



CASE 1.:THE GREBBELINIE, a Dutch military defence line in the middle of the Netherlands

Introduction

This case describes how Tourism and Living Heritage are connected in the Grebbelinie, a Dutch historical military water defence line in the middle of The Netherlands. It is situated between the river Rhine and the former South Sea, now a-days the Eemmeer and was the first defence line to protect Holland against aggressors from the east. The Grebbelinie is a nice example how a site of historical interest can be developed as a tourism object.

Objectives

After studying this case you:

- Have more knowledge of the Grebbelinie as a tourism example of a (living) heritage
- Are able to describe the importance of historical defence lines in EU perspective
- Can use the case as an example how to relate tourism and “living” defence lines and castles.



Content

Introduction

1. Defence lines as historical tourism objects: The Dutch “Grebbelinie
2. Defence lines and EU importance
3. A Dutch reconstruction approach
4. Tourism products
5. Living intangible Heritage, living like a soldier
6. Visitor centres
7. Accommodation and catering
8. Marketing

References

1. Defence lines as historical tourism objects: The Dutch “Grebbelinie”

The interesting aspect of the military defence line „Grebbelinie” is the use of earth and water, strengthened by fortresses in between. It is the same idea of the „Dutch Waterlinie” which is situated after the Grebbelinie, to defend Holland in the past. Compared with other defence lines as the Magninot line in France, the Ostwall in Poland and the Atlantic wall lines, the use of „natural” defence is very high. In this case Water, friend and enemy of the Netherlands.

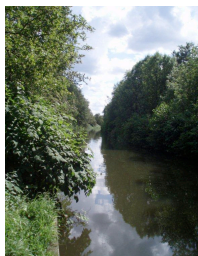
The so called „Grebbelinie” was constructed in the 18th century under the threatening of French troops that might attack The Netherlands. In 1794 the linie was successful inundated for the first time but unfortunately enough the big rivers were frozen and avoiding the Grebbelinie French troops occupied the Netherlands. During this occupation the line got its final design and was enriched with several defence works.

At the start of the German-French war in 1872 the Grebbelinie was fully functioning again with modern canons which were even used in 1940. During the First World War it played not a role in the defence strategy of The Netherlands.



Just in February 1940 the Dutch army decided to use the Grebbelinie as an effective defence line against the German troops. On the 10th of May 1940 on a beautiful summer day, the German troops invaded The Netherlands. The line was almost broken in the evening of the third war day by the Germans at the Grebbemountain. The Dutch troops draw back to the Dutch Water Defence line. Because of the unexpected resistance of the Dutch army at the Grebbelinie, Rotterdam was bombarded the fourth day of the war. The Dutch government surrounded The Netherlands in Europe under the blackmail that other cities in Holland should face the same faith.

Ironically the Germans improved the defence line in 1944 to stop the Canadian troops liberating Holland. The Grebbelinie, now called „Pantherstellung”, hold until the capitulation of the German Troops in The Netherlands at Wageningen in May 1945. After the Second World War the linie was functioning as a military defence line till 1951.



Fifty-five years after this date it was silent around the old defence line. Nature took over the trenches and dikes, trees were growing. Birds made their nests in the trees and the former casemates were covered by humus. Even one fortress disappeared under a provincial road.

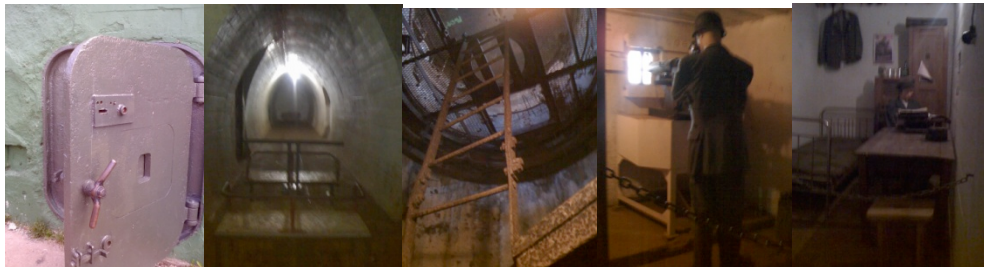
In May 2006 however the reconstruction of the „Grebbeberg linie” started as a tourism and recreational stimulation for the region. The old linie waked up with another mission



2. Defence lines and EU importance



Military defence lines are a subject of interest of the EU history and a reflection of the time spirit and living decades of the last centuries. You can find the equipment but also the furniture of the century in which it was constructed. You can have the idea how much a country was spending on its defence and how unrealistic they were in expecting not to be attacked. Dutch troops for example defended themselves in May 1940 with canons from 1870 (!). The Maginot line on the other hand was reflecting another point of view, using modern weapons for defending. However Germans troops changed the use of stable defence lines, studying the mobile strategies of Charles the Gaulle in their military academies since 1933 and avoided the Maginot line by invading Belgium and Holland. The Germans however built their own defence lines up to 1941 at the Atlantic. The construction of the Ostwall in the East of the former Germany, nowadays Poland, was already started in 1925. It stopped the Russians in January 1945 just a few days as the crew of the Ostwall was not very well trained and had not enough battle experience. After the Second World War the military importance of unmovable defence lines declined.



Ostwall, Poland

The defence lines and of course also castles and fortresses are “wave points” in our common European history. In fact those lines were generally built to defend oneself against a foreign aggressor. A tank in his way you can describe as an attacking mobile fortress which can also be used for defending.

The defence lines are keeping alive the memory of the inhabitants of Europe how valuable peace is. Without fearing aggression of the neighbourhood countries there is no need of this kind of defence construction works any more.

The European Union is the best way to guarantee that peace. It is the best defence against military aggression of EU neighbourhood countries. This statement has to become a collective memory of its inhabitants.

From an EU point of view it is also important that the authorities and tourism management of the “old defence” tourism objects are starting to co-operate with each other. It would be in the interest of the preserving of the defence lines to exchange know-how and organising together events. Of course also tourism package deals can be developed for tourists in and outside the EU. To visit three old EU defence lines in four days for example. Japanese and USA tourist will probably be interested.



3. A Dutch reconstruction approach

In May 2006 the project „Grebbeberg linie resurrected” started as a tourism and recreational stimulation for the region. Several activities were launched like canoeing in parts of the old water defence line, developing walking and cycling routes on and beside the line. Small historical „museums” were raised and nearby restaurants started offering a Grebbelinie meal. Tourism accommodations like „linie huts” were designed and constructed.

The most important work of the project was and is to reconstruct the defence line with its dikes, inundation works, fortresses, trenches, casemates etc. It are the steppingstones to realize the historical tourism object „Grebbelinie” in the middle of the Netherlands.

Old maps were studied and military, municipality and states archives visited. People which were active involved in the May days of 1940, were interviewed.

In this way a good overview was obtained to make true reconstructions of the dikes, sluices, fortresses, bunkers, casemates, canals and trenches during the centuries and especially in the Second World War.

The rebuilding works are still going on. Also the reconstruction of the fortress „Fort aan de Buurtsteeg”, that is crossed in the middle by the railway Utrecht-Oberhausen.. The reconstruction is financed by the provinces, municipalities, state NGO’s and partly by EU funding.

Cars are now running over a part of the fortress, crossing the railways, so the road on which they are driving now, has to be rerouted. There are also plans to construct a visitor’s centre, bridging the railway and being an observation point for the whole to rebuilt fortress. This centre has to play an important role in the education/information of adults and schoolchildren about the Grebbelinie. Four other small information centres will be raised and constructed alongside the line. Some are replacing existing little private „museums”.

Very important is to make the defence line reachable for all kind of visitor groups. Entrance roads and bridges in the old military sober architecture; have to be (re)constructed. Parking places for cars and bikes are essential. Public transport has to be arranged.

Beside of this, quays have to be constructed for mooring canoes, rowing boats, water bikes and round a about boats, in the revived water defence canals and works.

Handicapped people should have entrance to some of the most interesting parts of the defence line and in any case to the information centres. This means that at the beginning of the reconstruction works and the building of the information centres this has to be taken in account, as far as possible of course.

Target Groups

Dutch Schoolchildren

All Dutch children are learning about the history of the Second World War. The Grebbelinie is the lively history of one of the big battles in 1940 in the Netherlands. Primary schools in the neighbourhood are visiting already the defence line and this can be widening up to all schools in the Netherlands. Also the secondary schools are a target group.

Tourists between 20 and 60 years old

People, families in the neighbourhood and tourist are seeing the line as a nice place to recreate: to walk, cycle, canoe, and enjoy nature, having a tea or beer during their tour and having some nice experiences and activities on certain spots on the Grebbelinie. Historical event days around the WOII with a lot of activities are preferred as a lively view of the near past history.

60+

The seniors have the real historical ideas about the Grebbelinie. They were a child during the WO2 and the period after it till 1954. The Grebbelinie for the people up to 80 is the reality of the Second World War. Maybe there are still some ex soldiers living that fought in May 1940. Especially for this category some parts of the Grebbelinie have to be made wheelchair friendly. Anyway the to be constructed information centre at the fortress “Fort aan de Buurtsteeg” has to take care of this kind of visitors.

4. Tourism products

A defence line is a tourism object that creates a lot of rural tourism products. Most of the time it is situated in the country and more or less hidden, as a kind of camouflage. On the other hand it dominates and gives form to the landscape especially in the front line, as the guns of the defence line must have open fields like meadows and agriculture land. Defences of canals, inundations and obstacles for tanks can also dominate the front line. At the back of the line there are the transport roads for ammunition, supplies, meals etc. for the soldiers. The Grebbelinie does not have sheltered (underground) transport routes, like the Ostwall in Poland for example.

A recovered Grebbelinie means that roads are available to enter the defence line. The road behind the first defence line can be (re)constructed for cyclist and on the top of the line or in front of it, walking paths can be realized. Even a horse riding track is possible, giving an imagination of the cavalry officers, inspecting the line. On some special events this can be re-played by the cavalry or volunteer horsemen in the framework of the Living Heritage

The water defending, the canal is also in front of the line. Of course the inundations are too hard to realise given the restricted living space in the Netherlands.

So walking, horse riding and cycling are attractive parts of the renewed old defence line. On the defence canals, water sports of small boats are possible like canoeing, rowing and water biking. Even water round a about tours are possible with small and narrow more or less historical passengers boats.

To inform the tourists about the old defence line, the fortresses will be rebuilt with some small visitor centres in it. Some trenches and casemates are reconstructed.

Guiding by an uniformed “historical soldier” can be an integral part of the Grebbelinie experience.

The existing restaurants and tourism accommodations can take profit of the needs from the tourists to see the whole line or a part of it. New initiatives to raise rural accommodations, small restaurants, teahouses can be encouraged, as long as they are suiting in the line concept.

So a revival of an old defence line creates a lot of jobs in the reconstruction and preserving of it as well as the tourism products after its construction. It means stimulation for the local economy and an increasing of employment in the rural area that is threatened with urbanisation.

5. Living intangible Heritage, living like a soldier

To keep the cultural military traditions lively, events are organized with exercises, traditional soldier meals etc., targeting at the daily life during the mobilization of Dutch troops in 1939-1940. Such an event took place also on the 10th and 11th of May 2014 at several spots on or nearby the defence line which is around 68 km.

However this can be done for the different centuries, as the linie was a defence line in 1792 and 1795 against the French troops, which occupied the Netherlands for 18 years.

This „living intangible heritage” is still not on the list of the UNESCO. This UN organization made a first draft of such a list at the end of 2009 in Abu Dhabi. (Weekend journal, Sept.11-13 2009). It was concentrating more on folklore, songs, dances, traditional clothes etc.

Living like a soldier in a defence line

A rural B&B accommodation entrepreneur nearby the reconstructed defence Grebbelinie had the idea to develop a rural tourism accommodation as a so called “Linie hut”.

“Linie huts” are, with some moderations for the western spoiled tourist, reconstructed and used as tourism accommodations. These huts are situated against the former line dike.

Here was a big confrontation between the Dutch and the German troops in May 1940, so you are sleeping more or less in a battle area. Nearby is a trench reconstructed and you can feel yourself like a Dutch soldier, waiting for the enemy. If you book a linie hut the owner will organize a guided tour for you, telling you about this part of the Dutch defence line, the water management, the flora and fauna around.



6. Visitor centres

One big and several micro visitor centres can be raised in the fortresses or farms nearby the line. The main visitor centre will be constructed at the fortress “Fort aan de Buurtsteeg”. The first thing to remind by the inner architecture and furnishing is that it has to be a lively visitor’s centre, with movies and maybe computer animations. It has also to give its visitors a nice overview over the fortress. Old disarmed weapons and furniture, catering etc. should be in the centre or in the fortress. Clear explanation on information or IT boards tells the visitor how the equipment was used. To take care of a flexible movie/ class/meeting room in the centre, is advisable.

Available guides for the visitors of the centres would be perfect. They can tell colourful stories and give demonstrations of the use of the historical equipment in the centre. Volunteers can be trained to be a guide.

An I-pod “guide” can be introduced for all interesting objects in the centre if the guide is not present. In fact the I-pod can contain explanations of all objects and nature along the total Grebbelinie. It can contain even soldier songs of 1940 and the frightened war sounds like an attack of a Stuka airplane on Dutch soldiers at the frontline.

Training and information materials have to be present in the centre as it has to fulfil a role in the history lessons of the youth and the adults which are already living in peace during 65 years in the Netherlands.

The materials will target at the Second World War but also materials of the defence against the French troops in 1792 and 1795 can be developed.

It will be good to make connections with the air fighter museum at Soesterberg, the military logistic museum and other military museums in the neighbourhood. Also the ancient job and handcraft museum at Barneveld can give advices and maybe not used materials like old phones.

At the entrance/reception there has to be a (electronic) notice boards and a visitor’s book on a visible spot, where it will get definitely noticed by the tourists.

Expecting also foreign tourists, information boards and leaflets have to be not only in Dutch but also in English and German.

Hoeve De Beek at Woudenberg is the example of a micro museum. It has a little exposition of historical objects used at the Grebbelinie. The foundation “De Grebbelinie in het Vizier” is the

promoter of this exposition. Interesting is that the farm was destroyed during war time to have a better shooting position, see www.Boerenstee.nl

Guiding by round about boat and on foot

Tourist guiding services enables the tourist not only to see the most interesting locations but also to have the background information of a particular fortress or trench in the Grebbelinie with the battle details of the Second World War. Beside of that the guide can present the cultural and natural heritage alongside it.

This service is provided by no other than the *Grebbelinie tourist guide*, dressed in the traditional Dutch military uniform of 1940. He/she is a strong personality with various features (mental, physical, knowledge-based) doing a demanding, but interesting job, that is available to anyone who is willing to constantly improve their skills and knowledge, likes working with people and helps advertising the region and the villages as well the small cities inside.

He or she offers basic information about (parts of) the line, introduce attractions and interesting places, telling stories about what was happening at certain spots, while you are walking or even sailing with an open round a about tour boat in the canals and ditches of the Grebbelinie.

It is advised to have not only a Dutch but also an English and German guided tour. A dual spoken language guiding is a possible option.

Being part of the scene

One of the fortresses in the Grebbelinie can be occupied in the high season and during special days, by a volunteer pseudo company of soldiers, consisting of enthusiastically ex soldiers and other engaged people. The daily life of a soldier in the Grebbelinie can be experienced by the visitors, supported by a guide.

Some old bicycles can be reconstructed and used for a demonstration of a so called raffle group of nine soldiers. The canons of 1870 can be loaded with some powder and a salute shot can be given at noon.

Cooking can be done as in the days of 1940 and a real soldiers meal can be served in a soldiers can. Children can even train in an exercise of half an hour in marching and saluting as if they were recruits. A lot of possibilities are left to the creativity and possibilities of the volunteers.

7. Accommodation and catering

The farm “Hoeve De Beek” at Woudenberg, which has also an exposition of historical objects used at the Grebbelinie, is offering drinks and meals nearby the Grebbelinie. A chain of these kinds of small restaurants can be raised with a specific menu card of “soldier meals”.

Accommodations nearby or to be raised nearby the Grebbelinie are given the tourists the possibility to walk the whole Grebbelinie in 2 or more days, staying at an accommodation.

If visitors centres, accommodations, restaurants, canoeing and cycling companies are working together, a so called “Grebbelinie arrangement” can be developed.

As already stated one entrepreneur developed a special rural tourism accommodation, the so called “Linie hut”.

For more information about how to start a rural accommodation see the Aurora 2 Module “Accommodation in Rural and Regional Tourism”.

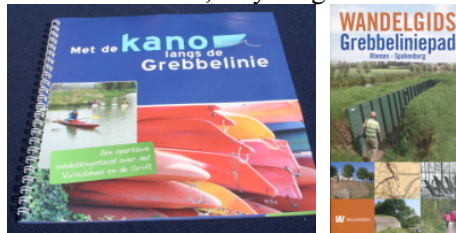
8. Marketing

A marketing strategy has been partly worked out for the Grebbelinie. The brand of the line is important as recognition for its visitors.

Projects that are realized in the framework of the line are described in press publications and mailed to local and regional papers. It is a free PR instrument.

In March 2010 a book was published of the history of the Grebbelinie by Mr. Jan Blokker, describing the real life experiences of people defending and living nearby the line in WOII.

A walking and canoeing route issue was realized, a cycling route description guide will maybe follow.



Grebbelinie festivals are organized every year with a certain theme. In April 2014 the theme was *200 Years Cavalry*, organized at the “Amersfoort”. A special Grebbelinie room in the museum Flehite at Amersfoort has been opened in May 2010.

The internet site in Dutch about the Grebbelinie is well maintained and frequently updated.

In the internet sites of the engaged organizations is also room for the Grebbelinie project. See

www.grebbelinie.nl

Several brochures in Dutch are realized like the “Grebbelinie, from defending to protection”. This brochure gives a picture of the defence works of whole line with the history of the line at the back. It gives also references to the walking, cycling and canoeing routes along the Grebbelinie and how to obtain this route guides.

Arrangements between entrepreneurs will be realized. Co-funding to mini projects of entrepreneurs is foreseen.

A very nice marketing idea is a small station that can be created at the fortress “Fort aan de Buurtsteeg” under the to be built visitors centre. This little station can be functioning during the weekend when the frequency of the passing trains is not so high. Another alternative is to revive an old railroad to Leusden and Woudenberg, even with an old fashioned steam locomotive. Volunteers love to maintain and drive in these kind trains.

As Public Transport is highly promoted in The Netherlands it would be nice to realize a “Tourism Station” or to restore a part of old railway with an historical train on it.

The roads to the visitor centres of the Grebbelinie must be well signalized and ending in guarded Parking’s for cars, busses and bicycles. In advertising this has to be stressed. Nothing is more stressful after a nice trip than a stolen bike or damaged car.

It is advised that information plates, leaflets, brochures etc will be also in English and German if you want to reach tourists from the neighbour countries, Europe, the USA and Japan.



References

The issues mentioned are only in Dutch available

1. Walking Guide Grebbeliniepad”, publishing house Waanders, Zwolle 2010, ISBN 978 90 400 7664 0 NUR 502
2. With the canoe alongside the Grebbelinie, Water NGO “Waterschap Vallei & Eem”.
3. www.grebbelinie.nl
4. www.wantbuitengebeurthet.nl
5. www.Boerenstee.nl
6. De Grebbelinie boven water, Gebiedsvisie voor de Grebbelinie deel 1, Hoofdrapport Provincie Utrecht 2006
7. De Grebbelinie boven water, Gebiedsvisie voor de Grebbelinie, bijlage 2, Voorbeelden Provincie Utrecht, 2006
8. De Grebbelinie in vogelvlucht, Anne Visser, Utrechtse Forten Stichting 2007
9. Landschappelijk Raamwerk voor Fort aan de Buursteeg, SVGV, November 2009
10. Defining heritage, Bridged Grauman, Weekend journal, September 11, 2009
11. Festungsfront Oder-Warthe Bogen, www.bunkry.pl, ISBN 978-83-922687-6-5