

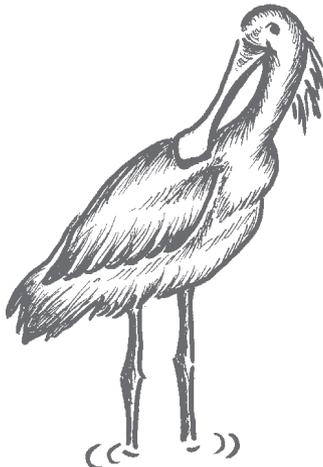
Danube Biosphere Reserve

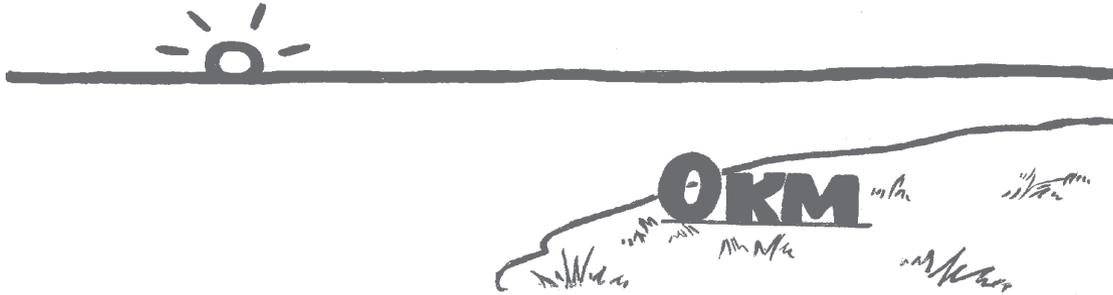
Because of the very active delta-forming processes, the Kilia delta supports a flora and fauna of worldwide importance. For example, the delta is home to over 950 plant species and nearly 260 bird species, many of which are listed in Red Data books.

Any visitor to the delta in spring or summer will quickly appreciate the natural wealth of the Danube Biosphere Reserve: vast reedbeds stretching to the horizon, lily-coated lakes, and islands of willows and poplars.



There are flocks of pelicans, cormorants, ducks, geese and spoonbills while an occasional sea-eagle soars overhead. In the water there is a myriad of aquatic plants, with millions of frogs and toads jumping and splashing. And the angler can have a rewarding day trying his luck to catch a giant carp or catfish.



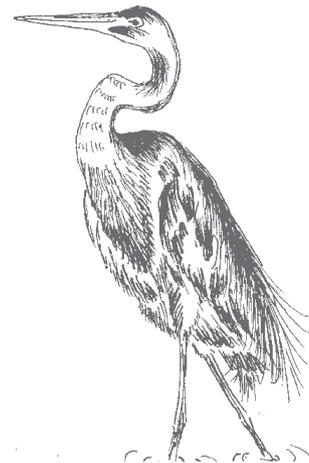


In 1967, a 1 km-wide coastal strip of the Kilia delta was declared a reserve.

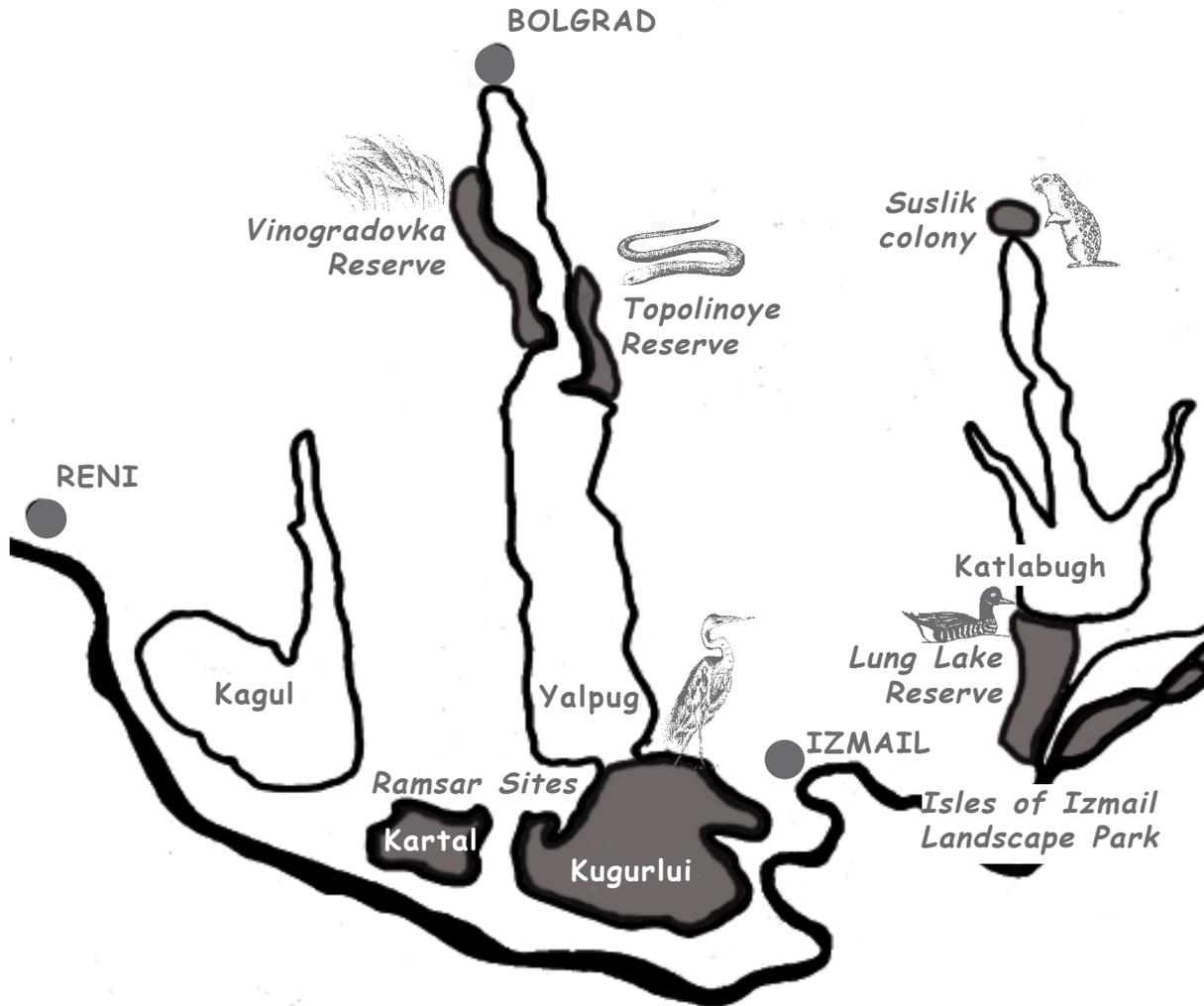
Between 1973 and 1978, the reserve area was increased to 14,851 ha as part of the Black Sea State Reserve.

In 1981, the protected area of the delta became a reserve in its own right, known as "Dunaiski Plavni".

By a Decree of the President of Ukraine in 1998, Dunaiski Plavni became a biosphere reserve and in February 1999 UNESCO included the Danube Biosphere Reserve in the global network of biosphere reserves; it also formed a component part of the Danube Delta Cross Border Biosphere Reserve Romania-Ukraine.

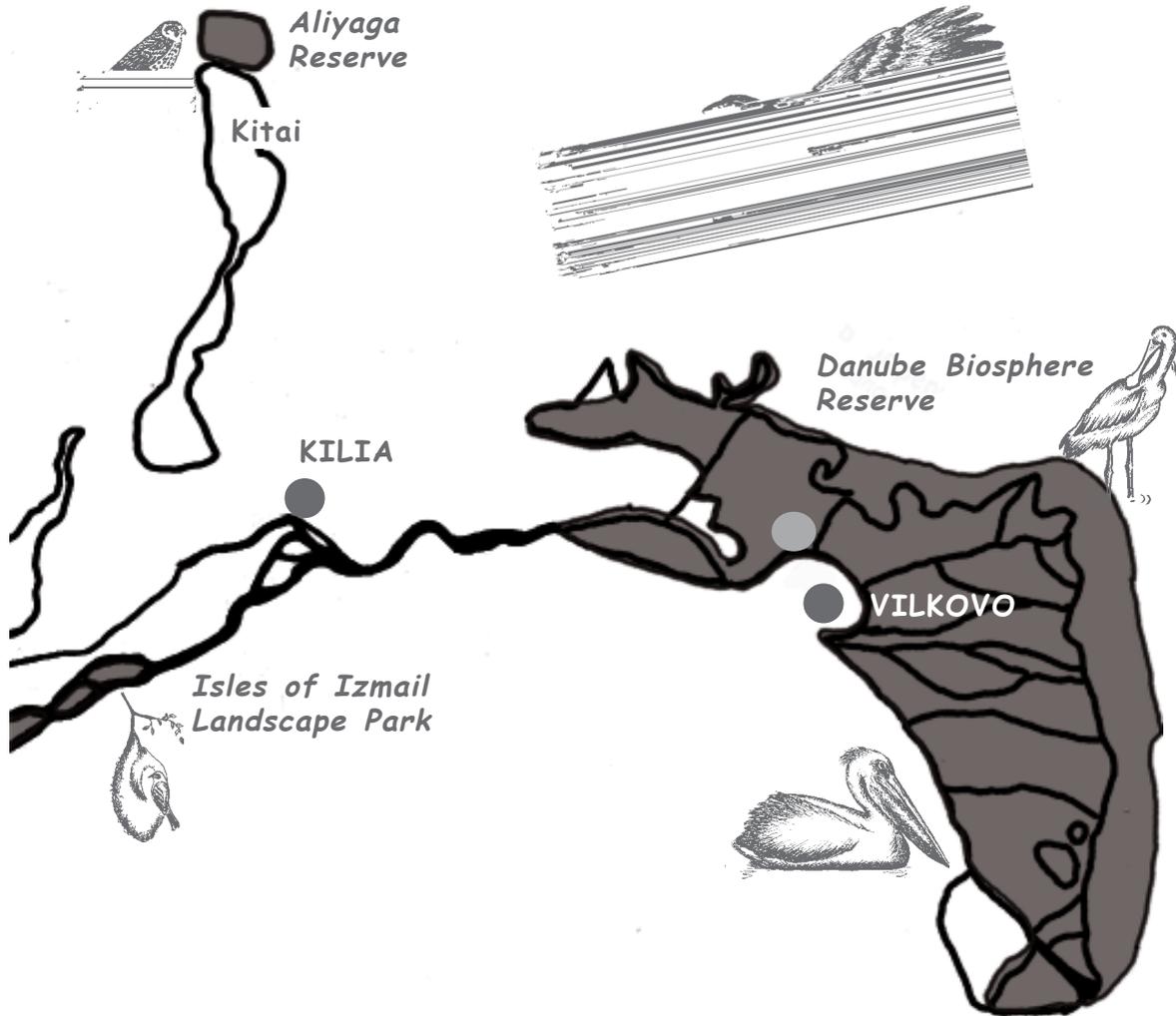


Nature reserves in the Lower

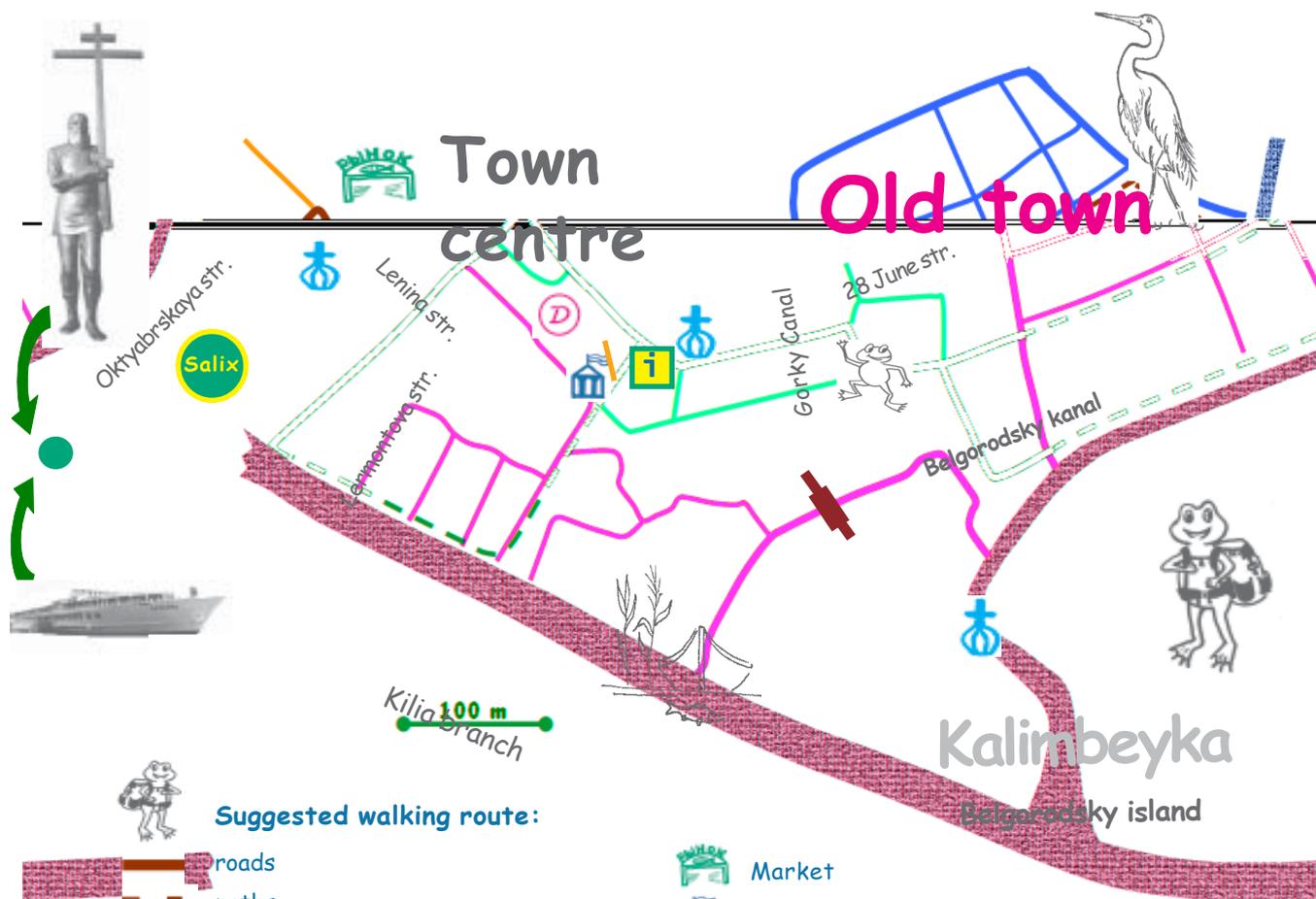


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Danube region worth visiting!



Vilkovo



Salix

Kilia branch 100 m



Suggested walking route:



roads
paths

Other roads
Canals

Salix

Tourist Information and Souvenir Shop



Market



Town council



Main churches



Dionys Restaurant



Danube Biosphere Reserve Information Centre

100 m

The Kilia delta of the River Danube

The delta of the River Danube begins some way upstream of Izmail, where it bifurcates in to the Tulcea and Kilia branches. The Tulcea branch then divides again to form the Sulina (central) and St George (southern) branches.

The northern Kilia branch marks the boundary between Romania and Ukraine. It carries just over half of the water flowing into the delta. The sediments deposited by the river rapidly build up new islands and sand bars, which cause the Kilia branch to split in to many smaller channels downstream of Vilково. In fact, so active is the formation of new land that the Kilia part of the delta is one of the fastest growing deltas in the world - it changes its shape not only year by year but sometimes from season to season!



Vilkovo Town

The town of Vilkovo was founded in 1775. It is situated on left bank of the River Danube, at the point where the Kilia branch of the Danube began to build a new coastal delta about 300 years ago. The first settlers actually lived on the seashore.

Today, the Belgorodsky channel (called *Goosevo* by the locals), which is a side-arm of the Kilia branch, divides the town in two parts: the mainland and Belgorodsky Island.

Vilkovo is the youngest town on the Danube in Ukraine, but it is also the most famous. The main feature of the town is the network of waterways, known as "yeriks". These were formed when the inhabitants built up small islands from the sediments, and on which they built their houses.

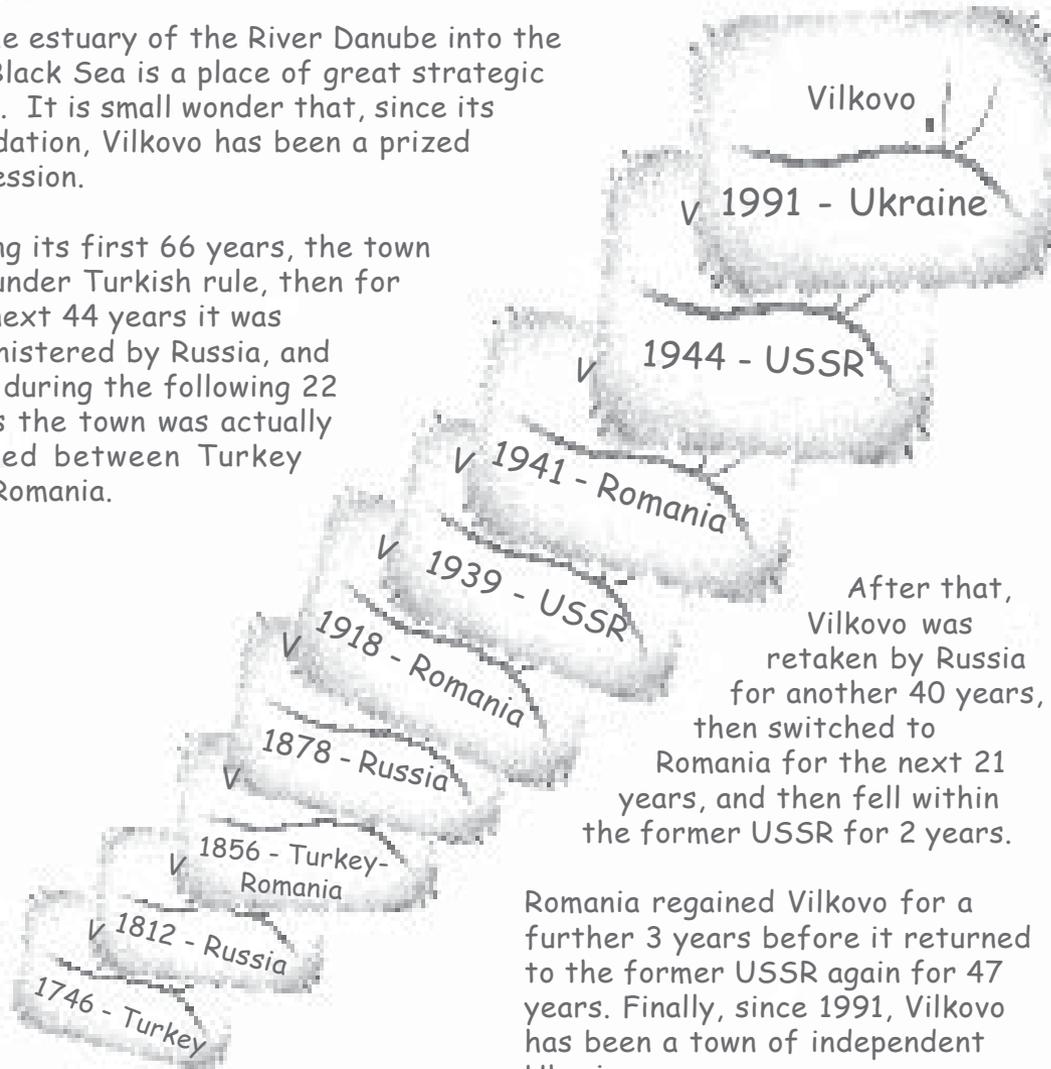


There were no roads in the past, but the narrow waterways allowed people to move around by boat. The original system of waterways still exists in the old town and provides delightful strolls among the cottages and gardens. However, many of the waterways need some work to restore them to their former beauty and glory.

A See-Saw History

The estuary of the River Danube into the Black Sea is a place of great strategic value. It is small wonder that, since its foundation, Vilkovo has been a prized possession.

During its first 66 years, the town was under Turkish rule, then for the next 44 years it was administered by Russia, and then during the following 22 years the town was actually divided between Turkey and Romania.



An Island Home

Vilkovo is a town built on marshland and very different from the typical towns of the region. People have established their homes and gardens on islands dug out of the silty marshes. Every year, the island dwellers have to repair and restore their islands to prevent them from sinking back into the marsh. The soil is dug out of a trench around the island: this practice serves to keep the trench clear for boat traffic and also provides a defence against flooding.

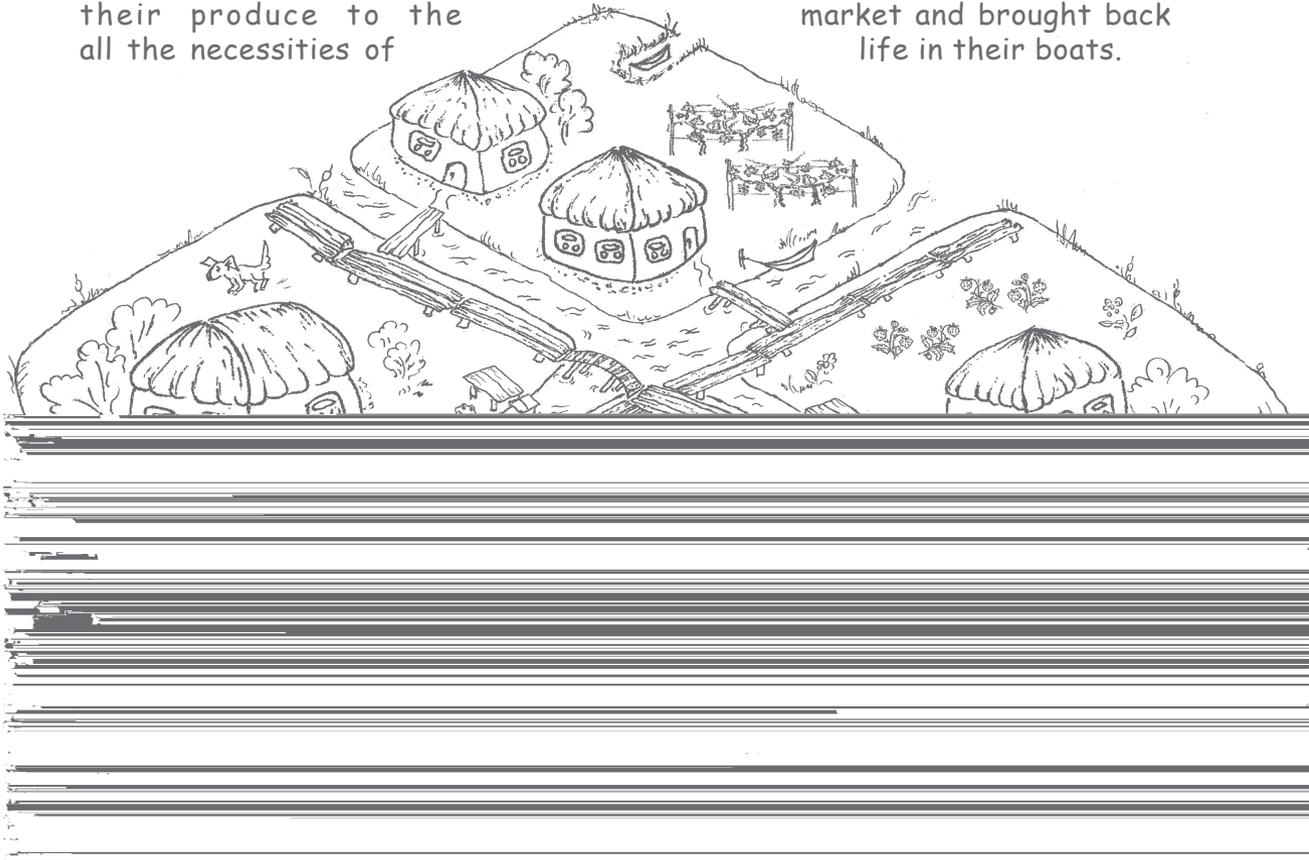


The Waterways - “Yeriks”

The old heart of Vilково has a system of waterways (called "yeriks") instead of the streets. Yeriks played a very important role in Vilково in the past. They served as roads and water-pipes, and the endless deposition of river silt in them provided building-materials, soil and fertilizer.

The yeriks also bore the boats that connecting townspeople with their produce to the all the necessities of

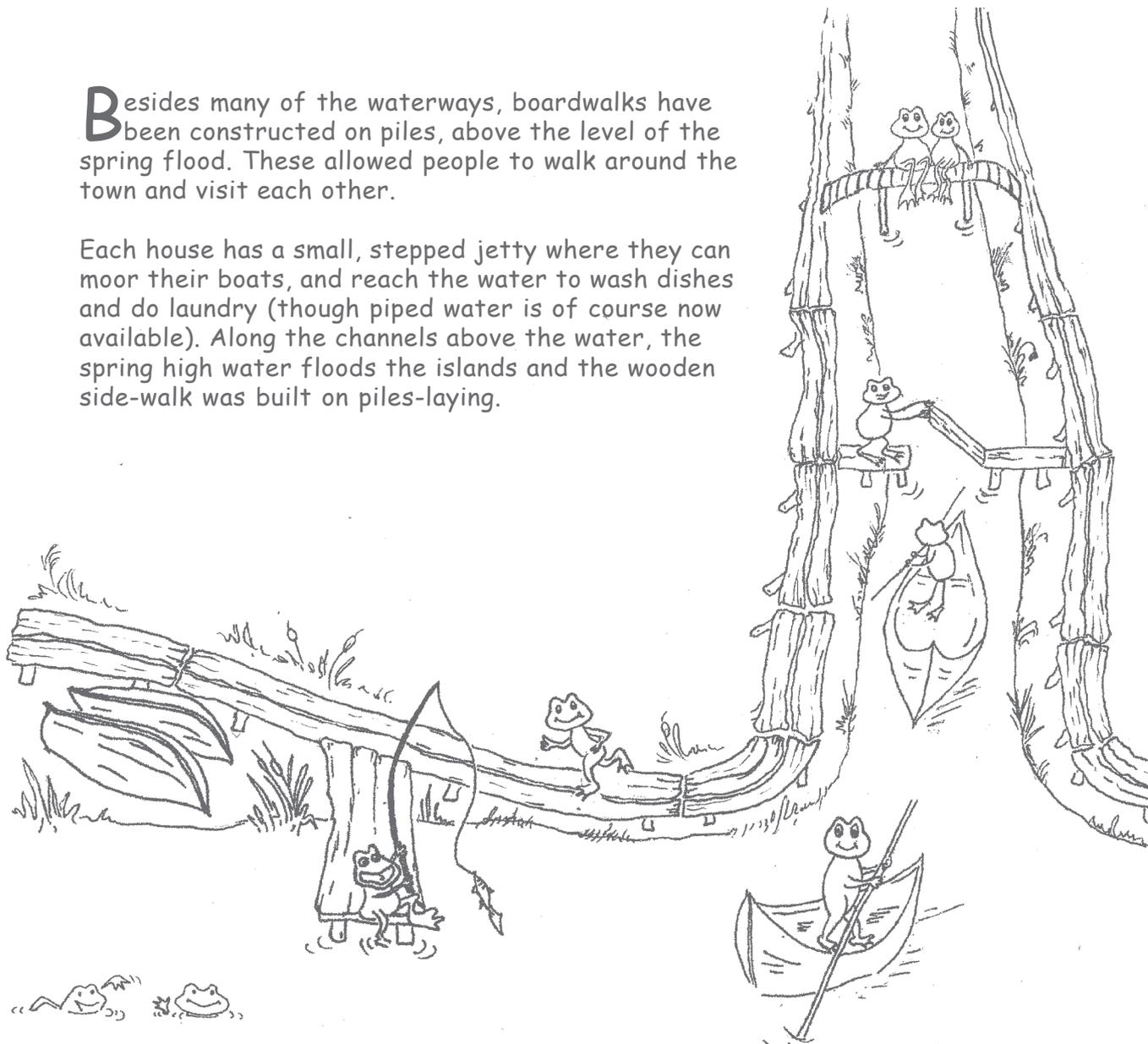
were the only mode of transport, the mainland. They carried market and brought back life in their boats.



Boardwalks, Jetties . . .

Besides many of the waterways, boardwalks have been constructed on piles, above the level of the spring flood. These allowed people to walk around the town and visit each other.

Each house has a small, stepped jetty where they can moor their boats, and reach the water to wash dishes and do laundry (though piped water is of course now available). Along the channels above the water, the spring high water floods the islands and the wooden side-walk was built on piles-laying.



Seagull Boats



The traditional Vilko boat is an exact copy of a Cossack type known as a "seagull". The seagulls were used by the Cossacks from Zaporozhiya as fighting craft: to avoid wasting time on turning, the boats were built with two bows.

These days, the inhabitants of Vilko call such craft "herring boats" since they are used by the local fishermen who catch the famous Danube herring in the river.

The boats can also be used for fishing some way out to sea - where sturgeon can be found.

There is no shortage of boats in Vilko: there are at least 5,000 of them presently afloat - or more than 2 boats per family!



The Lipovans

In 1654, Patriarch Nikon carried out some reforms of religious practices in the Russian orthodox church. However, some of the congregation found them unacceptable so they were branded as heretics and persecuted (many were put to death by fire). The dissidents were known as "old believers" or "Lipovans" - a term derived from "filipovan" or followers of Philip Vasiliev, who led the schism.



The Lipovans fled from their home villages and dispersed widely; however, quite a few came and settled in new villages throughout the Danube delta. A bronze statute depicting an early Lipovanian settler stands at the Vilkovo boat station.

Lipovans in Vilkovo speak an archaic form of Russian, preserved for 300 years. The men have beards and wear their shirts over their trousers, tied up with the belt. They have maintained their old religious practices, such crossing themselves with two (instead of three) fingers, they bow to the floor when praying, and parade around the church for christenings and other holy events. In public worship, Lipovans sit on special cushions and use a rosary.

Nicholas the Miracle-Maker

There are two churches and one chapel in Vilkovo: all of them named after St Nicholas. One of the churches is Lipovanian, and the other follows contemporary orthodox practice.

This focus on St Nicholas may seem surprising until you realise that St Nicholas is the patron saint of fishermen, sailors and travellers.

In the past, when the boats had no motors, it was even more dangerous than now to go fishing (especially far out to sea). So, no boat set out until it and its crew had been blessed.

