**THE OLESHKIVSKI SANDS**

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There are many amazing and astounding deserts on our planet. Each of them is unique. Landscapes, weather, flora and fauna determine the nature of each of the deserts. The desert discussed below is not noticeable against the background of the Sahara or the Gobi deserts. It differs from any desert we have ever seen live or on TV. However, the location of the desert is unusual, and this only fact is enough to attract our attention: it is our desert – the Oleshkivski Sands located in Europe, Ukraine!

The Oleshkivski Sands is a pretty young desert. Sands in the local area are deposits which were formed after the Ice Age. The main direct causes for their breaching the surface were: deforestation for the shipbuilding by the ancient Greeks and sheep breeding which began developing here rapidly at the end of the eighteenth century.

Baron Pfalz-Fein alone, the founder of Askania Nova, owned huge herds of animals, up to a million heads in general, that were grazing on the local meadows. The destruction of the vegetation cover was the result of this process. Therefore, the area began increasing because of the wind spreading the sand.

To stop the rapid growth of the area in the 1920s the edges of the Oleshkivski Sands were planted with man-made forests, the total area of which was about 1,000 square kilometers. In the 50s a research station and several forestries started operating.fff

Though the Oleshkivski Sands are referred to as a desert, it is only partially true. Because of the temperature and the volume of the rainfall, it is more accurate to rank it as a semi-desert. However, the sand in the summer easily warms up to 75 degrees by Centigrade. In addition, there are sandstorms with zero visibility in the Oleshkivski Sands. Like in any desert, there are lots of small pine and birch oases, casting shadows. Nevertheless, when there is lack of wind, it is even hotter there than in the open sands.

The history of the Oleshkivski Sands has got obscure pages. In the Soviet period a firing field was located on the grounds of the desert, where pilots from the member-countries of the Warsaw Pact practiced bombardment. To this day, when the huge dunes move, they sometimes open up unexploded projectiles and aircraft wreckages to the travellers.

The local sand is very fine and lightweight, so wind lifts it up in the air easily, and as a result there may be sandstorms and tornadoes which can reach Kherson located only 30 km away.

This impressive place is becoming increasingly popular with tourists. No wonder: the vast dunes casting gold against the background of a blue sky and fabulously framed with lush green pine forests create a strong impression of the revived Eastern fairy tale, which you do not want to return from!

**Based on the following Internet resources:**

1. <http://etotam.com/?p=1568>; <http://otdyhaem.com.ua/hersonskaja/herson/oleshkovskie-peski.html>
2. <http://lifeglobe.net/blogs/details?id=73>; <https://discover-ukraine.info/ru/places/southern-ukraine/kherson/59>
3. <https://discover-ukraine.info/ru/places/southern-ukraine/kherson/59>

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