

SOIL HONOUR FOR SAMANTHA'S PEAT FEAT

A first-off finding about the way time modifies carbon in the peatland of Victoria's Alps has scored a top prize for a young researcher.

Celebrating World Soils Day (**December 5**) is Samantha Grover, who has just been awarded the annual CG Stephens Prize by the Australian Society of Soil Science Inc (ASSSI).

Peatland at Wellington Plain in the Victorian Alps is a long way from Dr Grover's current post as a Research Associate at Charles Darwin University in Darwin.



But soils are soils for this former La Trobe University PhD... no matter where they are.

Dr Grover spent studied the chemical and physical properties of high country peats. That study has earned her the ASSSI national annual award for the best soil science PhD.

One of the highlights of her work was the discovery that dry peat decomposes slower than boggy peats. Dr Grover compared the decomposition of the organic material in wet and dry peats both in a laboratory and in the field.

She also dated the peats to about 3300 years old. She noted that the bog peats appeared to have drained to form dried peat between 131 and 139 years ago. Since then, erosion appeared to have been mostly responsible for the loss of organic material from the dried peat.

According to Dr Stephen Cattle, ASSSI President, Dr Grover's work has been "quite challenging".

"This type of work has never been carried out in Australia before now. There are important implications for understanding how climate may affect carbon storage in the peats, alpine ecology and water yield and flows from the high country river systems."

He added: "The research contributes important knowledge on the behaviour of organic soils. It is information that is much-needed in these uncertain times. The more we know and understand about the behaviour of carbon in the environment the better."

ASSSI is the peak body in Australia for professional soil scientists and promotes the importance of soil in Australia, and the development of competent professional soil scientists and managers.

World Soil Day is observed by soil scientists globally to advocate the use and need of soils for human survival and its sustainable management.

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