



National Park

The Drentsche Aa National Landscape



What is a National Park?

For centuries people thought that space, water and other natural resources were inexhaustible. As the world population grew, people increasingly exploited areas of previously untouched nature. They cut down trees to make way for farming. They hunted and kept animals in the surviving woodlands and forests. These woodlands gradually diminished in area. They were replaced by cultural landscapes which may look fairly natural, but in fact bear little relation to the original, unadulterated state.

The first misgivings about these developments were felt in the USA. They led in 1871 to the creation of Yellowstone as the first national park in the world. In 1909 Sweden was the first country in Europe to create a national park. Many other countries followed suit. In 1969 in response to the very different motives for designating national parks, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), an agency of the United Nations, formulated a

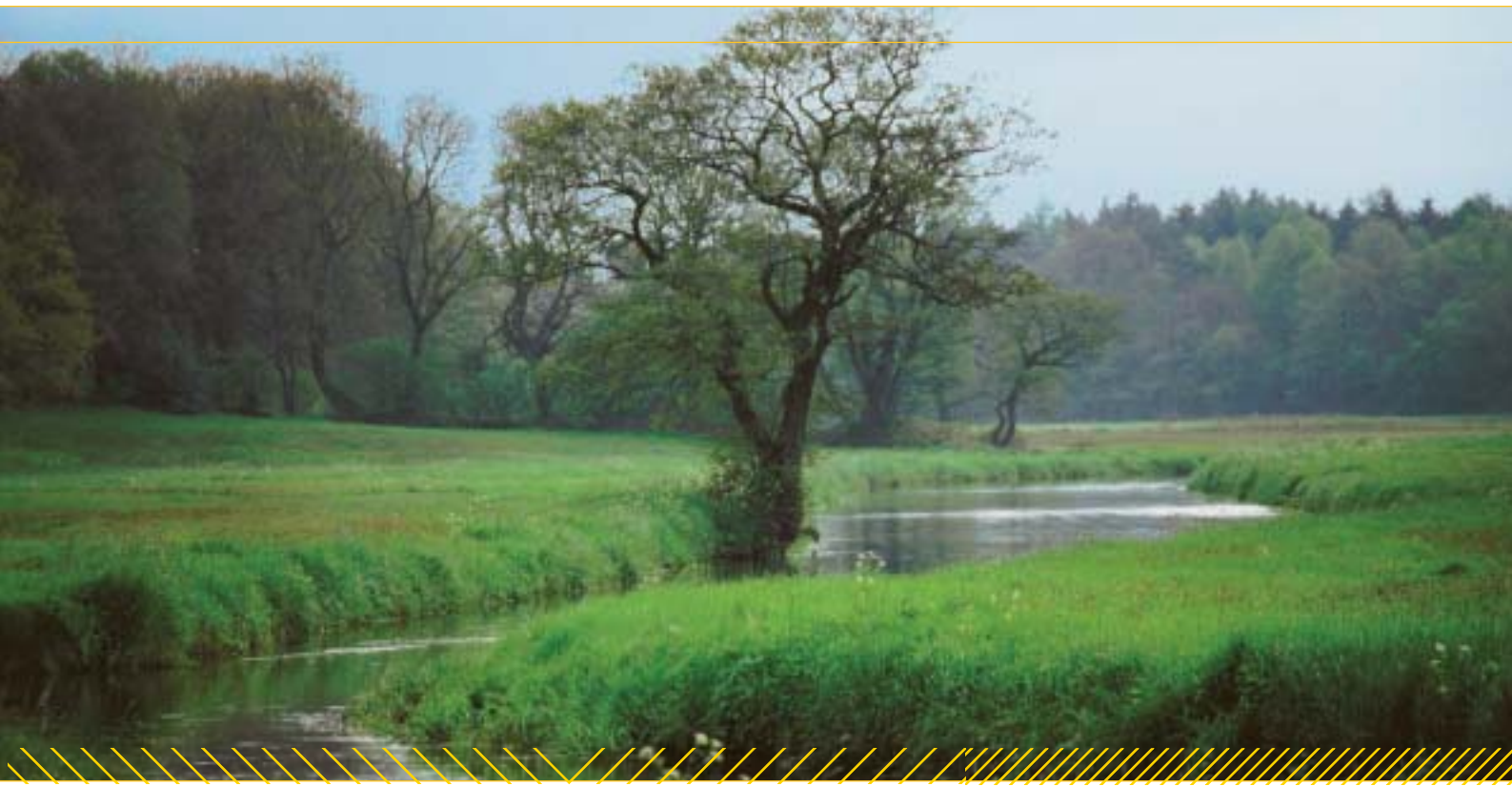
definition of national parks which was to apply world-wide.

The main aim in creating national parks is to protect large natural areas and landscapes, and the species of flora and fauna they contain. Secondary aims include environmental education, nature-related recreation and scientific research. Nowadays national parks can be found in practically every country in Europe. Altogether they offer their visitors an overview of the great variety of the wildlife and landscapes of Europe.

The Dutch national parks fit well into the European network. In 1969 the Netherlands signed international agreements concerning the establishment of valuable nature reserves as national parks. The Dutch nature reserves may be relatively small, but often contain valuable ecosystems rarely found elsewhere, such as dunes, peat bogs, and heathland. You can safely assume that if an area is designated

as a national park, it contains valuable flora and fauna and is well worth a visit.

In the Netherlands national parks are designated by the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality. A national park has been designated for all the landscapes which are characteristically Dutch. A national park is administered by a consultative body representing owners, managers and administrators. The provincial council provides the secretariat. The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality contributes a good deal to the costs of administration and maintenance, and information and education within the national park.



Welcome to the Drentsche Aa National Landscape

The landscape of the northern province of Drenthe is an ancient one, with human settlement going back thousands of years. The outstanding cultural and natural values here led to the area's designation as

National Landscape in 2002. Through it meanders a stream, the Drentsche Aa, from which the National Landscape derives its name. Fed by several tributaries, the Drentsche Aa follows its natural course

much as it always has done through a rich variety of traditional, unspoilt landscapes.

The Drentsche Aa National Landscape, a stream valley with typical es villages, is incorporated in the system of

Landscape formed between **200,000** and **50,000 years** ago
Saalian glacial stage (approximately **370,000 – 130,000 years** ago)
Weichselian glacial stage (approximately **115,000 – 10,000 years** ago)

Archaeological periods
Palaeolithic and Mesolithic (**300,000 to 4900 BC**)

Neolithic (**5300 to 2000 BC**)

Funnel beaker culture (**3400 – 2800 BC**)

Bronze Age (**2000 to 800 BC**)
including Middle Bronze Age (**1800 to 1100 BC**)
Iron Age (**800 BC to AD 12**)

2000 years ago: farming already

took place on the essen sites **1000 years** ago: villages and essen already created in their present locations

Roman Era (**12 BC to AD 450**) gold coins: finds from the 2nd and 4th centuries

Middle Ages (**AD 450 – 1500**): cart tracks from ancient trading routes the first bridges at most important fording places of streams

19th century: **1886** Mark Law, start of division of common lands

20th century:

1955 First nature and landscape report on Drentsche Aa stream valley
1960 end of discharge of untreated

waste water into the Drentsche Aa at Assen and into Rolderdiep
1962 end of reclamation of waste land announced in Queen's Speech
1965 conservation plan for Drentsche Aa stream valley, published by National Forest Service advisory section

1970 Pollution of Surface Waters Act in force, establishment of Drenthe water purification board

1972 Reparcellation of land Rolde-Anloo area
1973 Amendment of regional plan for nature and recreation for Drentsche Aa stream valley

1974 end of discharge of untreated waste water from slaughterhouse Udema in 't Andersche diepje

1982 special newspaper supplement

in Vrij Nederland

1991 first report on recreation in Drentsche Aa stream valley

1991 National Forest Service report on drying out and ecological study

1993 hydrological and ecological study report for management purposes

1993 National Forest Service report on management and policy

1994 Structure Plan for the Rural Areas in the Netherlands resulted in more money becoming available for land purchase, development and management of rural area and reorientation of agriculture.

1995 ROM/WVCL-project Drentse Aa & Elperstroom Implementation of Structure Plan for the Rural Areas with pro-

jects for water quality, sustainable agriculture, recreation and traffic, and nature and landscape. This plan marked a shift in the water boards' thinking and working with regard to environmental matters.

1995 National Forest Service management plan and spatial plan for Drentsche Aa stream valley

1995 Regional vision for nature, forest and landscape in the Drentse Aa by Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Development and Fisheries

1997 All sewerage water discharge points in area removed: water quality improved.

21st century:

2002 BIO-plan, regional plan for the

Drentsche Aa National Landscape completed

2002 creation of the Drentsche Aa National Landscape

2002 launch of website www.drentscheaa.nl

2003 First official Drentsche Aa guides trained

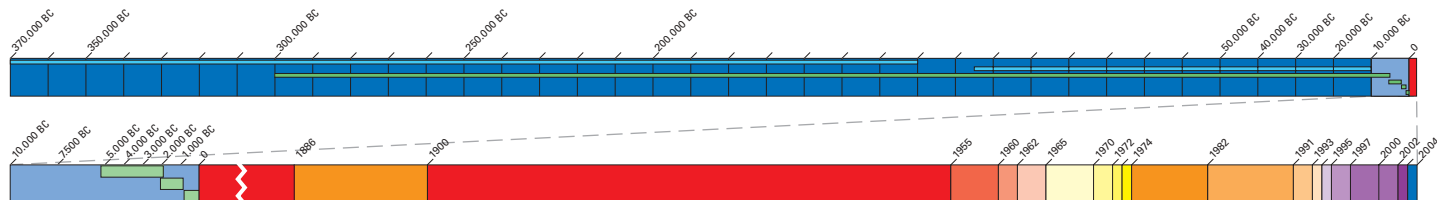
2003 Recreational access and mobility plan for the Drentsche Aa National Landscape

2003 Installation of working group on education, communication and recreation

















2004 Landscape Vision

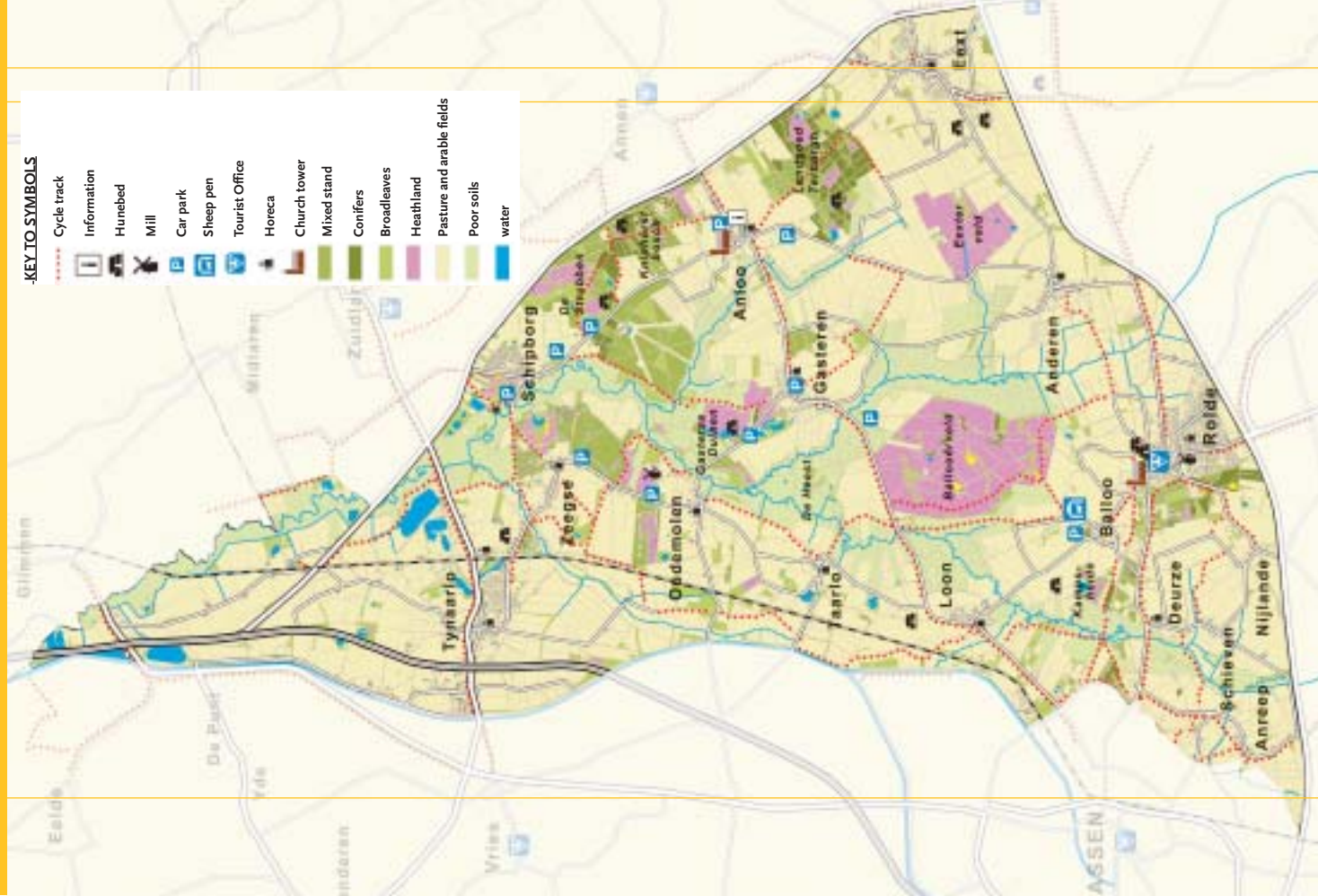
2004 Integral survey of regional opportunities

2004 Plan for visitors' information network



-KEY TO SYMBOLS

	Cycle track
	Information
	Hunebed
	Mill
	Car park
	Sheep pen
	Tourist Office
	Horeca
	Church tower
	Mixed stand
	Conifers
	Broadleaves
	Heathland
	Pasture and arable fields
	Poor soils
	water



Natural development

national parks in the Netherlands. In the management, planning and development of this area, consideration is given to the specific needs of nature and the landscape, but also to agriculture, recreation, local inhabitants and visitors, water management and cultural heritage.

The Drentsche Aa stream system flows from central Drenthe to the outskirts of the city of Groningen (SSE to NNW). For practical reasons, however, the National Landscape is currently limited to the area between Assen, Glimmen and Gieten. Access to this unique and diverse area is excellent.



Geological history

In the Drentsche Aa National Landscape, narrow streams meander through wide, shallow 'valleys' vaguely reminiscent of floodplains. In order to understand how this landscape arose, we must dive briefly into its geological history.

At the end of the Saalian glacial stage, about 150,000 years ago, glacial run-off carved deep gullies, which later filled with sand and peat. The advancing ice sheet also pushed up ridges of ground moraine in the low-lying land. Much later again, small streams meandered over the flat, peaty lowlands on their way to the sea. As the sea level fell, the streams flowed more rapidly, carving deeper and deeper channels roughly following the same SSE to NNW course as the ground moraine ridges. The streams deposited cover sands on the ground moraine plateaus between the stream valleys. Shifting sands actually blocked some watercourses, altering their path to the sea. That is how the Deurzerdiep,



Loonerdiep and Oudemolensche diep got their current course, which cuts 'through' the ridges of Zeijen, Rolde and Tynaarlo. Many small bog beds developed in the old watercourses that had been blocked. Many thousands of years later, these bogs became sites for peat extraction.

The cover sands started to form shifting sand dunes. There are still stretches of bare sand in the Drentsche Aa region, such as at Balloërveld. At the Gasterensche Duinen, Zeegser Duinen and Anloër Strubben, the shape of shifting sand dunes is still recognisable despite having become overgrown over the centuries by heather and trees. Tree plantations were started here in previous centuries to stop the shifting sand from engulfing farms and villages.

The region thus has sandy, peaty and loamy soils, but no layers of rock. Despite this absence of sedimentary rock, Drenthe is known as one of the rockier parts of the Netherlands. Large boulders from Scandinavia and the Gulf of Bothnia were carried into the area by the enormous glaciers, wrapped as it were in the loamy ground moraine. Most of these loose rocks and boulders are granite. They lie below the surface, although originally they were spread over the surface. Inhabitants of this



region have always found good uses for these rocks and boulders, from the megalithic tombs of prehistoric settlers to modern uses as war memorials, garden decoration, border posts and surface material for farm and forestry tracks.

Water as a shaping force

The Drentsche Aa National Landscape is generally regarded as a fairly pristine

system of streams and lowland brooks which flow into the Drentsche Aa. The Drentsche Aa actually comprises many streams and watercourses, each with its own spring and catchment area. The hydrological system as a whole has an area of 10,600 ha. This does not include the springs further to the south, nor the downstream broads to the north of the National Landscape. Since water is a determining factor in all these regions, however, there is close cooperation on policy measures and spatial planning.

The Drentsche Aa falls 21 metres from its highest point, near Grollo, to the lowest point in Groningen: enough for a current but not for a bubbling beck. The various streams and watercourses follow a meandering course through broad, peaty valleys. This is typical of the Drentsche Aa landscape. In other parts of the Netherlands, meandering streams have been straightened to ensure a standard rate of water drainage.

The streams are fed by springs and ground seepage as well as precipitation. Seepage water usually has a fairly constant temperature of between 8 and 10 degrees Celsius. In a cold winter, seepage sites can be recognised by the patches of brown slush on white snow or ice cover.

The fact that the stream system has several sources is the second typical



characteristic of the Drentsche Aa. The water that enters the Drentsche Aa system from underground aquifers can be very old and has made a long journey through underground streams before rising back up to the surface. This ancient water is free of modern pollutants and rich in minerals such as iron, which makes the water rust-coloured. For over a hundred years, the towns of Groingen, Haren, Eelde and Paterswolde have taken their drinking water from the Drentsche Aa catchment area.

Due to the unique characteristics of this stream system, the banks and neighbouring fields have a rich, unique flora. The National Forest Service has carried out a careful programme of nature conservation and management here since the 1960s. Water management is an important aspect of this.



Human influences

A characteristic man-made landscape

The Drentsche Aa region has a long history of settlement. Prehistoric peoples settled near sources of water, either streams or lakes. The first farmsteads in the area also cropped up along watercourses. Traces of early settlement can still be found both above and below the soil surface. A 2004 heritage inventory reported that the man-made landscape here is formed by archaeological remnants, villages and individual buildings. The report continued: “Not only is this one of the most characteristic and unspoiled examples of an *es* village landscape in Drenthe, it is also one of the most unspoiled sandy soil landscapes in all of the northwest European lowlands. In the Pleistocene landscapes of Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark, it is difficult to find another sandy soil landscape which historical stratification is so complete and is preserved in such detail.”

In other words, the Drentsche Aa is

Taarlo village green



an important European landscape. Over the centuries, everything developed here was interwoven with each other: the villages and hamlets, the road infrastructure, the cultivated lands (from the open fields, *essen*, on higher ground to the *groenlanden* or water meadows), the peat extraction sites and major churches. And in this same systematic way, everything is still interconnected today. The fortified houses of the gentry along the lower course of the



Drentsche Aa fall outside the boundaries of the National Landscape but are nevertheless a natural part of the stream valley.

Harmony between the old and the new

The sites of the *essen* were already being farmed some two thousand years ago. Houses were built on stilts and made of light materials, as the farmers moved

regularly to a better situation. The abandoned homestead site was put under crops. About a thousand years ago, as the villages became larger, settlers stopped relocating their farms. The locations of the villages and *essen* became permanent sites. The *essen* that remain today give evidence of these ancient settlements. Past and present merge in other ways, too. Today's

villagers take their walks in the same setting and use the same paths as their predecessors so long ago.

Many of our roads also follow the old routes. The N34 national road is only a stone's throw away from medieval cart tracks. The historical secondary routes between villages are largely intact, too. The junction of five roads in Schipborg, for example, is very old. In this region of streams and watercourses, there were of course many fords, from small fords through which farmers accessed their land to major fords on important routes between trading and political centres. The latter were replaced by bridges from the Middle Ages onwards. These bridges were often built at the ford sites.

For centuries, deep-litter livestock farming was the economic backbone of the *es* villages. Each village had its own flock of sheep that grazed daily on the sandy soil heaths. At the end of the afternoon, the shepherd returned with the common flock

and put the sheep in their pens for the night. The manure collected in these pens was used to fertilise the es lands. There was a natural balance between arable land, hay land (near the streams), the number of livestock (manure producers) and the area of heath for grazing.

The introduction of chemical fertiliser in the 19th century caused the collapse of this mixed farming system. Sheep flocks and heaths lost their economic function. The heaths were claimed for agricultural cultivation or

afforestation. Much afforestation was carried out by the National Forest Service, although private land owners also played a role. The woodland estates of Terborgh, Heidehof and Kniphorstbosch, for instance, were all planted by timber merchants. Some of the heaths were kept for military exercises by regiments stationed in the area. These expansive heaths are now nature reserves. Some heaths (50 Bunder, Balloërveld) also contain reminders of more recent history: the “Assener Stellingen” of the Second World War, for example, which comprises a tank moat running zigzag through the area and trenches with gun emplacements.

Balloo sheep herd



Traces from the past

Thousands of archaeological sites

The Drentsche Aa stream valley boasts more than 3500 archaeological sites. As a rule in archaeology, much of the prehistoric material lies dead and buried underground. Visible archaeological remains such as the hunebeds, burial mounds and tumulus chambers are evidence of a rich past. The recent digs in Midlaren brought to light that there are many more as yet undiscovered treasures hidden away in bog beds, under the *essen* of villages, and on the narrow sand ridges near some streams.

The digs, finds and measurements of

soil compaction give a fair picture of the different periods of habitation. Flint tools and hearth pits date from Mesolithic and Paleolithic times, when nomadic hunter-gatherer tribes collected at places where there was water. The picture is less clear for the Neolithic period, although burial mounds and flat graves tell us where people lived. This is the period that people first began to settle and cultivate the soil. However, no floorplans of houses have been found in this region. But stores of valuable artefacts dating from this period, such as funnel beaker pottery and a couple

of stone axes, point to Neolithic habitation.

The most visible evidence of human habitation are the hunebeds. Ascribed to the funnel beaker culture, they are megalithic tombs consisting of large stones (megaliths) set in formation and originally covered with earth or more, smaller stones. In many cases, the covering has been weathered away leaving only the stone skeleton of the monument. Given their character and the way they are arranged, people now believe that they were more than just burial chambers. The more so, as in later periods burial mounds were erected in their vicinity. Twenty-five hunebeds or what is left of them, have been found in the Drentsche Aa stream valley. In former centuries some of them were taken apart and the stone used for road construction or the reinforcement of dykes and embankments.

Prehistoric farmers

As the Stone Age gave way to the Bronze



Hunebed in Loon

and Iron Ages, farming became increasingly important. Celtic fields, squarish to rectangular enclosed plots, go back to the middle of the Bronze Age. Some twenty of these have been identified on aerial photos of the region. These plots might also have contained farmsteads that stood there for one generation. Remains of Bronze Age homesteads and floor plans have been found in the stream valley, as well as burial mounds and fields of burial urns, side by side. Their location near through-roads would suggest the choice of location was no coincidence.

There are also features typical of the Iron Age in this ancient landscape, such as the dozens of pyre sites, small man-made hills over places where the dead were cremated. The most well-known sites are in Tumulibosch near Balloo and on Kampsheide. Recent literature suggests that each settlement had its own arrangement of pyre sites, implying the existence of territorial structures as far back as the



late Iron Age. Over the centuries, many of these ancient territorial village structures have prevailed, so that a village walk today takes us through more than two thousand years of history.

The Iron Age climate allowed existing peatlands to expand rapidly. From this period date the long peat bridges, walking paths made from tree trunks placed on the peat. The subsequent Roman period had its graves where the ashes of the dead were

buried, a custom that continued up to the early Middle Ages. Farms also had features pointing to Roman influence. A wealthy elite in this region must have been in contact with Roman communities further south. Silver and gold coins have been found in the area dating from the 2nd to 4th centuries. Valuable Roman artefacts have been found on the edge of peatlands and in bogs. Such votive offerings were common in many villages.

Mark stones and church towers

From historic times date the documents and stones with inscriptions. The latter were often mark stones, indicating the boundary between common lands. In open country, burial mounds served the same purpose (later they were also used as gallows hills). But usually, small water-courses and brooks served as natural

Mark stone



boundaries, as some still do today. The current structure of es villages was already defined in the Middle Ages, so too was the use of grasslands near streams, fields and heathland as pasture land for grazing cattle.

Christianity was introduced in Drenthe in the 8th century. The first churches, small and built entirely of wood, date from the 9th century. From the 11th century, churches were built of brick or tuff (such as those in Anloo, Vries and Eelde), a relatively soft and light volcanic material that was imported from the Eifel region. The dead were now buried in church crypts or in the churchyard, although some were still buried (illegally perhaps) in the old burial mounds or burial fields.

The first communities here were *kerspels* (parish communities), which came under the authority of *dingspels* the larger administrative districts (*ding* means court). There are still *dingspel* churches in Anloo, Vries and Rolde. The churches could be





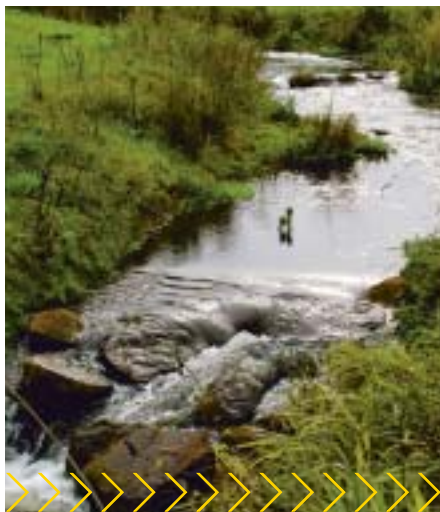
reached by church paths that had right of way across other people's land. These footpaths still exist. When the lands were reparcelled under the 19th century Mark Law, it was done in a pie chart pattern. The pattern is still visible in Rolde where the church tower was used as the pivot from which the lanes between the fields radiated out.

Focus on water

In recent years, water authorities have taken the lead in giving water the role it used to have in the landscape. Water will again perform its natural role in the system of small streams and watercourses. In the past, inundated banks were drained quickly; farmers did not like to see the banks stay wet for too long or their lands flooded. Seeing their hay drifting away on the currents time and again, they started to straighten out some of the meandering streams and dug drainage channels (there is one near Loon). But as farming practices changed, hay lands reverted to the National Forest Service. Now the streams and their adjacent banks have moved up the list of priorities. The streams are once more allowed to meander. Weirs will disappear and ox-bows and deep, slow moving current areas with their fish and wildlife will come back, as will the fords.

The quality of the water is important and has a history of its own. In the 1950s, the Groningen Water Company urged

Assen municipality to stop discharging its untreated waste water into the Drentsche Aa. Dairy factories in the neighbourhood also discharged their waste water directly to nearby brooks and streams. Now most of these discharge points have gone. Only when sewage systems overflow may excess



flow be directed into waterways untreated. Agriculture is also cleaning up its act. Millions have been invested in dedicated filling and washing facilities, so farmers washing manure storage tanks at a handy spot near the water is now a thing of the past. There are also no-spray zones near watercourses. The land along watercourses is increasingly used only for mowing and grazing.

The availability of water is also an issue. Land is drying out and measures are being taken to counteract this. Groundwater levels are raised, ditches are filled in. At the same time, excess quantities of water need to be stored. In the 1990s the fringe of a village, an urban neighbourhood and a hospital further downstream suddenly found themselves in the wet-foot zone. To improve water retention in the upstream area, water authorities, municipal and provincial authorities, nature managers and other parties downstream of the National

Fish ladder



Landscape joined forces and decided to dig a link underneath the canal separating the old course of the Aa (through the peat

polders of 'Oosterland' and 'Lappenvoort' near Eelde-Paterswolde) from its mouth at the Noordwillemskanaal. The two polders

may take in the excess water from the Aa to prevent too much water from reaching the city of Groningen.

Finally, a study will be made into the long-term feasibility of drinking water extraction in the Aa catchment area without irreversible damage to natural values.

Water is a source of life for humans, animals and plants. The National Landscape and its partners therefore organise dozens of nature and cultural projects every year. Water authorities as managers of water quality and quantity play a big role in this.

Nature and landscape management

Flora and fauna

The ecological variety and scenic beauty of this area is a result of ages of traditional farming and the conditions of soil, water and climate. The natural beauty of the area has always been a salient feature: as early as 1955, a report was published on the natural beauty and biological importance of the Drentsche Aa stream valley. But at the same time, from the 1940s to the 1960s, major land improvement programmes were being carried out for the benefit of modern agriculture. A more efficient parcelling of land and watercourses threatened to spell the end for natural development.

Luckily, this dark scenario was never realised. In fact, of all the natural water systems in the Netherlands, that of the *Drentsche Aa* catchment area has remained relatively unspoilt. This can be attributed largely to a publication by the National Forest Service in 1965 which effectively constituted a plea to turn the area into a large nature reserve, to be paid for by the

State and not by the people using it. This produced a lot of unrest in the community: the plan was far ahead of its time, but it came in the nick of time to save nature and the landscape. Farmers were given the opportunity to sell their lands to the Land Management Service to be sold on to the National Forest Service.

In the years that it has managed the area, the National Forest Service has developed great expertise in the ecological management of short vegetation. This has resulted in nutrient-poor grasslands with orchid, yellow rattle, marsh marigold, black



rampion, bog bean, lousewort, rare species of sedge and so on. On some of the heathlands near brook springs, yellow century and pillwort are thriving again.

In the water we find dace, ide, stone loach and river lamprey, all characteristic of unpolluted streams and rivers. Lampreys are some of the most primitive vertebrates alive today. They are jawless, having instead a round sucker-like mouth. Adults migrate to the sea and return to freshwater to spawn. Dragonflies hover over the water like tiny helicopters with the banded demoiselle stealing the show. Trees, groves



and hedgebanks provide habitats for such birds as golden oriole, hobby, yellow bunting and bullfinch. From time to time the elusive osprey and hen harrier can be seen here. Meadow birds have become rare, as elsewhere in the Netherlands, but the stork nest in Taarlo was occupied in 2004.

Private landowners, particularly farmers, are showing more interest in nature management. Subsidised nature management involves the protection of certain target species which include marsh gentian, broad leaved marsh orchid, yellow marsh marigold and tawny sedge but also meadow buttercup, ragged robin or daisy.

Drentsche Aa Landscape vision

The comprehensive vision for nature and landscape management in the Drentsche Aa National Landscape also embraces harmonisation with the area's cultural heritage. In landscape development, the 2004 vision builds on the existing



landscape and its cultural heritage. The vision can be summarised as follows:

1. an integrated approach should be adopted: everything is closely linked up with everything else;
2. the landscape should be made more interesting by creating vistas, more variety, more contrast;
3. the landscape is dynamic: it should not be preserved as a museum;
4. quality should be a first priority in planning decisions (new housing developments);
5. historic layers in the landscape should become more visible to help us understand how the landscape with its



With this vision as a basis and a little bit of luck, the Drentsche Aa National Landscape will see at least another hundred years.

hunebeds, burial mounds, cart trails, fords, dingspel churches and church paths has evolved;

6. drastic changes must not be made except in areas which were already completely overhauled in the past;
7. restraint is needed in the construction and design of facilities. Simplicity is what the area needs;
8. borders and transitions (e.g. between field and stream valley) should be made more natural.



Farming for the future

The official management and development plan for the area, BIO plan 2002, describes the Drentsche Aa National Landscape as a predominantly man-made landscape in what was once a woodland area with bogs and streams. Agriculture has always played an important role in this region: the landscape was, after all, created by traditional farming. But traditional farming has had to make way for modern farming. There are still some 100 farms in the region, mainly arable farmers or land using livestock producers. Half of the Drentsche Aa National Landscape is farmland and the challenge lies in keeping modern management and the landscape in harmony.

Agriculture is, and will remain, the core primary industry in the region. But where once the *Boermarkte* decided on matters agricultural, now the fate of farmers is largely in the hands of Brussels and world trade policy. However, agriculture is so interwoven with the landscape

here that further intensification and expansion can only take place on a small scale. But this very closeness to the landscape also provides farmers with new opportunities. Functions can be combined and farmers can take up a stewardship role.

For successful farmers who want to expand their businesses, relocation may be an option. Farmers who cannot bear to leave their beloved region may consider reparcelling. They may turn to the Land Development Committee, a body of land brokers advising farmers in National Landscapes. This works reasonably well. But farmers may also decide to branch out into new areas like outdoor recreation or tourism. Many farmers offer farmhouse bed-and-breakfast or farm-based holidays. Some have widened their business horizons to provide valuable services for locals and visitors alike. Others have joined forces in sustainable farming projects, such as two groups of farmers near Rolde



and Zuidlaren. Farmers can also choose to combine farming with nature management projects, such as the cooperative of part-time and hobby farmers who combine farming, nature management and outdoor recreation.

Clearly, then, there is a role for farming in the Drentsche Aa National Landscape. This was underscored in the spring of 2004 when the National Forest Service entered into a management contract with a group of farmers for the first time in its existence.

Living

Traditional villages and new housing

The Drentsche Aa stream valley has been inhabited since the hunebed builders kept cattle here some 5000 years ago. The basic village structure was already in place in 100 BC. The original pattern of dwellings and farms was similar for all settlements, being based on agricultural exploitation. During the Middle Ages, smaller settlements – only one or two farms at first – began to develop outside the main villages. Kamps in the Balloo mark is an example and so was Lantinge, which has now disappeared. After that, things remained relatively stable until in the second half of the 20th century when farming ceased to be the main source of income here. The region became more prosperous and with prosperity came mobility. It was no longer necessary to live and work in the same place and the traditional *es* villages saw an influx of people who worked in the towns and cities of the region (particularly Groningen and Assen).

The 1960s saw new housing develop-

Anloo



ments on the fringe of villages, which resulted in bland, uniform new neighbourhoods. They were often built on the green-field sites of *essen*, *kampen* and *veldgronden*. Many villages on the edges of what is now the National Landscape

became commuter villages.

At the end of the twentieth century, more variety in residential architecture was introduced. But these new developments became a visual intrusion. Suddenly, on the edges of old, sleepy *es* villages,

conspicuous new housing developments appeared. This had come to a halt by the end of the twentieth century, when people began to re-appreciate the value of beautiful landscapes and their surroundings, and liveability became the dominant theme. In many villages, inhabitants and community councils now work on more harmonious residential development plans that respect the character of local landscapes and focus on liveability and the region's cultural heritage. These new residential development plans can only be realised with the cooperation and funding of local authorities.

The comprehensive vision for nature and landscape management in the Drentsche Aa National Landscape includes such new residential development plans. The form, pattern and detailing of these plans should make a positive contribution to the sustainability of settlements and communities.



Nature and cultural heritage

Outdoor recreation and tourism

Outdoor recreation and the enjoyment of leisure time, only goes back half a century. The Dutch first saw the Saturday off in 1962 although the five-day working week did not become official until 1975. Another effect of greater prosperity was that people began to buy cars and motor bikes and they flocked to the woods, heaths, rivers or lakes to spend their newly gained leisure time.

The first tourists in the Drentsche Aa area were day-trippers who came to see the sights or stroll in the woods. The woodland near Assen, with its star-like pattern of paths and stately homes was a popular destination for 'townies'. So was the De Braak estate near Paterswolde. The old maze and chain bridge were great attractions here. Visitors had to buy a map and 58,717 copies were sold in 1925 alone.

Further to the south lies Zeegse which, with its heath and sand drifts, has always been popular with people from

Groningen and the towns in the peat district. People from Assen took the train to Rolde, which had a restaurant with a popular playground. From there people went to the Balloërkuil and the hunebeds after which they took the train back to town. Assen tourist office published brochures commending the excellent walks, woodlands and cycle paths.

In the 1930s, natural pools were very popular. Bad Evenhuis, near Schipborg, for

instance, was a dredged fen with a strip of sand in a meander of Schipborgerdiep. In summer, the land-owner hired a pool attendant to keep an eye on bathers. Mr Fennema was a famous character. He did his job in an immaculate tropical suit and hat and had an air of great authority. Nobody knew whether he could actually swim himself... The pools near Tynaarlo which had resulted from sand extraction for the new railway that was being built,



were popular for swimming and boating.

Small cafés and pavilions cropped up at popular natural sites. Hotel Duinoord in Zeegse, the Drentsche Aa Café in Schipborg and the Appèlbergen restaurant near Glimmen all date from this era.

Wherever there was an opportunity, people built small cabins or summer houses. A group of railway workers built their summer cabins near Okkenveen.

Campsites became popular, too. These campsites were concentrated around Zuidlaren, Zeegse and Schipborg. In the 1930s, farmer Glas in Schipborg was the first to let people to pitch their tents in his field. By this time, outdoor recreation had moved beyond day trips. The Drentsche Aa had been discovered.

Tourists were not the first 'outsiders' to discover the area, though. Artists had come before them and had settled in Anloo, Zeegse en Schipborg.



Outdoor recreation: research and information

Apart from the traditional Tourist Office brochure there was little to guide or inform visitors. The National Forest Service started a pilot in 1972 with two temporary discovery trails in the area. A year later, the Provincial Council adopted a new regional plan for nature and recreation and decided that recreation should focus on day visits and the conservation of ecological diversity and the conservation and rehabilitation of

the characteristic landscape structure. In 1977, a time when long-distance walking routes were being planned throughout the Netherlands, the National Forest Service mapped out the first walking routes in the Drentsche Aa area. Six new routes were drawn up in 1989.

A 1991 survey showed that the number of day visitors to the area had reached 1 million per year. Visitors come in search of 'quiet, nature and the landscape'. Many arrive by car and then go cycling or walking. Visitors are pleased with what they find: three-quarters of them find the simple recreational facilities quite sufficient. In March 2002 a study by the Royal Dutch Touring Club noted a new demand for provisions for mountain bikers and in-line skaters.

Outdoor recreation and tourism as economic factors

Outdoor recreation and tourism are a major source of income for the people



living in the Drentsche Aa National Landscape. The BIO plan applauds the use made of the area's economic potential. New innovative projects are launched in which farmers, local authorities, nature managers and businesses work together to improve infrastructure and the quality of facilities. A recreational mobility plan aims to resolve current mobility problems. Quality is a first priority. Everyone is welcome in the Drentsche Aa National Landscape as long as they show respect for the countryside.

Communication and Education

An innovation: national landscape, rather than national park

Good communication is a precondition for a working National Landscape. The local population in the Drentsche Aa region must feel affinity with the project and, if



possible, profit from its revenues. At the same time, visitors must have all the information they need to enjoy the area to the full.

This National Landscape has already made a name for itself. The government originally had plans to designate the Drentsche Aa as a national park. Local feelings about the plan were first tested at village meetings, but the local community was not prepared to subject everything to the needs of nature management and rejected the national park plan outright. Clearly, an alternative had to be found. The planning committee decided to recommend an alternative to the Minister, in the form of what has now become the National Landscape. The National Landscape was incorporated into legislation on national parks, by adding an exceptional clause to the area objectives, to include agriculture as well as nature.

This new approach had far-reaching effects. The National Forest Service, as

largest owner of nature areas, had to learn to deal with the broader objectives for the area. Landscape, cultural heritage and recreation were given more weight in area policy. A number of strictly defined nature objectives were criticised openly, which was difficult to accept after 40 years of good management. But recreation was already an important activity.

The consultative platform asked the National Forest Service to lead the development of the Drentsche Aa National Landscape. The Service developed and organised the first courses for the Drentsche Aa guides. This group was put through a rigorous programme including landscape history, cultural history, nature management and rural architecture as well as the art and literature of the area. The information and education package has now been broadened. Agricultural developments are as important as architectural style and nature education in stream valley landscapes. The form of the information

and education also had to change to include the local community.

There is a website www.drentscheaa.nl, a newsletter *Doorstroom* for the local community and an information brochure *Op Stap* for visitors. There are excursions and walks, and special activities can be arranged for groups. New cycle tracks, footpaths and bridleways will be constructed, as well other sporting routes.

The visitors' information network

In national parks, it is standard practice to have one central, manned visitors' centre. This functions as the hub for information and education about the area. In the Drentsche Aa National Landscape a different approach has been taken: a visitors' information network. There is no one large building serving as visitors' centre. Unlike traditional national parks with thousands of hectares of nature, the Drentsche Aa National Landscape has



many villages which can serve as a starting point for visits and excursions, and a great deal of knowledge rests within these local communities. This means that the task of information and education can be distributed over the villages and hamlets, and can be coordinated locally under regional direction. Farmers, nature managers, local

businesses and societies as well as cultural heritage organisations will all have their place in the network. It is a huge task to organise this network, but in theory, visitors will be able to find information, excursions and education throughout the area instead of in one building. In the end, these investments will be sure to benefit the local national landscape communities. The system is currently being developed, again using public meetings for the local population. The existing unmanned information centres at Anloo and Balloo fit into this scheme and will be improved.

In addition to the visitors' information network, the Drentsche Aa think-tank also came up with the idea of creating a electronic information points, for instance at the edge of the National Landscape, and a mobile form of communication, education and culture. The Drentsche Aa-Rangers, cultural societies and drama clubs could all be involved in this scheme, in setting up historical pageants, for

instance. The annual re-creation of a sitting of the ancient court, the *Etstoel* in Anloo, in which the whole village participates, also fits well into this scheme.

“Conservation through regeneration” will be the motto used in communication and education, to reflect both the history and future of the Drentsche Aa National Landscape.

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