

NATURAL MONUMENT

Creation of animated and inanimate nature of particular natural, scientific, cultural, historical or landscape value.

Natural monuments include single shrubs, trees and groups of trees or historic tree-lined avenues characterised by old age, size, unusual shapes or other features (monuments of animated nature); and erratic boulders, springs, waterfalls, ravines, rocks, karst springs, river gorges, caves (monuments of inanimate nature).

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) recognises as a natural monument natural elements of the landscape, a landscape feature or a relatively small designated area in order to protect and safeguard an element or feature of nature (the monument and its surroundings). According to the IUCN, a natural monument can be a completely natural creation or contain elements introduced by humans. The latter should have properties that make it unique to the natural world (e.g. coral reefs growing on sunken ships). In order to be qualified by the IUCN as a natural monument, a monument must have natural geological or geomorphological features, possess natural features that have been culturally influenced, be a site combining natural features with cultural features or a place distinguished for its cultural qualities with an accompanying ecosystem.

The legal basis for the creation of natural monuments in Poland is the Nature Protection Act of 16 April 2004. In this country there are more than 36,000 natural monuments (GUS, 2015). The vast majority of them are single trees (e.g., the oak called Bartek, the ash called Bolko, the oak known as Słowianin), also: tree clusters (plane avenue in Legnica), caves (Radochowska Cave), grottos (Mechowskie Groty), boulders and rocks (erratic boulder in Trąbin, St. Adalbert's stone, Babia Skała), springs (St. Hubert's spring, St. John's spring), botanical gardens (the Kazimierz Wielki Botanical Garden in Bydgoszcz), parks (Park Słowiański Natural and Landscape Complex, Źródlika Park in Łódź), forests (Chałubiński Forest).

Some of the natural monuments in Poland are connected with legends. According to one of them, the oak known as Bartek conceals treasures of Jan III Sobieski. According to another, a boulder in Mechowa was brought by the devil. According to legend, traces of his claws can still be seen on its surface to this day.

The idea of a natural monument (German: *Naturdenkmal*) was promoted by Alexander von Humboldt at the beginning of the 19th century.

[M. G.]

Literature:

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natural-monument-or-feature.

Ustawa z dnia 16 kwietnia 2004 r. o ochronie przyrody, Dz.U. 2004 nr 92 poz. 880.

