

‘Walravens-ide’

Archaeological traces of a deserted fishing settlement

In Raversijde, situated a few kilometres to the west of the town of Ostend (West-Flanders, Belgium), the archaeological traces are hidden of ‘Walravens-ide’, a deserted, rural, late medieval fishing settlement. A profound archaeological research, conducted by the VIOE and the Province of West-Flanders, made it possible to build up new ideas about living, working and habitation in the past.



The remains of a house with a brick fireplace, photographed around the middle of the 20th century by André Chocqueel.



A few imported goods, found in Walravensijde.



Spectacles made of bone were an important prove of literacy and trade in the village.



Three representative houses based on the archaeological traces are part of the museum.

The site exists out of 2 successive areas. The 13th-14th century settlement was situated on the present beach and was, prospected by amateur-archaeologists from the late 19th century onwards.

The later fishing village was built behind the sand-drifting dunes, as a consequence of the repetitive floodings. It was reinforced by a new dyke (the “Gravenjansdyke”). This site covers an area of 10 hectares, of which 2 hectares have been investigated so far.

Based on the material remains – houses, adjacent structures and archaeological objects – archaeologists tried to interpret and characterize this fishing community.

A lot of important data were revealed. Except for fishery, the fishermen from Walravensijde also participated in trade. This is proven by the large amount of imported goods, but also by the artefacts used for reading, writing, counting, weighing and measuring.

The site was densely populated, with one building every 300 m². This is also attested in other late medieval fishing villages. The menu of the inhabitants contained a lot of fish. 37 fish species were recognised among the numerous fish bones of which herring, cod and flatfish are the most common.

During the research, remains of toys, piracy, agriculture, peat digging and religion were also attested.

Today, the results of the research are visible in the Provincial visitor’s centre of Walravensijde, located in the area of the former settlement.



The archaeological traces of houses provide a lot of data on the orientation, the size, the used building materials, etc.



A reconstruction of the densely built village with in the front the 3 evocated houses.