide from the late 18th century onwards. The Russian Empress Catherine the Great, with her retinue, made a sightseeing visit to the Imatra Rapids in the summer of 1772. Her visit is considered to be the starting point of tourism to Finland.

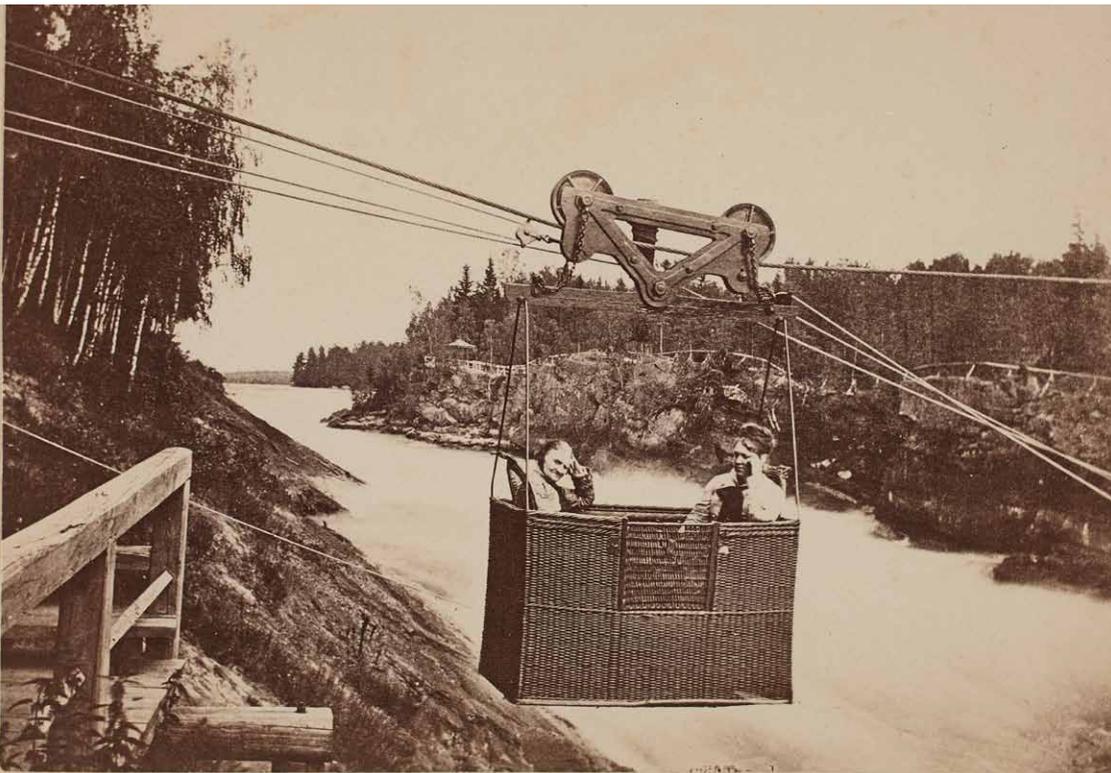
As early as the 1890s, Imatra Rapids were the most popular sight in Finland, with visitors from around the world. The most famous of these included, for example, Emperor Pedro II of Brazil (1876), and the Russian Emperor Alexander III with his family (1885).

Valtionhotelli Hotel

Valtionhotelli is one of Finland's most significant national-romantic works of architecture. The building shifts shape when viewed from different angles, and contains rich detailing, such as stylised floral motives and white-water wave patterns. The building is fully restored to its original condition.

Image: Imatra City Museum of Cultural History.





Ropeway

A ropeway was built over the Imatrankoski rapids in the summer of 1872.

Image: Finnish National Board of Antiquities.

The Russian royal family also paid several unofficial visits to Imatra. The rapids appealed also to various artists: the composers Jean Sibelius, Alexander Scriabin, Igor Stravinsky and Peter Tchaikovsky, and the painters Albert Edelfelt, Akseli Gallen-Kallela and Ilja Repin paid visits to Imatra.

There was an obvious demand for tourist accommodation. After a series of wooden hotels constructed at the rapids were repeatedly destroyed by fire, a new stone-built hotel was finally erected. The impressive Valtionhotelli, designed by architect Usko Nyström, was completed in 1903.

The rapids environment became Finland's first nature reserve, Kruununpuisto, established in 1842 by decree of Russian Emperor Nicholas I. Subject to a number of different protection regimes, Kruununpuisto is today a nationally significant nature reserve and cultural heritage site, as well as one of Finland's 27 designated national landscapes. Kruununpuisto is a popular sightseeing and recreation area.



Tasty Vuoksi salmon

Apart from the white water rapids, visitors were also attracted to Imatra by the Vuoksi salmon whose fame spread like wildfire among the fishing community. The River Vuoksi was frequented by fishermen of various nationalities in such numbers that a group of Englishmen established a club of their own, The Vuoksi Fishing Club, in 1875. Over the years, the club served as host to a great many eminent anglers, both ladies and gentlemen, including English lords, European royalty, Russian nobility, as well as foreign cabinet ministers. Marshal of Finland Mannerheim is also known to have tried his luck with the Vuoksi salmon. The locals, however, were literally fed up with salmon; the labour contracts of servants sometimes specifically stipulated at least one salmon-free meal a week.

Presidential salmon catch

'Miikin nirha', a lure with fish-skin coating, developed by a local fisherman especially for River Vuoksi, was a premium piece of tackle at the time, very popular with the fishing community. The image depicts the salmon catch of Finnish President Lauri Kristian Relander and his company in the summer of 1926.

Image: Finnish National Board of Antiquities.

4. White water to produce electricity for factories and mills



In the late 19th century, the focus gradually shifted from the aesthetic value of the rapids towards the energy potential contained in the enormous water masses that could be harnessed to produce electricity for industrial purposes. Companies

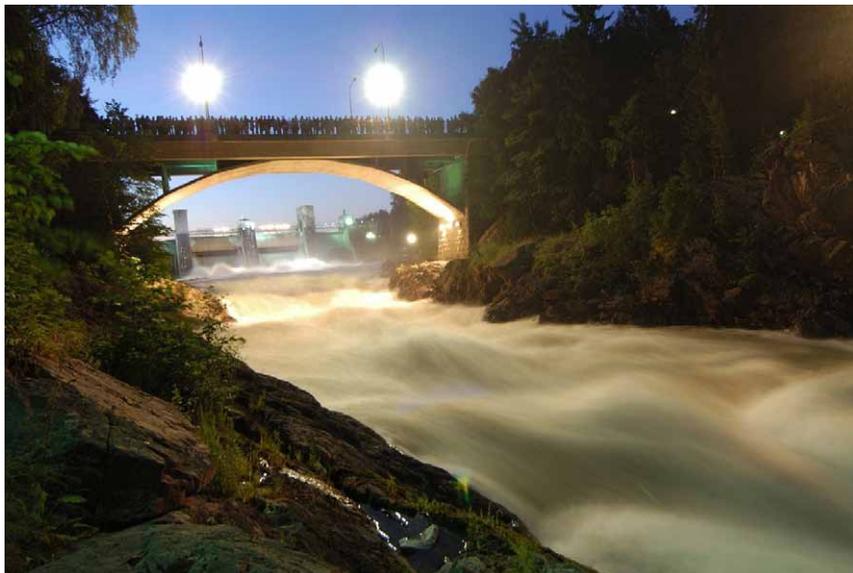
purchased land from peasants and, in particular, the water rights to the rapids. In 1895, Tornator Oy constructed a spool mill, wood grindery and paper mill at the Tainionkoski Rapids. The greatest change in the landscape of River Vuoksi was brought about

by the construction of Finland's largest hydroelectric dam on the river. Construction works were initiated in 1922, and the power plant was inaugurated in 1929. The water level behind the dam rose, and many of the upstream rapids were tamed.

There was still a popular demand for the spectacle of white water rapids after the dam blocked the former river bed. Various shows have been organised from the 1930s onwards, and, in their present form, the Imatrankoski dam gates openings commenced in the 1970s. Today, during the summer season the full force of the river is released on a regular basis to the delight of spectators.

Dam gates opening combined with show of lights and sound
A multimedia show of son and lumière creates a unique ambience in the dam gates opening show.

Image: Kehy.



5. Vuoksi – A River between East and West



Over the centuries, the present-day Imatra area has been part of both Sweden and Russia. The local population, however, stayed put when the rulers changed and, from generation to generation, lived through both the hardships

and benefits associated with the border. Peace time produced wealth and new influences, enriching cul-

tural life and heritage. Wars entailed great suffering and losses. After the Second World War, the Karelian Isthmus and most of the Jääski area became the territory of the Soviet Union, and the region's population was evacuated to Finland. The new border line was drawn close to Imatra, and River Vuoksi was divided between the two states. Composed of the areas remaining on the Finnish side, Imatra was incorporated as a municipality in 1948. Imatra was granted city status in 1971.

Imatra in 1965.

