

BOOKLET 03  
FIELDWORK NOTES

**LOCATION:**

H a m b a c h - \_\_\_\_\_  
I n d e n \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:**

1 2 - 1 3 / 0 3 / 2 0 2 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**DISTANCE:**

4 2 , 7 k m \_\_\_\_\_

**SPENT THE NIGHT AT:**

E l s d o r f \_\_\_\_\_

**WEATHER:**

S u n n y \_\_\_\_\_

Remy drops me off on the north side of the Sophienhöhe and drives to a small car park at the west side of the hill.

We will meet later on, after I finish a nice loop of running: up, to the top and down again. The fact that this is the largest artificial mountain in the world motivates me even more than usual.

It is not difficult to find a pleasant cadence. The slope is 'artificially' regular due to a perfectly constructed zigzagging path that regularly crosses an equally artificial stream, for which small bridges have been constructed that enable crossing. Once at the top, where I meet Remy, the summit is less straightforward than we expected. There are several paths, there is a small watchtower but also a wooden tower that is not accessible and acts as a kind of landmark. We experience a strange sensation when we arrive at something that looks like a 'Celtic tree circle', a kind of roundabout in which different types of trees have been planted and

from which roads start off in different directions. One of them ends at the rim of the RWE quarry, the direct reason for the existence of the hill we are standing on.

As there is no view of the quarry from here without entering a restricted area, we decide to descend and take the car to a viewpoint that is accessible. A surreal image! A hole of about 15 by 15 kilometres, so many earth layers and history exposed but also disappeared. The thought that we are looking so deeply into the earth is overwhelming. In the depths of the quarry, there also appears to be the lowest point in Europe, 299m below sea level, right next to the largest artificial mountain (302m above sea level). We stare blindly into that hole and do not seem to realise or be able to estimate how big and deep it really is, as if it exceeds our spatial and imaginative capacities. The question: 'What on earth are we doing with this

planet?’ also forces itself on us.

The rest of the afternoon we wander through the deserted Manheim and the half-abandoned village Morschenich. Most inhabitants of the latter have been relocated to a newly constructed village, Morschenich-Neu, just a couple of kilometers further. We hang around on a former motorway, once rerouted so the excavation site could be enlarged. What also has been ‘eaten’ is a large part of the Hambacher forest, although massive protests saved some of the remaining age-old trees. For good? Nobody knows. On our way to the hotel, we do realise that we’ve come across numerous tubes coming directly from the ground: perhaps part of a system that continuously pumps away groundwater? From now on we’ll see them everywhere in this region. In the evening, we talk to an inhabitant about the impact of this quarry. Spatially speaking, it is gigantic, but in his opinion the quarry does not speak

to the collective imagination. A man-made hole, so large that it is visible from space but also so inhumane that it's hard to develop any kind of affection for it. And maybe this is also the reason why people just don't seem to feel emotionally connected to the quarry, more than the rational answer about RWE being one of the largest employers in the region. At least, that's the impression we get, confirmed by this particular encounter during dinner.

The next day we visit Inden, where there is a smaller opencast quarry and where leisure development has been transforming the industrial site into an accessible landscape for several years already. The Indemann, a steel watchtower in the shape of a chequered man, overlooks it, flanked by fries and soft drink outlets. Here too, the quarry, the industrial activity, but also the recreational-tourist 'layer' seem to have little relation to the surrounding area. The Indemann stands

with his back to Inden. According to the designers, it shows the inhabitants the way to the future, but that future still seems to be no more than an uncertain void and a gaping hole.



