

RUTLAND WATER



(Jim Eaton)

Rutland Water was planned in the 1960s to meet the needs of an expanding East Midlands. Chosen from 64 sites, the mid-Gwash valley had the right shape and geology, available local material to build the dam, rivers nearby to fill the reservoir, and was close to new centres of population.

Why here?



At the time there was extensive local opposition to the plan. Apart from the noise and disruption, people lost their homes and livelihoods. The hamlet of Nether Hambleton was a small community of homes and farms which was flooded, including Beehive Cottage (above), one of the earliest dwellings in Rutland.

Q. What was the plan?

The plan was to flood the twin valleys of the Gwash, making Rutland Water Europe's largest man-made lake set in England's smallest county.

The main part of the project was to build the dam wall. Made of compacted clay, the dam is 35m high, up to 810m wide at the base and 1,200m long.

The Middle Gwash Valley before and after Rutland Water



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(Richard Adams)

Bill Udale, a local farmer, was working at the reservoir site and got chatting to the earthmoving crew. He persuaded them to come to Empingham Cricket Club for the weekend to level their pitch. For the cost of a drink or two the club now has a level playing area.

AND NOW?...



St. Matthew's Church, the private chapel to the Normanton Estate escaped being demolished, even though it was below the high-water line of the reservoir. Deconsecrated in 1970, it is now a sought-after wedding venue.



In 2022, an enormous 'sea dragon' that lived 180 million years ago was discovered at Rutland Water. The fossilised remains revealed it to be the largest and most complete Ichthyosaur ever found in the UK, with a skeleton measuring about 10m in length and a skull weighing a tonne.



The reservoir is used not just for water storage, but is a popular sports and recreation centre - including water sports, sailing, fishing, walking and cycling around its 25 mile (40 Km) perimeter. A pleasure cruiser, the Rutland Belle gives trips around the lake, and birdwatching is very popular, the reservoir being an important site for observing breeding ospreys.