

Sunken castle



- 1 Since May, you can virtually visit a sunken castle where it once stood in the Dutch village of Elsloo. A new archaeological “spearhead” has been opened there: a literal iron spear in the landscape that serves as a gateway to the past. Visitors can use their mobile phones to dive into the history of the drowned castle, showing the possibilities of combining augmented reality and archaeology for local heritage.
- 2 Elsloo Castle was once an imposing building with which the lord of Elsloo could enforce his power. He exercised control over the area and charged a toll on passing ships on the nearby river. But in the end, the river defeated the castle. The Maas moved slowly towards the castle, and the building eventually disappeared underwater. The remains are still there today, but invisible beneath the surface.
- 3 In 2004, underwater archaeologists examined the ruins, discovering that they were scattered all over the place, because of the construction of the nearby Juliana Canal. But the stacked stones with the mortar still in between show how impressive the castle of Elsloo once must have been. At least, for those who are willing to have a look underwater. 20, you can now also experience the castle’s history without getting wet. The new archaeological spearhead offers every passer-by the chance to discover the drowned castle via augmented reality on their phone screens.

- 4 “This is one of the countless historical stories that show our age-old bond with the Maas”, says director Bert Mennings of the Limburgs Museum. The local museum, together with Rijkswaterstaat, the Cultural Heritage Agency, the Province of Limburg, and several municipalities, is the initiator of the subproject of the Archeo Route Limburg. “The Maas clearly shows two faces here. On the one hand, as the lifeline of Limburg – with shipping and fertile soil on the banks. On the other hand, as a threat: eventually, the castle disappeared in the rising water.”
- 5 The ten new archaeological spearheads in the region, all part of the archaeological route, tell the story of the central role of the Maas in the region’s history. Instead of telling the history from a national perspective, the route is more focused on local elements and their influence on the heritage of the region. For example, the oldest traces of people have been found near the Maas, the first farmers in the Netherlands settled on the Maas and in the centuries that followed, powerful towns, villages and castles arose there. By combining 22 with archaeological remains, these forgotten bits of history resurface again and create new bits of narrative for local heritage to build upon.

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