

På Ræts Brodd

Breaking the hermeneutic circle of tourism in peripheral landscapes

Gjermund August Lia Bjønnes

På Raets Brodd - á raðar broddi

The name Ra derives from the Old Norse word rad (genitive radar), meaning "ridge," a fitting description of the terrain's distinct topography. The earliest known reference to the Ra appears in *Ynglingatal*, a skaldic poem by Tjodolf of Hvinir, later recorded by Snorre Sturlason around 860 AD. In this text, it is written of King Øystein Fret:

"...en Eysteinn fyr ási fór til Býleists bróður meyar. Ok nú liggr und lagar beinum rekks loðuðr á raðar broddi, þars élkaldr hjá jofur gauzkum Voðlu straumr at vági kømr."

"...and now the chieftain of the giants lies beneath a mound of stones on the edge of the Ra, where the icy Valda stream meets the sea near the Gautish king."

"...og nå ligger kjempenes høvding under en haug av stein på raets brodd, der den iskalde Valdastrøm kommer til sjøen nær den gautske konge".

(Stokke, 1978) (Nyhus, 2017)



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fig.02

ABSTRACT

Increasing mass tourism in peripheral landscapes places growing strain on fragile ecological and cultural environments. Architecture that caters to tourism often promotes standardised ways of encountering landscapes through predefined viewpoints and curated experiences. Within the experience economy, landscapes are increasingly reduced to consumable images - a condition reinforced by what Urry and Larsen (2011) describe as the hermeneutic circle of tourism, where visitors arrive with pre-formed images derived from media and seek their confirmation in the landscape. Existing tourism infrastructure tends to close this circle by following a single narrative and staging a frontstage image of place while not considering the multifaceted complexity that lies behind it. This thesis asks how architectural intervention in peripheral landscapes can break the hermeneutic circle rather than reproduce it, shifting the visitor encounter from the confirmation of a prior image toward a bodily engagement with the backstage reality of place.

The project is located at Mølen in Larvik, which contains the most prominent part of the Scandinavian terminal moraine. Mølen holds geological, cultural, ecological, and recreational significance, functioning as a protected landscape, hiking destination, and tourist attraction. It became part of the UNESCO Global Geoparks network in 2008. While the Geopark aims to promote geological heritage and sustainable development, current site infrastructure primarily supports short-term visitation structured around the scenic stone beach, leaving the site's deeper layers of significance often overlooked by visitors.

The thesis adopts a research-through-design methodology based on prolonged site immersion, and sequential mapping, producing a site encyclopedia that informs the architectural proposal. The outcome is a spatial sequence of thresholds distributed across the site, conceived as a journey through geological time, cultural memory, and ecological fragility. Rather than explaining the site through didactic display, the intervention makes these layers legible through spatial design, using walking and sequential thresholds as the primary mechanisms through which the hermeneutic circle is broken.

The thesis contributes to discussions on tourists' perceptions, especially regarding how architectural attractions in landscapes shape tourists' encounters with place.

Keywords:
Tourism, Tourist Attraction, Tourist Perception, Hermeneutic Circle, Placemaking, Authenticity, Protected Peripheral Landscapes, Experience Economy

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fig. 03 - Tourist taking photo of a sole tourist in front of the horizon

INTRODUCTION

At the southmost tip of Vestfold, where the Scandinavian terminal moraine meets the Skagerrak ocean, lies Mølen on the edge of the Ra (på raets brodd). It is a landscape shaped by deep time and rich history – a vast field of rounded stones stretching into the sea, shaped by forces that began 250 million years ago. The constant waves that wash over the shore are still grinding and polishing the same stones that the Fennoscandian Ice sheet carried here from across Scandinavia during the last ice age 12,000 years ago. Scattered across the ridge are over 200 burial cairns built from the same stones that forms the moraine by people who understood this place as significant long before anyone thought to put up an information board explaining why.

*The common tourist arrive,
walk down to the coast,
photograph the horizon,
and then leave.*

This thesis begins with this gap – between the rich qualities of Mølen and the mere surface that's encountered. The project asks how architecture can erase this gap. Not through didactic exhibitions or information boards, not through viewing platforms that frame the expected image, but through space, movement, and the experience of the body moving through a landscape that has more to say than its photograph suggests.

The outcome is a visitor centre – a journey through geological deep time, cultural memory, and ecological fragility that cannot be reduced to a single view or captured in a single image. The visitor arrives with one understanding of Mølen and leaves with a new understanding of what lies beneath the surface of a landscape they thought they already knew.

1.0 TOURISM IN PERIPHERAL LANDSCAPES

1.1 - The rise of ecotourism and pressure on peripheral landscapes

Tourism is a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal purposes (UN Tourism, n.d.). An increasingly popular branch within tourism is ecotourism, which is a type of nature-based tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to observe, learn, discover, experience and appreciate biological, geological and cultural diversity with a responsible attitude to protect the integrity of the ecosystem and enhance the well-being of the local community (UN Tourism, n.d.). Nature-based tourism is on the rise as the global population is becoming more urbanized, and people's desire to access "wild" areas is becoming greater (Enger, Sandvik, & Iversen, 2015). Sublime nature – dramatic mountains, deep valleys, and waterfalls – are often the scenic qualities ecotourists seek. These natural environments are often protected and located in peripheral places which are not primarily built for high visitor numbers. Peripheral landscapes are facing the challenges of tourism, as in some places their vulnerable ecosystems are turning into mass tourism destinations for national and international visitors, resulting in overcrowding and pressure on nature (Gundersen, Selvaag, Junker-Köhler, & Zouhar, 2024). Landscapes risks becoming victims of overtourism, threatening both the physical landscape and its geological, cultural, and ecological layers. Norway, where this thesis is situated, has experienced a rapid growth in the tourism sector with an estimate of growing 45% in revenue from 2019 to 2030, making tourism Norway's fifth largest export industry (NHO, 2024). While this generates value and revenue for villages and towns in peripheral places, it also creates pressure on the landscapes.

1.2 - Tourism infrastructure and architectural intervention

An important strategy for ecotourism – both to create growth, counteract economic decline and facilitate tourism – is tourism infrastructures. Accommodation, service facilities, and roads are central to tourism-based growth, but this

thesis focuses on architectural interventions in peripheral landscapes and how they shape visitors' perceptions. In Sweden, the Naturum projects, 32 in number, are visitor centers situated in protected landscapes acting like educational gateways designed to introduce visitors to local ecological and cultural conditions through exhibitions, guided tours, and informational material (Naturvårdsverket, 2025). The centers are larger-scale buildings, often of high architectural quality, for example, Naturum Höga Kusten in Docksta by White Arkitekter (2006). However, these often depend on didactic forms of experiences. Knowledge is communicated through informational graphics, exhibitions, and lectures. In Denmark, an initiative called "Steder i Landskabet" works with small-scale architectural interventions to reveal and intensify qualities in peripheral landscapes (Realdania, 2012). These succeed with facilitating paths and framing nature but fail to educate.

1.3 - The National Tourist Routes – architecture in scenic landscapes

In Norway, an ambitious infrastructural project is currently unfolding. The National Tourist Route Project (NTR), administered and developed by the National Public Roads Administration (Vegvesenet), displays landscapes invented by tourism. The project consists of 18 selected roads that run through especially scenic routes with unique natural qualities, along coasts and fjords, mountains and waterfalls. Along these routes, a series of architectural and landscape interventions aims to strengthen regional tourism and distribute visitor flows across Norway. The principles behind the architectonic expressions are, according to the NTR: *that the architecture should be bold and innovative and communicate the mood of the scene. Uniqueness is important, as is respect and consideration for the place itself. At the same time, the architecture must satisfy specific functions such as rest, parking, views, information, waste management and toilet facilities. The architecture may be anything from a modest expression, such as benches on a smooth, coastal rock, to huge viewpoint platforms that lift the visitor up into the landscape* (Nasjonale turistveger, 2025).

1.4 - The standardised encounter

The projects discussed on the previous page often display attractive and exquisite examples of design, but they usually rely on a standardised template that facilitates arrival at a car park, a short walk to a staged lookout point, and a walk back to the car to leave. The encounter is brief, linear, and structured around a single composed view. The visitor is delivered to a predetermined moment – a platform, a panorama, a photograph – before returning to the road. The landscape is framed as a visual destination; the visit is scripted around its consumption; and the site's complexity beyond that singular view is left unexplored. As tourist attractions designed to introduce visitors to fragile landscapes, these standardised encounters raise an important question. If the experience is reduced to a short walk toward a composed image, what understanding of the landscape does the visitor actually leave with? And if the architectural intervention reinforces rather than challenges this reduction, what role is architecture playing in shaping how peripheral landscapes are understood, valued, and ultimately protected?

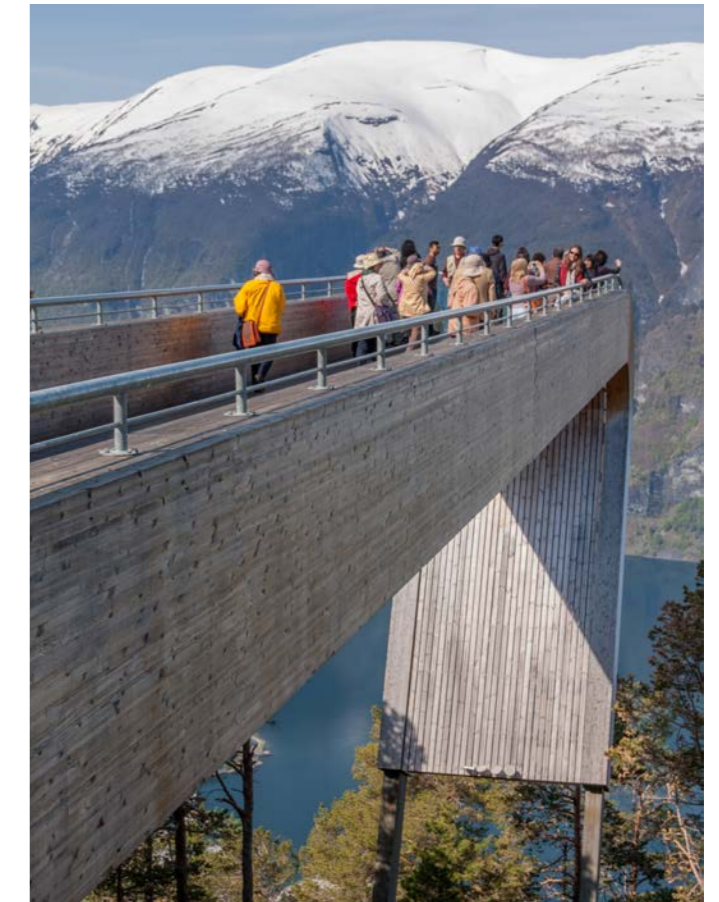


fig. 11 - Tourists at Stegastein viewing platform (Trienke, M.) CC BY 2.0

Stegastein
Todd Saunders
2006

2.0 DISCOURSE

2.1 - Viewing as typology

Looking at the architectural projects along the National Tourist Routes, viewpoints and the viewing platform are recurring themes. The lookout points may take different forms, from a minimal bench on a concrete platform to more advanced structures like towers, cantilevered platforms, or even minor buildings, for example Snøhetta's (2011) "Viewpoint Snøhetta" at Dovrefjell. In these projects, the encounter is heavily directed. The visitor follows a path from the car park towards an architectural intervention that frames a particular scenic view. Along the path, information boards tell the history of the site, with pictograms and short texts. By the carpark are often architecturally striking toilet facilities. Often, visitors do not even have to step off the concrete path leading to the view, and the entire encounter seems to emphasize a singular narrative that strongly relies on the visual sense.

2.2 - The romantic origins of landscape viewing

Interestingly, this seems to perpetuate a romantic viewing culture that has existed in nature-based tourism for 200 years but is only now receiving a designed expression (Larsen, 2012). The Norwegian landscapes – the dramatic mountains, the long fjords, deep valleys and the sublime – are now objectively seen as beautiful. However, until the Germans invented romanticism at the end of the 18th century, the Norwegian mountains were seen as something cold, dangerous and unwelcoming (Døving, 2012). During the national romanticism around the mid-1800s, when the word picturesque first came to Norway, Norwegian painters returned from Europe and began painting the untouched sublime landscapes. These paintings contributed to framing the Norwegian landscape as a visual object, establishing a way of seeing that would later underpin the development of tourism. English tourists started coming to Norway in the mid-1800s, and also the Prussian Kaiser Wilhelm II, noticed the country for its sublime nature and visited Norway regularly between 1890 until the first world war came to Norway (Larsen, 2012) (Jacobsen, 2025).

2.3 - The picturesque tradition and the framing of landscape

The completion of the Geiranger road marked an important milestone for the Norwegian infrastructure and encouraged tourists to travel up a thousand metres through steep hairpin-bend roads to the highest lookout. This first tourism was strongly focused on the landscapes' picturesque values and sought: "that kind of beauty which would look well in a picture" (Ousby, 1990). Norwegian tourists consumed and pictured places through imported landscape images, and the distinction between nature and art dissolved into a circularity (Urry & Larsen, 2011).

2.4 - The Claude glass and the panorama – predecessors of visual mediation

Notably, this tradition favoured framed views of the landscape. Early pre-photographic British tourists often carried a "Claude glass", a lightweight, tinted circular mirror that fitted into a (male) pocket and was used to frame the scenery. When arriving at a scenic spot, tourists would turn their backs to the view and hold up the mirror to see the scenery framed and reflected in the glass. The glass trimmed and recomposed the scenery by slightly distorting perspective and colour, so the reflection resembled romantic paintings – especially those by Claude Lorrain, the famous French romantic painter (Soth, 2021).

The panorama emerged at the end of the eighteenth century as a new form of visual representation. Originally, it referred to large-scale 360° paintings, often depicting landscapes, installed within purpose-built circular structures. These environments were carefully controlled: lit from above through skylights and viewed from a central platform, where the image completely surrounded the spectator (Barringer, 2021). While often understood as an immersive innovation, the panorama also contributed to the framing of the landscape as a visual object. To contemplate a conventional framed oil painting is to peer as if through a window; the viewer is subject to the visual logic of the composition. The panorama, by contrast, appears to liberate the viewer, allowing movement and the freedom to choose one's gaze.

Yet this apparent autonomy remains orchestrated. The spectator is enclosed within a constructed environment in which vision is still directed, and the landscape is transformed into a continuous surface to be consumed.

2.5 - Photography and the tourist gaze

The culture of climbing the highest mountain top for the view, romantic paintings, the Claude glass, and panoramas are all precursors to the camera and photography in tourism. I will not go further into the history of photography, but especially since Kodak launched user-friendly, lightweight, and affordable cameras, the camera has become an indispensable part of a tourist's travel accessories. Tourists now often experience places through a camera lens, as if documenting one's presence is more important than being present in the moment. Photography is also the primary way tourist places and attractions are represented in commercials, brochures, and websites. An interesting study by Fåltun (2024), investigating how tourists perceive landscapes by looking at tourists' Instagram posts from Swedish national parks, and shows how tourist attractions are created by tourists themselves. When looking at tourists' Instagram posts, it became evident that they often portray the same views, which become iconic places with enhanced visiting value through this repetition. Frequently, tourists tend to photograph views emphasised in tourism information publications, brochures, websites, etc. (Fåltun, 2024). This is a common phenomenon in tourism and can be understood as the 'hermeneutic circle', in which tourists travel to and take photos of vistas they have seen in different media (Urry & Larsen, 2011).

2.6 - The romantic tourist gaze

As discussed, the tourists' desire to frame and capture views comes from a long culture of viewing the landscape. Fåltun's study also highlights how nature is depicted in Instagram posts. Very often a lone tourist can be seen gazing towards the scenery, almost as in the romantic painting "Wanderer above the sea of fog" by Caspar David Friedrich (1818). Photographs representing pristine characteristics of the nature scenery are common among tourists' Instagram

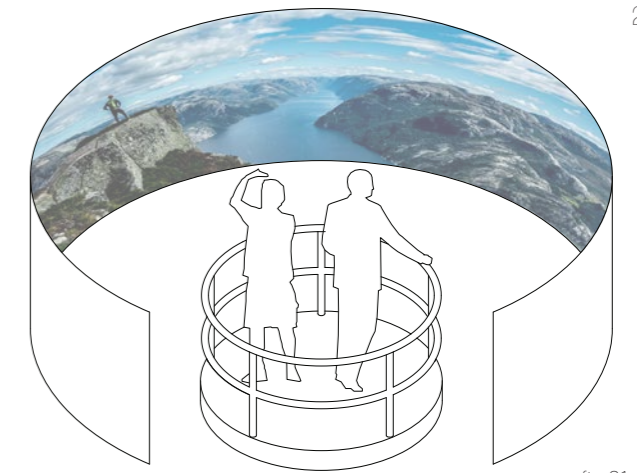


fig. 21

posts, while pictures of the crowds queuing to take a photograph of the same view are almost never posted. Such depictions are probably absent because they collide with tourists' imaginaries of how the peripheral landscapes 'should be' – pristine, with no signs of humanity (Fåltun, 2024). Experiencing the wild characteristics of nature without the presence of other tourists is an essential element of what Urry refers to as the *romantic tourist gaze*, since it is considered to offer a more personal relationship with the landscape than when other humans are present (Urry & Larsen, 2011).

2.7 - The experience economy and commodification of place

B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore introduced the term experience economy in 1998, referring to a shift in which experiences are designed and staged as consumable products, turning places and activities into curated events for visitors. In this shift they define commodities and goods as fungible and tangible, and services and experiences as intangible and memorable. They also define four realms of experience: *Entertainment*, where the "customer" is passively watching something; *Educational*, where the "customer" is actively learning; *Escapist*, where the "customer" is actively immersing oneself in an activity; and *Aesthetic*, where the "customer" is immersed but does not have an active role (Pine II & Gilmore, 1999). In architectural attractions in peripheral landscapes, particularly the viewing platforms of the NTR, the "product", or rather the experience, is primarily aesthetic- or entertainment-based. The visitor is positioned as a passive observer of the landscape. A more engaging tourist experience could instead move towards the escapist realm, where the visitor actively engages with and moves through the landscape.

2.8 - Authenticity and staged encounters

This shift towards staged and curated experiences also relates closely to questions of authenticity. As Dean MacCannell argues in *The Tourist - A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976), tourism is structured around a search for authenticity, yet what is encountered is often a form of *staged authenticity*, where places are carefully constructed and presented to appear real while remaining fundamentally mediated. Within the experience economy, such staging becomes not only inevitable but necessary, as experiences are designed to meet expectations and produce memorable outcomes. Architectural interventions in landscapes can be understood as creating a *frontstage*, a controlled and curated encounter, where tourists, by photographing and sharing the same framed views, actively participate in reinforcing and reproducing this staged authenticity.

2.9 - The dominance of the visual regime

Seeing this together, these historical and contemporary practices reveal how tourism operates through a dominant visual regime, in which landscape is framed, mediated, consumed and replicated as an image. From romantic paintings and the Claude glass to panoramas, photography, and contemporary viewpoints, the encounter with landscape is structured through devices that privilege vision and reduce the complexity of place to a reproducible picture. Within this framework, architectural interventions do not simply facilitate access, but actively reinforce this mode of seeing. Viewpoints and platforms position the visitor as a spectator, elevating and separating the body from the ground while directing attention towards a singular, composed image. In doing so, they participate in what Urry and Larsen (2011) describe as the hermeneutic circle of tourism: the prior image the visitor carries is confirmed and reproduced rather than challenged, and the landscape is returned to media as the same picture it entered as.



fig. 22 - Tourist photographing the horizon

2.10 - Sohlbergplassen - Case study

It is interesting to investigate the NTR projects through the lens of viewing culture. Sohlbergplassen (2006), designed by Carl-Viggo Hølmebakk and located along Riksvei 27 by Atnsjøen in Rondane, offers a clear example. A raised concrete platform extends from a roadside lay-by, guiding the visitor through the pine forest before opening towards a carefully framed view of Atnsjøen and the rounded mountains of Rondane. The platform's subtle tilt draws the visitor forward, while a few steps down at the end of the platform establish the viewing point as the final destination. The project reinforces a romantic gaze on the landscape, explicitly referencing Harald Sohlberg's painting *Vinternatt i Rondane* (1914). The landscape is encountered as a composed image - something to be viewed and captured in a glimpse rather than engaged with. In doing so, the intervention frames the surroundings through a singular aesthetic lens, emphasising the picturesque and the sublime while overlooking other qualities of the site.

The hermeneutic circle is legible here with particular clarity. The visitor arrives at Sohlbergplassen already carrying an image - Sohlberg's painting, or one of the countless photographs that are circulating through tourism media. The platform is precisely oriented toward the landscape the image depicts. The architecture does not introduce the visitor to the landscape; it confirms a picture the visitor already have. The encounter is choreographed through a linear and singular narrative, moving from arrival to the moment of photography, where the visitor is positioned in front of a predefined visual motif. That photograph is then shared, circulating back into the same media from which the prior image came, reinforcing the same view for the next visitor before they have even arrived. The circle closes completely: the landscape is encountered as an image and is returned as one, with nothing in between that the prior representation did not already contain.

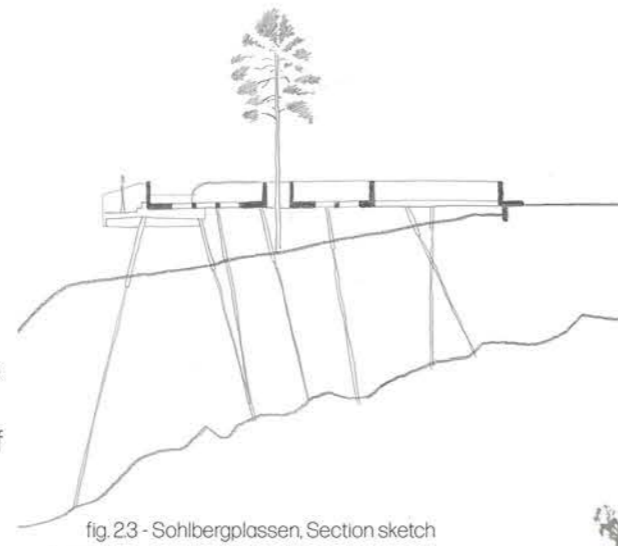


fig. 23 - Sohlbergplassen, Section sketch

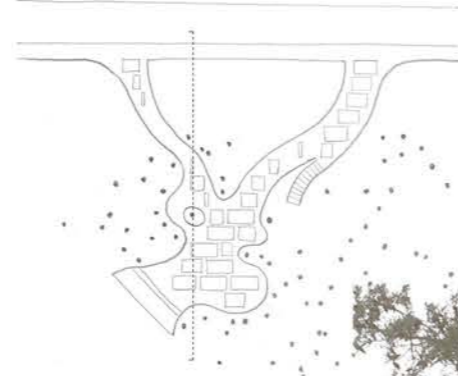


fig. 24 - Sohlbergplassen, Plan sketch

The intervention can also be understood as a contemporary form of the panorama. The visitor is placed on an elevated surface, surrounded by landscape, yet distanced from it. Like the historical panorama, the experience appears immersive, but remains controlled, transforming the surroundings into a visual field. The landscape becomes a surface to be observed, photographed, and shared, rather than a terrain to be explored. The concrete platform isolates the body from the ground, while directing attention toward the singular composed view the visitor arrived expecting to find. Sohlbergplassen exemplifies how tourism architecture can close the hermeneutic circle through architectural intervention - staging a frontstage encounter so complete that the backstage complexity of the site never comes into view.

fig. 25 - Sohlbergplassen, Collage



Sohlbergplassen
Carl-Viggo Hølmebakk
2006

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

How can architectural intervention in protected peripheral landscapes address the pressure of tourism and the commodification of landscapes in the experience economy?

How can the “hermeneutic circle” of tourism be broken by shifting the tourist experience from image-based consumption towards embodied engagement with landscape?

3.2 AIM

The thesis aims to investigate the role of architecture in protected peripheral landscapes experiencing increasing pressure from tourism. The project examines how architectural intervention can challenge the tendency within tourism-oriented design practices to close the hermeneutic circle of tourism – confirming pre-formed images of landscape while concealing the geological, cultural, and ecological complexity that lies behind them.

Through the case of Mølen, part of the Scandinavian terminal moraine and a UNESCO Global Geopark, the thesis explores how architecture can operate as a spatial mediator that breaks rather than closes this circle. Rather than producing attractions that confirm the visitor’s prior image of the landscape, the project investigates how walking and spatial sequencing can guide visitors from the confirmation of a frontstage image toward a more multifaceted encounter with the backstage reality of the site, its geological depth, cultural memory, and ecological fragility.

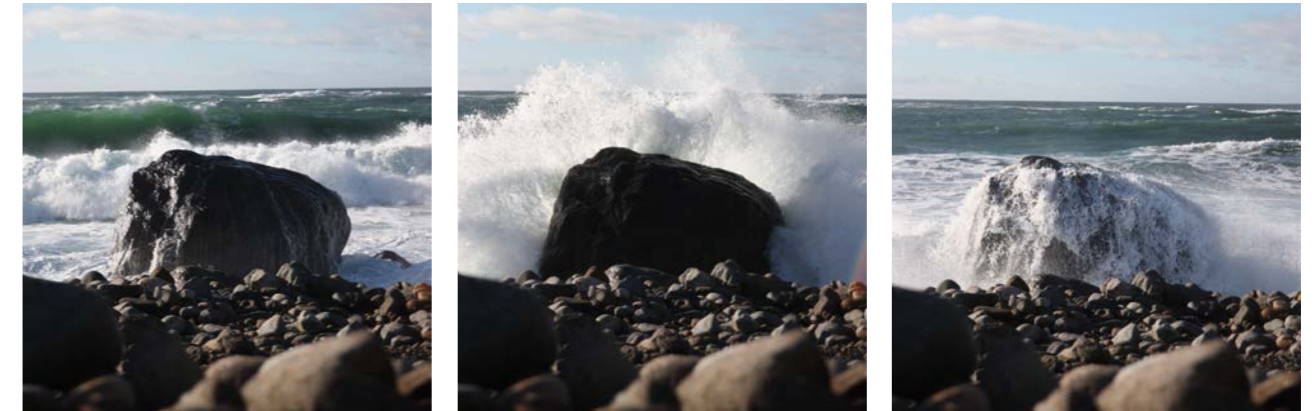


fig. 31 (a-c)

3.3 DELIMITATIONS

This thesis should be understood as an architectural argument exploring how design can challenge dominant ways of encountering protected landscapes, rather than a proposal of universal guidelines for tourism infrastructure.

Quantitative methods such as environmental impact assessments, detailed ecological surveys, life-cycle analysis (LCA), and cost calculations fall outside the scope of the thesis. While these aspects are crucial in real-world implementation, the purpose of this project is to investigate spatial and conceptual strategies.

The thesis focuses specifically on the site of Mølen and its immediate context. Broader regional planning questions, including the management of surrounding settlements, tourism infrastructure networks, or regional mobility systems, are not addressed.

The architectural proposal should be understood as a speculative exploration rather than a fully resolved development project. Given the ecological sensitivity of Mølen as a protected moraine landscape and bird conservation area, the construction of larger-scale visitor infrastructure could potentially conflict with conservation priorities. However, precisely because of this fragility, the site provides a valuable testing ground for examining how architecture might respond to highly protected environments.

The realism and feasibility of the proposal are therefore not the primary focus of the thesis. Instead, the project uses the design of a visitor centre to critically explore the relationship among tourism infrastructure, landscape perception, and embodied engagement with place.

4.0 THEORY

The following chapter establishes the theoretical framework for the thesis by citing key perspectives on tourism, perception, placemaking, and experience of landscape. It brings together theories on how tourists see, how experiences are structured, and how tourism produces places, before introducing walking as an alternative way of encountering landscape. The chapter moves from an understanding of tourism as a primarily visual and mediated practice, towards perspectives that emphasise embodiment, movement, and the temporal unfolding of experience.

4.1 - The tourist gaze: How we see

In *The Tourist Gaze* (2011), sociologist John Urry argues that tourism is structured around socially organised ways of seeing. People gaze upon the world through a particular filter of ideas, skills, desires and expectations, framed by social class, gender, nationality, age and education. Through travel literature, postcards, tourism marketing, and social media, tourists approach destinations with pre-established expectations that shape how landscapes are perceived and interpreted (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Landscapes are therefore encountered through culturally constructed visual frameworks that guide attention towards particular views, landmarks, and photographic moments. Urry and Larsen describe this as a *collective gaze*: a shared way of seeing in which places are repeatedly photographed and experienced from similar viewpoints. MacCannell (1976) notes that *"anything is potentially an attraction. It simply awaits one person to take the trouble to point it out to another as something noteworthy, or worth seeing."* This repetition reinforces familiar images circulating through tourism media and encourages stereotypical, surface-level perceptions of place. In this process, landscapes risk being reduced to visual confirmation of expectations rather than inviting engagement, awareness, and learning. The emphasis on documenting places often prioritises visual consumption over embodied experience.

Another important concept the book explains is the *romantic gaze*. The idea behind this concept is to seek an experience of the sublime aspects of unique, pristine wilderness, where wild animals roam, there is plenty of beautiful scenery, and

opportunities to enjoy nature's health-giving properties and make memories. It also includes a desire to experience all of this in solitude, far away from the arenas of mass tourism (Urry & Larsen, 2011). This gaze springs from the Romantic period, which was especially strong in Norway during the mid-19th century, when a focus on emotion, sensation and poetic mystery arose. The romantic gaze is closely linked to romantic paintings of the time, depicting picturesque, sublime, and mythical landscapes. This type of seeing is often passive, positioning the viewer away from the scene, almost as if the landscape is only there to be viewed upon, not engaged with. This type of gaze is frequently used in tourist brochures and websites, showing dramatic landscapes with little to no tourists. NTR is guilty of this by repeatedly showing grand views and deserted landscapes, which are far from the reality tourists meet during tourist seasons. On the NTR website, we find evidence of this; *"the traveller will experience Norway the way it is exhibited in tourist brochures and on postcards"* (Nasjonale turistveger, 2025).

Although many tourist places are designed according to the logic of visualism, and in that process suppress or control the other senses, and the visual sense is normally the organising sense within tourist experiences, it is important also to acknowledge the complex intersections of the senses in people's encounters with place (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Therefore, in the most recent edition of *"The Tourist Gaze 3.0"*, the authors introduce embodied gazing, or what they call a *performed tourist gaze*. This concept posits that gazing is not just passive but sensory, encompassing movement, atmosphere, and bodily presence. What this performed tourist gaze means is that tourists actively move and position their bodies in space. They learn where to look, what counts as a good view and learn to follow established routes and viewpoints. It is important to remember that tourists often have a desire to touch, stroke, walk, or climb, and even collect what they lay their eyes upon, and are not just static observers. In designing a visitor centre for tourism in peripheral landscapes, it is crucial to create an encounter that goes beyond the collective, romantic gaze. The design should engage the tourist by encouraging exploration of individual interests and several narratives.

4.2 - Authenticity: How experiences are structured

According to Dean MacCannell, all tourists embody a quest for authenticity, which is a modern version of the universal human concern with the sacred. The tourist is a kind of contemporary pilgrim, seeking authenticity in other times and other places away from that person's everyday life. Contemporary literature suggests that tourism increasingly leads to the commoditization of places, transforming landscapes and cultural practices into products for consumption (Cohen, 1988). An important part of MacCannell's argument, is that the authenticity the tourist encounters is often "staged authenticity". Places are arranged to appear authentic but, in reality, offer experiences constructed for tourists. He introduces the concepts of *frontstage* and *backstage*: the frontstage is what is shown to tourists, while the backstage is what is hidden and considered "the reality" behind the tourist attraction. Notably, tourism has acknowledged this issue by also offering the subject a glimpse into a backstage scene, for example, a view into a conservation



fig. 41 - Wanderer above the sea of fog, Caspar David Friedrich

workshop in a museum, or an open kitchen in a restaurant. Although this might grant the tourist a sensation that they glimpse into something authentic, these backstages are often equally choreographed and staged. MacCannell believes that all tourist experiences are commoditized and staged, and that authenticity is therefore ruined. Eric Cohen (1988), however, challenges the idea that tourism inevitably destroys authenticity through commoditization. While tourism does transform cultural practices, places, and everyday life into commodities, he argues that this process is more complex than a simple loss of authenticity. He believes commoditization can alter traditions by adapting them to tourist expectations, often making them more visible, simplified or staged. He argues that this does not necessarily make the experience inauthentic, and that authenticity does not have to be fixed, but can be negotiated, constructed and even newly created through tourism (Cohen, 1988). He distinguishes between original authenticity and emergent authenticity, where the latter is authenticity revived or evolved through tourism, and tourism can actually help preserve and revitalise cultural practices, even

if they are modified in the process. It is also important to note that tourists are not naive and may recognise staged authenticity, yet still find the experience meaningful.

Another theory Dean MacCannell introduces is that of *markers* (MacCannell, 1976). These can include guidebooks, maps, signage, information boards, websites and social media, and are a crucial part of understanding how tourist attractions are structured, and how they shape visitors' perception. These markers might identify what is worth seeing, where the attractions are, and what is authentic, both before and during the visit. In this sense, the experience of the place is often mediated in advance. Tourists arrive with expectations of what to see, and this can be linked to Urry's idea of the hermeneutic circle. Markers are important in shaping visitors' understanding of the place, but they also risk making the experience didactic. If an experience is primarily structured by information boards, diagrams and curated narratives, it might end up reducing the experience to a fully scripted tourist experience, lacking encouragement of individual interpretations.

4.3 - Experience Economy: What tourism produces

As mentioned earlier, the experience economy marked a shift from experiences being designed and staged as consumable products, turning places and activities into curated events. Before, tourism was about visiting places, the place itself was the attraction. The experience economy has shifted this to the creation of attraction and the consumption of experiences. According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), experiences are now designed through curation, structure, and memorable moments. The encounter with place is no longer open, it is scripted. Tourism has become strongly image-driven through commodification and the pursuit of making the tourist experience memorable. Attractions for tourists have become the main selling point for tourist sites, promising scenic views, iconic architecture and Instagrammable moments. Through this process, landscapes are transformed into destinations - sites structured around specific attractions, narratives, and expectations, rather than open-

ended environments.

The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, by contrast, understands place as something that emerges from lived experience rather than as inherent to a location. Through movement, time, and bodily engagement, abstract space is gradually transformed into meaningful place. This process cannot be reduced to a single moment or view, but unfolds through a sequence of experiences, where perception is shaped by continuous sensory interaction and memory (Tuan, 1977). While tourism constructs destinations as consumable and predefined experiences, place, in Tuan's sense, emerges gradually through embodied engagement and cannot be reduced to a single image or attraction.

A *destination* can then be seen as a place created for tourism consumption. Through a curated journey, predetermined views, a singular narrative and didactic markers, the experience is fully staged. While a *place* is experienced through prolonged immersion, where interaction is not staged, and the encounter is open for individual exploration and interpretation.

4.4 - Walking: A different mode of encountering

The act of walking has been theorised by several thinkers as a way of engaging with space, shifting the emphasis from static observation to movement and experience. Across different disciplines, Lucius Burckhardt, Michel de Certeau, and Francesco Careri each develop an understanding of walking as a central mechanism through which space is perceived, interpreted, and produced.

Lucius Burckhardt, through his development of *Strollology* (1996), argues that landscape is not an objective reality that exists independently of the observer, but rather something that is constructed through perception. Perception is shaped by cultural expectations, prior knowledge, and individual experience. For Burckhardt, walking becomes the primary means through which landscape is understood. As one moves through a landscape, perception unfolds gradually, revealing relationships, sequences, and variations that cannot be grasped from a fixed point. In this sense,



fig. 4.2 (a-f) - Moraine changing underfoot while walking towards the shoreline

landscape is not something that can be grasped in a single view, but a process that emerges over time. Burckhardt is also critical of designed viewpoints, arguing that they reduce landscape to a framed image and limit the possibility for interpretation and discovery (Burckhardt, 1996).

Michel de Certeau approaches walking from a different perspective, focusing on everyday practices and the relationship between users and designed space. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), he describes walking as a form of spatial practice through which individuals actively produce meaning. He introduces a distinction between *strategies* and *tactics*, where *strategies* refer to the systems and structures imposed by institutions, planners, and designers, while *tactics* describe how individuals navigate these structures in practice. Walking, in this sense, is a way of "writing" space, where each trajectory creates a unique interpretation of the environment. Rather than passively following predefined routes, the walker engages with space in a dynamic and often unpredictable manner, producing a lived and situated understanding (Certeau, 1984).

Francesco Careri extends these ideas into an architectural context in *Walkscapes* (2017), where walking is understood as a spatial practice. Careri frames walking as a method of design and analysis. Space is experienced as a sequence, unfolding through time as a series of transitions, thresholds, and encounters. In contrast to approaches that prioritise fixed viewpoints, Careri emphasises process, movement, and narrative. Walking becomes a tool for reading and producing space, where the act of moving through a landscape generates meaning and spatial structure (Careri, 2017).

While these three perspectives emerge from different contexts, they share a common understanding of walking as central to the experience of space. All emphasise that perception is not static but unfolds through movement, and that landscape cannot be reduced to a single image or viewpoint.

4.5 - The hermeneutic circle of tourism

The previous sections have looked at a recurring condition across tourism theory, visual culture, and the experience economy: tourists do not encounter landscapes directly, but through layers of expectations that shape what they expect to find, what they notice, and what they miss. In hermeneutic philosophy, this condition is described as the *hermeneutic circle*, the relationship between prior understanding and a new encounter in any act of interpretation. As Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960) argued, understanding never begins from zero. Every encounter is approached through a horizon of pre-existing expectations, assumptions, and knowledge shaped by culture, education, and prior experience (Gadamer, 1960). Interpretation is the process of bringing this pre-understanding into that which is encountered, allowing both to be altered in the meeting. The *hermeneutic circle* break when the encounter challenges prior expectations, or it closes, when the encounter simply confirms what was already known (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Urry and Larsen argue that tourists approach destinations with pre-formed images derived from brochures, postcards, travel literature, and social media. These images establish what a place looks like, what it means, and how it should be experienced before the visit begins. As Fåltun (2024) demonstrates, tourists tend to reproduce the views they have already encountered in the media, photographing the expected image and circulating it back into the same media that produced those expectations. The landscape is consumed as a confirmation of a prior image rather than encountered as a complex reality. What circulates through tourism media is inevitably a simplified and selective version of place – a *frontstage*, in MacCannell's (1976) terms, constructed to appear authentic while concealing the backstage complexity that lies behind. At Mølen, the frontstage is the scenic stone beach and the view of the horizon: vast, photogenic, and already widely circulated in tourism media. The backstage, the geological history embedded in each stone, the cultural memory inscribed in the burial cairns, the

ecological fragility of habitats under increasing pressure, remains largely invisible to the visitor whose encounter is structured by expectations. Tourism architecture participates in this condition by facilitating viewpoints, elevated platforms, and directing visitors' gaze – these are spatial strategies designed to deliver the expected image. As the study of Sohlbergplassen demonstrates, architecture can close the hermeneutic circle by staging a frontstage encounter so completely that the visitor never needs to look beyond it. The NTR projects largely reproduce this logic: arrival, path, viewpoint, photograph, departure. The circle closes before the visitor has engaged with anything the prior image did not already contain.

4.6 - Walking as a mechanism for breaking the circle

If the hermeneutic circle closes when encounter confirms prior expectation, then breaking it requires spatial conditions that exceed what prior representation can anticipate. This is where walking becomes not just an alternative mode of encountering landscape but a mechanism for resisting the closure of the circle. The hermeneutic circle of tourism operates primarily through the image. What circulates in brochures, websites, and social media is visual and static – a composed, framed, and reproducible representation of place. The visitor arrives carrying this expected image and, at a viewpoint, finds it waiting for them. Walking, however, generates encounters that the prior image cannot fully prepare the visitor for. The uneven surface of the moraine demands attention to the immediate ground rather than the distant horizon. The sound of waves dragging rounded stones shifts as the visitor moves along the shoreline. The physical effort of crossing the stone field slows movement and alters perception. These are conditions that arrive through bodily experience, and they resist anticipation because they cannot be represented in a photograph or described in a brochure.

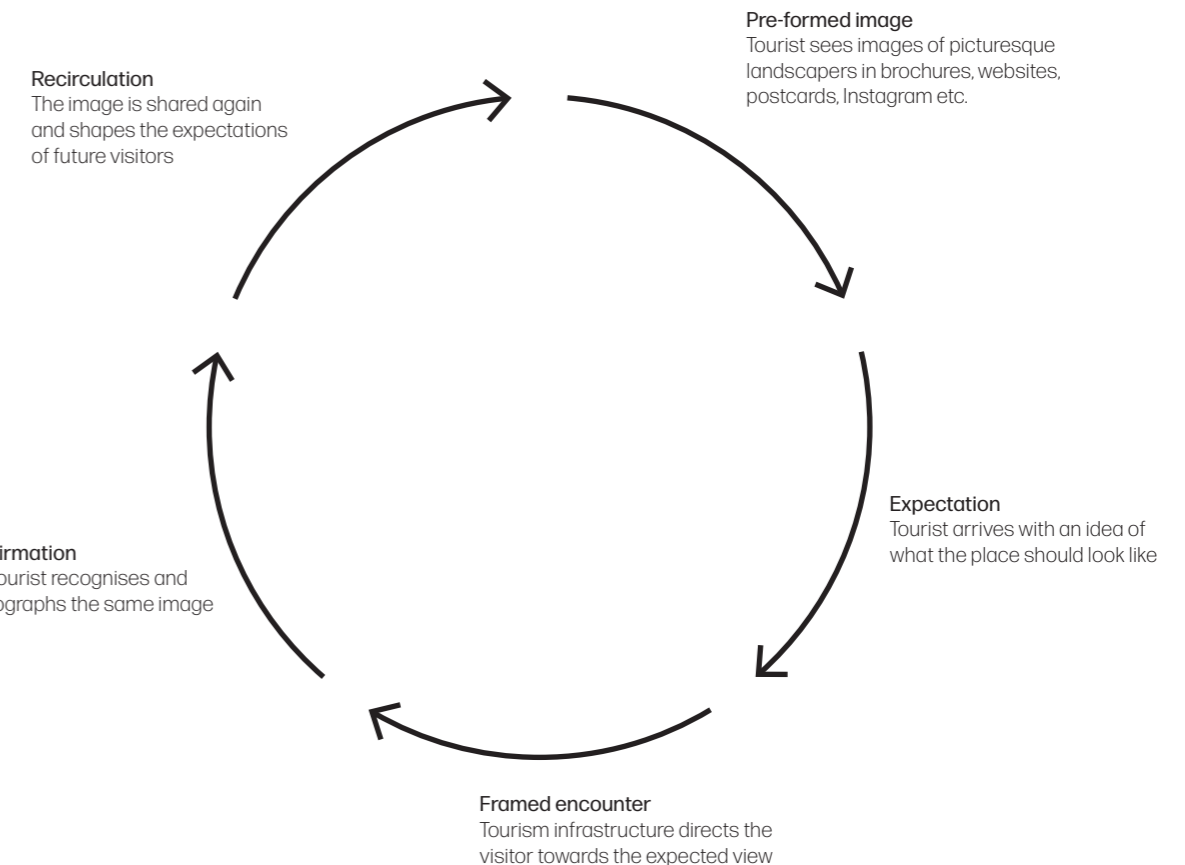


fig. 4.3

Burckhardt (1996) argues that landscape is not a fixed object to be viewed but a process that unfolds through movement. What is perceived depends on where the body is, how fast it is moving, and what it is doing. The designed viewpoint fixes the body in space and directs attention toward a predetermined image, while walking unfolds perception of the landscape sequentially. De Certeau (1984) extends this argument by framing walking as active production of space rather than passive consumption. The walker does not follow a script but creates a unique spatial text through their prolonged immersion, encountering designed space in ways that exceed what was intended or anticipated. Careri (2017) develops the consequence for landscape: the walk produces a new image rather than confirming a prior one. Where the view closes the circle, the walk breaks it.

However, the architectural response cannot simply claim that walking produces authentic encounters while the viewpoint produces staged inauthenticity. MacCannell (1976) acknowledges that all tourist encounters are mediated and constructed to

some degree, and Cohen (1988) argues that this does not necessarily make them inauthentic. The problem is not staging the encounter, but staging that conceals itself as authentic rather than being honest about its designed reality. This is what Cohen (1988) calls emergent authenticity: an openly constructed encounter in which both architect and visitor understand that what is experienced is an interpretation of the site rather than the site itself.

The risk that any architectural intervention at Mølen faces is becoming another attraction within the experience economy, a frontstage that closes the circle it set out to break. The design should be self-aware and honest, and invite the visitor to encounter the backstage of geological, cultural, and ecological reality rather than a curated image of it. The architectural project tests if a spatial sequence structured by walking and thresholds can produce an encounter that breaks the hermeneutic circle, rather than reproducing the conditions it seeks to challenge.



fig. 5.1

Projects visited during the study trip include: Hanstholm Bunkermuseum (Cubo, 2002), Tirpitz Museum (BIG, 2017), Vadehavscenteret (Dorte Mandrup, 2017), Mønsted Kalkgruber (Schönherr, 2017), Moesgård Museum (Henning Larsen, 2014), Kannikegården (Lundgaard & Tranberg, 2015), Thy Nationalpark Center (LOOP Architects, 2021), and Stevns Klint Experience (Praksis Arkitekter, 2014). Later I also visited the Verdens Ende Visitor Centre by Holar (2015).



fig. 5.2

5.0 METHOD

This thesis is grounded in the observation that architecture in protected landscapes often moves too quickly from site to design, producing standardised interventions that confirm expectations and close the hermeneutic circle. If architecture is to break the self-reinforcing loop of tourist representation, it must first understand what lies behind the frontstage image of the landscape it sits in. At Mølen, the circulating tourist image of the stone beach conceals layers of geological, cultural, and ecological complexity that only become legible through prolonged immersion with the terrain. Landscapes are highly specific environments and cannot be approached through universal design rules or guidelines. This project is therefore structured as an argument that meaningful architectural intervention in protected landscapes must emerge from sustained engagement with the site.

The thesis is developed through a research-through-design methodology in which theory, site analysis, and design exploration evolve in parallel. Design is used as a tool to test how architecture can mediate between tourism, landscape preservation, and embodied experience. Theory is tested through design strategies that are gradually refined through drawing, modelling, and site analysis.

5.1 - Literature review

The project begins with an overview and investigation of the literature on tourism, especially that on nature-based tourism/ecotourism. Establishing a foundation of knowledge about tourists, their aim, the way they encounter places, and how they perceive, has been crucial when going more in-depth into architectural tourism attractions. The history of tourism has also been reviewed, as it helps describe how a long history of viewing has affected contemporary tourism architecture.

5.2 - Study trip

Before starting working on the thesis, a study trip to Jylland, Denmark, was conducted to provide a basis of knowledge about visitor centres, exhibitions, and tourist experiences. A broad range of projects were visited, with the aim of understanding architecture's role in shaping visitors' experience and how architecture deals with cultural heritage and construction in landscapes.

5.3 - Site immersion / Walking

One of the most central components of the methods was prolonged site immersion. Over the past year, I have visited the site at Mølen repeatedly across different seasons to understand its spatial, atmospheric, and environmental conditions under changing climates. Walking has been the main approach to the landscape; observing tangible features and documenting sensory impressions have allowed the site to be understood beyond its measurable characteristics.

5.4 - Site Encyclopedia

The observations from the site visits have been systematically organised into a Site Encyclopedia. This catalogue brings together both tangible and intangible aspects of the landscape. Tangible conditions include geological, cultural, ecological and recreational features. Intangible observations include atmospheric qualities, sensory perceptions, and spatial conditions encountered as one moves through the landscape. The Site Encyclopedia forms a foundation for the architectural proposal and is a separate document from the thesis. The encyclopedia has been a way for me to understand and organise my findings from the site. It is also a crucial element for the

audience during presentations for understanding the site's complex layers, as verbally presenting the findings would take too much time. A condensed summary of the Encyclopedia's contents will be included in the thesis booklet as part of the site analysis.

5.5 - Landscape analysis

To understand and represent Mølen's strong atmospheric factors, the site has been analysed through sequential landscape mapping. Inspired by the work of Kevin Lynch, this method maps the experience of moving through the site, an experience that cannot be represented solely through maps or images. Routes, moments of attention, points of uncertainty, and locations where visitors stop or photograph the landscape are recorded. This mapping reveals how certain viewpoints and spatial conditions structure the visitor's perception of the landscape. The mapping supports photographs and sketches, as these fail to display the scale of the site and its atmosphere.

5.6 - Precedent studies

Precedent studies provide an understanding of how architectural interventions contribute to the commodification of landscapes and rapid encounters. Projects from the NTR have been analysed not through their architectural qualities, but for the relationships they establish between visitor and landscape. Through the theoretical lenses of tourist theories such as the tourist gaze, authenticity, placemaking, and the hermeneutic circle, these projects have been examined to understand how architectural interventions frame landscape encounters and often reinforce image-based, stereotypical, and surface-level ways of experiencing nature. In parallel, more unexpected projects by architects such as Sverre Fehn and Tadao Ando have been studied for their use of spatial sequencing and carefully staged movement.

5.7 - Design exploration

Through drawings, models, and spatial studies, the project explores how architectural thresholds and sequences can shift the visitor's encounter with Mølen. Design becomes a method for testing how architecture can guide movement, direct attention, and encourage embodied engagement with the landscape without creating curated, staged and anticipated experiences.



fig. 61 - Mølen's location at the tip of Vestfold



fig 62 - The moraine ridge enveloping Scandinavia

6.0 SITE

6.1 - Mølen

Mølen, located at the southernmost tip of the coast of Vestfold in Norway, is a landscape where geological, cultural, and ecological layers are unusually condensed into a single site. Formed as part of Raet, a terminal moraine left behind at the end of the last Ice Age, the area is known for being Norway's largest pebble beach, where waves from the Skagerrak continue to shape and polish the terrain. At the same time, Mølen is one of Norway's most significant cultural landscapes. The site contains around 230 burial cairns, dating from the Bronze Age through the Iron and Viking Ages, positioned along the ridge overlooking the sea (Visit Scandinavia, n.d).

In addition to its geological and cultural significance, Mølen is also an important ecological site. Its exposed coastal location makes it a key point for bird migration, with hundreds of species recorded as they pass through the area each year (Visit Scandinavia, n.d). Today, Mølen is a popular tourist destination and hiking spot protected as part of a UNESCO Geopark and nature reserve.

6.2 - Raet

Raet is a terminal moraine system formed during the final stages of the last Ice Age around 12 000 years ago. The moraine forms a continuous geological belt that can be traced across large parts of Scandinavia, extending from southeastern Norway through Sweden and into Finland (see fig. 6.2). In Norway, the ridge runs along the Oslofjord region and continues through Vestfold and Østfold, where it appears as a series of moraine hills, ridges, lakes, and coastal formations.

6.3 - Vestfoldraet

Vestfoldraet forms one of the most visible sections of the Ra moraine in Norway (see fig. 6.3). The ridge runs across Vestfold as a belt of hills, lakes, and agricultural land, marking the former edge of the Scandinavian ice sheet (Stokke, 1978).

At its southwestern end, the moraine reaches the coastline at Mølen. Here, the geological formation meets the Skagerrak ocean, where waves have washed away finer sediments and leaving a vast field of rounded stones. At this point, the moraine no longer continues across land, but gradually disappears into the sea, giving Mølen the character of a geological edge - often referred to as the end of a continent or the edge of the Ra (Raets brodd).

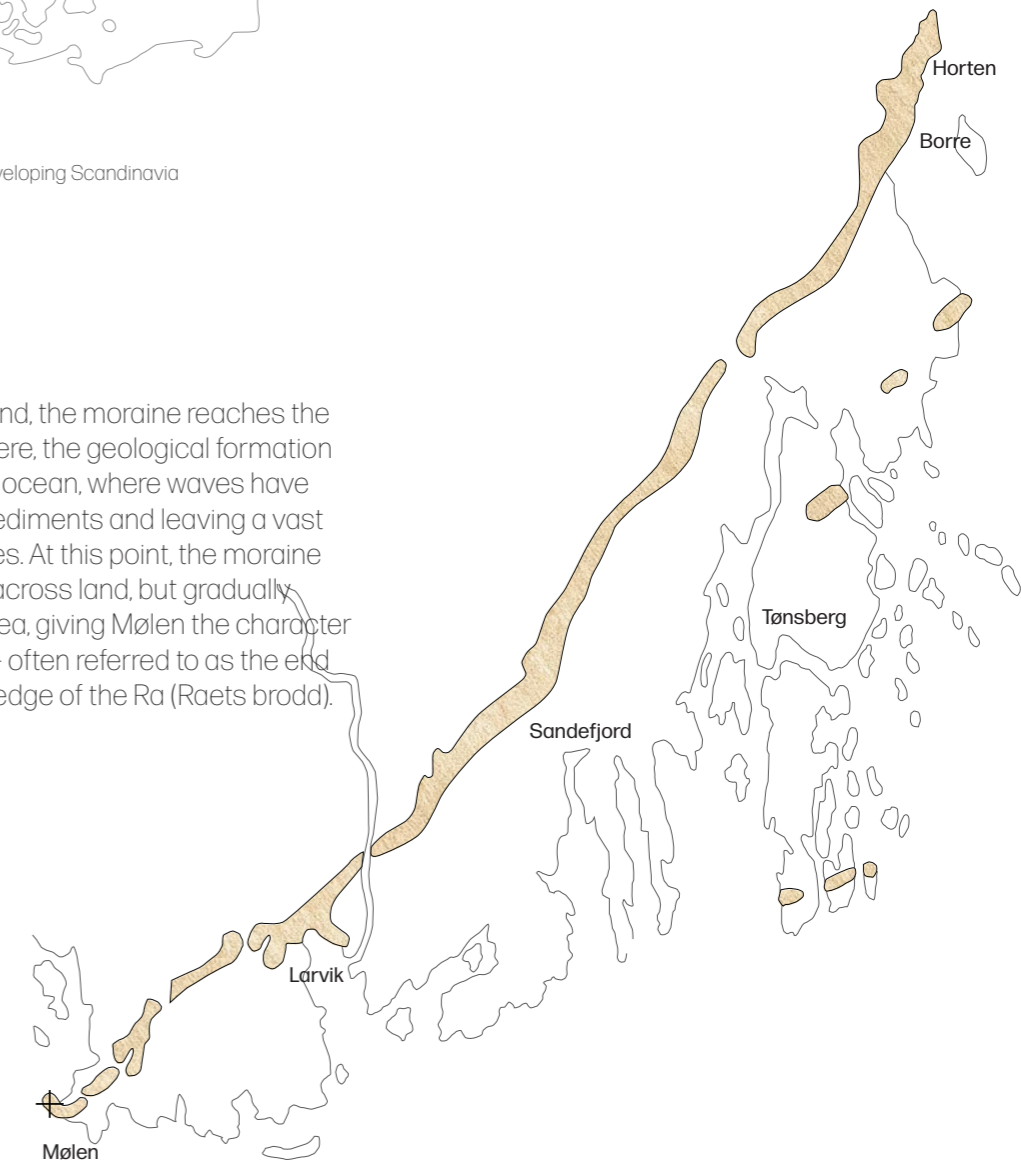


fig. 6.3 - The moraine ridge through Vestfold

Gea Norvegica Geopark

1. Bøkeskogen
2. Kapittelberget
3. Langøy
4. Kongshavn
5. Holla Kirkeruin
6. Fensfeltet
7. Steinmann
8. Ula
9. Skriua
10. Stangnes
11. Rakke
12. Fossum
13. Mølen
14. Kjærra Fossepark
15. Jomfruland
16. Løvøya
17. Valleråsen
18. Ælva
19. Steinvika
20. Rognstranda
21. Dybedalsgruva
22. Gorningen
23. Øverbøtjern

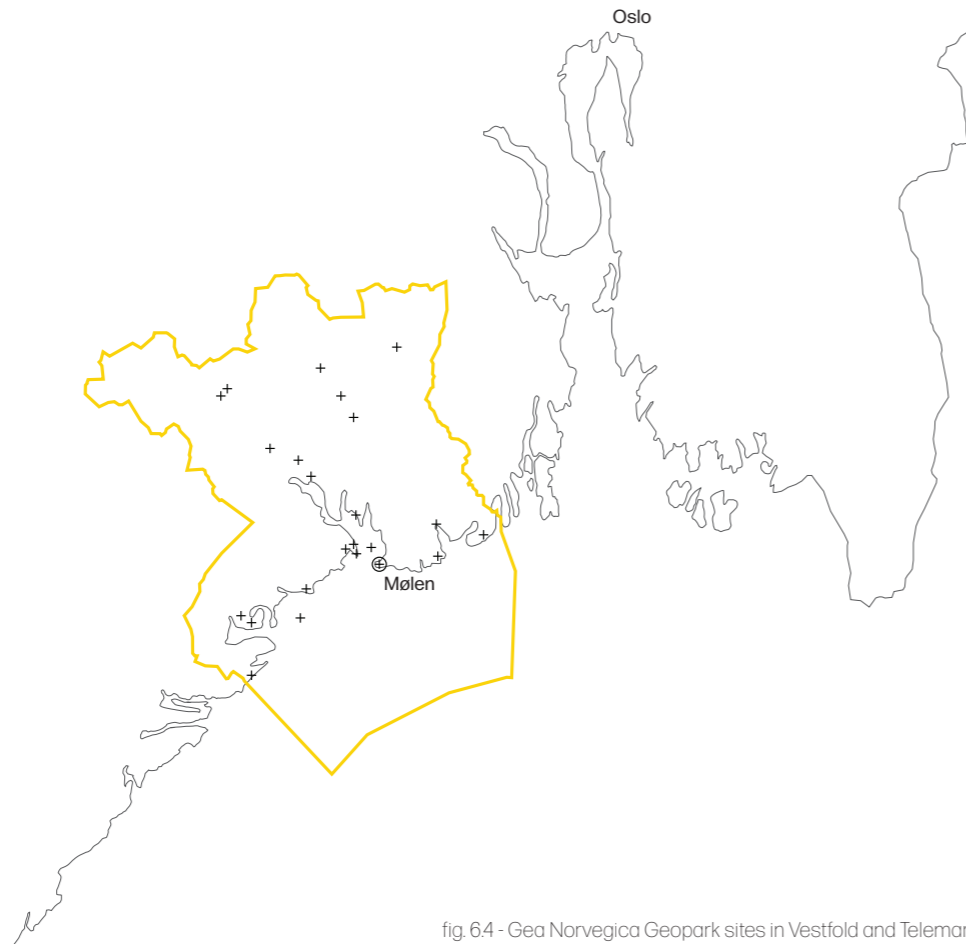


fig. 6.4 - Gea Norvegica Geopark sites in Vestfold and Telemark

6.4 - Immediate context

Mølen is one of 23 geological sites that together form the Gea Norvegica Geopark in southeastern Norway. Each of these locations represents a distinct chapter in the geological history of the region, revealing landscapes shaped by volcanic activity, glacial movement, sedimentation, and coastal processes. Together they form an area of exceptional geological diversity.

6.5 - UNESCOs Global Geopark

In 2008, Mølen became part of the UNESCO Global Geoparks network, making it the first geopark in Scandinavia to receive this designation. The UNESCO Global Geopark programme recognises landscapes of international geological significance and aims to promote understanding of the relationship between geological heritage, natural environments, and human history. Through education, research, and sustainable tourism, geoparks seek to communicate how geological processes have shaped both landscapes and the societies that inhabit them (UNESCO, 2026).

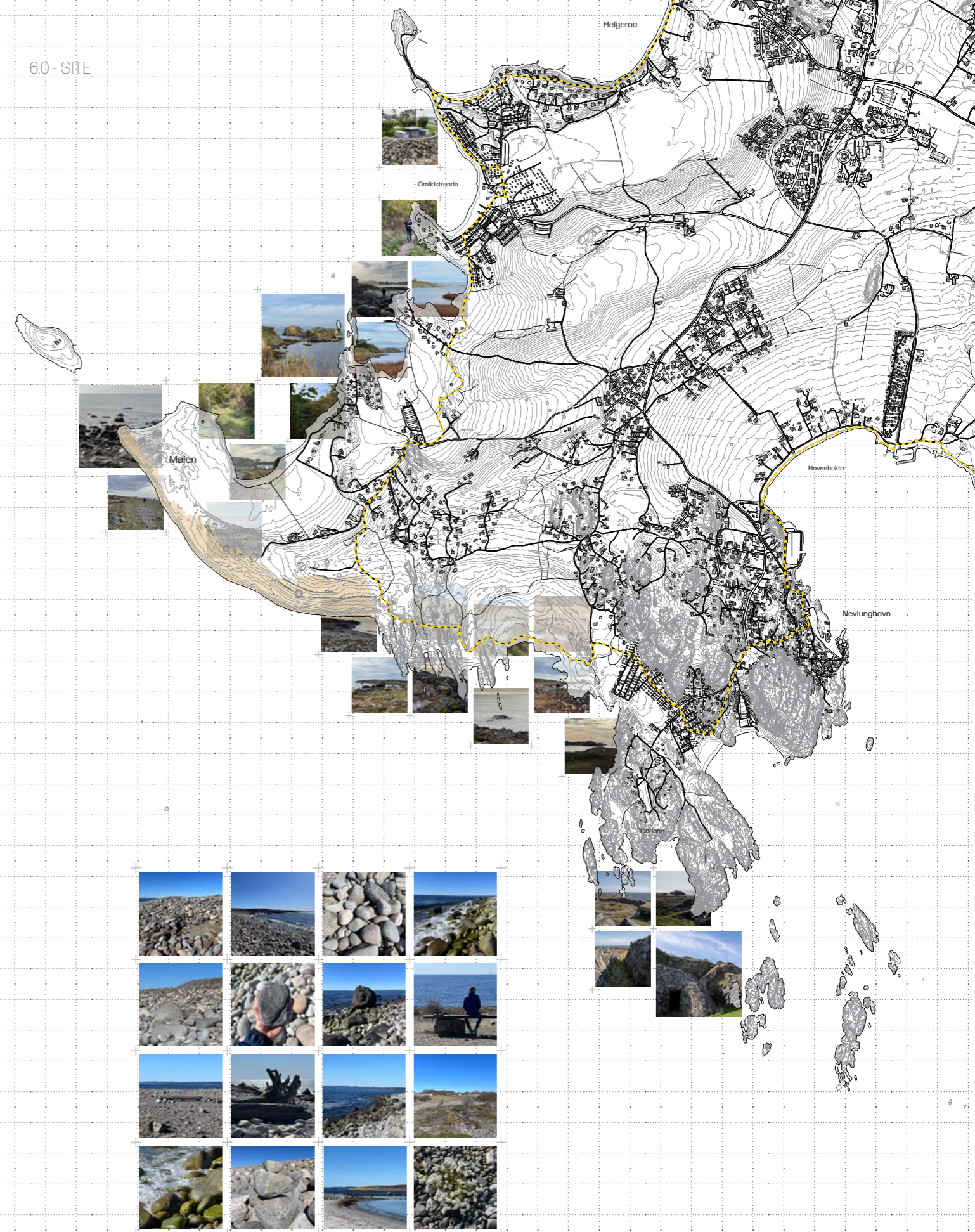
6.6 - Existing tourism infrastructure

The physical infrastructure that communicates the geological significance at Mølen remains limited. The site has a small number of didactic information boards placed along the path towards the site and a small exhibition of rocks showing the age and origin of the different stone types. While these elements provide basic geological information, they fail to introduce the complex geological, cultural, and ecological layers present at the site. These *markers*, in MacCannell's words, are only trivially informative and reduce the interesting narratives of the site to something straight out of a school textbook.



fig. 6.5(a-c) - Information boards in todays parking lot marking the entrance of the area

6.0 - SITE



--- Coastal Trail



Mølen forms part of Raet, a continuous terminal moraine that stretches across southern Scandinavia. It marks the outermost advance of the last ice sheet approximately 10,000 years ago. As the glacier repeatedly advanced and retreated, stones and debris were pushed forward and deposited in large ridges beneath the sea. When the ice finally withdrew, wave action reworked the exposed material, rounding the stones and removing finer sediments.

AGRICULTURE



the ground conditions shift from exposed moraine stone fields to deeper, more stable soils composed of glacial sediments. These areas support vegetation and agriculture, with fewer visible stones and a more even terrain shaped by both glacial deposition and post-glacial land uplift.

Agriculture around Mølen benefits from fertile soils left behind by the glacier. As the ice retreated, it deposited sand, gravel, and fine sediments that created well-drained, mineral-rich ground. Combined with a mild coastal climate, this makes the surrounding landscape well suited for farming, directly linking glacial processes to today's agricultural use.

SRUCE FOREST

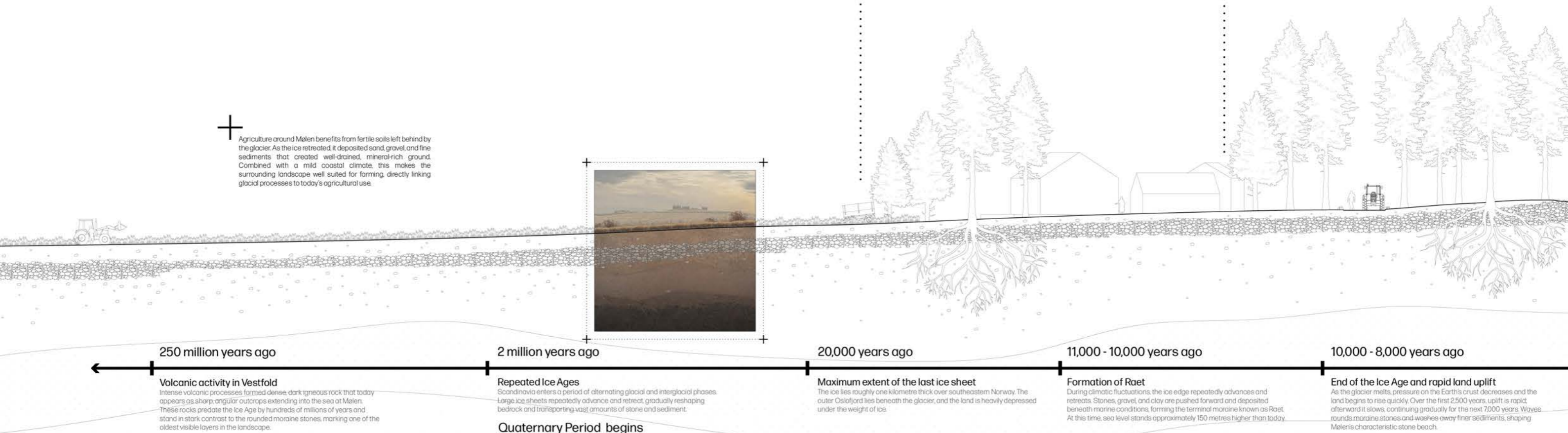


In 2008, Mølen became part of UNESCO Global Geoparks. Despite this designation, on-site interventions remain limited to a small stone exhibition and a few information boards, leaving much of the site's geological, cultural and ecological significance difficult to understand. UNESCO's aim for these parks are:

The purpose of a UNESCO Global Geopark is to explore, develop and celebrate the links between that geological heritage and all other aspects of the area's natural, cultural and intangible heritages. It is about reconnecting human society at all levels to the planet we all call home and to celebrate how our planet and its 4,600 million year long history has shaped every aspect of our lives and our societies (UNESCO, 2025).

PINE FOREST

A belt of tall pine trees separates Mølen from the line of residential houses next to the fields



MIXED VEGETATION



The vegetation at Mølen consists mainly of mixed low shrub vegetation, with a large proportion of evergreen species adapted to poor, well-drained soils. The site is highly exposed to strong south and south-west winds coming directly from the Skagerrak, which limits tree growth and keeps much of the vegetation low and dense. Where trees do grow, they often develop asymmetrical, wind-shaped forms, bent and hardened by constant exposure.

SHRUB VEGETATION



Around 500 metres inland from the shoreline at Mølen, stones increasingly pierce the surface through shallow soils, mixed with wild grasses and mosses. The ground becomes visibly rougher, revealing the moraine beneath.

DRY MEADOW



Around 400 metres inland from the shoreline, exposed rocks become more frequent, with only patches of grass and moss surviving between the stones. The moraine increasingly dominates the surface.

PEBBLE BEACH



Around 300 metres inland from the shoreline, vegetation is almost absent, with only scarce dry shrubs appearing occasionally. The ground is covered by dense, small stones (approximately 2-10 cm in diameter), forming a compact surface that is easy to walk on.

The gaze is drawn toward the open sea and distant horizon, where land dissolves into water. This outward pull makes the site feel like an edge condition.

There are no man-made paths; instead, repeated footsteps leave subtle scars in the vegetation, forming natural routes shaped by movement rather than construction.

Strandedik - *Calluna Maritima*
Strandik - *Crambe Maritima*
Tangmelde - *Alnopsis Lullula*
Strandmelde - *Alnopsis Littoralis*
Gåssmure - *Poterilla Anserina*
Krutshymel - *Rumex Crispus*



The terminal moraine alternates between being fully exposed and partially buried. In some areas, the belt of stones lies visibly on top of the landscape, while in others it continues beneath soil and vegetation, revealing how the moraine both shapes the surface and quietly persists below it.

10,300 - 5,000 years ago

Postglacial vegetation establishes

Open birch forests and alpine plants give way to pine, hazel, and later mixed oak forests as climate becomes warmer and wetter. Vegetation spreads across newly exposed land, while small lakes form in depressions left by the glacier.

5,000 - 4,000 BC

Early Stone Age settlement

Hunter-gatherers settle along former shorelines, now elevated above sea level. They live from fishing, hunting, and gathering, leaving minimal impact on the landscape. Archaeological traces show rich wildlife and coastal resource use.

3,000 BC

Agriculture emerges

Slash-and-burn farming begins. Forest is cleared in cycles, creating a shifting mosaic of fields, grazing land, and regenerating woodland. Human influence on the Raet landscape increases.

500 BC

Early Iron Age

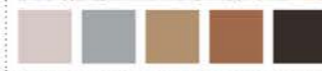
More organised agriculture develops, and grazing landscapes become established across Raet. Burial practices shift toward marked cemeteries, with cairns and mounds placed in prominent locations, including at Mølen. Spruce and beech spread as climate cools, while human land use increasingly shapes vegetation patterns through farming, grazing, and forest management.



At Mølen, the world feels momentarily distant. Light arrives with unusual clarity, reflecting off the stones and flattening shadows, creating an almost lunar sense of exposure. Walking across the moraine carries a weightless, otherworldly quality – like moving through a landscape outside ordinary time. Salt settles on the lips, and the constant rhythm of waves crashing and dragging stones back and forth fills the air, slowly honing their surfaces. Beneath this ongoing geological motion lies a quieter layer: burial cairns scattered across the site, marking human presence within deep time.



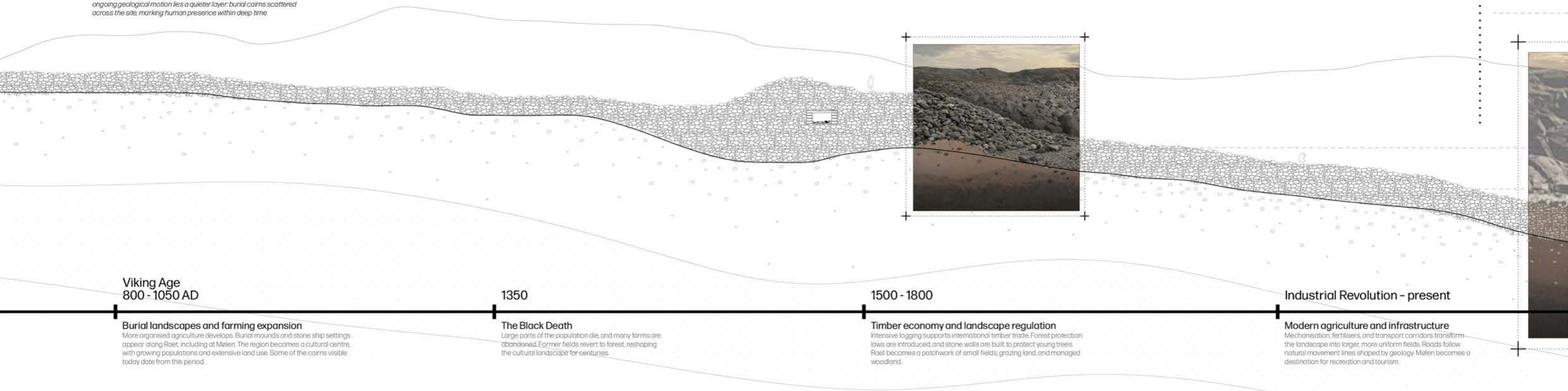
Around 200 metres inland from the shoreline at Mølen, vegetation disappears entirely, leaving only rounded stones that increase in size toward the sea. Finer gravel and debris are largely washed away, and the landscape is reduced to a muted palette of grey, blue, and beige.



Around 100 metres inland from the shoreline, stones increase in size to approximately 20-30 cm in diameter and the colour palette becomes more varied as the sea approaches. The uneven ground challenges balance and vestibular sense, making movement slower and more attentive, though still passable on foot.



Movement across Mølen requires constant attention to balance. The shifting stones demand careful placement of each step, engaging the vestibular sense and forcing the gaze downward toward the ground. Walking becomes deliberate and slow, shaped by the instability of the surface.



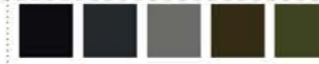
OCEAN



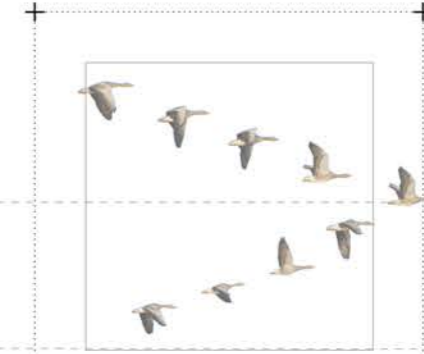
At the shoreline at Mølen, waves wet the stones and intensify the colour palette, revealing blues, greens, yellows, and pinks, with the stones closest to the water often green from algae. The rounded stones are typically 30-60 cm in diameter (with some larger), and the shifting surface strongly challenges balance, requiring careful attention with every step.



The dark volcanic rock appears massive and heavy, its sharp edges and near-black surface absorbing light and anchoring the body. In contrast, the rounded moraine stones feel lighter and brighter, their pale, polished surfaces reflecting colour and movement



Extending into the sea at Mølen, a formation of volcanic rock creates a sharp contrast to the rounded moraine stones. The edges are angular and hard, formed approximately 250 million years ago, and their dark, almost black surface stands in strong opposition to the lighter, colourful stones along the beach. Where the moraine feels loose and shifting underfoot, the volcanic rock appears heavy, dense, and immovable.



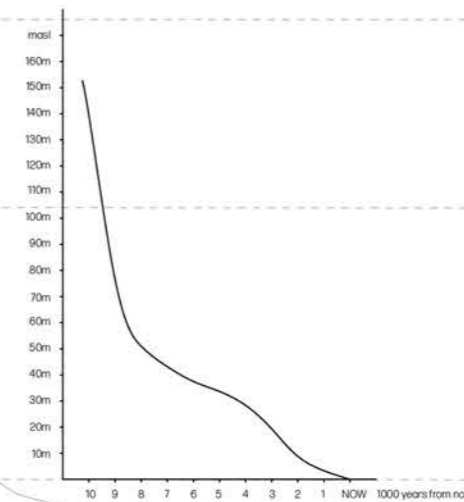
As a stopover site for migratory birds, Mølen is of international significance. This headland facing the open sea is the first landfall for many birds arriving from the south and continuing inland. During the autumn migration, it serves correspondingly as the last resting place before the birds cross the Skagerrak.



Steppetråkksvale
Glaucala Nordmanni
One of the rarest species observed at Mølen



The vegetation at Mølen - heathland, dense scrub, alder woodland (riparian forest), and coniferous forest - provides favourable roosting and foraging habitats. In addition, the various shoreline types (rocky shore, sandy beach and accumulation beach), open water, wetland areas, and agricultural land offer suitable conditions for a large number of species.



9 000 years ago
63m above sea level

8 000 years ago
50m above sea level

7 000 years ago
43m above sea level

6 000 years ago
37m above sea level

5 000 years ago
34m above sea level

4 000 years ago
29m above sea level

3 000 years ago
20m above sea level

2 000 years ago
7m above sea level

1 000 years ago
3m above sea level

Sea level today

- Salthav - *Juncus Gerardi*
- Hovsvik - *Scirpus Maritimus*
- Fjæresvik - *Scirpus Uhlugumii*
- Fjæresvik - *Triglochin Maritimum*
- Fjæresvik - *Puccinellia Maritima*
- Tokar - *Pragmites Communis*

1981

Protection of Mølen

Mølen was formally protected as a nature reserve in 1981 due to its unique geological and cultural significance. Prior to this, visitors frequently collected the rounded stones for private gardens and landscaping, gradually reducing parts of the moraine. The cairns are today visibly damaged, this might be because of ignorance and lack of knowledge.

2008

UNESCO Global Geopark

Mølen became part of the UNESCO Global Geoparks network, recognising its international geological value. Despite this status, on-site measures have remained limited, consisting mainly of information boards and a small stone exhibition, leaving much of the site's deeper geological narrative unexplored.

TODAY

A geological and cultural archive

Mølen stands as the exposed edge of Ræet volcanic bedrock, glacial deposits, postglacial uplift, vegetation succession, and thousands of years of human activity coexist in one site. What appears as a stone beach is in fact a layered record of deep time, climate change, and cultural history.



fig. 6.8 - The shift from the "young" moraine landscape to the ancient and heavy volcanic rock formations

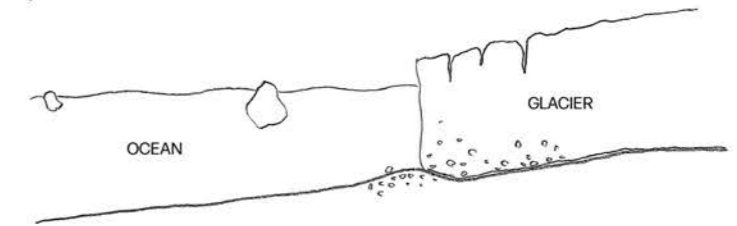
6.7 - Geological Foundation

The landscape at Mølen represents a rare intersection of geological histories spanning hundreds of millions of years. The region forms part of the Oslo Rift, a geological system created by volcanic activity approximately 250 million years ago. This period produced extensive volcanic formations across southeastern Norway, leaving dark igneous rock formations still visible along the coast at Mølen. These volcanic structures reveal traces of deep geological processes that long predate the more recent glacial landscape (Stokke, 1978). Later during the last Ice Age, massive glaciers transported and deposited large quantities of stone and sediment across the region, forming the Ra terminal moraine that today stretches across southeastern Norway. These glacial deposits, combined with the older volcanic bedrock, create a landscape where geological processes from vastly different timescales become visible in the same terrain.

6.7.1 - Formation of Raet

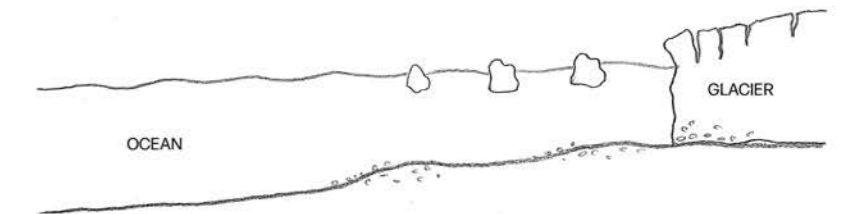
20 000 - 13 000 years ago

As the glacier moved forward, it pushed stones, gravel, and debris in front of it. This material was carried along the glacier's base, dragged across the seabed and accumulated at the ice margin. At this time, the area was submerged, with sea level approximately 150 metres higher than today.



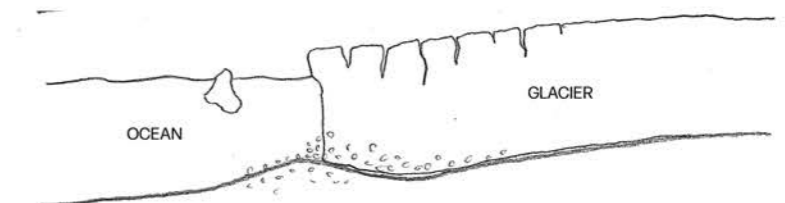
13 000 - 11 000 years ago

During periods of melting, the glacier retreated. The material it previously pushed forward was left behind as piles of stones and debris on the seabed. These deposits marked temporary pauses in the glacier's movement.



12 800 - 11 500 years ago

The glacier advanced again, pushing new material forward while piling it on top of earlier deposits. Repeated advances and retreats concentrated large amounts of stone and debris into a ridge, forming the terminal moraine known as Raet.



11 000 years ago - today

When the glacier finally retreated permanently, the moraine remained beneath the sea. Waves and currents continuously reworked the stones close to the shoreline, washing away finer sediments and polishing the rocks into smooth, rounded forms.



Today

As the land gradually rose after the ice age, the shoreline moved downward to its present level. Parts of the moraine emerged above sea level, allowing vegetation to establish and small lakes to form in depressions left by the glacier. Mølen today is the visible result of these long geological processes.

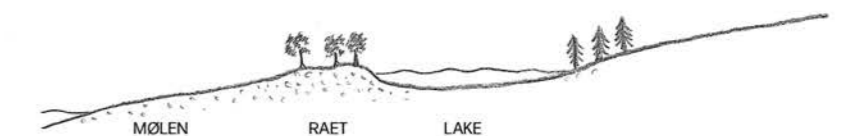


fig. 6.9

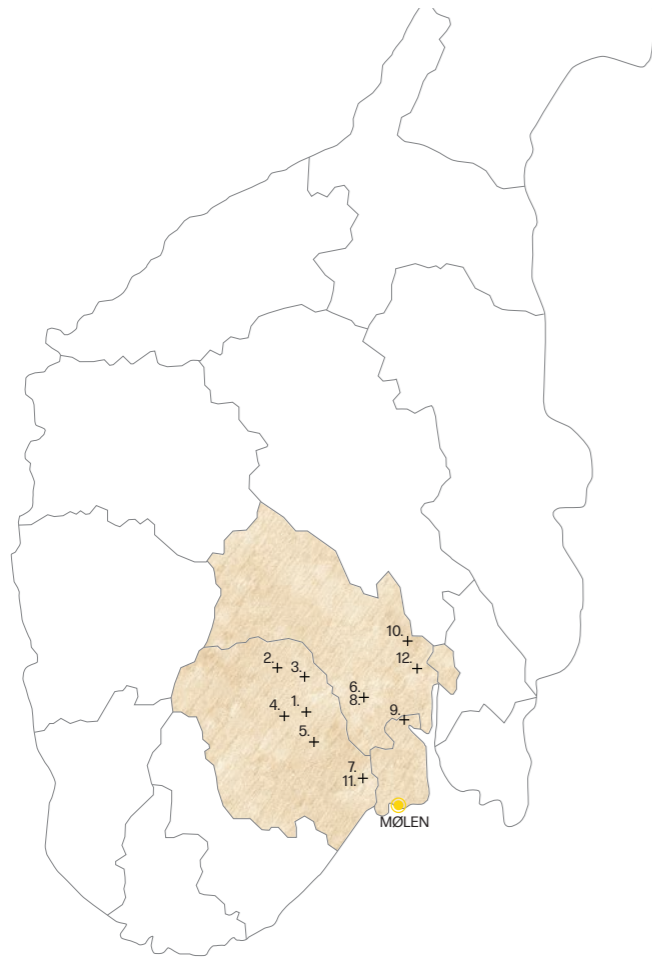


fig. 6.10 - Stone Origin

6.7.2 - Archive of Stones

As the Scandinavian ice sheet advanced during the last Ice Age, it acted as a powerful agent of erosion and transport. Moving slowly over the landscape, the glacier scraped and loosened rock from the underlying bedrock. Stones and sediments were incorporated into the base and front of the glacier, where they were carried over long distances as the ice moved southwards. The glacier served as a conveyor of geological material, collecting rocks from various regions and depositing them along its margin as it eventually slowed and retreated. The stones found at Mølen therefore originate from a wide geographical area and reflect the geological diversity of southern and central Norway (Stokke, 1978). When the glacier finally deposited its material along the Ra moraine, the stones were left as a geological mixture representing multiple regions and geological periods.

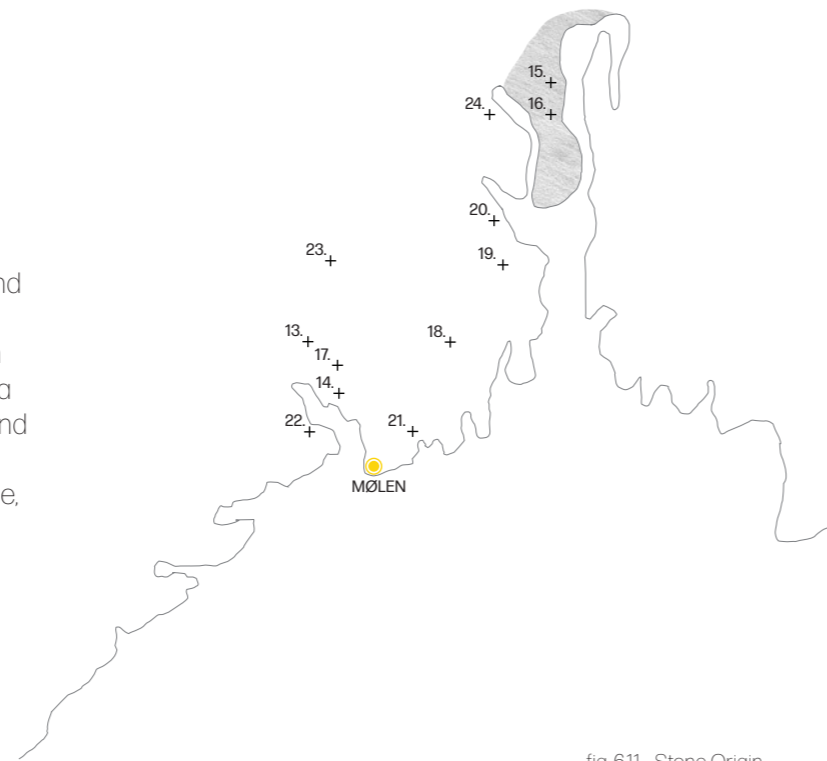


























fig. 6.11 - Stone Origin

1.  Vulkansk Aske 1150 million years Sauland/Tinnoset	2.  Rhyolitt 1500 million years Rjukan	3.  Kvartsitt 1200 million years Gausta Region	4.  Gabbro 1147 million years Hjartdal
5.  Granittisk Gneis 1190 million years Bø/Nome	6.  Granat-Amfibolitt 1250 million years Kongsberg	7.  Garbenskifer 1147 million years Svanstul, Skien	8.  Båndgneis 1500 million years Kongsberg
9.  Hornfels 480 million years Grenland/Sande/Sandsvær	10.  Knollekalkstein 470 million years Grenland/Ringerike	11.  Alunskifer 510 million years Skien/Kongsberg	12.  Rød Sandstein 400 million years Ringerike/Hole
13.  Grå Sandstein 400 million years Grenland	14.  Kalkstein m/fossil 430 million years Porsgrunn	15.  Rombeporfyr-Konglomerat 285 million years Sletter, Oslofjorden	16.  Ørkensand 285 million years Oslofjordområdet
17.  Konglomerat 310 million years Skien/Porsgrunn	18.  Rombeporfyr 295 million years Vestfold/Krokskogen	19.  Vulkansk Aske 280 million years Re/Ramnes	20.  Basalt 310 million years Skien/Brunlanes/Holmestrand
21.  Larvikitt 295 million years Brunlanes	22.  Nefelinsyenitt 294 million years Langesundsfjorden	23.  Alkali-syenitt 280 million years Siljan, Lågendalen	24.  Drammensgranitt 280 million years Røyken/Hurum/Svelvik



6.8 - Cultural Heritage

Beyond its geological significance, Mølen is also a landscape shaped by centuries of human presence. The site contains Norway's largest concentrations of burial cairns from the Iron Age and Viking Age, revealing that the moraine ridge has long held cultural and symbolic importance (Visit Scandinavia, n.d). These archaeological remains demonstrate how successive generations have interpreted and used the landscape. The cairns are situated within the moraine terrain and are built from the same stones that form the surrounding landscape. In this way, the cultural traces at Mølen are inseparable from the site's geological foundation. Understanding these cultural layers is essential for reading Mølen as more than a geological formation. The cultural heritage of Mølen is an important part of the broader landscape narrative, revealing how the site has served as both a natural landmark and a sacred burial ground.

6.8.1 - Cultural Heritage through Vestfold

Vikingveien is a cultural route that traces the historical landscapes of southeastern Norway, connecting important archaeological sites associated with the Viking Age. Stretching from Borre in Horten to Skinnarbu in Telemark, the route passes through Vestfold, a region that once formed one of the political and maritime centres of early Norwegian society. Along the route, burial mounds, settlements, and coastal landmarks reveal how this landscape functioned as a corridor for travel and trade during the Viking Age (Vestfold fylkeskommune, 2024). Mølen lies within this broader network of movement and navigation. Vikingveien offers an alternative framework for understanding and visiting landscapes. While tourism initiatives like the Norwegian National Tourist Routes often emphasise spectacular views and short visual encounters with nature, Vikingveien instead focus on cultural history.



fig. 6.14 - Nesjarspelet

6.8.2 - Ancient Sagas and the Battle of Nesjar

Mølen appears in several early written sources connected to the coastal history of southeastern Norway, particularly in the sagas by Snorre Sturlasson. In the poem *Ynglingatal*, which recounts the lineage of early Scandinavian rulers, kings are described as being buried in prominent coastal cairns along the Oslofjord. These accounts have led historians to suggest that the large stone cairns at Mølen may correspond to such burial sites. Mølen is also associated with the Battle of Nesjar in 1016, where Olav Haraldsson defeated Earl Sveinn Hákonarson in a naval battle along the Vestfold coast. Although the exact location remains uncertain, the waters around Mølen are widely believed to be part of this historical event. Today, this battle is recreated through the annual performance *Slaget ved Nesjar*, an outdoor play at Mølen that reconnects visitors with the site's history.

6.8.3 AN ANCIENT BURIAL GROUND

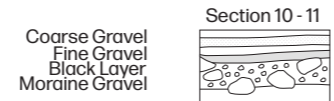
- D100 Ship-shaped stone setting
Roman Iron Age/Migration Period
boat cremation grave
- D129 Langrøys (Long Cairn)
Late Roman Iron Age/Migration Period
Inner stone construction
- D202 Medium round cairn
Early Iron Age
excavated, no grave goods
- D112 "Skipsrøysa" (Ship Cairn)
Early Iron Age
One of the largest cairns
- D27 Vestrøysa (The lowest cairn)
Viking age
Possibly the youngest cairn
- F82 Small Cairn
Presumably Late Iron Age
Most likely foundations for bird catching nets



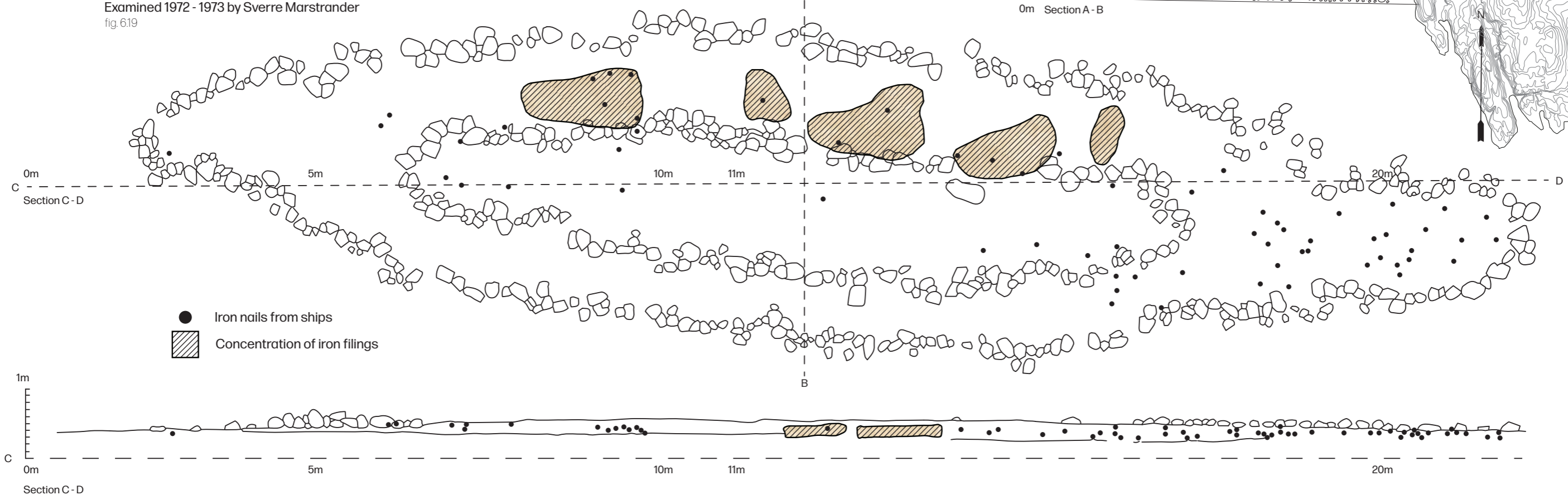
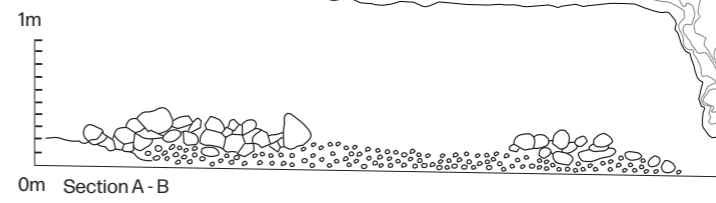
fig. 6.15 - View from Row F with cairn D112 fig. 6.16 - View of Cairn D197 towards North fig. 6.17 - D100 - Ship-shaped Stone setting

6.8.4 SHIP-SHAPED STONE SETTING D100

Mølen, Brunlanes, Vestfold
Examined 1972 - 1973 by Sverre Marstrand
fig. 6.19



Section A - B



- Iron nails from ships
- ▨ Concentration of iron filings

6.9 - Ecology

Mølen has a rich ecological environment shaped by its exposed coastal conditions and varied microhabitats. The moraine landscape creates a mosaic of ecological zones ranging from sparse vegetation among the stone fields to patches of shrubland, grassland, and small wetland depressions further inland. The constant influence of wind from the Skagerrak ocean, together with salty air and thin soils, limits the growth of large trees, resulting in low, wind-shaped vegetation adapted to harsh coastal conditions. The site also plays an important role in regional bird migration routes. Mølen, with its coastal location, functions as an important resting point for migratory birds. Seasonal changes bring significant variations in ecological activity, with different species using the area throughout the year (Stokke, 1978). These ecological conditions make the landscape both biologically valuable and environmentally fragile, requiring careful management to balance public access with habitat and wildlife protection.

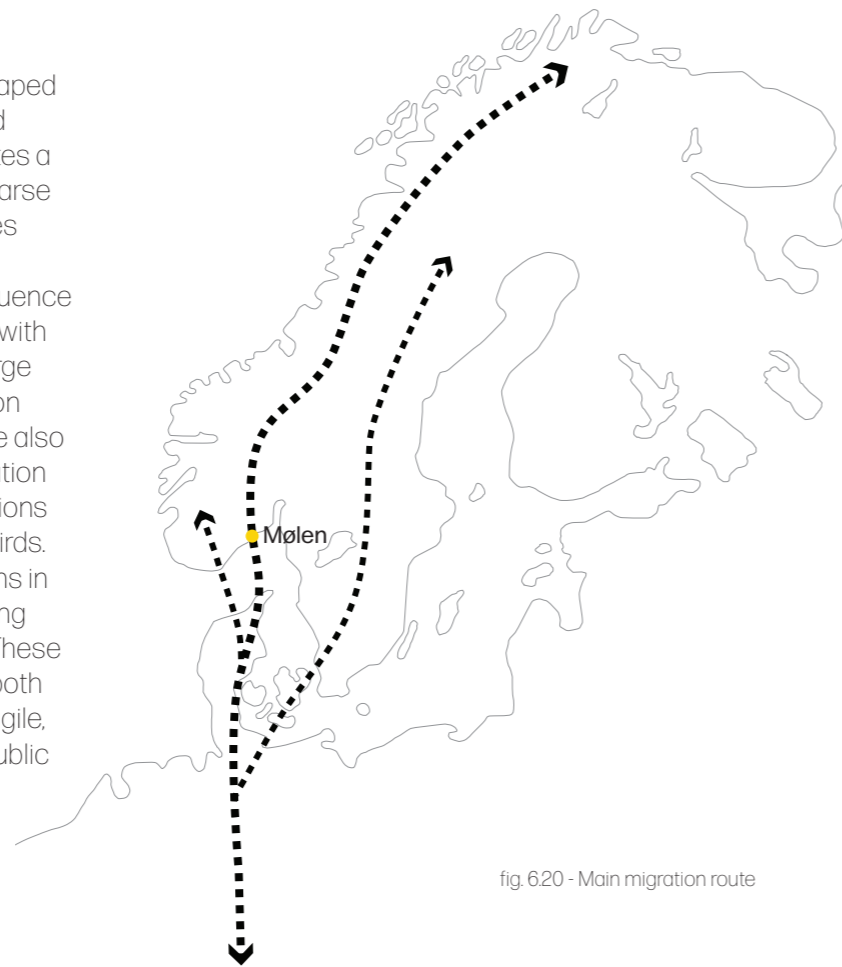


fig. 6.20 - Main migration route



fig. 6.21 - Illustration of what bird catching on Mølen might have looked like

6.9.1 - Extreme Weather Conditions

Mølen's coastal location exposes the landscape directly to the weather of the Skagerrak ocean. The site is particularly affected by prevailing southwest winds. These winds keep vegetation low and sparse while constantly moving air, salt, and moisture across the terrain. During autumn and winter, strong storms frequently pass through Skagerrak, generating large waves that crash against the volcanic rocks of the shoreline. As the water retreats, the waves drag the rounded stones back and forth across the beach, producing the distinctive grinding sound that characterises the site. During such conditions, Mølen becomes a popular destination for visitors who come to witness the raw power of the sea.

6.9.2 - Bird Migration

Mølen is one of Norway's most important observation points for migratory birds. During spring and autumn migration, large numbers of birds pass the site as they follow the coastline southward or arrive from the continent. 320 bird species have been recorded in the area, and 1.5 million birds pass through the site during the autumn (Visit Scandinavia, n.d). This concentration of birdlife makes Mølen highly sensitive to disturbance. Many species rely on the site as a resting point before continuing long sea journeys, and human presence in this area can disrupt feeding, nesting, or resting behaviour. For this reason, the landscape is protected, and access is regulated during important breeding and migration periods.

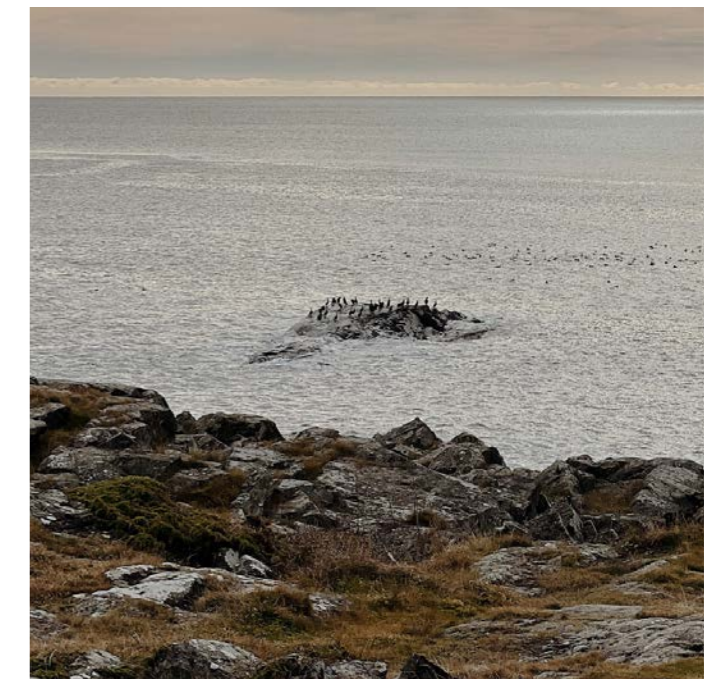
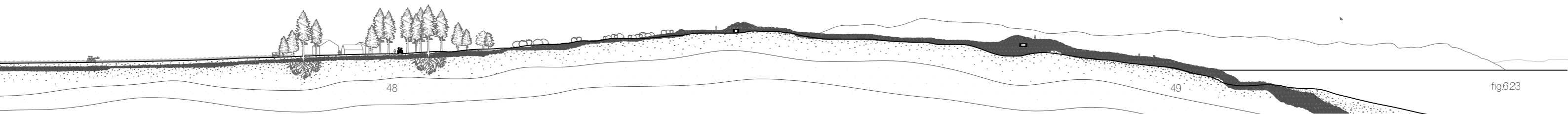


fig. 6.22 - Gathering of seabirds on the coast just off Mølen



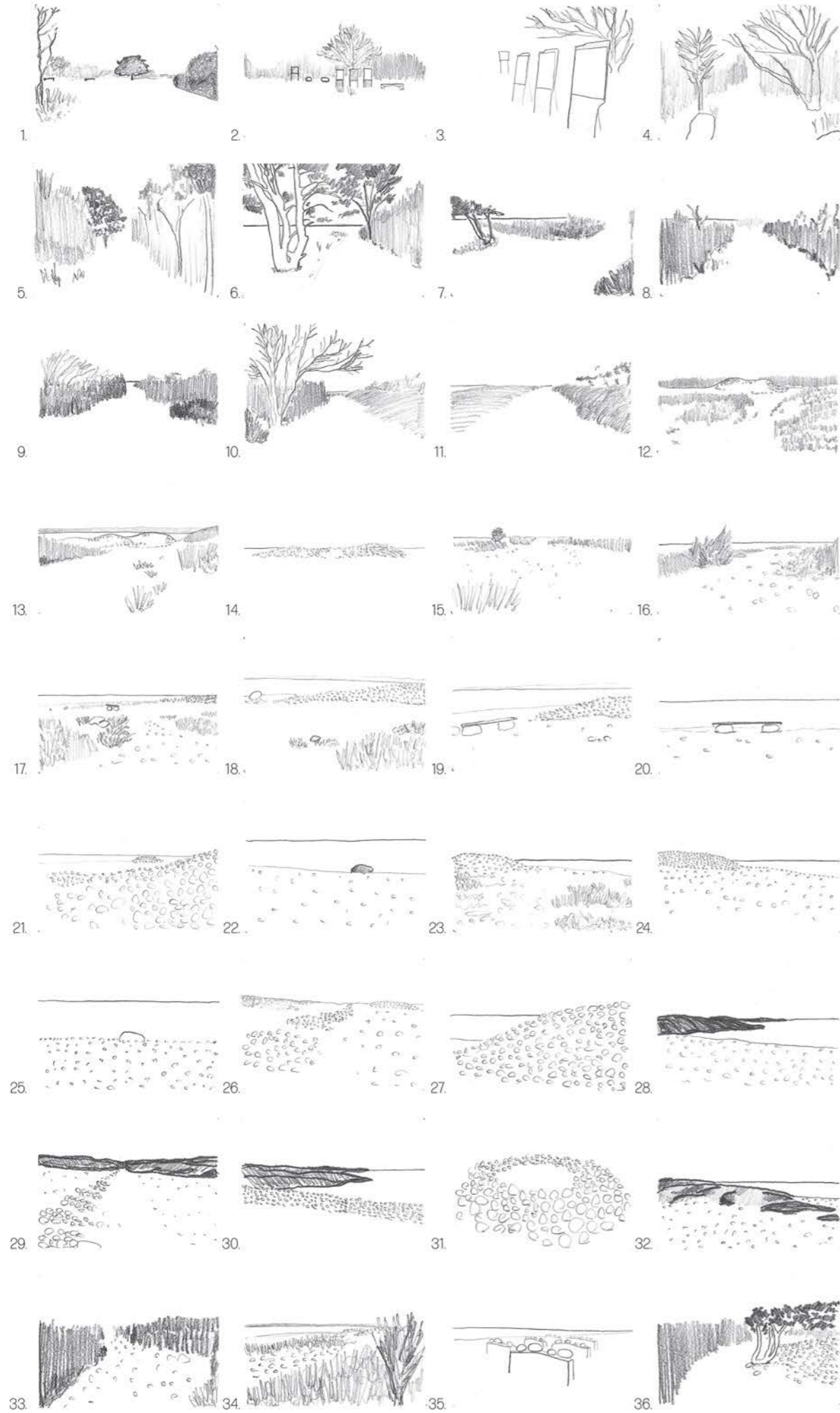
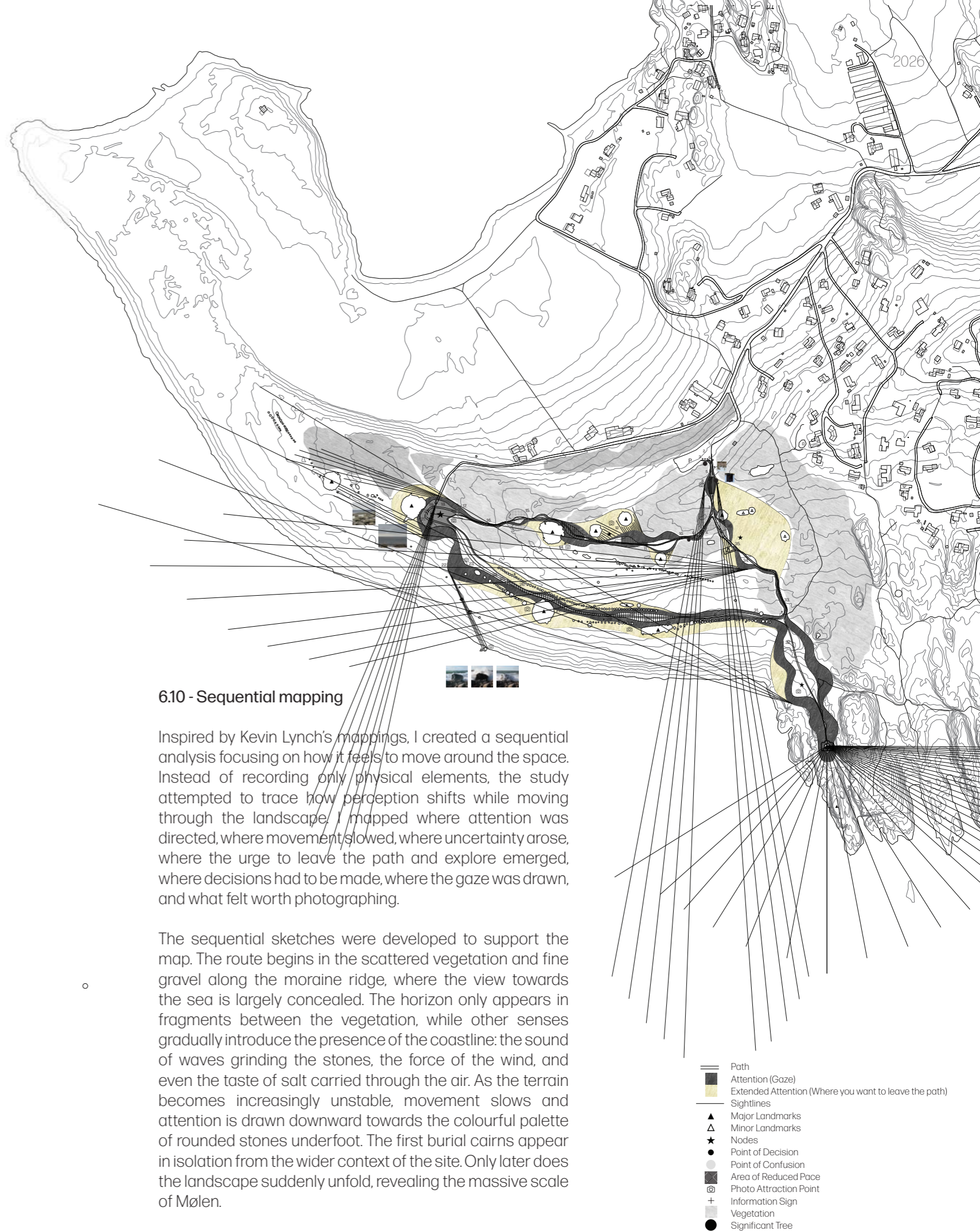


fig6.24



6.10 - Sequential mapping

Inspired by Kevin Lynch's mappings, I created a sequential analysis focusing on how it feels to move around the space. Instead of recording only physical elements, the study attempted to trace how perception shifts while moving through the landscape. I mapped where attention was directed, where movement slowed, where uncertainty arose, where the urge to leave the path and explore emerged, where decisions had to be made, where the gaze was drawn, and what felt worth photographing.

The sequential sketches were developed to support the map. The route begins in the scattered vegetation and fine gravel along the moraine ridge, where the view towards the sea is largely concealed. The horizon only appears in fragments between the vegetation, while other senses gradually introduce the presence of the coastline: the sound of waves grinding the stones, the force of the wind, and even the taste of salt carried through the air. As the terrain becomes increasingly unstable, movement slows and attention is drawn downward towards the colourful palette of rounded stones underfoot. The first burial cairns appear in isolation from the wider context of the site. Only later does the landscape suddenly unfold, revealing the massive scale of Mølen.

fig.6.25

6.11 - Perception Problem

There seems to be a gap between the site's richness and how it is perceived and experienced by its visitors. The landscape is often experienced primarily as a large pebble beach with a visually striking horizon, while its deeper layers remain largely overlooked. The complex geological formation of the terminal moraine, the cultural significance of the burial cairns, and the ecological importance of the site as a habitat and migration point for birds are not immediately legible and, therefore, often go unnoticed. This is reflected in visitor behaviour, where cairns are climbed, stones are rearranged into new formations, or taken away as souvenirs, despite the prohibition against moving or taking stones. Attention is frequently directed outward, towards the distant view and the open sea, rather than towards the ground and the narratives embedded in the landscape. This suggests not only a lack of knowledge but also a mode of perception shaped by visual expectations, in which the immediate and scenic dominate over the subtle and layered. As a result, the site is reduced to a surface experience, where its significance is present but not fully perceived and its potential as place is missed.

6.12 - Site Tensions

The site analysis suggests that architectural intervention at Mølen must carefully balance access, education, and experience with protection. Mølen is not defined by spectacular views alone, but by subtle shifts in ground conditions, horizon lines, sound, wind, taste and bodily movement. The unstable moraine terrain slows the body, directing attention downward toward the ground, while the open horizon simultaneously draws the gaze outward toward the sea. Prolonged site immersions and walking as an approach have revealed how perception changes through movement. The landscape unfolds gradually rather than immediately. From the surrounding forest and agricultural fields, the moraine appears almost hidden, only hinted at through scattered stones. As one moves further into the landscape, the ground begins to shift, and the visitor becomes increasingly aware of the body's relationship to the terrain. These subtle transitions create an atmosphere that



fig. 6.26 - Tourists stepping on stone settings

cannot be fully understood through rapid visitation, photographs or reading of maps alone. The atmosphere of Mølen is therefore closely tied to its material conditions, which cannot be anticipated nor captured in a single image. The constant wind from the Skagerrak ocean, the rhythmic sound of waves grinding the stones, the salt in the air, and the difficulty of walking across the rounded stones all contribute to the experience. At the same time, the visible traces of human history - cairns, paths, and stories embedded in the landscape - remind the visitor that this is not untouched nature, but a place shaped over centuries by the interaction between people and the environment. These qualities reveal a series of tensions that structure the site. The long cultural tradition of viewing landscapes from designated points contrasts with the bodily presence demanded by the uneven moraine terrain. The site continuously negotiates between horizon and ground: between the distant gaze toward the sea and the immediate attention required to balance on the stones beneath one's feet. Together, these tensions form the conceptual foundation for the architectural project.



fig. 6.27 - Tourists climbing cairn

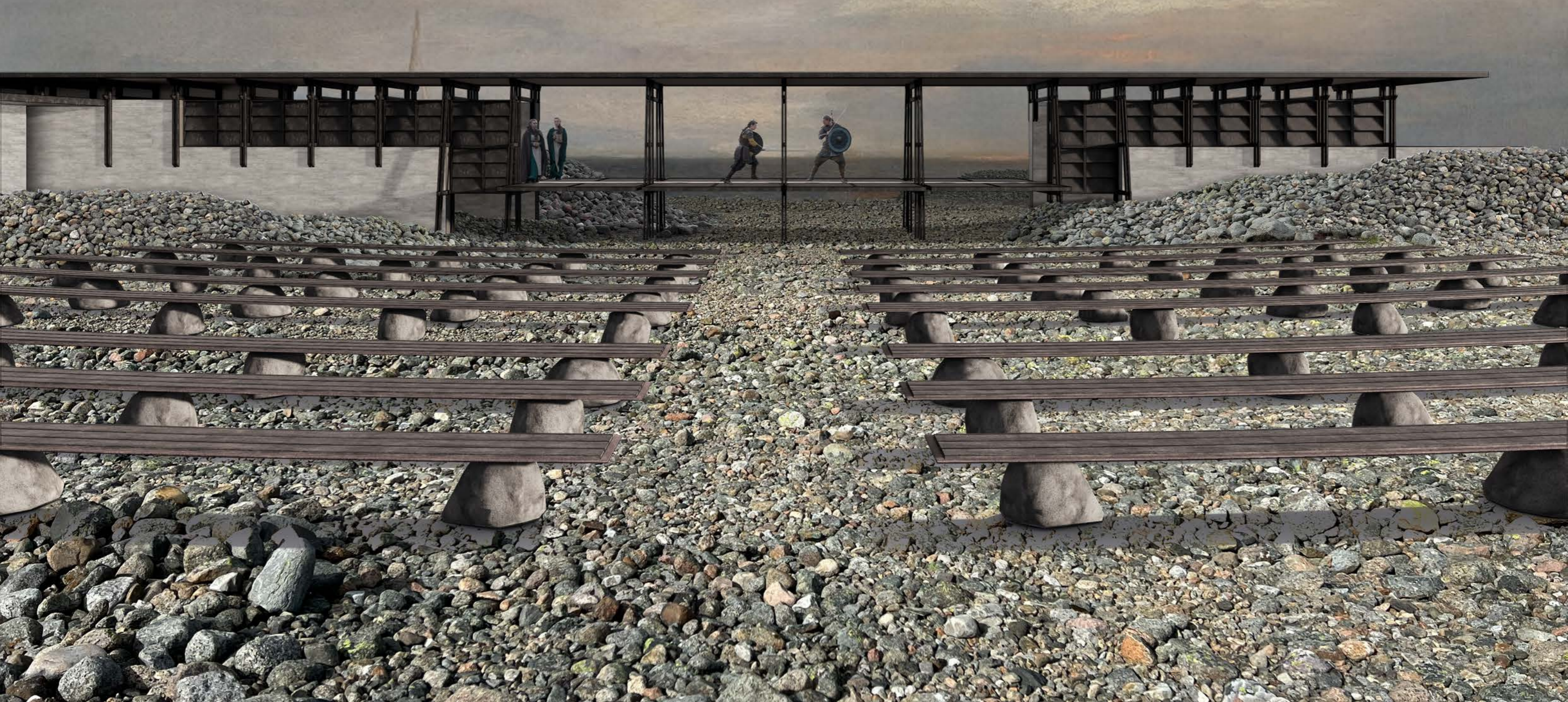
7.0 DESIGN

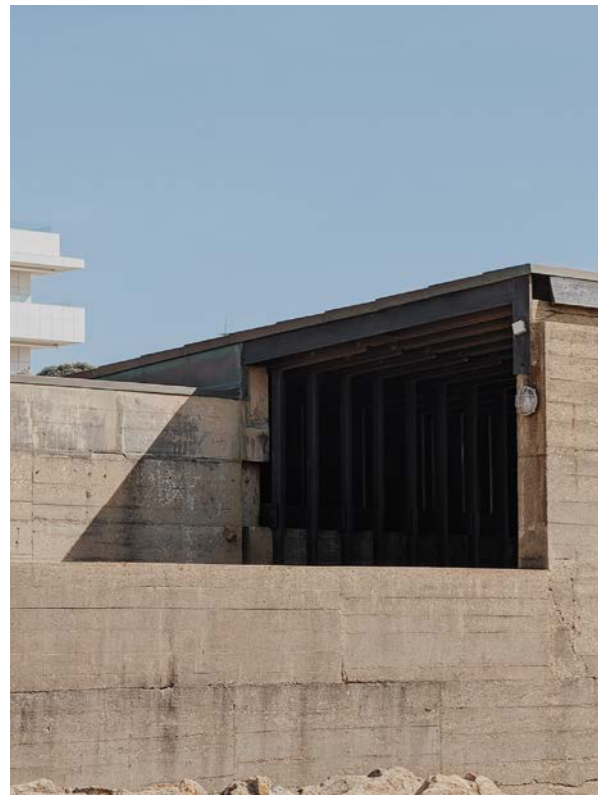
7.1 - The Hermeneutic Circle as a Design Framework

The theoretical framework established in the previous chapters identifies the hermeneutic circle as a central problem in peripheral tourist landscapes. Tourists arrive at sites like Mølen carrying anticipations and pre-formed images derived from tourism media, and the existing infrastructure - viewpoints and information boards - is designed to confirm these images, closing the circle and leaving the geological, cultural, and ecological complexity of the site invisible behind a scenic frontstage.

The design project at Mølen takes this issue as its starting point. Rather than creating a "tourist destination" adding another attraction to the experience economy, the intervention aims to design staging that breaks the hermeneutic circle: a journey that exceeds anticipations, reveals the backstage of the landscape, and invites the visitor into a gradually unfolding encounter with the site's layered qualities.

fig. 71 - Stage towards the horizon





Leça Swimming Pools
Matosinhos, Portugal
Álvaro Siza
1966

7.2 - Precedents

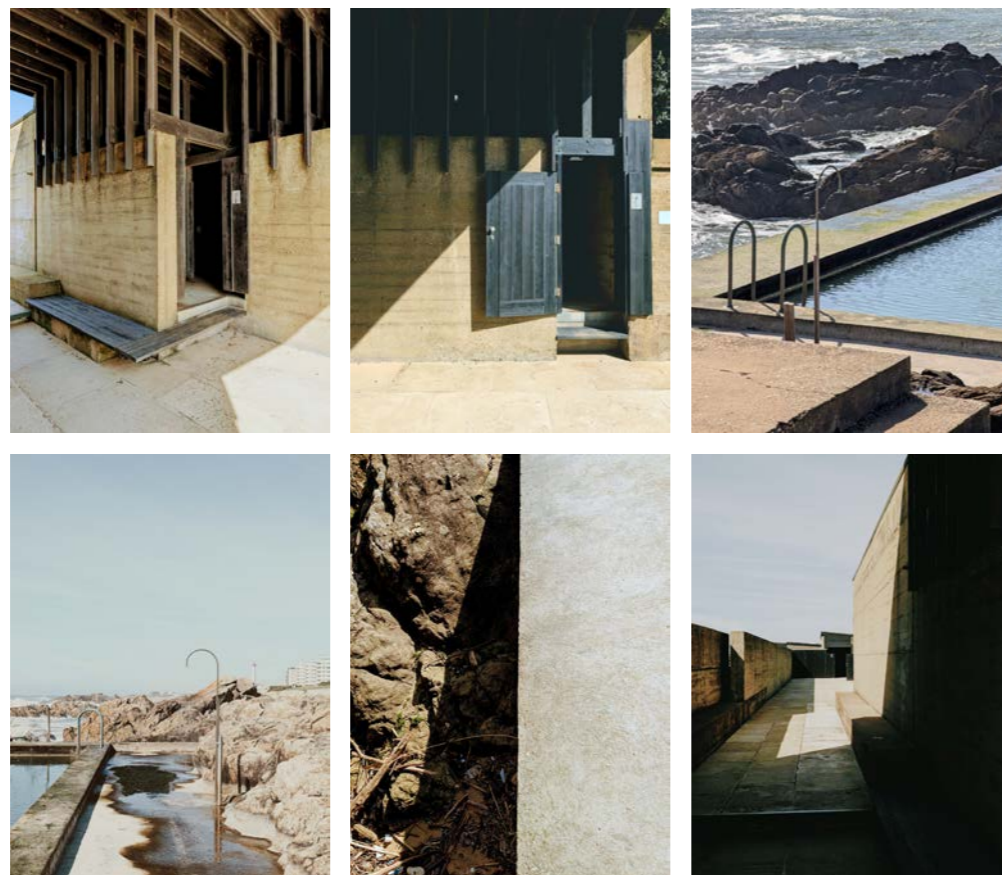


fig. 7.2 (a-g)



fig. 7.3

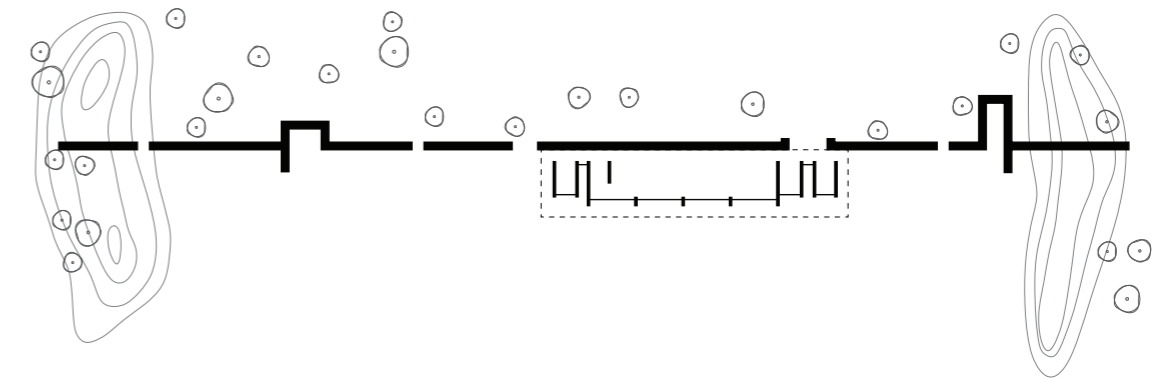


fig. 7.4

A central precedent for the project is a competition entry from 1950 by Sverre Fehn and Geir Grung for a crematorium in Larvik, the same town where Mølen is located.

Crematorium Larvik
Unrealized Competition Proposal
Sverre Fehn & Geir Grung
1950

The project proposes a 140 metre long, three and a half metre tall wall drawn across the site, separating the everyday landscape from the sacred space of the crematorium. The wall resists a panoramic view of the horizon, but rather directs the visitors' attention to specific points through precisely pierced holes in the wall. It might seem like an unusual parallel to draw between a crematorium and a visitor centre, but the underlying concept is the same - architecture creating a clear threshold between the ordinary and the sacred.

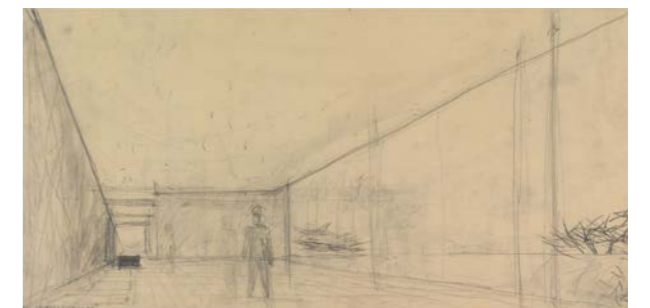


fig. 7.5 - Interior sketch



fig. 7.6 - Site model

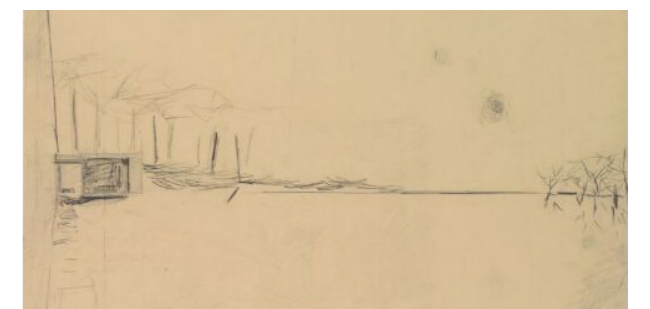


fig. 7.7 - Exterior sketch

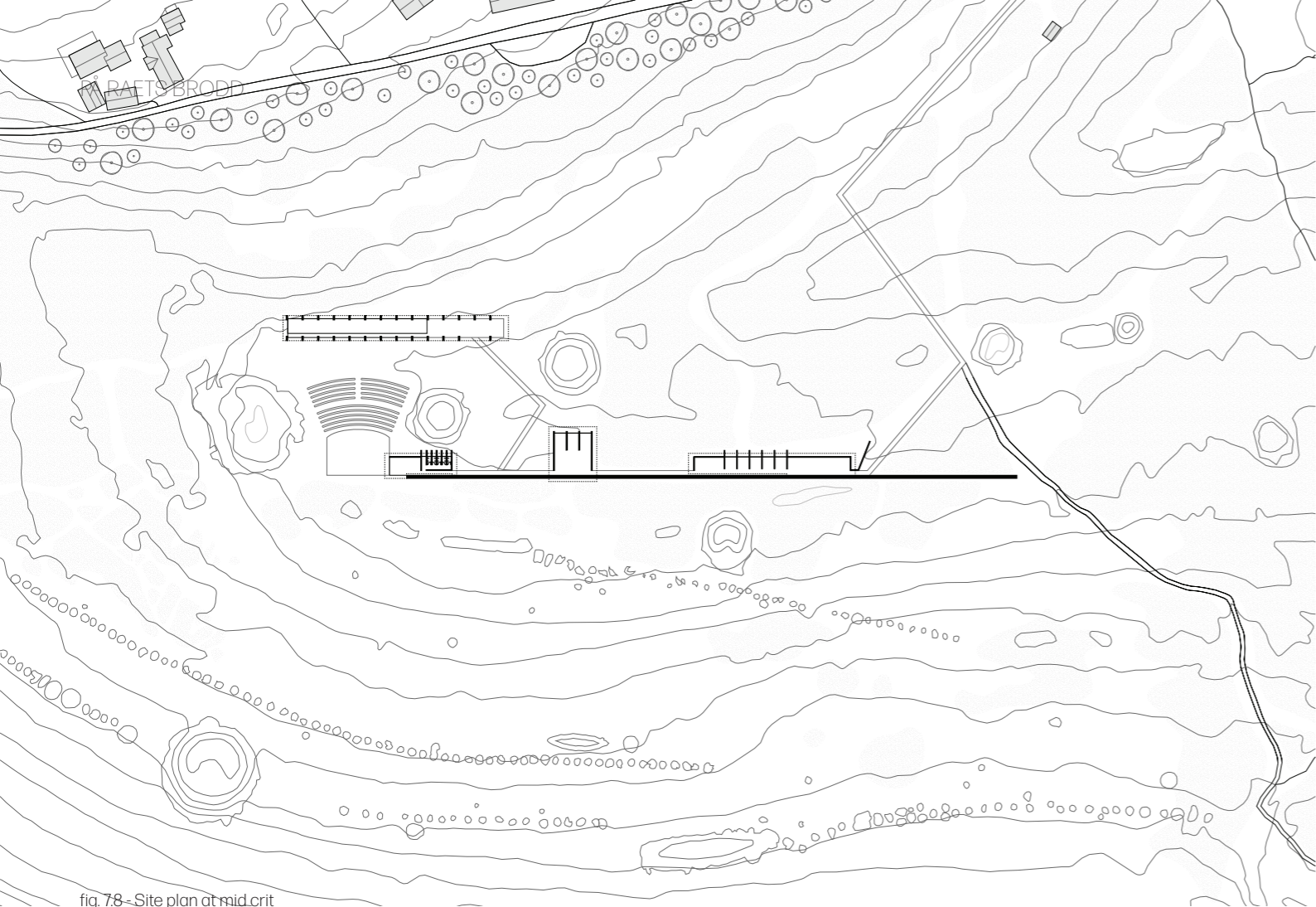


fig. 7.8 - Site plan at mid.crit

7.3 - Design process

An early design iteration took Fehn's crematorium quite literally. A 200 metre long concrete wall was drawn across the site, robbing visitors of the view of the horizon entirely until they had walked through the full length of the scheme. It was a conceptually bold move using the architecture to physically delay the expected image. In retrospect, this proposal was a direct spatial translation of the thesis's earlier theoretical position, which identified the vision and the gaze as the fundamental problem in tourism architecture. The wall was a physical barrier, distinguishing the everyday from the significant.

As the theoretical argument shifted, from a critique of visual dominance toward the hermeneutic circle as the central problem, it became clear that the wall was solving the wrong problem. Omitting the visual sense would not break the hermeneutic circle. A visitor who is denied the view of the horizon and then finally given it at the end of a sequence has simply had the expected image delayed, not challenged. The problem was never that tourists see the landscape. It was that they encounter a mediated frontstage while believing it to be the full reality of the place.

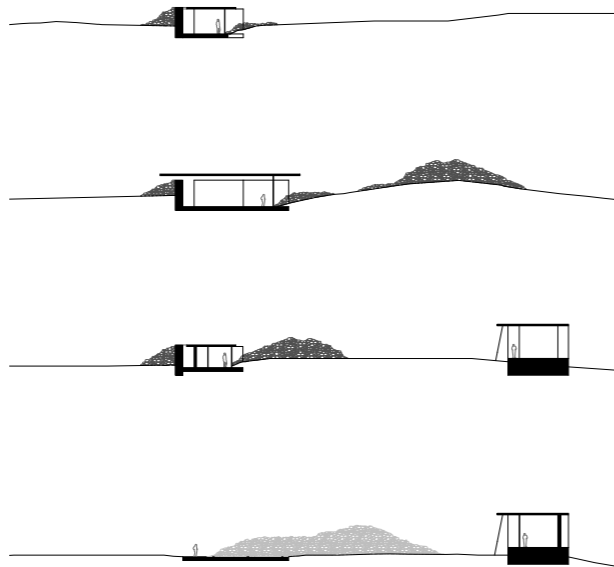
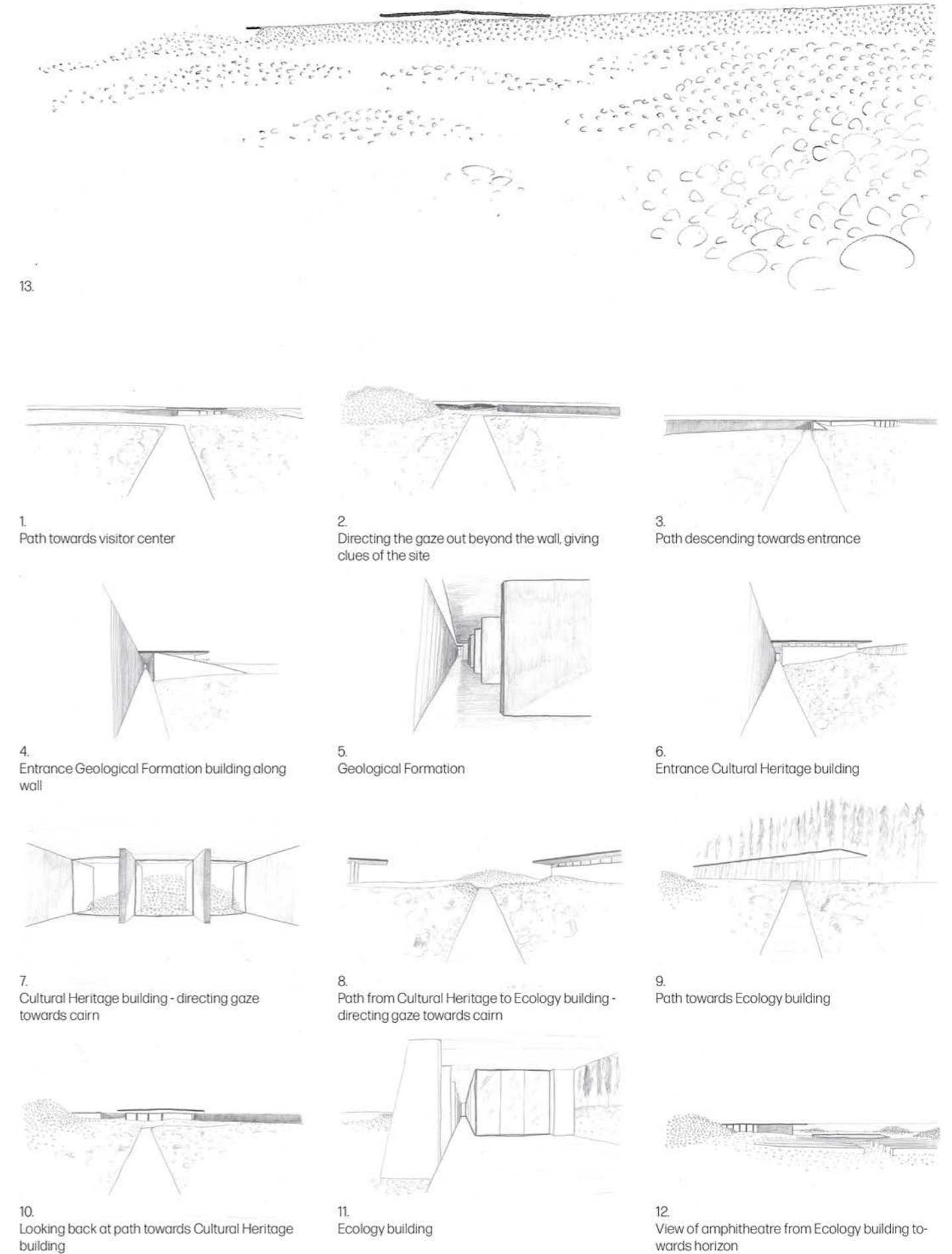


fig. 7.9

This realisation pushed the design away from the wall as a controlling gesture and toward a spatial sequence that seeks to unfold the site's qualities through prolonged immersion.



7.4 - Design Principles

I have defined four design principles:

1. Replacing the singular viewpoint with a sequential journey

The viewpoint is the spatial form of the closed circle: it fixes the body, frames the expected image, and delivers the confirmation the visitor arrived seeking. The sequential journey functions by spreading the programme across the site as a series of thresholds. The building becomes a timeline, immersing the visitor in the site's formation, its history and ecology. The design introduces spatial conditions and redirects attention to aspects that the visitor's prior image of the stone beach could not have anticipated. The journey cannot be reduced to a single image; it unfolds through prolonged immersion, bodily movement, and encounters that arrive in sequence rather than all at once.

2. Revealing the backstage

Each stage of the sequence engages a layer of Mølen that is missing from its circulating tourist image. The volcanic formations predating the moraine by 250 million years, the history of the stones transported by the glacier from across the country, the burial cairns, and the rare bird species - none of these conditions are part of the image the visitor arrives with. The design makes them legible not through information boards, which would reproduce the didactic logic of existing tourism infrastructure, but through spatial experience. The visitor encounters the backstage through movement and bodily engagement rather than through text on information boards.

3. Relation between ground and body

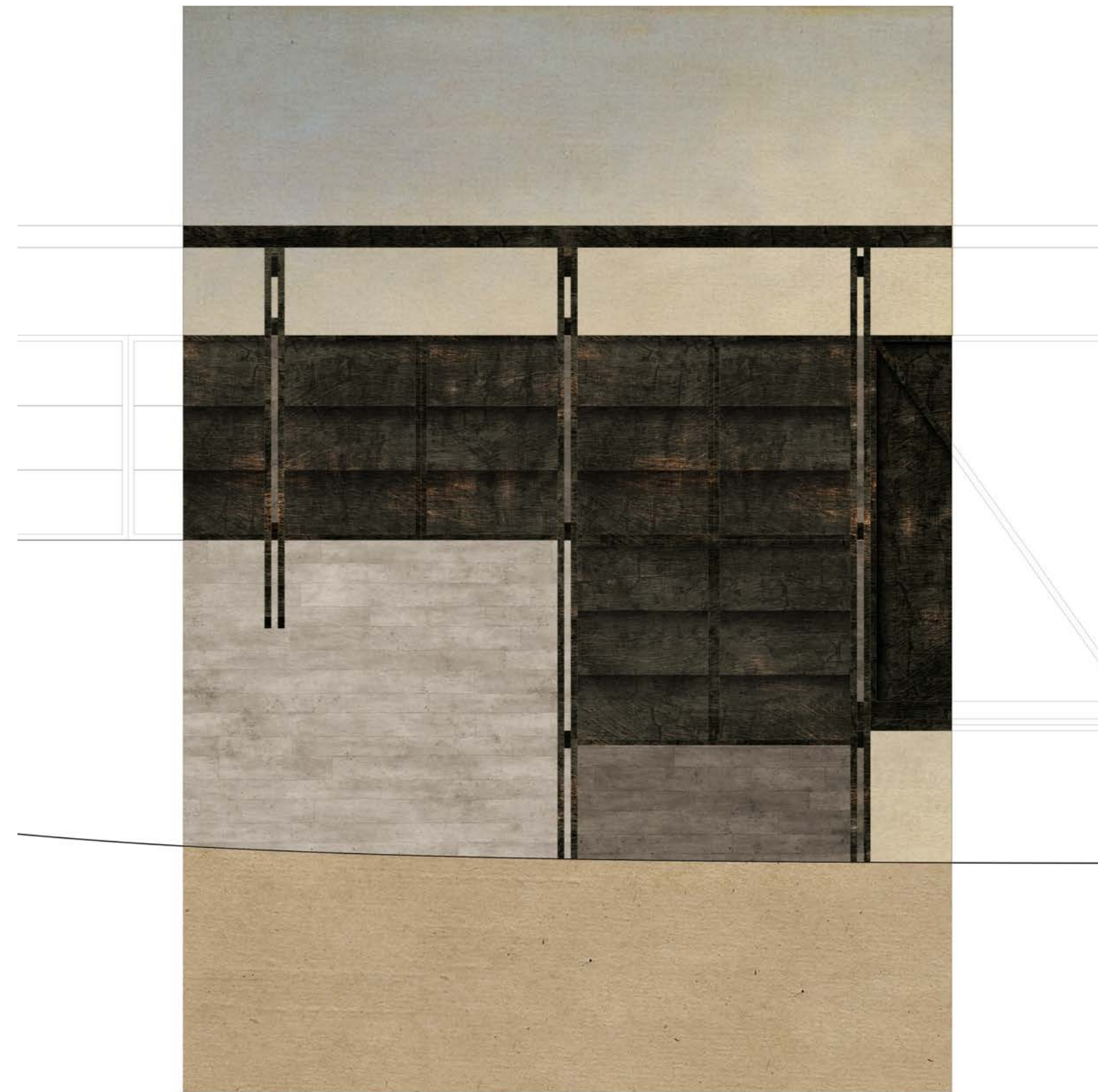
The dominant typology of the NTR and other architectural interventions in tourist landscapes, the elevated viewing platform, separates the body from the terrain, directing attention toward the distant horizon while insulating the visitor from the material conditions of the site. At Mølen, this separation is particularly interesting: the geological significance of the site lies in the ground itself, drawing visitors'

gaze and attention down to their feet. Therefore, spaces are cut into the terrain, revealing geological sections; the morain ground continues into the building, and the visitor is placed at different elevations, creating altering relations between the ground, the body, and the horizon.

4. Acknowledgement of architectural mediation

The intervention does not claim to deliver an authentic encounter with Mølen. All architectural interventions stage the landscape to some degree, and this design is no exception. The journey is clearly constructed and takes the visitor through the site's history and forgotten qualities before opening up to an uncurated encounter with the site. The staged experience aims to create a foundation of knowledge and a lens that will alter visitors' understanding and care for Mølen in ways that exceed their expectations. The design refuses the naïve claim to authenticity that characterises much tourism infrastructure, and it invites the visitor into interpretation rather than delivering a "polished" product.

Taken together, these four decisions create an architectural argument about how the hermeneutic circle of tourism can be broken through spatial means. The design project that follows should be understood within this framework: not as a visitor centre that explains Mølen, but as a spatial sequence that guides the visitor from the frontstage image they arrived with toward a more complex, layered, and honestly mediated encounter with the site.



E5

fig. 7.11



1:1000 @A1
Fig. 712

SITE PLAN

7.5 - Spatial sequence

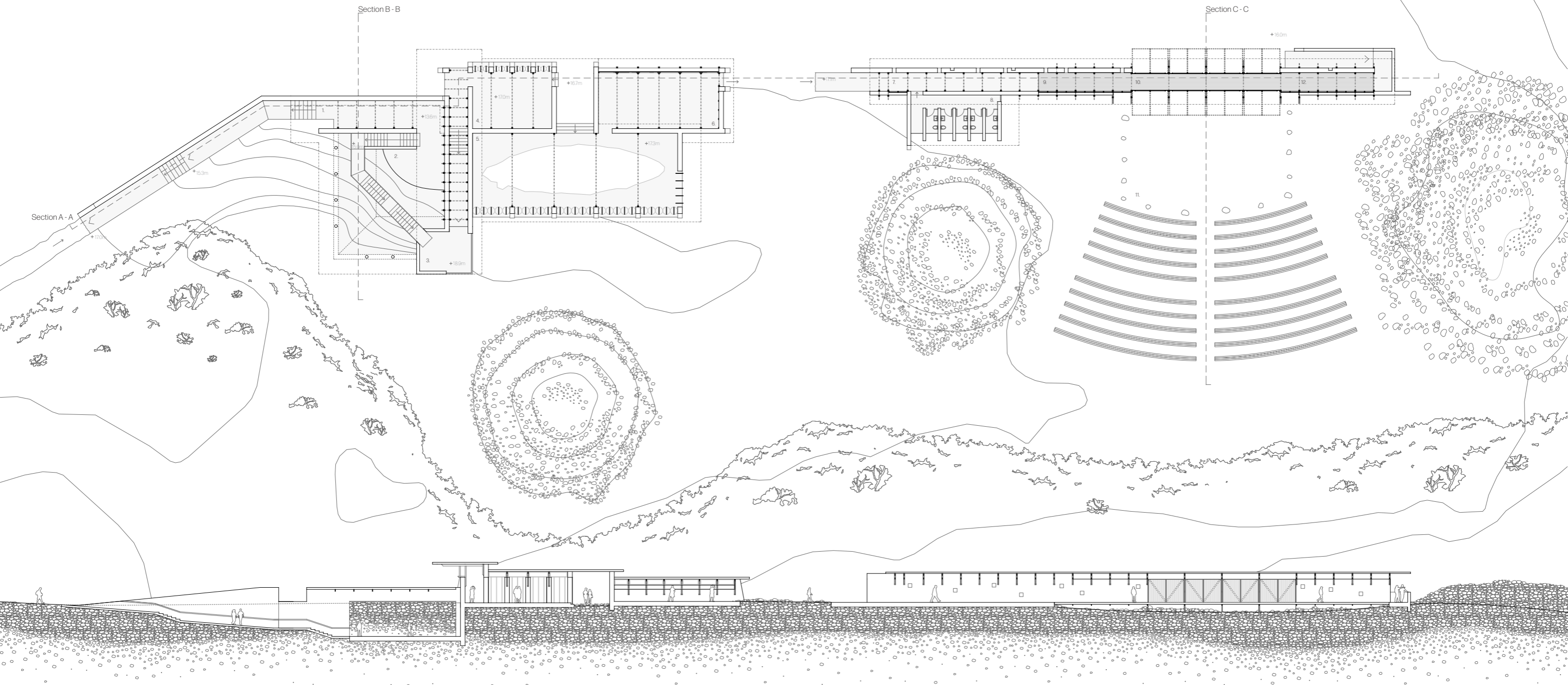
The journey begins on a clearly defined concrete path that leads the visitor from the car park to the site's highest point. This is the first introduction the visitor has to the horizon, yet the moraine remains hidden behind scattered vegetation. Here, the path widens to mark the threshold between the ordinary landscape and the more significant and let the visitor feel the importance of this exact point. As the moraine is still hidden, their image has not yet been confirmed, but the first hint of the site has been given.

SITE MODEL



Fig. 713

- 1. Stone Exhibition (Moraine Section)
- 2. Glacier (Geological Formation)
- 3. Cairn Lookout
- 4. Burial Ground Exhibition
- 5. Archeological Findings
- 6. History and Sagas
- 7. Ecology Exhibition
- 8. Toilets
- 9. Bird Species Exhibition
- 10. Stage
- 11. Amphitheatre
- 12. Site Today (UNESCOs Geopark)



Section A - A
fig. 714
fig. 715

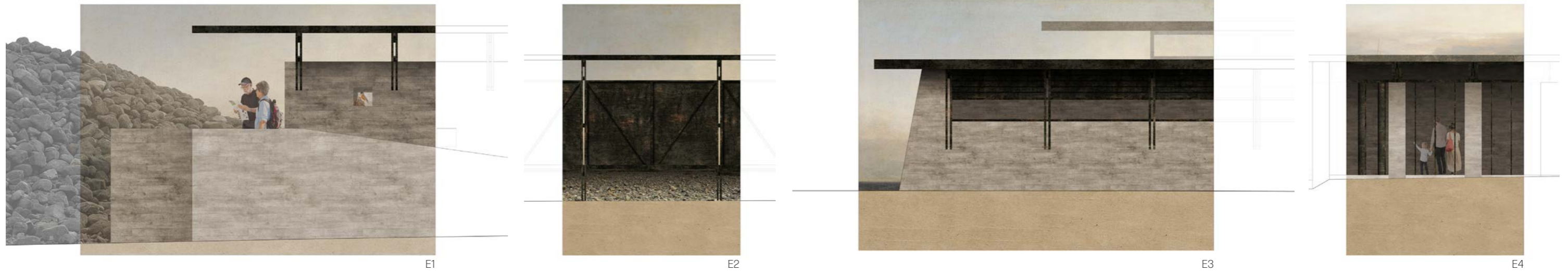


fig. 716 (a-d)

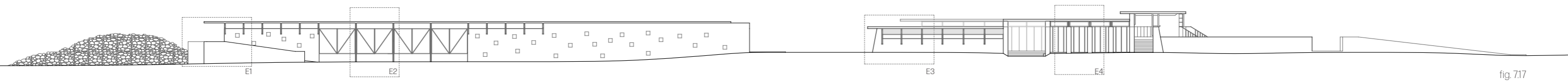


fig. 717

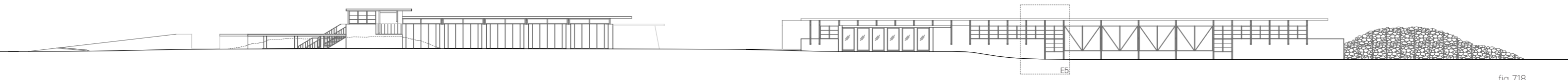
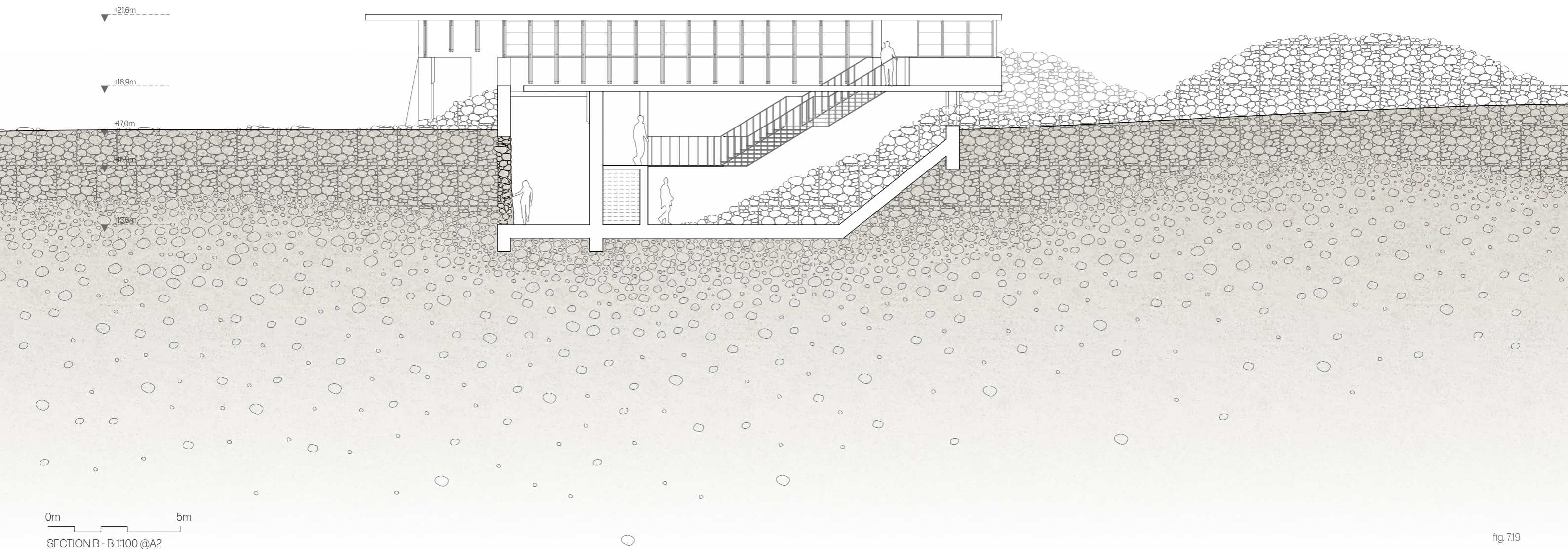


fig. 718

The concrete path continues across the landscape before descending into the building. A slit in the concrete wall leading down to the entrance gives the visitor their first glimpse of a distant cairn - a fragment of what lies ahead, not yet explained. In the first encounter, the architecture reveals a geological section of the moraine by cutting into the terrain. This provides the visitor with an understanding of how deeply the moraine is anchored into the ground - not through diagrams or information boards but through spatial means. This space brings the visitor below ground to a dark, quiet place, lit only by a slit of natural light from above.



Rounding a corner, the visitor is met by a wall of stones, flowing from a slit at the top of the wall down to their feet - a material representation of how stones, debris and gravel were pushed in front of the glacier to its final destination. Rather than the prior stone exhibition, the visitor is invited to recognise different stone types themselves, reading the geological diversity of the moraine directly from the wall and the pile at their feet.

Heavy concrete steps bring the visitor to eye level with the terrain, before a light steel staircase carries you over the constructed moraine. The staircase is oriented toward a view of a single burial cairn, encountered in isolation from the rest of the site. Turning 180 degrees, the gaze is directed toward the volcanic rock formation by the shoreline.



A narrow corridor now directs the visitor towards the horizon, following a spatial logic not unlike Sohlbergplassen. The floor subtly tilts towards the view, and a set of stairs brings you down to the level of the moraine. The purpose here is not to confirm a prior image or invite a photograph. It is to understand the vastness of the geological formation in the context of the site as a whole. A final step places the visitor directly on the moraine, which is the first time you actually step onto ground other than concrete. An axis aligns the body between the open horizon and one of the site's most prominent cairns.

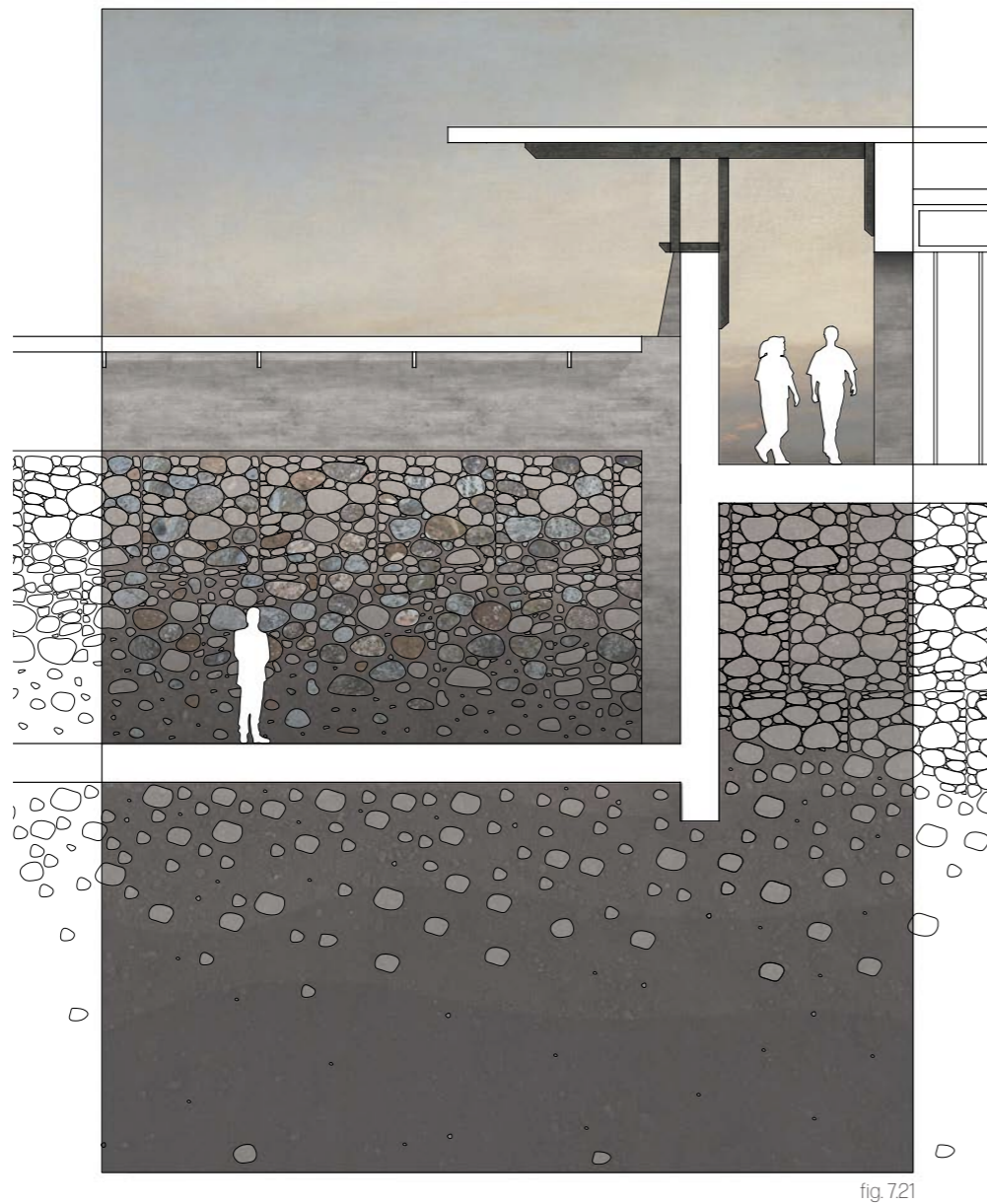


fig. 721



fig. 722

The largest enclosed space in the sequence is dimensioned after the ship-shaped stone setting found at Mølen. Here, the site's cultural history is present through findings from archaeological excavations, and lamellas directing attention to cairns in their natural context, framing the landscape beyond as part of the narrative rather than separating the interior from it. The final space in the site's history is a dark room with a long, narrow window at eye level facing the horizon. Inscribed into the glass is a depiction of Slaget ved Nesjar - the naval battle of 1016 - so that hundreds of ships appear to emerge from the horizon. The sea outside becomes the historical scene. The room does not explain the battle, through didactic display, it makes it appear.

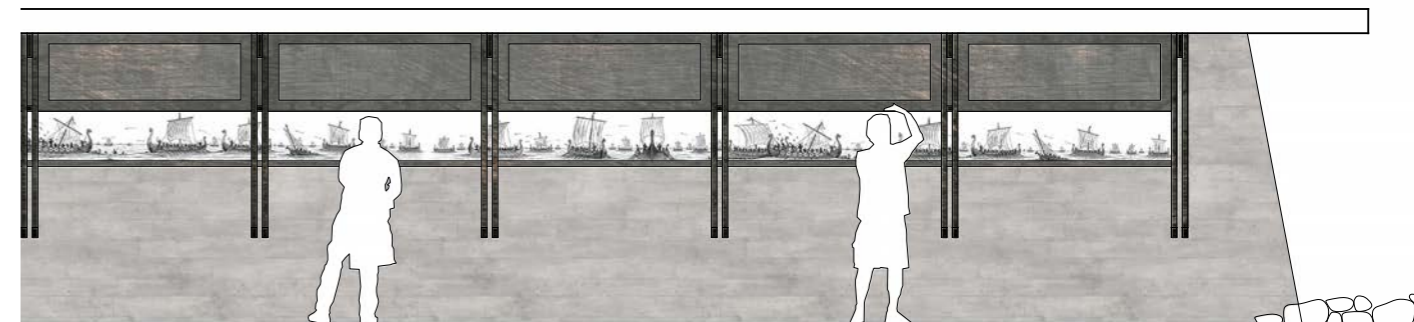


fig. 723

After a brief moment in open air, you enter a narrow linear structure that shifts the sequence from cultural memory to ecological present. The concrete floor shifts to timber planks as you are elevated above ground. Small openings in the concrete wall provide nesting spaces for birds, admit shafts of midday light, and direct careful, partial views toward the horizon and the moraine. The openings are placed at different heights, directing attention to different views for different visitors.

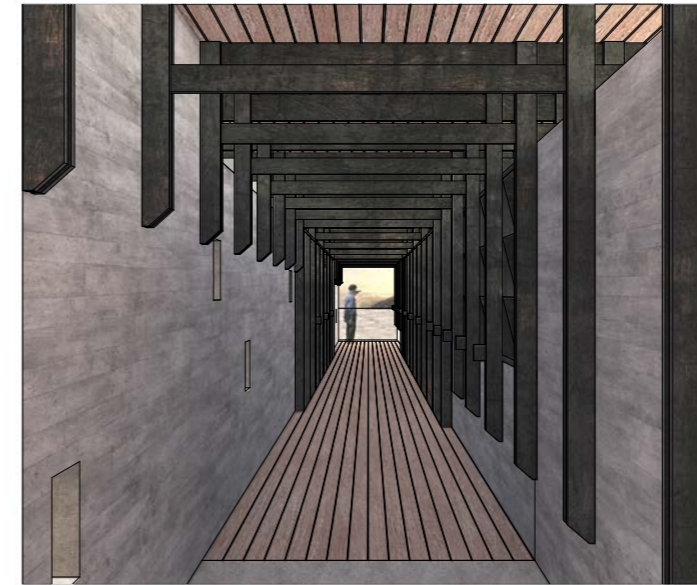
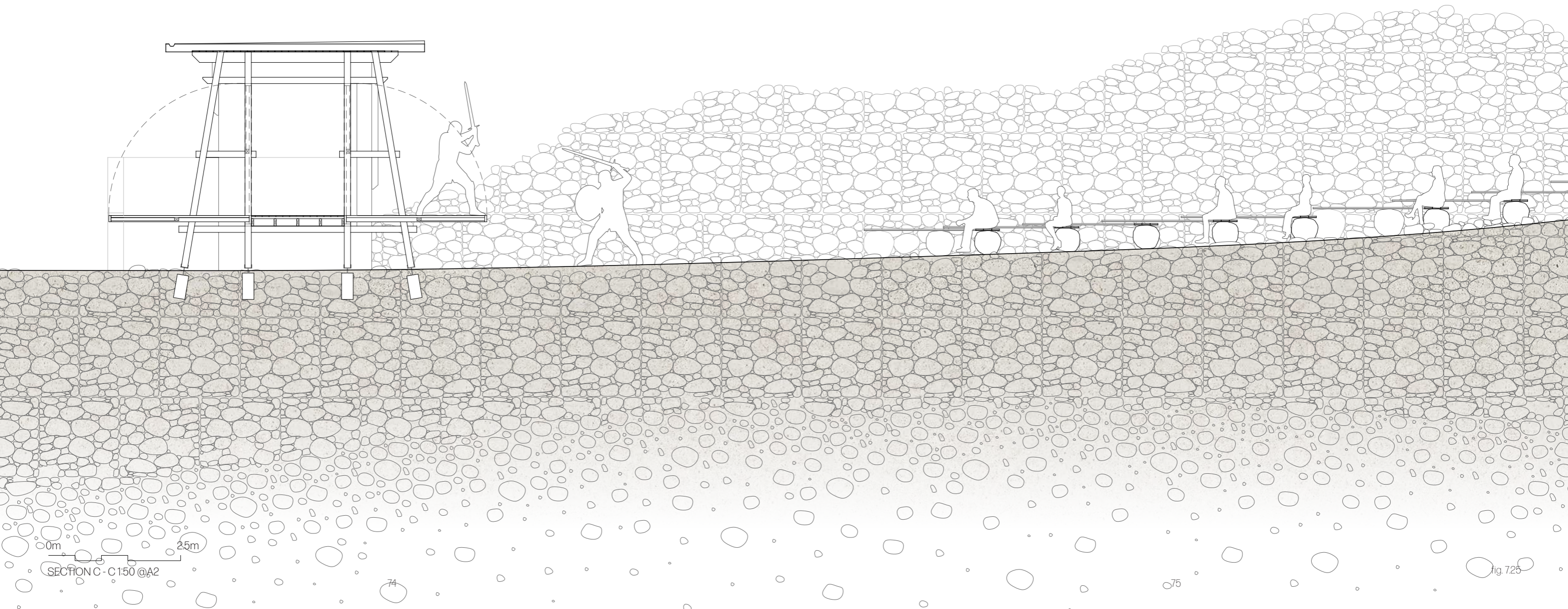


fig. 724



SECTION C - C:1:50 @A2

fig. 725

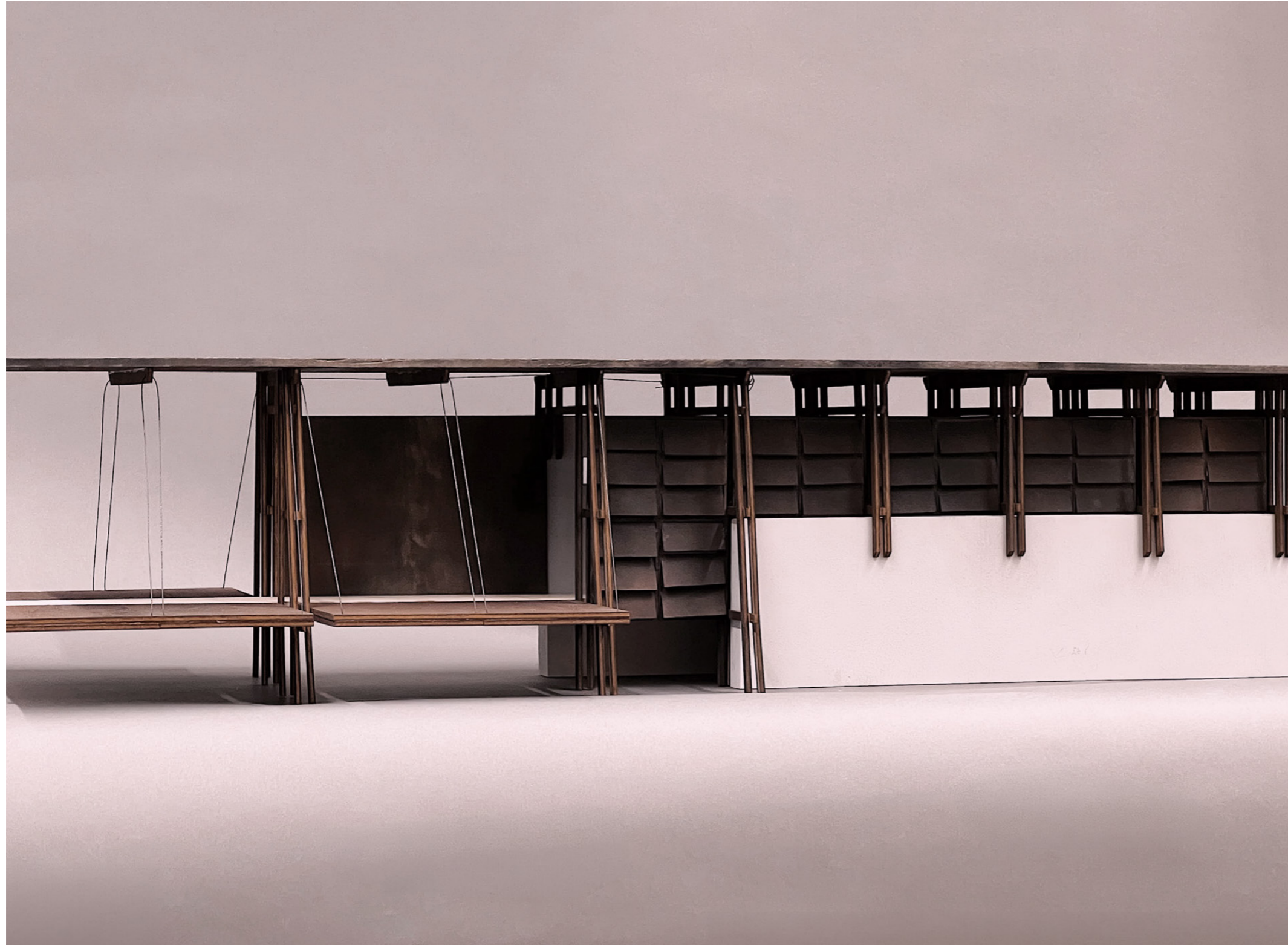


fig. 726

At the end of the walkway, the built structure ends. For the first time, the entire site opens before the visitor without mediation. A ramp descends back to the moraine, and as the visitor moves down it, they look back across the journey they have made. They step onto the stones with a different understanding of what lies beneath them. The hermeneutic circle, however, is not yet broken. The architectural sequence has been carefully staged, and what it produces is not the breaking of the circle itself, but the conditions in which that breaking becomes possible. From here, the visitor is free to explore the site independently, following the narratives that interest them, moving through a landscape they now know differently than when they arrived. It is in this unscripted encounter, shaped by the architecture but no longer controlled by it, that the circle finally has the possibility of breaking.

MODEL PHOTOS

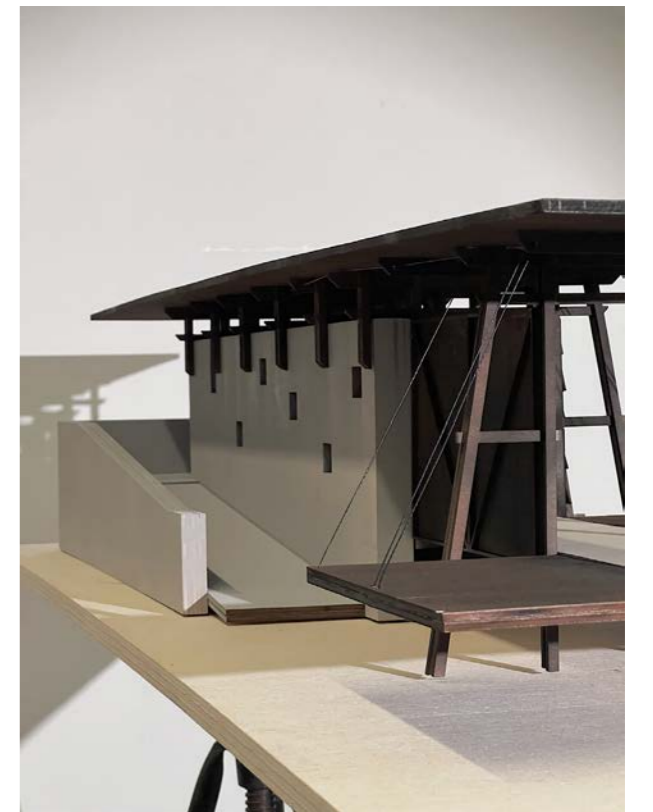


fig. 727



8.0 DISCUSSION

8.1 - Summary

This thesis has investigated the role of architecture in protected peripheral landscapes experiencing increasing pressure from tourism. It understands architectural intervention not just as a facilitator of access, but as an active participant in shaping how landscapes are perceived and experienced. Starting from the observation that much contemporary tourism architecture reinforces rather than challenges a dominant, image-based mode of encounter, the project has examined whether architectural intervention can break the hermeneutic circle of tourism – the self-reinforcing loop through which visitors arrive with pre-formed images of a place and leave having confirmed them.

Through a design proposal at Mølen, the thesis tests whether a spatial sequence, unfolding gradually through the landscape, can shift the visitor's experience from the visual confirmation of a frontstage image toward a more embodied engagement with the site's backstage reality. Walking and prolonged immersion are positioned as counterpoints to the rapid, single-narrative encounters that tourism architecture often produces. Rather than presenting the site through a singular viewpoint or fixed narrative, the project explores how movement, thresholds, and changing spatial conditions can structure perception over time.

The thesis was developed through a research-by-design methodology in which theory, site analysis, and design evolved in parallel. The theoretical framework draws on literature on tourism and perception, including the tourist gaze, authenticity, placemaking, the experience economy, and walking. The initial study trip to Denmark marked an important shift in the project, moving from a conventional understanding of the visitor centre as a commercial facility toward a critical investigation of how architecture mediates encounters with landscape. This was followed by prolonged site immersion at Mølen, including visits across different seasons and the development of a site encyclopedia, which together formed the foundation for the design proposal.

The project proposes a visitor centre conceived not as a singular building, but as a spatial sequence across the moraine. It aims to prolong the visitor's engagement with the site and encourage a more attentive, reflective encounter. Rather than delivering information through didactic means, the project seeks to support understanding through movement and experience, with the intention that a deeper engagement with the site may foster a more careful and considered relationship to it.

8.2 - Findings and Reflection

The most significant findings of the thesis come from the methodology itself. Prolonged and repeated site visits, combined with walking as the primary mode of analysis, revealed qualities of Mølen that no map, photograph, or prior knowledge could fully anticipate. This difficulty in representing the site, which has been a constant issue throughout this project, became a finding in itself. Despite multiple attempts to draw, photograph and describe Mølen, it proved impossible to fully communicate the site's scale, atmosphere, and layered conditions to someone who has not been there. This limitation reinforces the central argument of the thesis: image-based encounters reduce the complexity of landscape and produce only a partial understanding. Through prolonged immersion, the site is experienced through the body as much as through vision – in the sound of waves grinding against the stones, the resistance of the terrain underfoot, the exposure to wind, and the constant shift of attention between the horizon and the immediate ground. These conditions unfold gradually and resist anticipation precisely because they cannot be fully represented in advance.

Walking appears resistant to the hermeneutic circle, as the embodied experience of moving through the landscape consistently exceeds what prior images can prepare the visitor for. The sequential mapping of the site, inspired by Kevin Lynch, reinforced this observation. By recording not only what is visible, but where attention is drawn, where movement slows, and where the body becomes uncertain, the analysis revealed a landscape that changes significantly depending



fig. 81

on how deeply it is engaged with. Visitors who walk only on the paths encounter a predictable, scenic landscape, while those who walk farther into the terrain encounter a more complex, less easily photographed environment. This suggests that the architectural task is not to introduce new content or attraction, but to redirect movement and attention towards what is already present. Architectural intervention in protected landscapes can address the commodification of landscapes by facilitating longer visits that cannot be reduced to a single photograph. By revealing an honest image of the backstage of a site, the tourist gains a better understanding of the landscapes' layered qualities and, in that way, acts more carefully and considerately.

After the mid-critique, the thesis shifted from a general critique of visual dominance to the hermeneutic circle as the central problem. This clarified the argument but also made it more difficult to translate into design. Multisensory engagement can be easily addressed through design strategies; breaking the hermeneutic circle, however, requires a change in understanding. At

the mid-critique, a proposal robbing the visitor of the visual sense, forcing the visitor's gaze away from the horizon towards the backstage qualities of the site, risked simplifying the actual problem. Further work with the design proposal made it clear that it is not the visual sense in itself which is the problem. Whether the proposed sequence breaks the hermeneutic circle cannot be fully determined, as this would require further observation of how visitors interact with the building. The project, therefore, remains speculative. The project acknowledges that all architectural intervention inevitably stages the landscape, as the proposed sequence is itself a curated narrative. Although it differs from conventional tourism infrastructure, it still guides movement and frames experience. The design attempts to address this by being honest about staging rather than presenting itself as an authentic experience. Whether these gestures are sufficient to distinguish the project from the tourism infrastructure it critiques is a question that this thesis leaves open rather than resolves.

8.3 - Contribution and further investigation

This thesis contributes to the field of tourism architecture and architectural intervention in protected peripheral landscapes by proposing a shift in focus from the design of *destination* to design of *place*. Meaning that the architectural intervention should focus on the encounter with the landscape rather than the creation of an attraction. By viewing the hermeneutic circle as a spatial condition, rather than merely a theoretical one, it suggests that architecture plays an active role in how landscapes are perceived. The thesis also contributes to site-specific architecture practice by demonstrating the value of walking and prolonged site immersion in understanding and revealing the site's hidden qualities.

Several questions do, however, remain open. Most significantly, the effects of the proposed design on visitor behaviour and perception cannot be verified without implementation and observation. Further research could involve comparative studies of built projects that employ similar strategies, or post-occupancy evaluations examining how visitors actually move through and interpret spaces. A second area for further investigation is how tourism strains the landscape and how architecture mediates between protection and access.

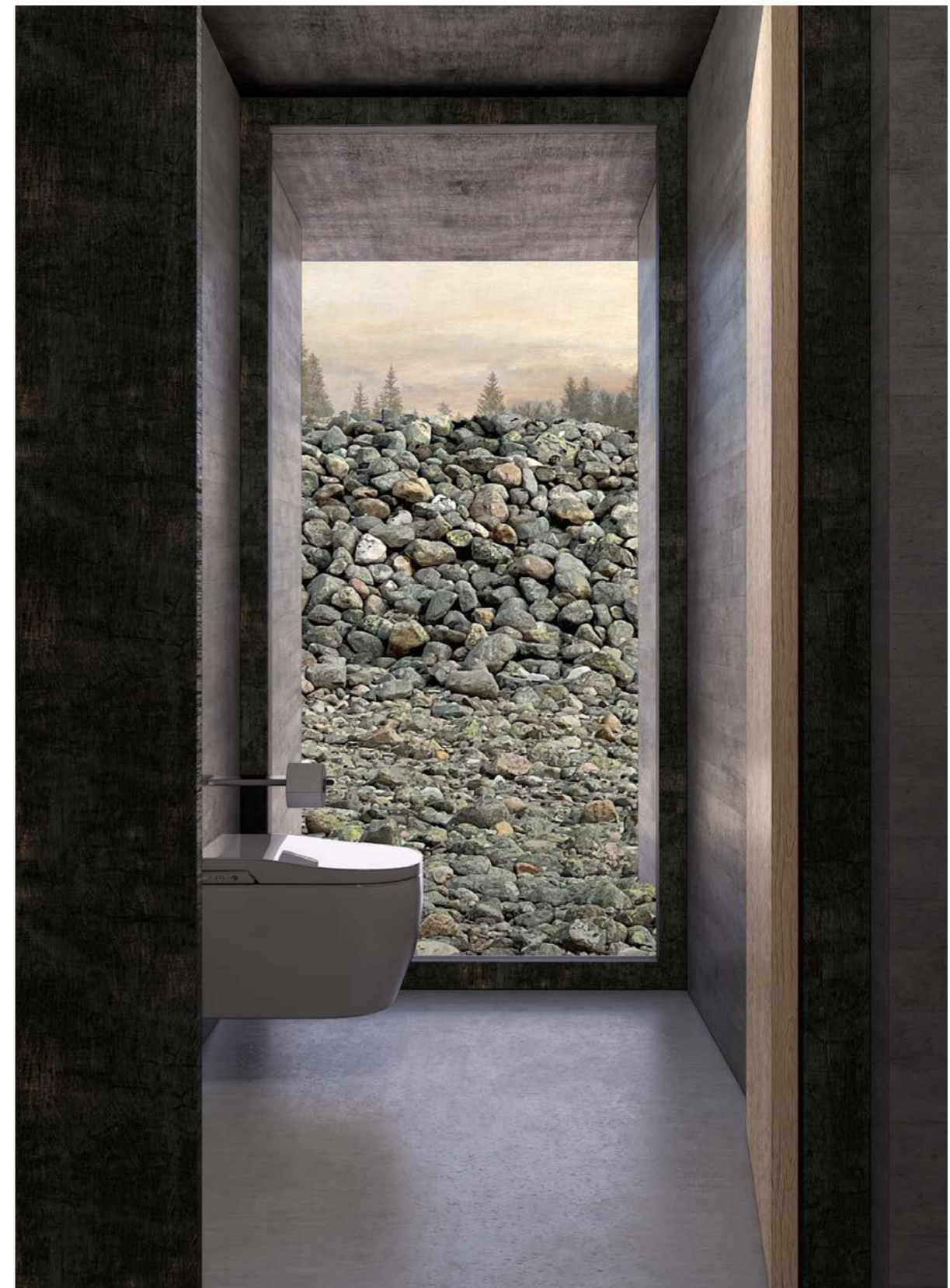
Finally, the transferability of the project's approach to sites with higher visitor pressure remains uncertain. While the strategies developed here respond to the specific conditions of Mølen, it is unclear how they would operate in more heavily trafficked locations where movement is already highly controlled and space is limited. Exploring how spatial sequencing and walking-based design might function under such conditions would be a relevant continuation of this work.



fig. 82

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AI DECLARATION

Artificial intelligence tools, such as ChatGPT by OpenAI and Claude by Anthropic, have been critically used in the research and writing process of this thesis. ChatGPT has been used as a tool for navigating, discussing, summarising, and translating academic literature, helping to clarify theoretical concepts and identify connections between sources. Claude and Grammarly have been used to structure arguments and organise the thesis, as well as to improve language, such as correcting typographical errors and refining phrasing. AI has not been used to generate text in the thesis, nor to produce any images or visual material. All arguments and design decisions are the author's own.

På Raets Brodd
Breaking the hermeneutic circle of tourism in peripheral landscapes

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