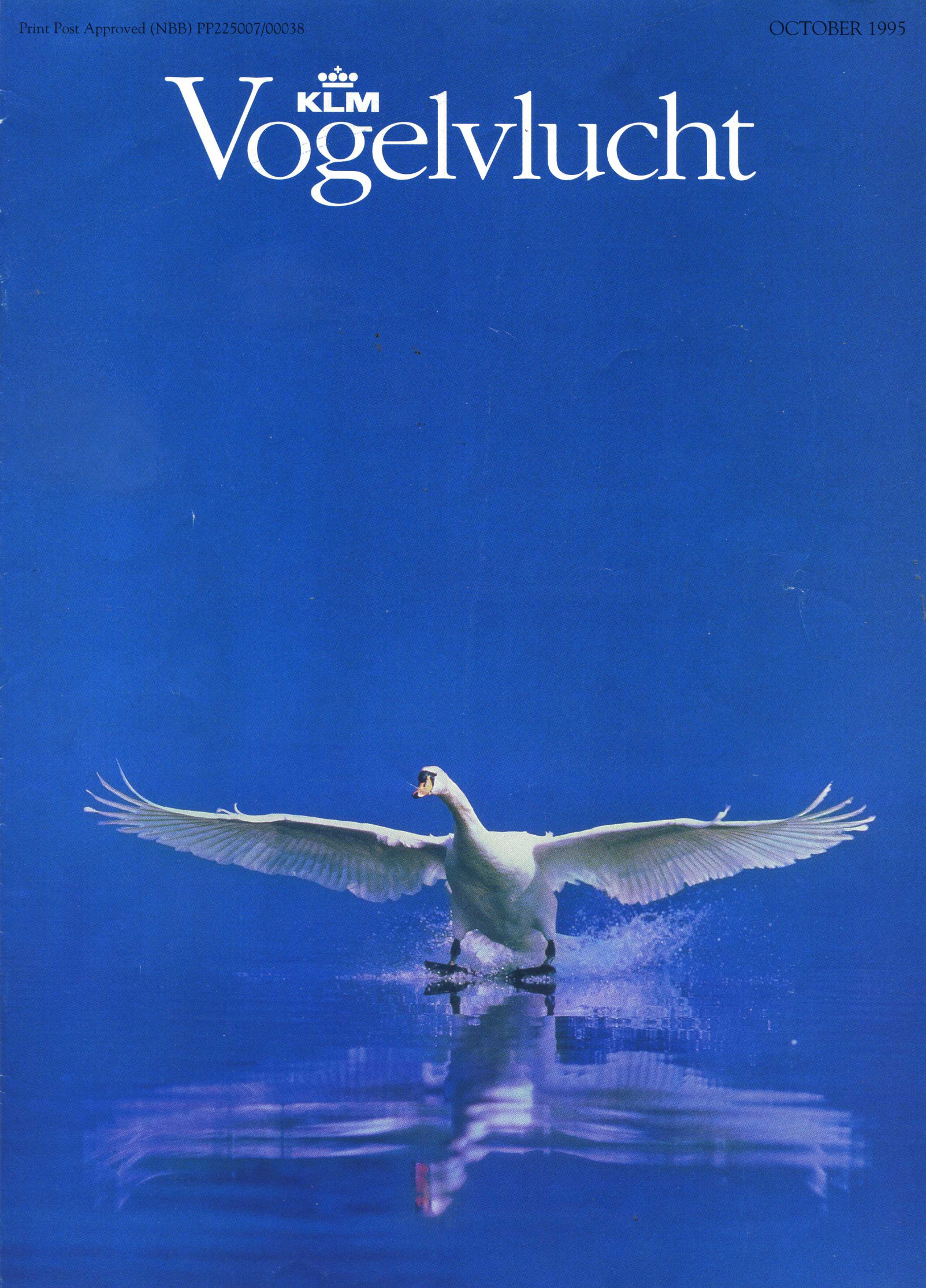
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KLM

Vogelvlucht



KLM Vogelvlucht

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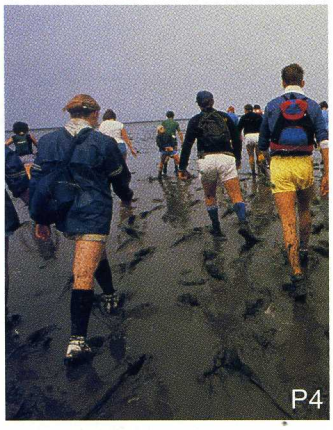
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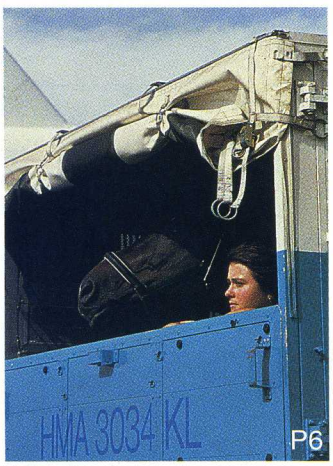
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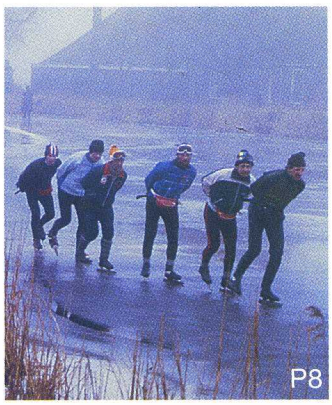
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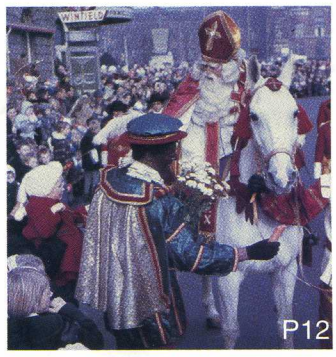




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Two editions of Vogelvlucht are produced per year

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

November 19,1995-January 7, 1996
Sint Nicolaas Exhibition
Exhibition about the history of Sinterklaas and all the folkloristic traditions
Amsterdams Historisch Museum
Ph.: 020-523 1822

March1-June 2,1996
Vermeer Exhibition
Europe's first exhibition ever exclusively devoted to Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675)
The Maurits huis Museum
Den Haag
Ph.: 075-346 9244

March 4-March 10, 1996
ABN/AMRO World Tennis Championships
Ahoy Rotterdam
Ph.: 010-4104204

March 21-May 22, 1996
Keukenhof Flower Show
Lisse. Ph.: 02521-19034
April 13, 1995
Keukenhof Scenic Walk
Scenic walks along the magnificent flower fields. Distances vary from7 up to 30 kilometres.
Ph.: 02521-16164

May 1-September 30, 1996
Mudwalking
Mudwalking/Wadlopen, scenic walks to the islands and sandbanks of Engelsmanplaat, Rottumeroog, Simonszand, or Ameland.
Pieterburen,
Ph.: 05952-8300

July 12-July 14, 1995
North Sea Jazz Festival
Live Jazz Festival, featuring the biggest names in international Jazz.
Nederlands Congresgebouw
Den Haag
Ph.: 070-354 8000

August 17, 1995
Mosseldag/National Mussel Day
A festive opening of the national mussel season.
Yrseke. Ph.: 01131-1864

KLM
Royal Dutch Airlines

Dear Reader

Welcome to our Spring edition of Vogelvlucht- Autumn in Europe, of course. With the northern winter on its way now is a good time to take advantage of KLM's special 'Down Under' fares enabling you to bring your family or friends to Australia... for your convenience simply book and pay for the tickets here in Australia. What a wonderful surprise.

And as a special treat for Christmas you will find you can save hundreds of dollars off the normal airfares... details from your Holland Gateway travel agent and KLM.

In July this year we increased the number of weekly Sydney/ Amsterdam KLM flights to three, and I'm pleased to announce that with continuing support from the Dutch community in Australia, with great success.

For those of you considering travel to Europe you now have the choice of Sunday, Monday or Thursday departures to allow you more flexibility in your travel plans.

Many of our readers have written to ask us to continue with the regular articles on Holland and so this edition has a timely story on Sinterklaas, as well as interesting features on such diverse topics as Mussels and Holland's unique Mud Walks.

For those of our readers interested in importing unusual cargo to Australia, you will find a fascinating article on KLM's cargo capabilities. Another example of why KLM continues to lead the airline industry in so many ways.

So, happy reading and we look forward to welcoming you on board a KLM flight soon.

Vriendelijke groeten

Harry Hemmer
General Manager
Australia and New Zealand

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The walking tour on



The Swiss are lucky. They have mountains to ski on, rocks to climb and rarefied air to breathe. The Norwegians sail the fjords, the shivering Icelanders take a bath in a geyser. The Arab can ride straight through the desert. And the Dutchman? He drags himself through the mud.

Above the northernmost provinces of Holland – Friesland and Groningen – stretches a region of 800 hectares. The Wadden Sea, the largest continuous nature reserve of Europe. Viewed from the sky, it is a plain of mud, water and islands, with a boat here and there. Those who live there – either on the North Netherlands coast, or one of the five Wadden Islands – see and experience more, much more. And so do the thousands of people who come every year from far and near to walk across the mud flats.

Dangerous

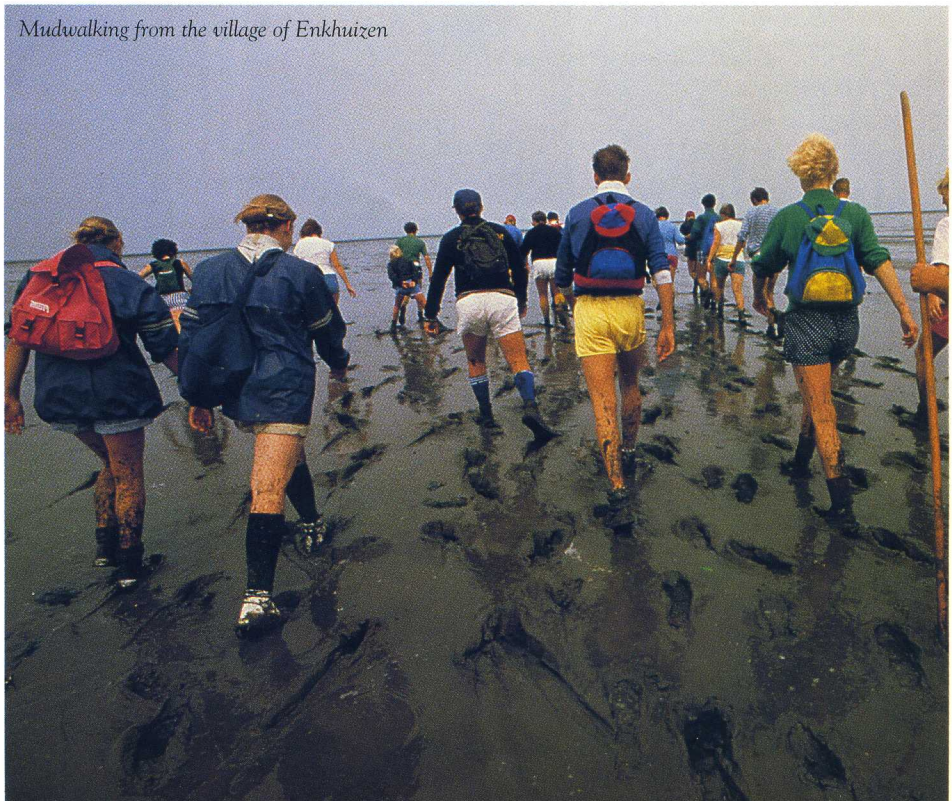
Nowhere else in the world will you find such an area. Yet as beautiful as it is, it also abounds with danger. This is why for thirty years, mud-walking trips have been organised and accompanied by specialists. Guides who have had years of training. Their training includes reading maps, general knowledge of the mud flats, tidal study, meteorology, establishing radio communication, first aid, resuscitation, knowledge of flora and fauna and nature conservation. "From this Groningen village, half a million people have walked across the flats in the last thirty years. 13,000 people were taken across last year," according to Van Hoorn, one of the guides from Stichting Wadloopcentrum Pieterburen (Pieterburen Mud-walking Centre Foundation).

Experience

Yet no matter how experienced and well-trained a guide is, he works with small groups for reasons of safety: the mud flats change, the weather changes, and he must be certain that the walk will transpire safely. Van Hoorn adds, "If ever just one person drowns, we can forget the whole adventure." It's as simple as that.

And there is another reason for the fact that one guide accompanies each group of the fifty people and that not more than 150 people leave at the same time. The nature and the landscape must undergo as little harm as possible, and, says Van Hoorn, "We must ensure that we always have the possibility of being able to enjoy this lovely nature".

Het Wad (the mud flats) is treacherous, and without expert leadership, walking across the mud flats can be perilous. Even a guide with years of experience can be surprised by a sudden change in the weather, for example. "That you can get lost in the mist is simply not true. With good guides, that won't happen," claims Van Hoorn. "The greatest danger is a thunderstorm which could arise a kilometre away. We've cancelled trips even when there was a fifty percent change of a thunder shower.



Mudwalking from the village of Enkhuizen

the bottom of the sea



Mudwalking

Mountain climbing

Most wadlopers (mud-walkers) come from the Randstad, the urban area of Western Holland. They are looking for rest, space and nature. Some Japanese and Americans sign up for a walk. But the largest group of foreign tourists is Belgian. Van Hoorn has never had any Germans in the group, but has escorted many Swiss. "They come every year to Holland, sometimes especially to cross the flats." Van Hoorn has no idea why the Germans stay away. Once a group of Americans came to cross the flats after reading an article about wadlopen in a local paper. While Switzerland is not as far away as America or Japan, it isn't exactly close to Holland. Perhaps they come this far because they don't have a coast. "Most Swiss people are nature lovers. And besides, crossing the mud flats, if it's a long walk, is just like climbing mountains."

Wandering

To cross the mud flats, you must be reasonably fit. People who do not exercise much or play sports but do enjoy walking have the opportunity to participate in a special "wandering trip". This type of walk is not long and does not require any special amount of fitness. There's something for everyone.

The beginning wadloper, for example, can go to the Wadloopcentrum Friesland to try the fifteen-kilometre walk (3.5 to 4 hours) to Engelsmanplaat, starting out from the village of Wierum. There are also walking tours for sporty participants and serious walks for trained and selected wadlopers who make the heavy crossing to Terschelling, one of the Wadden Islands.

"Half a million people have walked across the flats in the last thirty years."

Ice

For centuries, people have walked over the mud flats. Because the structure of the area was different a few hundred years ago, everyone could cross the mud flats. In the winter they were often covered with a thick layer of ice. Today, it is impossible for the Wadden Sea to freeze over because of the salt water. The last time the Wadden Sea was partially frozen was in the season of '62-'63. With this very harsh winter, organised wadlopen was initiated for the first time.

Waiting List

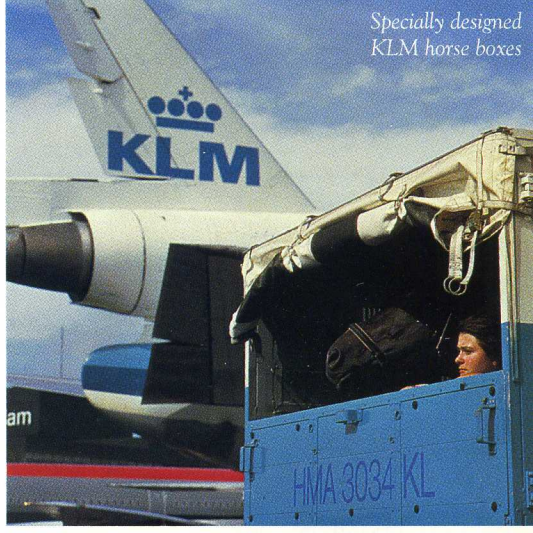
An average of five to six walks are made per week during the season (May to September), usually on weekends. The commercial organisations walk every day, if possible. However, the interest in these sporty and educational trips has grown to such an extent during the last few years that not everyone who wants to participate can do so at a moment's notice, so a waiting list was created.

While crossing the mud flats, you walk through a different world. It is a unique experience, one you'll never forget. This is why half of all wadlopers come back again. The flats have something special, they're even addicting to some. "We don't really have to advertise," says Van Hoorn. Fortunately, sufficient information has been printed. Most of the folders are available in German and English.

Requirements

Anyone between twelve and seventy years old who is capable of walking for about four hours essentially is in a good enough condition to participate in a wadloop trip. But he or she must be properly equipped. The wadloper must have warm and wind-proof outer clothing, because it is always colder on the mud flats than it seems. High-top tennis shoes are required. The wadloper must also have a backpack with dry clothing and shoes, of course packed watertight. And enough to eat and drink on the way, but no alcohol.

Horses for courses



Specially designed KLM horse boxes

KLM's very first commercial flight 75 years ago, from London to Amsterdam on May 17, 1920, carried a cargo consignment for the Dutch capital: a 15 kilo package of that morning's London newspapers. That year, KLM carried some 25,000kg cargo and mail in addition to its 345 passengers.

Cargo has remained a core KLM business activity ever since that modest start. KLM Cargo is traditionally a carrier which regards unusual shipments as a challenge to be met. It has always held a large market share in air-freighting products such as perishables, live animals, bullion and valuables and chemicals and medical products.

VIP Treatment for Horses

When the renowned stud bull Nico V flew from Rotterdam to Paris by KLM Fokker F-III on July 9, 1924, few could surmise that seventy years later KLM Cargo would be making daily work of flying animals around the world. Nico took to the air because Belgium was in quarantine for hoof and mouth disease, making surface transport a difficult matter. These days, animals are mainly transported by air to save time.

During those seventy years since Nico's flight, KLM has flown just about the whole Noah's Ark listing of animals from antelopes to zebras. Air animal transportation took off when the Second World War ended. Europe's zoos were looking for new lions, leopards, snakes and birds to display to their visitors. They turned to the airlines for transport, because so soon after the war, surface transport was still severely disrupted and sometimes completely impossible.



Horses flying KLM Cargo are given VIP treatment

Transporting animals by air requires specialised expertise. KLM sought this at the Faculty of Veterinary Science, Utrecht University. A close relationship with the Faculty staff has developed over the years since. The partnership has produced a rich harvest of scientific data on how flying affects animals.

Animal transports are now daily bread-and-butter work for KLM Cargo staff. Their charges include some three thousand horses a year. Thoroughbreds, hunters, Arabs, show-jumpers, trotters, circus performers, mustangs, polo ponies, all types and breeds fly KLM. KLM developed the horse-boxes used to transport the horses, currently in their fifth generation, in close partnership with its customers and aviation authorities, and with grateful use of Utrecht University expertise.

In 1924 Nico V travelled in the open hold on a bed of straw. However, when KLM began transporting horses regularly in the late forties, there was a greater need of a dedicated horse box. The first was a road trailer mounted on a pallet. But the specifications and standards required of road transport differ somewhat from those for transport by air. As planes grew in sophistication and size, so did the horse boxes. A container on a pallet replaced the road trailer, followed by the two-horse box and finally the three-horse box in use today.

The current design of this box has to meet demanding standards combining light weight with great tensile strength, in addition to providing high standards of comfort for the horses themselves. The boxes have a walk-through design, the horses enter one side and exit the other. The interior is painted a neutral grey colour, which soothes the horses. A space

for the animal steward or groom is built in at the front. The inside partitions can be moved to give a horse more space if it needs it. The box is shaped for a perfect fit into a Boeing 747 main-deck hold.

Owners deliver their horses to KLM Cargo about three hours before the flight departs. At KLM's home base Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, this would be to the special KLM Animal Hotel at Cargo Terminal I. After arrival, the horses are placed in the special boxes, which are then ferried to the aircraft.

Horses are always accompanied by one or more of the 22 animal attendants working for KLM Cargo. More often than not, the horse's personal groom travels on the flight as well. KLM animal attendants must follow special courses developed in co-operation with Utrecht University.

They are trained in the correct psychological approach to an animal as well as studying animal nutrition and care. If an animal becomes nervous, they are consequently well-trained in techniques to clam them down.

Since animals' ears are affected by differences in air pressure during a flight just as those of humans, they are given an apple or other treat to chew on during take-off and landing to help them adjust. The KLM attendants are authorised to stay with their charges in the hold during these periods to calm them down if necessary. During the flights, someone is always close by to give them a bit of hay or a drink.

Horses flying KLM Cargo are always given VIP treatment. The company's many years of experience in flying these sensitive animals have enabled it to build a world-renowned reputation of the transportation of livestock.

KLM is the owner's preferred carrier as they know they can count on professional and efficient handling and care. For KLM, carrying horses brings a beneficial side-effect on passenger revenues, as most of them are accompanied by a groom or owner who occupies a seat in the passenger cabin of the same aircraft.

On Sunday 6 August the arrival of KL843 AMS/SYD combi service saw the first delivery of horses to Australia flying KLM. And what a way to start, one of the six horses arriving was Danehill, who is valued at $25 million (NGL 29 million). This arrival was being billed as "far and beyond the most valuable consignment ever into Australia" in Australian print media. TV media was on hand at Sydney Airport to film the offloading of Danehill and 5 other extremely valuable horses.



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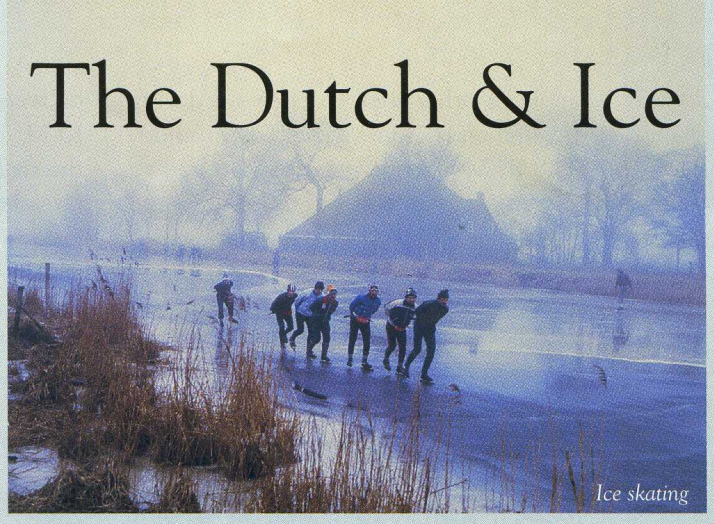
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The Dutch & Ice


Ice skating

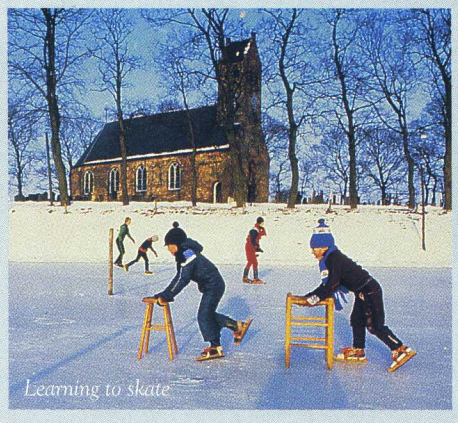
The history of the Dutch and their affiliation with ice-skating goes back to the Middle Ages and even earlier. The first ice-skates were made from cow shanks or cow ribs through which holes had been hand- drilled to tie them to the feet. The next form of the skate was a wooden block with a metal strip. This eventually evolved into the curled wooden skate with steel blades which appeared before 1600. This was the last step before the combination shoe and skate as we know it today. The skates were first used as a mode of transportation. The roads were bad and often impassable in the wet winter season. When there was ice it was a good time for relatives and friends to visit one another across the frozen waters.

In the Middle Ages it was custom for the lord of the castle to attract skaters to compete in various activities during the ice period. What was once a mode of transportation soon became a sport as rules were created among the men to see who could get home quicker from a certain place.

This started the competition sport in the oldest form of speedskating. The first skating association was set up in 1840 in Dokkum, Friesland.

Elfstedentocht

Dokkum takes us to the "Eleven Towns Race", or Elfstedentocht, held in Friesland, one of the most northern provinces in Holland. This ice skating marathon has taken place only 14 times in the past 82 years, the last one in 1986, due to ice and weather conditions. The race goes through 11 towns, covering 125 miles, starting at the Frisian capital of Leeuwarden down to Sneek, IJIst, Sloten, Stavoren, Hindeloopen, Workum, Bolsward, Harlingen, Franeker, Dokkum, and back to Leeuwarden.


Learning to skate

The Elfstedentocht started during the severest winter of the 19th century, in 1890. It was then that a Dutch sports journalist, Pim Mullier, decided to skate the 11 Frisian towns in one day. He succeeded in 12 hours and 55 minutes. To prove that he had not missed any towns, Mullier made random visits to houses in each village where he had the owners place a signature and the time of the day in a small red notebook.

In 1908, the society "De Friesche Elfstedentocht" (The Frisian Eleven Towns Race) was founded. They organised their first official race in 1912.

The race starts between 5am and 6am in the Friesland Hall in Leeuwarden. There they wait for the starting signal underneath the heating lamps.

As they take off, the skaters are confronted with the winter darkness. Some farmers drive out in their tractors and use the headlights to light up the canals. As the skaters progress from one town to the next, their noses and hair turn to ice. Stalls offering hot chocolate and Dutch 'snert', pea soup, are located along the route. The skaters are followed closely all day by the radio and television. At every town the skaters have to get their cards stamped at the control point, indicating the time they passed through.

Many spectators (about 600,000) show up to shout words of encouragement. The last 30 miles of the race are the most gruelling as the skaters are confronted with the cutting northeastern winds between Harlingen and Dokkum. During the race, strong bonds between the skaters are formed as they help one another along, although many never finish. In 1956 this bond had grown so strong that the five skaters in the leading group crossed the finish line simultaneously. The committee declared the sixth a winner. The winner is awarded a gold medal. In 1947 less than 10 percent of the contestants reached the finish point.

A non-competitive tour was introduced whereby the participants do not race against the clock but try to reach the finish point. However, they must reach it before midnight of the day they started.

Each year the participants start preparing for the big event in the hope that winter will be a strong one. For Holland this has developed some of the world's best long distance and speed skaters. When this became a continuing disappointment, the race was transferred to Norway in 1974 where the winter weather conditions were more reliable.

The Alternative Elfstedentocht Foundation was formed in Finland in 1976. This, however, does not compare to the Elfstedentocht in Friesland and the surrounding enthusiasm which accompanies it.


Ice racing in Holland

The last two races in Holland were held in February of 1985 and 1986. Sixteen thousand ice skaters participated in each race. Evert van Benthem, a farmer from the province of Overijssel won both years. In 1986 crown prince Willem Alexander partook in the race and his mother Queen Beatrix was there to welcome him at the finish. Alternative Eleven Towns Races by boat and bicycle take place every summer.


Oysters & Mussels

Mussels

A visit to Holland is not complete without making acquaintance with the Zeeland mussel.

Cooked or baked the Zeeland mussel is very tasty and moreover healthy. A typical Dutch delicacy.

Like the oyster the mussel is a mollusc and lives in the coastal waters and inlets of the North Sea. The Oosterschelde in the south of Holland and the Waddenzee in the north are especially ideal living environments for the mussels.

The water contains much plankton, the mussel's main nutrition, and has a relatively high temperature resulting from the low and high tides.

At low tide large parts of these inlets are temporarily not covered with water and these areas are then warmed by the sun. At high tide this accumulated warmth exudes into the water resulting in a pleasant "incubator" atmosphere for many kinds of fish from the North Sea.

The original coast inhabitants quickly discovered that mussels which were caught far out to sea could be resettled close to land. In this way it was easy to preserve the mussels within reach until the time when they were needed. Moreover the mussels became even tastier due to the warm coastal waters.

The first laws to regulate mussel fishing were enacted as far back as 1825. The coastal waters were then divided into lots and leased to the mussel farmers.

Mussel farming is an important industry in Zeeland.

With more than 100 million kilograms to its name, Holland is the world's largest producer. The greater part of this production goes in foreign export.

The starting element for mussel farming is seed mussel. Mussels reproduce in the months of April and May. The larva swim around free initially but sink to the bottom when the shell begins to develop. They attach themselves to the seabed at certain places – depending on the current – and form extensive mats.

When these young mussels have reached the length of approximately one centimetre they have reached the point of being seed mussels. This seed is dug up during a few weeks each year and resettled on the lots, the mussel beds. After about two years the mussel has reached maturity and is suitable for consumption.

At this point the mussels go to the only mussel auction in Holland, Zeeland's Yerseke. After being sold to wholesalers they go back into the water. Before the consumer sees the mussels they are once again rinsed and algae, seaweed and fibres removed. Finally they are sorted out and submitted to a stringent quality control. An attached certificate of quality is compulsory for mussels destined for export.

The mussel season runs from July until the second half of April, the high point being in autumn when the mussel is at its tastiest. The mussel is less suitable for consumption during the reproduction period in the months of May and June, and is not offered in a fresh state at that time.

The mussel (Mytilus edulis) is a nutritious product. It contains as much protein per ounce as steak, but is less fatty. Compared to meat mussels are also richer in minerals, calcium, phosphorus and iron. Moreover mussels contain the vitamins A, B1, B2 and C.

The versatility of mussels is unlimited. They can be eaten raw, but are more often offered in a cooked, baked or marinated form.

The basic recipe is simple. You need about two kilograms for four persons. Keeping them in the fridge is best but be careful not to let them lie in their own juice.

Right before preparation the mussels must be washed again. On the bottom of a large pan you then place: a few twigs of parsley, 1 sliced onion, 1 bay leaf, 1 leek cut in rings – and for the fanciers – a carrot cut in pieces. Add the mussels and salt and pepper to taste. Cover the pan and bring to the boil until the liquid rises. Then uncover for a moment so that the liquid goes down again. Put the cover back on and repeat this process twice. The best results are achieved when the pan is half filled with mussels. Any mussels that don't open must be removed.

The mussel meal gets extra attention each year in autumn as part of the promotion campaign around the Dutch kitchen. For that time Neerlands Dis has compiled special mussel menus for its approximately three hundred affiliated restaurants.

The restaurants can be recognised by a sticker on the door. There, two people can enjoy a three-course dinner (including wine) for, at a maximum, one hundred guilders. Those who have ever tasted Zeeland mussels in a restaurant have certainly also had a taste of Holland.


Dutch fishing boat



Sailing at Ysselmeer

Skutsjesilen

Skutsjesilen, a battle for daily bread developed into a sporting highlight.

Every year, in the summer months, Skutsjesilen in the watery northern province Friesland in Holland is an enormous highlight. Fourteen historic ships fight during two weeks for the highest honour of Frisian skippers. An impressive spectacle which is observed at the water's edge by thousands of tourists and sympathisers. The battle against each other and against the elements has a strong traditional, historic background. It is the link with the very past which gives Skutjesilen such a charming touch, that in these modern times people still find time and space for this event.

Skutsjes are ships that were built for transport on those characteristic Frisian waters: narrow and shallow. Because there is no keel, the stability is maintained with lee-boards at both sides of the ships. Nowadays, during the race, some ten to twelve robust Frisian men man these skutsjes. In the old days – when these ships were still used for freight traffic – only the skipper and his wife were on board.

In those days it was already a tug of war. The vessel that arrived first at the discharging-berth, was unloaded first, and could go to the loading berth sooner. That is how the struggle for the daily bread turned into a competition. If there was any favourable wind, the skutsjes could sail, but when the wind was against or gone completely, the skippers dragged their ships like draught-horses through the Frisian waters.

Shortly before, but especially after the Second World War, things changed completely. These ships were motorised, skippers anticipated in this new development and they changed into a more intensive carrying trade.

The transformation was quick, for skippers who were born in the little deck house in the skutsjes, now sail 2000 ton ships to and fro the Rotterdam harbour. And meanwhile, what happened to the skutsjes?

As far back as World War II, the organisers of the skutsje competitions realised that, were they to continue Skutsjesilen, there had to be a structured organisation. Gradually, skutsjes were bought by local foundations and money was raised by commercial institutions. But money also came from the ever growing number of spectators, both on land and on recreational boats. The organisation developed from an amateur level into a very professional one, with an official starting ship and sponsoring. The regulations were changed a little, only to please the onlookers.

And all happened with one intention: skutjesilen should remain. Not as a pastime for the old days, but as traditional games in the present day society. It had to remain as a recreation for many.

What remained of the old days: the skippers. And they are still the families of Zwaga, Meeter, Brouwer, Van der Meulen, Van Akker, who, in summer, man the ships that make the highlight in Frisian sailing. For a great part they are still the same old sailors who sailed the skutsjes for their daily bread in days gone by. But also their descendants, often young professional skippers, consider it an honour to spend this fortnight in the old way every year. In these days they change their computerised helm into the time honoured tiller made of wood. That has to be controlled with every bodily power, in order to change the direction of the skutsjes in a strong wind. Then for a moment there are no hydraulic winches, but strong sailors arms who must pull the sixty yard long sailing sheet with all their powers. Then again there is this time honoured tough battle between skippers and against the elements.



Traditional sailing

The skutsjes have hardly changed from the old days when old skippers had to transport mud, peat and dung to the farmers all over Holland. Only the sails are considerably larger now than they were in those days, when only the skipper and his wife managed the ship.

"In the race for the championship, one of the highest honours in Friesland, great risks are sometimes taken."

The large crew can handle bigger sails. These fuller sails turn skutsjesilen in its present form into a spectacular happening. Especially when a strong wind blows across the Frisian lakes (like the Sneekermeer, the Fluessen), the skutsjes often list enormously to keep their headaway as much as possible. Sometimes a skutsje turns over. But in the race for the championship, one of the highest honours in Friesland, great risks are sometimes taken. Therefore the master organisation: the Sintrale Kommisje Skutsjesilen (founded in 1946), has decided to limit the increasing size of the sails. Every skutsje was given a maximum size, and the surprising outcome of this decision was that all skutsjes became equivalent.

That is what has turned the annual battle into an extremely exciting competition. One can recognise the origin of the skutsjes by looking at the marks on the sails. The H stands for the town of Heereveen, L means Lemmer, J means Joure, B means Bolsward and the D for instance is written in the vessel of Drachten. The traditional start of the races is on the Sneekermeer, near the village of Grouw. The skutsjes sail also on the wide IJsselmeer and on the narrow waters of Eernewoude. There, skutsjes don't even fit in the waterway lengthwise. Ability, power, courage and a feeling for tradition are qualities every crew needs to be equipped with. They all have that: the feeling for skutsjesilen their fathers and grandfathers had: a skippers feast.

Of course hard words are uttered now and then, collisions occur, but at the end of the race they all cheer the long pendant that is given to the champion skipper.

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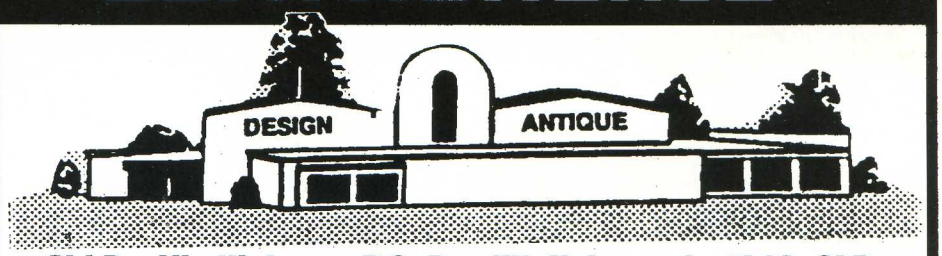
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The annual 'Sail Amsterdam' event

GOOD CHILDREN GET TREATS

Long before 6 December there's no escaping it; Holland is preparing on the grandest scale for St Nicholas' birthday. In November the steamer from Spain bringing the Saint and his entourage arrives in Holland, where thousands of people are ready to receive him. His arrival is broadcast live on television. Displays in the shops are dressed for the festivity with delicacies and presents.

Children, who really believe in St Nicholas, compose rhymes, put out their shoes by the hearth, and sing songs to him. The good ones get treats, naughty ones are threatened with a rod.

St Nicholas is a famous popular saint for whom there are very few reliable historical sources. He is thought to have been bishop of Myra, in present-day Turkey, in the first half of the fourth Century AD. The essence of his legend comes from the Greek.

St Nicholas is the patron saint of scholars, children, sailors, prisoners, bakers, merchants, chemists, lawyers, some cities (eg Amsterdam), and some countries, such as Russia. In the folklore which became current about him in Holland, Spain took the place of Southern Italy. From Spain, too, comes his blackamoor servant, Zwarte Piet (Black Peter).

'Sinterklaas' in Holland

Nowhere in the world is the feast of St Nicholas (Sinterklaas) so widely celebrated as in the Netherlands. An old document records that in 1360 the schoolchildren of Dordrecht were given a holiday on the Saint's feast day, and also some money to buy some sweets.

From the celebrations in church schools the feast gained a place for itself in the family. While 6 December remained an occasion for religious celebrations in churches and religious houses, outside them it developed around this time into a genuine popular festival. In the sixteenth century, after the Reformation, the worship of saints was considered sinful. The Protestants, supported by the government, tried with all their powers to root out the papist feast of Nicholas. Children should be protected from heresy from their earliest age. Saints had never done miracles, and certainly did not do so now. But the festival appeared to have become so popularly established in spite of all official measures against it, that it held its place. Admittedly it changed a bit. St Nicholas was deprived of his Catholic halo and became just a bountiful giver of presents for everyone. He was no longer venerated as a saint, but he was still revered as the patron of children. St Nicholas had become 'Sinterklaas'.

In the eighteenth century it was again thought necessary to attack the feast of St Nicholas. But then, too, the festival stood firm and even gained ground. For centuries it had been a childrens' feast, but gradually adults, too, began to share in the fun.

Its religious origins disappeared more and more into the background. In this process the original stories got lost, but St Nicholas survived. His feast is an occasion for giving presents and composing rhymes. This still goes on in his footsteps and in his name.



St. Nicholas

St Nicholas and Amsterdam

Amsterdam has a special relationship with St Nicholas. The first link dates from the fourteenth century with the building of a church dedicated to St Nicholas. Amsterdam was a port and Nicholas was the patron saint of sailors and merchants.

In 1884 building commenced of a new church on the Prins Hendrikkade.

The church faces the harbour. High on the facade, in a niche overlooking the harbour, is the statue of the saint. High up sixteen scenes from the life of St Nicholas adorn the long walls of the central nave. In no other Dutch church can such a comprehensive account of the popular saint be found.

Today the Sinterklaas celebrations are accompanied by several traditional customs.

One story goes that the bishop of Myra scattered coins when he saw poor children. Scattering pepernoten today probably comes from this.

SINTERKLAAS

St Nicholas Cookies

(Speculaas)

250grams plain flour
7 grams baking soda
175 grams butter
150grams brown castor sugar
3 tablespoons milk
1 1/3 tablespoons five spice powder
pinch salt

Cream butter and brown sugar Sift flour/baking soda/5 spice powder/ add to butter mixture. Add milk & mix to a stiff consistency. Leave preferably to stand overnight in a cool place. Prepare wooden forms with a light dusting of plain flour. Press mixture firmly into the form ensuring that surplus is trimmed from form. Turn form upside down and tap firmly on a flat surface to dislodge the 'shaped' mixture. Place shapes onto a lightly buttered biscuit tray. Bake for 20 mins in a moderate oven.

Filled St Nicholas Cookies

(Gevulde Speculaas)

Almond filling (to be prepared 2-3 days before baking).
125grams ground almonds
125grams white sugar
1 large egg
grated lemon rind

In a bowl thoroughly mix all the ingredients together until a paste consistency.
Cover and leave refrigerated.

Use the same ingredients as for 'Speculaas' to prepare the dough.

Roll out dough until 1/2cm thick. Divide mixture into 2. Place one half of the mixture onto a lightly buttered biscuit tray. Spread almond filling on this layer. Cover with remaining dough. Press edges together to seal in the almond mix. Brush top with a mixture of sugar and milk. Bake in a moderate oven for 45 mins.



Creamy Sugar Candies

(Borstplaat)

50grams icing sugar
100grams castor sugar
2 tablespoons water/or milk
Food colouring (assorted flavours)

Bring to the boil, castor sugar, water/milk, over a medium flame. Stirring for 1 minute. Remove from the heat, add sifted icing sugar and food colouring. Prepare cooled sweet moulds (usually heart shaped) on a greaseproof paper. Pour mixture into individual moulds. Leave for 5-10 mins until set. Remove greaseproof paper and stand moulds upright till fully set.

A variation for chocolate flavour: -
Add 4 teaspoons cocoa powder I.S.O. food colouring.

CHRISTMAS DINNER

Roast Turkey

(Kalkoen)

1 Turkey
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon pepper
150 to 200 g butter or margarine

Wash the turkey and dab it dry. Rub the bird inside and out with the pepper and salt. Heat the butter or margarine in a large roasting tin, and roast the turkey quickly on all sides. Put the roasting tin in a hot oven (175° C) and roast the bird for about 2 hours (regularly drip the fat over the turkey). For the gravy, add enough water so that the undissolved parts in the liquid dissolve. Put the turkey on a preheated dish and serve the gravy separately.
Bon Appetit! (Serves 6.)

Pears with Cranberry Sauce

(Peren met Cranberry Saus)

12 canned pear halves
300g cranberries
10 ml water
40 g sugar

Drain the pears well and dry them with a cloth. Wash the cranberries and bring them to the boil with the water and the sugar. Cook the berries gently for 10 minutes until they split open, stir the mixture well and let the mush cool off. Arrange the pears on a dish and fill them with the cranberry sauce.

Brussels Sprouts with Chestnuts

(Spruitjes met Kastanjes)

1/2kg chestnuts
3/4 kg brussels sprouts
1/2 teaspoon salt
30g butter or margarine

Wash the chestnuts thoroughly and make an incision in the broad side. Bring them to the boil with just enough water to cover them. Cook the chestnuts for 30 minutes. Clean the sprouts and bring them to the boil with just enough water to cover them. Add the salt and cook them for 15 minutes. Drain the chestnuts and peel them. Drain the sprouts and add the chestnuts to them. Stir the butter or margarine through the vegetables.

Christmas Custard

(Custard pudding)

2 egg whites
150g finger cookies (large fingers)
20ml cream
5 sheets of gelatin
80g sugar
10ml water
5 ml maraschino

Brush some of the egg-white over the bottom and the sides of a strong smooth pudding mould. Put the cookies next to each other in the mould, with the sugared side against the sides (if necessary, shorten the cookies). Beat the egg-white and the cream separately. Carefully mix the cream with the egg-white. Soak the gelatin in cold water. Bring the water and the sugar to the boil, take the pan off the fire and dissolve the soaked gelatin in it. Stir the mixture until cold and add the maraschino. Let the mixture cool thoroughly and gel. Spoon the still-liquid mixture through the mixture of egg-white and cream. Put the mixture into the pudding mould and let it set well. Cut off the cookies that still stick out of the pudding. Turn the pudding into a flat dish and tie the ribbon around it. Garnish the pudding with the candied fruit, cut into small pieces. Decoration: Reel ribbon (about 50cm).

Special thanks to Mrs. Wil Hemmer and Mrs Mans Smit, and thanks to the many readers who have sent in their recipes – we will try to use them in future editions of Vogelvlucht.



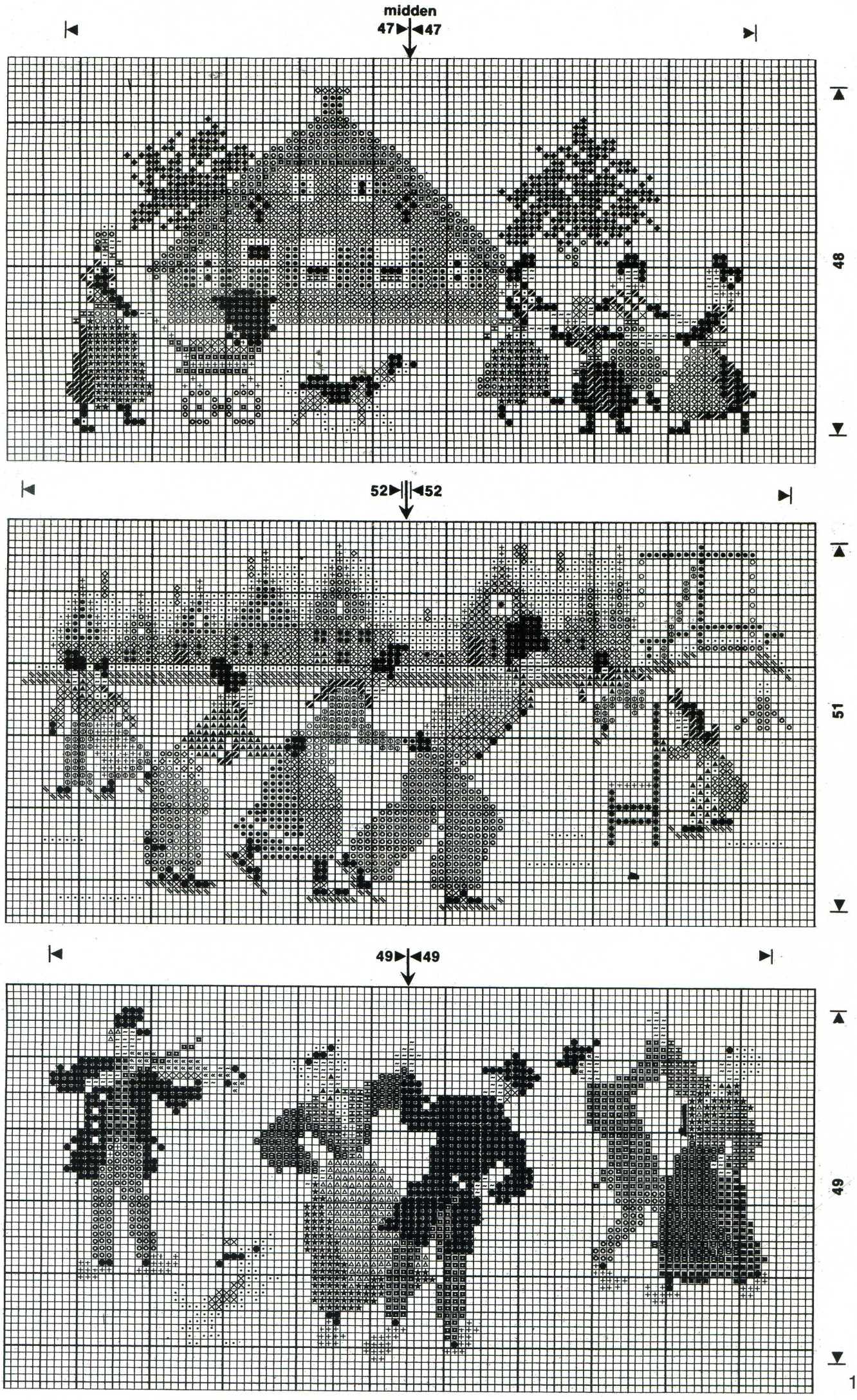




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