

THE WHITE FEATHER GANG



A legend from De Langstraat



The White Feather Gang forms part of the Myths & Legends routes

Exciting cycling and walking routes in Brabant

— 43-kilometre cycling route near Loon op Zand —



ROUTE DETAILS

Total route: 43 kilometres

S Start and finish point:
De Zwammenberg
Zijstraat 20, 5176 NG De Moer
dezwassenberg.nl

JUNCTIONS

31 - 26 - 07 - 27 - 49 - 48 - 29 - 28 - 05 - 08
- 09 - 38 - 31 - 55 - 52 - 32 - 37 - 38 - 31

LEGEND SIGHTS

- 1** Ravensbosch Farm
- 2** De Donge
- 3** Boundary post
- 4** Dongen Church ruin
- 5** Tannery Museum De Looierij
- 6** The White Castle
- 7** Galgeneind



THE WHITE FEATHER GANG

Around the year 1720 the inhabitants of North Brabant had been hit hard by poverty. Survival was the only thing that mattered. A gang was formed that terrorised the area, its leader was Black John, Swarte Johannes. The White Feather Gang ('De Bende van de Witte Veer'), its members disguised, plundered farms and robbed the populace. A manhunt ensued, but would the authorities manage to catch the gang members? Who knows, a white feather might give them away...



Myths and legends live on in Brabant. Cycling and walking routes take you past the most impressive places where tales come to life. The White Feather Gang cycle route is a 43-kilometre route in the vicinity of the De Langstraat.

North Brabant around 1720. The population had been suffering under the yoke of Spanish and French occupation for years. Survival was the only thing that mattered. A group of heathens, vagabonds, and deserters formed a wild gang and became the terror of the region. Farms and mansions were not safe from their raiding parties. They sold stolen goods and livestock to local receivers in exchange for clothing, food and weapons. The gang had hidden their camp deep in the impenetrable area between Loon op Zand and 's-Gravenmoer, which at the time was close to the border with Holland. The most notorious and cunning of them all was gang leader Swarte Johannes (Black John). Nobody knew what he really looked like, because Swarte Johannes was a master of disguise. Only the white feather on his hat betrayed that he was a member of the gang.

Gang member Blommerantje was head over heels in love with Swarte Johannes. But he was married to another and Blommerantje, to her anger, had to contend with being his mistress. She secretly made a sandstone head of Swarte Johannes which she carried with her day and night, for those times when he was with his wife or on a rampage. This head now adorns the facade of the Ravensbosch farmhouse (1). You'll discover how it got its place there during this trip.

The gang's crimes went from bad to worse. Otto Juyn was an ambitious drossaard (a government official) who had been sent to the area to put things in order. He started a relentless manhunt for the gang members and their receivers. He and his men found the camp and arrested everyone there. Swarte Johannes managed to escape, but the remaining gang members, including Blommerantje, were put in prison. They were interrogated harshly to get to the truth and most of them ended up on the gallows. The cunning Swarte Johannes evaded arrest by repeatedly crossing the border into Holland. He knew Otto Juyn would not be able to get to him there.



— *The pig screamed bloody murder* —

Until the night that he made a huge mistake. In the pitch dark, Swarte Johannes stole a pig, loaded it onto a boat and set out to cross stream De Donge (2). But the pig screamed bloody murder. Otto Juyn and his men followed the shrill noises and waited quietly at the border post (3) on the bank. As soon as the boat landed in Brabant, they apprehended Swarte Johannes.

Otto Juyn suspected he was a gang member because of the white feather in his hat, but he could not prove it. Swarte Johannes claimed to have found the pig. In his knapsack they found a crowbar and a pistol, but according to Swarte Johannes these were gifts from blacksmith Adriaan Coenen from Dongen. Otto Juyn visited Adriaan Coenen, who confirmed that he had indeed given the crowbar and the pistol to an unknown man. The drossaard smelled a rat. When his men searched the blacksmith's house, they found all kinds of stolen items. These were stored in the church of Dongen (4) and the blacksmith was locked up. He was later hanged for being a receiver. Swarte Johannes disappeared into the dungeon of the White Castle (6), where he was violently interrogated for a year. He told many a lie and some halftruths. But Otto Juyn had no hard evidence that he belonged to the White Feather Gang. Soon, he would have to release him.

— You've found Swarte Johannes —

When Blommerantje was transferred to the White Castle, she recognised Swarte Johannes' voice. Embittered because she never came first for him, Blommerantje grabbed her chance for revenge. In exchange for her own release, she offered Otto Juyn the sandstone head: "If the man you have in there looks like this head, then you know you have Swarte Johannes." And so Blommerantje gained her freedom. Swarte Johannes eventually confessed to sixty crimes. He ended up on the gallows and his corpse was taken to Galgeneind (7). Thus ended the biggest gang that Brabant has ever known. Otto Juyn gave the sandstone head to the farmer from whom the pig was stolen. Because without this pig, Swarte Johannes would never have been caught. And so the head ended up on the façade of the Ravensbosch farmouse (1).

But the stories persisted and still wander around like a memory. Thus, anyone entering the area will hear about The White Feather Gang. It is whispered that the ghosts of Swarte Johannes, Blommerantje, Lucretia de Heydinne, Capiteyn Alewijn Aertappel and Luytenant Peldertje still wander the fields and forests. And if you find a white feather on the trail... well. They may have been very close.



There's more

Various hospitality locations in the region offer special products and activities related to the adventures of the White Feather Gang ('Bende van de Witte Veer'). Want to find out more about this robber gang, the cycling route, related workshops, local produce, menus, activities and events? Then take a look on bendevandewitteveer.nl.



And the De Langstraat region has a lot more to offer. Besides the picturesque fortified town of Heusden, theme park Efteling, National Park The Loon and Drunen Dunes and the river Bergsche Maas, the region offers many unique smaller gems that are also well worth a visit. Do not forget to take a look at bezoekdelangstraat.nl/en, which lists all recommendations, eating and drinking locations, places to stay overnight, routes, and the De Langstraat event calendar. Welcome to De Langstraat: garden of wonder!





Searching for traces of the White Feather Gang

When you enter the border area between Holland and Brabant, you can still feel the ghosts of the White Feather Gang roaming around. Set out on your trip but be warned: if you find a white feather, they might be very close....

Route description

Do you want to know where blacksmith Adriaan Coenen's illbegotten wares were stored? Then follow the directions below to the church ruins in Dongen. You might just find the loot on display like finest treasure...

- Cycle from De Hoge Ham towards junction 08;
- At junction 08, turn right towards Looiersplein and follow the route towards junction 06;
- Turn left into Kerkstraat;
- Continue until you see the church in front of you.

On this route you will also pass Museum De Looierij.
Another place where the gang has left its mark.



CYCLE ROUTE NETWORK

Follow the route from one intersection to another using the familiar cycle route signs. You simply cycle from one number to the next. You will see the intersection numbers on signs at the side of the road. Arrows then direct you on the route to your chosen number.