

## Step out in Little Bognor



Photo: Darren Rolfe

**A**re we in some strange tropical paradise? The photo above was taken last June by Darren Rolfe WSCC Volunteer Co-ordinator who led the task at Little Bognor near Fittleworth. So not tropical but definitely paradise. Paradise as defined by the VRS, as you know – go in, cut back, rip out old steps and replace with new. The Sunday Central East (old Western Area) volunteers put in 15 steps

and a hand rail. Darren was very pleased with the work achieved by the volunteers. Pictured from left to right are Leonie Haines, Karen McCreedy, Me, Helena Lewis, Edna Zammit and Neal Beck.

**Cris Savill**  
*Volunteer Task Co-ordinator*

**South Downs**  
Volunteer Ranger Service

**South Downs**  
National Park



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## Comment

Welcome to a larger than normal Downland Thymes. I know it has been a very long time in coming, for a number of reasons and I'm sorry you've had to wait so long. As it has been longer than usual since the last issue, there is a lot to fit in. There's a new look too, to reflect the new partnership with the National Park Authority and hopefully to look more current. I hope you like it.



Ian Hartle  
Volunteer Co-ordinator

Alongside this update to the newsletter, we are looking for a new logo for the VRS. Again, it seems appropriate to have something which emphasises the close link with the National Park Authority, but which also reflects the heritage of the group.

You can have a look at ideas we've come up with so far in this issue and decide whether you would be happy with one of these, or would like to submit your own design. I have used one of those for this edition.

The Review of volunteering that I have mentioned previously, is now well under way. We have commissioned an 'audit' of opportunities for volunteering in the National Park which contribute to the two Purposes and the Duty of the National Park Authority. We will also be consulting widely with groups and organisations who work with or would like to work with volunteers. While this work is important, just as important is to talk to you about how we should be working with the VRS and how you would like to see it develop. I am putting together a questionnaire at the moment to go out to everyone. The VRS Committee are also involved in its preparation.

To complement the questionnaire we are also holding three workshops (one in each of Hampshire, West Sussex and East Sussex) to look at the issues in a more discursive way. I will give you more information about those shortly, but would encourage you all to come along if you can. The National Park offers huge opportunities for expanding the range of things that Volunteer Rangers could help make happen, so this is a chance to tell us about the things you think are important.

If you have access to the internet and haven't yet joined the South Downs Forum, do go and have a look and join in some of the discussions on the site. There are now over 600 members and more than 40 'threads' on different subjects, with some fascinating exchanges of views.

Finally, sadly, we have to report the death of Geoff Williams. Geoff was one of the original recruits to the Volunteer Ranger Service in 1981 and the last of those that we were in regular contact with. Although he moved out of the area a little while ago he was able to come to the AGM in July and it was great to have what turned out to be a last chance to chat. Phil Belden, who worked with him over many years has written a piece later in the issue.

Ian Hartle  
Volunteer Co-ordinator

## News from the Chief Executive



Photo Ron Wells

It's been a hectic first few months for the new South Downs National Park Authority in this, its first operational year.

The early focus is on shaping the *South Downs National Park Management Plan*, which must be adopted by March 2014. This is a plan of action for the whole National Park, and everyone who cares for it – not just for the National Park Authority – so it is imperative to hear the views of partners and stakeholders from all walks of life. We are making huge efforts to allow anyone with something to say to help shape the agenda.

We launched the engagement at Stanmer Park in July, when 250 people packed into a large marquee to define the special qualities of the National Park and debate the top risks and opportunities. You can watch a five minute film of the event on the southdowns.gov.uk website. Meanwhile, the Forum has moved on-line, and the live debate continues through a rapidly increasing number of participants that now measures several hundred. You can have your say too by clicking on [www.southdowns.gov.uk/forum](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/forum)

We hosted nine community workshops across the National Park during the Autumn – three events each in Hampshire, East and West Sussex, at eight different venues. It was good to see Volunteer Rangers at each of these workshops. Seven technical working groups are also underway to make sure we build a sound evidence base for the new National Park.

For more immediate impact, we launched a new *Sustainable Communities Fund* in April to help support local initiative that delivers National Park Purposes.

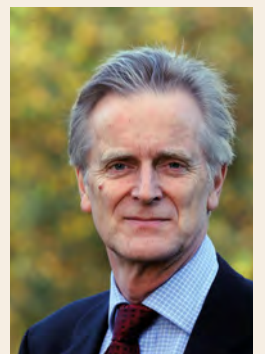
There has been a tremendous response and we have committed £380,000 of funding to 52 projects so far, leveraging in additional funding at a ratio of 1:5. We have also launched a new partnership fund for larger projects, the first of which, the *Wooded Heathlands Project*, is underway now with 15 partners.

The National Park Authority's Guiding Principles emphasise the value of volunteering, and we have started a review to look at ways of further strengthening the existing South Downs VRS and to explore opportunities for involving new people in different activities. I know many of you have valuable insights to share and we are keen to hear from you. In line with the advice of volunteers at the AGM last July, we will circulate a questionnaire to you all and set up a couple of workshops.

The new National Park Authority is now almost fully staffed. Some of the faces will be familiar to you from the days of the South Downs Joint Committee, while others are new. The senior management team is almost complete, and the new Chief Executive, Trevor Beattie, will join us in mid-January. It has been tremendously fulfilling for me to be a part of this venture, and my successor will inherit a wonderful role in a wonderful part of England. From the very outset I have admired the work you do as volunteers in the South Downs, and I am know you will achieve great things in the years to come.

**Richard Shaw**  
Chief Executive  
South Downs National Park Authority

Volunteer Rangers from the Thursday group at Seven Sisters pictured at Sussex Wildlife Trust Reserve Malling Down on 31st March 2011. While installing this new stile, they were visited by Environment Minister Richard Benyon MP and NPA Chair Margaret Paren on their way to the celebrations in Lewes.



Richard Shaw, who left the NPA at the end of January.



Trevor Beattie has now replaced Richard as Chief Executive. We hope to have a piece from him in the next issue.



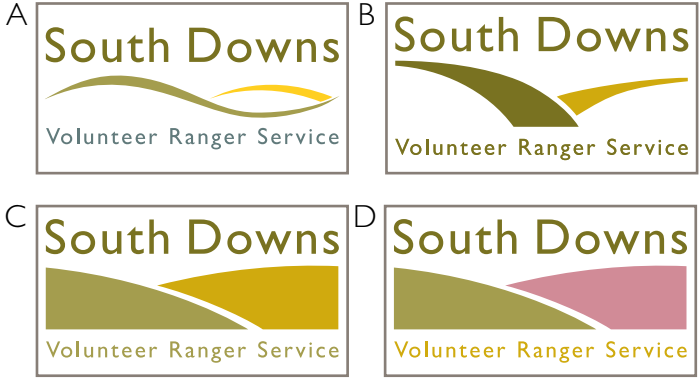
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# What's in a logo?

We are looking for a new logo for the VRS. It seemed appropriate to have something which emphasises the close links between the VRS and the National Park Authority, but which also reflects the heritage of the group, so pictured here are four possible designs which use colours taken from the South Downs NPA 'palette'. These are combined with the interlocking hills used in VRS literature for more than a decade and by conservation projects/ organisations working for the South Downs for many years.

If you would like to adopt one of these designs as the new logo for the VRS, could you e-mail me, or drop me a note letting me know which one? If, on the other hand, you have an idea for something you would prefer, let me have your design, or at least a description and a sketch.

Depending on the response, we'll work with the VRS Committee and present preferred candidates in the next edition, for you to finally choose from.



**Ian Hartle**  
Volunteer Co-ordinator  
email: [Ian.Hartle@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:Ian.Hartle@southdowns.gov.uk)

# Changes? What Changes?

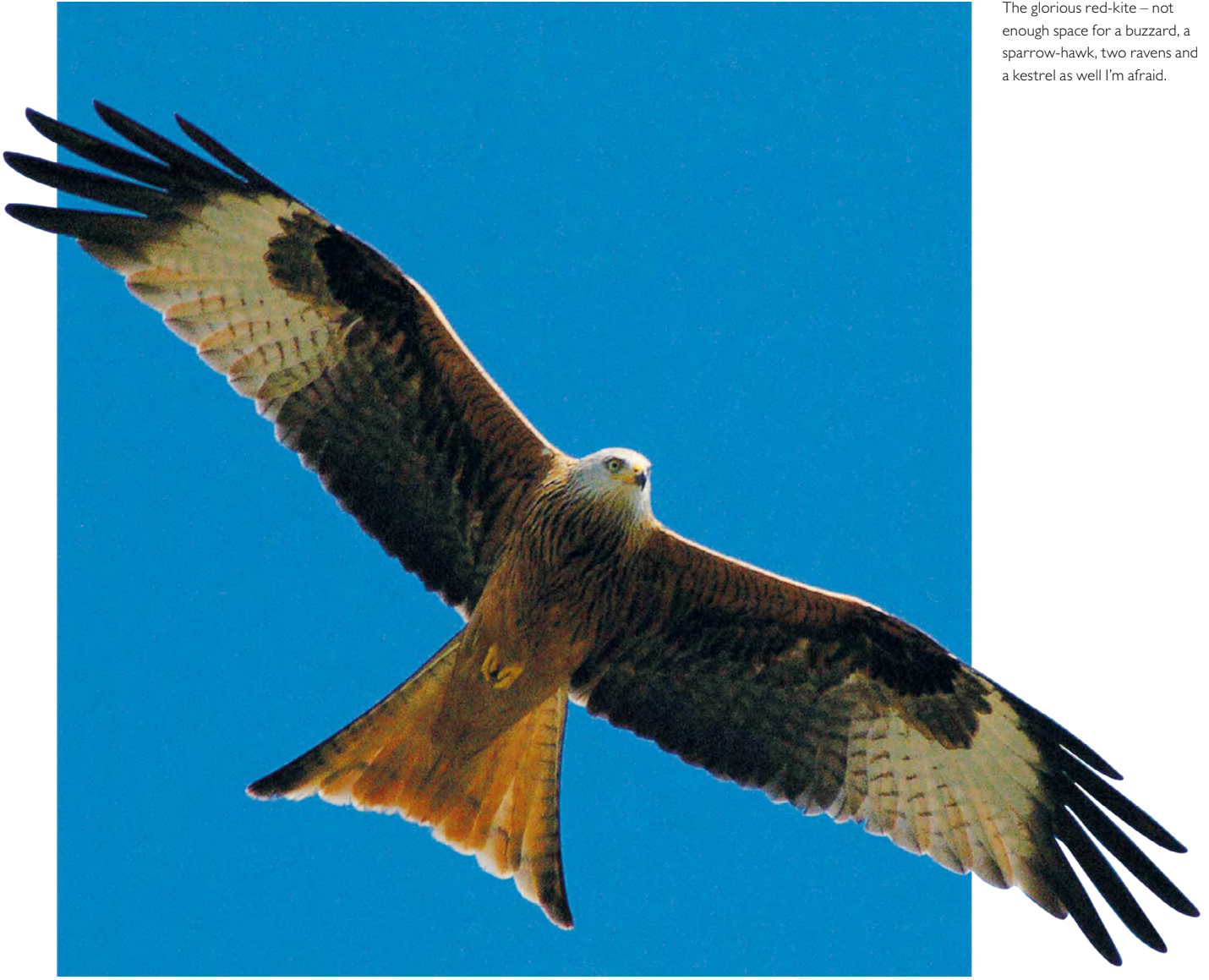
- Meetings, maps and boundary change
- Discussions and more chat
- And through it all the VRs work
- Doing this and that.
- Replacing posts and fixing wire
- Pathways cleared of briar
- Scrub bashing and repairing stiles
- And perhaps a Dutch Elm fire.
- The SD National Park now born
- Maybe a change or two?
- Will we lose the camaraderie
- And chance of special view?
- No! Teams continue tackling jobs
- Happily giving time
- Doing tasks to help preserve
- What is yours and mine!



Peter Parsons, Michael Haizelden and Marilyn Bailey from the Seven Sisters Tuesday group at work with the Forestry Commission last May.  
**Poem by Shirley Brice** Volunteer Ranger – Seven Sisters  
Photo Ian Wildridge

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# Magic Moments



The glorious red-kite – not enough space for a buzzard, a sparrow-hawk, two ravens and a kestrel as well I'm afraid.

I believe that every day we are given a bonus of some sort, a pleasant greeting, a phone call from a friend or a beautiful sunset.

VR bonuses are often shared by the group and we recently enjoyed a fantastic flying display high in the skies above the Cuckmere valley. Working in a small but very important reed bed conservation area in bright sunshine, one of our members, Jerry, drew our attention to a distant speck which he identified as a buzzard. Tim, the lead Ranger agreed and within seconds the bird was joined by another and they were soaring on a thermal above our heads.

Moments later along came a sparrow hawk. After a couple of entrancing minutes, two ravens joined the flight and then a kestrel appeared. By this time tools were unattended and all eyes were raised to the heavens. I was one of those regretting that binoculars had been left at home! As neck ache began to lower concentration a stranger to our valley flew to join the throng and Tim swiftly identified it as a red kite. Wow!

**Shirley Brice**  
Volunteer Ranger – Seven Sisters



## Where do you take your Downland Thymes?



I can't quite match the altitude of Karen's Ladakh photo (see Issue 55), but here I am with Downland Thymes at the top of another iconic mountain pass, the Lairig Ghru (2756ft), which traverses the Cairngorm mountains where I've been working as a Ranger for the last few months. The midges are too small to show up, but they're there!

**Alison Pitts**  
Volunteer Ranger  
Midhurst Office

## 10,000 glorious ranger days (1981 - 2011) and more...

I went along to the 30th anniversary event of the SDVRS because I wanted to share in that remarkable celebration of achievement. It was lovely to see old friends and newer acquaintances. It was wonderful to meet up with my oldest colleague, Geoff Williams, who I was particularly pleased came along; he was one of the "original" Volunteer Rangers, there before I arrived to start work in the South Downs in 1983. (Ed. Very sadly, since Phil wrote this piece, Geoff's family have let us know that he died in August. Phil has written an obituary elsewhere in this issue.)

I had earmarked this 30th engagement long before, because I had hunted down an old American book, Park Ranger – the Work, Thrills and Equipment of the National Park Rangers, published in 1955, before even the SDVRS was a twinkle in the eye. Paul Millmore's eye that is, for it was he who set the whole thing up in 1981, the founder to whom we are all deeply indebted. So, I came along, to pay a fitting tribute and hand him this little token, but I had my thunder completely stolen!

It was the next day when it really sunk in, that you had bestowed on me one of those rare Long Service awards – I feel deeply honoured. On the day, it came as a total surprise when Paul announced it. I was waiting in the wings for him, to let him finish wittering on about whatever he was to talk about; then I was going to leap forward, before he left the stage, to utter some appropriate words about him, the VRS vision he had at the time and the legacy he's left, which has grown way beyond his wildest dreams I would guess. I was totally upstaged and (almost) speechless, when Paul presented me with the award, which was followed by Ian saying some nice things as a follow-up. Thank you, I shall wear it with pride.

Over my quarter century plus in the South Downs, I have retained an unflinching trust in the VRS and its work and do try to speak up, to represent you and generally support you the best I can. My job has changed considerably since I first started, but I hope you will always see me as a friend and loyal supporter, and someone who has your best interests at heart – because I know you have the Downs' best interests at heart, and that's what it's all about.

10,000+ days, yielding an immense amount of conservation, access and PR works in our beloved South Downs, delivered by a merry band of highly motivated, enthusiastic and skilled Volunteer Rangers.



We celebrated on the 9th July 2011, when the South Downs National Park Authority was just 100 days old, one per cent of the lifetime of the VRS! What an enduring and indispensable service that is, to go with, I hope, an equally long-term and successful National Park Authority.

To really qualify for my long service, I'll need to be present to join in the celebrations at the 50th anniversary, when the SDNPA should have earned its respect for 20 years of work well done – that presents me, and colleagues, with a real inspirational challenge. Together, we have a terrific opportunity to build a strong partnership, to see the South Downs well cared for, engendering respect and understanding in the many people that visit the area, and working well with the local communities in and around the Park.

**Phil Belden,**  
July 2011

PS The tie I wore on the day. That too goes back before the SDVRS. It's an original Association of National Parks and Countryside Wardens tie, something I joined back in the late 1970s, when a small number of "lone rangers" (largely confined to National Parks) needed to get together to share experiences and generally support each other in this strange new "rangering world". The ANPCW later became the Association of Countryside Rangers and is now known as the Countryside Management Association.

Paul Millmore (right), who created the VRS, presents Phil Belden with a special VRS 'long service' award for his fundamental role in making a truly 'South Downs' Volunteer Ranger Service.

*Photo Anne Bush*



This is the gold 20 year award, like Phil and Paul's, except theirs have had a small green agate stone embedded in them by VR (and jeweller) Brian Russell.





# 30th AGM and Barn Dance

It only seems 5 minutes, not 5 years, since we celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the Volunteer Ranger Service. Now here we were in 2011, the 10th anniversary of the *International Year of Volunteers*, the first year of the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) and, most importantly, the 30th Anniversary of the *South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service*.

Over 60 Volunteer Rangers attended the celebrations at Pulborough Village Hall on Saturday 9th July. The hall was duly decorated with banners, streamers and balloons to get us all in the mood for a birthday celebration.

The afternoon started with a welcome to everyone from Nevill Brooke of the VRS Committee who was chairing the event. Volunteers' guests then went off for a visit to the nearby RSPB reserve while the Annual General Meeting took place. Margaret Paren, chair of the SDNPA spoke on the aspirations and strategic future for the VRS with the SDNPA. She talked about the review of volunteering being carried out through this year and how members of the VRS could feed into that.

Nevill Brooke and Ron Wilder from the VRS Committee gave short presentations on Committee feedback from the previous year, VRS accounts update and approval, election of Officers for 2011/12 and approval of an amended VRS Constitution. (See their written reports).

Ian Hartle gave a short update on the VRS and the way ahead, also talking about the review of volunteering and the VRS.

Following the official business of the AGM, Margaret Paren presented long service awards (silver badges for 10 years service) to Rod Bilton, Dick Cole, Sue Grant and Wendy Muriel. Paul Millmore, who founded of the VRS in 1981, presented Phil Belden with a special gold badge in recognition of all the support, encouragement, guidance, advice and enthusiasm Phil has offered the VRS over the last 28 years.

The Annual General Meeting finally closed with a champagne toast to the *South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service*. A raffle in aid of the *Paul Millmore Travel Fellowship* raised £93.50. Thanks to everyone who bought tickets.

Our guest speaker, Geoffrey Mead, gave an extremely interesting and informative talk on literary references to the South Downs going back many years.

This was followed by what everyone had been waiting for - the opening of the bar(!) and a



delicious, hot buffet provided by Buns to Banquets of Pulborough. The weather was perfect and people were able to mingle on the terrace overlooking Pulborough Brooks and the Downs. After the food it was on to the best part of the evening, the barn dance with music by the Sussex Pistols. Their caller soon had everyone on their feet dancing and it was great fun – it doesn't matter at a barn dance whether you go wrong or not, that's all part of the enjoyment!

Thanks go to all staff who helped out on the day whether it was serving behind the bar, making teas and coffee, washing up, driving Land Rovers to the RSPB reserve or blowing up balloons! To the VRS Committee for the work they put in to making sure the day ran smoothly. And to all Volunteer Rangers and their guests who attended and helped to make it such a special occasion.

**Anne Bush**

*Volunteer Support Officer*

NPA Chair Margaret Paren talks to Volunteer Rangers.

*Photos Anne Bush*



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# VRS Committee Activities Report for 2010/2011



In his role as the Chairman for this year's Annual General Meeting, Nevill Brooke gave a brief overview of the main activities undertaken by the VRS Committee during the past year.

Given the formal establishment of the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) on 1st April 2011 there was considerable dialogue and liaison with the interim management team during the year which also resulted in an extra committee meeting being called. Both Richard Shaw and Liz Ballard attended two meetings in 2010 whilst Phil Belden, Head of Operations with the SDNPA, became the Senior Management Team representative on the committee and attended meetings in 2011.

Ron Wilder joined the committee in September 2010 as the Hampshire representative. Chris Hicks represented the committee at the VRS ballot count. Several committee members liaised with the interim team during the year to give advice on VRS uniforms. Then in January 2011 most committee members attended the SDJC Celebration Event in Chichester

to recognise the valuable work undertaken by that organisation during its term of operation.

Considerable amount of work was done in updating the VRS Constitution as well as the VRS Committee's Terms of Reference – this review was led by Ron Wilder. In addition, Stephen Allberry and Ron Wilder are on a small committee working with Ian Hartle and his team in reviewing all VRS training.

The committee was also very pleased to have funded its first specialist course on scything during the year with more specialist courses planned for next year. It also expressed disappointment that no VRS Ranger had taken advantage of the Travel Fellowship Grant during the year but hoped that this would be taken up again this coming year.

In summary, the committee feels that with the updated VRS Constitution, the formalisation of VRS officer appointments as well as clarification of their roles, plus the active and positive participation it has had with the SDNPA this year, that it has moved forward to being a more pro-active body.

VRS Treasurer and Hampshire group Volunteer Ranger  
Nevill Brooke

## VRS Finance Update/Accounts Approval

The Treasurer, Nevill Brooke, reviewed the audited accounts for the year ending 30 June 2011 – hardcopy account summaries as well as the Auditor's Report were available to all AGM attendees. The relevant bank accounts are held with Santander UK Plc.

As last year, there was again a surplus in the year of income over expenditure of £258.96 which resulted in a Year-end bank balance of £6394.56 – ring-fenced within in this balance is an amount of £576 which relates to the Founders Travel Fellowship Grant which had not been utilised during the year. Interest received was again very minimal due to exceedingly low deposit account interest rates but donations, plus training contributions from VRS volunteer rangers who attended the scything course, amounted to £620. The most significant donation being £500 received from the E.S.C.C. Sustainable Development Fund. In addition, last year's AGM raffle raised £148 which was allocated to the Travel Fellowship Grant mentioned above. On the expenditure side £200 was spent on a scything course and £315 spent on the purchase of scythes, blades and sharpening tools, all of which are held at the Midhurst office for use by any VRS Ranger.

The Treasurer also mentioned that the VRS Committee had agreed to spend further funds in the next financial year on another scything course and a skid pan driver training session at Goodwood for off-road VRS drivers.

In conclusion, the VRS AGM voted unanimously to approve the accounts as presented and gave a vote of thanks to the Hon. Auditor, Alastair Stewart

## Election of VRS Officers for 2011 / 2012

In line with the newly approved VRS Constitution, the VRS Committee proposed to the AGM that the following be elected to hold office for the periods indicated – all three individuals had agreed to stand:

<b>Chairman for 2011/2012:</b>	<b>Stephen Allberry</b>
<b>Vice-Chairman for 2011/2012:</b>	<b>Ron Wilder</b>
<b>Treasurer for 2011/2014:</b>	<b>Nevill Brooke</b>

The AGM voted unanimously to elect the said officers for the periods indicated.

**Nevill Brooke**  
VRS Treasurer

## Mobile phones for outdoor practical volunteers

The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) has issued mobile phones exclusively for Volunteer use on any VRS outdoor practical task. There is one phone for each operational area (two for the Eastern area, one at Stanmer and one at Seven Sisters Country Park) and they will be based in the area offices.

Relevant phones numbers for SDNPA staff, the VRS team, leaders from partner organisations etc have been added to the phone's memory, and a member of staff is responsible for ensuring the phone is kept fully charged and is always available for Volunteers' use.

If using the mobile phone please ensure that it is returned at the end of the task and not left in the vehicle. At Seven Sisters Country Park please return the phone to the workshop.

Given below are the phone numbers and the person responsible for them:

- **Western Area (Hampshire)**  
**075577 853281 – person responsible:**  
**Dan Oakley**
- **Central West Area (Midhurst Depot)**  
**07557 563939 – person responsible:**  
**Dan Cornell**
- **Central East Area (Singleton)**  
**07557 563936 – person responsible:** Cris Savill
- **Eastern Area**  
**Stanmer: 07557 923838 – person responsible:**  
**Anne Bush**
- **SSCP Workshop: 07557 923839 – person responsible:** Richard James





# New toolstore at Seven Sisters



One consequence of the creation of the South Downs National Park Authority (NPA) on 31 March 2011 was the resumption of responsibility for, and occupation of, Seven Sisters Country Park by East Sussex County Council. All its facilities including the spacious tool store occupied by Eastern Area Volunteer Rangers were included. Fortunately the NPA obtained agreement for the use of another part of the core building complex but as it comprised a dark, cramped, earthen-floored single bay stable in poor repair this seemed at first a distinct step backwards. However, the builders were called in and soon provided a concrete floor, wall lining, lighting and power outlets and a security door that wouldn't look out of place in a small bank!

It was equipped with racking, shelves and other storage in early July. Most of this came from the old store which was fitted out in 2007 when timber containers ruptured on the MV Napoli following its stranding off the West Coast. The wood arrived at

Cuckmere Haven 13 weeks later on the Channel Drift, proving the old adage about ill winds! It was dismantled and re-installed over three days, only a few items needing 'tailoring' or reworking. It's all standard issue apart from a cabinet-like fitting allowing grass hooks, bill hooks, loppers etc. to hang individually. This keeps tools of this kind in better condition than piling them on shelving and their sharp edges out of the way of unwary hands.

Room has been found for all but a few spare items and the modest dimensions have the advantage that everything is readily to hand and difficult to overlook! Thanks to all volunteers for keeping it clean and tidy. (Ed. It looks fantastic; Area offices take note!)

All of which prompts a few words about tools generally. A common concern among VRs is their condition. Admittedly our tools lead a hard life being in near constant use in all weathers and in many hands, nevertheless the faults seen are often the result of misuse rather than fair wear and tear. Volunteering is

The cabinet fitting for small edge tools. The yellow devices in the foreground are clever grabs devised and made by a volunteer for handling heavy gate posts.

the first time many people have a sustained encounter with a variety of tools and the training focuses, rightly, on safety so doubtless it's inadvertent. These notes aim to redress the balance somewhat.

The golden rules are –

- Use each tool only for its intended purpose and within its design capacity
- Carry out regular basic care and maintenance

The most frequent 'victims' of failure to follow these simple rules are loppers. It's evident they are sometimes used to cut wire but the blades are not sufficiently hardened to do so becoming chipped in the process. Forget too, the manufacturers' recommendations on cutting capacity. The right capacity is the thickness you can personally cut without strain in one even squeeze (or two or three for ratchet loppers). Straining to cut an oversize branch soon causes an irreparable twist so the blade fails to meet the anvil groove or the two cutting parts on bypass loppers develop a gap. The result is a costly tool that can only be thrown away. Chipped and blunt edges can be cured with a few strokes from a fine file but not for ever. The groove on the anvil and, on both types, the moving parts, can benefit from a clean with a wire brush and the mechanism generally from a spot of oil.

Bow saws are almost 'soldier proof' but trying to saw scrub at ground level, whilst occasionally necessary, is a great way of blunting the teeth if they grind into chalk or flint. Scrape a little away to give cutting room and tamp it back afterwards.

It does no harm if say, a spade, is put away wet but a kit of hand tools in a steel box is a different matter. If it rains on the day lay them out to dry overnight after a quick wipe, the next team would rather repack them than find a box full of rust!

Volunteers often ask why we don't have powered bench grinders for sharpening but contrary to popular belief they aren't a good idea in the tool store. Apart from falling within the PUWER (Provision & Use of Work Equipment Regulations), requiring expensive training, they are quite unsuitable for grinding curved edge tools such as bill hooks, grass hooks and slashers. This wrecks the square edges of the wheel so it rapidly becomes useless for other tools etc. and is potentially dangerous because of an accepted safety rule of thumb that the wheel be heavier than the item being

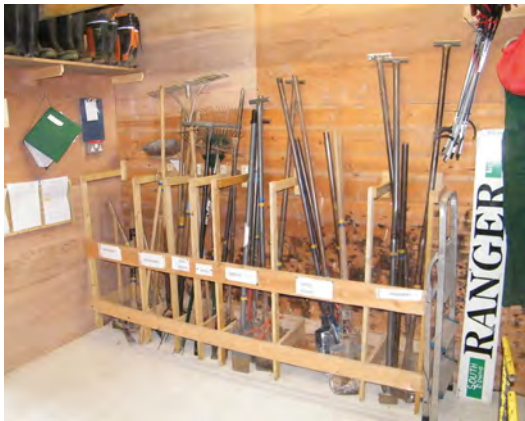
treated! The familiar 'cigar' stone is perfectly adequate but it is best used with ample water. This helps prevent the stone becoming clogged and enables formation of the abrasive slurry that gives a keen edge.

The edges of spades and grafts occasionally get turned over and, although they should not be too sharp, do need an edge of sorts to work efficiently. A few strokes with a coarse file e.g. a 'farmer's file' which is usually to be found in the tool box will sort it out. Incidentally, rubbing the file with a lump of dry chalk helps minimise clogging. Such a file will take smaller 'dings' out of mattocks or improve the edge a little but anything more serious on these and other heavy tools is a job for e.g. an angle grinder (PUWER again) or replacement.

A sharp tool is safer than a blunt one but, as ever, observe the safety rules: suitable working distances, no fingers or other body parts in front of the cutting edge and no gloves with swinging tools – slashers, mattocks, sledge hammers etc. A 'hook stick' cut from nearby growth is a great aid for keeping thorns and nettles away from bare hands when using a billhook or grasshook.

No one would suggest that all volunteers can, or should, undertake all the maintenance jobs described here but everyone can accommodate at least some of them, take reasonable care in use and enjoy a more effective day.

**Ron Wells**  
Volunteer Ranger  
Seven Sisters Base



Racking for large tools.



Small tools and shelving.

Photos Ron Wells



# Gallery

Here are a couple of photos of tasks over the last few months. They are both of the Stanmer Wednesday group, so thanks to them. It would be great to see pictures from more of the groups more often, so take your cameras out with you and send in some pictures. If you want to send some words to go with them, all the better. It would be particularly good to see more of what's going on in Hampshire and around Midhurst.

**Right:**  
Richard Holkham, Barry Linfield, Dave Nightingale, Chris Pomfrey, Roger Beaumont, Edi Little and David Griffiths. This collection of logs, dug into the ground, is designed to encourage use by Stag Beetles. One or two other groups have made these in the past, with the Seven Sisters Thursday group I think, claiming the most artistic interpretation of the concept.

**Below:**  
Peter Martin, Chris Pomfrey and Natasha Stonestreet clear reeds at Lewes Railway Land Local Nature Reserve.

*Photo Jan Knowlson*  
© SDNPA

*Photo Thyone Outram*  
© Lewes District Council



# Geoff Williams – sound stalwart of the South Downs



Geoff (second from right) is pictured here with a group of Volunteer Rangers at the end of a long day clearing footpaths after the 1987 storm – this was pretty much full-time VRS work well into 1988! Left and right of Geoff are Tony Bish and Ray Mann, still giving their time for the Downs through the VRS. Geoff's son Richard is also here, third from left.  
*Photo Phil Belden*

It is with sadness that I write this little, inadequate piece. On the 10th August 2011 Geoff Williams passed away, peacefully, at his home in Dorset.

Many of us had seen Geoff only a month before, at the VRS AGM in Pulborough, he was 81. That in itself encapsulates his devotion to the cause, he was proud to be part of the ranger service, he enjoyed the great company and he was with us to the end (and from the start too!). I was deeply touched he was there, when I received my long service award; humbled too, as Geoff had been presented with his award ten years earlier – he deserved that accolade far more than me.

Geoff was one of the initial recruits of the Volunteer Ranger Service, joining in the inaugural year of 1981. He was a quiet, conscientious colleague who gave his all for the South Downs and the VRS. He was keen, reliable and modestly professional; a role model for others, a studious leader where others followed.

Geoff was always receptive and uncomplaining at whatever was thrown at him – conservation tasks, rights of way maintenance, big projects, little snags, PR and events – taking it all in his competent stride. It was a real honour to have worked alongside him on so many activities, achieving so much, over so many years. He was the perfect companion to have around, a real steady influence and someone to respect. Geoff brought his son Richard into the VRS.



Geoff is presented with his gold 20 year long service award at the start of a task day, back in 2001.  
*Photo Anne Bush*

He inspired his son, and it led him to make a career change into environmental work, from which Richard has not looked back. Richard, and all of us who knew him, will have some fond memories to treasure.

I have lost a good friend and the VRS has lost one of its best members. He will be missed, but he has an enduring place in our history, one of the original team from where a great service has grown. He should be an inspiration, and I'd like to think that his legacy might be that the South Downs will seriously benefit from the enthusiastic energies of all who aspire to follow in his footsteps.

RIP Geoff. Though a big hole has opened up in the South Downs and Volunteer Ranger Service, you've gone on to do greater things in a higher place.

**Phil Belden**  
*Head of Operations – South Downs NPA*



# Volunteer Ranger support to the Mosaic project

In late October, a group of community 'Champions' from across South-East England joined Volunteer Rangers above Birling Gap to help clear gorse from chalk grassland for the National Trust. They walked from Crowlink, further along the chalk cliffs, with a walk leader from South Downs Society.

In November, many of them came back to spend a day with me and another group of Volunteer Rangers, to learn about leading guided walks and how to use map and compass to navigate in the Downs. The group then spent a few hours practising their new skills to find their way from Stanmer Park over the Downs to Ditchling Beacon and back.

Luckily the weather on both days was fantastic and the feedback was very positive. However, you may not be surprised to hear that despite the 'prickly' subject everyone especially enjoyed cutting gorse and feeding the fire.

The Mosaic project aims to increase the number of visitors to National Parks from ethnic communities by building links between community leaders and the National Parks.

## Ian Hartle

Volunteer Co-ordinator

**Top:** Saira Niazi, Henna Chowdhury, Vanessa McClune and Pravin Mistry cut back gorse above Birling Gap on the Seven Sisters

**Middle:** Feeding the fire: Adil Hussain with VR Richard Bosworth

**Bottom:** Lucy Tsikira was reminded of work she did growing up in her village in Namibia

Photos: Sarah Wilson © Mosaic



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The information contained in this newsletter was, as far as known, correct at the date of issue. The South Downs National Park Authority cannot, however, accept responsibility for any error or omission.