

## Life as a Peat Worker – KS1 & KS2

### Overview –

<b>Description</b>	Set your class a challenge to build the tallest ruckle, or to be the quickest. Or simply do a role play activity
<b>Time</b>	30-45 minutes
<b>Equipment</b>	2-4 sacks of ‘turves’ (play peat blocks).
<b>Curriculum</b>	KS1 History– Significant historical events, people and places in their locality KS2 History– Develop a chronologically secure knowledge and understanding of British and local history
<b>Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk about what archaeology is, and how archaeologists work.</li> <li>• Do a hands-on interactive dig in real peat, to discover archaeological artefacts.</li> <li>• Discuss what the artefacts teach us about the past in the Avalon Marshes.</li> </ul>
<b>Learning Outcomes</b>	At the end of this activity all pupils should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain what a ruckle is.</li> <li>• Talk about what life was like for a peat worker.</li> </ul>
<b>Linked resources</b>	<p>Introducing the Avalon Marshes</p> <p><b>Pick &amp; Mix:</b> Avalon Marshes Timeline; Getting to Know Peat; Creative Response to Landscape – Poetry; Avalon Marshes Quiz</p> <p><b>Factsheets:</b> The Avalon Marshes; What is Peat</p> <p><b>Audio</b> - Avalon Marshes, A Peatland Story</p> <p><b>Specialist equipment</b> – Avalon Marshes Peat Dig</p>



## Teachers' notes –

Preparation: The 'ruckles' resource consists of 4 sacks of around 50 'peat' blocks. The blocks are actually made of black foam, so are very light. It works best to use at least 2 sacks of blocks – that way there are enough to create a big ruckle.

Introduction: Introduce the Avalon Marshes to your pupils using one of the presentations on our website. Use the 'Getting to Know Peat' resource to help pupils understand what peat is, and its significance in the Avalon Marshes.

### Story - A Day in the Life of a Peat Worker (1930):

My name is Harry and I'm a peat-cutter. I live in a village called Meare, in Somerset. I left school when I was 14 and now I do piece work down on the peat moors. Piece work means they pay me for the work that I do. If I cut 1000 blocks of peat I get paid for 1000 blocks of peat, not more not less. I usually earn about 6 shillings a day. Sometime I get given cheese and cider too. We all have cheese, bread and cider for our lunch.

It's hard work cutting peat. The soil is so wet and sodden with water, it weighs a tonne! But I'm strong and hardworking, so I don't mind. I start first thing in the morning and work all the daylight hours.

We start by clearing the topsoil of the peat, and we call that 'unridding'. We work in long straight rows, and once the topsoil is out of the way we can mark out the 'head'. This means slicing a grid of lines on the top of the peat, and these are the lines we cut down on. We cut down these lines to dig up huge cubes of the wet, black peat. They're 20cm x 25cm x 30cm, and they're called 'mumps'. I cut and dig the mumps and put them up on the side of the row we're doing. As we go deeper and deeper into the hole, the peat gets wetter and heavier. And because I'm in the hole I have further to chuck it up to the side! So the work gets harder throughout the day. And I've got to work fast else the hole fills with water, and then my jobs even harder!

We cut the peat in the summer so it can dry in the sun, before being sold in the winter. The mumps get sliced into three smaller blocks, called 'turves', and the turves get stacked to dry in the sun. Firstly they get put in narrow rows called 'windrows'. After that they get put in small piles called 'hyles', and then into small beehive shapes called 'tates'. Once they are half dry they get put in huge beehive shaped piles called 'ruckle'. It's the rows of tall ruckles that you can see all around the moors. They are 3m high and have 1000 turves in them! The driest ones on the inside, and the wetter ones in the middle. Women and children normally do the stacking. My mum, my aunt, and my sister all work on stacking ruckles.

All in all it takes about 12 weeks for the peat to dry out. The ruckles stay like that until after the summer when the dry turves get taken to Glastonbury to sell it for fuel. My mum and sister go on a horse and cart to sell them. Some people use a horse and boat! The horse on the drove, pulling a boat in the rhyne stacked full of turves.

**The 'ruckles' resources can be used as a fun way of getting pupils to think about life in the past, and the peat industry. Do a role play activity where the pupils play the men who dug and cut the peat, the women and children who stacked the peat, and the people who took it to sell it in the town.**