

**INTRODUCTIE TRILHA DOS HOLANDESES**

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**Joint Project of the Foundation for Exploration  
and Conservation of Monuments of the Dutch  
West India Company (MOWIC), Amsterdam, the  
Netherlands, and the Laboratório de Arqueologia  
da Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (LA-  
UFPE), Recife, Brazil.  
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## THE PROJECT 'TRILHA DOS HOLANDESES'

### I. Introduction

Fort Orange was built by the Dutch in the year 1631 on the Island Itamaracá, of the coast of Pernambuco in North-East Brasil. Successful archaeological excavations were held at the site of the fortress from January until April 2002, as the first part of the 'Fort Orange Project' under auspices of MOWIC and UFPE and with financial support of the Dutch government. Two month into the project, a bad accident happened to the campaign's leader, Dr. Marcos Albuquerque, professor of archaeology at the UFPE. As he was exploring the historical and archaeological aspects of the village of Vila Velha, he fell through a rotten shelf of a small, wooden bridge at the mouth of the river Paripeira, leading to the *Rio da Santa Cruz*, which separates the island from the mainland of Pernambuco. He was not to remain the only victim. In the same week, a four year old boy of the island also fell through the same bridge and, after laying six days in coma in the Hospital Oswaldo Cruz in Recife, had to learn walking again by physiotherapy

This bridge is, in fact, an important item for the inhabitants of the Vila Velha part of Itamaracá, being the connection of this village over the river Paripeira, leading through the mangroves by a footpath to Fort Orange. In fact it is the shortest way to Fort Orange, with nearby the beautiful beach (Praia dos holandeses), the famous Sea-cow gardens (Peixe-Boi Marinha), hotels, restaurants, kiosks and shops. The footpath, "trilha" in Portuguese, is an old one, dating from the times that the Island of Itamaracá was part of "Dutch-Brazil". The bridge, in Portuguese "Portilhão", is mentioned several times in seventeenth-century maps and reports. And indeed, historically, the "*Trilha dos holandeses*", "Path of the Dutchmen", and the original bridge have been constructed by military experts through the mangrove bushes and the swamps, over the Rio Paripeira, to connect Fort Orange with Vila Velha, conquered by the Dutch in 1633 and at that time called *Nossa Senhora de Conceição*. Proudly, this name was changed, from then on, into *Schoppestad*, after the WIC general Sigismund von Schoppe. The Dutch took a great liking to the fertile island of Itamaracá. There were sugar-mills, cattle was raised, and dearly needed vegetables were cultivated.

The Dutch colonial period of Brazil lasted from 1630 to 1654. After an unsuccessful attempt in 1624-1625, the Dutch succeeded in conquering part of the Northeast of Brazil (*o Nordeste*) from the Portuguese in 1630. Until 1654, this region remained under the name *Nieuw Holland* or *Hollantsch Brasil*, in possession of the Dutch West-India Company, *Geoctroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie*, (WIC). All along the Northeast coast of Brazil, the Dutch built fortifications, like Fort Orange on Itamaracá, at strategic positions. Already existing fortifications, like the citadel *Nossa Senhora de Conceição*, were reinforced and extended.

The original wooden bridge had been a strong one. It was replaced only in the beginning of the nineteenth century by a construction in stone, at the time the Portuguese king Pedro I visited the island. This bridge, however, was destroyed by storm and wind and the actual, again wooden, bridge, near the site of the stone one, of which the bridge-heads remain, dates from the twentieth century. Against this background it seems logical that the name of the footpath in the language of the local population still remains: *Trilha dos holandeses*, Path of the Dutchmen.. Also, the mouth of the river *Rio Paripeira* at the Vila Velha side is called: *Porto dos holandeses*, Dutchmen's Harbour. Together with the names of *Forte Orange* and its nearby *Praia dos holandeses*, the names *Trilha dos holandeses* and *Porto dos holandeses* keep the memory of the historical Dutch presence on the Island of Itamaracá alive until the present time.

### **Present function and situation of the bridge and the Trilha dos holandeses:**

The local population lives mainly from fishing, agriculture (coconuts) and tourism. In connection with the latter, some traditional craftsmanship is developed (wood carving, pottery, and ceramic sculpture). The fishermen's wives serve delicious dishes of local seafood, in the shadow of the abundant coconut palms. In the recent past some tourists staying at the Orange Praia Hotel, nearby Fort Orange, have been wounded while crossing the delapidated bridge. Hence, the organisation responsible for showing the island's beauty and ecology by visiting the *Trilha dos holandeses*, cancelled further trips. This to the detriment of the local restaurants and craftsmen of the *Porto dos holandeses* and Vila Velha. A few weeks after the incidents, around the middle of March 2002, the Secretary of Infrastructure of the Municipality of the Island of Itamaracá had the bridge provisionally repaired. The Prefecture of the Community not being a wealthy one, did its utmost. A thorough restoration or even reparation, however, will involve more than a few boards of wood and a can of paint.

## **II. About the Trilha dos Holandeses Project**

The Trilha dos Holandeses Project consists of five elements:

1. Restoration of the *Portilhão*.
2. Archaeological survey of the banks of the *Rio Paripeira*.
3. Restoration of some architecturally important remnants along the *Trilha dos holandeses*.
4. Clean-up of the little beach behind the Carmelo.
5. Production of educational information panels on the environmental elements of the *Trilha dos holandeses*.

1. Restoration of the *Portilhão*.

The restoration of the *Portilhão* (bridge), connecting Fort Orange with the *Porto dos holandeses*

and Vila Velha, is the most urgent element of the project. Because of its vital function (the word "Pontilhão" in Portuguese is used for important connections) it will have an impact on people's daily life, involving the island's whole society.

A calculation of time and costs of the restoration will follow in a later paragraph..

2. Archaeological survey of the banks of the *Rio Paripipeira*.

Archaeological survey of the banks of the *Rio Paripipeira* near the Bridge, and of a few places along the *Trilha dos holandeses*, without disturbing the original vegetation, forms part of the main objectives of both MOWIC and LA-UFPE. By exploring the bridge-heads and the banks, and on a smaller scale the *Trilha* itself, it is not unlikely that some historical indications, found on ancient maps, can be confirmed by concrete proofs of the former Dutch and Portuguese presence and activities. This survey could be made within the framework of the second archaeological campaign at Fort Orange by LA-UFPE and MOWIC, foreseen for the months of October to December 2002.

3. Restoration of some architectural remnants along the *Trilha dos holandeses*.

The restoration of some architectural remains along the *Trilha*, in particular of a large seventeenth century farmhouse, built by Carmelite monks, called "o Carmelo", and of two *Casas de taipa*, simple houses built of clay on a wooden skeleton, has to be mentioned in this context. Elaboration of this part of the project by far exceeds the possibilities of MOWIC and the LA-UFPE. Here the participation of IPHAN, the National Institute for Monument Care in Brazil, is essential. The Superintendent of IPHAN-Nordeste, Dr. Múcio Aguiar Neto, already on last March 27, at a reunion in Orange Praia Hotel, organized by MOWIC, in the presence of the Dutch consul in Pernambuco, representatives of the Archaeological Laboratory of the UFPE, the Dutch Business Office and of Mr. Teixeira Mendes, representing Philips-Nordeste, described the *Trilha dos holandeses* and the *Portilhão* as valid historical subjects and promised look for an opportunity to have these items declared historical monuments.

The Archaeological Laboratory of the UFPE already carried out a global survey, while waiting for further possibilities. MOWIC offers its assistance by organising, exploring and contacting institutions for sponsoring this project of restoring the unique and very interesting architecture of the Carmelo. Restoration of the two *taipa* houses can be carried out readily during the same period.

4. Clean-up of the small beach behind the Carmelo.

Behind the Carmelo lays a small bay with a pretty beach, partly lined by old mangrove trees, bending over the sand and the water of the *Rio da Santa Cruz*, a river that reaches the open ocean just to the South of Fort Orange. It is an idyllic place, worth to be protected against pollution, now

occurring mainly in the form of plastic bags and bottles.

Most importantly, educational information will contribute to increase people's consciousness on this vital subject of our time.

5. Educational information panels on the environmental elements of the *Trilha dos holandeses*.

**Threat:**

Unfortunately, erosion by wind and water and lack of maintenance has greatly damaged the bridge, and as we saw above, the small, idyllic beach. Also, the vegetation of the Trilha's environment of mangroves, swamps and woods needs to be protected. The little monkeys, the snakes, the bees and other insects, they all need to be identified. People, inhabitants as well as tourists, have to be informed professionally on how to behave themselves and what to look for. During the last decades, the Southern river, *Rio da Santa Cruz*, along this part of the island gradually changed its course in such a way that the bank on this side is eroding. Within the foreseeable future, we have to be aware of the necessity to protect this part of the island against further erosion. The presence of a sturdy bridge is necessary to support this task. Good information, aimed at reaching a common awareness of the values of this region of the island, will be of much help in reaching these goals..

**What has to be done :**

Educational information panels on the environmental elements of the *Trilha dos holandeses*, the history of the bridge and the architectural remains, as well as some shields indicating directions for the route, are necessary.

They can in principle be made from the wood of the existing bridge, when the new one is under construction. A local artist can paint the information: textual and pictorial representation of the flora and fauna of the island. Concerning the inventory and determination of the flora and fauna: we are in contact with several biologists, both in- and outside Brazil.

**III. Time table**

With the exception of point 3, the points mentioned above can be realised in a fairly efficient way.

Ad 1, Restoration of the *Portilhão*:

MOWIC and the LA-UFPE can contract one or more local master-builders for the construction of the bridge and the fabrication of the panels, immediately. Considering the wet season, and the situation of the carrying poles of the bridge, the work can start in September and can be finished in 6 to 8 (six to eight) weeks time, or at least well before Carnival 2003. Importantly, the bridge can be ready, painted and all, before the visit of the Queen of the Netherlands to South America, which is planned for March of 2003.

Ad 2, Archaeological survey of the banks of the Rio Paripeira:

The archaeological survey of both the banks of the river near the harbour, and the path itself, could be carried out anyhow, and would not interfere with the restoration works.

Ad 4, Clean-up of the little beach behind the Carmelo:

The clean-up of the small bay behind the Carmelo can be done anytime. A thorough clean-up will take three days. Some wooden protection in the water could prevent plastic bottles washing ashore, preventing them from drifting into the root systems and branches of the mangrove trees. The necessary wood could be taken from the old bridge. A simple and effective protection of just a few meters can be constructed in two or three days.

Ad 5, Educational information panels on the environmental elements of the *Trilha dos holandeses*:

A careful inventory of the flora and fauna must be made by a small team of biologists. This will take several days to a week.

**IV. Calculation of the Costs**

An estimate of costs with a specification is given below. The total costs are estimated at Euro 50.000.

<b>Bridge, material</b>	<b>R\$ 45.990</b>	<b>U\$ 21.240</b>	<b>€ 22.750</b>
<b>Bridge, work 4 weeks</b>	<b>R\$ 10.110</b>	<b>U\$ 4.670</b>	<b>€ 5.000</b>
<b>Biologists, inclusive transport, 1 week</b>	<b>R\$ 1.011</b>	<b>U\$ 467</b>	<b>€ 500</b>
<b>Fabrication 2 environmental info-panels and some small route indicators, inclusive R\$ 2.500 for the painter</b>	<b>R\$ 10.110</b>	<b>U\$ 4.670</b>	<b>€ 5.000</b>
<b>Archaeological survey and research, 3 weeks</b>	<b>R\$ 20.220</b>	<b>U\$ 9.340</b>	<b>€ 10.000</b>
<b>Clean-up beach and placement wooden protection</b>	<b>R\$ 6.920</b>	<b>U\$ 3.200</b>	<b>€ 3.425</b>
<b>Unforeseen</b>	<b>R\$ 6.920</b>	<b>U\$ 3.200</b>	<b>€ 3.425</b>
<b>Estimated total:</b>	<b>R\$ 101100</b>	<b>U\$ 46.700</b>	<b>€ 50.000</b>

**Recommendations**

Restoration of the bridge, preceded by an excavation, offers the best possibility at present to start the project. As the excavation-activities of Forte Orange expire in December 2002, short-term decision-making is required.

The restored bridge could be a valuable element during Queen Beatrix's visit to Brazil in March 2003.

*MOWIC foundation (Foundation for Exploration and Conservation of Monuments of the Dutch West India Company)*

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## **Illustrations**

A CD-Rom is part of this presentation.  
It shows the situation of the bridge before and shortly after the March accidents, some environmental topics and some aspects of the flora and fauna of the Trilha dos holandeses .

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