

FOUNDATION FOR
THE PRESERVATION
OF JEWISH HERITAGE
IN POLAND



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Ustrzyki Dolne

THE CHASSIDIC ROUTE



Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland was established in March 2002 by the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland and the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO).

Our mission is to protect and commemorate the surviving monuments of Jewish cultural heritage in Poland. The priority of our Foundation is the protection of the Jewish cemeteries: in cooperation with other organizations and private donors we saved from destruction, fenced and commemorated several of them (e.g. in Zakopane, Kozienice, Mszczonów, Kłodzko, Iwaniska, Strzegowo, Dubienka, Kolno, Iłża, Wysokie Mazowieckie). The actions of our Foundation cover also the revitalization of particularly important and valuable landmarks of Jewish heritage, e.g. the synagogues in Zamość, Rymanów and Kraśnik.

We do not limit our heritage preservation activities only to the protection of objects. It is equally important for us to broaden the public's knowledge about the history of Jews who for centuries contributed to cultural heritage of Poland.

One of the most important educational activities of our Foundation is the "To Bring Memory Back" program (www.pamiec.fodz.pl) directed to students, with over 130 schools from all around Poland participating in it, and the multimedia Internet portal POLIN – Polish Jews Heritage (www.polin.org.pl), meant to present the history of the Jewish communities from 1,200 places in the country.

One of the major undertakings by the Foundation is the Chassidic Route project.

More information about the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland:

www.fodz.pl

www.pamiec.fodz.pl

www.polin.org.pl

Dear Sirs,

This publication is dedicated to the history of the Jewish community of **Ustrzyki Dolne**, and is a part of a series of pamphlets presenting history of Jews in the localities participating in the Chassidic Route project, run by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland since 2005.

The Chassidic Route is a tourist route which follows the traces of Jews from southeastern Poland and, soon, from western Ukraine. 20 localities, which have already joined the project and where the priceless traces of the centuries-old Jewish presence have survived, are: Baligród, Biłgoraj, Chełm, Cieszanów, Dębica, Dynów, Jarosław, Kraśnik, Lesko, Leżajsk (Lizhensk), Lublin, Przemysł, Ropczyce, Rymanów, Sanok, Tarnobrzeg, Ustrzyki Dolne, Wielkie Oczy, Włodawa and Zamość.

The Chassidic Route runs through picturesque areas of southeastern Poland, like the Roztocze Hills and the Bieszczady Mountains, and joins localities, where one can find imposing synagogues and Jewish cemeteries with gravestones dating back to the 18th, 17th or even 16th c. Many of those cemeteries have still been visited by the Chassidim from all over the world.

Within the frames of the Chassidic Route project, the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland supports local authorities and non-governmental organizations to protect and promote multicultural heritage of their communities. It also stimulates establishing firm partnership between sectors in favor of the development of profiled tourism, based on Jewish cultural heritage.

The Chassidic Route gives many places the opportunity to appear on the map of tourist attractions of Poland; apart from well-known Zamość, placed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites, there are many places on the Route, which are often omitted by tourists, unaware of their attractions.

We cordially invite you to join us on the Chassidic Route!

Monika Krawczyk | CEO





Why the “Chassidic Route”?

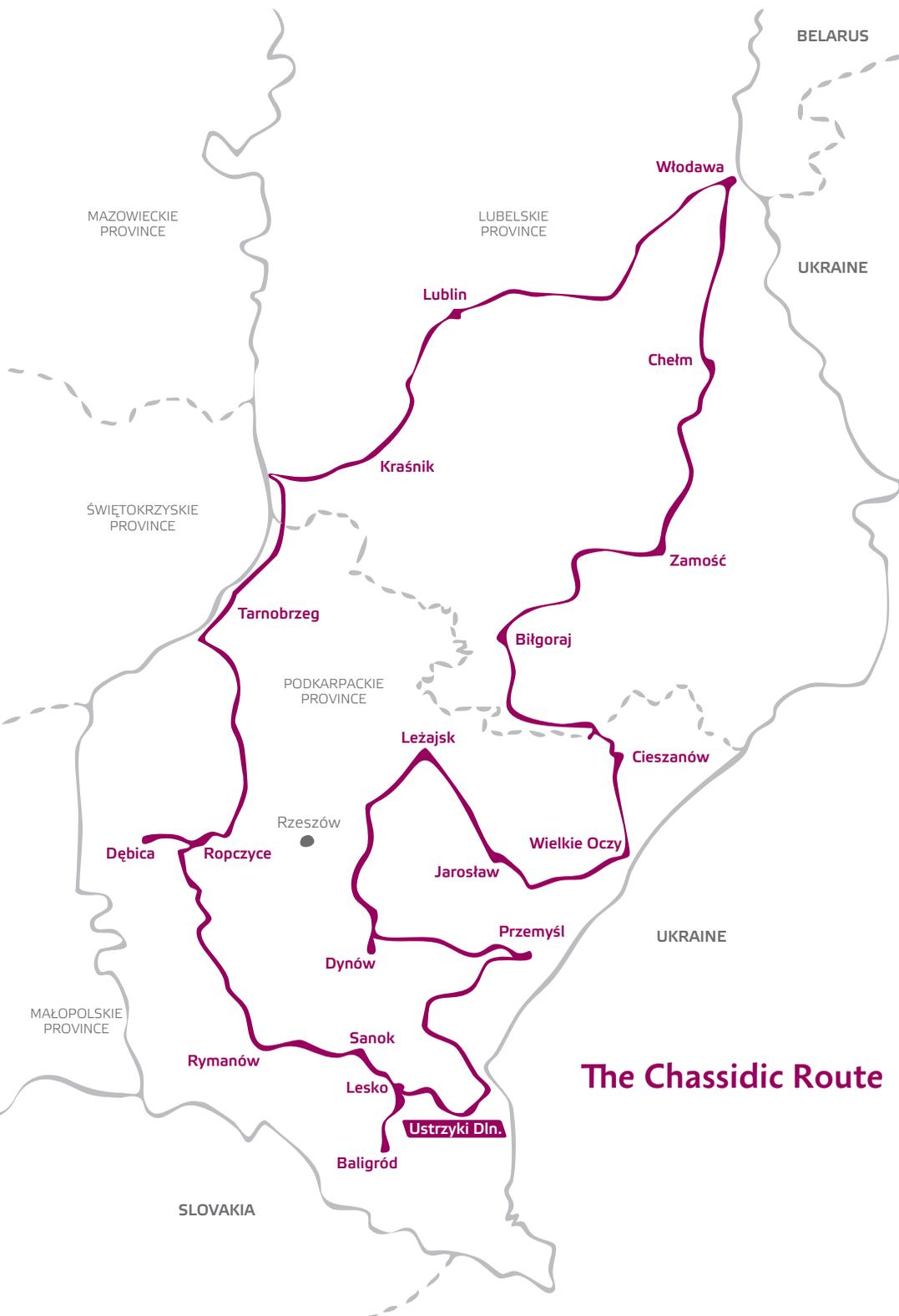
For centuries Poland used to be the homeland to many generations of Jews. An unprecedented development of Jewish culture, as well as religious thought and writing, took place in this country. Here in the 18th c. emerged Chassidism, one of the most important currents in Judaism ever. It gained particularly many supporters in eastern Poland, among others on the territories through which the Chassidic Route runs today.

It is traditionally believed that the creator of Chassidism (*chassid* stands in Hebrew for “pious”) was Israel Ben Eliezer of Międzybóž (Medzhybizh) in the Podolia region (today in Ukraine), known as the Baal Shem Tov. The Chassidim believed that religiousness could not be limited only to strict observing of orders and bans of Judaism, and even that obeying of them in a too restrictive way could distance the man from God. Therefore they strongly emphasized the spiritual dimension of religion and the emotional experience of faith.

The Chassidim gathered around the *tzadikim* (*tzadik* stands in Hebrew for “righteous”), charismatic spiritual leaders, each of whom proposed a special way of coming closer to God, concrete methods of studying of the Torah and other religious writings, as well as celebrating of rituals. In the 19th c. the rank of a *tzadik* became hereditary, which led to establishing entire dynasties of the *tzadikim*, taking their names from the towns, where their courts were located.

On an anniversary of death of a *tzadik* (*yortzeit*), the Chassidim gather around his grave with belief that on such a day the soul the *tzadik* visits the place. They pray and leave at the grave *kvitlech*, small pieces of paper with written requests. This tradition is still vivid and the Chassidim from all around the world still come to the graves of *tzadikim* in Lizhensk, Lublin, Dynów, Ropczyce or Rymanów.

There were courts of *tzadikim* in Cieszanów, Dębica, Dynów, Lesko, Leżajsk (Lizhensk), Lublin, Przemyśl, Ropczyce, Rymanów and Tarnobrzeg (or, more precisely, in nearby Dzików). The most important center of Chassidism in Poland was Lizhensk, where the famous *Tzadik* Elimelech lived. In other localities of the Route only small groups of the Chassidim, affiliated to *tzadikim* from other towns and villages, used to live. This, however, does not downgrade the appeal of the relics of Jewish heritage located there.



The Chassidic Route

The Chassidic Route – Places of Interest:

BALIGRÓD – a cemetery established at the beginning of the 18th c.

BIŁGORAJ – a cemetery established in the 19th c.

CHEŁM – a so called “new synagogue” from the beginning of the 20th c.; a cemetery established in the 15th c., one of the oldest surviving Jewish cemeteries in Europe.

CIESZANÓW – a synagogue from the end of the 19th c.; a cemetery established in the 19th c.

DĘBICA – a synagogue erected probably at the end of the 18th c.; a cemetery established at the turn of the 17th and 18th c.

DYNÓW – a cemetery from the end of the 18th c. with the grave of Tzadik Zvi Elimelech Shapiro of Dynów (1785–1841).

JAROSŁAW – two synagogues from the 19th c. and a cemetery established at the beginning of the 18th c.

KRAŚNIK – a complex of two synagogues from the 17th and 19th c.; a so called “new cemetery” established around 1850.

LESKO – a synagogue erected in the 17th c. and a cemetery from the 16th c., one of the oldest surviving Jewish cemeteries in Europe.

LEŻAJSK (LIZHENSK) – a cemetery established in the 17th c. with the grave of Tzadik Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717–1787), a place of pilgrimages of the Chassidim from all over the world.

LUBLIN – the *Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin* (the School of the Wise Men of Lublin) erected in 1930 as the biggest Jewish religious school in the world; a so called “old cemetery” established in the 16th c., with the grave of Tzadik Jacob Isaac Horovitz, called “The Seer of Lublin” (1745–1815); a so called “new cemetery” established at the beginning of the 19th c.

PRZEMYSŁ – a so called “new synagogue” erected at the beginning of the 20th c.; a so called “new cemetery” established at the beginning of the 19th c., the biggest Jewish cemetery in Podkarpackie province.

ROP CZYCE – a cemetery established in the 18th c.

RYMANÓW – a Baroque synagogue and a cemetery with the grave of Tzadik Menachem Mendel of Rymanów (1745–1815).

SANOK – a synagogue of the *Yad Charuzim* society, build in the 19th c.; a synagogue erected in the 1920’s; a so called “new cemetery” established in the 19th c.

TARNOBRZEG – a cemetery established at the beginning of the 20th c. with the grave of Tzadik Eliezer Horovitz of Dzików.

USTRYKI DOLNE – a cemetery established in the 18th c.

WIELKIE OCZY – a synagogue from the beginning of the 20th c.; a cemetery established in the 18th c.

WŁODAWA – a Baroque synagogue complex from the second half of the 18th c.

ZAMOŚĆ – a famous Renaissance synagogue erected at the beginning of the 17th c.; a so called “new cemetery” established in 1907.



The synagogue



The synagogue



The synagogue, a fragment of the elevation's original decoration

Ustrzyki Dolne is a town in Podkarpackie (Subcarpathian) province, located at the foot of the Bieszczady Mountains, on the Strwiąż River (a tributary of the Dniester River), and is inhabited by almost 10,000 people. It is the only town in Poland set in the catchment area of the Black Sea.

The Beginning of the Settlement

The earliest reference to Ustrzyki Dolne dates back to 1502, when King Jan Olbracht leased the area of the current town to Iwonia Janczonowicz. In 1509, Iwonia established the village of Ustrzyki, which rapidly developed thanks to a favorable location on the trade routes from Lesser Poland to Ruthenia and Hungary. At the time, the settlement was the place where merchants used to trade, among others in Hungarian wine and cattle. In 1727, King Augustus II the Strong issued a decree granting Ustrzyki with the town rights.

The First Jews in Ustrzyki

Unfortunately, very little information about the history of the Jewish presence in Ustrzyki has survived. It is unknown when the first representatives of the Jewish population arrived to the village and when the kehilla (the Jewish religious community) was established. It was not until the 18th c. that the first written references to the Jewish community appeared, however, it is almost certain that Jews had settled in Ustrzyki a long time before.

The fact of granting the village with the town rights was related to the influx of a big number of people to Ustrzyki, among which Jews were the most numerous. The first Jewish dwellers worked mostly

as merchants, contributing considerably to the development of the town. The Jewish community was established in Ustrzyki in the second half of the 18th c. As of 1765, there were 162 Jewish residents in the town, and their number rose up to 190 people in 1785.

Under Partitions

Ustrzyki was incorporated into the Austrian Empire after the first partition of Poland carried out by Russia, Prussia and Austria in 1772. However, this did not stop the development of the town; moreover, the 19th c. was the time when the town's economic condition improved after the discovery of oil deposits in Subcarpathia. A dynamic boom began after 1872, when a railroad track from Košice (now in Slovakia) to Przemyśl running through Ustrzyki was opened. The output of oil in the area of the town began in the 1880's. In 1889, a railroad joining Ustrzyki with Sanok, Krosno and Jasło was introduced, and a refinery was established there in 1900.

The 19th c. brought a sudden development of the Jewish community, too: as of 1824, there were 244 Jews in the town, and already 926 in 1870. In the same year, the local community owned a synagogue (built in the first half of the 19th c.), a cemetery and a school attended by 30 students. The kehilla employed two rabbis.

In the 1880's, the Jewish population made already a majority of the town's residents: there were 1,146 Jews out of 1,824 inhabitants. As of 1900, Ustrzyki Dolne was inhabited by 3,424 people, 61% of whom were Jews (2,091 people). In those days, the community's executive maintained five religious



The cemetery



The cemetery



The cemetery

schools. At the turn of the 19th and 20th c., Mojżesz Frankel, a Jew, served as a mayor of the town for several years. His grandson Zygmunt Frankel (1929–1997), who left Poland after World War II, was a renowned poet and novelist, whose works were published in the United States and in Israel.

Before World War I, the number of the Jewish population in the town reached 2,600. The front came across Ustrzyki twice during the war, leading to the town's destruction and impoverishment.

The Interwar Period

According to the census of 1921, Ustrzyki Dolne was inhabited by 3,234 people: 556 Roman Catholics (17.2%), 906 Greek Catholics (28%), and 1,768 Jews (54.7%). Only four people (0.1%) declared another religion.

At the time, the main source of income of the majority of Jews in Ustrzyki was trade, focused on the needs of the inhabitants of surrounding villages. The merchants used to buy food produced by them and provided the villagers with goods necessary for their farms and agriculture. After World War I, the Jewish traders played a dominant role in Ustrzyki, however, in the second half of the 1930's, their part in trade started to diminish gradually in favor of Poles and Ukrainians.

After World War I, a significant increase of numerous Jewish institutions and organizations occurred; this was an evidence of the community's large economic, political and cultural activity. The Jewish artisans were united in the Jewish Craftsmen's Society *Yad Charuzim*. The scope of its activity was wide and included education as well as legal and medical consultancy. Much importance was attached to

the accessibility of the Jewish craftsmen to the current professional sources of knowledge in the form of texts, lectures and discussions. The loan association *Gemilut Chesed* played a major role in the economic life of the Jewish community, giving interest-free loans to small merchants and craftsmen.

During the interwar period (1918–1939), apart from the main synagogue, there existed in Ustrzyki Dolne: the old and the new *Beth Midrash* (houses of prayer), and houses of prayer of the Chassidic supporters of the tzadikim from Belz and Sadhora. The *Yad Charuzim* Society owned a synagogue in Ustrzyki Dolne as well. The local Jewish community used to maintain a cemetery, a ritual slaughterhouse, a mikvah (a ritual bath) and an asylum. The kehilla supported the Jewish charity institutions active in the town, among others the Society for the Care of Jewish Orphans and the Charity Society.

World War II and the Holocaust

World War II ended the history of the Jewish community of Ustrzyki Dolne. Germans entered the town in September 1939 and right after that, they began brutal persecution of Jews. On the day of the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, Germans got into the synagogues and houses of prayer, and seized over 120 people who were forced afterwards to carry gliders from the airport in the nearby village of Ustianowa. Jews were subject to constant offences and violence by Germans, who used to cut beards of religious men in the streets and forced Jewish youths to felling and cleaning German cars.

Due to the fact that Ustrzyki Dolne was located on the territory, which was incorporated into the Soviet Union following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (a Soviet-German agreement on dividing



The cemetery



The cemetery



The cemetery

Poland and other countries between the two aggressors), Germans withdrew from the town yet in September 1939, giving place to the Red Army. Ustrzyki was under the Soviet occupation until June 25th, 1941, when Nazis entered the town again.

Soon after re-capturing Ustrzyki, Germans forced Jews to establish a *Judenrat*, a Jewish council totally subordinated to Nazis. They ordered the head of the *Judenrat* to assign 150 Jews to work consisting in loading 500 carts with gravel exploited with bare hands from the river. Jews were also forced to work at building of the Soviet prisoners of war camp in Ustianowa. Labor continued throughout the whole winter of 1941, and people were made work for hours in frost. After that winter, the camp was demolished. Jews were involved in constructing of a bridge, the foundations of which were made of gravestones from the Jewish cemetery.

Like all the other Jews from the occupied Poland, also the Ustrzyki Jews were subordinated to the regulations decreed by Germans, among others to the obligation of wearing armbands with the Star of David, and to the ban on moving in the Market Square and the main streets of the town. The lack of the armband could be punished with 25 beats of a stick or even death. Jewish shops were closed and Poles along with Ukrainians were strictly forbidden to sell food to Jews. Forced labor lasted from 7 a.m. till 7 p.m., and the curfew used to begin at 7:15 p.m., which made it impossible for the majority of Jews to return home without breaking the law. In fact, they could not buy any food. Besides, daily ration of bread was just 250 grams per working person, so famine spread quickly among the Jewish population.

In May 1942, all Jews over the age of 65 were ordered to come to the Gestapo headquarters. 350 of them were shot at night on the courtyard of the jail and were buried in a mass grave beyond the railway track. The remaining people in the number of about 250 were taken away to the forest in Brzegi Dolne and executed. The weak and the ill who could not come to the Gestapo headquarters where shot in houses. An eyewitness, Iwler Herman, whose testimony was registered and now is being kept in the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, reported about those events, as follows: *On the eve of Pentecost (i.e. the Jewish holiday of Shavuot) of 1942, (Germans) ordered all the people over the age of 65 to come to the Judenrat in their best clothes. Before that, Becker (one of the Gestapo officers in Ustrzyki, known for his cruelty) had come to houses and enlisted all the elder. Following that list, all were ordered to come in the afternoon. (...) In the evening, they were taken to the jail, and some of them to the jail's cellar, as there was not enough place. At night, they were gathered in front of the Judenrat building in the Market Square, close to the Court. Then, 50 people were shot there. (The most outstanding people of the town were the first on the list). Before the execution, all of them were stripped naked. Dawid Herman (nicknamed "Kostek") was the leader of the gravediggers' group, and they carried still warm bodies to the Jewish cemetery at once.*

It is difficult to estimate the number of Jews murdered in Ustrzyki. Some data say about two executions with the total number of 1,000 killed people. Those who survived were transported to the camp in Zasław, and later to the death camps in Bełżec and Sobibór. Preparation of the transportation, which left the Zasław camp on September 6th, 1942, was reported by Iwler Herman as follows: *There were 50 wagon cars poured out with lime, each loaded with 90 people. This made 4,500 people in all. The heat was*

terrible. A Schu(t)zpolizei officer stood by almost every car and counted. The train was loaded and shut within two hours. The Gestapo tranquilized us, saying that the transportation was to go to labor in Germany, but we had already known that they were going to the camp in Bełżec. There was beating and shooting while loading. Some people died the previous night in the hall, and I had to take them out later. That week on Friday, on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, September 9th, 1942, the second transportation left. My family was there (five sisters with brothers-in-law and children).

The last Jews of Ustrzyki were killed in an execution in January 1943, during which 24 Jews, who had managed to escape from the transportation to Bełżec, were shot. The Red Army re-entered Ustrzyki in September 1944. The town was incorporated into the Soviet Union after the war, and was given back to Poland in 1951, following the procedure of the so-called compensation of the border with the USSR.

Traces of Presence

Today, the main mementoes of the centuries-old Jewish presence in Ustrzyki Dolne are historic monuments: the synagogue and the cemetery, delightfully situated on a slope of the hill overlooking the town.

The synagogue in 5 Rynek St. was erected in the first half of the 19th c., however today, it is hard to identify the primal function and the architectural shape of the building. Although Germans devastated it, the synagogue survived the war and served after 1945 as a corn warehouse. It was later thoroughly renovated, including a serious modification of the elevation. The Municipal Public Library was set there and still occupies the place. Only ornamental molding on the eastern elevation reminds of the building's former function.

The Jewish cemetery in Ustrzyki is located on the other bank of the Strwiąż River, beyond the railroad, on the slope of the Gromadzyń Mountain. The easiest way to reach it from the Ustrzyki Market Square is to follow the "black route" for tourists. The cemetery was established probably in the 18th c.; Jews from Krościenko, Ustianowa, and other nearby villages were buried there as well. Today, there are about 240 gravestones on it, dating back to the 19th and the 20th c. The necropolis was severely devastated during World War II, when Germans took away part of the matzevot, and used them for paving streets and building of a bridge. In 1993 and 1995, several dozen of them were found during road works and transported back to the cemetery.

| Sławomir Mańko

Activities for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage

Thanks to the successful partnership between the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, Jewish organizations from abroad and the authorities of Ustrzyki Dolne, the monuments of Jewish culture, which survived the war, are today in a relatively good condition. Hopefully, the remaining traces of the Ustrzyki Jewish community will remind the future generations about the multicultural past of the town for many years.

The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland takes up many activities to involve the Ustrzyki inhabitants in looking after the historic heritage of their town. Students of the Middle School No. 1 participate in the "To Bring Memory Back" educational program, created and implemented by the Foundation. Within the program, youths discover the multicultural history of their town and the local Jews, Jewish tradition and culture. They also carry out public events, thank to which the results of their work became available for the inhabitants. The students of the Middle School No. 1, in cooperation with the Ustrzyki Tourist Association "Bieszczady", take care of the Jewish cemetery and prepare its photographic record.

The Ustrzyki Tourist Association "Bieszczady" has been taking up the activities for the preservation of the local Jewish necropolis for years now. The Carpathian Tourist and Cultural Association "Dar Karpat" is involved as well in taking care of the multicultural heritage of Ustrzyki. Regular cleaning up is carried out on the cemetery and inventories of the surviving gravestones are made. As of the end of 2007, there were 237 matzevot registered, and it is worth noticing that before the inventories by the "Bieszczady" Association it was believed that there had been only 80 gravestones on the cemetery. On the Association's initiative, a tourist route from the Market Square to the cemetery was marked out, and an information tablet in Polish, Hebrew and English was installed at the entrance to the necropolis. In the upcoming years, cleanup work on the cemetery will continue and a publication devoted to it is planned to be issued.

We hope that soon in Ustrzyki Dolne there will be further activities carried out, meant to remind the inhabitants and tourists about the history of Jews, who for centuries co-created the social character of the town and contributed to its cultural and economic development.



↕ Students during cleanup works on the cemetery

↕ Students during cleanup works on the cemetery





← The cemetery

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Text: Weronika Litwin, Marianna Mańko, Sławomir Mańko

Translation: Maciej Gugala

Editor: Weronika Litwin

Design: RZECZYOBRAZKOWE.PL

Photo: Łukasz Giersz, Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland

Information and educational materials on the Jewish culture are available on the website of the "To Bring Memory Back" program www.PAMIEC.FODZ.PL and on the Internet portal POLIN – Polish Jews Heritage www.POLIN.ORG.PL

© by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland
Warsaw 2008

ISBN 978-83-61306-72-6

ISBN 978-83-61306-72-6



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