

WHERE & WHAT

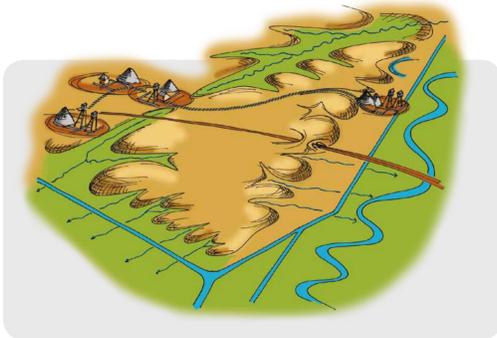
Situated in the east of Belgium (western Europe).

Located on the Kempen plateau: river sediment cone with pronounced plateau edges, formed during Ice Ages.



Core area: National Park Hoge Kempen (5,700 ha of heathland, coniferous and ancient broadleaf forests on gravel-rich sandy soil).

Directly surrounded by remains of early 20th century coalmines and their garden cities, historical stream valleys, rich natural spring areas on plateau edges.



Sunset over the lake of Kikbeekbron.



A National Park Ranger guides a group of visitors.



Shaft towers as the most prominent witnesses of the 20th century coal mining industry.



Sand dunes as a result of extensive medieval land use.



Children on a large boulder, one of the typical Hoge Kempen phenomena.

CONTACT & PARTNERS

Nationaal Park Hoge Kempen project agency
c/o Regionaal Landschap Kempen en Maasland vzw
Winterslagstraat 87
3600 Genk
Belgium

www.nationaalpark.be

The National Park project agency operates on behalf of a massive partnership of organizations and institutions (see below), both governmental as non-governmental, situated on a local, regional and national level and dealing with nature conservation, heritage and landscape, visitor management and tourism, spatial planning, economic development etc.

Government of Flanders

- Agency for Nature and Forests
- Roads and Traffic Agency
- Agency for Spatial planning
- Flanders Heritage Agency
- Tourism Flanders

Province of Limburg

- Provincial Centre for Nature
- Provincial Centre for Cultural Heritage
- Limburg Tourism Board

Hasselt University

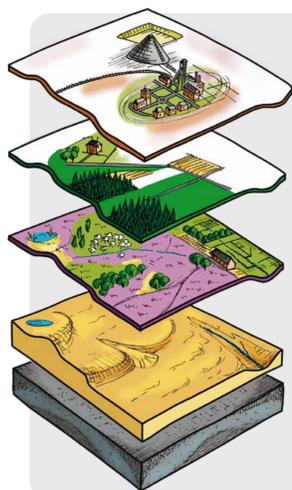
City of Dilsen-Stokkem

- City of Genk
- Kattevennen
- Municipality of As
- Kolenspoor
- Municipality of Lanaken
- Vrienden van Pietersheim
- Municipality of Maasmechelen
- Municipality of Zutendaal
- Lieteberg

Limburgse Reconvertie-Maatschappij
Limburg Sterk Merk



READING THE LANDSCAPE'S BIOGRAPHY



5 | coalmining | urbanization and garden cities | accelerated socio-demographic development

4 | turning point | decline of heathland area and agriculture because of spatial planning, traffic infrastructure and industrial revolution | landscape painters and first nature conservation

3 | human influence on the landscape (from first settlements till 19th century) | heathland economy

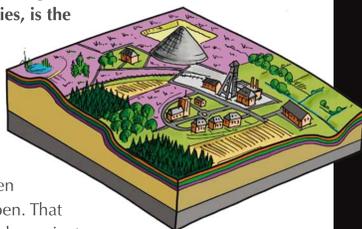
2 | morphologic landscape formation (from last Ice Ages till presence of sedentary men) | creation of sediment gravel plateau

1 | geological process | formation of coal

History layers, the book pages of the bibliography, are still visible in and even typical for today's landscape.

The unique feature that the Hoge Kempen landscape embodies, is the transition from a rural to an industrial society.

This transition obviously happened in a lot of places worldwide, but is still very visible in (and even typical for) the Hoge Kempen. That is why the National Park project successfully (re-)connects people with landscape and gets them involved: the cultural landscape embodies their own history and lives.



WELCOMING PEOPLE

At the moment, annual visitor numbers to the (region of the) National Park amount to 750.000: these include walkers, cyclists, horse riders or visitors. The creation of 5 'Gateways' to the National Park is key to this operational activity. Each one recounts part of the landscape story to the visitor and provides the necessary visitor facilities. They also each represent a tourist destination in itself with integrated activities.

Because the Gateways are located outside the National Park, sometimes even a few kilometers away, they ensure that the landscape quality boost created by the National Park is spread across the region. Moreover, they prevent excessively high levels of recreational stress in the actual National Park and help manage mobility.



Extensive heathland, a characteristic landscape feature of the Hoge Kempen.



Visitors in the geological display area, a transformed, former quarry.



Aerial view of one of the garden cities with typical street pattern and tree plantation prescriptions, and coal tips of belonging mining site in background.

WORKING WITH THE LANDSCAPE

The objective of the Hoge Kempen National Park project is to preserve the intrinsic value and quality and functional coherence of the Hoge Kempen landscape, to restore it where possible, to enhance it where necessary and to open it up for people to enjoy it. Bearing this in mind, a National Park occupying approximately 6,000 ha, was demarcated in the centre of the Hoge Kempen region and supplied with quality reception infrastructure.



The project's implementation involved seven areas of activity:

- delimitation: 80% of the nature reserves are public property; the perimeter will be consistently translated into policy instruments for nature, landscape care etc.
- reducing fragmentation: transforming existing roads into cycling paths; construction of ecoducts (wildlife crossing bridges) over roads that can't be closed to traffic
- handling enclaves: realising exit and transition scenarios for conflicting functions
- organisation and management: management by the Agency for Nature and Forests: implementation of a nature and landscape restoration plan
- heritage: core area of "Hoge Kempen rural-industrial landscape", eligible to UNESCO World Heritage
- improved access and shared recreational use: quality route network for walkers, cyclists and horse riders; permanent maintenance service; Ranger activities
- welcoming visitors and tourism: five Gateways to the National Park, in close cooperation with existing local hospitality and lodging businesses

HOGE KEMPEN NATIONAL PARK

Belgian candidate for the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe 2012-2013