How does the Landscape tells the Story of the Great War?
A Non-Invasive Landscape Archaeology Approach

Hanne Van den Berghe - Department of Geography (supervisor: Veerle Van Eetvelde)

Introduction

During the Great War the impact on the landscape in the Western part of Belgium alongside the front line was enormous. In spite of an increase in World War I-related excavations and inventories of war relics, little is known about the exact nature and extent of the buried heritage from research on a landscape scale. This project combines archaeological research with soil sensing and landscape analysis to acquire the archaeological preservation of WWI heritage. The main question is: “How can we characterise the buried heritage of a former war zone within the present landscape using a non-invasive methodology?” As result we aim an interactive cartographic assessment model that represents the possible presence of remains of the war, taking into account as much as parameters as possible.

Research area

The study area covers the entire Western Front on the Belgian territory, from the North Sea coast to the French border, and including both the Allied and German hinterland. Three transects were selected, covering three typical landscape types, each with different strategic importance:
(1) Nieuwpoort (Newport)
(2) Ieper (Ypres)
(3) Heuvelland (Mount Kemmel)

Methodology

Survey of WWI landscape (LA)
- Visual assessment of WWI landscape (LA)
- Survey of WWI landscape (LA)
- Survey of pre-WWI landscape (LA)
- Typochronical research (RSA)
- Spatial analysis (RSA)
- Inventory and analysis of WWI aerial images (RSA)

War traces detected by GSS and RSA are fed back to present landscape and change analysis (LA).

Results

Amount of changes

Witnessing elements

Conclusion

A lot of elements in the landscape are preserved or reconstructed and tell the story of the Great War. In the highly dynamic landscape the best conserved relics are in ancient and stable land uses (especially pasture and woodland). By means of an interdisciplinary approach it is possible to characterise the buried heritage in a new way.

Contact: HanneN.VandenBerghe@Ugent.be

www.wo1.ugent.be

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