

Little Ouse Headwaters Project

www.lohp.org.uk



Digging peat in the valley – and using it as fuel

Garboldisham Primary School, Years 5-6
and Reg Langston, LOHP Trustee

**Peat used to be dug out from areas of the fens like this.
It was used on poor peoples' fires.**

**The LOHP wanted to dig
some pools to make
habitats for water-loving
plants and animals.**

**They invited the school
to join them and to try
digging out, drying and
burning peat.**



The vegetation growth in summer is dense in the wet conditions.

Peat is precious stuff.

It makes habitats for thousands of uncommon plants and animals.

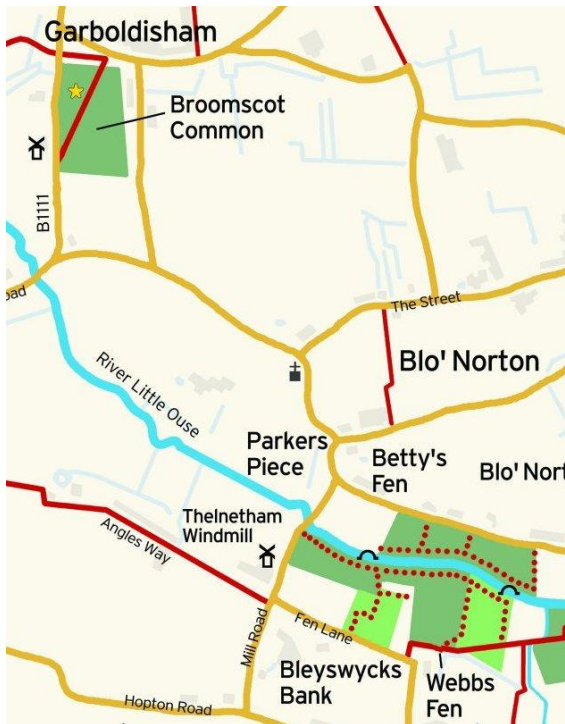
Like forests, peatlands store carbon.

Nowadays no-one should dig it up unnecessarily.

The LOHP had special permission to do it on this site.

Hinderclay Fen

LOHP volunteers start to dig a peat pool after the vegetation has been cleared away.
This is in 2011 on Betty's Fen.



A larger peat pit showing turves stacked round the edges.





The turves cut from the pond were stacked on higher ground to dry out. When they were dry, people used to take them home to burn for cooking and heating. The LOHP leaves them for wildlife habitat such as hibernation sites or burrows for insects.

Not all peat looks the same



Photo David Orr

This is also local peat - on Redgrave and Lopham Fen.

At an open day in 1970 Albert Driver (the last surviving local peat digger) showed visitors how peat was dug and stacked.

Can you see the tools he used?



A peat pool finished and full of water.
When the vegetation grows up it will attract lots of creatures
from amphibians and reptiles to water beetles and dragonflies.

Betty's Fen



Years 5-6 pupils from Garboldisham Primary School helped each other dig out the peat.

We got a spade and started to try to dig. It's very heavy.



The whole class dug up loads of peat but nowhere near the amount they had to dig in the olden days.



Turves being gathered.

The amount we all dug would have lasted about a day.



Success! Now it has to be left to dry for all of the summer.



After the peat turves were dried over summer they were made into a fire alongside an equal amount of firewood. Each fire had one firelighter. The children timed how long it would take each fire to boil a kettle.

The next slides show what happened . . .



**Don't go on if you want to try this
experiment for yourselves!***

*** Don't *ever* dig up peat unless you have permission**



The peat fire was hard to get going and burned slowly.

The wood burned quicker and hotter.



The wood fire boiled the water after 20 minutes but the peat fire didn't. Even when the peat was put on top of the wood fire it was very slow to burn.

What questions does that make you want to ask?

Think before you go on to the next slide.....

*Was our peat
dry enough?*

*Has the peat
changed?*

*Is peat really
a bad fuel?*

*Were people 100
years ago better at
getting it to burn?*



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- What other questions would you want to ask?
- How would you try to test the answers?

?

Some peat facts

- Peat gives out less heat than wood but burns for ***much*** longer
- Peat is still used as a fuel in people's homes in many countries including Ireland
- Peat is used as a fuel in power stations (generating electricity) in Ireland and Russia
- There are good wildlife conservation and climate change reasons to leave peat where it is in the ground
- If peaty soils are drained and dried out, the peat starts to rot and is then much less good as fuel. This has happened to the peat in much of the LOHP area
- Dried wood has about twice as much energy value as peat (for the same weight)
- Heating oil has about 5 times as much energy value as peat (for the same weight)

Source- Biomass Energy Centre and Electricity Research Centre Univ Coll Dublin 2009

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