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CONSERVING AND RESTORING THE SOIL MONOLITH COLLECTION OF THE BELGIAN SOIL MAP: HISTORY, CHALLENGES, NEW DEVELOPMENTS AND EDUCATION POTENTIAL

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Between 1947 and 1991, a detailed national soil survey was conducted in Belgium. Maps were published at a scale of 1:20 000 and were based on at least one soil augering per hectare and one soil profile pit described per 2 km². In support of the soil survey work, a collection of soil monoliths was constructed as a reference and for illustrating the soil diversity of the territory. The monolith collection remains an important scientific educational tool and also represents an heritage value by providing a tangible link to the actual observations made by the soil surveyors in the past. Nevertheless, preserving and displaying the Belgian monolith collection posed significant challenges over the years. The monoliths suffered substantial damage due to movement, display and the degeneration of the resins. Hence, in order to safeguard the displays for the future, the entire collection was rehoused and reorganised. Novel methods were tried-out for restoration the monoliths. Simplified approaches were also tested for displaying soil monoliths and lacquer profiles for educational purposes, particularly in ecological tourism settings. Important lessons were learned from these experiences for the dissemination of pedological information to a wider public.