

Reflections on 15 Neydharting Round Table Conferences 1988 - 2003

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The make-up of the International Peat Society as a scientific-technical association is characterized by an interdisciplinary construction. The various specialities can be recognized by the relevant commissions, and traced into these, where in addition to the name-giving discipline other specialities are active.

Curative peat therapy, the speciality of IPS Commission VI - Peat Balneology, Medicine and Therapeutics - is practised, therefore, in an interdisciplinary way. This practice is not only typical for the IPS but is interwoven through and through the framework of medicine, as can be seen by studying the historical development of medicine and natural sciences.

It is necessary to explain in an understandable way, especially to laymen, how much we know about processes and effects in the human and animal body, by using biochemical, biophysical, pharmacological and – indeed! – mineralogical-geological knowledge on a special remedy used in peat therapy.

History of the Neydharting Round Table Conferences

The portrayal of the situation in which peat therapy is looking for its success may hopefully help to understand its present day problems and the motives for the event which reached its 15th anniversary in October 2003. These Neydharting Spa Round Table Conferences, traditionally held at Bad Wimsbach-Neydharting, a spa in the Prealpine foreland south of Linz, Aus-

tria, stem from an idea of its founders Prof. Otto Stöber and the author.

It is almost forgotten in the present member circles of the IPS, that, years ago, two international societies on peat affairs existed: the International Society of Mire Research (IMG), Vaduz, and the International Peat Society (IPS), both devoted to the same topic. These two societies not only lived shoulder to shoulder but sometimes acted against each other. Using the German Peat Society (DGMT) as a vehicle which could enable mutual cooperation, we two started to follow the very simple judgement: better to talk with one another than to continue at cross-purposes.

Being chairmen of both, IMG and DGMT, respectively, and on the basis of a sympathetic understanding, which we became aware of at the outset, we outlined the following basic princi-



A part of the participants of the 15th Round Table Conference in front of the Neydharting Spa. Photo: Fausta Piccini-Stöber



Peat balneology products were also on display at the Peat Congress in Tampere, here by the Finnish company Ruhajoki Oy. Photo: Matti Salmi

ple: we should come together and meet regularly in the privacy of Otto Stöber's Neydharting Spa, in an open-minded atmosphere, to chat and discuss unrestrainedly, dispute and fight, in a frank, fair and friendly manner, but without the presence of nonexperts, laymen and publicity makers, so that we might reach a consensus that could then be spread into the public sunlight.

There is always a way to compromise, the results of which can then be transmitted to the public as "purified" opinion. But what seems more important is that we, from the very beginning, had our eyes on using the basic role of natural sciences in peat therapy as the topic of our talks and the means of achieving cooperation because we felt that this could be the best link to assist the idea of the reunion of medicine and natural sciences. What was the advice of the famous Paracelsus, whom we may call the initiator of pharmaceutical chemistry: the real medical doctor is made by exploring nature and by his experience at the sickbed. This became our motivation.

Experience in our open round showed very soon that we were able to obtain a brain-storming atmosphere and that our frank dialogue could become an event of standing character, if we observed some rules. We always tried to abstain from high-flown scientific superlatives and from prayer-wheel lectures and to confine our talks to

open and unconstrained exchanges of knowledge and ideas.

With this intention, we started our first Round Table Conference in 1988, on 20 - 22 April, and since that time have now reached number 15. One of the meetings, following an invitation by the Hungarian National Committee of IPS, was held at Héviz Spa, Hungary. For that we are cordially indebted to our friends József Gyarmati and Andras Tóth.

The author has published two reports on the Neydharting talks, one after the 6th conference and the other after conference number 10. The reports not only show that, over the years, the number of participants at such confer-

ences remained steady but proved that, in the course of time, the grouping changed from an exclusively German-speaking community to an agglomeration in which an increasing number of Non-Austrian and Non-German peat specialists was incorporated. This led to a slight linguistic change, that is to say English came into use, so that we had a two-language system, but without simultaneous translation. This procedure is still working perfectly and did not bring any handicap in understanding - a good model for other similar international conferences!

All the time, we had the Stöber family aside and could enjoy the overwhelming hospitality; certainly not one of the participants felt other than deep sympathy and gratitude from the bottom of his heart.

From the lists of participants recorded, another lesson can be drawn which is valid for practical work in almost every society or association: it is easy to note that with a total of 96 participants, 61 of them have only attended a meeting once. 15 persons took part 5 times or more often, but only two were present at all of the meetings, and one more, the most honourable Claus Goecke, attended almost all. However, one should not fail to see that 4 of our members passed away – the unforgotten Otto Stöber amongst them – and that two of the founders and most faithful and capable members, Wolfgang Flaig and Wolfgang Ziechmann, have been forced



Part of the complex of buildings of the Neydharting Spa. Photo: Fausta Piccini-Stöber

to withdraw for reasons of age and health. They are unforgotten as well.

At present, we have participants from 14 countries. Besides the Austrian-German group, our Hungarian friends were the first to participate. No wonder: József Gyarmati was the preceding chairman of Commission VI. The full list of countries is as follows: Australia, Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and the USA. Most astonishing is the participation of members from Australia and the USA, where curative peat therapy is practically unknown.

Challenges and problems

After 15 conferences, it seems legitimate to ask for an account of the achievements of the events for the benefit of natural medicine in total. This crystallization of thoughts may be expressed by specifying the following keynotes.

The peloid called curative peat is, by origin, “a soft rock”, the main substance of which belongs to the humite group (about 90% water), a mixture of organic compounds (former biomass) rich in carbon, and of different genesis, petrographic-palaeobotanic and geochemical character and humification degree, and this is responsible for the therapeutic effects. Regarded from

this viewpoint, curative peat should not in any sense be called “moor”. Other topics often discussed at Neydharting have been:

- the impact of humic acids, including their pre-stages and related substances
- thermophysical peculiarities (like overheating and buoyancy effects) as the “motor” providing the effectiveness of peat-pulp mud baths in the case of special dysregulations of the locomotion system, so that the thermophysician is required to assist and interpret.
- the influence of crystallographic peculiarities (crystal lattice factors) of smektite and hormite minerals, used in medicine and veterinary medicine, as of decisive relevance in the behaviour and treatment of meteoric processes in the human and animal body. This knowledge requires mineralogical attendance of course.

This difference in the make-up runs parallel to a diversity of the substances within the peat, which furnishes a peculiarity called the “moorbukett” by Otto Stöber. This mysterious “something” is comparable to the bouquet of an outstanding wine and is responsible for some of the mysteria in the effects of peat-baths. In addition to the thermal and physical impacts, well known ever since peat-pulp mud baths were introduced, these effects of biochemical origin are in part responsible for the curative power of the peat. Both impacts underpin the success of curative peat therapy.

The specific impact of substances in peat, responsible for its biochemical efficiency, is reverting to the use of small quantities, a fact that supports the application of peat suspension baths, like at Neydharting Spa.

Comparing the main applicative types of peat baths, one may, therefore, say that the pulp mud bath is – besides its high biochemical efficiency and high concentration – mainly efficient for its thermophysical mode of action, whereas the suspension bath has its support among biochemical allies, so that some effects like overheating, buoyancy forces, radiant heating a.s.o. are of secondary importance. At the same time, one should not forget to mention in the course of this comparison that there is a great psychological-parapsychological influence from the black and hellish mud of the pulp-bath.

This discovery and promotion of the effects of the biologically active substances is – not to forget – of great support to the utilization of peat extracts and preparations with respect not only to human but also veterinary medicine.

The use of curative peat and its derivatives is a decisive element in health resorts and rehabilitative medicine and – in addition to the application of thermal and mineral water, including some gases – is a prerequisite for the standard of spas and health resorts, mainly because of its influence on prevention and long-term provision measures. But, as already stated, we have to learn that well-founded and convincing statements showing the benefits of this applications seem to be insufficient. Therefore, the use of econometrical data would support a better acceptance by administration, health insurance and public authorities and help to adjust the socioeconomic obliqueness of curative health measures in the public discussion.

There is a lack of international standards for balneological peat and peat therapy in particular. We need better specification of every variety of peat applied, which should not be considered a unique product and a remedy of ubiquitary character. Doing this would mean applying antiquated,



Products of the Bad Neydharting product range: toothpaste, hair tonic, mouthwash, different creams and peat bitters in slim bottles. Photo: Lea-Elina Nikkilä

not to say irresponsible or incomprehensible medicine. Standards and analyses should be as simple, short and as cheap as possible! The cheaper they are the more the respective spa director will use them. Moreover, the doctor in charge should take care to ensure long-term follow-up observations of his patient. The welfare of the patient is the overriding aim, and for that no measure is too costly!

Administrative handling of peat products still unclear

One other problem which we had to discuss during the 15th Neydharting Conference is the administrative handling of peat products on a national and international level. For that reason, some producers of peat preparations came to Neydharting. These firms – and one should not forget that they are small firms or middle class entrepreneurs – are suffering more and more from unclear, unpractical and inconsiderate allowance and authorizing procedures.

In part, this has to do with the cancellation of the validity of national pharmaceutical laws for many peat products and preparations and their transfer to medical products, some to foodstuff supplement regulations and the handling and application of the relevant orders and laws.

Much confusion has been created by these changes. This disorder has been accelerated by some actions of the European Union, due to a lack of sense and professional knowledge. The EU tends to assign peat products and preparations to the order for “Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restrictions of Chemicals” (REACH).

The producers, already in difficulties in preparing the acquisition of the relevant allowances, are becoming increasingly uncertain about allocating their products to the right category. Shall they declare it, following e.g. § 109a of the pharmacological law, or as a medical product, or as a foodstuff supplement, or as a cosmetic product?

The decision, in many cases, is not made by the producer and then not in a proper way. At the same time, attributes of the product are not

guaranteed in a way that can be verified, and the increasing distribution by the internet makes it more and more impossible to control the origin and peculiarity of the product.

Here again, it must be pointed out that peat is an extremely variable substance, so that a peat species, and the deposit, is, strictly speaking, a “unicum” because of the differences in lithofacies, distribution of types and the geological make-up of the deposit.

This means that survey, drilling and exploration are necessary before production. Of course one should come to a golden mean with these measures; production must be feasible, there must be an equilibrium between demand for careful peat selection and the technical-economic input. But there shouldn't be any chance for the producer to use so-called technical difficulties as an excuse for not following this golden rule.

It is one of the main tasks of Commission VI to assist in following this principle, and this can be done by developing clear and simple advice for survey, designation and technical separation of the correct and feasible peat variety.

In the 15th Neydharting Talk we, beyond our discussion on these problems, had a chance to complete our knowledge on recent research on peat substances, a topic which is always part of our discussion, mainly on the role of the humic acids group, which is a terrain in which we used to ask for extensive support from our members Renate and Hans-Peter Klöcking.

In addition, this conference aimed to obtain detailed information on peat products closely related to peat, like the marine and lacustrine muds of Estonia, the curative peat situation in the Czech Republic and from saunaland Finland by our relevant guests, and on the Italian fango practices.

It is a point of honour for the peat-bog-family to pay tribute to our friends



Saint Neydhart - what's what? Three old Neydharting pals: Andras Tóth, József Gyarmati and Gerd Lüttig. Photo: Fausta Piccini-Stöber

from the other side of the peloid business.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all participants and fellow-combatants, to our host, the Curative Peat Bath Company Bad Neydharting Ltd., and to our assistants working in the background, faithful and silent!

Thoughts come and go, most fly away with the wind... What remains is the small, tiny feeling of happiness: We could move something. How says the poet? “Es gibt nichts Gutes, außer: man tut es!” – “There is nothing good, expect you do it” (Erich Kästner). ■

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The next conference of IPS Commission VI will be held under the topic “Peat Preparations in Medicine, Veterinary Medicine and Cosmetics” in Bad Langensalza, Germany, on 25 - 27 May 2005. Welcome!