

How the Lows may have looked 300 million years ago

**1** The large quarry face in front of you was declared a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1989 as it is of national geological importance. The rocks were formed over 300 million years ago, when Oldham was actually on the Equator and was part of a gigantic river system like the Amazon or Mississippi deltas of today.

Think of the sand and mud you see on beaches and mudflats. Similar beaches and mudflats at Glodwick Lows got thicker and thicker over time, as the river brought in new sand and mud from distant mountains. The weight of this new material squashed the layers below, turning them into sandstones and clay mudrock.

**2** Below the steep slope to your right lies the entrance (filled and made safe) to one of the many coalpits on the Lows. About 370 years ago Oldham became important for coal mining. In the early days coal would have been obtained from shallow workings on Glodwick Lows, as seams were close to the surface. Later coalpits descended well over 200 metres.

The different coloured layers of rock in the cliff face are bands of coal, sandstone and clay mudrock, created by changes to the Lows over millions of years. An ancient coal forest was drowned by a lake, which then filled up with mud and sand so new plants started to cover the site. As these changes continued over time bands of rock were formed, including the numerous coal seams that were mined here and across Lancashire.

There were several quarries on the Lows but this was the biggest. Well over 200 years ago the early quarries here provided sandstone for houses and boundary walls. Later, bricks became cheaper and quicker to produce so stone quarrying gave way to quarrying the clay mudrocks, and brickworks appeared. Quarries expanded rapidly, eventually merging into this huge, eastward looking rock face.



Families digging for coal during the Miners Strike, 1926

**2** In 1780 John Vaiton a Methodist preacher, described Glodwick as 'a village of colliers and weavers'.

Albert Buckley belonged to a family of miners who worked the Lows between the wars. He describes working a 2 metre thick seam of coal by the light of candles or carbide lamps.

Oldham Local Studies Library has a recording of Albert recalling what it was like digging the coal; in the mines in the nineteenth century. Mining ceased on Glodwick Lows in the 1940's when there was not enough good coal left to be profitable.



**3** Try and spot some of the wildlife of the Lows, ranging from foxes to mining bees and field bindweed. Heather, grassland and woodland habitats have all been enhanced.

In the past 200 years the Lows has changed considerably from a windswept moorland hideaway to quarries, coal mines, brickworks and, finally, a Local Nature Reserve surrounded by houses. It is now a perfect place to observe wildlife, study local history and geology, to walk the dog and for children to play imaginative games and hunt for fossils.

In the 1990's, Glodwick Lows was transformed by an 'Open Space Reclamation Scheme', which stimulated research into the history and geology of the site, leading to the production of this leaflet and a detailed Geological Trail booklet.

This leaflet points out interesting historical sites, helps you explore the nature and geology of the Lows, shows you where to find fossils and presents you with superb views of the surrounding area. The walk should only take about an hour. Please follow the map, inside this leaflet, around the Lows. Each number refers to a point of interest around the site.

Enjoy your walk!



If you would like to know more about local geology you can contact the

Oldham Geological Society  
T: 0161 652 1161 and you can also visit  
Oldham Local Studies Library  
T: 0161 770 4654

Glodwick Lows is managed by  
Oldham Countryside Service.  
If you wish to get in touch with them  
their details are as follows:

Oldham Countryside Service  
Alexandra Park, Kings Road,  
Oldham OL8 2BH  
T: 0161 770 4056  
E: env.rangers@oldham.gov.uk



Oldham  
Council



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Council

Local Nature Reserve

# Glodwick Lows

## Welcome to Glodwick Lows

About one kilometre from Oldham town centre lies a small hillside with a 300 million-year history. It has witnessed the Iron Age, Roman and Viking invaders, Medieval settlers, coal miners, quarrymen and even a hermit! This is Glodwick Lows.

**4** Stop where the paths join near the top of the hill and take a look around you. With commanding views over the surrounding countryside, Glodwick Lows provided a good site for settlement with people having lived here for over two thousand years.

The word 'Glod' is of Celtic origin and Iron Age flints have been found here. The term 'wick' is Saxon and later, it is thought Vikings may have settled here. Incidentally, "Lows/Laws" is used throughout Britain to describe high ground!

**5** Near here stood the 'Elysian Cot', home of Oldham's famous hermit, Billy Butterworth, who lived from 1781 to 1834. He lived here, alone, for nearly twenty years.



Billy Butterworth

Billy dressed in the fashion of the days of King Charles II: wearing a black hat with buckle and ostrich feather, and a long waistcoat and jacket. Along with his waist length black beard, this reflected his love of theatre and unusual views on life.

His strange home was built partly below ground level, using rough stones, turf and moss, and without proper building tools. The cottage had a chapel and an observatory with a Camera Obscura (a device for plotting stars and tracing landscapes).

The house and garden were ornamented with shells, fossils and grotesque Plaster of Paris carvings.

Though, supposedly, a hermit, Billy had plenty of visitors, even school groups! He sold them cakes, ginger beer and sweets. He would sing old songs or tell the sad tale of how his one true love had deserted him to marry another.

**6** The housing estate to your left was once the home of Oldham FC (later Oldham Rugby League FC). In 1876, they played their first ever match here (at that time 15-a-side rugby union) against Stalybridge FC.

Oldham FC (Red and amber strip)



Perhaps the most renowned person connected with the Lows was Clem Beckett, who lived on Swinton Street in Roundthorn. Clem was a daredevil motorcyclist and probably practiced here. He rode the 'Dome of Death' at fairgrounds and became a famous speedway racer. He was killed in Spain, in 1937, fighting the forces of Fascism.



Clem Beckett

**7** Look at Abbey Hills Road. Notice the change of roof level to your left, with its lower, tiled roofs. This site saw Oldham's worst bombing of World War II.

In the early hours of Christmas Eve, after a wedding celebrated with a party on Abbey Hills Road, it was devastated by a V. 1 rocket (flying bomb), launched from a German bomber and aimed at Manchester.

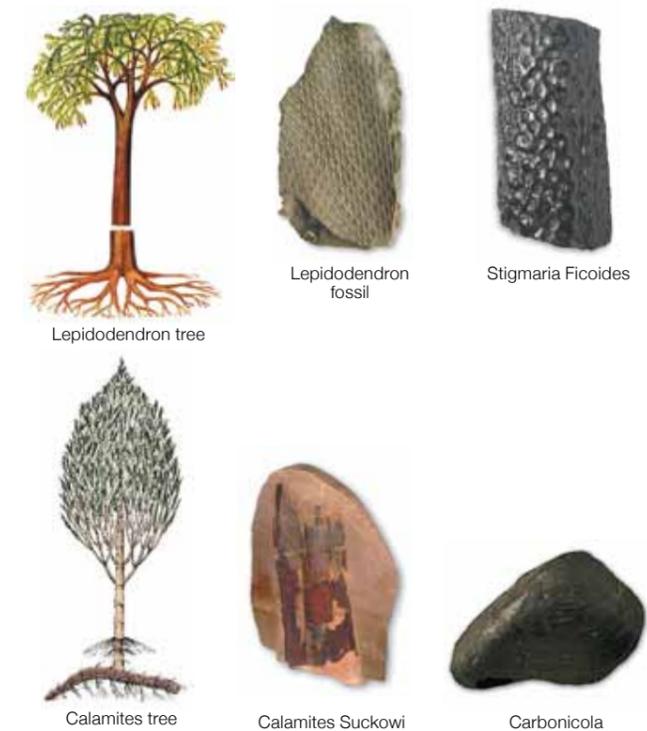
The last sounds heard by the 27 people killed, were the distinctive rasping noise of the rocket engine, followed by a spluttering, then a deathly silence as the bomb plunged to earth.

Also, 35 houses were destroyed and 53 people injured but no newspaper was allowed to publish the details because of wartime censorship.

**8** Nothing is now visible, but archaeologists think this was the site of the Roman road, built about 79 AD, linking Manchester, through Castleshaw and over the Pennines, to York. Look south-west and note the straight line of Honeywell Lane continuing towards Manchester.

This road, used as a military and civilian supply route, may even have transported coal, dug up on the Lows, for use by the garrison in Manchester!

**9** The quarry face is unstable, with occasional rock falls. However, a rock pile has been created here where you can safely collect fossils. There are no dinosaurs, as these rocks are about 100 million years older than any dinosaur! You may find impressions of bivalve shells (like modern mussel shells), plant fossils, even fish scales or a water 'flea'. Here, over 300 million years ago, there was once a tropical freshwater lake and a gigantic swamp forest.



**10** The housing estate around Jinnah Close stands on the site of Lowside Brickworks. Bricks were first produced in the area about 130 years ago. The Lows was ideal for a brickworks, having both coal and clay on site. The bricks were used to build local cotton mills and houses around the Lows.

Behind the Dog and Partridge Inn, there was once a pottery, set up by a Staffordshire man who lived on Roundthorn Road. The pottery's clay came from a locality behind the Hawthorne Inn. It produced crude earthenware mugs, with yellow insides and brown outsides, known locally as 'butter mugs'.