

BOOKLET 02
FIELDWORK NOTES

LOCATION:

V a a l s - K e l m i s -
P l o m b i è r e s

DATE:

2 6 - 2 7 / 0 2 / 2 0 2 2

DISTANCE:

4 3 , 1 k m

SPENT THE NIGHT AT:

K e l m i s

WEATHER:

S u n n y

Our 'subterranean' expedition starts at a symbolic place: the Three Countries Point. We quickly leave the border tourists behind us and head south for a day trip that will take us zigzagging into and past Kelmis. Only just started we pass a series of old border stones separating the former Neutral-Moresnet from Preußen (the later Belgian-German border). Slightly less regular but perhaps just as noticeable are manhole covers, which we see under our feet in the woods between Vaals and Kelmis. As if we were in an urban environment!

Railway line 24 between Antwerp and Aachen is an inconspicuous presence, piercing through the Vaalserberg, but near Moresnet it becomes clearly visible because of the viaduct that raises it above the landscape. We feel small between the huge concrete columns on either side of the Geul, where we ourselves sink into the marshy meadows on our way to

Kelmis.

The soil becomes rockier near Kelmis, where signs point out all kinds of historical events and where efforts are made to explain why the situation is as it is today. We find it difficult to match the historical pictures with today's landscape, but also to get a grip on what is considered valuable and why: when does pollution cease to be pollution and become valuable and exceptional 'nature'? What is and what isn't accessible and why? Is there a danger to our health or are we a danger to fragile flora?

One historic building clearly stands out among the contemporary warehouse buildings: the Museum Vieille Montagne, the centre of former mining activities. We continue our hike through the forest and come across regular industrial remnants, we assume, such as steel poles sticking out of the ground, but also former

mine entrances and picturesque meadows and waterfalls. After some time, Schloss Eyneburg reveals itself, a castle that sparks the imagination, which must surely be the most medieval-looking castle in the Three Countries Park. The last path leads us straight back to Kelmis, past vertical rock faces where we can't answer the question of whether it's natural or man-made, and where the next question immediately comes up: does this really matter?

The next day we head for Plombières. A clear goal (Maison du site minier), a clearly mapped out route in a clearly defined area that rather distinguishes itself from its surroundings. We regularly meet other hikers, this area seems to be part of the daily life of quite a few people living in the immediate surroundings. Here too, some areas are closed off, and it seems that both pollution and fragile natural value are reasons for this. A special

part of the route is the place where the Geul river disappears into a rock face via several waterfalls; impressed, we forget to ask ourselves whether this too was an intervention in the service of ore mining. The general impression that we get from both the former mining areas in Kelmis and Plombières is that they only recently are generally considered as areas with valuable nature. For us it's hard to not think of walking across and on top of area that quite recently was perceived as dirty soil. Inaccessible, too, but for totally different reasons.

