



## **Weichselian Aeolian Geoheritage Top 20 of the Netherlands**

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The Netherlands are known world-wide for its engineered landscapes, its deep polders and bulb fields. The deep polders, up to more than 5 meters below sea level, originated by reclaiming peat lakes and peat quarries made for fuel. Its bulb fields are situated on levelled permeable dunes on which the precise water management is possible that growing bulbs requires. The Waddensea and -islands are less widely known (except by German bathers), although they are a World Heritage. The Waddensea is a highly pristine tidal landscape that already occurs along the Dutch coast for over 10,000 years and an important Natura 2000 area. The Wadden islands have an interesting history of erosion and re-growth and old cultural landscapes that show the interaction of land use and small-scale differences in geology and geomorphology during different cultural periods. Therefore, it is time to change the international perception of foreign visitors to The Netherlands and add the high variety of its historical landscapes, partly pristine and partly old cultural landscapes, to its tourism qualities.

The poster presents a Top 20 of a less spectacular but another internationally important Dutch landscape: the coversand sites of the Netherlands. The Top 20 is selected by Geoheritage NL's Platform Aardkundige Waarden.

The coversands evolved during the Late Weichselian, when the Netherlands was not covered by land ice and for a long period of time was part of a polar desert. The coversand landscape with dunes of 0,5 m up to 15 metres is not spectacular, but very characteristic. The coversands comprise of more than half a kilometre broad and 40 kilometre long dunes, series of river dunes as well as isolated dunes. The coversands and related Holocene drift sands make up about a quarter of the Dutch landscape. Over a century ago more than half of this landscape still had its pristine topography. Now less than a few percent is remaining. Especially the few remaining heathlands on coversand are an important geoheritage because they have the most pristine geomorphology and soils. Other important coversand sites occur in neighbouring Germany and Belgium, which were part of the same Weichselian polar desert environment, but all countries in land ice covered Northern Europe have coversand occurrences. We propose to organize an international IAG – ProGEO- INQUA - meeting in spring 2017 to discuss the European coversand heritage and its management problems.