

wasteland in the forest

The Destruction of the Bingeberg

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site of investigation

Sand Quarry Hauset Flög

coordinates

50°43'12.2"N 6°04'44.6"E

place

Hauset, Raeren, Belgium

time period

1976 - today

Our research field „Material Memories“ deals with the retelling of a material that has either already been extracted or is still being extracted. Our research brought us to the village of Hauset in eastern Belgium and to the blog of Walther Janssen, who documented the events surrounding the sand pit in the Flög. Hauset is located on the border between Germany and Belgium. There is a large sand deposit on the Bingeberg in the Flög, which forms the southern end of the huge sand field under the Aachen forest.

Municipal reform and exploitation

After a municipal reform in 1977, Hauset had joined the municipality of Raeren and only three months later the sand mining was a done deal. The Hauset municipal council had voted against it the previous year. The contract was quickly awarded to the Falkenberg company from Kettenis; they cleared the old pine forest and destroyed the former Bingeberg to get at its sand. The main part of the sand extraction was completed after only two years, despite numerous protests from the citizens. However, since the quarrying was only approved on the condition that the sand pit had to be renaturalised again by the Falkenberg company after the operating period, the local residents could still dream of a redevelopment of the Bingeberg.

The fine Hauset sand was mainly used by farmers to fill in terrain and for road construction.

Illegal waste disposal and investigation

In 1979, fires took place in the excavation pit, and in the following years more and more doubts about a professional renaturation arose because more and more sightings and reports of unclean materials in the excavation pit appeared. Thus, the former sand pit became an illegal landfill, with rubbish consisting of bulky waste, building rubble and other household waste. However, there was neither proper preparation of a landfill nor a permit. Many residents complained and protested against the expansion of the sand pit. The municipality of Raeren tried to register the landfill, but the attempt failed and the Hauseters were left with the waste. Further dumping was stopped, but after the operation ended in 1986 and the Falkenberg company came to light through dubious dealings in other sand pits in Brenhag, concerns about the waste mountain in Hauset also increased.

After closer investigations by environmental authorities and an emerging green movement in Belgian politics through the Ecolo party, the concern was finally confirmed and unclean materials were found in the sand pit. The Falkenberg brothers were convicted, but neither the waste problem nor the responsibility was finally resolved and after further attempts to backfill failed, today there is still unsecured and unclean material under a thin overgrown layer of pine trees and shrubs.

Today's situation and task

Today, at first glance, the pit looks almost like a harmless overgrown hill. The clear edge of the sand wall is still visible, but most of the rubbish has been overgrown by new nature. The entrance area looks narrow and only on closer inspection does one notice all the rubble and rubbish. Reinforced concrete pillars, road parts, plastic sheeting and all kinds of household rubbish pile up into giant mounds. There are signs of rubbish everywhere, obviously in the form of a refrigerator or inconspicuously as part of the new landscape. The steep slopes to the sand wall have partly slid down and trees and bushes have fallen.

Renaturation seems almost impossible today, and environmental assessments have also been stopped by the Walloon Region because removing the rubbish would entail unaffordable costs.

Our work illustrates the problems that the removal of a material often entails. The removal of the sand left a huge hole, which was then filled with a lot of rubbish. Some of the waste also needed sand for its production, and so the story of the sand pit at the Flög ironically describes where a linear production and economic system leads in the long run. Without a cycle, the demand for natural resources and the waste produced increase linearly with each other. Pictures like the one in Hauset are no exceptions.



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