



*tilt (2001-2021)*

On the way to “my” fence I am following the narrow roads through the Flakkee polders. On my left hand are fertile fields with an alternating cultivation of potatoes and grain. On my right, a steep green dike that completely hides the landscape behind it from my view.

I park my car on top of a culvert along the road. To the right, in front of the dike, are wooden steps. Sheep are grazing here. Their worn path meanders on the crest of the dike.

I am climbing up and once I am on the dike, it happens: suddenly a vast landscape of mud flats and salt marshes reveals itself. Here flows, or rather, flowed the Grevelingen. On the distant horizon are Dreischor and Zonnemaire.

Whenever I raise my head above this dike, and I have done this for over 20 years, the landscape behind it comes as a surprise. Sometimes thousands of geese are frightened off, or there is just a single egret. Another time I surprise a pack of deer or I suddenly hear a lark sing.

Though the Grevelingen is separated from the North Sea by the Brouwersdam, the water level still fluctuates. The salt marshes behind the dike can be completely dry in the summer months or, if it has rained a lot and the wind has pushed up the water, all the land can be wet and swampy. Together with the changing of the seasons it gives this area an enormous dynamic.

Ever since my first visit, in 2001, I have also noticed a fence. *The fence*. This fence runs roughly perpendicular to the dike. In the first pictures that I took there, the fence showed up. In these pictures I could recognize how the fence explained the dimensions in a scaleless alternation of textures, like an archaeologist who photographs a pack of matches in order to be able to trace the true scale of his find.

What in a strange way explains the presence of the fence is the natural vegetation and the relief: it looks like they seep through the fence.

Though I could never fully understand the function of the fence. Yes, the fence will stop the large grazers from walking around it on the right. Heck cattle and Konik horses. But without the fence there was already the natural boundary of land and water, which in my opinion was adequate.

The question of the function of the fence still haunts me. What's inside and what's outside?

One day I met "The Man" from Staatsbosbeheer on the dike. I asked this ranger: "Why the fence?" He told me that the fence serves the Northern Vole, a very rare and therefore protected species of mouse. A fence for mice. According to the ranger, the large grazers trample the mice's passages and burrows (to the right). the mice live on the left and are protected by the fence. The large grazers remain on the right side and human beings draw a sharp line in between. I have a hard time believing this explanation.

The dike runs north-south at this spot and as said, the fence is perpendicular to it. There must be an E in the wind for me to be able to photograph the fence from the dike while flying my kite. Such an east wind forces me to stand with my kite spool sheltered at the foot of the dike. Because my camera is hanging in a fixed construction under my kite, the angle at which the fence comes into view always changes according to the wind direction.

The fence can therefore appear parallel to the frame, but also run diagonally to the right or the left.

Two years ago, Covid lockdown and fence came "together". I was scanning old negatives in my archive and found the images in sequence through time and tides. I supplemented these series with work made in the past two years. As soon as there was an E in the wind, you could see me driving to "my" fence.

December 2021 / Text: Gerco de Ruijter / Translation: Ton Haak / Image: *t / t* (2001)