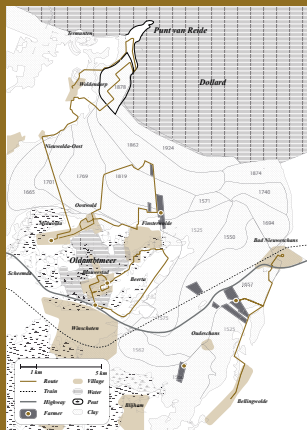




- *Essential guidebook for trekking the Oldambt*
- *Extensive research for the development of regenerative farmyards*



In a four stage trekking route van den Eijnde embarks on a journey to discover the hidden identity of the Oldambt region. While hiking and interviewing local farmers he discovers that this area contains a rich history that is still visible in today's landscape and can form the basis for regenerative redevelopment.

TREKKING IN THE OLDAMBT

Sem van den Eijnde

TREKKING IN THE OLDAMBT

Trailing the farmyards of North-East Groningen



Sem van den Eijnde

STUDIOKEIJ

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Contents

Hiking map

Chapter 1: intro

1.1 About the author

1.2 Research

1.3 Brief history of the Oldambt

1.4 Important words

1.5 Flora & Fauna

Chapter 2: The hike

2.1 Stage 1: Woldendorp to Midwolda

2.2 Stage 2: Loop around Oostwold and Finsterwolde

2.3 Stage 3: Loop around Blauwestad and Beerta

2.4 Stage 4: Blauwestad to Bellingwolde

2.5 Stage 5: Bellingwolde to Bad Nieuweschans

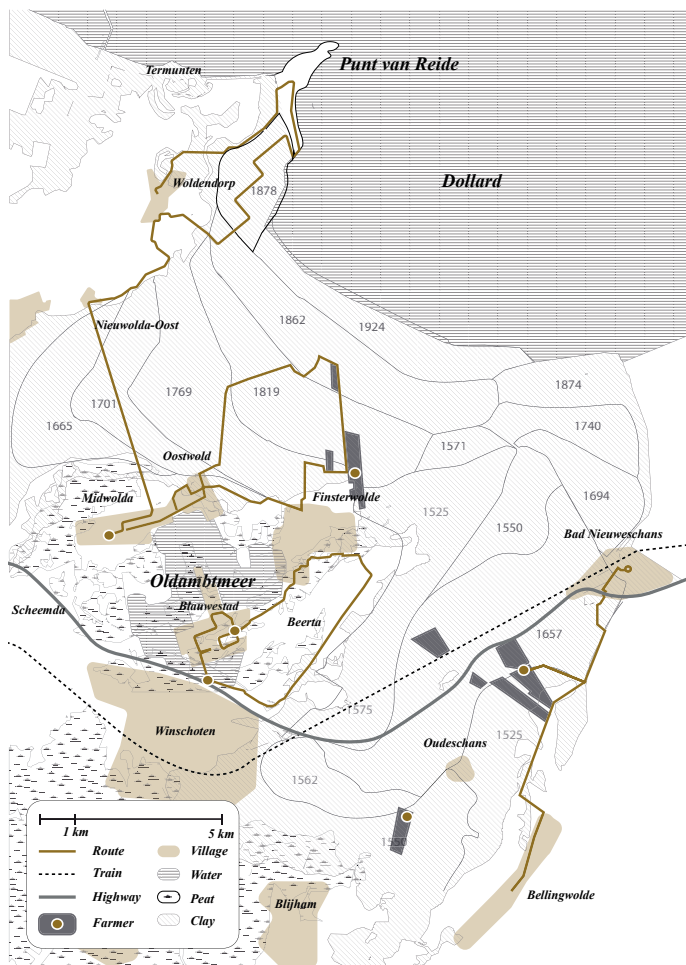
Chapter 3: Conclusions

3.1 Findings

3.2 Conclusion

3.3 Reflection

3.4 References



About the author

Sem van den Eijnde (1997) is Dutch a student at the Technical University of Delft specializing in a master of Architecture. He concerns himself with the human relationship with the landscapes we live in and connects this to architecture, building methods and materiality. At the Arkitektskolen in Aarhus, Denmark van den Eijnde specialized further in local building culture and its place within the broader field of architecture. Furthermore, he is an experienced hiker; having walked the Haute Randonnée Pyrénéenne in 2021, the Dolomites in 2022 and Italian Alps in 2023. In this guide van den Eijnde stays closer to home, exploring the flat landscapes of Groningen with the aim of combining his love for hiking and architecture in a thrilling research into the landscapes, farmers and building cultures of the Oldambt region.



Research

Research

In this hiking guide wandering is used as a research method to investigate multiple elements of the landscape. Hiking is something we all do. It is a very practical tool of transportation, but it can be adapted as a method of research as well. When we hike we slow down and you gradually become more aware of your senses and surroundings. Hiking forces you in the role of the observer: while you focus on the horizon you process every step, noise, the weather and texture. Furthermore, hiking is also a tool of encounter. While you wander you come into contact with the landscape, people and places which allows for new revelations and interesting stories. This guide is the result of hiking and encountering as a research method for understanding landscapes as a basis for regenerative design solutions.

In this hiking guide I will take you through the landscapes and farmyards of the Oldambt, an area in the most eastern part of Groningen. The Oldambt in the east of Groningen is an interesting area in which the current landscape and architype of the Oldambster farm developed around the same time in the early 16th century, when people started with the reclamation of land from the river the Dollard. The typology of the Frisian barn slowly developed in to the Oldambster barn due to a shift from a mixed peasant farm to a focus on agriculture. The fertile soil and efficient farms that focused on large scale production

of grain resulted in great wealth among farmers in this region. This development resulted in a class society between farmer and farmworker, something which is still visible in today's social landscape.

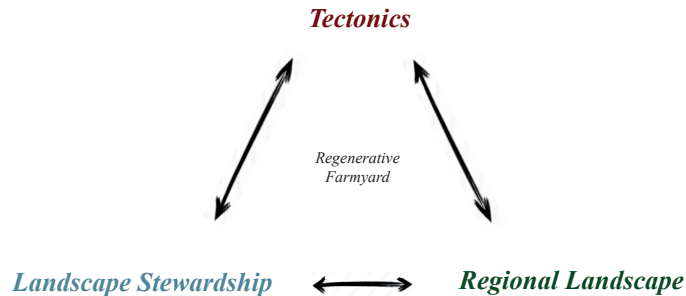
In the 20th century mechanization led to even larger farms and reduction of workforce. The result of this is that farmyards are left behind and people are leaving the region due to lack of opportunities. In recent history multiple projects have been initiated to regenerate the draining area like the Blauwestad in the late 90s and more recently the Graanrepubliek which is part of national program Groningen, which intends to boost the region. However, these projects are not getting enough footing and seem to lack a real connection with the regional landscape. The region is in dire need of a regenerative approach to its abandoned farmyards that takes multiple elements like social, cultural and physical aspects into mind.

The ideas from the Danish philosopher Nicolai Schultz (2022) brought me towards a new approach that could be investigated for this area. He argues that Ecology emphasizes a place and its limitations. When we become dependent on a place that supports our existence, our understanding of freedom shifts. In the notion of dependence lies an opportunity to redefine independence and freedom. The more dependent we are, the better. Schultz' philosophy therefore led me to the concept of Borgen (loosely translated to borrowing) in its broadest

sense. Borgen refers to borrowing from the landscape in such a way that what you take you can also give back. However, in Dutch it also refers to securing, securing a future for the region while taking its physical and material elements into account. Lastly, Borgen is also a name given to the particular country houses in Groningen that are characteristic for the Oldambt region. With the idea of trying to use the concept Borgen, as a verb as well as an archetype, as the starting point for regenerative redevelopment, I set out wandering into the region with the following question in mind:

How can landscape stewardship contribute to a regenerative farmyard whilst a tectonic that depends on the regional landscape?

The question contains three elements of mutual interdependence to be examined that lead the way towards a regenerative farmyard: landscape stewardship, regional landscape and tectonics. So, while I take you wandering along the long wide-open landscapes and historic farmyards and farmers that make up the Oldambt region the following three elements and their interrelationship will serve as the backbone of this guide.



In the image the three elements are all have their own color, throughout the guide wanderings, experiences and observations that refer to these elements will be highlighted in its assigned color. In this way the hiking guide is structured to distinguish the different elements from each other while being on one single hike.

The first element that will be researched by wandering is landscape stewardship. Landscape stewardship refers to “the responsible interaction between people and their landscape, aimed at safeguarding its values for present and future generations (Opdam, 2017).” I tried to find the ways of human engagement and responsibility in managing landscapes to preserve their ecological, cultural, and social values over time. Landscape stewardship the concerns itself with how farmers treat their land and in which way they use it. While wandering elements that refer to landscape stewardship will be visible in the color blue.

The second element I will address is the regional landscape. A regional landscape refers to the physical characteristics, features, and environmental elements that define a specific geographical region. It encompasses natural aspects such as terrain, climate, vegetation, and hydrology, as well as human-made features like infrastructure, land use patterns, and cultural landmarks. Regional landscapes are shaped by both natural processes and human activities over time, giving each

area its unique identity and sense of place within a larger geographical context. Studying regional landscapes provides insights into the interactions between natural and human systems and how they influence each other.

The last element that will be encountered in my wandering research is tectonics. The tectonics, defined as the structural principles and constructive systems that underlie a building or other architectural work. Tectonics go beyond just the technical aspect; it is also about making visible and celebrating the construction and materiality of a building as an integral part of the design (Semper, 2010). Tectonics, then, refer to the tangible and architectural elements that are characteristic for the region and what it represents.

These three elements and their dependence on each other is researched on this wandering with the goal to arrive at a new regenerative way of developing in which the concept of Borgen is placed at the center. Ultimately, it aims to show the potential of a bottom-up approach to the challenges in the Dutch countryside. The approach focuses on local value chains through the engagement and stories of farmers and people who are active in the region. landscape stewardship. In this case focused on an approach to repurposing the obsolete farmyards in Het Oldambt and reconnecting them to an agricultural landscape. The stories and observations of the research are structured in this hiking guide. To translate and

visualize the data that is collected, which is to be used to inform the design process of one repurposed farmyard. This research strongly believes in the stories brought by people, buildings, and a landscape acquired through hiking and encountering.

While hiking through the area, I visited and conducted episodic narrative interviews (Mueller, 2019) with four farmers connected to the graanrepubliek on their views on landscape stewardship. Each stage is connected to one farmer. The observations during the hike that are related to one of the elements (regional landscape, tectonics, landscape stewardship) are elaborated in the coloured boxes. The interviews at the end of the stages are visualized in drawings inspired by Jan Rothuizen.

History

A brief History of the Oldambt

Borgen and Monestaries

Between the 7th and the 9th century, settlements appeared on Wierden and sand ridges, that were elevated above the peat landscape. Coordinated by the local monasteries the peat was mined and the land used for agriculture, which resulted in the subsidence of the landscape. Due to this subsidence, most of the settlements ended up on sand ridges and Wierden which led to the characteristic ribbon development of stretch-out out settlements (Cultuur Historisch Centrum Oldambt, 2011). In this period noblemen with their Borgen also acquired a lot of power in this area (Formasm, Luitjes-Dijkveld Stol, & Pathuis, 1987). From the 11th century on dikes were constructed to protect the land, wick became more vulnarble to flooding from the Dollard. This resulted in a system of locks and waterways.

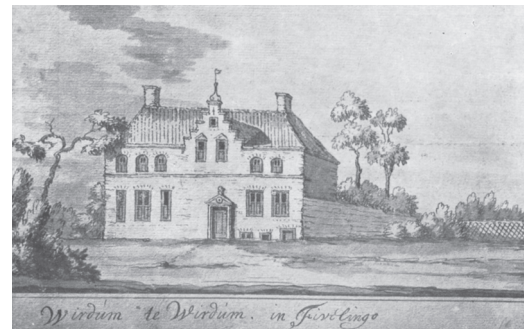


image 1: Borg

Floodings

The Oldambt region has a rich history of flooding and has always been in combat with the water. In 1413 troops set fire to the locks at Reide which flooded the hinterland (Cultuur Historisch Centrum Oldambt, 2011). This moment signified a century where the Dollard moved further inland. In 1507 the dike at Termunten gave way, as a result, Scheemda Midwold and Oostwold were moved to higher ground, following other villages that had been lost in previous floods (Cultuur Historisch Centrum Oldambt, 2011). The consequences of dike breaches can still be seen in the form of Kolken in the landscape.

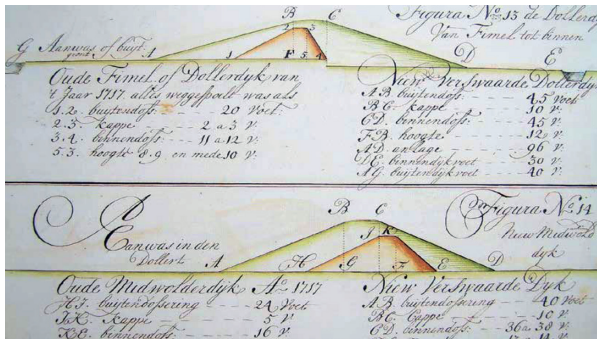


image 2: Dike

The reclamation of land and the rise of the agricultural farm

In the late 16th century the city of Groningen acquired more power in the Oldambt region, they initiated the reclamation of land (Hofstee, E. W., 1937). With the help of monasteries, they started to dike in the land. Furthermore, farmers acquired the right to accretion (recht van aanwas) allowing them to acquire adjacent outer-dike areas, resulting in bigger farms (boederijenboek Oldambt, 2024). A division is visible in the newly won land and the old existing landscape. This process of land-winning resulted in fertile soil consisting of sea clay that continued until the 1980's. The growing size of the farms, fertile soil, and the then-existing cattle diseases made it so that agriculture became the main cultivation used in the area, becoming one of the first farmers to specialize in only one cultivation.

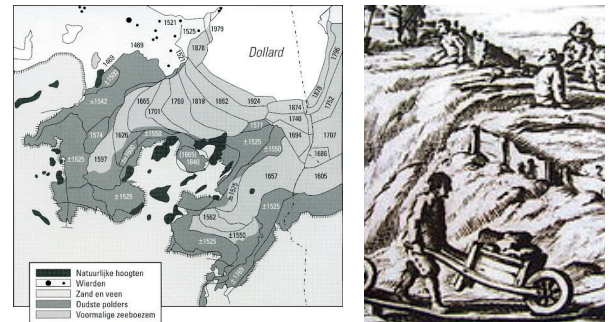


image 3: Reclamation

Wealth accumulation in the 19th century

In the 19th century, grain prices started to rise significantly due to multiple wars in Russia. The farmers in the Oldambt, who now had about two centuries of experience in agriculture, accumulated a lot of wealth, becoming the wealthiest and most modern farmers in Europe (Westerman, 1999). In this period the Herenboer (Gentlemen Farmer) is born. They have about 15 workers who work the land while they themselves distinguish as an elite who runs the farm. Large and excentric front houses were built to show off the newly accumulated wealth. This wealth however led to a big class difference between the hereboer and the land worker, one that is still visible today.



image 4: Crossed house

Industrialization

At the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century mechanization took a big leap. The rise of the steamship made it possible to import grain from the United States resulting in lower grain prices in Europe (Centrum Agrarische Geschiedenis, n.d.). Simultaneously, mechanization led to a reduction of the workforce needed. As a result, the farms became even bigger with less people populating the area. At the same time, industry arrived in the area in the form of straw-carton factories due to an overload in straw in the area (Cultuur Historisch Centrum Oldambt, 2011).

Unemployment crisis in the 30's

In the 1930's the great depression moved from the United States to Europe and also the Netherlands. Unemployment rates dropped below 30% and a crisis was born. The central government set up a program to get men to work again called Werkverschaffing (work relief) (Witteboer, 2017). This program sent unemployed men from all over the Netherlands to the Oldambt region to work on the farms. These men, working for almost next to nothing, were hired to dig up fertile soil from under the upper layer to make the land feasible for cultivation. In this period, with all these underpaid workers there, communism gained a lot of foothold in the region, a stark contrast to the wealthy herenboeren in the area.



image 5: Strikes in the 1930's

The Blauwestad

In the second half of the 20th century straw-carton factories started to leave the area as carton was now produced from old paper, further draining the area. At the end of the 80's the province of Groningen initiated a new urban development to regenerate the area called the Blauwestad (the Blue City) (Tingen & Veltman, 2012). Farmers were bought out to create a large commercial and residential area that was supposed to attract rich people to the area and create new jobs. Unfertile ground was set underwater to create a large recreative space as well. At the end of the 90's construction finally started but demand was seriously lacking, making the project a failure to regenerate the area (Tingen & Veltman, 2012).



image 6: Advertising of Blauwestad

Graanrepubliek

In 2017, a new local initiative started called the Graanrepubliek (the Grain Republic). Farmers joined together in one cooperation intending to start making high-end, local food production again. They aim to create a local chain intended for local sales markets. They want to get rid of the monoculture that has developed over the centuries and opt for healthy soil recovery and grain types that are in line with current food needs (De Graanrepubliek, n.d.)

The development of the Oldambster and Heren Farm

The roots of the Oldambster Farm can be found in East-Friesland. The development of this typology was most prominent in the development of the house. In the late 16th century the Old Frisian farmhouse developed into a new typology (Fockema et al. 1948). There was a new focus on agriculture initiated by the reclamation of land from the Dollard and a cattle plague. This created the need for a new typology, which was constructed by reusing the house and moving the old barn behind it. The house was constructed as a box placed within the barn. Later the house became separated from the barn and was placed in front. The old barn wall functioned as a fire protection wall with a side entrance and hallway separating the house from the barn (Fockema et al. 1948). For aesthetic reasons, it was later decided to extend the roof ridge of the barn to the front house. In the 18th century, better drainage and the rise of grain prices increased the wealth of farmers, which also influenced the use of farm buildings. This started a broad implementation of the Oldambster typology. At first the wealth of farmers was only manifested in the increased size of the buildings. The houses were extended from the front tapering inward with each extension. Which resulted in the typical *krampen* (narrowing) (Cultuur Historisch Centrum Oldambt, 2011). The second floor above the house was often marked with little windows indicating the attic which was used as seed storage. The barn increased in

size extending between six to nine frames up to eighty meters long. The stables of the horses were placed in the back. In the 19th century farmers started to express their wealth more in the front house. In some cases the accumulation of extensions where (partly) demolished and replaced by a new house that was placed transversely. The quarters of the maids and land workers were also separated from the house and small houses were constructed in the landscape inspired by the shape of the Oldambster farm (Fockema et al. 1948). Farmers started to express their wealth in their houses. In some cases the barns where extended by one or two barn(s) being put next to it. This resulted in the typical two or three-hooded barns.



image 6: Development of Oldambster farm

Vocabulary

Groninger wordlist

To be able to understand the Groninger folk and the context in which the research is done, I provide a wordlist of typical words that are characteristic for the region:

Wierden = Natural elevation in the landscape

Kwelder = Where land is silted up

Bouwten = Place where clay and sand come together

Kolken = remains of dike breaches

Oeverwall = elongated heights that lie along the riverbank

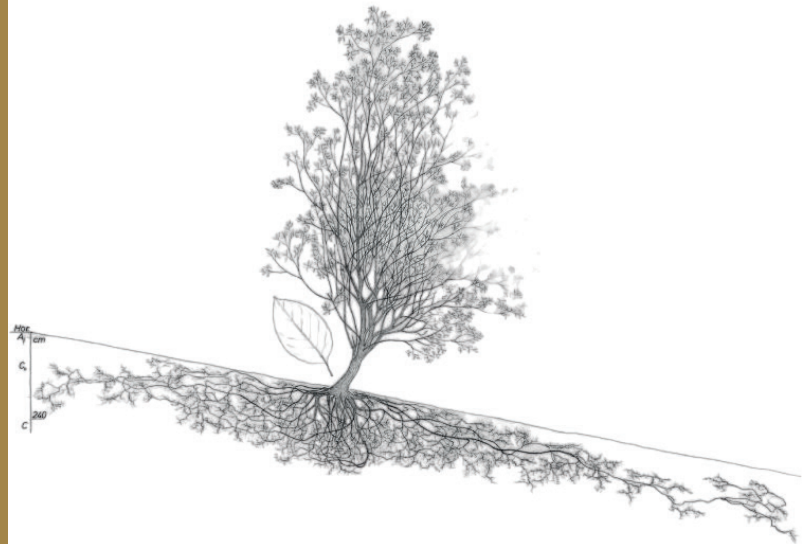
Wold/Broek = swamp forest

Borg = Borgen are traditionally the fortified farmsteads that started to appear in the Groningen landscape around the 14th century. They were created by farmers who were self-made. These buildings were often an expression of wealth, but originally a place for security and justice. They were a place for stewardship over the countryside. Rights for governance and jurisdiction were attached to the Borg. Nobleman tried to gain influence in the region through the acquisition of these rights. The Borgen lost their function as a physical place for safety, due to their high maintenance cost they were often left to decay. Their precious stone was reused in other buildings. The number of Borgen dropped and they slowly disappeared from the landscape, until they lost their rights in 1795.

Flora & Fauna

Willow (pollard)

Is one of the most common trees in the region. They are often planted in rows along ditches and recognizable when they're cut down to a pollard. The bark is usually grayish/brown, with a rough texture. The leaves are bright to dark green and are narrow with pointed tips. The flexible branches used for wickerwork. A pollard willow is usually not higher than 3 meters but when not cut down can grow up to 15-25 meters in 10-20 years.



Poplar (different species)

Is one of the most recognisable trees as they are mostly planted in long rows on the dykes and grow mostly upright. They are between 20-30 meters high and fully grown in 40-60 years. The bark on younger trees is smooth often silver-gray and gets more texture when they grow older. The leaves differ depending on the species. They can be triangular or oval. In the case of the silver poplar the leaves are white silver at the back. Poplar wood is soft and used for woodcarving or roof finishings.

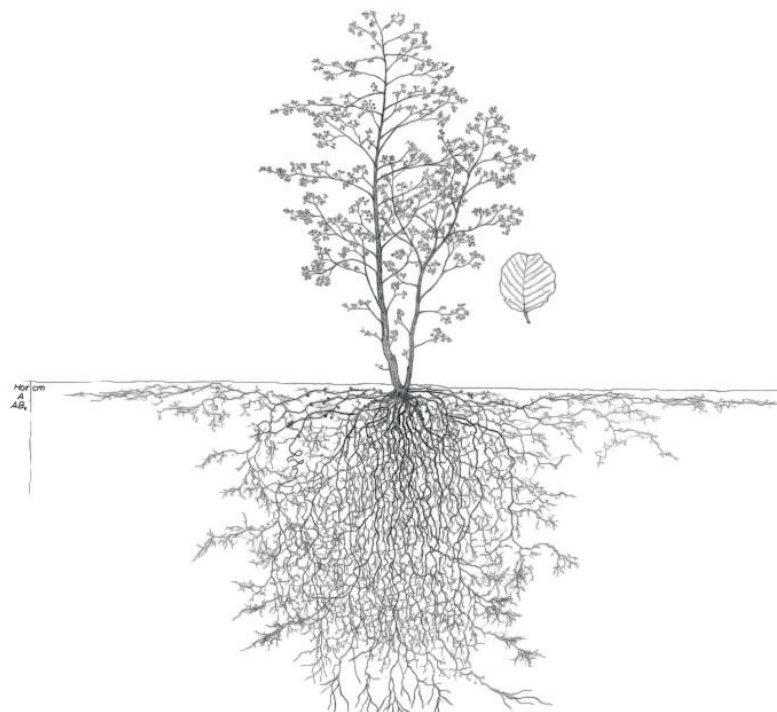
Ash

Was used commonly around farmyards to protect from the wind or can be found in former woodcutting groves. In recent years a big part of the ash population has died off as a result of the ash branch diseases. At the Blauwestad a project has started to breed ash that is immune to this disease. As grows 20-30 meters high in 40-60 years. A single Ash leaf is made up of multiple leaflets. The wood can be used in roof construction, stairs, and doors.



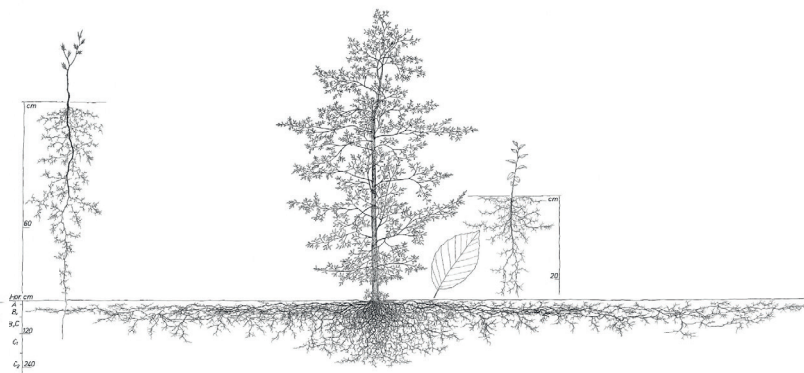
Black Alder

Is a fast-growing tree that can be seen around farmyards or former woodcutting groves. They often overgrow decayed farm buildings. Black alder grows 15-25 meters high in 25-40 years. Watering Alder protects it against fungi and moist. Alder can be used in roof construction and foundation poles.

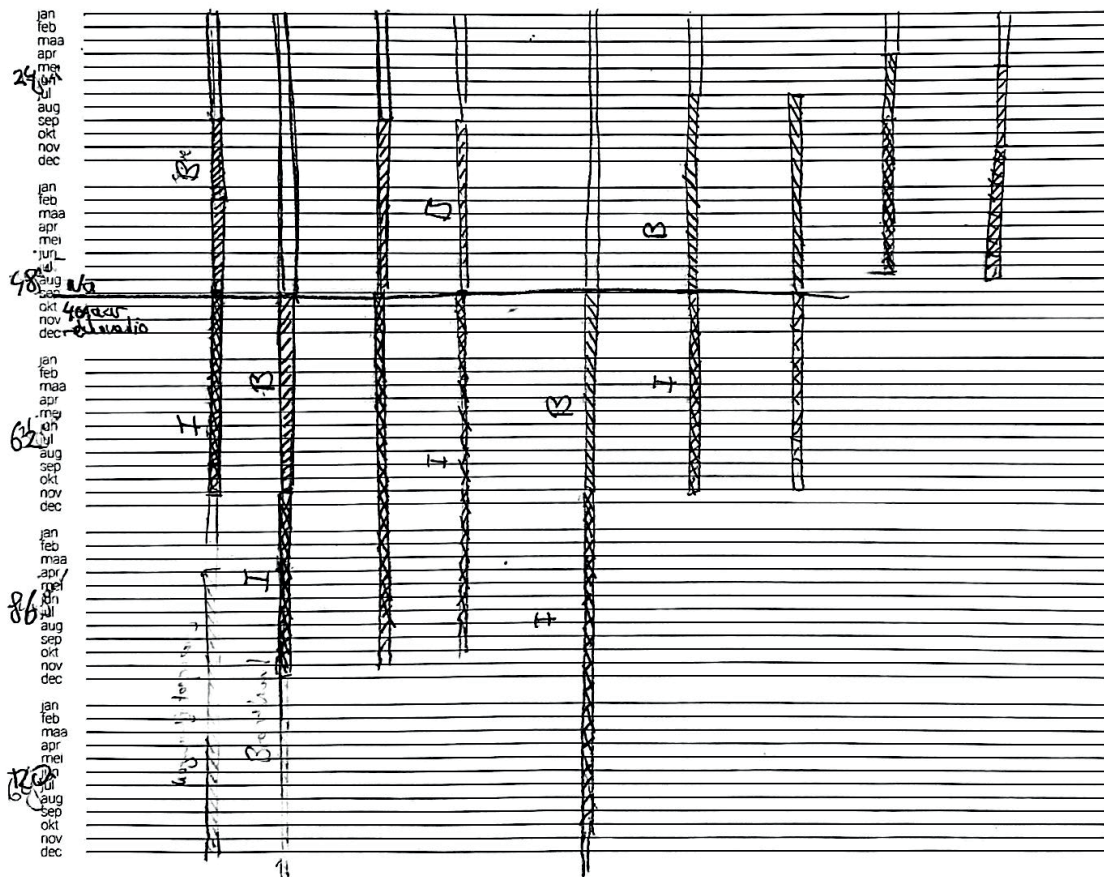


Beech

Beech trees are found in the groves or as monumental solitary trees on farmyards. They can be up to 30 meters high in 50-70 years. Like Black Alder beech can be preserved by watering the wood, which protects it against fungi and cracking.

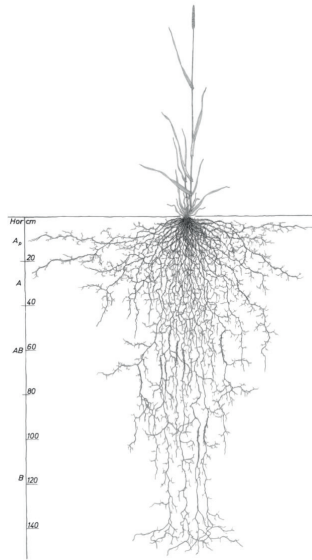


Appel Berk Berk rosen esdoorn eiken els Hagebeek Kers populier
 gewas



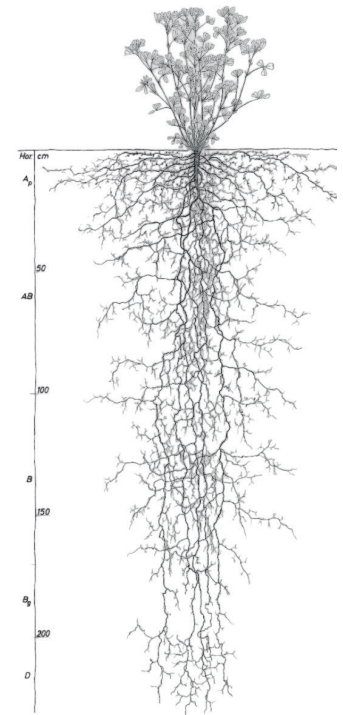
Grain

The Oldambt region also known as the Grain Republic is most famous for its grain. Different types of grains are cultivated like rye, barley, and wheat. The Graanrepubliek in Bad Nieuweschan tries to diversify the different breeds of these types of grain. Based on their different tastes. For example a Swedish breed called Olandsvete is used for bread making. The straw which is separated from the grain during harvest is stored in large barns during the year and sold when the price favourable. It can also be used as material in construction or in cattle farming. Winter grain is sown in September-October and summer grain in March- April and harvest of both types is common in June-September depending on the conditions. Grain can be grown on the same plot for multiple years, but it is better to do this one in every two to three years for a better soil condition.



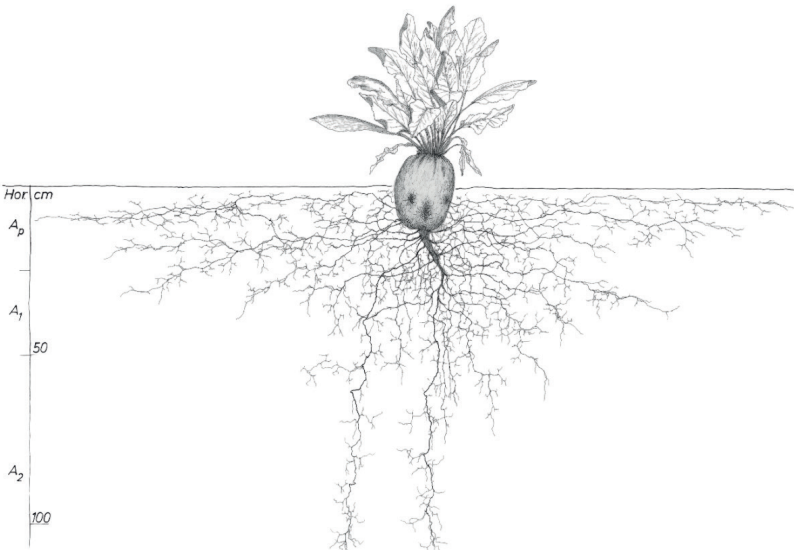
Alfalfa

Seedlings of this crop are used in salads but when cultivated they grow as a crop that can be mowed around 4 times in one season from May until September. It is used for animal feed and is good at fixing nitrogen. The crop is recognizable from its purple flowers and grows 60-90 centimeters high. It can stay on the same pot for four years and return after fifteen years.



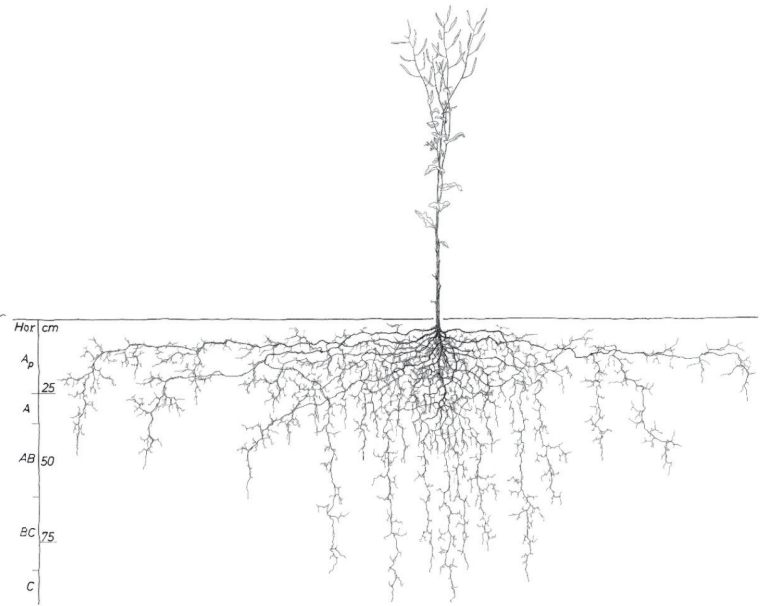
Sugar beet/Potato's

From September until October, big piles of sugar beets can be seen in the landscape. In this period they are harvested. Depending on how heavy the clay is it is possible to cultivate eighter sugar beet or potatoes. They are sawed in around march.



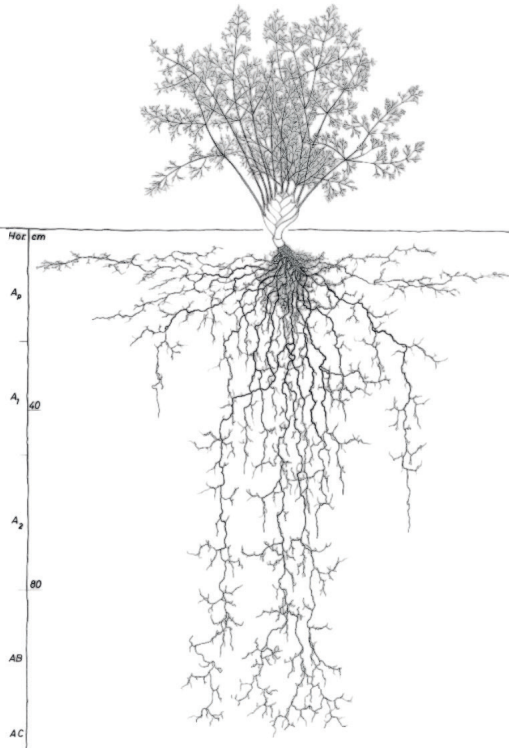
Rape seed

Rape seed is recognizable coloring the landscape bright yellow. It can be cultivated either in a winter or summer season. In winter it is sown in September en harvested around September en harvested in June. Rape seed is mostly used to make oil



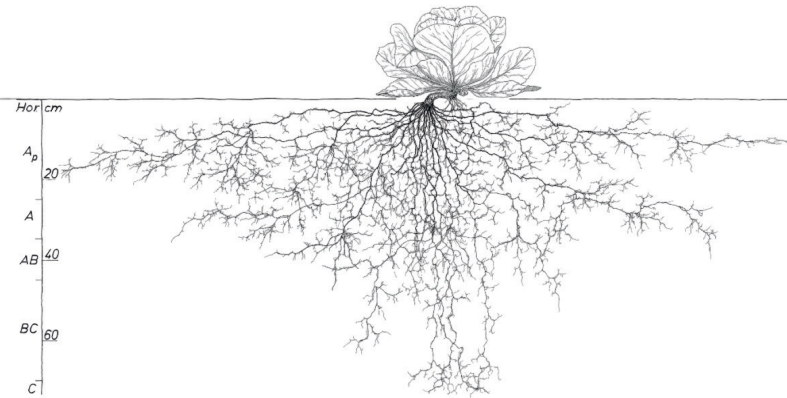
Fennel

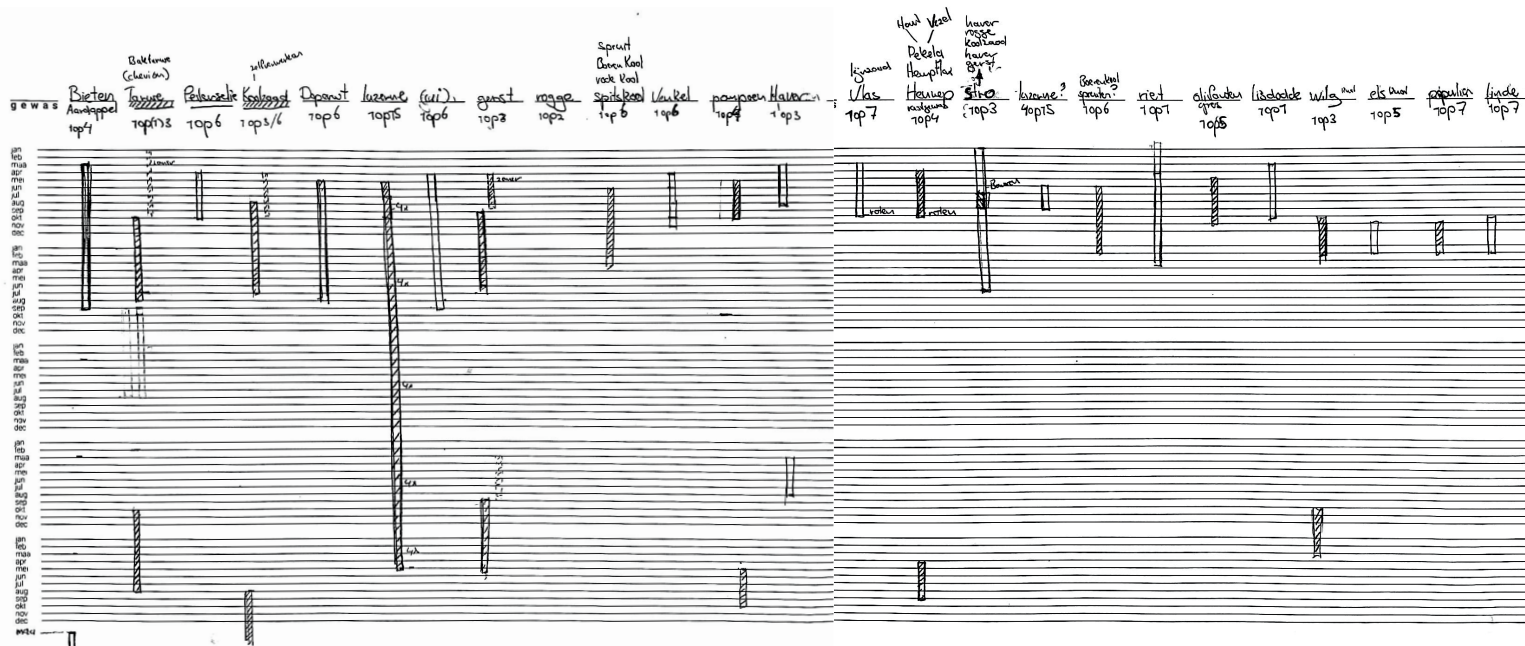
Is not only cultivated for it's taste, but also has a functional smell as a pest controller. In this case farmers sometimes choose to not harvest all the fennel and use it's functional smell.



Cabbage

Different types of cabbage are grown in the region. Look out for kale and sprouts, wich grow above ground





The Hike

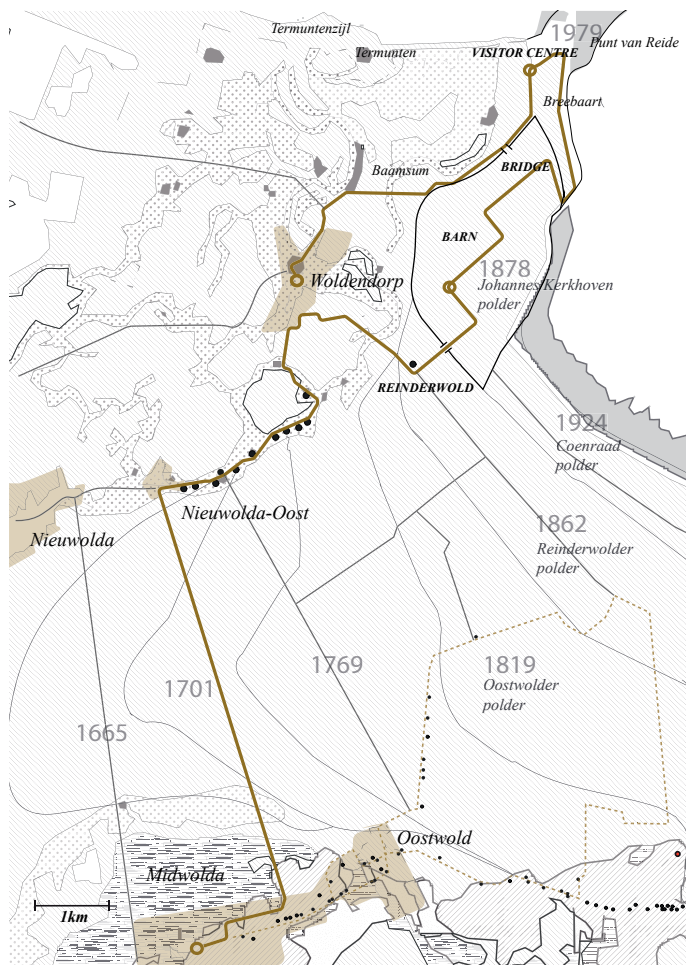
Intro

This four stage hike amongst the landscapes of the Oldambt is a relatively easy one. As one of the flattest areas in the Netherlands, it is no challenge for experienced hikers. The long straightforward stretches along the regional roads might seem boring at first glance, but looking further they hold an interesting and unexplored world.

Overnight stays are possible at the campsite Blauwestad Hoeve or asking to camp on farmers meadows. Not many hotels or refuges are present in the area so coming prepared is a must.

The large shops for provision can be found in Winschoten or Bad Nieuwenschans. Small local shops are present in all the villages as Woldendorp or Scheemda but have very limited offerings.

The landscapes of the Oldambt hold a lot of hidden beauty and identity and I hope that this hike can give you an insight in one of the Netherlands most unexplored areas!



Stage 1:

Start	Woldendorp
Finish	Camping de Blauwestad Hoeve
Distance	28,5 km
Time	7h

Woldendorp

We start at the bus stop of Dollard College in Woldendorp. The bus runs twice a day in winter (and is probably filled with schoolchildren). On the right, you can see the small school building. We turn left and arrive at a T junction. If you turn right at this junction there is a small village store should there be any forgotten provisions or other needs to be stocked up. The route continues to the left marked by a head-neck hull farm (kop hals romp boerderij) on the left side of the road.

Walk out of the village along this road, after about 700m a junction follows, turn right here. Just before the sign, Baamsom is an exit to the right here we walk into the polder. Here follow the concrete slab path that extends to the horizon. In the distance, the dike of the Johannes Kerkhovenpolder can be seen as a barely distinguishable line on the horizon.

A head-neck-trunk farm originates from the hall house group and also reached Groningen from West Frisia in the early 17th century. This farm is characterized by a front house that is not directly connected to the barn. At this time, Dutch agriculture was thriving, requiring more space for storage. A section was added to the side, creating the head-and-trunk structure. This typology is rare in the Oldambt region.



The landscapes in the Oldambt region are characterized by vast polder plains. Concrete paths stretch endlessly through the landscape until they slowly fade into the horizon. The immense scale makes the walker seem small in an endless world of polders and agriculture.

Follow the path until the dike is reached. If you look closely, the red color of a brick is sometimes visible in the meadow.

The classic characteristic red bricks, made from nearby marine clay, are still widely visible in the architecture of the area. Today, there is only one remaining factory (Strating) producing them.



We follow the dike and the reed-lined drainage canal that flows alongside it. Sheep maintain the grassland on the dike. After about a kilometre, a dike whole follows, revealing the Johannes Kerkhoven Polder. Here we cross the bridge to continue following the drainage canal.

The polder dyke was constructed in 1878 for the Johannes Kerkhoven Polder. Along the agricultural drainage channels, reeds often grow. Farmers often mow these reeds, but for biodiversity in the area, it would be better if the reeds were left untouched.

Sheep are used in the Oldambt region to naturally fertilize the land and maintain the grass. By keeping the grass short, they ensure a dense root system, thus strengthening the dyke.

As the process of land reclamation extended further into the Dollard, dykes lost their function. To reach a new polder, holes were made in the old dykes, creating a new path to the new polder. In the Oldambt region, these holes are often painted yellow.



The Visitors Center is placed next to the historical Breebaart Polder, which was never finished and is a physical manifestation of shifting views on land reclamation and its impact on the environment and ecosystems. It came to be the first inner-dike tidal area of the Netherlands. With its characteristic biodiversity its home to a lot of animals and plants such as the avocet, black-headed gull, samphire and bristle herb. Enclosed by dikes, it looks like a gated community for birds hiding in the reeds.

(1h) We pass a fish passage along the canal and Visitor Center Dollard. From the visitors center it is possible to cross the Polder Breebaart. As you walk up the sea dike, the tip of Reide and the industry of Emden are visible. With any luck there are a few seals. From the dike a small paved path along the shore is visible. We follow the other path in the polder along the reeds.

From the visitors center it is possible to cross the Polder Breebaart. As you walk up the sea dike, the tip of Reide and the industry of Emden are visible. With any luck there are a few seals. From the dike a small paved path along the shore is visible. We follow the other path in the polder along the reeds.



The dikes of Polder Breebaart meet in a point in the south. Arriving here, it is possible to have a view the gigantic Johannes Kerkhoven Polder. In the middle is a huge straw barn can be seen In the distance is the monumental farm complex built after the 2nd World War is visible.

In the area, large quantities of grain are still being produced, which has led to increasingly larger barns. For farmers, straw is a profitable commodity to store due to its relatively stable value. The straw is stored in enormous straw barns and sold at the opportune moment. Because these barns are so large, they serve as landmarks in the flat landscape of the Oldambt region. With a few rows of trees surrounding them, they act as focal points during walks.



(1.45h) We walk right up the dike in a north-westerly direction, this requires climbing a fence. Follow the dike for about half a kilometer.

(2h) On the left is a disused bridge made of railroad sleepers. Cross the bridge carefully to enter the Johannes Kerkhoven Polder. (It is possible to stay overnight at the farmyard (Polder stay 06 - 50 89 06 77))

Once descended into the polder, silence returns. The frame of the dike defines the horizon and the distance of your gaze, in this orthogonal landscape. At the tip of the polder, an avenue of poplars stands as a clear marker.

In the Oldambt we see a lot of practical architecture. Evidently, farmers were concerned with finding the most efficient solutions for their architectural and infrastructure problems and left the aesthetic part for their own houses. The bridge of railroad sleepers is a clear example of this practical approach that we see much more often.

As we zigzag, we follow the framed landscape of the polder first past the straw barn and then past the huge farm yard complex, to then walk out of the polder by the row of poplar trees through a dike hole.

(3h) As we pass the dike hole, the landscape changes. Where the Johanneskerkhoven Polder was framed by high dikes, we now look out over a gigantic plain. No dike manages to obstruct the view. It is a modernist



landscape of production and silence, a sea of orthogonal lines with groups of trees as islands in this sea of clay. They are usually an indicator of a farmyard.



The landscape of the Oldambt is characterized by orthogonal lines that shape the polders. This sea of orthogonal lines gives notice of the immense production that goes on in this area and that no land is left unused. The orthogonal landscape structure makes it so that as a hiker we perceive the land in one way and it accentuates the already long and stretched-out landscapes.

Farmhouse Reidewold is the first visible yard. It is a Heren farm with a front house and characteristic two-roofed barn.

The front of the house is propped on one side and appears to have been recently re-jointed. On the roof is a central chimney accompanied by several small chimneys that continue into the ridge of the barn. The barn is clearly still in use. At the rear, a small worker's house is visible.

We follow the Zwaagweg back toward Wolderdorp. On the right side is a triangular grove. From Woldendorp, it is possible to take the bus back to the final destination Midwolda or follow the route for another 12.5 km.



(3.5h) Upon entering the village there is a landscape artwork in the form of a bench. We turn right to a path that follows the edge of the village. It offers views of several backyards. We leave the Woldendorp on the AE on a winding ridge (kreek rug) with typical ribbon development taking advantage of this natural elevation in the landscape. In the distance the Binnen A.E. is visible which runs towards Nieuwolda the gigantic Oldambster farmhouses lie side by side along the road.

"Kreekruigen" are tidal inversion ridges and thus higher areas in a former tidal flat region. Due to their elevated position in the landscape, these were often the places where ribbon development emerged.



(4h) We turn right and follow the Inner A.E. to Nieuwolda-Oost. On the right side are the farmyards (Herenboerderijen). In the Second World War there was a lot of fighting in this area probably some farms were damaged or rebuilt.

The buildings from the farmyards can be described one by one;

- 1. Inhabited, basic no trees around the yard*
- 2. Particularly long barn, tiles fall from the roof. However there are flowers in the window, but probably still uninhabited*
- 3. Typical inward tapering barn (krimpen)*
- 4. The Meyveert; beautifully maintained,*

impressive English landscape garden (slingertuin)
5. The stable clearly has a "modern" interpretation of a front house.

6. A huge arable farm with its own silos and a relatively plain front house (probably rebuilt)

7. Monumental farmhouse, perhaps an Oldambster. Especially interesting is the adjacent barn. This one is completely open and has no walls. The roof continues on one side.

8. Lies at the head of the junction. The house is covered with tiles the barn with asbestos sheets. This separation between house and barn that becomes visible in the roof is clearly visible in several farms.



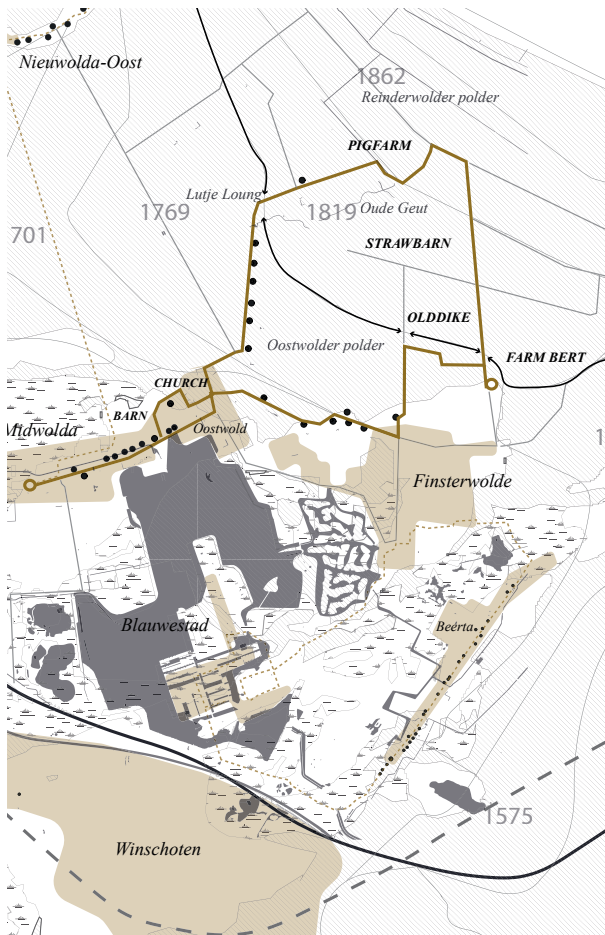
(5h) Upon entering Nieuwolda-Oost there are a number of huge mansions/farms. It is hard to tell if they are front houses that are now missing their barns. (Farmers seem to build their own palace in front of a barn.).

In Nieuwolda-Oost we start with a less enjoyable part of the hike a straight 6km stretch that clears through the polder, the Nieuwelandseweg. Passing along this road you have to watch out for trucks that certainly don't take into account hikers, several huge farms are passed including large livestock farms. The various dikes that have been used to reclaim this landscape over 300 years are smoothed out and barely distinguishable. In the distance, the lights of the windmills around Delfzijl are visible. The poplars of the Johannes Kerkhoven polder also stand out clearly against the horizon.

*(6.5) The Nieuwlandseweg ends in a T junction where we turn right. Via a goat path along a trout pond, it is possible to sneak into Midwolda. Arriving at the Hoofdweg we turn left along the beautiful church to finally settle at our final destination the **Camping de Blauwestad Hoeve***

+31 597 55 40 55

info@blauwestadhoeve.nl



Stage 2:

Start	Camping the Blauwestad Hoeve
Finish	Camping de Blauwestad Hoeve
Distance	25,6 km
Time	5h

From the campsite Blauwestadhoeve, we take a right on the Hoofdweg and walk in the direction of the church. Daycare Centre de Schakel appears after just 200m where you can enjoy a coffee or lunch to start the day.

At the Schakel clients can live more independently and work simultaneously. Former farms are increasingly being used as care farms for people with disabilities or mental impairments. These farms often also offer various daytime activities.

We follow the village's main road and note the different Oldambster and Heren farms along the route. We pass the trout pond (De Kolk) on the left side.

A “kolk” refers to a type of water feature typically formed in low-lying areas. It is a deep pool often created by water erosion, usually due to a dike breach or flood, and usually serves as an important habitat for various plant and animal species.



(0,25h) On the left side of the Hoofdweg between Midwolda and Oostwold we see number 221. It is an intriguing example of an Oldambster farm that developed over into a double roofed barn. When you enter the farmyard the structure of the building can be analysed well;



The front house appears to be largely renovated. Behind the barn, there are several large piles of wood, mainly consisting of roof battens but also large square beams. The structure of the roof is visible through the collapsed hole. Notably, the dilapidated wall is patched with a variety of repairs. Due to the lack of protection, such as an overhang, the mortar in the side walls of the barn is deteriorating. Cracks are forming above the (pre-tensioned lintel) at the corners of the back wall of the barn.





We leave this barn and pass a small community of tiny houses at the left side of the road. Followed by a small lift bridge to enter Oostwold we take a left after 200m entering a small path parallel to a golf course.

The path is constructed from brick rubble, which is often seen in the Oldambt region.



(0,30h) We reach the farmyard of Pitch and Put Golf Oostwold. The back of the yard reveals a beautiful simple wooden barn.

Most of the barn is made out of round timber. The wood is hardly processed, except in places where joints were made. Only the beam connecting the frames is completely clean-cut.



We leave the farmyard from the back and take a right to enter the Oudelandseweg, providing a panoramic view over the flat polder plain revealing impressive industrial farmyards.



After 200m the road takes a left turn, we take a right past another double-roofed barn which we can admire from the side and front. From here we enter the center of Oostwold and can admire it's small church.

A lane of oak tree's probably to protect churchgoers was forced to lean heavily as a result of the strong southwestern wind leaving a visible mark of its strong presence in the landscape.



We follow the Kerksingel and arrive at the Hoofdstraat where we take a left turn and an immediate right to the Goldhorn. The road between Oostwold and Finsterwolde. The road lies on a dike connecting a dozen farmyards between the villages.

The first and third farmyard we pass on the right side of the road are both specialized in worm compost

Worm compost, or vermicompost enriches the soil with nutrients, boosts beneficial microbes, and helps to retain water, making plants healthier and more resilient. Besides it recycles organic waste and also improves the soil structure. Overall, it supports sustainable farming and healthier ecosystems.

Note the clear distinction more wooded right side of the road around the moraine of Kromme Elleboog and the silent plains of the Oostwolderpolder on the right

moraine refers to the geological formations left behind by the movement of glaciers and consist of accumulated rocks, soil, and debris. In the relatively flat landscape of the Oldambt moraines can appear as slight elevations or ridges. Settlements

where constructed on these moraines using the natural elevation as flood protection. Stimulated by Herenboeren the less fertile soil of the moraine of Kromme Elleboog was appointed to peasants to make them self-sufficient.



We follow the road in the direction of Finsterwolde. Most of the farmyards are still in use and extended with big grain silo's or barns over time.



(1,30h) We arrive in Finsterwolde and take the first road to the left after 200m the road slightly curves and goes further as a straight road in the direction of a big pig farm, with an enormous straw barn appearing in the distance.



(2h) At the pig farm, we take a right when we look to our left you can see how the old polder dike forms a contrasting element in the otherwise flat landscape.



We follow a twisting private farming road and take a right at the junction. On the left you can see the farm of Bert and motor club Waardeloos. We follow this busy road that crosses the Oosterwolderpolder entirely, trucks will drive back and forth as this is a direct route to Delfzijl.

(2,45h) We arrive at a T junction of the Oosterwolderpolder and the Reinderwolderpolder where we take a left. On your right sight, a livestock barn pokes out above the dike of the Carel Coenraad polder.



After 500 meters we take a left to follow the Oude Geut an old drainage stream. On the sides of the stream different grass species and herbs are planted.

Called Functional Agro-Biodiversity (FAB). FAB margins can serve various functions. They contribute to a larger habitat for various birds and insects. They can act as a buffer between the farmland and ditches, creating more space for nature. The margins can provide a survival place for natural predators, making pest control in the adjacent crops easier. Additionally, the margins can attract pollinating insects, which can be beneficial for certain crops.



The path disappears but we follow the orthogonal grid of the farmland in the direction of a big pig farm in the distance.



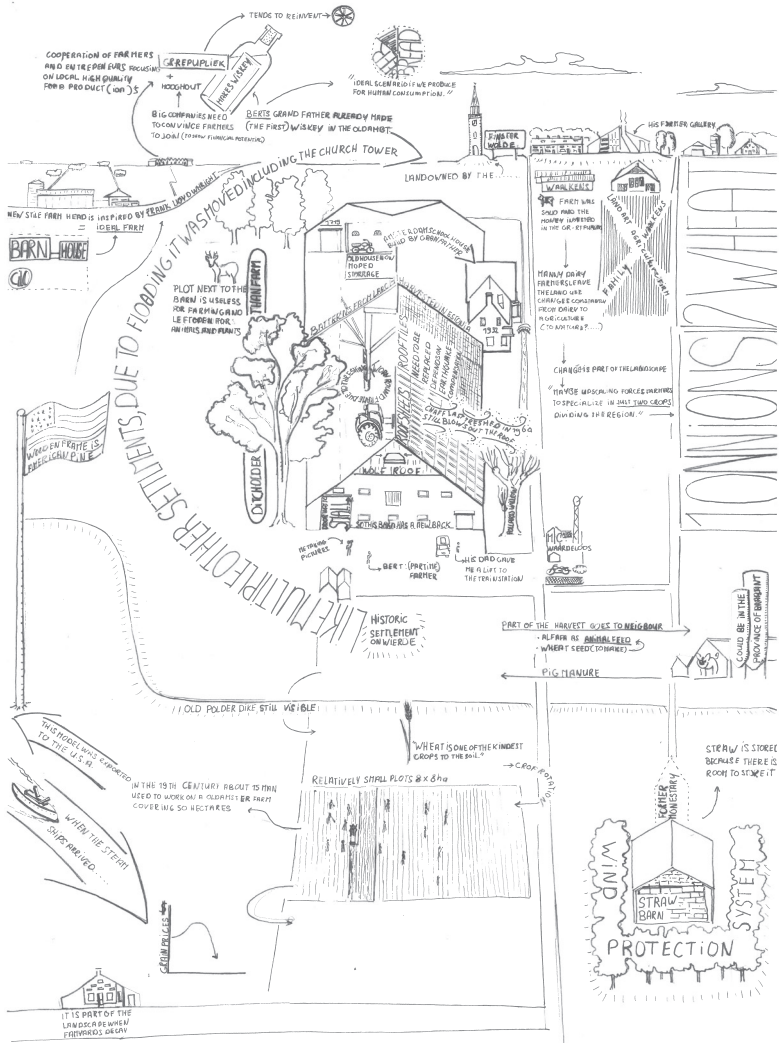
(3,15h) We arrive at the Pig farm and take a left to either follow the Oude Geut or a straight farming road in SE direction. If you're lucky at sun set the sun just peaks under a cloud deck which results in a spectacular scenery.



4,15h We arrive of the small township of Lutje Loug (Oude Zijl) consisting of six houses where we take a right to arrive at a long straight road in the direction of Oostwold. Seven farmyards are lined up along the road, which we pass one by one.

(5h) At the small airport wet take a left to enter the Village of Oostwold. From the centre of Oostwold it is a 45min walk back to the Blauwestad hoeve along the Hunningaweg wich corresponds to the firt part of the hike only taking out the detour around the golfcourse and church.

Bert





Stage 3:

<i>Start</i>	<i>Farm Marc van Zanten</i>
<i>Finish</i>	<i>Farm Marc van Zanten</i>
<i>Distance</i>	<i>14 km</i>
<i>Time</i>	<i>3,5 h</i>

We start at the farm of Marc van Zanten in Blauwestad and enter the Pieter Smit bridge via a stair. From the bridge, we can see the land artwork of Mixed Aerea's

Mixed Areas is a one-hectare field situated beneath the Pieter Smit Bridge to improve the soil innovatively. The plot is compartmented due to different cultivation and mowing techniques. Through this a land art project has emerged. The goal is to connect farmer and neighbors, practice, science, and education. A literal and figurative sustainable living environment.

We cross the Pieter Smit bridge and turn left in the direction of the Wilgenborg a steel structure and event space overgrown with willow, referring to the Borgen. Walk around the Wilgenborg and cross a wide footbridge to enter the Blauwestad indicated by a blue tower.

Blauwestad is a unique development that started in the 1990s and aimed to rejuvenate the Oldambt region, which had faced economic and population decline. A plan to transform farmland into a new residential and recreational area centered around a large artificial lake (Oldambtmeer). The project involved flooding vast land to create the lake and constructing new homes along its shores. The project was not without its challenges with not many plot sales and the economic downturn in the late 2000s. Plots are still being sold.



(0,15h) We take a turn right after the footbridge and walk for 200m to enter the main road (Hoofdstraat) of Blauwestad. Here we take a left turn. On our right side there are five entrance roads to islands with villas constructed on them, feel free to explore the difference. We take a right at the fourth island.

Each island has its architectural typology and 'style.' The houses are focused on pensioners with assets and a car. It is not the most friendly environment to walk, strengthened by the fact that the streets are dead ends. The bigger island has more family-oriented houses, seemingly inspired by 19th-century army barracks. This is emphasised by 'Het Arsenaal' a mixed block of apartments and family homes inspired by an Arsenal.



at another footbridge entering Meerland, a township and nature reserve that already existed before the Blauwestad project. Now it's an island within the Oldambt Lake. We follow the dike, and on our right side, you notice a square island. After 500m we pass a farm that is turned into a daycare facility. In the distance a sheep flock can be visible

Nature reserve Meerland contains the last parcel of raised peat in the province of Groningen, a young deciduous forest, grassland, and a sheep barn serving a flock of sheep managed by Staatsbosbeheer.



(0,30h) After 300m there is a footbridge on the left side connected to a parallel island, which we cross to arrive

(0,45h) We cross the Kanaal Jufferbridge followed by an imitate right turn. The path continues on a twisting dike looking back to the islands of Blauwestad. In the distance the historic settlement of Ekamp is visible. At the junction with the Ekamperweg, we take a left turn.

Ekamp has been inhabited for centuries and lies on a high moraine with a height of + 2.50 m. The soil is not very fertile and consists of pot clay. The poor soil mainly produced rye and buckwheat, in the 19th century flax was grown aswell.



(1h) Former dairy farm of the family Steentjes, which is abandoned for over 20 years. We continue along the Ekamperweg and pass the neighboring farm building of

a similar size, which is also in a state of decay. After 500m the Ekamperweg joins the N967.

The less fertile soil along the Ekamperweg resulted in a smaller farm typology intermediate in size in comparison to the massive 18th-century barns and the farms of peasants and farmworkers. The farm of the family Steentjes was sold as part of the Blauwestad development. The land was developed into a new neighborhood and the Oldambtlake. The buildings were not incorporated in this development and are abandoned since the early 2000s. The different buildings on the farmyard show how the farm developed. It started out as a mixed farm with cattle during the early 18th century. In the mid-20th century, it specialized as a dairy farm. During the second half of the 20th century, the farm developed. Roughly every 10 years a building was added to the farmyard. When the farm was sold in the early 2000s there were around 150 cows.



(1,5) On the right side of the N967 we have a view of the Reinderwolde nature reserve. Upon entering Harderberg we cross the roundabout and take a right turn after 200m in the direction of Finsterwolde. Before the fields of Footballclub B.N.C. we take a walk along the length of the field, which continues as a horse path where we take a left turn followed by an immediate right. After which, we follow the forest edge.

The Reinderwolde nature reserve was partly initiated by former Secretary of State Henk Bleker. And is a privately managed. The project was used as an example where Farmers turned farmland into nature without

being subsidized. It turned out that this wasn't the case and millions of public money were spent on subsidizing the project. An example are the pollard willows that were planted because each individual tree brings in a subsidy. Resulting in a monoculture of pollard willows.



(1,45h) Along the forest edge, we pass the artificial hill and land-art work 'Ode to a Spot' on the right side we have a view over the De Tjamme nature reserve.

The sculpture is situated on the edge of a newly planted forest and an area, where nature was allowed to take its course after the removal of a layer of heavy clay soil. The soil was reworked into the artwork, which is accompanied by a corridor that cuts through the woods. This corridor is both a footpath and sightline in the direction of the church tower of Finsterwolde.



(2,15h) The path along the forest edge continues on concrete slabs. From here you can watch over the polder plain and see Drieborg in the distance (5km away). This is one of the oldest polders.

In the first and oldest polders the layer of seaclay is relatively thin because the sea had a relatively short time to deispose clay on the peat. During plowing farmes sometimes plow up the peat.



(2,5) The path arrives at a T junction where we turn right, and after 700m, take another right turn to reach Beerta. Beerta is a prime example of ribbon development, with beautiful farms on either side of the main road, which we follow for its full length of 4km.

The rise of communism in Beerta after the Second World War, can be explained by the increased economic disparity in the region. This had already emerged by the end of the nineteenth century between farmers and farm Workes. This ultimately led to hardened divisions fueled by the ideologies of socialism and anarchism. In the fifties, there was a communist majority in the municipal council, as well as in the municipality of Finsterwolde. This prompted the government at the time to suspend the municipal council and replace it with a government commissioner. The communist party still has seats in the Oldambt municipality, which includes Beerta.



(3,15) The main road makes a right turn revealing the old steam pumping station. After 800m the pass a big roundabout and access to the A7 highway. On the left side of the road stands a Double roofed barn facing the highway. We walk in the direction of the barn and arrive at our starting point at the end of the street.

The Winschoten steam pumping station was established in 1878 by the then-Reiderland Water Board. It is located on a wind-powered water mill site that burned down in 1877. The pumping station was situated on the Beersterdiep canal and managed the drainage of the so-called of the Reiderland. At the moment it is preserved by an association of volunteers combined with a program for the mentally disabled.



They're planning on demolishing the double-roofed barn. To build drive-through restaurants connected to the A7. This street is the facade of Blauwe Stad at the moment consisting of five historic farm buildings from different periods. The question is how this image will change overtime. Since the Blauwestad is in search for its own aesthetical identity.



WINSCHOTER DIEP

CITY PARK WINSCHOTEN

CHANGING JERSEY

IF YOU WANT TO FEEL REGENERATIVE YOU HAVE TO TAKE TIME AND INVEST IN THE SOIL

EACH PART OF HOUSE HAS CULTIVATED A DIFFERENT PLANT SPECIES RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HOUSEHOLD TASKS CARRYING OUT THE WORK

ROOM FOR EXPANSION

COULD BE INDOOR KITCHEN PRODUCTION?

BOKAS HIGHPOST

PODIUM FOR RECREATIVE INITIATIVES

BLUWISTAND

PROVINCIAL ROAD

ARRET STOVE

OFFICE FOR THE HIBIT

NEUROF FILES

FIRE PLACE HEATS THE HOUSES CHAIRS IN WATER

MOOD BOARD

TABLE IS NEVER CLEANED OR WASHED COVERED IN RECYCLES AND PROVIDED WITH A SPREADER

ALL KINDS OFF MATERIALS ARE STORED OVER HERE

SMALL BATH FOR GUESTS

WILLOW BOG

WATCH OUT! (FOR BIKES)

GOOD FOR BIODIVERSITY PEOPLE SINKED SO APPRECIATE THEM WHEN THEY FOUND THIS OUT

EXPERIMENT WITH NEW PEEKS RESISTANT AGAINST WEATHERING DESIRE

USED AS BASIS TO PLACE CROPOST

IMMERSIVE WATER PLANTS OR SCULPTURE

TO INCREASE BIODIVERSITY THE WATER BUFFER CAPACITY RATIO PERCENTAGE OF THE SOIL

PORTUGAL RESTRANT BUILDINGS FOR SALE

SECOND HAND SHOP

PATHS IN BLUWISTAND HAVE STRAIGHT HAND RAILINGS

WATER FOREST PROVIDING SHELTER FOR DIVERSE FAUNA

NOT POSSIBLE

WATER DECOR

Marc



Stage 4:

<i>Start</i>	<i>Farm Marc van Zanten</i>
<i>Finish</i>	<i>Camping Rigtersheert</i>
<i>Distance</i>	<i>13 km</i>
<i>Time</i>	<i>3 h</i>

From the Blauwestad yard, we turn left, paralleling the roaring A7 highway. Along with the Winschoterdiep and the railway, the A7 bisects the region. As we follow the provincial road, we pass old farm buildings that form the facade of Blauwestad.

The Roundabout acts as a gateway to Blauwestad and is articulated by brick walls and a moat, evoking the impression of a fortress.



At the roundabout, we turn right, crossing the highway and the Winschoterdiep via a drawbridge. We then cross the road at the roundabout and return to the bridge, now on the opposite side. Following the Winschoterdiep, we walk along a dike, where the water and landscape stretch out before us.



(0,30h) The path curves to the right we cross the Rensel and the train tracks, where we take an immediate left turn. To our right, we see the construction of an enormous data center commissioned by Google.

Looking back at Winschoten, you can see the church, the 19th-century industrial heritage, and now the addition of the new data industry. The useless heavy sea clay is now transformed into an industrial area. The undeveloped land on the outskirts of the city are prey to these projects. Raising the question what they add to the region.



(1h) We pass the nature reserve of Zuiderwuppen and cross the Pekel A on a small footbridge entering the municipality of Westerwolde. We follow the Pekel A on a dike and take a right turn after 500m to enter a private road.

In the distance, the bright orange roof of a farm contrasts the green and brown landscape. The chimney of the former brick factory stands out against the horizon. The heavy clay of the Garelanden was used in the bricks.



The Zuiderwuppen Nature Reserve functions as a small-scale water buffer. We pass the Garelanden. It's worth have a glance at the different names in the landscape and philosophize about their origin. Garelanden refers to unfertile grounds. Uiterdijken, Tussendijken and Binnenlanden refer to the position of the land to the dike.

(1,3h) We enter the Tweekarspelenweg and look back at the private farmroad. From this point it is a straight 6km walk to Bellingwolde. We start by undercrossing the high-voltage cables. Allong the road we pas different farm buildings most of them beautifully surrounded by trees.





The trees around these farmyards function as wind protection. In recent years, ash trees have died as a result of ash branch disease. This has sometimes resulted in wind damage to buildings as they lose their protective barrier.

(2h) we pass a farmer who turned the house in to a takeaway cheese vending machine. After 500m we pass the Westerwoldsche Aa a remnant of the primal river that flowed a km further and becomes visible on the fields in the form of puddles during extremely wet conditions.



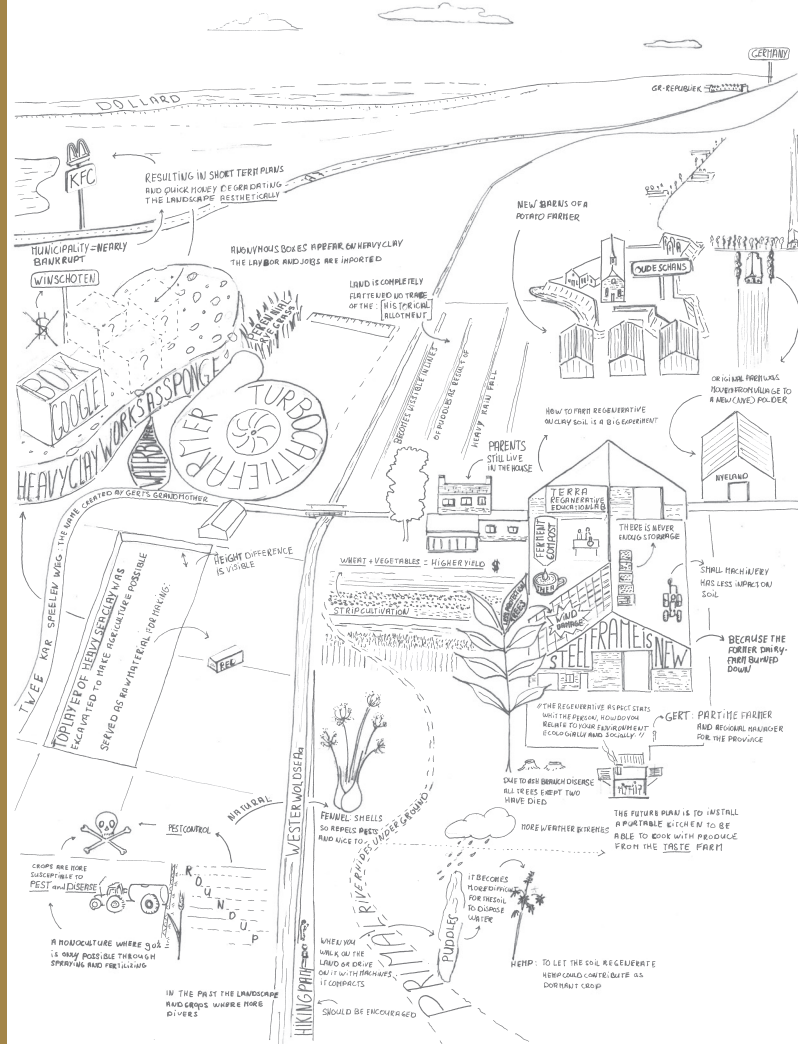
(2,30h) On our left we can see Oudeschans a remnant of the 80-year war. The schans decayed but was restored for tourism.

Interestingly a potato farmer was allowed to construct his barns in front of the village dominating the view

(3h) We arrive in Belling wolde and take a right at the main road to enter the small camp site of the richters heert after 500m.

***<https://www.rigtersheert.nl>
tel: 06 27524950***

Gert





(0,3h) The main road leads to the charming settlement of Lutje Ham straight ahead. We go in a different direction. On the left side of the road is a small path marked by a Herenboerderij. Recognizable by its traditional silhouette marked by a cross-shaped house and twin chimneys. Circling the farmyard, we admire the stately doors at the rear of the building.



The Bellingwolderbos is probably not the name-giver to the village. Wold refers to a swampy or wet forest in a area of sea clay.

The Bellingwolder bos is currently exploited by Natuurmonumenten. Sections of the forest are no longer accessible to the public and are designated as natural forest. To allow the forest to regenerate naturally and to be able to observe how the forest restores itself, 'it's left to nature.'

(0.45) At the end of the forest we take a turn to the right and arrive at a crossroad after 100m to enter the Hamsterweg. There is a wide ditch on de left side of the

road, flanked by a row of sturdy oak trees on the right that line the way.



(1h) On the right side of the road, stands a weathered barn, proudly displaying its skeletal wooden frame.



The Oldambster barns functioned as straw and grain storage. Some farmers still use the 18-19th century barns for the storage of grain. On the other hand, the round silver towers of modern silo's to store the grain are visible in the landscape.



If the land is covered in snow or not is a big factor in if the land cultivated and how it is cultivated.



(1,30h) At the junction, the Hamsterweg gently curves to the left, offering the choice to continue along its path towards the picturesque Remkesheert, a fine example of a cross-housed farm, or to venture onto the dike leading into the Bovenlanden Nature reserve.



(1,45h) We arrive at the Remkesheert shand take a right to follow the Hamdijk until we reach Booneschans.



The Remkesheert, nestled along the Hamdijk, forms part of a series of farmsteads lining this historic route. Dating back to around 1525, the Hamdijk was the inaugural dike erected along the Dollardboezem. Traces of a few Kolken (dike breaches) are still visible. The nature area Bos op Houwingaham refers to the flooded medieval village of Houwinga, which was reconstructed at Den (lutje) Ham.

A schans is an earthen fortification many villages in the region are constructed around a schans. Oudeschans is maybe the best-preserved example.

(2h) The Booneschankerbridge spans across the B.L. Tijdenscanal as we continue along the Hamdijk. Along the way, we encounter a striking double-roofed barn, with a cross-house design. Taking a left turn, we walk alongside the German border, passing another double-roofed barn with reinforced side walls. After traversing approximately 1km, we make a right turn, venturing into the Bos op Houwingadam through a breach in the dike.



The German landscape has a smaller allotment with more vegetation than the large-scale agricultural landscape on the Dutch side of the border.

The side walls of this barn are reinforced, potentially as the result of subsidence caused by gas extraction or peat subsidence. This process results in even more maintenance costs for these farm-buildings, often leaving them abandoned. This results in an ad hoc tectonic of bracing keeping the building together. Maybe different from the first impression the majority of farm buildings on the Hamdijk are inhabited.

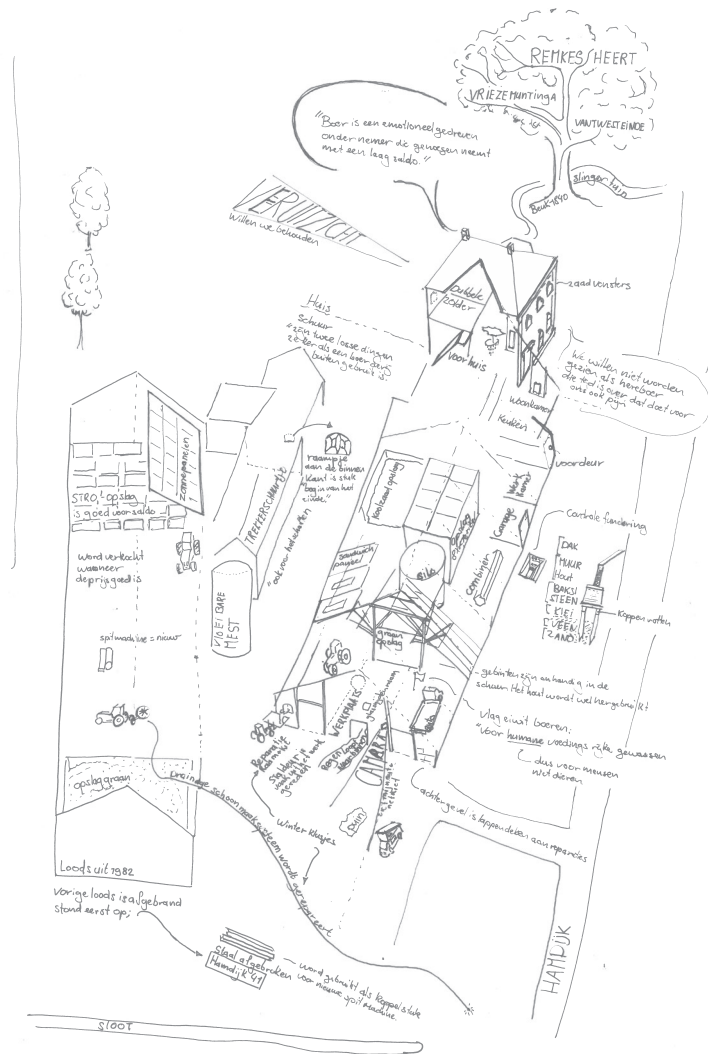


(2,5h) The path leads us across reeds on a slender footbridge, culminating at a dike where the B.L. Tijdens canal merges with the Westerwoldse Aa. We follow the dike in the direction of the A7, , its distant hum now perceptible. We under cross the highway and traverse a bridge over the Westerwoldse Aa, continuing along its left bank until we reach Bad Nieuweschans.

(3h) The Westerwoldse curves to the left and is crossed by the main road of Bad Nieuweschans we take a left turn after 200m we cross the train tracks. On the leftside the train station and on the right side the Graanrepubliek

The Graan republiek is a cooperative initiative of local farmers entrepreneurs and “taste makers.” It aims to improve our food system for the very best taste, utilizing the clay soils of Groningen and change the way people think about food. Exploring how to cultivate and produce products in a way that has a positive and truly sustainable impact on the soil, local community, and the people who consume their products.

Doeko



Findings

Values

During my interviews with farmers in the Graanrepubliek, I uncovered shared values that could serve as the basis for a landscape stewardship approach. Socially, there exists a strong sense of responsibility and connection to the region. Each farmer has the ambition to cultivate produce for humane consumption, with a desire to bridge the gap between consumers and the agricultural process. More importantly, they see the social class difference in the region as a struggle that needs attention. Aesthetically, value is placed on the visual appeal of the built environment. The openness of the polder landscape is repeatedly praised, alongside an emphasis on integrating buildings into their surroundings. Culturally, farmers can be seen as emotionally driven entrepreneurs who are modest, with deep roots in the landscape. They would like to weave personal narratives about locally produced goods into their interactions with consumers. Economically, farmers display a blend of entrepreneurship and pragmatism. They are willing to adapt their practices if it gives proven economic benefits. Still, they are conservative in their approach. In addition to the larger agricultural operations, smaller-scale farmers are working a different job part-time on the side. In principle, most farmers underline the importance of a longer crop rotation and more diverse cultivation. At the moment in most cases, the economic interest is prioritized over the ecological interest. There is a strong motivation to balance these two contradictory interests.

values



Social

*bridge historical social
boundaries*

*cultivate for human
consumption*

*connect consumer to
agriculture*

*collaboration among
farmers*

hospitable



Aesthetic

*integration of a building
in the landscape*

*openness in the
landscape*

embrace decay/ tidy up



Cultural

emotionally driven

*historically connected
to a place*

*added value of the story
of locally produced*

*international
orientation*

modest



Ecological

*soil useless for
agriculture can be used
as nature*

longer crop succession

more diverse cultivation



Economical

parttime farmer

*experimenting/ evidence
proven*

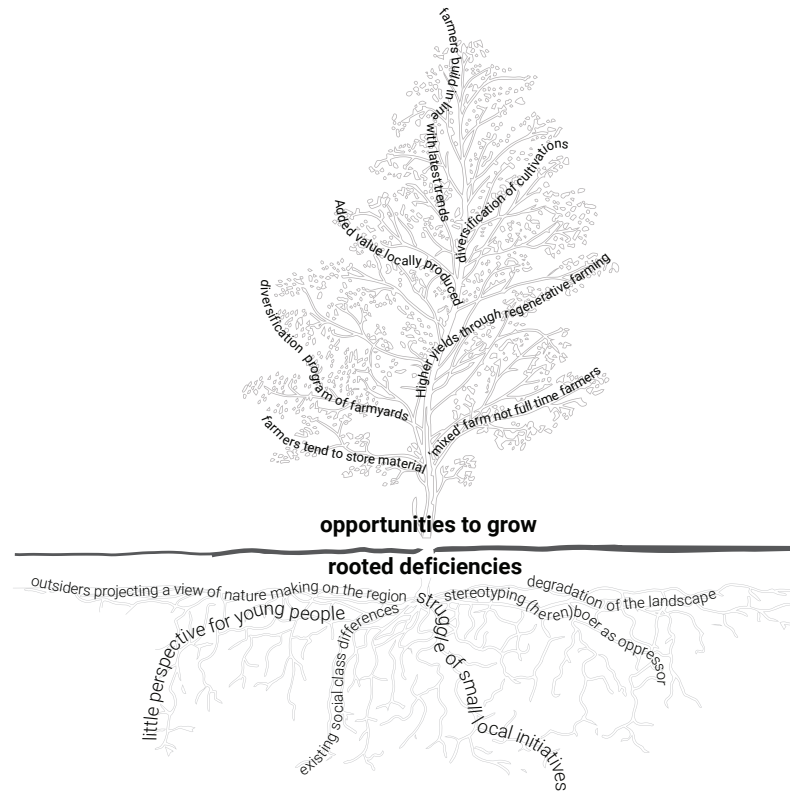
entrepreneurial

Opportunities & Deficiencies

In my research, I identified both opportunities for growth and rooted deficiencies within the agricultural landscape. These findings, coupled with the shared values of farmers, could serve as the foundation for a regenerative approach to farming practices. By leveraging the identified opportunities, we can begin to address the entrenched deficiencies present in the landscape.

One key observation is the external pressure to create nature on farmland, as noted by one farmer. This concept of nature encroaching upon arable land is particularly sensitive, especially in light of recent developments such as the transformation of arable land into nature and recreation areas in Blauwe stad. Additionally, the municipality's intention to designate the region as a UNESCO World Heritage Site has sparked concerns among farmers regarding the romanticization and stereotyping of their profession. This stereotype also perpetuates the historical role of “heren boeren” as oppressors, further exacerbating class differences within the region.

Underprivileged individuals are a major concern in the region and how to provide a sense of ownership. Even a larger initiative like the Grain Republic faces challenges; they endeavour to look beyond the region with their production. However, attracting visitors from outside the region remains difficult. Simultaneously, a



deeper social connection with the community seems to be lacking, causing it to fall between two stools. There is a burgeoning recognition that the prevailing agricultural system is contributing to land degradation and is increasingly vulnerable in the face of climate change. Within this framework, farmers encounter significant challenges in deviating from conventional practices and experimenting with alternative, more resilient, and regenerative approaches.

These deficiencies can be used as the basis for the process of regeneration. The fact that farmers see potential in the diversification of their crops to be more resilient can be investigated as a tool to prevent soil degradation and add to the ecosystem. Even more when more evidence can be shown that regenerative farming can result in higher yields. The fact that farmers see value in a local chain of production has potential. The fact that an increasing number of farmers are not full-time farmers and they want to diversify the program on their farmyards gives opportunities to add a program that can contribute to regeneration.

These deficiencies can serve as the foundation for the process of regeneration. The potential identified by farmers in diversifying their crops to enhance resilience can be explored as a tool to prevent soil degradation and contribute to the ecosystem, especially when supported by evidence indicating that regenerative farming practices

can lead to higher yields. Moreover, the recognition by farmers of the value inherent in establishing a local production chain holds promise. With an increasing number of farmers transitioning away from full-time farming and expressing a desire to diversify activities on their farmyards, opportunities emerge to implement programs that can actively contribute to (social) regeneration.

‘Behind the Facade’

The majestic front houses of the farms in the Oldambt are a striking image of the region. One I was eager to capture. Behind their decorated facades of the house, lie barns that show a very different image. There is a big contrast between the functional structure of wooden frames in the barn and the monumental front house. It could be seen as a physical manifestation of the sentiment of class difference between farmers and farmworkers, a difference still noticeable in the region.

The former farmworker's villages in the region provide little perspective for the current generation. Due to a lack of financial investment in the region, there are few opportunities. The inheritance of negative sentiment towards farmers still lives on in these communities; ‘There are still people who cannot phantom to say the word farmer.’ On the other hand, farmers don't want to be associated with a higher cultural status anymore. It is painful to be equated with the oppressing herenboeren, while times have changed.

The initiative of De Graanrepubliek tries to create a more local chain of production and creates an opportunity for farmers to be less dependent on the big supermarket chains, who now dominate the supply chain within the country. The Graanrepubliek's strategy to use and romanticize the history of the region makes a beautiful

story. However, they have difficulty obtaining the faith of farmers for sustainable and long-lasting investment. The shared history of farmer and land worker is a delicate story. At the moment the romanticized stories can be seen as keeping up the image of the decorated front facade. One tries to maintain an already crumbling history. Keeping up this front façade conserves the social differences that are still embedded in the region. It emphasizes the differences instead of looking for a new common ground.

When I set out on my hiking trip through the region the goal was to reconnect an abandoned farmyard to the agricultural landscape. Preferably the farm would have a beautiful monumental house. During my observations, I became less interested in this superficial image that are the front houses. If we want to reconnect and regenerate the landscape the story should be told differently. The back of the barn should be the façade and protagonist in the story of reconnection and not the front house. We can learn from the back facade. It shows the scars obtained during their heavy use and are a patchwork of different bricks, repaired cracks, and enlarged doors. They physically embody the sentiment of the social scars within the region and represent the shared place in history of farmworkers and farmer. These barns should be the starting point of a new story of regeneration.



Oostwold



Nieuwolda Oost



Bellingwolde, Gert Noordhoff



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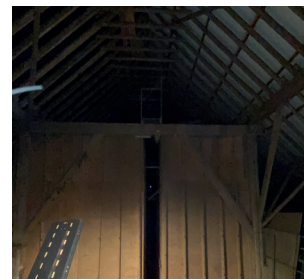
Wolldendorp



Finsterwolde



Bad Nieuweschans, Doeko van 't Westinde



Bad Nieuweschans, Doeko van 't Westinde



Oostwold



Finsterwolde



Finsterwolde, Bert Gosselaar



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Conclusion

Conclusion

Initiating from the concept of Borgen, both as a verb and an archetype, as the foundational premise for regenerative redevelopment, this hiking guide aimed to address the following inquiry:

How can landscape stewardship contribute to a regenerative farmyard with a tectonic that depends on the regional landscape?

Comprising three distinct components, this query has been thoroughly examined throughout this guide: landscape stewardship, the regional landscape, and tectonics.

Landscape Stewardship

Exploring landscape stewardship, characterized as “the responsible interaction between people and their landscape, aimed at safeguarding its values for present and future generations,” the investigation delved into avenues of human engagement and accountability in landscape management to preserve ecological, cultural, and social values across time. Within the Oldambt region, a profound connection to the area is noticeable among local farmers, underscored by their extensive knowledge of the locale’s history, biodiversity, and multi-generational residency. These values, as elucidated in

the findings, serve as the bedrock for their interpretation of landscape stewardship. Consequently, it is apparent that local farmers perceive landscape stewardship with earnestness. However, interviews revealed that while most farmers harbor a sense of attachment to the area, their primary impetus remains economic gain. Absent an economic incentive to assume responsibility for the landscape, many refrain from doing so, relegating responsibility to consumers rather than producers. Consequently, a chasm emerges between the landscape and its products, culminating in monoculture proliferation and landscape degradation. Nevertheless, a small group of entrepreneurs in the area evince a willingness to shoulder needed responsibility, experimenting with novel farming methods and landscape stewardship practices. Although the initial investment is substantial and takes time, these farmers evince the feasibility of responsible landscape stewardship in tandem with economic profitability. Thus, while numerous local farmers may persist in conventional farming methods, displaying resistance to change, the path to landscape stewardship is not without obstacles. There exists no singular blueprint for regenerative farming, with each farmer tasked with defining their approach and assuming responsibility accordingly.

Regional Landscape

The physical landscape of the region presents countless opportunities for regenerative farming practices and

landscape stewardship initiatives. Characterized by fertile clay soil resultant from centuries of land reclamation, supplemented by sludge dredged from the Dollard, the area fosters prospects for novel, locally sourced building materials and techniques. Additionally, the region's agricultural heritage affords ample potential for integrating food and fiber crops, particularly those amenable to dormant cultivation. However, a crucial takeaway underscores the imperative of acknowledging the intangible social landscape concomitant with physical topography. An examination of the region revealed persistent social divisions, harkening back to the era of feudal landlords and land laborers. This intricate social tapestry fundamentally shapes interpersonal dynamics and interactions with the landscape, constituting a pivotal observation in understanding the regional landscape.

Tectonics

Tectonics, defined as the structural principles and constructive systems underpinning architectural works, tectonics extend beyond technical specifications, encapsulating the visualization and celebration of a building's construction and materiality within its design. A prominent manifestation of tectonics lies in the reflection of the social landscape, epitomized by the juxtaposition between opulent front houses and utilitarian rear sheds. This architectural disjunction mirrors the pronounced social stratification prevalent in the region. Moreover,

as farmsteads expanded in recent decades, tectonic elements increasingly diverged from the landscape, embracing modern materials such as steel, corrugated sheets, and asbestos. Notably, Groninger farmers were early adopters of imported building materials from the United States and Baltics, thus initiating a departure from regional architectural norms. However, the surplus from the historic large sheds facilitates the adaptability and integration of modern farming machinery. Farmers exhibit resourcefulness and thrift in reusing existing materials, presenting an opportunity for leveraging towards regenerative farmsteads.

In conclusion, the research affirms that landscape stewardship can indeed foster regenerative farmsteads reliant on regional landscape tectonics. The approach to and reliance upon the landscape fundamentally shapes farmyards. Necessary is an integrated perspective that considers landscape stewardship, regional landscape dynamics, and tectonics as interconnected elements. Tectonics intertwine with the social landscape, while the regional landscape is profoundly influenced by agricultural land use practices. Regenerative farming not only fosters a symbiotic relationship with the physical landscape but also serves as a conduit for reshaping the social landscape and healing centuries-old social rifts.

Reflection

Reflection

My graduation project started with a fascination for the Dutch countryside and its spatial challenges. Prior to my exchange in Aarhus in spring 2023, I sought guidance from Mo Smit and Roel van der Plas to explore the possibilities within the AE and ExploreLab studios. This initial step showed my intention to examine spatial challenges not only from a technical standpoint but also from a social perspective. Recognizing that the issue of abandoned or discontinued farmyards transcends mere architectural concerns, I realized the necessity of placing it within a broader context, encompassing landscape architecture and urbanism. Given the accumulation of crises spanning from social to ecological realms, an interdisciplinary approach became imperative. In my view, the role of an architect extends beyond specialization; it entails connecting diverse fields of interest and scale levels, which became the overarching aim of my project.

My method of exploratory research through hiking resulted in unexpected insights, deviating from my initial design brief. Instead of conceptualizing a regenerative farm inspired solely by interviews with farmers, my focus shifted toward the aspirations of an artist I encountered. His motivation to transform an abandoned farmyard into a breeding ground for underprivileged individuals in the region seemed more relevant. This programmatic shift was further substantiated by discussions with farmers

regarding the class disparities within the region. As an outsider, I perceived these social challenges as more urgent than the personal struggles of individual farmers. Nevertheless, I aimed to include both narratives within the program of my design, envisioning it as a place for agricultural education.

My research resulted in a few design principles. For example I advocated for subdividing farm buildings into smaller units to enhance resilience and facilitate mixed-use applications. Also, the practical way of thinking I experienced on the different farms influenced me as a designer to think similarly. This also made me look back to my research and the hikes I made. What were the different wood types and materials I encountered in the region and how can I use them as a designer? To study this I also visited studio Tjeerd Veenhoven a designer from Groningen who is designing biobased with local residual streams.

During my research, I wasn't convinced of the current approach of most of the farmers I met, although they are connected to an initiative like the Graanrepubliek. I sought for alternative perspectives. My visit to Erve Kiekebos, a small Lenteland farm, offered valuable insights into the functioning of community-supported farms, thereby informing the relevance of such models within the context of abandoned farmyards in the Oldambt region

For the first time during my education, I tried to dive into a problem by interviewing and speaking to multiple

people in an unknown context. The challenge of stepping into a new context and trying to get a grip on the different problems and opinions made me insecure and modest as a designer. The fact that I was welcomed to stay over in different homes was asked for dinner, and collaborations made it personal and real to me. Sometimes it was difficult to step out of the role of the observer and make decisions as a designer. I think that the personal connection to some extent made me more modest. Although I am still challenged by this approach, hiking convinced me to be a great research method. To get an image and sense of the scale of a region. I was surprised by the amount of knowledge I gathered through meeting different people during my hikes and how it influences how you perceive the landscape. It is an active way of learning to read a landscape recognizing the stories that are told in the landscape.

However, translating the knowledge gleaned from these experiences into a coherent narrative proved challenging. Despite employing various mediums, including drawings, photographs, and writing, I found it difficult to encapsulate the essence of my hikes. Consequently, I consolidated my findings into a hiking guide, envisioning myself as a guide to narrate the stories and experiences firsthand. This challenge was amplified by the difficulty in clearly defining the various concepts within my research. As a result, I found myself

sometimes using these definitions interchangeably to establish connections between them.

The aim is to show the general principles in a farmyard development guide. Next to my research which is bundled in a hiking guide. I want to show the generic principles of transformation of a farmyard in a small developing guide, based on the design methods and building strategies that I used with examples from my design. For my p5 I would like to show a mock-up on a 1:1 or 1:5 scale. The process of making this can also be part of the transformation guide. I invested a big part of my project on how to build with local materials and I think the project deserves it to be physical and materialized.

A short personal note;

This graduation year has unfolded differently than I had anticipated. After my time in Aarhus, I had intended to incorporate a methodology centered around anthropological research into farming practices, believing that designers must venture into the field to truly understand the problems they seek to address. Next to this I would have liked to combine this with one to one model making. However, I placed high expectations on myself, which I ultimately found challenging to fulfil. I recognize the potential of my project and its various components, yet sometimes I feel that I fall short in realizing this potential and am unable to fully convey the story or create the project I envision, due to these high expectations. Through this process, I also come to realize

that I thrive more easily in a team environment, as this aligns with my approach to generating ideas in the context of a group. However, working independently proves to be more challenging for me. Throughout the process, I have engaged in several brainstorming sessions with friends, during which some of the most significant and valuable steps were made. These moments have been pivotal for me.

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Images

Image1: Formasm, W. J., Luitjes-Dijkveld Stol, R. A., & Pathuis, A. (1987). Ommelander borgen en steenhuizen. Van Gorcum.

Image 2: Cultuurhistorisch Centrum Oldambt (2011) Canon van het Oldambt

Image 3: Canon van Nederland (n.d.) Canon van het Oldambt from: <https://www.canonvannederland.nl/nl/groningen/oldambt>

Image 4: Cultuurhistorisch Centrum Oldambt (2011) Canon van het Oldambt

Image 5: Cultuurhistorisch Centrum Oldambt (2011) Canon van het Oldambt

Image6: Cultuurhistorisch Centrum Oldambt (2011) Canon van het Oldambt

All images from the Flora section where derived from; <https://images.wur.nl/digital/collection/coll13/search>





Bellingwolde, Gert Noordhof



Bellingwolde, Gert Noordhof



Bad Nieuweschans, Doeko van't Westeinde



Bad Nieuweschans, Doeko van't Westeinde



Finsterwolde, Bert Gosselaar



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Oostwold



Nieuwolda Oost



Woldendorp



Finsterwolde



Oostwold



Finsterwolde



Reinderwold



Woldendorp



Woldendorp



Finsterwolde



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Nieuwwolda Oost



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Johanneskerkhovenpolder



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