Drouwenerzand today

In 1923 the Drouwenerzand was taken over by the Heidemij organisation. The section east of the road to the villages of Borger-Gasselte was sold to Mr J.A. Schreuder of the village of Haren. Following the heavy storm of 1972 the woods were severely damaged and Schreuder sold his land to the 'Drents Landschap' on 20th December 1974.



The extreme conditions are perfectly suited to lichens.

The eastern side of the Drouwenerzand is not symmetrically afforested. During the 20th century the remaining open areas became grown over with heather and at least 25 lichen varieties. This section has also been grazed by sheep since 1981. The sheep, together with the great number of visitors to the area, ensure that the shifting sands remain shifting. However, the threats of a hundred years ago are no longer an issue.

Changing insights

Years ago the people of Drouwen used to talk of the Gasselterzand, and the people of Gasselte spoke of the Drouwenerzand. In other words, it was a completely useless area that nobody wanted or needed. Nowadays, however, it's not just the sand that's shifting. Thousands of people have learned to see the area in a more positive light and appreciate its value. It is a popular place for Sunday walks and for school trips in particular.

The Drouwenerzand is a Natura 2000 area since 2003 and this means it is protected under European legislation.

It is a recognized geological phenomenon and the link between cultural history and natural environment is still clearly visible. So it is perfectly logical that the Drouwenerzand has been crowned the first geological monument in the Province of Drenthe!

For more information about this geological monument please contact

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aardkundig monument

drenthe

The Drouwenerzand is the only active 'drift sand' area of the Hondsrug and it is one of the last of such areas in Drenthe. A hundred years ago the Drouwenerzand was considered to be a 'disaster area' but nowadays we appreciate its value as the first geological monument of

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The uniqueness of a 'disaster area'

At the beginning of the 19th century the Drouwenerzand was a barren area of drift sand, extending over an area of some 300 hectares. The main roads from the village of Drouwen to the neighbouring village of Gasselte were constantly covered by sand dunes, as was the farmland in the area. It was quite disastrous.





The Drouwenerzand as a great desert in the 1820s (left) and the present situation (right)

Nowadays the eastern part of the region is covered with heather and juniper, and only a small area of drift sand remains open. The western part is completely grown over with trees. Yet the former high sand dunes are still easily recognisable in the entire area, even in the wooded areas. This sand relief, the area's situation on the side of the Hondsrug, the diversity of flora and fauna and the ever-present cultural-historical relationship between man and his surroundings, all contribute to the fact that Drouwenerzand is an area worth experiencing!

Geology and soil

The great mass of ice from Scandinavia that reached as far as the middle of the Netherlands during the Saalien ice age (approx. 170.000 – 120.000 years ago) has visibly left its mark on the landscape in Drenthe. The Hondsrug was formed as a straight line in the landscape, cut and formed by passing glaciers. When the ice melted it left deposits of rock and stony clay.

During the last ice-age, the Weichselien (approx. 70.000 – 10.000 years ago), freezing winds covered the landscape with an undulating blanket of wind-borne sand deposits. The area then gradually became wooded.



In the drift sand area of the Drouwenerzand rocks from a former ice-age have been exposed once again.

Even in pre-historic times our forefathers cut open places in the woods to create space for farming. The region between Drouwen and Gasselte was completely reclaimed and used intensively. As a result the sandy soil was exposed once again and this extensive area of drift sand came into being.

Cultural History

At the end of the 18th century the threats formed by drift sand dunes became so serious that the farmers of Drouwen collectively elected so-called 'Sand Lords'. These lords were responsible for taking the necessary measures to control the situation. Dams were built and extensive pine forests were planted. Unfortunately, due to lack of supervision, the woods were cut down again at a later date and by the mid 19th century the Drouwenerzand was, once again, a desert area.

In 1903 the area was bought up, for 10 Dutch guilders per hectare, by the 'Oranjebond van Orde', with financial support from the 'Kwartgulden Vereniging'. These were both antisocialist organisations that endeavoured to solve the social chaos in cities caused by unemployment and poverty by, for example, buying land in the peat district and setting labourers to work there. A new forest plan was implemented, using the most successful tree, fir, to keep the sand in place. This explains why there are so many fir trees in the wooded area of the Drouwenerzand.



The roots of the fir can grow to great depths and this tree requires little nourishment.