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A SONGLINE FOR THE VENEN

De Stelling van Rondehoep

THE RONDEHOEP POSITION

PAUL DE KORT

2002

NEW NATURE IN DE VENEN...

‘Ecological mainstructure, structureplans green space, nature development, strategical green projects’; a big consecutive pond- and fen meadow area located between Woerden, Alpen a/d Rijn, the motorways A9, A2 and the railway between Harmelen and Breukelen, functions as the main area for nature- and landscape policies. The goal is to create a vast natural reservoir by 2020 with marshlands, floating fen, damp grasslands, reedlands, and ponds. All this new nature will connect the Nieuwkoopse and Vinkeveense Plassen and create one big natural landscape where animals who needs a vast, wet habitat can survive. The counties Utrecht, Noord- and Zuid-Holland have drafted the report ‘Beeld van de Venen in 2020’ in 2002, stating that nature is a priority, but also giving space to nature-friendly agriculture, recreations and art, because...

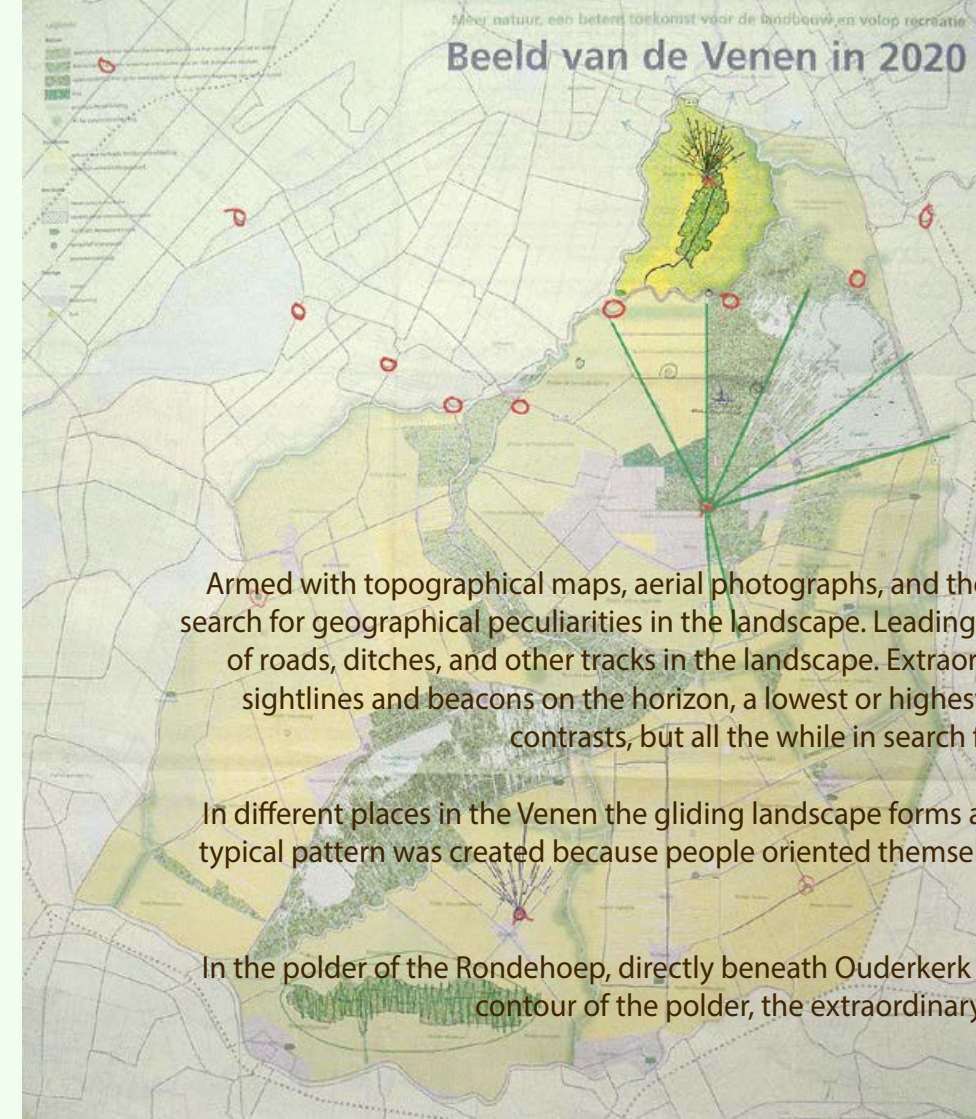
...ARE THERE SONGLINES IN THE VENEN?

The Aboriginals, the original inhabitants of Australia, know their surroundings and find their way in unfamiliar areas thanks to sung stories, the so-called ‘songline’. Songs that are passed from generation to generation.

In the Venen, such stories must be present too, about hidden peat, an old tree, a strange twist in a path, the orientation of a ditch...

The Strategisch Groenproject De Venen will cause approximately 2885 hectare to change its function. Within the borders of the planning area additions of the visual arts can be made too;

‘are there songlines in the Venen?



Armed with topographical maps, aerial photographs, and the ‘Beeld van de Venen in 2020’ I started my search for geographical peculiarities in the landscape. Leading me is my fascination for striking drawings of roads, ditches, and other tracks in the landscape. Extraordinary structures and geometrical shapes, sightlines and beacons on the horizon, a lowest or highest point in a meadow, sharp transitions and contrasts, but all the while in search for the stories behind these phenomenon.

In different places in the Venen the gliding landscape forms a fanning pattern of ditches and plots. This typical pattern was created because people oriented themselves towards a meander in a peat river or a church tower on the horizon.

In the polder of the Rondehoep, directly beneath Ouderkerk a/d Amstel, three rivers define the striking contour of the polder, the extraordinary ditch pattern focuses on one central axis.



Peat polder the Rondehoep is over a 1000 ha and was created between 1100 and 1300. The original, medieval subdivision pattern is still beautifully visible. The peat was not suitable for peat extraction because it contained clay sediments from the Amstel, and this is why the polder has almost completely escaped industrialisation and urbanization. This is extraordinary, especially so close to Amsterdam. The rivers Amstel, Bullewijk, Waver and Oude Waver form the contours of the polder. From the borders of these rivers the polder was quarried towards the centre of Amsterdam. Farms are all situated on the border alongside the dyke, the central area is completely void, open and flat. The plots are hard to reach and are therefore extensively used. The quiet makes the core of the Rondehoep attractive for meadow birds. The advancing high-rise blocks of De Zuidas and Amsterdam Zuidoost is clearly visible on the horizon.

POLDER THE RONDEHOEP



RIVERS THAT SURROUND THE POLDER

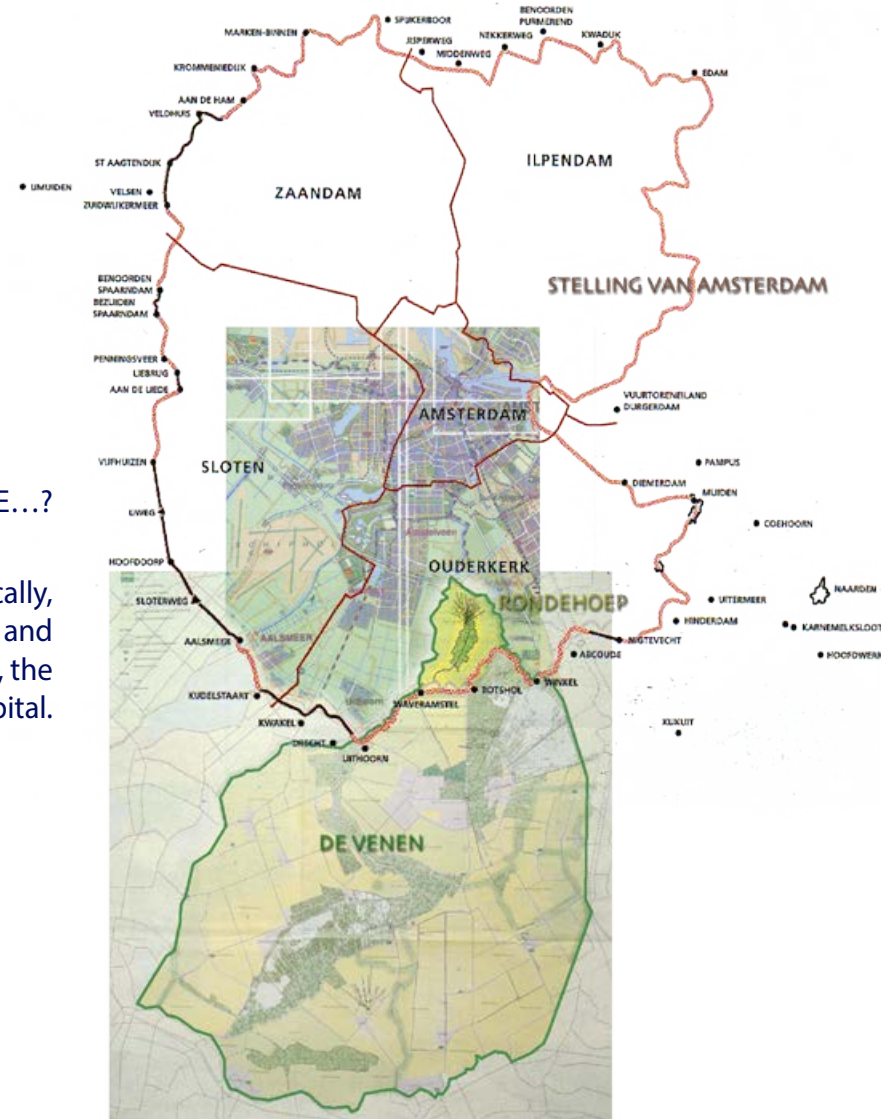


Two fortifications of the Stelling van Amsterdam near the polder Rondehoep; Waver-Amstel en Botshol, seen from the dyle that surrounds the Rondehoep.

DE STELLING VAN AMSTERDAM

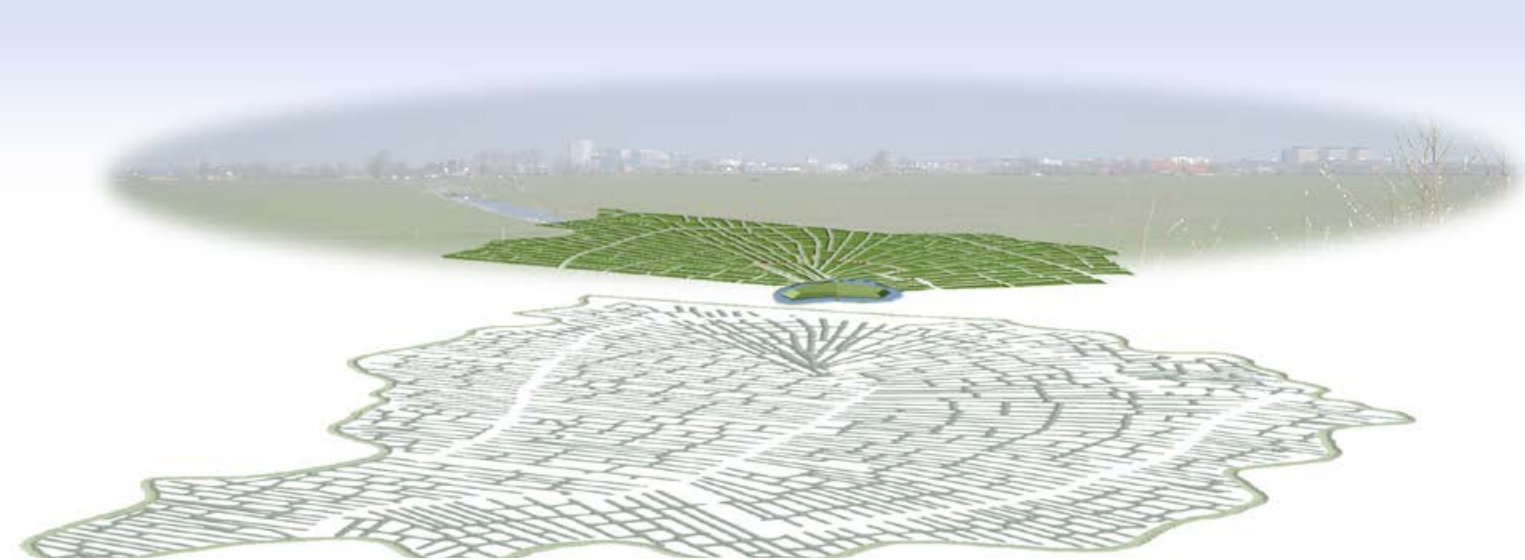
About 15 to 20 kilometres from Amsterdam is a series of military forts; DE STELLING VAN AMSTERDAM (1890). As a unique defence fortification it has been added to UNESCO's world heritage list. The landscape around the forts, defence walls, dykes, and batteries has largely remained untouched, despite being located in an area with a high population density.





A SONGLINE...?

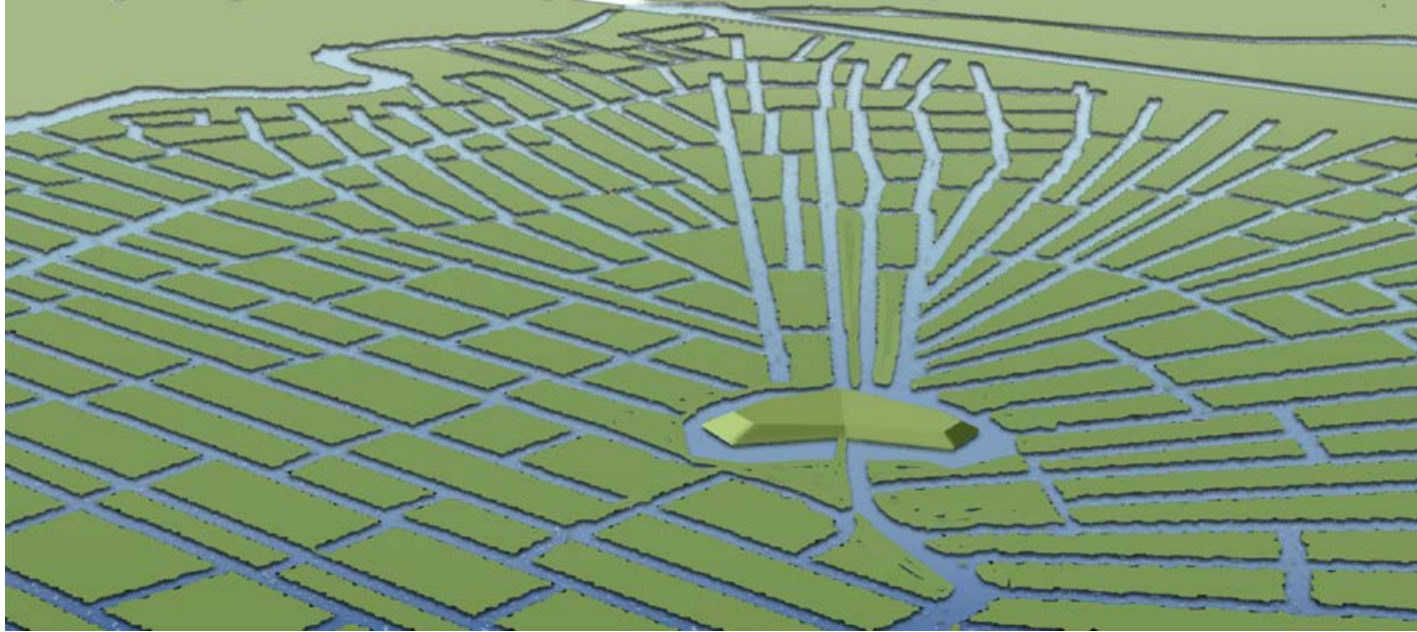
Strategically,
like an advance post of the Groene Hart and
surrounded by the defence line of Amsterdam, the
Rondehoep spies on the capital.



But, in the 21st century, the danger no longer comes from within the polder, it is the polder itself that is in danger!
This is why I'd like to suggest an earth fort pointing towards the north in the heart of the Rondehoep.

DE STELLING VAN RONDEHOEP.

A fort with a view over the fanning ditch pattern that functions as a foreground for the panorama of the A9 and Ouderkerk a/d Amstel with economical centres behind it; Amsterdam Zuidoost, the Zuidas, Aalsmeer, and Schiphol.



A new fort in the heart of the vast polder is the central point from with the ditch pattern seems to fan out. It functions as a beacon and viewpoint, but is also a counterpoint against the defence line of Amsterdam and the forts Waver-Amstel and Botshol.

As cultural heritage, we need to cherish these kinds of fragile landscapes, but ignorance is its biggest enemy. With the defence line of the Rondehoep, I'd like to hum the melody of a story, the special pattern in the landscape

De Stelling van Rondehoep as a songline; "land-art avant la lettre".

If ignorance can be dispelled this way, does the Rondehoep still need a fort?

De Stelling van Rondehoep



THE RONDEHOEP POSITIONS

POSITION 1

the labyrinth of ditches of the Medieval parcelling pattern branches out like the nerves of a leaf in a green oasis. But instead of feeding the polder, the water is extracted from the thousands of seasons and gets stored in the memory layers of the fen.

POSITION 2

with nature nota's as weapons, recreational users as forces and the zeitgeist as ammunition, the defence line of the Rondehoep flips the bird to the economical violence of the delta metropolis. But it is also this economic activity that allows us to occupy ourselves with this new nature..



Openings speech for the exhibition 'LAND-SHAPE / Defence line of the Rondehoep' in the BCK Alphen a/d Rijn, given on 16 March 2003 by Dirk Sijmons (H+N+S Landschapsarchitecten and Chief Government Advisor for the landscape from 2004 to 2008).

Not that long ago things were so bad with landscape architecture in The Netherlands that we looked with great distrust at the interference of artists in the landscape. These artists were blissfully unaware of our troubled feelings. How did this come about? We are talking about the beginnings of the 80s and my field existed of an anonymous subservient professional group mainly in service of the government where it occupied a small territory in the aquarium of policies. In fact, to the outside world we were so invisible that administrative employees – whenever a cultural stance needed to be made – did not even consider the fact that they had a landscape architect in employment, but instead hired artists to make, in our eyes roguish, contributions to our projects. In short, there was no 'jalouzie de metier', but 'jalourzie entre les metiers'.

A lot has changed. In the twenty years since, the field has pulled itself out of the water and, after a long emancipation process, has blossomed, and now I'm delivering the opening speech for someone from that once so suspect discipline of landscape artists.

In fact, I'd like to state that thematically speaking, the work of Paul de Kort and my own is convergent without erasing the disciplinary borders of our fields.

The work around the fort Rondehoep is framed by a project called 'Songlines in the Groene Hart': a reference to the Songlines, the songs with which the Australian Aborigines produced a complete, vocal map of the entire continent. Every tribe sung about the area they inhabited in ritual processes, songs that were then linked to the songs of other tribes. Together, it shaped – so beautifully described by Bruce Chatwin – the biggest cultural project on this earth. If the songlines are the biggest work of art on this earth, perhaps the Dutch landscape could make a close second.

It seems that artists have, in a sense, an advantage, because they, like Paul de Kort, are able to confiscate the landscape with their interventions by shaping and situating something between art and archipuncture (new word) making it look like the surroundings are just another part of the design. De Kort has done this before with the beautiful Mandercircles in Twente, where he made an addition to the existing circles of the progressive farmer Jannink. A hill in the middle of one of the circles and a road to the centre of the other circle where a labyrinth or ritual route begins are such meaningful additions that they transform the once so rationally intended circles into magical places that, in the mind of the visitor, must have been there for hundreds of years.

The placement of the fort in the new Defence Line of Rondehoep has a similar effect, it is strategic in a way that the fanning subdivision looks like an extension instead of its original medieval origin. This brings me to the second similarity in the thematics of my work and that of Paul de Kort; lines and defences.

Whereas De Kort placed a fort in the Rondehoep to spy on the urbanization, we made a plan several years ago for the defence line of Amsterdam, not far away from Rondehoep: a 241 kilometre long ring supposed to protect the capital, but which after its realization was made redundant because of the development of long-range artillery. Five years ago, this defence line was placed on the UNESCO world heritage list (in the company of the Pyramids of Cheops, Mont Saint-Michel, and the Aya Sophia) and the county Noord-Holland wished to give it some meaning. The defence line is made up of forts, line dykes, and inundation plots that glide with the landscape in such a way that they're almost invisible. This was the intention of the military designers. This raised the first paradox: How do you create a world monument out of something that is designed to be invisible?

Our suggestion is a 'silence-defence line' with field-units such as a cemetery, meditation centre, land art projects etc. this makes the link complete: Paul de Kort has subconsciously created a field-unit and we have created the basis for a work of art of Paul de Kort.

I open the exhibition in the hope that mindful collaboration between landscape architects and landscape artists will further the blossoming of both fields.