



LOHP's hard work wins (more) recognition

The LOHP was honoured to receive two awards for its work from Norfolk CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) at a ceremony at the Assembly House in Norwich on 21st November. A CPRE Norfolk Award recognises 'significant achievements in buildings and landscape', and the Boldero Award, in its inaugural year, is given for 'enabling, enhancing and encouraging access to the countryside'.

LOHP trustee Helen Smith said, 'All our awards are a tribute to the work of the many volunteers who make up the LOHP. Receiving these Norfolk CPRE awards is a great way to conclude our 10th anniversary year'.



In pursuit of records

17 experts were joined by two recent graduates from UEA to set about the LOHP sites in late June for a weekend extravaganza of biological recording. Highlights included the first record for LOHP of Britain's smallest water beetle (1mm long) from Blo' Norton Fen and three new hunting spiders for Hinderclay Fen. Look out for more details in the next newsletter.



This riot of brown-lipped and white-lipped snails found in one nettle-patch on Bleyswycks Bank shows the huge variation within common species

New skills

An excellent course in July with a trainer from Writtle College, means that six more LOHP volunteers now know how to use and maintain brushcutters effectively and safely. The massive plant growth this year means the course was very timely and the trained volunteers have been extremely busy on LOHP sites but even so it has been hard to keep pace. The project is grateful to these volunteers for their time and glad to be able to offer useful training.



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WELCOME

to the newsletter of the Little Ouse Headwaters Project. 2012 has seen our tenth anniversary and we've been celebrating in style!

The Project was started in 2002 by a group of local people, all still very much involved, to conserve the wildlife, landscape and cultural heritage of the upper Little Ouse valley. Find out more about us - and join in. We look forward to seeing you!



INSIDE...

A swallow in midwinter?
How can that be?
See page 7



Young photographers choose views to compare in future



'We went to the common and we saw the grass. It was a yellow colour because it was dying. This is the pond but it is overgrown.'
(Tilly and Clara)

'The pond is overgrown. We couldn't see any water but we knew where it was.' (Fynton, James and Danny)



'We decided to take our photo here so we can compare it in a couple of months.'
(Eddie and Joshua)

The epic struggle between rabbit and gorse continues...

Following a full summer of growth it was obvious that our experiments were a success. The new growth in the patches where the rabbits had been kept out had grown about half a metre, while the gorse outside the experiments was only a few centimetres high.



It's working!

Having initiated interest and armed children with knowledge of the local sites we were delighted to hear that many of them decided to continue to visit and keep notes throughout the summer holidays. This interest is really everything that the project aspires to. We wanted, in the words of the Olympics, 'to inspire a generation.' It is important to educate this generation to take care of their environment; and gratifying to see that some really have taken this on board.

Older children introduce Broomscot to younger ones

At the start of the new school year Rowan Tree class visited the common, and the Year 4's introduced their new class mates to different aspects of the place, pointing out the different vegetation, the changes that they observed throughout last year and other interesting features.

Many children continued to visit and keep notes all through the summer

Observing changes

The main differences noticed were the larger tufts of grass, the flowers appearing between the gorse bushes and the 'overgrown' pond area.

Future plans

Plans for involvement this year include studying different soil types: introducing the children to the concept of acidity; monitoring the growth of the gorse; rabbit 'activity'; seasonal changes, diversity and interdependence of species (bug hunting!)

Tamsin Young
Garboldisham Primary School

Reading the past from the landscape

The Little Ouse Headwaters has a fascinating earth heritage. The valley reveals the story of local environmental change over the last 450,000 years.

The valley we see today originated in the Anglian glaciation (about 450,000 years ago). Ice sheets eroded the Chalk bedrock and deposited thick layers of glacial debris over the landscape; pressurised meltwater beneath the ice carved deep into the bedrock, initiating the ancestral valley.

During later glacial periods, meltwater was dammed up in the Fenland basin, and the valley was an overflow route towards the North Sea. An arm of this Fenland lake may even have filled the valley. Sands and gravels from these cold periods now underlie the valley floor, and also form terraced areas marking the remnants of former floodplains.

The last Ice Age ended about 12,000 years ago. It left a legacy of spring-fed lakes in the valley. These have now vanished, but their buried sediments contain fossil pollen from which we can reconstruct the vegetation of the period, which was tundra with scattered trees.

Since the last Ice Age, mature soils have developed on thick layers of peat and floodwater deposits which have built up in the valley. Chalk bedrock continues to supply abundant lime-rich water through seeps and springs.

Human activity has increasingly shaped the environment of the Little Ouse valley, particularly over the last 200 years. Pollution, water abstraction, deforestation, drainage, peat extraction and flood control have all had an impact.

Tim Holt-Wilson

Windows into the Underworld

Three borehole pipes are used for testing water levels on Thelnetham Fen. When these were drilled, they recorded no less than 35 m (115 ft) of glacial deposits overlying chalk, suggesting the chalk bedrock here was deeply hollowed out by the glacial meltwaters, and a 'tunnel valley' is now buried beneath the surface.



Blo Norton Banks and The Lows

The slopes were probably carved out by water action when the valley was a glacial meltwater channel. Buried layers of mud have been sampled from beneath the valley floor, and are evidence for a lake here at the end of the last Ice Age, about 12,000 years ago. (Read more about the Lows on page 6)

St Mary's Well at Hinderclay.

Lime-rich water wells up here, and is said to be good for curing sore eyes. Nearby finds of Roman artefacts suggests the well may have been a focal centre for over 1500 years.



A Triffid at Hinderclay Fen Wood?

The stilt roots of this alder tree are evidence of peat wastage, caused by the impact of lowered water levels in the valley in recent years.

Broomscot Common.

This flat area of well-draining, sandy soils is thought to have been laid down as a river terrace, the remnant of a former floodplain developed in the last Ice Age, perhaps 30,000 years ago.

All photos on this page Tim Holt-Wilson



LOHP celebrates in style

Not every 10 year old can have 500 people at their party - but that's what happened on September 1st for LOHP's enormous birthday bash 'Food and Folk on the Frith'.

This event took a huge amount of work from a vast army of people - and it was enormous fun. It showed off what the project has achieved, gave a platform to some wonderful local food producers and craft workers (and some hot musical talent) and gave everyone the chance to find out more about the past and look forward to the future.



commitment fun inclusiveness orchards
action art bright continuity dancing local great party past smells
food future heritage history music peat work
conservation honey lathe

Photos Arthur Rivett
and Reg Langston

Giants in the landscape

Trustees plan to enhance and restore the Little Ouse valley landscape by planting rare native black poplars this winter.

Until about 1800, these huge monarchs would have stood in margins of the valley bottoms but none now remain on the Project's fertile lowlands and water meadows, their historic and ideal habitat.

The black poplar can grow higher than a church spire, with a trunk many paces round, so sites for them are being carefully selected. Britain's most spectacular tree, when mature it has a fat belly and its bark is a crusty riot of warts, scabs, bosses and carbuncles.



These twisted and deformed giants are now very rare, but a medium-sized tree can be seen beside the High Street, Thelnetham. Visitors will easily recognise it – it has a magical and imposing presence. Thelnetham is now the last village in the LOHP area that has a mature specimen. It has stood for probably 150 years, but is now showing signs of mortality.

Abundant in the Middle Ages, this most leprosy of trees was, like leprosy itself, headed for extinction in Britain by the twentieth century. Thus, a mediaeval sainthood should now await the Trustees as reward for this most recent surge of piety and goodness.

In the 1920s botanist Edgar Milne-Redhead began to record the few that were left. Since then, a keen conservation movement has gathered force.

In recent years local authorities have begun recording and protecting their specimens.

The black poplar is a prima donna of sorts – the right sequence of circumstances and weather conditions for germination of its seed are so rigorous as to be almost farcical. So, back in history, the tree was spread by way of cuttings, or simply re-grew from suckers put up by fallen trunks in wet lowland meadows.

Planting ceased by the nineteenth century when the pine plantations came on stream and Italian black poplars, and the unlovely hybrids with straighter, smoother trunks were preferred. Because some interbreeding has taken place DNA tests are now used to single out the pure English stock – a source of which is available to LOHP. Suffolk is a stronghold for the mature trees which, by now, are mostly reaching old age. As deciduous trees go, the species is not long-lived – probably about 200 years maximum. The new plantings will take a century or so to mature. The planting scheme has County Council blessing too. Sue Hooton, Suffolk's county ecologist, says, 'The next step for conservation of this rare tree is to get it growing in the local landscape.'

Only one tree in fifty is female, possibly because nobody planted females, which shed their fluffy down onto ancestral linen lines. We know the sex by the colour of the catkins – males red, females green.



Mediaeval man seldom washed his smalls but may have been more bothered by fluffy tufts on his tunic or pointy shoes; we don't know. We do know that peasants wanted wood for their floorboards and doors – and black poplar was just that, in large quantities, the poor man's oak. Hard to identify, normally it now passes as 'pine' or 'elm'.

Not re-stocking our landscape with this magnificent tree would deny to our descendants the huge pleasure of coming into the presence of one of Nature's crazy wonders. Visiting one of these monstrous veterans, and there are only about only 7,000 left nationwide, is a great joy. JF

Cuttings will also be available free, to LOHP members who have a suitable site at least forty yards from any building. Contact 01379 898502.

There are (at least) two examples of young native black poplar trees locally – both on Suffolk Wildlife Trust land. One grows on the verge along Low Common Road, South Lopham (TM 049802) and one on Redgrave Fen (TM 046795).

The Lows - take a walk and imagine...

Those who pass along the country road and peek over the hedge at The Lows would not guess at the 450,000 year-old tale of climate change and landscape evolution it harbours.

The steep bank along the road margin is said to have been carved by a great meander cutting a steep bluff into the vast plain of glacial sediments smeared across Norfolk and Suffolk by the huge ice sheets of the Anglian Glaciation.

Valley margin

The steep river cliff was eroded by freezing and thawing during the last cold period, 10-30,000 years ago, to form a more gentle slope. This valley margin, much changed again by recent agriculture, now carries a grassy meadow which the LOHP is trying to restore to a chalky, flower-rich condition.

A vast lake

Deep below the flat marshy bottom are layers of organic sediments which show the area was once part of a large lake. This, too, was formed during the last cold period, when the ice sheet stopped at Hunstanton. All of Norfolk was a frigid region. Freezing conditions encouraged a great hollow to form in the chalk under the valley, with a strong upwelling of springs. The Mere that developed would have existed perhaps 10,000 years ago.

Transition to swamp

Over time, the lake filled with fine sediment. Swamps began to grow in the shallow water, and peat started to accumulate. Over thousands of years



The Lows is a mysterious place of buried ancient lakes and tiny rare snails, an important part of the story of East Anglia

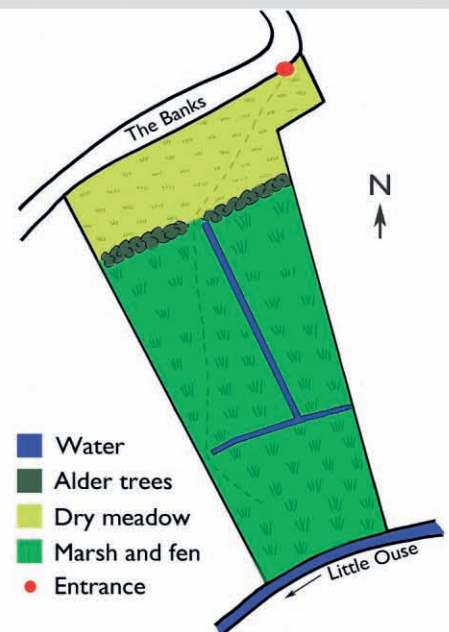
as the climate warmed, a huge body of ancient peat formed. The landscape evolved from lake to fen to bog, sometimes with scrubby trees, at other times it would have been more water than land.

Drained to make it farmable

Until the late eighteenth century, The Lows would have been part of the great valley fen that filled the upper reaches of the Little Ouse. Since then, fen was reclaimed by drainage, either to improve grazing or even sometimes to grow a crop, although this was rarely successful. Ditches were dug and the Little Ouse enlarged so it could carry more water. The Lows probably lost many uncommon fen plants and animals at this time.

Rewetting for wildlife

In 2003, the LOHP leased the Lows so that it could protect what wildlife remains, and restore what has been lost. The low-lying marshes are a mix of grassy meadow, rushy marsh and sedgy fen. It still harbours a wide range of fen plants – early marsh orchids have been seen, along with the gloriously named one-glumed spike rush – and more will return with sympathetic management.



Very small and very rare . .

The fen's rarest resident is the tiny narrow-mouthed whorl snail. Although only specialists can find or recognise the beast, it's wonderful to know that it's there.



• Actual size

The Lows feels surprisingly remote. It is a place to immerse yourself in the subtle landscape of the Little Ouse headwaters, and to imagine the lost climate and landscape of past millennia.

Mike Harding



Reg Langston

LOHP creative group update

The LOHP has started a Creative Group which aims to celebrate the Little Ouse valley through art, writing and performance. The group is going well, and new members are always welcome.

We have held six meetings, including two afternoon visits to the valley and some of its habitats. We also visited the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts who are organising the programme for us. We looked at their collection of world art to see how other cultures have celebrated the natural world through creative work.

We are currently working on three strands:

- ◆ Photographers and writers working together around a theme of journeys through the valley.
- ◆ A collaborative "*Mille fleurs*" (thousand flowers) project, based on the idea of a medieval tapestry of the same name. Each person will make pieces based on a single plant, animal, leaf, fruit etc. from the valley. The results will be montaged together to produce a huge frieze or tableau of 1000 pieces.
- ◆ A performance strand which may be podcasts or live performances from poets, musicians, singers and so on.

We will be organising workshops to support the creative work. For instance we will be visiting the Castle Museum to look at the collection of Lopham Linens. Other workshop suggestions include paper-making and looking at how people of other cultures relate to their rivers - for example Shamans in the Brazilian Amazon.

Books for Christmas?

The Norfolk dialect

Second only to nature and the landscape the subject of language attracts all sorts of myths and nonsense, and books on Norfolk dialect are usually of the Dew Yew Reckun, Bor? variety.

The more welcome therefore is Prof Peter Trudgill's little paperback that sets out in clear simple terms the dialect features and grammar as well as a little about the history of this fascinating

tongue that punched well above its weight at the time when the English we now speak was being formed.

It can be understood by non-specialists and offers them

a fascinating read. It also confirms the saying that you shouldn't judge a book by the cover, for this has the most horrible one you ever saw...

For those drawn to this topic the more academic *East Anglian English* is available – ed. Fisiak and Trudgill, containing papers by various authors on deeper and more technical aspects of the dialect.

***The Norfolk Dialect* Peter Trudgill. Poppyland. Cromer, 2003. and *East Anglian English* . Eds. Jacek Fisiak & Peter Trudgill. D.S.Brewer, Cambridge, 2001.**

Our Final Century

Not very Christmassy, this, but it puts into perspective the good work that the LOHP does, There are some books you should read before you die – and you may not have much time left.

The message from Prof Martin Rees, physicist and cosmologist, is that we've entered the most dangerous period in history. Apocalyptic predictions are a part of our culture, but this is backed by science.

Keep warm and bright and support conservation!

Now you can keep a swallow with you - winter and summer - with the new range of clothing from LOHP:

Sweatshirts,
Tee shirts,
Polo shirts,
Beanie hats,
Baseball caps,
Basic fleeces ,
Waterproof fleeces.



Shirts come in a variety of colours: red, navy, royal blue, emerald, bottle green.....

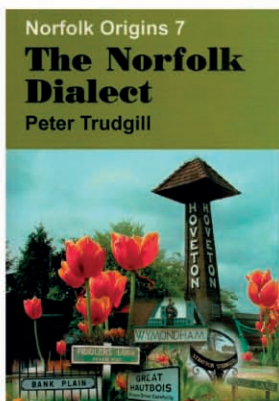
See the website or contact Margaret Malley on 01379 643435



In this simple little paperback he analyses all the threats: nuclear bombs, chemical and biological weapons in the hands of terrorists, an electronic cyber-goo that could invade the whole world, strange particles that could tear the fabric of time apart or cause change of state in matter, ecological GM disaster, as well as the usual suspects – asteroids, disease famine and war.

When Prof. Rees speaks, the scientific community listens. His risk assessment is cogent and detached. He pops up on the telly as Astronomer Royal now and then and is such a nice chap. That explains why this is not a counsel of despair, but a reminder that this century will decide if the magical thing called life is to continue - and a plea for humanity to realise that it is in our hands.

***Our Final Century : will Civilisation survive the 21st Century ?* Martin Rees. Heinemann, London, 2003.**



Membership application

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Phone:

E-mail:

I wish to support the LOHP as an:

Ordinary member:	(£2 per annum)	
Friend of the Fens:	(£10 minimum per annum)	
Junior member:	(25p. per annum)	

Please tick one category and indicate the amount paid for Friend of the Fens. Please make cheques payable to 'Little Ouse Headwaters Project'.

I wish to donate £..... to the Little Ouse Headwaters Project

I want all my subscriptions and donations to the LOHP to be Gift Aided until I notify you otherwise. I pay Income Tax/Capital Gains Tax at least equivalent to the value of my contribution.

giftaid it

Signed:.....

Dated:.....

Registered Charity No: 1098232

The LOHP needs you!

The LOHP relies on volunteers to run the charity and help with conservation (and other) work. Might you have some energy and some time? If so we'd love to hear from you.

Thinking money ...

We're hoping to form a small finance group to help the treasurer. Since the LOHP started, the financial work has been carried out by the treasurer. We feel that the LOHP has now grown big enough to need several people to assist.

There are two areas of work we need a bit of help with:

1. Inputting financial data into an accountancy package so the treasurer has an easier job in preparing quarterly financial statements for trustees. Help with other tasks, such as paying in funds, assisting with invoices etc. could also be included. We're looking for one or two people to work with the treasurer on this. Training in the use of the accountancy package will be given by another volunteer who is a qualified accounts technician.
2. Anyone out there with accountancy or financial planning experience? Extra help with these would also be welcome.

... or helping in any way

If you would like to get involved, or for more information, **contact** enquiries@lohp.org.uk or ring Bev Blackburn, Volunteer Coordinator and Event Manager on 07747 691285 or Pete Fox on 07500 044587.

Work parties

Get out and enjoy yourself whatever the weather at a LOHP work party. Monthly on Sundays (see dates below) and weekly on Wednesdays.

Check details on the website or ring for information:

Dec 9	Hedge planting	Hinderclay Fen
Jan 13	Coppicing gorse	Broomscot Common
Feb 10	Scrub clearance	Blo'Norton Fen
Mar 10	Pond digging	Blo'Norton Fen
Reg & Rowena Langston		01379 898009 (Broomscot)
Jo-Anne Pitt		01379 898684 (Blo' Norton)
Nigel Clark		01379 890460 (Hinderclay)

Winter events

Annual Talk, members' evening and AGM
Thursday 13th December

**Flowers of the Little Ouse Headwaters -
a National Treasure**
talk by Jonny Stone

Redgrave Activity Centre 7.30 pm.

Non-members very welcome. £2 donation.

New Year's Walk - Sunday 6th Jan
Start at 10.30 - back in time for lunch

Greet the New Year and walk off the mince pies with a bracing stroll around some of our sites.

Meeting point details on the website nearer the time, or ring 07500 044587.



Contact LOHP

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