

The par force hunting landscape in North Zealand, Denmark has been inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage

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On July 4th 2015, a series of three forests in the par force hunting landscape in North Zealand in Denmark was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Throughout Europe, absolute rulers of the 17th-19th centuries designed hunting landscapes in direct connection to their parks and castles. Some were primarily meant for par force hunt (chasse á courre), others primarily for the German Hauptjagd, and the landscapes' design varied after their function. However, while castles and parks have been subject to a wealth of scientific studies and hundreds of beautiful coffee table books, the hunting landscapes have until very recently been more or less neglected. They are perhaps best known from France, where especially André Le Nôtre's landscape at Chantilly became an inspiration for other European hunting landscapes. Therefore, very few studies exist on Europe's heritage of cultural landscapes created by the rulers' hunting practices, and undoubtedly the inclusion of the par force hunting landscape in North Zealand on the World Heritage List will inspire future research in this obviously very rich cultural heritage.

The rather modest Danish par force hunting landscape, which was founded in 1670 and perfected in the 1680'ies, stands out among the other preserved landscapes with its functional and emblematic focus on a strictly geometric design.

With the reforms of the Enlightenment, the ostentatious absolutist's par force hunt was given up in Denmark (1777), and absolutism was abandoned (1849). As in many other European countries, forestry was now considered more important than hunting in the royal forests. Red deer were considered vermin and shot outside the deer parks. In fact the red deer almost became extinct in the entire country. The land reforms of the late 18th century did, however, preserve the hunting roads, which were practical both within and outside the forests, and the economy forbade that they be replaced with new forestry roads as was the case in many German states. Therefore the hunting road system is very well preserved, and may today be seen as an excellent example of the exchange of ideas behind the design of hunting landscapes in the European Baroque.

The Danish Museum of Hunting and Forestry chairs the steering committee, and is designated future site manager (www.jagtskov.dk).



Old map of the par force hunting roads in North Zealand
The roads in the forests are clearly seen .



Arial view to day of par force hunting roads in a forest in North Zealand.



The hunting castle in Jægersborg Dyrehave North of Copenhagen

UNESCO's experts wrote a.o.:

The series covers the former royal hunting forests of Store Dyrehave and Gribskov, traces of connecting roads between them, and the former royal hunting park of Jægersborg Dyrehave/Jægersborg Hegn. The entire former royal forest landscape covered a much larger area with a number of royal castles. The components have been selected as they encompass a completeness of attributes illustrating the development of the Baroque par force hunting landscape as an emblematic and functional spatial entity.

Designed and created intentionally by Man, the par force hunting landscape in North Zealand exemplifies a 17th-18th-century landscape created to perform courtly hunts. Its layout results from the combination of French and German design models based on a central-star grid system, combined with an orthogonal grid subdivision, which optimised its function during the hunt, and makes it emblematic of an absolute European monarch, his role in society, and his reason and power to control nature. The Outstanding Universal Value of the landscape lies in the spatial organisation of the hunting forests, hunting roads, buildings, emblematic markers, numbered stone posts, stone fences, and 16 numerical road names conveying an understanding of the practical application of the design as a means of orientation.

The criteria of Outstanding Universal Value by which UNESCO's World Heritage committee has accepted the series are

Criterion (ii): The par force hunting landscape in North Zealand exceptionally exemplifies how the interchange of Baroque values in Europe influenced developments in landscape design in the 17th-18th centuries, and particularly bears witness to the influence exerted by French and German designed hunting landscapes. These models were adapted to the specific situation of the Danish terrain and to the Danish kings' aspirations. The series illustrates a development in design that evolved alongside the landscape function during par force hunts also in terms of its increasing symbolic significance.

Criterion (iv): As a landscape of power created by an absolute monarch in the late 17th century, the par force hunting landscape in North Zealand exemplifies a significant stage in European landscape design applied to hunting grounds when the rise of scientific thought took place within the context of absolutist ambitions. The orthogonal geometry conceived for its design improved the octagon or circle-based star network used in French or German examples. In its infinite expandability, the orthogonal grid could give equal access to all parts of the forest; differently from radial examples, its diagonals created more than one star point suitable for the rendezvous.