

# Language Accessibility of the Dutch Limes

Helping visitors understand a World Heritage candidate



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## Introduction

The *limes* is the latin name, coined in the 19th century, for the former border of the Roman Empire. In the Netherlands, it stretches along the Rhine, from the present-day German border, through Utrecht and Leiden, to the North Sea at Katwijk aan Zee. Along the river were forts (*castella*), watchtowers, villages and ports, linked from c. AD 90 by a road on the southern bank. The frontier runs through many European countries, across Northern England and from the North Sea to the Black Sea, making it the largest archaeological monument in Europe. Sections of the frontier have been nominated and recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Hadrian's Wall, in England, was declared World Heritage in 1987, the Upper German-Raetian Limes in 2005, and Scotland's Antonine Wall in 2008 (Breeze *et al.* 2018, 18). The Limes in the Netherlands is now being proposed as a candidate for World Heritage, together with the adjoining section in the German *Bundesland* Nordrhein-Westfalen. A decision on inclusion in the list will be taken in 2021. The proposal for the Dutch section has been a collaborative effort between the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed/RCE), and the provinces of Zuid-Holland, Utrecht and Gelderland, combined in the Dutch Limes Collaboration (Nederlandse Limes Samenwerking/ NLS), together with 26 municipalities and Nordrhein-Westfalen.

One argument for this inclusion is that it will provide social and economic opportunities and be used as a tool for providing knowledge and attention to visitors (Limes Werelderfgoed- Added Value of World Heritage). This paper will investigate the ways that World Heritage Status correlates to tourism, and what the current state of accessibility is to information on the Limes to foreign (non-Dutch speaking) tourists. To what extent do 'World Heritage' and 'Outstanding Universal Value' titles have on accessibility to the world's collective heritage? Should it involve the inclusion of people on an international level instead of only local or national, and ultimately, should this accessibility mean the inclusion of English (as the best-known foreign language used by tourists in the Netherlands), German (in relation to the collaboration with Nordrhein-Westfalen) and possibly other non-Dutch translations?

To answer these questions, an investigation was conducted on the current state of accessibility of attraction points relating to the Limes; specifically, which language they are available in. These points, including reconstructed monuments, museum exhibits, information panels, biking and walking routes, and Internet sites relating to the Limes, were visited and inspected. For practical reasons, the investigation was limited to the province of Zuid-Holland. Additionally, Interviews were held with a number of spokespeople for the Roman Frontier in the Netherlands. Onno Helleman is the Head of Heritage and Space for *Erfgoedhuis Zuid-Holland (Zuid-Holland Heritage House)*, member of the advisory committee of *Romeinse Limes Nederland* and former intern chairman of *Romeinse Limes Zuid-Holland*; Mariëlla Beukers is the Public Outreach Project Manager for *Romeinse Limes Nederland*, and Erik Graafstal is director of Museum Hoge Woerd in Utrecht and municipal archaeologist for that city.

The purpose of this study is not for the promotion of the Anglicization of all historic attraction points in the Netherlands, but to determine if the inclusion of a World Heritage Site should mean greater language accessibilities.

## UNESCO World Heritage

Accessibility is a key concept when determining cultural significance of a site. The values that people place on heritage are partly related to their accessibility to it. Information facilitates our appreciation of heritage, enables personal experiences to develop, and offers an opportunity for our own interpretation (Georgieva 2013, 4). Personal interpretation is important for the Limes, since so much remains unexcavated; the lack of visibility needs to be compensated by capturing the visitor's imagination. This is why many projects are underway to bring the Limes to the attention of the public. The Roman Limes is the largest archaeological monument in the Netherlands, but many are unaware of this, and unknown makes it unloved (Limes Werelderfgoed- Roman Limes for Public). Such projects include the Interpretation Framework, a presentation tool for the Limes on location, and walking and cycling routes.

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Other projects are being proposed to establish the Limes as a tourist destination, including a Rhine boat tour on a replica of a Roman barge, and an increase in hospitality establishments near the sites, such as restaurants. These projects are expected to increase tourism and the economies of municipalities. Speaking with Onno Helleman of *Erfgoedhuis Zuid-Holland* and *Romeinse Limes Nederland*, he describes this situation as a chicken and the egg dilemma. 'Outstanding Universal Value' needs to be proved in order to get on the World Heritage List, but the inclusion on this list is what the Limes needs in order to improve how people value its importance.

According to the Management Guidelines for World Cultural Heritage Sites: ICCROM, 'in presenting and interpreting the historical story of the heritage site, it is necessary to be selective and to decide which elements will be of most interest to the kinds of people that the site will attract' (Feilden and Jokilehto 1998, 100). This raises the question; do we know what kinds of people are visiting Limes sites? It is only Dutch nationals or foreign tourists? They go on to say 'the media used to interpret the history of the site should be chosen to be as effective as possible for all visitors' (Feilden and Jokilehto 1998, 100). Media can be exploited in this case as a cost effective option for gaining attention to all visitors. It is much easier to create a translation for a webpage or attaching a QR code to an existing sign, rather than recreating a sign to include multiple translations.

The World Heritage List identifies sites in different State Parties that are recognized as resources of international significance, thus meriting special acknowledgement and protection (Feilden and Jokilehto 1998, 13). International significance and 'Outstanding Universal Value' hold the assumption that there is interest on a global scale, and should therefore be accessible to an international audience, not just a Dutch speaking one.



## Spokespeople

The issue of language accessibility is of importance to many spokespeople of the Limes. Onno Helleman, Mariëlla Beukers, and Erik Graafstal all see the importance of providing multiple translations to attraction points. Onno Helleman<sup>1</sup> sees two obstacles: funding in the first place, and possible doubts about the necessity of translations in relation to the uncertain amount of foreign visitors. German and English are two languages that would be beneficial for inclusion, since the Limes extends into Germany, and because English is the unofficial second language of the Netherlands. He believes there is an obligation for these sites to be accessible to non-Dutch speaking visitors and it should be a project for the future; however, the funds that would be required for such a task are currently unavailable, as are the statistics for the amount of interest non-Dutch tourists have in the Limes.

Mariëlla Beukers<sup>2</sup>, the Project Manager of Public Outreach for *Romeinse Limes Nederlands* also sees an obvious necessity for translations. Her work involves using social media to help the public interact with Limes projects and raise awareness for the inclusion in UNESCO World Heritage. She believes the inclusion on the list will raise awareness of Roman history in the country, but there is a lot of work that needs to be done in order for there to be an economic benefit through tourism. Right now, tourist organizations are only marginally involved in the Limes. She believes that organizations should work together to create a bigger coherent story about the Limes that continues as an unbroken line through the country and into Germany. Right now we have a number of separate sites, but little accessible information on how the sites relate to each other. The UNESCO inclusion makes translations absolutely necessary. German and English are languages that should be represented alongside Dutch. She believes that tourism may not be directly impacted by the inclusion in the World Heritage List because the Dutch section of the Limes is unlike the Hadrian's or Antonine's Walls, since there is lower visibility here. Visitors do not come to the Netherlands for the Limes or Roman history, but if there was greater visibility to sites and less of a language barrier, perhaps these sites will gain popularity among tourists.

Finally, the opinion of Erik Graafstal<sup>3</sup>, director of Museum Hoge Woerd in Utrecht, a high-tech presentation centre on the site of a former Roman fort. Mr. Graafstal previously worked with the World Heritage nomination team, and believes that there is a necessity for greater language inclusion, particularly in English and German. The inclusion of German is particularly important since the nomination involves German Limes sites. Some work has already been done in this area; the Castellum Hoge Woerd now includes Dutch, German and English translations. He believes that the inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List will have a huge impact on tourism, citing the Upper German-Raetian Limes, which received recognition in 2005 (German Limes Commission) and subsequently improved in tourism.

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<sup>1</sup> In person interview, January 15, 2019, Delft.

<sup>2</sup> In person interview, January 17, 2019, Utrecht

<sup>3</sup> Phone interview, January 18, 2019

## Site Visits

During this study, seven Limes attraction points in Zuid-Holland were visited: Park Matilo and Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden in Leiden, Park Arentsburg, site of the Roman town of Forum Hadriani, in Voorburg and Museum Swaensteyn, also in Voorburg, the roadside memorial in Valkenburg, Kalla's Tower monument and the Katwijk Museum in Katwijk aan Zee.

Starting in the west of Zuid-Holland, Katwijk aan Zee is the most coastal town of the Limes and home to the



Figure 1: Kalla's Tower monument, Katwijk aan Zee

also a small display on Roman pottery found in the area. The museum website is in Dutch ([www.katwijksmuseum.nl](http://www.katwijksmuseum.nl)) but the museum itself offers audio guides for non-Dutch speakers.

Along the N206 highway from Valkenburg to Leiden, there is a roadside monument to the Roman Limes (fig.3), including an information panel and concrete cypress trees. The information panel here was also entirely in Dutch (fig.4). The Torenmuseum Valkenburg houses a permanent exhibit dedicated to the Roman castellum, Praetorium Agrippinae, which stood in this area. The museum has limited visiting hours and a planned visit did not take place, but the information inside and the website is in Dutch only. ([www.oudvalkenburgzh.nl](http://www.oudvalkenburgzh.nl)).

Park Matilo is a reconstructed Castellum near the junction of the Oude Rhine and Nieuwe Rhine in Leiden. The park contains seven signs, only one of which offered an English translation. Three signs included a QR code (fig.5), which directed me to the homepage for the park, which again is only offered in Dutch ([www.parkmatilo.nl](http://www.parkmatilo.nl)). The one sign that was offered in English described a brief overview of the site (fig 6).

The next point I visited was the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden. The National Museum of Antiquities is a great starting off point for visitors interested in the Limes because of its permanent exhibit on the Romans in the

historical Brittenburg, a Roman fort now long washed away by the sea. Near the beach there is a monument to Kalla's Tower (fig.1), a reminder of the Emperor Caligula's alleged visit to the site in 40 CE. Here is the starting point to the walking and cycling routes along the Limes, and a signpost providing information for the Limes is located here. It is all in Dutch only. (fig.2). In the city, the Katwijk Museum houses a 16th-century edition of the Tabula Peutingeriana, a medieval copy of a Roman road map. There is

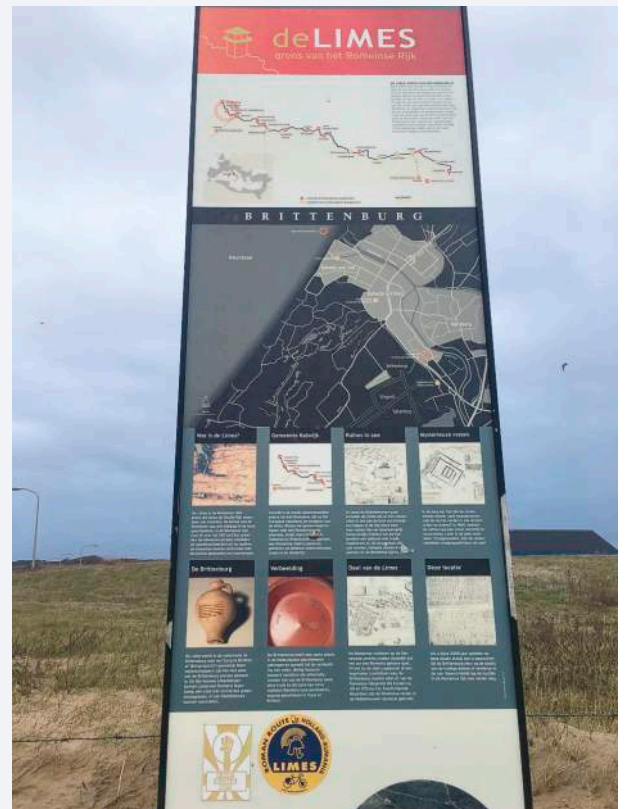


Figure 2: Katwijk aan Zee, Limes signpost





Figure 3: Roman milestone replica, Valkenburg N206

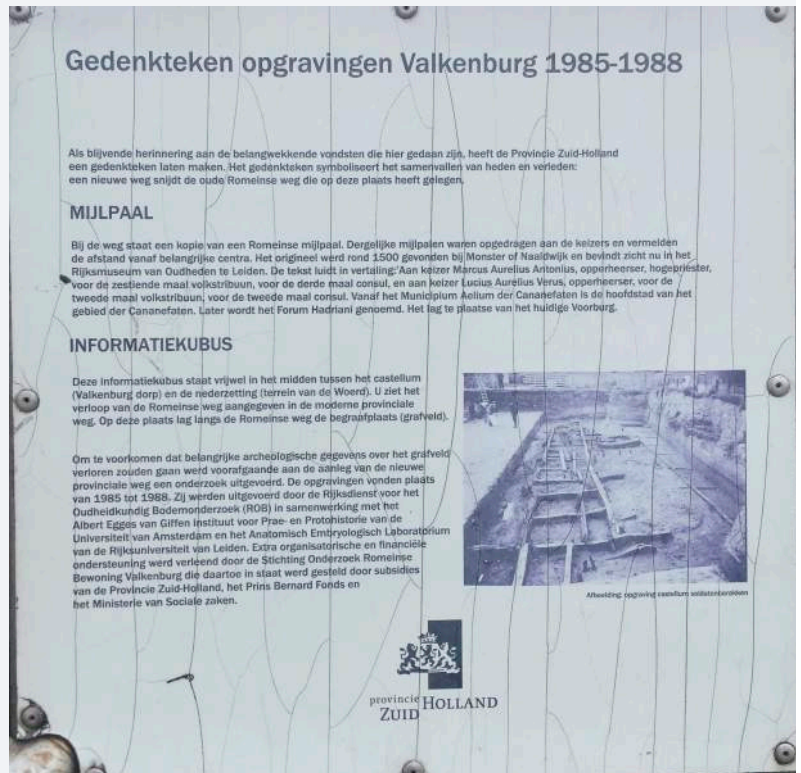


Figure 4: Signpost, Valkenburg N206

Netherlands, and because translated signs and audio guides are available for non-Dutch speakers. A touch screen display shows a map of the sites along with Limes, from the website [www.romeinselimes.nl](http://www.romeinselimes.nl), which, however, is available in Dutch only.

In Leidschendam, finding the Canal of Corbulo is difficult for an English speaker with little knowledge of Dutch. The best guide seems to be the bike route in the online brochure, *Fietsen Langs de Limes*, which is entirely in Dutch. The canal is a “well-kept” secret according to Evert van Ginkel of TGV *Teksten en Presentatie*, who designed the reconstruction in 1993. This greatly limits accessibility to non-Dutch tourists interested in seeing the site.

Figure 5: QR Code, Park Matilo, Leiden

Figure 6: Sign with English translation, Park Matilo, Leiden





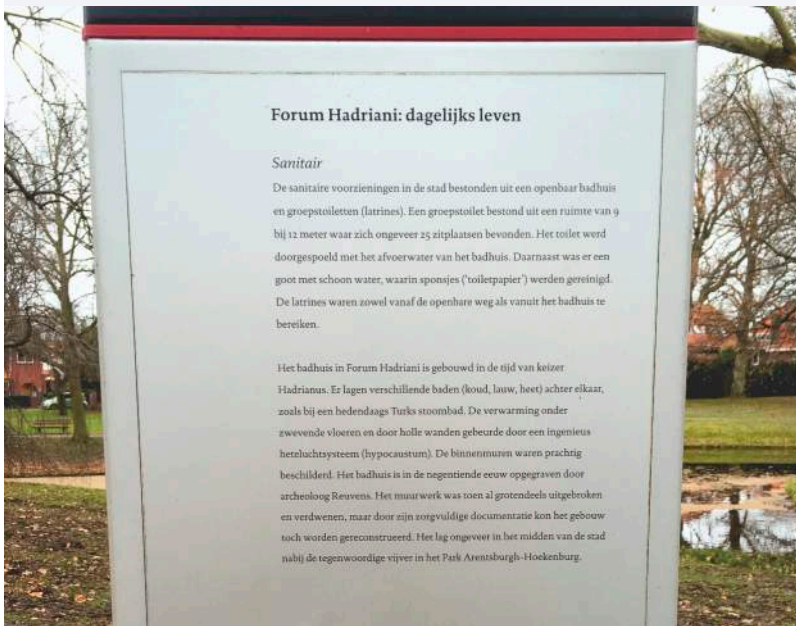


Figure 7: Forum Hadriani Sign, Voorburg



Figure 8: Roman monument, Voorburg

The last site on the list was Park Arensburg, Voorburg, the site of the Roman town of Forum Hadriani, parts of which have been excavated around 1830 and 1915, while other parts are still buried here. Again, the signposts here are all in Dutch (fig. 7). Nearby in Voorburg is the Museum Swaensteyn, which houses a Roman exhibit. The information provided in this exhibit is, as well as the others in the museum, all in Dutch.

There are many more Limes attraction points in Zuid-Holland, including the Museon in The Hague, sites dedicated to Castrum Albanianae in Alphen aan den Rijn, Archeon theme park (where Roman barges from Zwammerdam are being reconstructed) and Archeologiehuis Zuid-Holland in the same town (see Table 1 for more information on these sites, their webpages, and languages they are available in). Sites in the provinces of Utrecht and Gelderland should equally be considered in the question of language accessibility, but could not be dealt with in the scope of this study.

There are multiple walking and cycling routes along the Limes available online, one of which was granted the title of Route of the year in 2019 ([www.romeinselimes.nl](http://www.romeinselimes.nl)). However, these again are all in Dutch. One English site for cycling the Limes is [www.holland-cycling.com](http://www.holland-cycling.com). When comparing the Limes to other recognized heritage sites with walking routes, such as Hadrian's Wall or Antonine's Wall, the Limes is not as established for tourists. There is available information in languages other than Dutch. The 2018 publication "Frontiers of the Roman Empire: The Lower German Limes" is written in Dutch, English and German (Breeze *et al.* 2018). Comparably, there are many more sources relating to the German Limes available in English, such as those set up by the German Limes Commission ([www.deutsche-limeskommission.de](http://www.deutsche-limeskommission.de)).



## Recommendations

The inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List brings global attention to a country's heritage. One way to increase this attention, along with the economy through tourism, is to provide accessibility to foreign speaking visitors. To know what is needed to accommodate this group, we should firstly establish how many visitors the Limes receive, and what their backgrounds are, admittedly not an easy task. Knowing the languages spoken by these visitors would provide insight into which languages should be provided.

The Netherlands hosts 15.5 million tourists a year, according to a 2016 survey (NTBC Holland Marketing). It is unknown how many of these tourists visit Limes related sites for the purpose of learning about the Romans in the Netherlands, but it is probable that the Limes is not the first reason for their visit to Holland; however, this could change with the attention of World Heritage status. English is widely recognized as being spoken and understood not only by the majority of the Dutch public but by most foreign tourists as well, so it would be the first language to consider for translating Dutch information into. The inclusion of German also seems recommendable, since the Limes continues on into Germany, and the UNESCO proposal is collaborated with Germany. The World Heritage Information Network provides this language suggestion:

**“Although we expect and encourage site maintainers to use the local language in displaying information about a World Heritage site, we also wish to encourage the site to maintain pages in English or French, the two “working languages” or the World Heritage Convention” (Guidelines for Partnership in the WHIN)**

French, however, is not regarded as ‘second language’ for Dutch inhabitants and tourists alike as is English, though of course French visitors would be pleased with this service.

Since information panels are already established at Limes sites, the simplest solution until funds are secured for new signs would be to include QR codes that direct visitors to translated websites, which has also been suggested by Onno Helleman, Mariëlla Beukers and Erik Graafstal. Another solution is to provide translation pages to websites and publications. More cycling and walking routes available in other languages might also increase tourism at these sites.

## Conclusion

Hadrian's Wall, the Antonine Wall and the Upper German-Raetian Limes have all achieved World Heritage Status. The inclusion of the Lower German Limes in the Netherlands will be a step towards the creation of a transnational World Heritage Site (Breeze *et al.* 2018, 18). The Dutch Limes is special in that it follows the Rhine, instead of a walled landscape, but also because hardly if any authentic remains are still visible. Once World Heritage Status is achieved, more social and economic opportunities should be available, but first there are obstacles in the area of language accessibility that need to be overcome. For these sites to benefit from tourism, they need to be more comprehensible to tourists. There are many English speaking visitors in the Netherlands who could be lacking knowledge in the largest archaeological monument, simply because they cannot understand the information that is available. The German language should also be included since the UNESCO proposal is in collaboration with Germany and because the Limes continues on past the Netherlands into the neighboring country. Most of the sites visited were easy to find, but not easy to understand as a visitor with little knowledge of the Dutch language. The Rijksmuseum van Oudheden is, as a national museum, understandably the most accessible place to gain information on the topic. Speaking with officials working within this project, it is clear that there is a necessity for various languages, but there are certain obstacles in the way, namely time and money.

The inclusion of the Lower German Limes in the UNESCO World Heritage List may well bring attention to the Netherlands' archaeological and Roman past, and boost the economy of Dutch municipalities and provide knowledge to visitors, provided that information is available in their language.

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**Table 1: Limes Attraction Points in Zuid-Holland**

Site	Roman Fort?	Attraction	Website	Language
Katwijk	Lugdunum	Katwijk Museum	<a href="https://www.katwijksmuseum.nl/nl/historische-peutingerkaart">https://www.katwijksmuseum.nl/nl/historische-peutingerkaart</a>	Website-Dutch; Exhibit-Dutch +others
		Kalla's Tower	<a href="https://www.langsdelimes.nl/bezienswaardigheden/kalla-s-toren">https://www.langsdelimes.nl/bezienswaardigheden/kalla-s-toren</a>	Website-Dutch; Sign-Dutch
Valkenburg	Praetorium Agrippinae	Road side memorial	<a href="http://www.oudvalkenburgzh.nl/vov_J35/index.php/torenmuseum">http://www.oudvalkenburgzh.nl/vov_J35/index.php/torenmuseum</a>	Dutch
		Torenmuseum Valkenburg		Website-Dutch
Leiden	Fort Matilo	Rijksmuseum Van Ouheden	<a href="https://www.rmo.nl/en/exhibitions/permanent-exhibitions/netherlands-in-roman-times/">https://www.rmo.nl/en/exhibitions/permanent-exhibitions/netherlands-in-roman-times/</a>	Website-Dutch& English; Displays- Dutch &English
		Archaeological Park Matilo	<a href="https://parkmatilo.nl/info/">https://parkmatilo.nl/info/</a>	Website-Dutch; Displays-Dutch
Leidschendam		Canal of Corbulo	<a href="http://www.waterwegwijzer.nl/OpenLayers/appl/route/FRouteLimes02.pdf">http://www.waterwegwijzer.nl/OpenLayers/appl/route/FRouteLimes02.pdf</a>	Online Brochure-Dutch
Voorburg	Forum Hadriani	Museum Swaensteyn	<a href="https://www.swaensteyn.nl/en">https://www.swaensteyn.nl/en</a>	Website-Dutch& English; Exhibit-Dutch
		Info Panel- Park Arentsburg	<a href="https://www.awlv.nl/forum-hadriani/het-monument-de-stadsbakens/">https://www.awlv.nl/forum-hadriani/het-monument-de-stadsbakens/</a>	Website-Dutch; Site-Dutch
Den Haag		Museon The Hague	<a href="https://www.museon.nl/en/exhibition/romans-behind-the-dunes">https://www.museon.nl/en/exhibition/romans-behind-the-dunes</a>	Website-Dutch& English
Alphen aan den Rijn	Castrum Albaniana	Roman Julius Albanian Statue		
		Archeon theme park Artwork in city center Info panels	<a href="https://www.archeon.nl/index.html">https://www.archeon.nl/index.html</a>	Website-Dutch& English
		Archeologiehuis Zuid-Holland	<a href="http://www.archeologiehuiszuidholland.nl/en/">http://www.archeologiehuiszuidholland.nl/en/</a>	Website-Dutch& English
Zwammerdam	Nigrum Pullum	Reconstructed Roman Barges	<a href="https://www.langsdelimes.nl/bezienswaardigheden/castellum-nigrum-pullum">https://www.langsdelimes.nl/bezienswaardigheden/castellum-nigrum-pullum</a>	Website-Dutch
Bodegraven		Monument with replica Roman Helmet	<a href="https://www.langsdelimes.nl/bezienswaardigheden/replica-romeinse-helm">https://www.langsdelimes.nl/bezienswaardigheden/replica-romeinse-helm</a> <a href="https://www.raap.nl/pages/RAAPnieuws_Limespark_informatiepaneel_Bodegraven.html">https://www.raap.nl/pages/RAAPnieuws_Limespark_informatiepaneel_Bodegraven.html</a> , <a href="http://www.rtvbodegraven.nl/node/17763">http://www.rtvbodegraven.nl/node/17763</a>	Website-Dutch
		Limespark Brochure		Website-Dutch Dutch



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Table 1: Limes Attraction Points in Zuid-Holland