



Connecting Brabant's cover sand landscapes through landscape history

Erik Heskes (1), Hanneke van den Ancker (2), Pieter Dirk Jungerius (2,3), Jaap Harthoorn (1), Bert Maes (4), Karel Leenders (5), Piet de Jongh (6), Sjoerd Kluiving (7), and Ger van den Oetelaar (8)

(1) Provincie Noord-Brabant, 's Hertogenbosch, Netherlands, (2) Stichting Geomorfologie & Landschap, Ede, (3) University of Amsterdam - Institute for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Dynamics (IBED), Amsterdam, (4) Ecologisch Adviesbureau Maes, Utrecht, (5) Free Lance Historical Geographer, The Hague, (6) IVN, Waalwijk, (7) Free University - Geoarcheology, Amsterdam, (8) Streekhuis Het Groene Woud, Liempde

Noord-Brabant has the largest variety of cover sand landscapes in The Netherlands, and probably in Western Europe. During the Last Ice Age the area was not covered by land ice and a polar desert developed in which sand dunes buried the existing river landscapes. Some of these polar dune landscapes experienced a geomorphological and soil development that remained virtually untouched up to the present day, such as the low parabolic dunes of the Strabrechtse Heide or the later and higher dunes of the Oisterwijkse Vennen. As Noord-Brabant lies on the fringe of a tectonic basin, the thickness of cover sand deposits in the Centrale Slenk, part of a rift through Europe, amounts up to 20 metres. Cover sand deposits along the fault lines cause the special phenomenon of 'wijst' to develop, in which the higher grounds are wetter than the boarding lower grounds.

Since 4000 BC humans settled in these cover sand landscapes and made use of its small-scale variety. An example are the prehistoric finds on the flanks and the historic towns on top of the 'donken' in northwest Noord-Brabant, where the cover sand landscapes are buried by river and marine deposits and only the peaks of the dunes protrude as donken. Or the church of Handel that is built beside a 'wijst' source and a site of pilgrimage since living memory. Or the 'essen' and plaggen agriculture that developed along the stream valleys of Noord-Brabant from 1300 AD onwards, giving rise to geomorphological features as 'randwallen' and plaggen soils of more than a metre thickness.

Each region of Brabant each has its own approach in attracting tourists and has not yet used this common landscape history to connect, manage and promote their territories. We propose a landscape-historical approach to develop a national or European Geopark Brabant's cover sand landscapes, in which each region focuses on a specific part of the landscape history of Brabant, that stretches from the Late Weichselian polar desert when the dune landscapes were formed, through prehistoric, Roman and medieval times up to the post-modern nature building projects aimed at restoring biodiversity.

A brochure was developed to raise awareness and promote interest for a landscape historical concept, in which each region profits from being part of a quality history.