

Drouwenerzand

[illegible]

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 anti-socialist 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.