



# De Hondsrug

UNESCO Global Geopark

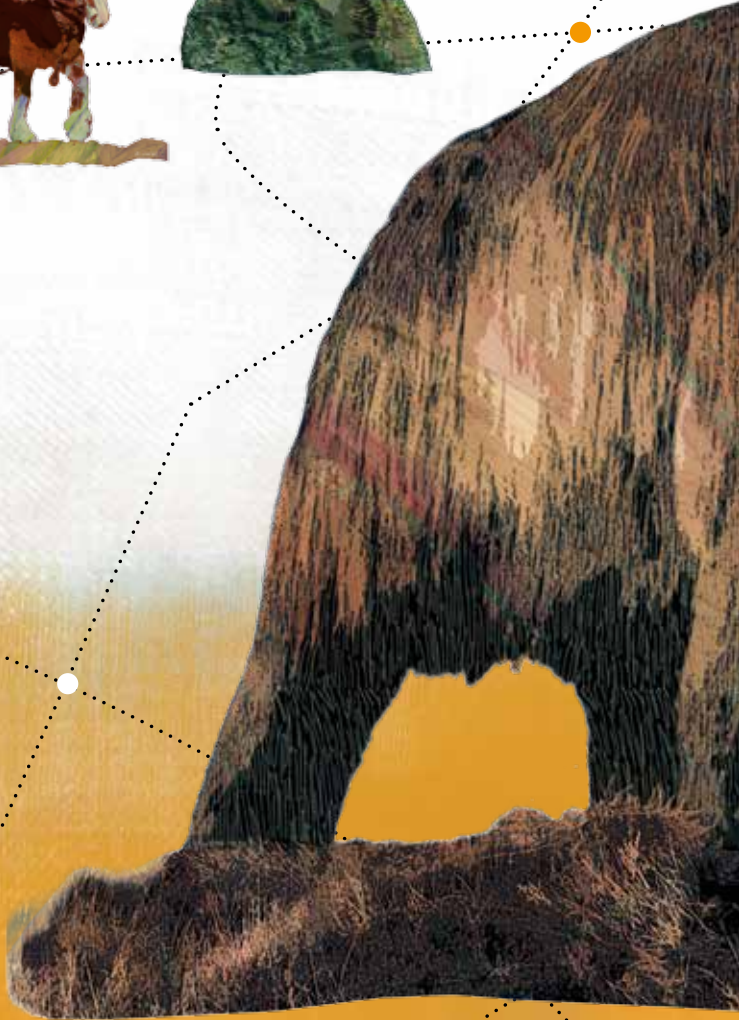


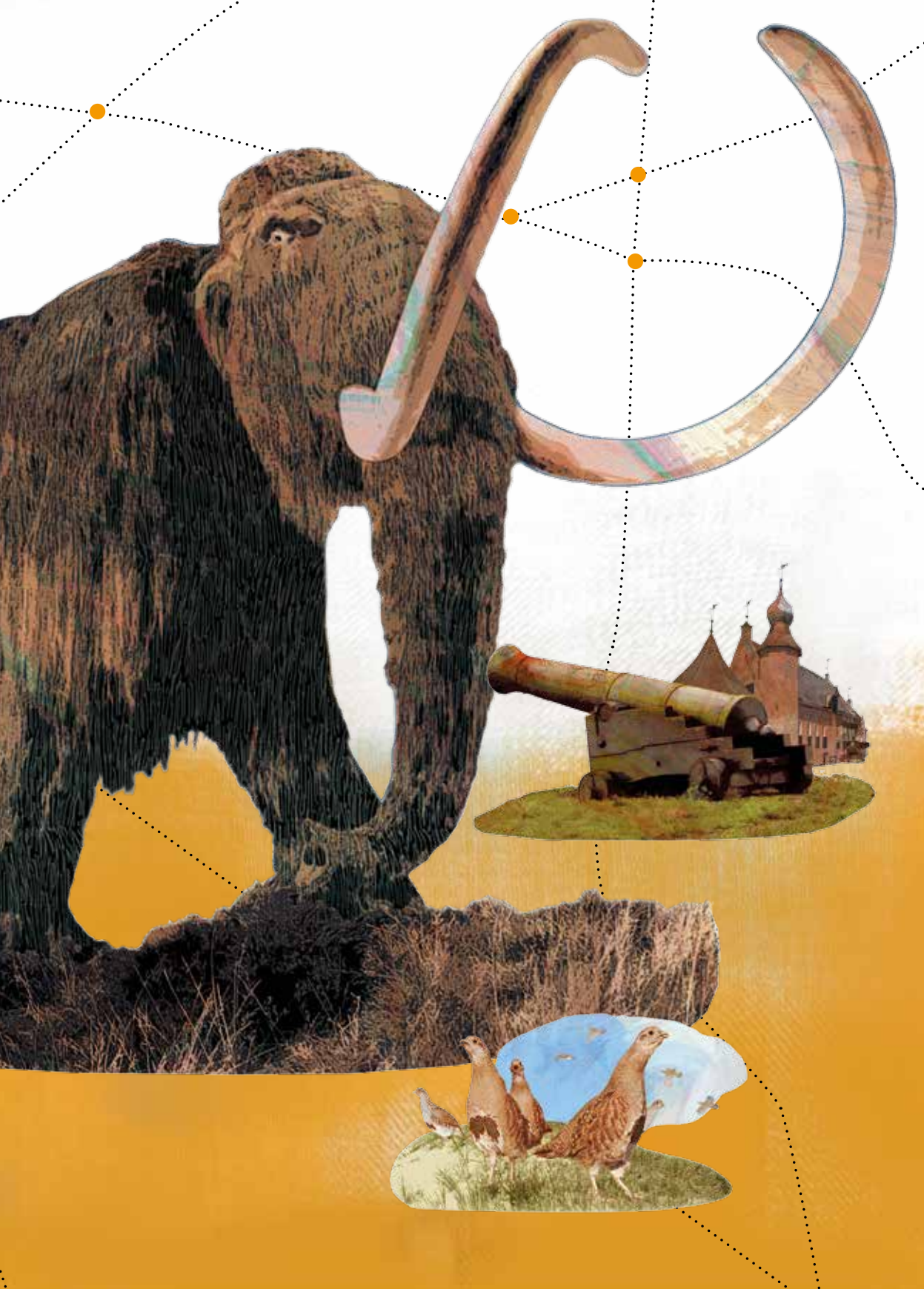
2017  
MASTERPLAN  
2027



Geopark de Hondsrug  
is sinds november 2015  
UNESCO Global Geopark.







**2017**

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**MASTERPLAN**

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**2027**

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The slope of the Hondsrug near Borger



SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION:  
A MASTER PLAN  
FOR THE HONDSRUG  
UNESCO GLOBAL  
GEOPARK







## A UNESCO Global Geopark

Geologically and cultural-historically, the Hondsrug region is rich and interesting. The region is so unique that in 2013 it was given the status of a European Geopark. The procedure for obtaining this status was begun several years earlier by government and commercial organisations in the region. This status is reserved for a small number of regions which commit themselves to preserving, strengthening and promoting the special qualities of the local geology and the cultural landscape which stems from it. In 2015 UNESCO accorded all geoparks the status of UNESCO Global Geopark. The Hondsrug region now bears the UNESCO label which stands for international quality and a certain character.

## A plan for ten years

Having achieved Geopark and UNESCO status, all partners – governments, commercial organisations and businesses – now wish to develop and promote the region further. The aim is to strengthen the economic development of the Hondsrug region, based on the strong regional identity and international appeal which the newly-acquired status brings with it. Alongside preservation and education, further development is one of the most important criteria which UNESCO attaches to the Geopark status. This must be agreed with local residents, commercial organisations and governments.

## The Foundation as a driving force

The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation – on behalf of its partners – has drawn up this master plan to give direction to this development. Furthermore, implementation of the master plan must secure the preservation of the Geopark and UNESCO status,



which is reviewed every four years. The Foundation co-ordinates implementation of the master plan and is responsible for consistency among all partner activities. The Foundation also acts as a driving force for new initiatives.

## The Master plan in brief

The central focus for the Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation and its partners is the identity of the Hondsrug region. The remarkable geology, nature and cultural history make the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark a distinctive region with an international appeal. The power of the Hondsrug region rests on three unique elements: (1) the ridges and valleys formed by the ice, (2) a wealth of archaeological treasures and (3) the cultural landscape formed over thousands of years by human activity. Devoting more attention to these three core values will make the Hondsrug region even more attractive, both for local residents and tourists. Geopark de Hondsrug aims to stimulate sustainable economic development in the region based on these core values. In that way we will maintain the robustness and energy of the region by protecting and investing in the regional qualities. Innovation and participation of local businesses and residents are an essential part of that. Focused education and marketing will increase the reputation of the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark.

This master plan details how we, working together with all our partners, will strengthen the regional identity over the coming ten years!



# The present situation: much has already happened

Much has happened since project Geopark de Hondsrug (as it was then called) began in 2011, and many developments have taken place. One of the most important milestones was the drafting of the application for the status of European Global Geopark in 2013. Another milestone was the UNESCO status which was accorded to all geoparks worldwide at the end of 2015.

The following is an overview of the most important steps taken to date:

## Infrastructure

- Seven Expedition Gateways have been established in the Hondsrug region, each with its own theme.
- 101 Hotspots in the countryside tell the story of the UNESCO Global Geopark.
- Routes have been developed to take people to impressive examples of the three core values.
- Taken together, these elements help to bring the core values to life for visitors.

## Products

- Eight storylines with a booklet explaining the theme and linking the Gateways to the Hotspots.
- A toolbox on the Geopark de Hondsrug website for use by all partners
- An app for smartphones

## Education

From the very beginning, education has been of key importance for the geopark. Projects include:

- The Hondsrug Academy, which has delivered dozens of lectures to a

varied public including many local inhabitants.

- Courses, partly provided by the Hondsrug Academy and partly by other institutions such as musea, e.g. a course about erratics designed to increase knowledge about the boulders in the local landscape.
- An Academic Committee consisting of representatives from the University of Groningen (RUG), Stenden and Hanze High Schools and the Province of Drenthe.
- Projects with RUG, Stenden and Hanze High Schools, IVN (nature group) etc.
- Training guides who can also organise their own excursions (in co-operation with IVN).

## Communication and promotion

Geopark de Hondsrug has developed its own lines of communication by which many different products and promotional messages have been launched. This forms the basis for further promotion.

- Website [www.geoparkdehondsrug.nl](http://www.geoparkdehondsrug.nl)
- Facebook page Geopark de Hondsrug
- Twitter page Geopark de Hondsrug
- Leaflets and brochures
- A Hondsrug newspaper



 Wij zijn partner van  
Geopark de Hondsrug

**Geopark de Hondsrug**  
*Van alle tijden...*

[www.geoparkdehondsrug.nl](http://www.geoparkdehondsrug.nl)

Geopark de Hondsrug is een samenwerkingsverband van:

-  Provincie Drenthe
-  Waterschap De Oostvaardersplassen
-  Waterschap De Eem
-  Waterschap De Wierde
-  Waterschap De Zuyderbierde





External promotion such as participating in fairs, a dedicated promotional team, television spots in Ster en Cultuur, TV items in travel programmes on RTL4, articles in national newspapers and magazines plus many press reports.

also nationally and internationally. The Foundation views this network as the basis for the development, co-ordination and implementation of all activities and projects referred to in the master plan.

### Protection

Local authorities have developed a policy for the protection of the most important geological and archaeological phenomena. Landscape management organisations have taken on the protection and maintenance of those hotspots considered to be of special geological or archaeological interest.

### Network

The Geopark office and its successor, the Geopark Foundation, have built up a wide-ranging network, both within the Hondsrug region and

### Organisation

Having begun as a project, Geopark de Hondsrug has since 2014 been a Foundation with a board recruited from regional partners. It co-ordinates implementation of the master plan and the consistency of all partner activities, the Geopark agenda committee and the Academic Committee. This ensures the continuity of the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark in the long term.

### Analysis and conclusions

The above-mentioned activities form the basis for further successful



development of the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark. Points worthy of special mention are:

- The remarkable story of the region's geomorphology is difficult for visitors to appreciate due to the restricted views of the ridges in the landscape. Small changes in the landscape, such as that in the area known as 'Besloten venen', can lead to a better understanding.
- Residents and visitors find the present structure of Expedition Gateways and Hotspots, with multiple storylines, far too complex. Simplifying the structure to focus on the three core values will contribute to a clearer presentation.
- The offering for schools is diverse and wide-ranging but could be more consistent.
- Brand awareness is growing and more and more people know what the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark represents. The next stage must be a more focussed regional marketing message, disseminated by all partners, together with further

improvement in the quality of the offering to visitors.

- 148 local businesses have signed up as Geopark partners and this forms a solid basis on which to build further participation and the role of entrepreneurs as ambassadors.
- Protecting nature and the landscape is the role of the nature conservation organisations and local authorities. A good monitoring system is lacking and this is essential for the four-year evaluation of UNESCO status.

The criteria employed by UNESCO for the award and maintenance of the special status form the guidelines for the further development of the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark. In Section 4 these criteria are dealt with in more detail by the programme lines, in which all these points are discussed.



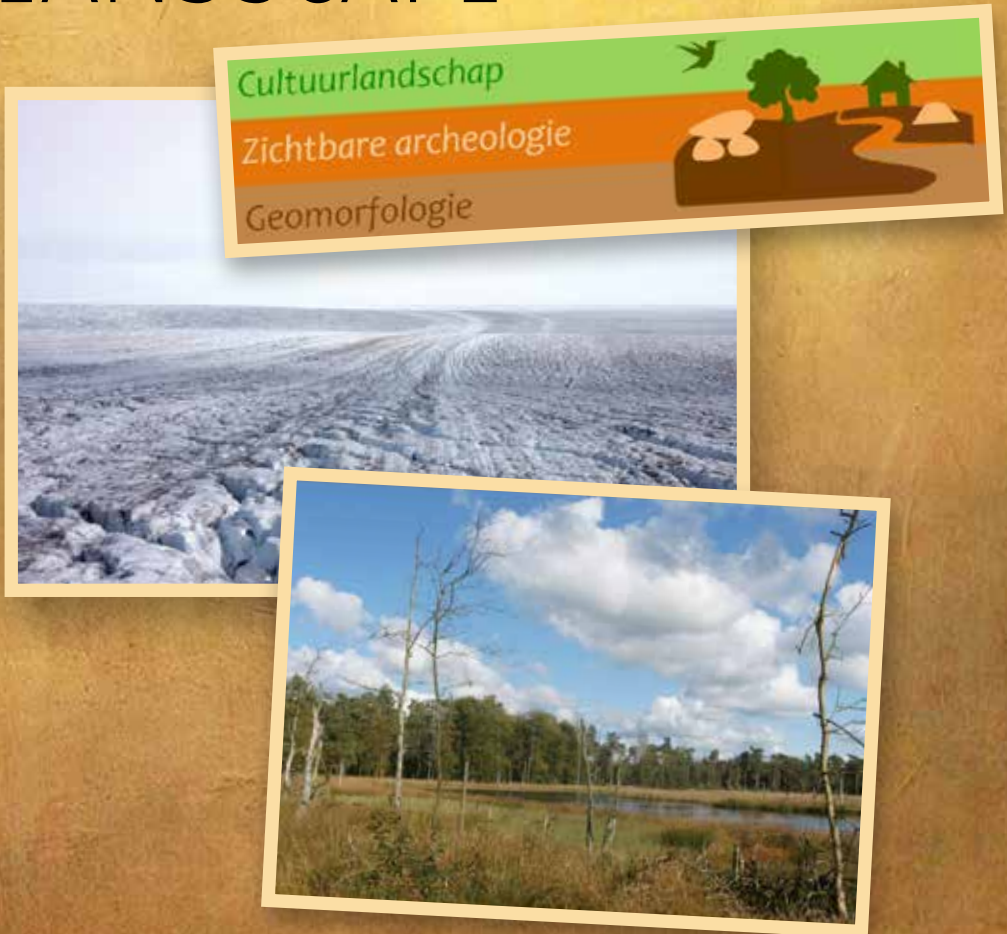




The farming village of Anloo

## SECTION 2

# THE REGION: A UNIQUE ICE AGE LANDSCAPE



The Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark extends beyond the Hondsrug. It consists of several parallel ridges, separated from each other by stream valleys. The Hondsrug region runs from the centre of the city of Groningen in the north to the fortified town of Coevorden and the Bargerveen area below Emmen in the south. Apart from the sandy ridges, the stream valleys of the Drentsche Aa and the Hunze form a large part of the region. The region is seventy kilometres long with an average width of twenty kilometres. The highest point – near Emmen – lies thirty metres above sea level. The region extends over two provinces – Drenthe and Groningen – and covers seven municipalities: Groningen, Haren, Tynaarlo, Aa en Hunze, Borger-Odoorn, Emmen and Coevorden. The population is 240,000, spread over an area of almost 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

In November 2015 the whole region acquired the status of UNESCO Global Geopark and is the only Geopark in the Netherlands. The Northern Netherlands is known internationally for its two UNESCO World Heritage Sites (the Waddenzee and the Wouda Pumping Station) and a number of National Parks. Worth special mention is the Drentsche Aa National Park which lies almost wholly within the Geopark region.

## Three core values

The Hondsrug region is home to a great variety of landscapes, dwelling types and cultural-historic elements. What is remarkable is that this diversity shares a unique unity which logically consists of three parts. These are (1) the ridges and stream valleys, (2) the archaeological wealth and (3) the cultural landscape related to them. This is the power of the Hondsrug region!

### 1. Geomorphology – ridges and valleys formed by the ice

One look at the map shows that the Hondsrug region consists of several straight ridges running parallel and alongside each other, of which the Hondsrug is the most prominent. These ‘megaflutes’ were created during the Saalian Ice Age about 150,000 years ago, when an ice mass from the North Sea region bulldozed over today’s Drenthe and Groningen. The pressure of the ice and the force of the meltwater left behind this pattern of parallel ridges and depressions in the landscape. Stream valleys such as the Hunze and the Drentsche Aa formed in the lower areas. Nowhere else in Europe is there a similar system of ridges and valleys from the ice ages that is so well preserved and visible.

### 2. Visible archaeology – treasures from our ancestors

Inhabitation and development of this region can be traced back to the ice age landscape of valleys and ridges. After the last ice age, about 10,000 years ago, the first people here were hunters and gatherers. In the stream valleys and woodland, which then covered this area, there was abundant food such as wild game, fish and edible plants. From ca. 3,000 BC the first farmers settled on the higher sandy ground, and they left behind their stone burial monuments, the hunebeds. Later inhabitants left hundreds of burial



The Drentsche Aa

mounds, 'celtic field' complexes and traces of cart tracks which reveal ancient roadways. It is almost certain that a continuous prehistoric route ran over the Hondsrug for thousands of years. Worldwide, few regions display such an enormous concentration of visible prehistoric traces.

### 3. Cultural landscape – made by the hand of man

Today's cultural landscape forms the third part of the Hondsrug region. Formed over thousands of years by human activity, its origins can be traced back to the structure of ridges and valleys from the ice ages. From west to east, the landscape alternates between high and low. Today's farming villages ('esdorpen') on the ridges arose in the Middle Ages when the inhabitants laid out their agricultural fields - 'essen' in Dutch - on the higher sandy soil along a stream valley. Much later, at the time when peat was being dug, the 'peat colony' settlements arose to the east of the Hondsrug in the Hunze valley. The names were derived from the villages on the Hondsrug, such as Buinen - Buinerveen - Nieuw-Buinen. Thanks to the centuries-long intensive inhabitation, the original pattern of streams has remained well preserved and the Hondsrug region now has a National Park (Drentsche Aa) and several nature areas with a European Natura 2000 status.

[Appendix 1](#) provides an extensive description of the power and qualities of the Hondsrug region.



SECTION 3

VISION AND  
ASPIRATIONS: AN  
ATTRACTIVE REGION  
FOR RESIDENTS,  
BUSINESSES AND  
VISITORS





The Hondsrug region is home to an exciting landscape with many stories. People enjoy living and working here and there are many opportunities for small businesses. Visitors are pleasantly surprised at what they find here. The special qualities – the three core values – guarantee an excellent living environment and an acute perception of the region.

Our aim for the next ten years is to make the region even more attractive for residents, businesses and visitors. So this is our vision of what the future will look like:

## **1. A well preserved ice age landscape**

All partners are committed to protecting the three core values - geomorphology, visible archaeology and cultural-historic landscape - and conserving them for future generations. The identity of the ice age landscape remains well preserved and forms the basis for future developments. The conservation policy goes hand-in-hand with responsible development, in accordance with the status of a UNESCO Global Geopark.

## **2. A pleasant place to live and work**

The Hondsrug is a region of which residents and businesses can be proud. Within five years 75% are aware of the three core values. They actively help to maintain and disseminate them. They see them as part of the region and derive a sense of identity from



Hunebeds in Valtho

them. New inhabitants and businesses are drawn to the strong regional identity. The core values contribute to the quality of life and the business climate in the Hondsrug region.

### 3. Tourism as a driving force

The Hondsrug region has a great appeal for visitors from Drenthe and Groningen, the rest of the Netherlands and other countries. They come here because of the unique combination of the three core values which are prominent in the landscape and highlighted by ‘hotspots’ and in visitor centres. The status of UNESCO Global Geopark has helped us to reach a larger target audience, thanks to attractive marketing and promotional programmes mounted jointly with the regional marketing organisations of Groningen and Drenthe. The extra visitors (10% of the total) stay longer and spend more, creating more job opportunities, all of which benefits the local economy. That is why preserving, strengthening and maintaining the core values is so important, along with research, education and actions to bring the values to life.

### 4. A hospitable welcome

Local businesses work hard to provide a hospitable welcome to visitors to the Hondsrug region. They understand the qualities of the region and are able to share these with visitors.

Visitors are very happy with the quality of food, drink and overnight stays in modern and sustainable accommodation. These





score a minimum of 8 on tourist websites. Visitors highlight the year-round activities and endless opportunities for walking and cycling on well-maintained, clearly signposted routes. The Hondsrug region is so well-known that at least five travel organisations offer holidays here.

## 5. We do it together

All partners work together towards the same goal. Local authorities, commercial organisations and residents share a common interest in emphasising and celebrating the appeal of the Hondsrug region. They do this by reinforcing the three core values and sharing information and money. The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation initiates product development and takes care of co-ordination and consistency between all partners.



## SECTION 4

# COURSE OF ACTION: FOUR PROGRAMME LINES TO ACHIEVE OUR AIMS



## UNESCO criteria

The UNESCO Global Geoparks Network has established criteria with which a region must comply in order to receive and maintain the status. A Geopark is measured against these criteria every four years. The criteria may be summarised as follows:

### 1. Size and setting

A geopark is a unified region with a clear boundary. What makes the region special and provides its own particular identity is the unity between geology and landscape, nature and cultural history. These qualities must be clearly visible and accessible for visitors and local residents.

### 2. Management and local involvement

Every geopark has a recognisable organisation which functions as a central point of contact for the international network and all regional partners. Local inhabitants, organisations and authorities are all involved in the planning and the activities carried out in the name of a geopark.

### 3. Economic development

One of the most important aims of a geopark is to stimulate sustainable economic development in the region. A Geopark reinforces the quality of life and stimulates local industry and employment.

### 4. Education

A geopark communicates knowledge of the region in an easily understandable and attractive way to a large public and also to specialist target groups. This can involve musea and visitor centres, laying out routes and organising activities. This is always done in co-operation with local partners. A geopark encourages research in order to extend knowledge.

### 5. Protection and conservation

Local authorities have a duty within their own laws and regulations to protect and conserve the qualities and values which contribute to the status of geopark. Loss of quality leads in the long run to loss of the status.

### 6. The global network

Every geopark is a member of the Global Geoparks Network, within which information, experience and best practices are shared. Membership commits a geopark to sustainable development on the basis of its own regional identity.

## Four programme lines

The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation has translated these criteria and its own aspirations into four programme lines. All programme lines have as their basis the regional identity – the power of the Hondsrug region – which consists of the three core values.

### Programme lines:

- Identity: *Experience* the power of the Hondsrug region
- Education: Make people *aware* of the identity of the Hondsrug region
- Economic development: *Make use* of the potential of the region in marketing
- Conservation: *Protect* the core values of the Hondsrug region

The text and the programme lines are structured according to the UNESCO criteria in order to involve local inhabitants and organisations in the planning process and activities.

Each programme line consists of a number of tasks, designed to ensure that the aims of the masterplan are achieved over the next ten years. The tasks are sub-divided into actions with concrete activities. The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation takes care of annual adjustments, additions and assessment of the plan.



## 4.1 Experience the power of the Hondsrug region

### A unique ice age landscape

The power of the Hondsrug region lies in the unique combination and cohesion of the three core values. Together they form the identity and environmental quality of the region. Residents and visitors can get more enjoyment from the region if the three core values are made more prominent and accessible in the landscape.

#### Task 1: Strengthen the perception of the Hondsrug region

### Outcome

Inhabitants and visitors perceive the Hondsrug region as an attractive region in which to live and to stay because of the three core values. These core values are visible, tangible and accessible to everyone in the landscape.

### Actions

#### 1.1 Strengthen the landscape identity of the region

The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation is investigating how to make the core values more prominent in the landscape. We shall then decide with our partners what actions are necessary. The top priority is to improve the visibility of the geomorphology – always the most important reason for granting Geopark and UNESCO status – which in this case means drawing attention to the differences in height of the ridges and the gradients.

Other aspects of the geomorphology include pingo's, eroded valleys and blowouts; archaeological elements such as burial mounds, hunebeds and cart tracks; and cultural landscape forms like 'esdorp' farming villages, wooded banks and peat wetlands.

#### 1.2 Breathe new life into old routes over the sandy ridges

For centuries the ridges in the Hondsrug region have carried ancient routes which literally and figuratively link the villages and towns of the region together. The most striking examples are the cart tracks, remains of old roads which can still be seen in the countryside. It is not always clear where these old routes used to run but their modern-day successors, such as the N34 highway and the Rijksweg road in Haren, still run lengthwise along the tops of the ridges. These existing routes may provide opportunities to illustrate the significance of the Hondsrug region. One example might be to make the prehistoric route and the medieval route more visible in places. More research is in progress into old routes and developing a plan to give the N34 highway a Hondsrug identity.

### 1.3. Make the unique settlement pattern visible and recognisable

The oldest villages in the Hondsrug region are on the ridges. On the Hondsrug itself they lie on the east or west side. Safely high and dry but still close to the stream valleys with their water and pastureland. For this reason all these villages have an 'es' or communal field on the north or south side.

A characteristic settlement pattern can also be seen in the former peat-working areas of the Hunze valley and the 'Monden' region. Examples are Eext, Eexterveen and Eexterveenschekanaal. The settlement names are derived from villages on the Hondsrug. We are investigating how these shared qualities can be made more obvious in the landscape itself. The routes themselves could tell the story, either as part of an exhibition or in other ways.



Digging peat involved the whole family

Peat moss factory in Griendtsveen





Cart tracks visible on the Balloërveld



Cycling past hunebeds in Bronneger



Guides bring stories to life

## 4.2 Education: Make people aware of the identity of the Hondsrug region

### The Geopark develops and shares knowledge

One important aim for a Geopark is to develop and share knowledge about the region. To this end the Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation has set up an Academic Committee, regularly organises lectures and excursions, has trained its own guides and uses various media and channels to spread information about the Hondsrug region. The Foundation works closely with educational institutions and other partners in the region. The target group includes everyone who is involved in the region – from residents and visitors to experts and business people, as well as educational and academic organisations, land conservation managers and other commercial institutions. Focussing on the three core values will reinforce peoples' awareness of the Hondsrug region.

Educational material must focus on the three core values, while target groups, locations and partners must be carefully selected. In this way we can better control the achievement of our educational aims. Besides visitors and schools, local residents and business people are the most important target group for educational activities because they are the 'bearers' of the identity of the Hondsrug region.

The programme line *Awareness* consists of four tasks designed to reinforce knowledge of – and respect for – the Hondsrug region.



## Task 1: Strengthen education about the core values

### Outcome

Local people (including schools) and visitors recognise and respect the Hondsrug region because of the three core values.

### Actions

#### 1.1. Continue with the present educational activities

The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation, together with its partners, will continue present educational activities such as the Hondsrug Academy and programmes for primary and secondary education. The Hondsrug Academy will give a series of lectures at least once a year. In addition, 300 children per year take part in studying the ice ages. Every year children in primary schools in two municipalities use our study material about 'the ground under our feet'. Over six years this will reach a total of 13,000 students.

#### 1.2. Teach the three core values in the field

The Gateways, other partners and the Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation organise a minimum of 50 educational safaris and excursions through the Hondsrug region.



Target groups are schools, visitors and local inhabitants as well as business people and other partners. This is also a kind of ‘training on the job’ for people who will later use this knowledge themselves and pass it on to others. The objective is to double the present reach within the period of the master plan.

### **1.3. Train guides and ambassadors**

Local business people and residents are the most important ambassadors for the region. The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation and its partners train guides who can tell - and show - visitors the story behind the three core values. The pool of guides will remain at least at its present level of 50 people.

## **Task 2: Convert several Expedition Gateways into Knowledge Portals**

### **Outcome**

Three or four Expedition Gateways will place more emphasis on education. As well as expounding the gateway theme they will communicate, through their content, the core values of the Hondsrug region. They work together with experts, the Geopark office and schools to broaden and deepen knowledge around the theme of the Expedition Gateway and to interpret this through their content and educational activities.

### **Actions**

#### **2.1. Each Knowledge Portal develops its own educational programme**

In discussion with the Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation, each Knowledge Portal creates its own programme to deliver its message about its own theme and about the core values, e.g. through courses, excursions and lectures. The most important target audiences are schools, residents and visitors. Each Knowledge Portal also ensures that hospitality businesses in the surrounding area which provide accommodation to visitors know about their particular theme and the three core values so that they can communicate this to their guests.

#### **2.2. Vocational education has a role in each Knowledge Portal**

Each Knowledge Portal has a fixed contact person within the vocational education sector for arranging internships, research programmes and excursions. The activities must fit the curriculum and be designed to improve knowledge and understanding of the three core values within the theme of the Knowledge Portal. Each gateway will offer two internships every year.



Researching the ice ages

## Task 3: Stimulate academic research

### Outcome

The geopark's Academic Committee has its own research programme with which it assists academic establishments by commissioning and encouraging work to increase awareness of the core values of the Hondsrug region. The programme has created greater awareness of the Hondsrug region.

### Actions

#### 3.1. Keep a record of academic research

The geopark's Academic Committee maintains a record of all research in the Hondsrug region. It keeps this up to date and ensures that it is digitally available. The committee recruits interns and students from (among others) Stenden High School, the Hanze High School and the University of Groningen, and encourages market research. In this way there is one place where everyone can find out more about the Hondsrug region.



### **3.2 Create a research programme**

There is now great interest in the Hondsrug region and we know a lot about it. But there are also unanswered questions and will doubtless be further questions in the future. Based on actual questions, on the research already completed and on that still to be done, the Academic Committee will draw up a programme for educational institutes to carry out further research in the Hondsrug region. For instance, mapping all collapsed pingo's.

#### **Task 4: Place more emphasis on international collaboration**

### **Outcome**

Geopark de Hondsrug develops and actively exchanges information with other geoparks and academic institutions in order to increase knowledge about the Hondsrug region and improve the quality of its products and activities

### **Actions**

#### **4.1. Make use of the knowledge and experience of the Geopark network**

Geopark de Hondsrug is part of the European and Global Geoparks Network. This network organises annual meetings at which all geoparks can share and exchange information and experience. The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation attends these meetings and ensures that information is shared with all partners. In this way products and activities can be improved.

#### **4.2. Facilitate student exchanges**

The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation uses the international geopark network to give students a chance to gain international experience. This means Dutch students going to work abroad as well as offering foreign students internships and research places with partners in the Hondsrug region.

#### **4.3. Organise a conference of the Global Geoparks Network**

The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation is taking the initiative in organising an international conference of the Global Geoparks Network in 2020. All partners are invited to attend this conference, which will welcome 800 to 1000 visitors from all over the world. This will lead in the longer term to greater awareness, more visitors to the area and higher local expenditure.

## 4.3 Economic development: Make use of the region's potential in marketing

### For all ages

The Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark distinguishes itself from other regions by the combination of the three core values. Similarly we can talk of them as three elements which together provide visitors with a memorable journey through time. The journey begins 150,000 years ago, travels past the earliest human traces, and continues to the present day. All this can be seen in a short period and within a short distance. The route over the Hondsrug is itself a journey through thousands of years. This makes our slogan 'Van alle tijden' (For all ages) very appropriate for spotlighting the UNESCO Geopark. The slogan also shows that the Geopark is suitable for people of all ages, from children to adults.

### More visitors through a stronger regional identity

The Hondsrug region attracts many visitors from the lifestyle group defined as 'Outgoing and Enthusiastic'. They come here to enjoy the beautiful landscape, large-scale attractions like the Wildlands animal park in Emmen, high quality holiday parks, facilities for children and countless walking and cycle paths.

Our strategy for the coming years is two-fold. Firstly to tempt existing visitors to stay longer by improving and building on the quality of the present offering. And secondly to attract new visitors (from the lifestyle groups 'stylish and luxury' and 'creative and



inspiring’) by placing more emphasis on the UNESCO status and the three unique core values. People with these lifestyles, which include international ‘geotourists’, are strongly attracted by landscape and cultural history. The UNESCO Global Geopark status adds an extra dimension to the Hondsrug region, which will appeal to a new target group.

## Regional marketing is effective

The programme line will tempt people to visit the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark and to stay here longer. By the end of the master plan, in 2026, the effect will be:

- 75% of local inhabitants and visitors will know the three core values of the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark and view them positively.
- The impression created by the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark (through the three core values) delivers 10% extra visitors, including more from other countries, who stay here longer.
- They award the region a score of at least 8 out of 10 on tourist websites.
- The way the Geopark office and its partners present the three core values – for instance through activities, sites, tourist packages, routes, etc. – strengthens the perception of residents and visitors.
- The Hondsrug region is so well known that at least 5 travel organisations include it in their programmes.

## The programme line consists of four tasks:

### Task 1: The Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark as a strong brand

#### Outcome

The Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark is a strong brand. This creates bonds between local people and a reputation with tourists and results in more overnight stays and higher expenditure. Growth of 10% is expected. The three core values are named in all messages as the most important qualities of the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark. They are summed up in the slogan ‘Van alle tijden’ (For all ages).

#### Actions

##### 1.1. Jointly publicise the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark brand

All parties – governments, commercial organisations and businesses – convey the same message about the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark. They position the UNESCO Geopark as a high quality region attractive to residents, visitors and businesses thanks to the three core values and the way in which all parties relate to them. All messages use the communication media and house style developed by the Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation.

## 1.2. Consider the consequences for other story-lines of focussing on the core values

During the last few years eight story-lines have been developed in the Geopark region. Each one has an Expedition Gateway and hotspots. The new focus on the three core values, which will help the region more clearly to distinguish itself, has consequences for the other story-lines. The future structure is not yet clear and the Geopark office is working on a plan for discussion with Gateways and musea.

## 1.3. The core values form the basis for all messages and tourist products of the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark

The core values are named in all messages about the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark as the most important qualities of the Hondsrug region. They are summed up in the slogan 'Van alle tijden' (For all ages).

In addition, every tourist product that uses the name Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark, must refer to at least one of the three core values. This includes, among other things, routes, tourist packages and events, the Expedition Gateways and hotspots. In this way we will create a recognisable and consistent image for the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark.

## 1.4 Strengthen internal and external promotion

Local residents, (international) visitors and businesses know the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark through constant and consistent internal and external promotion. This is achieved by using various media, communication methods and channels. Internal promotion means, among other things, leaflets, brochures, newsletters,







Premier Rutte meets Geopark de Hondsrug during the National Liberation celebrations in Assen in 2014

guide books, information boards, websites, social media, presentations and press releases. External promotion includes participating in fairs, TV-spots, articles in newspapers and magazines, signage and communications via partners such as hotels and holiday parks. Our objectives are to grow the number of website visitors by 10,000 per year; and to increase our reach through social media by 10% per year.

The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation, together with Marketing Drenthe and Marketing Groningen, has drawn up a separate strategy and campaign to attract international (geo)tourists.

The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation co-ordinates all promotion of the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark and involves partners by producing and distributing promotional material.

## Task 2. Strengthen regional marketing through collaboration

### Outcome

Programmes and activities offered by all partners (business people, authorities, societies, commercial organisations, education) must subscribe to the core values of



Groningen on the River Aa

the Hondsrug region and make clear in their promotion that they are a part of the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark.

## **Actions**

### **2.1 Jointly create a regional operational programme**

The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation, together with the partners and tourist organisations will create a programme for marketing and promotion of the Hondsrug region. This will address the specific needs of each target audience. The programme will take into account all aspects and will avoid duplication and gaps in communication.

## **Task 3. Product development based on the core values**

## **Outcome**

All products, services and visitor locations contribute to a better visibility and understanding of the core values. This will make it easier for inhabitants, businesses and visitors to recognise and appreciate the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark.

## **Actions**

### **3.1. Make the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark prominent in the landscape**

Along all major roads there are signs telling visitors where the Hondsrug UNESCO

Global Geopark begins. Every Expedition Gateway and hotspot is also signposted as a recognisable geopark location. Where necessary, boards are designed jointly with local partners to combine each other's messages as clearly as possible. The same approach applies to routes which carry the name of the UNESCO Geopark.

### **3.2. Develop locations, projects and products to strengthen perception of the core values**

Many initiatives and ideas within the Hondsrug region could serve to strengthen the perception of the core values and so attract more visitors. Examples are the ice ages route in Gasselterveld; soil profiles revealed during sand excavation; improving the visibility and accessibility of the peat road in Nieuw-Dordrecht, the Emmerschans and the Veenlinie; or creating a wildlife park.

### **3.3. Link the Maritime Museum and Hortus Botanical Garden to the Geopark**

The Maritime Museum in Groningen would like to broaden itself into a historical museum, including the story of the city and its location on the Hondsrug. The Hortus Botanical Garden in Haren is currently laying out a Hondsrug Garden. Both merit a place in the structure of the Geopark.

### **3.4. Develop a story line about Farmers**

The story of the cultural landscape – one of the three core values – has not yet been completely developed. This could be done with a story line about Farming centred in an Expedition Gateway in the Nabershof in Emmen, in which farmers and agriculture would be the central theme.



### 3.5. Create a journey through the earth

Visitors need a central point from which to begin their discovery of the region. The Biochron on the site of the former zoo in Emmen offers the potential to become such a gateway and a Geopark Knowledge Portal. Here we could create the concept of 'A journey through the earth'.

### 3.6. Make the Hondsrug more accessible

The best way to experience the core values is via the recreational routes. We must make an inventory of existing walking and cycling routes and analyse their position in relation to Expedition Gateways, hotspots, cafés and accommodation; and in relation to the requirements of the target audience.

### 3.7. Leisure businesses as ambassadors

Local travel, hotel and catering businesses develop products and activities which conform to the core values of the Hondsrug region. With their products and their business image they contribute to these core values and reinforce the identity of the region. These locally-based businesses contribute to the customer experience and create a closer link and more revenue.

Such businesses are also ambassadors for the Hondsrug region. They receive guests and direct visitors to other locations and activities in the region. They could improve their hospitality by participating in themed meetings and ambassador courses.





## 4.4 Conservation: Protect the core values of the Hondsrug region

### The Hondsrug remains a UNESCO Global Geopark

The core values of the Hondsrug region form the foundation of the UNESCO Global Geopark status. A good strategy, strong management and control are essential to preserve these core values. Achieving this requires support and commitment from all partners. The programme line Conservation will ensure that the Hondsrug region remains a UNESCO Global Geopark.

#### Task 1. Protect the core values of the Hondsrug region

#### Outcome

The Hondsrug region retains its status of UNESCO Global Geopark because the core values have been well preserved and protected, and communicated clearly externally.



## **Actions**

### **1.1 Protect the core values through strategic management**

Government bodies are responsible for planning measures essential for protecting the core values in the Hondsrug region. The cultural landscape and geological assets, above all, merit extra attention to ensure their conservation. Local land management organisations (such as Groninger Landschap and Drentse Landschap) also ensure that the core values are properly preserved within their areas. Good co-ordination of all concurrent projects (e.g. the Pingo programme and Hunebed management plan) is essential. The role of the Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation is to stimulate ideas and encourage action.

### **1.2 Conservation through development**


Responsible development contributes to preserving the core values. Using clever and appropriate designs in environmental developments – e.g. town development, house building, road planning and nature development – can reinforce the core values of the Hondsrug region. In return, the core values can inspire designers to come up with original plans for new developments in the region.


For these reasons it is essential that official bodies take the Hondsrug region and its core values into account in their visions, policies and projects. The role of the Geopark Foundation is to stimulate ideas and encourage action.


### **1.3. Setting up a monitoring system**


The Global Geoparks Network has established criteria with which a region must comply in order to maintain the status. This is measured every four years. The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation is setting up a system to monitor the criteria and enable action to be taken if the status appears to be threatened. Monitoring also serves as a way of measuring the actions to ensure they are producing the required results.

# Highlights OF THE PROGRAMMELINES

	<b>Perception: Identity</b>
1	Emphasise the differences in altitude
2	Breathe new life into old routes
3	Focus on the settlement pattern in the Hunze Valley

	<b>Make people aware: Education</b>
1	Strengthen education about the core values
2	From Expedition Gateway to Knowledge Portal
3	Stimulate academic research
4	More emphasis on international collaboration
5	Make more use of virtual reality

	<b>Make use of the economy</b>
1	Emphasise the Hondsrug UNESCO Geopark as a brand
2	Regional collaboration in local marketing
3	New Gateways in Groningen and Haren
4	Develop a storyline about Farmers
5	Journey through the earth in the Biocron
6	Entrepreneurs as ambassadors

	<b>Manage: Conserve</b>
1	Preserve the core values through strategy, management and monitoring









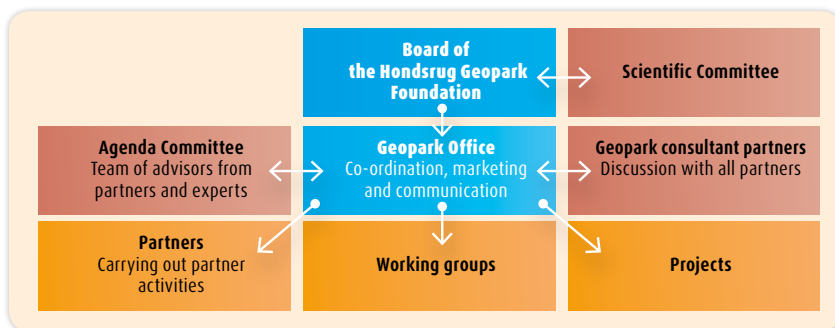
SECTION 5

ORGANISATION:  
GEOPARK DE  
HONDSRUG AS  
A NETWORK  
ORGANISATION



## An action-oriented network organisation

Every UNESCO Global Geopark must have at its disposal a recognisable organisation which functions as a point of contact for the international network and all regional partners. The Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation sits at the centre of the web of the network organisation Geopark de Hondsrug. It is a small organisation with many partners around it: government bodies, commercial organisations and small businesses.



The foundation consists of a small team with a manager and a small number of employees plus a board. According to UNESCO criteria the foundation must possess the following expertise and abilities or be able to call upon relevant experts: management and marketing ability, geological and landscape expertise plus knowledge in the areas of education and communication.

The main functions of the foundation are co-ordination, ensuring consistency, marketing and communication, education and initiating new activities to strengthen the Hondsrug UNESCO Global Geopark. The most important instrument is the masterplan with its four programme lines. The foundation monitors this plan and plays an important role in executing it, working closely with all partners including local businesses.

## Network

The foundation operates within a network of governmental authorities (comprising both provinces and the seven municipalities which make up the Geopark), commercial organisations (including musea and land management agencies), entrepreneurs, educational institutions and the Academic Committee. Also important are the volunteers who contribute to the Geopark through their work as guides, members of the promotional team or in other ways. An agenda committee with representatives of all groups directs the development, consistency and execution of tasks in the master plan. Finally the foundation is a member of the European and Global Geoparks Network and represents UNESCO Global Geoparks in the Netherlands Forum.

## Its own budget

The foundation manages its own budget, subdivided into the following divisions:

- personnel and accommodation;
- support;
- products and activities;
- communication and marketing.

The fixed budget comes from government and commercial organisations. In addition the foundation attracts occasional contributions from funds and organisations for projects and special activities.

In order to be able to realise the four programme lines in the coming years, the most important criteria for the Geopark de Hondsrug Foundation are:

### **1. Constructive collaboration between regional organisations**

Within the Hondsrug region other organisations, besides the Geopark, are active in regional development and marketing. The most prominent is the Drentsche Aa National Park. The messages sent out by the two organisations complement each other well. The Drentsche Aa National Park strengthens regional quality and helps to explain the region, and its activities complement and support the core values of the Hondsrug region. For its part, Geopark de Hondsrug highlights the work of the Drentsche Aa, for instance through the hotspots. The National Park actively informs its network of businesses and local residents about the UNESCO Geopark. There is regular discussion between the organisations concerning practical subjects like signage, activities and promotion.

### **2. Strengthen the position of Geopark de Hondsrug in the international network**

The foundation uses the international network of geoparks to share and gather information and develop projects with partners in other countries.

### **3. Maintain contributions from governments**

As part of a wider remit (e.g. quality of life, the housing market and strengthening the regional economy) governments contribute financially to the maintenance of the foundation and realisation of its goals. The foundation meets regularly with all authorities to ensure this support is safe-guarded.

### **4. Flexible use of resources**

Part of the financial resources are used for a project fund. As a result the foundation can respond quickly and easily to new developments and opportunities and can encourage others to produce innovative ideas.

### **5. Increase financial commitment from the business world**

The foundation asks local businesses to contribute to concrete activities in which they can quickly engage and from which they immediately benefit. Where possible, the foundation encourages businesses to contribute to promoting the Hondsrug region.



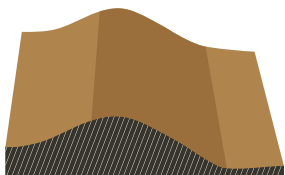
→ APPENDIX 1





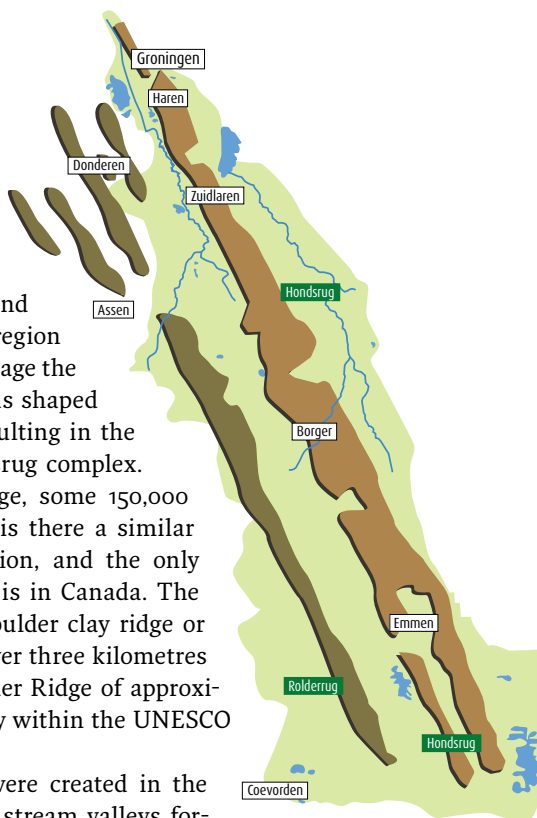
# The Power of the Hondsrug region

## 1 Geomorphology – ridges and valleys formed by the ice



The power of the Hondsrug region rests on its geomorphology. The concept of geomorphology refers to the land formation, and that of the Hondsrug region is unique. During the last but one ice age the ground in the North Netherlands was shaped by a river of ice from the north, resulting in the straight parallel ridges of the Hondsrug complex. This occurred in the Saalian Ice Age, some 150,000 years ago. Nowhere else in Europe is there a similar large-scale linear landscape formation, and the only comparable example of a megaflute is in Canada. The Hondsrug is the most prominent boulder clay ridge or megaflute, 70 kilometres long and over three kilometres wide. Second is the Sleener- or Rolder Ridge of approximately 60 kilometres. Both lie wholly within the UNESCO Geopark.

It was not only the ridges which were created in the Saalian Ice age. Between the ridges stream valleys formed as a result of the melting ice. In later ages these valleys were filled with newer deposits and became the stream valleys which we know today. Besides the ridges and valleys in the Hondsrug region many other traces of geological history can be seen.



### Megaflutes

As explained above, the Hondsrug and other smaller ridges in the Hondsrug region were all created in the Saalian Ice Age. The ridges consist of layers of sand which in the ice ages were covered with boulder clay. During the Weichsel Ice Age this was in turn covered with more sand.



### **River systems**

During the Saalian Ice Age broad valleys were created parallel to the ridges, deeply eroded by rivers of meltwater. In the Weichsel Ice Age cover sand was deposited and in the Holocene they became filled up with peat. This is how the stream valleys were formed. On the eastern side is the Hunze valley and on the west side the Drentsche Aa and the upper reaches of the Overijsselse Vecht.



### **Water gaps**

In two places the Hondsrug was cut through by water gaps, created like the meltwater valleys during the two last ice ages. These are the Voorste Diep near Borger and the Besloten Venen between Glimmen and Noorderlaren. Where these flow out into the Hunze valley we find sandurs or outwash plains.



### **Collapsed pingo's**

In the Weichsel Ice Age pingo's were formed through frost in the surface. They are now mainly present as marshy, round depressions or small fens. There are hundreds of collapsed pingo's in the Hondsrug region, often found in small clusters.



### **Ridges of cover sand and blown sand**

All over the Hondsrug the sand layer on the surface is predominantly cover sand deposited in the Weichsel Ice Age. These deposits are not evenly distributed but form ridges, arches and outcrops often clearly visible in the landscape. Where the cover sand has been blown by the wind – as is the case in some places in the Hondsrug region – we find deposits of blown sand. This is caused by wind and rain in places where there is no longer any vegetation.



### **'Hoogveen' bogs**

During the Holocene peat deposits appeared in the valleys between the ridges. Particularly to the east and south of the Hondsrug were layers of bog several metres deep. Almost all were later exploited by turf diggers in the peat colonies. Only in a few places was the peat left untouched, as in the Bargerveen in the southeast of Drenthe.

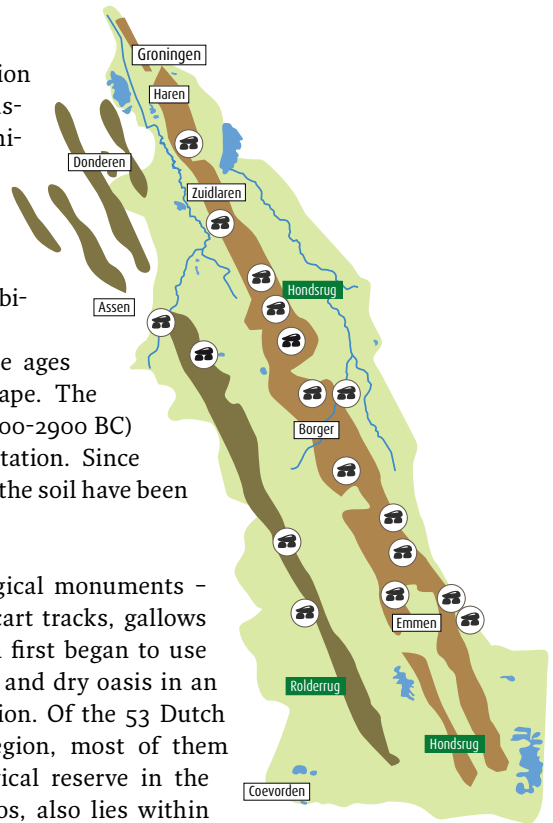
## 2 Visible archaeology

The landscape of the Hondsrug region has been inhabited by man since prehistory, firstly by hunters. The hunted animals - mammoth, woolly rhinoceros, aurochs - now live only in our imagination. Just as mysterious, but still visible, are the traces of habitation and burial monuments left by later inhabitants.

During the first millennia after the ice ages man made little mark on the landscape. The arrival of the Funnel Beaker Culture (3400-2900 BC) marked a period of permanent inhabitation. Since that time, changes to the landscape and the soil have been caused by man.

The locations of the visible archaeological monuments - hunebeds, burial mounds, urn fields, cart tracks, gallows hills and celtic fields - show how man first began to use the Hondsrug as a place to live: a high and dry oasis in an otherwise boggy and impenetrable region. Of the 53 Dutch hunebeds, 48 lie in the Hondsrug region, most of them on the Hondsrug. The only archeological reserve in the Netherlands, the Strubben-Kniphorstbos, also lies within the borders of the UNESCO Geopark.

Moreover the ridges have been used for thousands of years as connecting routes from north-west to south-east because of their favourable situation, high and dry, yet close to water over a long distance. Apart from the probable prehistoric route along the hunebeds and burial mounds there are also clear indications of use by the military and for trade. Many myths and stories cling to these routes. Even the routes we know and use today are often oriented on the ridges, examples being the N34 highway, the Hondsrugweg in Emmen and the Rijkstraatweg in Haren.



### Hunebeds

The iconic hunebeds are tombs dating from 3400-3000 BC, built with large erratic boulders from the Saalian Ice Age. Here the people of the Funnel Beaker Culture laid their dead. There are 48 within the Hondsrug region.



### **Burial mounds, urn fields and cremation mounds**

Burial mounds were used from 2850 BC until about 200 BC. The oldest date from the Single Grave Culture and the Bell Beaker Culture (2850-2000 BC). The dead were buried with their everyday possessions. Burial mounds continued to be used in the Bronze Age after 2000 BC. Urn fields date from the late Bronze Age (1200 BC) when people were no longer buried but cremated. Cremation mounds date from the Iron Age (800 BC).



### **Cart tracks and prehistoric routes**

Cart tracks or carriage tracks are relics of the medieval route over the Hondsrug between Coevorden and Groningen. They are clearly visible from higher ground, or particularly from aerial photos. Although the prehistoric route itself no longer physically exists, it can be traced along the entire Hondsrug through a chain of prehistoric relics such as burial mounds and hunebeds.



### **Celtic fields**

Besides hunebeds and various types of burial mounds, celtic fields are the only visible remains of prehistory in Drenthe and Groningen. They are rectangular agricultural fields in which houses stood and they date from the late Bronze Age and Iron Age



### **Peat roads and sacrificial bogs**

Peat roads are prehistoric routes through the peat bogs, made from tree trunks or wooden planks. Dates vary considerably from place to place. The peat road near Nieuw-Dordrecht from the New Stone Age is a good example. In total five examples are known in Drenthe. Sacrificial bogs are relics from the Roman period or sometimes older. They are small fens, sometimes collapsed pingos, in which objects were placed as an offering.



### **Huisplaatsen**

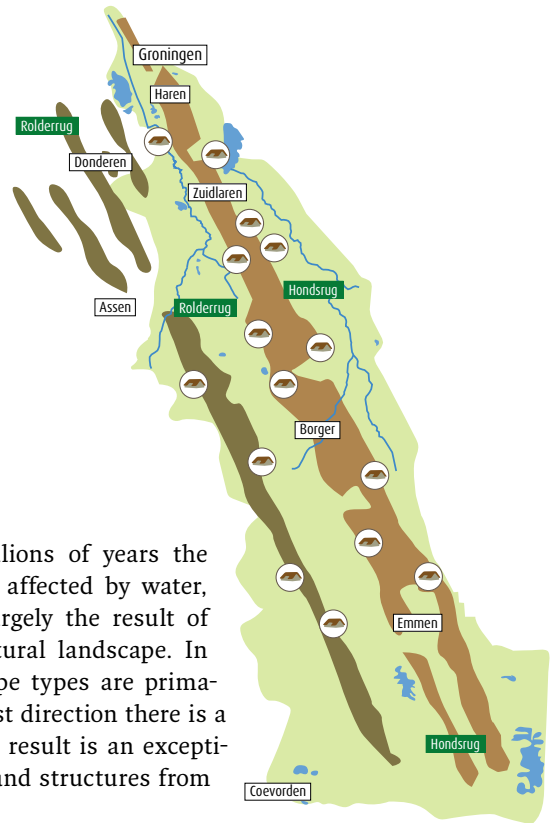
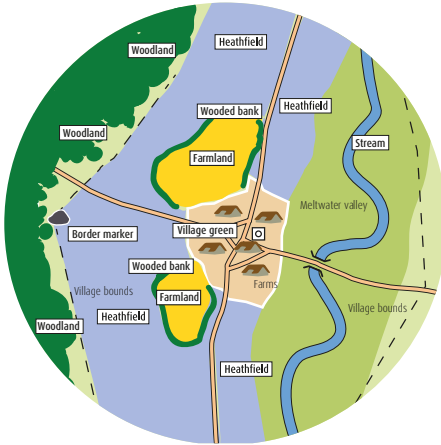
These are 'primitive' peat knolls or mounds which are found in the Hondsrug region only near the Paterswoldsemeer and the Hoornseplas. Most have disappeared. The buildings which sometimes stood on the knolls dated from the Middle Ages.



### **Redoubts and fortifications**

All over the Hondsrug and on some of the smaller ridges are strategically located historical fortifications. Some can still be seen and some have left hardly any traces in the landscape or in written histories.

### 3 Cultural landscape



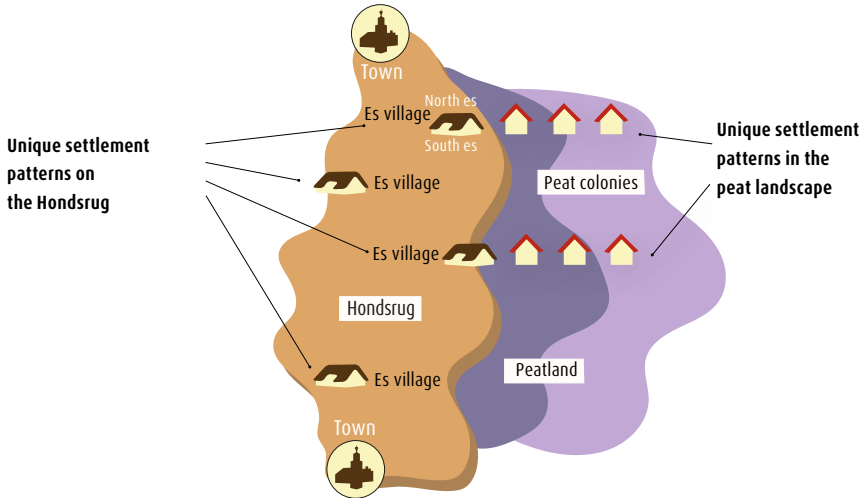
Despite the fact that in the last millions of years the Hondsrug region has repeatedly been affected by water, wind and ice, today's landscape is largely the result of human influence: what we call a cultural landscape. In the north-south direction the landscape types are primarily homogeneous while in the east-west direction there is a great diversity of landscape types. The result is an exceptional landscape layered with elements and structures from diverse periods of history.

During the Middle Ages the 'esdorp' landscape arose on the ridges and in stream valleys. This was a self-sufficient agricultural system in which the village with its common land(s), agricultural and arable land, hayfields in the stream valley and waste ground formed a dynamic whole. Although this system later fell into disuse and the landscape was modernised in later centuries, the esdorp landscape can still be seen in many places in the Hondsrug region. From a culturally historic point of view, what above all makes the region special is that the shape of the Hondsrug led to the es villages appearing on opposite flanks, diagonally opposite each other. The villages almost always have a north es and a south es, because of the proximity of the stream valley and the characteristic fertile soil on the flanks. This is unique when compared to other es villages where there were often only a west- and/or an east es. Moreover there is a link between the es villages on the east side of the Hondsrug and the villages which grew up later when new land was brought into cultivation.

The landscape along the eastern flank of the Hondsrug clearly shows where land was cultivated at the edge of the peat bogs. Large-scale new cultivation also took place in the peat colonies in the ancient river valley of the Hunze. Typical for the Hondsrug region is the steep transition from the mainly wooded Hondsrug to the much lower and more open region of the peat colonies. Towards the south the landscape changes

from former peat cultivation into the Bargerveen, one of the last and largest uncultivated peat regions in the Netherlands.

## Uniqueness of the settlement pattern in the Hondsrug region



The varied cultural landscape of the Hondsrug region means that there is also a great variety of flora and fauna. Because of the relatively large difference in altitude between the Hondsrug and the Hunze valley, and the soil structure, the spring water on the eastern side of the Hondsrug is rich in minerals and has a constant temperature. On the western side the transition to the stream valleys is less linear and less steep so that the spring water is poorer. On top of the ridges, where there is no spring water, there are natural areas primarily fed by rainwater. These conditions have led to large and small natural areas, each with its own flora and fauna and therefore its own distinct character. A number of these areas have been granted the status of Natura 2000: the Drentsche Aa and Drouwenerzand, Bargerveen, Elperstroom and Zuidlaardermeer. That means that 5 of the 14 Natura 2000 areas in Drenthe lie within the UNESCO Geopark.



### Settlement pattern

Es villages can be found elsewhere in Drenthe, but nowhere are they so systematically positioned as on the Hondsrug and the Rolder/Sleener ridge. They lie on the flanks of the Hondsrug like a chain, all equally close to the wet valleys and the high and dry ridge. The village 'essen' often lie to the south or north of the village centre.



### **Peat cultivation in the Hunze valley**

On the eastern flank of the Hondsrug, in the Hunze valley, there were once extensive areas of peat. In the Middle Ages small-scale cultivation took place on the edges of the peat by the Hondsrug villages on the sandy ridges. Later, from the 14th century, and starting in the north, cultivation of the remaining peat along the Hunze began. What now remains is an open peat-colony landscape lying at right angles to the Hondsrug.



### **Visible relief and contrast**

In a number of places the difference in altitude between the Hondsrug and the meltwater valleys can distinctly be appreciated in splendid vistas or on roads or meadows across a slope. In some places also, such as on the flanks of the Hondsrug and on the borders between sand and peat, there is a stark contrast between the open peat landscape and the small-scale landscape of the villages.



### **Wetlands in the stream valleys**

In the valleys of the Drentsche Aa and the Hunze, in and close to the rivers, lie very special natural treasures, the wetlands. The stream systems, for instance those in the Drentsche Aa region, are still exceptionally unspoiled. They also hold natural underground reservoirs of fresh water, a major source of drinking water for both Drenthe and Groningen.



### **Regions with unique flora and fauna**

Unique and diverse fauna and flora can also be found on the Hondsrug. 5 of the 14 Natura 2000 nature areas in Drenthe lie at least partly in the Hondsrug region. These are the Zuidlaardermeer Lake area, the Drentsche Aa area, Drouwenerzand, Bargerveen and Elperstroom.

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