

Utrecht Fort Tour

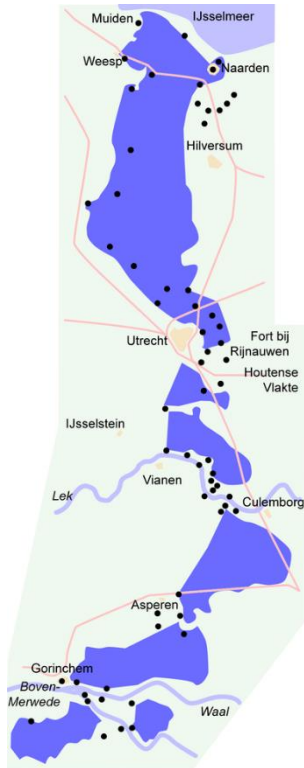
Our tour will guide you along a few beautiful fortresses in Utrecht. The city of Utrecht does have more to offer than just the beautiful city center which is mostly visited by the tourist. We want to show a different side of Utrecht and enrich you with a new perspective on the city we all study in. In this tour you will discover more the edges of the city by bike and learn more about the history of the city. The tour is best done by bicycle. The tour starts at the Zuylen Caste (Slot Zuylen) in the northern part of the city. The tour will guide you past Fort Ruigenhoek, Fort Blauwkapel, Fort Voordorp, Fort the Bilt and Fort Rhijnauwen to the more southern part of the city and ends at Fort Vechten. In the picture below you can see what the tour will look like. The estimated duration of the tour from Fort Ruigenhoek to Fort Vechten is around 1,5 hours.



In case you are not in the possession of a bicycle in Utrecht we advise you to rent an OV-fiets at the central station of Utrecht. It takes around 20 minutes to cycle from the central station to fort Ruigenhoek and around another 20 minutes to cycle from Fort Vechten back to the central station. This makes the tour a bit longer but is our recommendation if you do not have a bike yourself.

Background information

The fortresses you are going to visit are all part of the *Nieuwe Hollandse Waterlinie*, which is a defensive line made of multiple fortresses to protect the biggest part of Holland and the city of Utrecht. It has been in use from 1870 until 1945. The line starts at the Zuiderzee and ends in the Biesbosch as you can see on the map below. The *Nieuwe Hollandse Waterlinie* has been used as a defense strategy four times. The area has been flooded with water as a response to threats of war in 1870 (Franco-Prussian War), 1914-1918 (World War I), 1939-1940 and 1944-1945 (World War II).



The expansion of Utrecht

The establishment of the Nieuwe Hollandse Waterlinie also influenced the development of the city of Utrecht. With the Nieuwe Hollandse Waterlinie the old fortifications and walls to protect the city became unnecessary and thus could be removed to create an opportunity for urban expansion of the city. Between 1830 and 1872 almost the entire city walls were demolished. The mayor in that time was Van Asch van Wijk and together with landscape architect Zocher he planned the urban expansion, renewal and beautification of the city. At first, however little of the plans were realized and only in 1879 the intended expansion of the city was realized by the development of Wittevrouwen, Lombok and Oudwijk.

The forts of the Nieuwe Hollandse Waterlinie also hindered the expansion of the city, mainly in eastward, but also in westward direction. The expansion beyond the forts were limited although the demand for the expansion became so high that in the 90's Leidsche Rijn was established outside of the borders of the Nieuwe Hollandse Waterlinie in the west. But mostly in the east of Utrecht the so called 'Kringenwet' hindered the expansion of the city in eastward direction for a long time. In 1963 the 'Kringenwet' was removed to no longer prevent the expansion of the city. Nevertheless, the expansion remained limited to keep the openness of the fortresses.

Fort Ruigenhoek

Your second stop will be at Fort Ruigenhoek. The fort is a quadrangle with bastions, bombproof barracks, depots and group shelters. Its task was to close the access via the Ruigenhoeksedijk and to protect the quay between two inundation basins. Its task changed during the periods until now. In 1977 Staatsbosbeheers became the owner of the fort. There are plans by the Forestry Commission to give this fort a tourist destination as part of the Noorderpark. The fort is close to a Polder, a landscape reclaimed from water, which is a beautiful area to hike and bike through. Did you know that the construction of this

fort only took one year? Try to figure out in what year it was finished and take a picture with your team representing this number!



Fort Blauwkapel

After Fort Ruigenhoek, you will visit Fort Blauwkapel. The fort was built in 1818 to 1821 as part of the New Dutch Water Line and is one of the largest fortresses on the line. Additional features were built or rebuilt, depending on the new task the fort was getting. During the mobilization for the First World War, the occupation of Blauwkapel consisted of more than 300 men. The fort functioned as an infantry support with trenches, military positions and observation posts. In 1970 the fort lost its function as a defense work. The municipality of Utrecht bought it in 1997 and a plan was drawn up in which living, working and recreation are central. Try to find as many blue objects as you can and make a picture – the sky does not count!



Fort Voordorp

Next you will go to Fort Voordorp. It is part of the New Dutch Waterline, just like Fort Blauwkapel, that lies between Utrecht and De Bilt. The fort was built in the period 1867 to 1871. This fort also had many

military functions, but these were lifted in 1960. For years it served as a storage facility for the Ministry of Defense. Now it has been bought by private individuals and the fort functions now as event location. The fort is currently closed as the owners suffered bankruptcy due to Corona measures. What kind of event would you host here? Make a picture of how it will look like.



Very near Fort Voordorp, there is a very nice little coffee place that is called 'Koffie by Maria', which is great if you want to take a break from all the biking.



Fort De Bilt



Fort De Bilt was erected between 1816 and 1819 to protect the eastern side of Utrecht. Since 1930 the fort has been divided into two parts by a road, the biltsestraatweg. The northern part is owned by ProDemos, a Dutch organization providing education about the democratic system and law, and features an interactive exhibition on prejudice, diversity, bullying and the scapegoat phenomenon. The northern terrain is accessible on Monday's, Tuesday's, and Wednesday's, between 09:00 and 16:00¹. The Southern part is owned by the Royal Military Police and therefore inaccessible to the public. During the second world war the fort was used as an execution site by the German Occupation. Now it's time to play a game: Hide and seek! Play a few rounds to discover the area.

Fort Rhijnauwen



Fort Rhijnauwen is the largest fort in the nieuwe hollandse waterlinie and was erected between 1868 and 1875 to protect one of the weakest points in this defense system; a strip of land on either side of the Kromme Rijn that could not be flooded. This fort is surrounded by nature and protected by staatsbosbeheer, a government organisation responsible for the protection of Dutch nature. The site makes for good hiking grounds. Why do you think the biggest fort was built here?

Fort Vechten

¹ This may differ depending on corona restrictions. Please check <https://prodemos.nl/over-prodemos/contact-en-route/#fort> for opening hours.



Fort Vechten was erected between 1867 and 1870. From 1950 till 1996 it was used by Ministry of Defence as a storage facility. The fort is owned by staatsbosbeheer and offers tours, events and the Waterlinie museum. In the Waterlinie museum you can learn more about the forts you've visited during this tour and the defence system they're part of. Fort Vechten is currently closed due to Corona measures.

This fort is very near Amelisweerd. If you want to, you can go there to rest a bit from the bike tour with a hot chocolate or coffee. This is also the perfect moment to chill with your group.