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Title: Ancestral heaths : reconstructing the barrow landscape in the Central and Southern Netherlands
Issue Date: 2013-11-21
Chapter 14

Conclusions: answers to the research questions

14.1 What did a barrow landscape look like and what was the vegetation (history) around barrows?

From the Late Neolithic onwards barrows were built in open spaces that were covered with heath vegetation. The heath the barrows were raised in originated from before the barrows were built and must have been maintained by heath management activities before and after the barrows were built. Management activities most likely involved grazing and possibly also burning and sod cutting. On the one hand these activities might have been applied intentionally to maintain the heath. On the other hand maintenance of the heath might have been a side-effect to the agricultural activities prehistoric man carried out in their everyday life. The oldest barrows were built in heath areas with an average distance to the forest (ADF) varying from 50 m up to 150 m. These heath areas were often connected to each other, forming long-stretched heath areas with a length of several kilometres, while in the late Neolithic A long alignments of barrows were formed. From the Late Neolithic B barrows onwards barrows were also built outside these alignments. These barrows too were built in heath areas with an ADF of 50 to 150 m. At the same time the long-stretched heath areas were maintained as well, while barrows in the alignments were re-used or new barrows were added to the alignments. The open spaces the youngest (Middle to earlier Late Iron Age) barrows were built in might have been larger in size, with an ADF that could reach 500 m. The barrow heath was surrounded by deciduous forest. In the relatively dry parts of the environment this deciduous forest was fairly open of character and consisted mainly of *Quercus* (oak) and *Tilia* (lime; from the Bronze Age onwards partly replaced by beech *e.g.* *Fagus*) with probably *Corylus* (hazel) profusely present at the forest edge. The forest in the wetter parts of the area was dominated by *Alnus* (alder).

In summary, the barrow landscape must have been dominated by managed patches of heath surrounded by open forest. These heath areas contained one or more barrows and were often connected to each other, forming passage ways in the landscape. The barrow landscape was a stable, managed mosaic heath open-forest passage landscape that was must have been maintained as such for many generations.

14.2. Were barrows built on ancestral grounds? What is the relationship with pastoral zones?

Based on the data that are currently available, discussed in the previous chapters, it is most likely that barrows indeed were built on ancestral grounds. Most barrows were situated in pastoral areas that were not only grazed when the barrows had been built, but probably also prior to the barrow building. None of the investigated barrows was built in areas that were very recently cleared especially
for the construction of a burial mound. No indications have been found that barrows were built in the near vicinity of a settlement or an arable field, but in all cases barrows were built on land that had been in use by prehistoric man who could very well be the ancestors of the builders.

14.3 What was the size of the open space barrows were constructed in and what was the distance to the forest?

Open spaces barrows were built in varied in size from small, with an average distance to the forest of 50-100 m, until rather large, with an average distance from the barrow to the forest of 300-500 m, although the latter has only been found in the relatively young Early Iron Age barrows of the Echoput. Most barrows were probably built in open spaces with an ADF of approximately 50-150 m. Although the forest might have been rather close to most barrows, the heathland area barrows were built in could still have been relatively extended. Long-stretched heathland areas with a length of several kilometres were probably not exceptional. Such extensive heathland areas already existed in the Late Neolithic and continued to exist for thousands of years.

14.4 What was the role of barrows in the landscape? How can the history of the barrow environment be linked to that of the natural and cultural landscape in the surroundings?

The role of barrows in the landscape of the central and southern Netherlands appeared to have been twofold. First, they occupied a special place in the landscape. Barrows were built in heath areas that were probably at a distance from settlements and arable fields. Visibility seemed to have played an important role. Second, they were part of the daily life of prehistoric man. The barrow landscape was included in the economic zone of farming communities in the area, while the heath areas were used as grazing grounds. Prehistoric landscape seems to undergo impressive changes from the Neolithic to the Iron Age (and further on), when prehistoric man gradually changed it to a cultural landscape. The heaths of the barrow landscape, however, probably were very stable elements in this changing landscape that existed as such for thousands of years.

14.5 Supplying Staatsbosbeheer with advice and suggestions, to aide in reconstructing the original environment around barrows for purposes of tourism

In the previous chapters has been attempted to sketch what the barrow landscape of the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC in the central and southern Netherlands looked like. In Chapter 1 (1.2) the societal significance of this barrow research has been stated. Combined with the theses of Bourgeois (on the genesis of the barrow landscape; Bourgeois 2013) and Wentink (on the social and ideological identity of the dead; Wentink in prep.) this thesis should provide a most detailed possible story about the barrow landscape, the barrows, who and what is buried inside the barrows and who built them: a story that could be told to the public. The owners of Dutch nature reserves want to present the barrows to the public in their original environmental context (if possible). Therefore they are interested in what the original environment looked like, information which would enable them to adjust their management and development regime [to achieve this original environment as much as possible].
The barrow landscape as reconstructed in the previous chapters has provided a general view on what it must have looked like in reality. The reconstruction pictures with circular patches of heath are simplifications of what the barrow landscape must have been looked like in reality. Nevertheless, they must certainly give a good impression of the visual impact of the heathlands barrows were built in. For the owners of nature reserve areas that want to include barrows in their development and management this would be a good starting point. To show the public what the barrow landscape looked like they should be situated in a heathland area in such a way that the barrow (or barrows) is well visible when entering that heathland area.

The size of the heathland differed from case to case and the size of the area that should be reconstructed is probably more dependent on present day environmental and logistical circumstances. Current environmental circumstances are different than they were in the barrow period. Present day acidification, fertilization and dehydration have changed the soil conditions. Consequently, these factors will be of great influence on the maintenance of heath areas and surrounding forest. As for heritage management: only the barrow itself is considered a monument and in some cases the area around the barrow to a maximum of 10 metres (see 1.2). This research has shown that a barrow was inextricably linked to the heathland around it. The heath was most likely wider than 10 m around the monument. In addition, the excavation of Oss-Zevenbergen (Chapter 12.1) and the Echoput (Chapter 8.1) have shown that the area around a barrow could be of great archaeological value (post hole structures) and it does make sense to enlarge the protected environment around the barrow to preserve valuable Dutch cultural heritage. This thesis provides a guide line of what the barrow landscape probably looked like in general and it is now up to the landowners (and the cultural heritage management) how to use it.