



Poland's Crooked Forest
Sandy Welches, MGV 2005

In a small corner of western Poland, near the town of Gryfino, a strange and eerie woodland exists. This bizarre collection of curved trees, named the "Crooked Forest," is shrouded in mystery, and despite the numerous different theories that have been proposed over the years, no one truly knows what caused the trees to adopt this conformation.



The Crooked Forest consists of around 400 pine trees that grow with a 90-degree bend at their base, the vast majority of which are bent northward.

Curiously, the Crooked Forest is enveloped by a larger forest of straight-growing pine trees. It is estimated that the trees were planted in the 1930s and that they were around 7-10 years old when they experienced whatever force/damage that resulted in trunk curvature. So, what could have caused these trees to grow in this bizarre "J" shape?

Many bizarre ideas have been thrown around, but the one that seems to have gained most acceptance is perhaps the most boring one. It proposes that the curves are man-made. This would make sense, given the fact that the trees are very consistent. The suggestion is that during the 1930s, local farmers planted and manipulated the trees for ultimate use as a construction material, for example, for pieces of furniture or, more likely, ship building. An extract from a piece entitled *Wooden Vessel Ship Construction* even supports this idea: "Oaks from the areas of Northern Europe were fine for the development of long, straight planking, but the gnarled English "Hedgerow" Oak was the best for the natural curved timbers used to strengthen the ship internally. Trees were even deliberately bent in certain ways so as to 'grow' a needed set of curved timbers. These curved timbers were known as 'compass' timbers."

The invasion of Poland during World War II would have likely interrupted this activity, preventing the farmers from being able to finish the job and thus leaving this peculiar forest that we still see today. The local town was also devastated during the war and was not reestablished until the 1970s, when a new power plant was built in the area. This would explain why none of the locals have the foggiest idea why the trees look like this.

Ultimately, no one can be certain of what caused the curvature of these trees since there are no witnesses that can testify one way or another, but the last explanation certainly seems the most plausible.

Source: *New York Times*, April 2, 2017