

The "Flearen trees" are planted in the Sahara, November 2010

Together with the local people Tineke de Vries and I planted 150 donated trees in the Sahara in M'hamid, Southern Morocco. These trees had been donated because of a collaborative action together with primary school children, teachers and residents of Elahuizen and Oudega in the Netherlands. This had been organized by Tineke and her family. Tineke and I had both won the 2nd and 3rd "Terre des Femmes" environmental prizes in 2009. This event is organized yearly by the Yves Rocher Foundation. We decided to combine our projects together and so on March 17, 2010, the National Tree planting day in the Netherlands, the children of primary schools in Oudega and Elahuizen participated in a nature conservation project, on the wet lands of the "Flearen" in Elahuizen, the Netherlands. It was a rewarding project for both Tineke and me as it tied to my tree planting project in the dry Sahara, in the surroundings of M'hamid in southern Morocco to her project in the Netherlands".



On arrival in M'hamid we left the car behind and travelled by camel to a desert camp in the Sahara where we would stay during the next few days. This camp is within walking distance of the village where our tree planting action would take place. In October I had already been here in order to discuss how things had to be prepared and the person responsible for our trees projects, Abda Ali, had already begun installing a fence of palm branches that would give protection to newly planted trees.

Upon arrival at the camp it soon became clear that the "Groasis Waterboxx's " which we had placed in October, had moved from the front to the back of the camp. These "UFOs" were apparently not in the right place at the entrance of the camp. We are now experimenting with the WaterBoxx or "incubators" to see if our newly planted trees have a better chance of survival.



Back in the Netherlands, I had discovered that "wicks", a small piece of rope through a hole in the bottom of the WaterBoxx, had not been placed so now Tineke and I quickly went to work to put them in place. A few small children were also staying in camp and they were very curious to see what we were doing. They wanted to know everything about us and watched us while we were working. A little boy read to Tineke from the booklet "Me and my Sahara" as he sat at the top of a sand dune close by. We had given the booklets to the

children that morning and now we were both greatly moved. As there were no other tourists in the camp at that time, relatives of Ibrahim and Halim Sbai, with whom we work together on our projects in M'hamid, were also enjoying the peaceful environment. It was a very special feeling during this period of the "Eid Al-Adha" which is comparable to Christmas for us, and Tineke and I were soon part of the family.

As we did our work on the waterboxx's we were pleasantly surprised to see that the Groasis WaterBoxx really did work. Because of condensation the water droplets were collected in the green box. The water droplets were then led to the newly planted "grafts" through a wick

The planting of tamarisk grafts is done in the same way as planting of willow tree grafts in the Netherlands. Healthy branches are removed from existing tamarisk that grow here in the area and are then prepared for planting. This way we know that the branches of trees are already strong and well adapted to this difficult environment. Now we hope that our "trees" will quickly sprout green twigs.



Our official tree-planting day had arrived and the morning we walked through the desert to the site where about 150 trees would be planted. We soon saw Abda Ali standing by the water well and it soon became clear that the newly repaired water pump was not yet working: the water needed to come up from about 20 meters below the ground into a water tank. Desperate, we looked at each other,

that afternoon? Suddenly we heard a huge noise in the silence of the desert. As the water pump started to work the water came gushing up and into the water tank. What a blessing! Abda Ali assured us that at 15.00 hours there would be enough water for our tree planting action.

They connected a huge garden hose to the water reservoir and this would bring the water to where it was needed about 300 meters away. A little reassured we walked back to the camp to work on the labels for the trees. The names of all donors were to be written on labels and then hung on the branches.



At 15:00 pm we walked back to the site for our "hot date in the desert". Nearby the village Zaouia, children were playing football and after spotting us they soon came running towards us. Everyone wanted to help during our activity and during the planting they stopped playing football.. Halim Sbaï also arrived and took the lead. Men were busy with the water and preparing the tamarisk branches that would be planted. It was great to see that the youth were so enthusiastic. We hoped that they would also

feel responsible for the newly planted trees. 10 "Groasis Waterboxx" were placed. At first, the men were a little sceptical about, they were worried that the "green bucket part of the waterboxx " would be taken to be used as tubs for laundry! Tineke had a brilliant idea. Next time I should bring laundry tubs for the women in the villages along! All in all it was a successful afternoon, 120 traditionally planted tamarisk and 10 Groasis Waterboxx were placed. Tineke and I could return back home with an accomplished feeling, Tineke had now completed her project and for me this was the beginning of a "green wall" for the second village.



Wanda Hebly, January 22, 2011

Labels with the names of the children of the primary schools in Elahuizen and Oudega.
The children did chores to collect the money that would make it possible to be able to plant trees in the Sahara.

