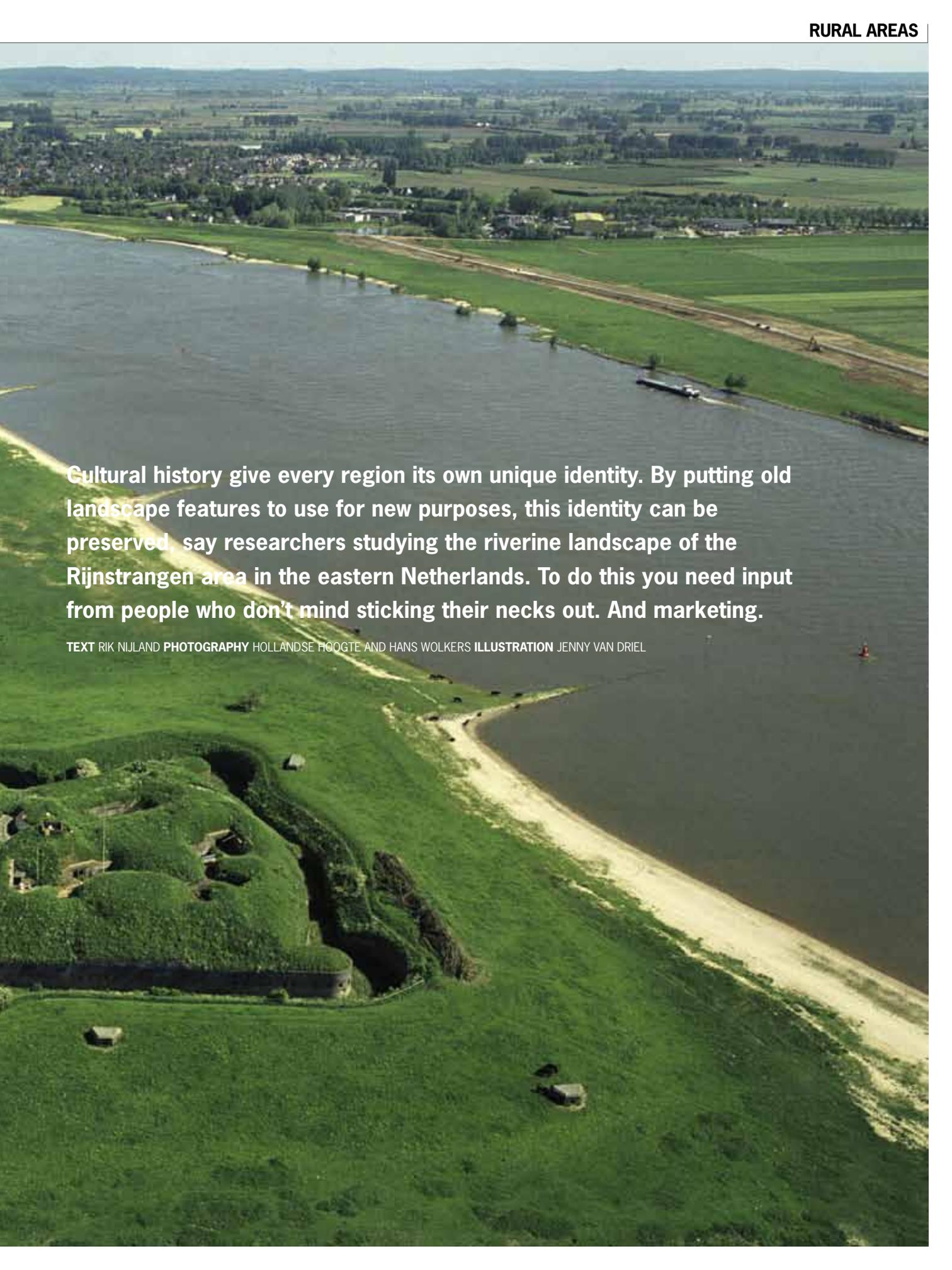
An aerial photograph showing a wide river flowing through a green landscape. On the right bank, there is a large, circular, earthen fortification structure, likely a historical site. The river has several boats and barges. In the background, there are residential areas and industrial buildings. The sky is clear and blue.

NEW FUNCTIONS FOR CULTURAL HISTORY FEATURES

Capitalizing on history



Cultural history give every region its own unique identity. By putting old landscape features to use for new purposes, this identity can be preserved, say researchers studying the riverine landscape of the Rijnstrangen area in the eastern Netherlands. To do this you need input from people who don't mind sticking their necks out. And marketing.

TEXT RIK NIJLAND PHOTOGRAPHY HOLLANDSE HOOGTE AND HANS WOLKERS ILLUSTRATION JENNY VAN DRIEL

As soon as John Mulder (64), cultural heritage researcher at Alterra, part of Wageningen UR, drives into the Rijnstrangen area between the Rhine and the Waal rivers in the eastern Netherlands, he doesn't stop talking. He notices flood gullies, earthworks and dike houses, ridges, overflow channels, and cross-dikes built by villagers at the end of the middle ages to hold back the water if the river dike broke in the neighbouring village. Between them, river and humans have formed a varied landscape here. Not that this is obvious to the untrained eye looking at this cultural landscape north of the Waal river, between the settlements of Lobith, Oud Zevenaar and Doornenburg castle, just across the Pannerden canal. But with Mulder's running commentary providing one enthusiastic story after another, you won't miss it. It was 30 years ago that Mulder first visited this district with a colleague from the former Stiboka (a foundation for soil mapping), in search of traces of Roman settlements. The passion that was borne then now shines out of the report *Key to the past, key to the future*, compiled by Mulder together with Ferdinand van Hemmen of the Bureau for Landscape History in Huissen and Marije Tilstra of consultancy firm Royal HasKoning. At the request of the province of Gelderland, the three municipalities in the area and the Rhine and IJssel water board explored the question: what is the cultural-historic value of the area and how can this be exploited? 'Cultural history gives the area its identity and it's a calling card, but it can also play a role in inspiring new developments', says Mulder at De Panoven, a property just south of Zevenaar. 'The owner has restored this old brick and roof tile factory from 1850, which is next door

to his hotel, and turned it into an information centre about the brick industry. And he rents out the drying shed as group accommodation. So a piece of cultural heritage that was going to pot has been given a new lease of life by this private initiative', says Mulder. 'Did you know that the Rijnstrangen area was the cradle of the Dutch brick industry?'

TOURISM POTENTIAL

The district has great potential for tourism, for example for walkers or cyclists, say the writers of the report. All the more so if the region does more to cherish and emphasize its cultural history. This means putting disused old features to use for new purposes. These would vary from reintroducing the steam engine in an abandoned pump house to creating a hiking route taking in the earthworks and fortifications erected as defences during the Dutch war of independence in the 16th and 17th centuries. 'You can bring the cultural history to life even more there by offering supplementary information via smartphones', suggests Mulder. Such information has a nationwide appeal, in his view. 'The Rijnstrangen are riddled with the traces of events that had a far-reaching impact on our national history as well as the history of our waterways.'

This was where, in the 1630s, Johan Maurits and Fredrik Hendrik successively besieged the Schenkenschans fortress, which had fallen into Spanish hands. It was also where, in the 'disaster year' of 1672, French King Louis XIV's troops crossed the silted up Rhine almost unopposed. This was then such a weak point in the national defences that the decision was taken in The Hague to dig the Pannerden canal, in-



The rope ferry provides a taste of **traditional means of transport**.



Old farm polders form the basis for **new nature areas**.

‘Cultural history is a source of inspiration for new developments’

BELVEDERE

In the *Belvedere memorandum* of 1999, the Dutch government acknowledged the value of cultural heritage in the Dutch landscape for the first time. Many provinces picked up on the theme. For example, the province of Gelderland issued the *Belvoir* policy paper a year later, expressing the aim of conducting a heritage policy in which spatial, economic and cultural interests would reinforce and inspire each other. The research on the *Rijnstrangen* was carried out with a Belvoir grant. Meanwhile, the *Belvedere* memo has been followed up with *Opting for character, visual heritage and space*, in which the cabinet outlines its strategy for the period up until 2015. The main implementing body for this policy is the Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency, under the ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

initially as a defence line but later also to reroute the Rhine and as an essential part of the series of water-based defences called the New Dutch Water Line. And it was here, in the 17th century, that the Waal river changed its course in a northerly loop, threatening to merge with the Rhine. ‘If that had happened, Leiden and all the larger towns in the west of the country would have been in big trouble’, says Mulder.

FORT PANNERDEN

The prototype and showpiece for the water management and military importance of the district is the recently restored Fort Pannerden, which safeguarded the steady flow of water to the water line. According to the authors of this report, this location should grow into a major attraction. This is one of their 19 suggestions for how to highlight the area’s cultural history and stimulate the local economy. The suggestions range from new hiking routes to a large-scale plan for digging a new channel between the Upper Rhine and the course of the old Rhine – if that can be done safely. This would create scope not only for emergency water storage in times of flood, but also for constructing some top-end housing and restoring the lost harbour at Lobith for pleasure boats or perhaps as a boatyard for the restoration of old ships.

It is easier to capitalize on cultural history in the cities than in the countryside, says Eric Luiten, professor of Cultural History and Design at the Technical University of Delft. Luiten, a Wageningen alumnus, was one of the speakers at the congress on the ecological and economic value of cultural history hosted by Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences at the beginning on >



An old farmhouse lives on as a **country home**.



A former groundwater seepage pool now serves for **water storage**.

January. 'Architectural heritage in the city is popular with companies or with people in the creative professions who are looking for a special place to live or work. That is more difficult in a rural area; you can't put buildings to new uses if there is no interest in doing so.'

Luiten himself became well known through his involvement in the restoration of the New Dutch Water Line. Luiten: 'To make a success of a project of this sort, it is important that people who don't mind sticking their necks out feel part of a kind of movement, and feel they are working together on a local revival. It has to be a kind of childhood dream – a restaurateur who pursues his dream of setting up shop in a fort in spite his bookkeeper muttering, 'Do you know what you are letting yourself in for?'' The second requisite is good marketing, Luiten is convinced. 'For the Water Line there is an organization that promotes the forts and the events laid on in them.'

It has not yet reached this stage in the Rijnstrangen, though, as councillor Jos Lamers from the Rijnwaarden municipality makes clear. Collaboration between the surrounding municipalities is gradually increasing, but his efforts to map out a canoeing trail for nature-lovers, for example, have run up against a veto from the state forest service.

ENTREPRENEURS INTO ACTION

Lamers is very impressed by the report. 'You often get all sorts of claims being made in a scientific study like this, but without much link with everyday practice. In this case, there are concrete recommendations in the report which we, or entrepreneurs, can take up', says the councillor. The report also draws the attention of local

residents to the value of the cultural history of the area. 'By linking its conservation with economic developments, you create a sound basis. If you are dependent on grants or sponsors, conservation is a lot less secure in the long term', says Lamers. He tries to get this message across to restaurateurs and other entrepreneurs in the area, to inspire them into action. For example, there is still a lack of accommodation in the area, although the number of bed & breakfasts is rising rapidly. 'I could imagine that at some point we will apply for the status of UNESCO World Heritage site, as the report suggests, but it is too early for that now. The idea that the Rijnstrangen is such an exceptional area still has to take root.'

The question is, though, whether this idea is likely to take root, especially among the young. After all, cultural history is traditionally the preserve of the over-55s, isn't it? John Mulder, no spring chicken himself, responds as though he's been stung. Rubbish. OK, he admits, it might not be so easy to interest young people in the finer details of historic field patterns. 'But just ask them: where would you rather go shopping, in Amersvoort or Almere? The vast majority will go for the historic city centre of Amersvoort. That is somewhere where you are immersed in cultural history. In the countryside too, cultural heritage contributes to a local identity and colour, and people are proud of their district. And that is appreciated, by young people as well.'

The Dutch-language report *Key to the past; key to the future – the rich cultural history of the Rijnstrangen as a driving force in economic revival. An evaluation of qualities and opportunities* can be found at www.gelderland.nl ■

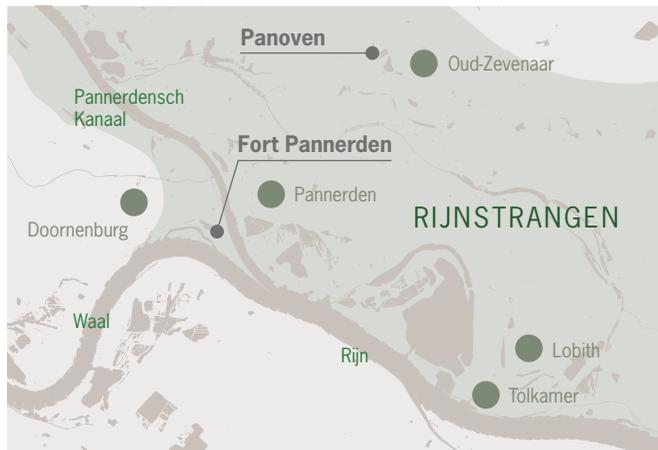


A skip train shows how the old kilns worked.



A fortification that is now in use as a winery.

The Rijnstrangen research area



BRINGING CULTURAL HISTORY TO LIFE

Crumbling or even totally lost pieces of cultural history can sometimes be revived by means of 'transposition': retaining cultural history while putting it to contemporary uses. This sort of thing has gone on for centuries: old river inlets or pools gained new functions as part of a defence canal, for example. According to the report's authors, there are also modern ways of drawing more attention to cultural history, even if they only provide a glimpse or a faint echo of the lost heritage. An art work featuring sails, for example, at a spot where a mill once stood, a barn converted into a house, or a defence construction that now forms a footpath. 'Attention to cultural history does not have to mean restoring things and keeping them the way they were', says John Mulder. 'The point is to preserve an identity, but the Netherlands is not an open-air museum.'

'It has to be a kind of dream come true for the entrepreneur'



The remains of brick kilns are integrated into a **rambling route**.



The flooded chapel gets a new lease of life in the **playground**.