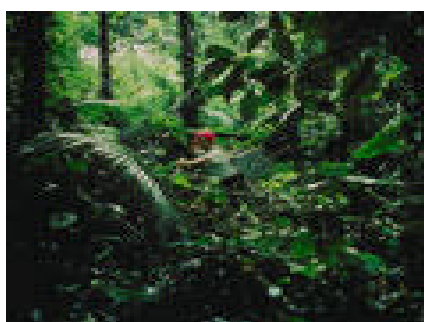


What is Coal?

Long ago forests lived and died in warm swamps. When they died, the remains of the plants became buried by sand and mud which, over a very long time, turned to stone. The dead plants became squashed by the rock which formed on top of them. This turned the plant remains into coal. Coal is a rock that burns. We think that ten metres of the remains of dead plants were squashed down to form one metre of buried coal.



A tropical swamp where the plants which became coal grew hundreds of millions of years ago.

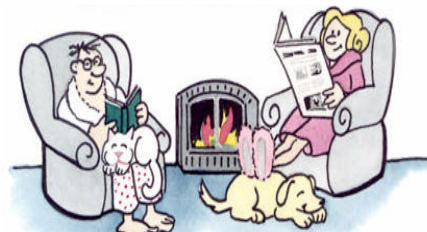
The plants that became coal lived a very long time ago. In the British Isles this was about 300 million years ago – long before humans or even dinosaurs walked the Earth. 300 million years is such a long time it is almost impossible to imagine. If you are nine and a half years old, 300 million is about the number of seconds since you were born! Geologists (people

who study rocks) call this time the Carboniferous period, which means the coal forming time

When it burns coal gives out lots of heat. For thousands of years people have used coal for heating homes and for cooking. About two hundred years ago several inventors discovered that the steam from boiling water could be made to drive machines. They burned coal to heat up the water. First, these machines were used in factories. Later they were also used to pull trains and drive ships. Later still it was discovered how to use the steam made by burning coal to make electricity.

In many countries, such as the United States, India and China, coal is still the major source of energy used to make electricity. Things that can be used to make heat are known as fuels.

Can you think of any other fuels that we use? Because coal gives out lots of heat when it is burned it must have heat somehow packed up inside it. Where do you think that stored up heat came from, when the plants which became coal were growing all those millions of years ago?



Coal was used to heat our homes, cook our food, power our factories and make our electricity.