

Eastern Area gallery



Photos 1, 2 and 5: Chris Pomfrey. Photos 3 and 4: Jan Knowlson.



1. Brian Read cools down in Kingston Pond, on a pond survey.
2. Volunteer Rangers take a break while carrying out clearance work at the Tide Mills at Bishopstone near Newhaven recently. Joanna Wilkins from Sussex Archaeological Society introduced us all to the site with her talk at the AGM in Alfriston in July (see centre pages).
3. Children gather round the badge-making table, manned by David Lilly and John Dutton.
4. Another pond survey, this time at Friston. Peter Parsons (near) and Barry Hobbs measure the pond. Also shows Ian Wildridge (blue hat) and Alan Jones (clipboard!).
5. Can we have our Land Rover back now please? Stewart Penfound and Barry Linfield dubiously change their mode of transport in the reedbed on Lewes Railway Land.

South Downs
Volunteer Ranger Service

South Downs
National Park

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Comment

Over the next few months Anne, Cris and I are joining as many of you on task as we can; I've so far visited the QE Monday group, Singleton Wednesday group, Seven Sisters Tuesday group and Stanmer Tuesday group and over the next six months I will be getting out to spend the day with all the practical groups. It's a welcome opportunity for us to get away from our desks for a bit, but more importantly it is a chance to talk to you about any issues that affect your experience of working with the VRS, whether it be new ideas, things that could work better, or anything else. These visits are one of a number of things we are doing to improve communications between support staff and the NPA as a whole with Volunteer Rangers. We are setting up some web-based facilities to help you find out what's going on better and to enable you to exchange views and ideas with other Volunteer Rangers and Task Leaders from both NPA and our partners. The VRS Committee is providing useful input to this, recently proposing a VRS sub-group on the South Downs on-line Forum, which we are looking to implement shortly. The main role of the Committee is to provide a forum for discussion between staff and Volunteer Rangers, so make sure you know who your rep. is and talk to them if there is something you'd like discussed.

We have a couple of spaces on the Committee, which we would really like to fill, so that all of you are represented. If you work with the Stanmer weekend group, or are a South Downs Way Warden, do seriously consider joining the Committee. You can speak to Anne, Cris or me about the role, or better still, talk to a member of the Committee. Chair Ron Wilder, or any of the other reps will be happy to discuss what the role involves. While it's a useful job, it doesn't need to take up lots of your time, so do find out



Ian Hartle
Volunteer Co-ordinator

more. Contact details for the Committee are on the inside back page of this issue. At the AGM in July, a question was asked about groups having something to indicate who you are when out on task. So you all know, each of our Area offices has two VRS Signs announcing the presence of Volunteer Rangers and giving some contact details to the local office. They are triangular rollout tripod signs, like the traditional 'men at work' signs but with VRS information rather than a picture of someone digging. Rangers should know about them, so do encourage your Task Leaders to collect them from the workshop, or keep them in the Land Rovers, so they are always available. That way everyone will know who you are!

As I mentioned last time, we are including obituaries for two Volunteer Rangers – Diana Sadler and Ted Hurdle. Diana was a VR with the mid-week group meeting at Chichester/Singleton; Ted with the weekend group at Seven Sisters. Those of us who were at the funerals, within a week of each other, discovered they had both committed a huge amount of their time to a wide range of voluntary activity in addition to the work they did with the VRS – Ted to amateur wrestling and trade union work and Diana to an extraordinary array of local groups. You can find out a bit more about Ted's wrestling connections at:

<http://talkbritishwrestling.ning.com/forum/topics/ted-hurdle>

I'm always pleased to receive articles (with photos) from Volunteer Rangers for inclusion in Downland Thymes. Do keep them coming.

All the best to you all.

Ian Hartle
Volunteer Co-ordinator

The South Downs National Park Authority staff structure consists of four Directorates. In the first of a short series of articles giving insight into the work of the organisation, Andrew Lee introduces the team he looks after.

Strategy and Partnerships

I am hugely impressed by the work of the VRS. I discovered the joys of volunteering whilst at Aberystwyth University in the early eighties, driving ancient minibuses full of tools around mid-Wales, winching out huge rhododendron stumps and planting marram grass on sand dunes. I then ran midweek BTCV groups as a long-term volunteer in its Workington office. At the Sussex Wildlife Trust, volunteers were at the forefront of everything we did, especially in education.

Nowadays I'm very well aware of being part of the dreaded 'head office', but the Strategy role is exciting because it brings together policy and practical action. I'm also very lucky to have a wonderful set of people to work with in my Directorate, staff who bring so much

passion, expertise and energy to this still very new organisation, not to mention cakes and plenty of office banter.

So what do the four teams in Strategy & Partnerships actually do? The first building block has been the State of the National Park report, to be launched in October. This brings together a huge amount of data on the Park's seven Special Qualities – from maps of geology to average house prices, from the extent and quality of chalk grassland to the current state of historic buildings. It has been a huge task involving hundreds of experts and partners.

Next comes the Vision and the Management Plan. After lots of consultation, a vision for how we all want

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Andrew Lee
Director, Strategy and
Partnerships



SDNPAs Communications Team work with Area offices to organise and staff public events like the South of England Show at Ardingly.

Photo: © SDNPA

Strategy and Partnerships *(continued)*

the National Park to be in 2050 has been agreed (see panel on the right). If the vision describes where we'd like to be, the Management Plan is about how we start to get there. Work is well underway to identify the main priorities for the Plan, and involves talking to many organisations to pin down what, jointly, we might be able to achieve over the next five years in areas like landscape, cultural heritage or sustainable tourism. Volunteering will have a key role to play in many of these.

Our Major Partnerships Fund has already invested nearly £850,000 in nine projects. For example, the South Downs Way Ahead Nature Improvement Area and the Wooded Heaths Partnership are helping groups of organisations to conserve, expand and interpret chalk grassland and heathland. Our South Downs supports Winchester based national charity Learning through Landscapes to get children out of the classroom.

A joint post with the Forestry Commission will target better advice to woodland owners to help them manage more sustainably. At Birling Gap and Itford Farm (near Lewes), we're helping the National Trust and the YHA to put in exhibitions on the importance of these places as gateways to the wider National Park.

The Sustainable Communities Fund has supported 70 local projects. These range from restoring ponds (Alciston and Friston), providing new village shops (Milland and Slindon), testing new charcoal burning techniques (West Sussex), investigating the feasibility of cycle routes (Ouse Valley) and upgrading visitor facilities (Butser Ancient Farm and Saddlescombe Farm). Most of these projects have strong volunteer involvement.

Finally, communications is an essential part of everything we do. As well as explaining what we do through our website, forum, publications, media work and interpretation, our intention is to work with others to build a shared identity and sense of place for the National Park.

With such a huge area to cover and nearly two million people within 5km of the National Park, we need to be clear who our audiences are, how we'll reach them and with what messages, and ensure that in all our communications we try and move people from awareness to getting actively involved in caring for this special place.

Andrew Lee

Director

Strategy and Partnerships



Round-table discussions at the launch event for the South Downs Forum at Stanmer Park, between Lewes and Brighton.

South Downs National Park Vision

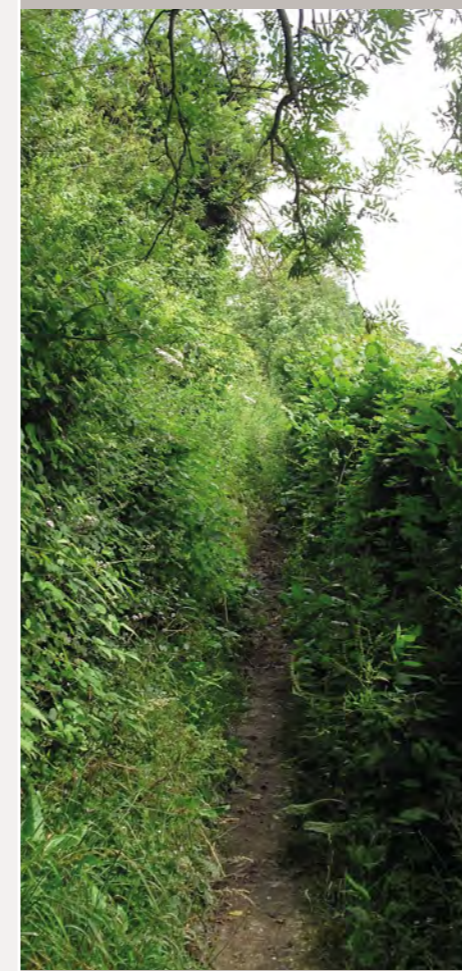
By 2050 in the South Downs National Park:

- the iconic English lowland landscapes and heritage will have been conserved and greatly enhanced. These inspirational and distinctive places, where people live, work, farm and relax, are adapting well to the impacts of climate change and other pressures;
- people will understand, value, and look after the vital natural services that the National Park provides. Large areas of high-quality and well-managed habitat will form a network supporting wildlife throughout the landscape;
- opportunities will exist for everyone to discover, enjoy, understand and value the National Park and its special qualities. The relationship between people and landscape will enhance their lives and inspire them to become actively involved in caring for it and using its resources more responsibly;
- its special qualities will underpin the economic and social well-being of the communities in and around it, which will be more self-sustaining and empowered to shape their own future. Its villages and market towns will be thriving centres for residents, visitors and businesses and supporting the wider rural community;
- successful farming, forestry, tourism and other business activities within the National Park will actively contribute to, and derive economic benefit from, its unique identity and special qualities.



Droxford Primary School children learn about farming landscapes in the Downs on a farm in Droxford, Hampshire, as part of the 'Our South Downs' project.

Photo: © SDNPA



Before...



...after



A Hampshire Cutting Out Expedition

More than ever, this year's wet weather led to many rights of way (RoW) becoming particularly overgrown. This was certainly the case at Bishops Waltham, where one local cyclist became very concerned that nearby bridleways were virtually impassable. His cry for help was passed on by the County RoW staff to South Downs Rangers and as a consequence Hants area VRS Thursday Group was directed on-site on 19 July armed to the teeth with brush cutters, billhooks and rakes. Here was a Restricted Bridleway, over 1 km long, that needed immediate attention.

Ron Wilder, our VRS chairman, led a band of twelve plucky volunteers who were soon spread out along the track, almost lost from sight in the vegetation.

To begin with it seemed a desperate battle. We almost lost Ron in the undergrowth – but after what felt like an age (but was probably only an hour), came the faint cry "Tea break!"

And Ron miraculously reappeared from somewhere, weapon still in hand. So following his leadership we then attacked the refreshments in a determined and organised fashion.

After our R&R we went back up the line to once more combat the massed ranks of bramble, nettle and tree growth. We indeed faced mud and muck but it was the vegetation that suffered the broken limbs, and before long it was soon in full retreat. The gallant volunteers, wielding hand and machine tools in a united front, finally won the day. And with what was truly a nice last touch, along the now thoroughly accessible track, a lone cyclist rode up at the end of the day. He came to thank us profusely for all our hard work; for he was the very same cyclist who had reported the problem in the first place.

Russell Cleaver

Volunteer Ranger – Western Area

AGM 7 July 2012

Record of Decisions

The meeting started with a short silence to remember the VRS founder, Paul Millmore, and other VRS members who had passed away during the year.

The Notes from the previous AGM of the VRS, held on 9 July 2011 were proposed as agreed by Frank Parkinson and seconded by Teri Cranmer, and adopted unanimously.

Chair of the VRS Committee's Report: Stephen Allberry gave a short roundup of highlights from the VRS year and explained Committee activity.

Treasurer's Report: Nevill Brooke presented his report. The approval of the accounts was proposed by Chris Pomfrey and seconded by Russell Cleaver. The AGM voted unanimously to approve the accounts as presented.

Election of VRS Officers for 2012/2013: Coralie Tiffin proposed and Phil Luffingham seconded the Officers for 2012/13 as:

- Chair:**
- Ron Wilder**
- Vice Chair:**
- Nick Egerton**
- Treasurer:**
- Nevill Brooke (continues 3 year appointment from 2011/2012)**

These were unanimously elected.

NPA Update: Margaret Paren gave a short update on the work of the NPA in its second year emphasising that; a great deal of work had been done to capture the State of the Park, develop the Special Qualities and from them to start development of a Management Plan with priorities for the next 5 years. However, the NPA is now really starting to add value. Areas of specific concern to VRS members covered: Tool Store facilities for the Western Area, Sustainable Transport issues, RoW standards and monitoring, engagement by both the SDNPA and VRS with the public, VRS ID Cards, VRS signage on work and, finally, the absence of South Downs National Park entry/exit signs.

Feedback on VRS Survey and Workshops: Ian Hartle explained that there had been a study into volunteering across the Park, which included some 170 organisations providing volunteering opportunities. The VRS workshops had been very successful and had also fed into this work. A draft report had now been submitted to the Senior Management Team of the SDNPA on this review which included; an Action Plan for the VRS, a review of training for the VRS and a future development piece which identifies roles in education, heritage work and information development as suitable new areas for volunteer recruitment. Ian also undertook to forward these reports to the VRS Committee for their consideration.

Any Other Business: There being no further business the meeting concluded with Margaret Paren presenting long service awards.

Long Service Awards

At the VRS Annual Meeting, held this year in Alfriston on Saturday 7th July, Margaret Paren, chair of the South Downs National Park Authority, presented long service certificates to some of the many volunteers who will be receiving them this year.

Peter Tucker and Phil Luffingham both received a gold certificate for 20 years service. Helena Lewis also completes 20 years this year, but unfortunately she was not able to attend the meeting to receive her certificate. Peter joined the Sunday group in West Sussex when the pickup was Ham Road in Shoreham. Sometime after that the pickup was moved to Chichester railway station and then to Barnham railway station where it has remained. During all that time Peter has regularly come out once a month. Phil joined the weekend group working out of Seven Sisters Country Park in October 1991 and has also come out regularly once a month since then.

Silver certificates for 10 years service were presented to Dave Nightingale, Rob and Coralie Tiffin, Adrian White, Sue Disney and Frank Parkinson. Sue and Frank joined the Seven Sisters Country Park Thursday group when it was formed 10 years ago and have both been out most Thursdays ever since. Frank is also the VRS Committee representative for the Seven Sisters midweek groups. Rob and Coralie first joined the VRS as Seven Sisters Country Park Visitor Centre Volunteers and over the years have offered help and advice to many of the thousands of visitors to the Country Park. They are now also South Downs Way Wardens and for three years Coralie was the Visitor Centre representative on the Committee and is still on the sub group that assesses applications to the Founder's Travel Fellowship.

Dave Nightingale is a regular member of the Stanmer Park Wednesday group and one of the group's trained drivers. A retired chartered engineer he put his engineering skills to good use during the recent restoration of the shepherd's caravan. Adrian White joined the VRS in 2002 as a Volunteer Parish Path Ranger and then also became a Dutch Elm Disease Warden. As well as walking his parish to report any maintenance needed Adrian regularly attended VPPR training and this year helped at a map reading/navigation day organised by the National Park for Mosaic Community Champions.

Everyone will receive a gold or silver badge to accompany their certificate. Other long service awards presented this year will be reported on in future editions of Downland Thymes, but special mention goes now to Terry Doyle from Hampshire who is overdue his 10 year award. Terry joined the VRS in 2000 regularly going out with the Sunday group and often hosting woodland management tasks or socials and BBQs at his own area of woodland (Dolly's Firs). Terry is now also a South Downs Way Warden.

Anne Bush
Volunteer Support Officer



Peter Tucker and Phil Luffingham receive certificates from SDNPA Chair Margaret Paren recognising twenty years contributing to the work of the VRS



Coralie and Rob Tiffin, Frank Parkinson, Sue Disney and Adrian White receive their ten year award certificates from Margaret Paren

Photos: Anne Bush

South Downs VRS

VRS Finance Update / Accounts Approval

The VRS Treasurer, Nevill Brooke, reviewed the audited accounts for the year ending 30 June 2012. Hard copies of the Profit & Loss Account and the Balance Sheet were available to all AGM attendees – copies will be distributed to all Volunteer Rangers.

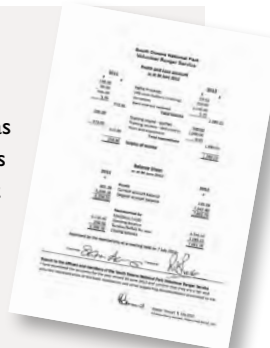
This year there was a significant surplus of income over expenditure amounting to £1289.22 which resulted in a closing bank balance of £7683.78. Ring-fenced within this bank balance is an amount of £670 relating to the Travel Fellowship which again, disappointingly, was not utilised in the year.

Income in the year totalled £2589.22 primarily made up of donations of £2140 and VRS volunteer ranger training contributions of £350. The majority of the donations received were in memory of the late Paul Millmore – the VRS Committee is to consider the best and most appropriate way to spend these funds. Expenditure

totalled £1300 in the year of which £300 was spent on scythe training for 11 volunteer rangers while £1000 was spent on skid pan training at Goodwood race track for 24 authorised off-road VRS drivers. Overall, it was encouraging to have utilised funds to train 35 volunteers in the year.

In conclusion, the VRS AGM voted unanimously to approve the accounts as presented. I should also like to record my thanks to Alastair Stewart, the Hon. Auditor, for performing this role once again.

Nevill Brooke
Treasurer - South Downs VRS – 8 August 2012



After the business was done...

This year's meeting was held in the Old Chapel Centre, just off Alfriston's village green (The Tye), in the heart of the village. The building was built as a church in 1801, by a group of non-conformists and is still in use as a United Reformed Church.

After the business of the AGM was concluded, we were treated to a fascinating introduction to the Tide Mills at Bishopstone, a site that has been visited by working groups of Volunteer Rangers on a number of occasions over the last few years. Reputed at one time to have been the largest tide mill in the world, with 16 pairs of grinding stones, the mill worked by using the incoming tide to fill a large pond and drive water wheels. After the tide turned and the pond started to empty, the wheels could be driven in the opposite direction, allowing operation around 20 hours out of 24. I think it's fair to say that even for those of us who knew about the existence of the site, very few appreciated what a major installation the tide mill and associated buildings had been. At its height, it was more a village than simply a work-place, with up to 100 people living there. Built in 1761, the last residents left in 1939. The talk looked at how the role of the site changed over its lifetime.

After lunch we were taken on a guided walk south alongside the River Cuckmere then up onto the Downs towards the White Horse chalk figure beneath High and Over.

Led by frequent VRS Task Leader Dave Morgan from the National Trust, the route was almost entirely over land owned by the Trust. Parts of the path we followed along the riverside have been very substantially improved by Volunteer Rangers over the last year.

People who hadn't visited the area before had possibly their first opportunity (for more than thirty years anyway) to see mature and semi-mature elm trees - the valley is home to a substantial population of English elms and lies within the East Sussex Elm Disease Control Area. Local geography offered some protection against the disease



Photo: Anne Bush

when it decimated most of the British tree population in the 1970s, and East Sussex County Council set up the Control Area and have run a project ever since, to protect the trees. Many of you will be aware that for many years the responsibility for delivering the project was delegated to Sussex Downs Conservation Board and then South Downs Joint Committee, with Volunteer Rangers being involved for several years in monitoring trees for the disease.

In some senses Alfriston could be said to be the home of the National Trust; Alfriston Clergy House was the first property to be purchased by the Trust in 1896. It sits next to the very substantial village church - sometimes known as the cathedral of the Downs – overlooking the Tye.

Thanks very much indeed to the Seven Sisters based VRS Committee representatives for organising so much of the day. In particular to Chris Hicks, who found the venue for the meeting and the speaker for the day Joanna Wilkins, as well as persuading Dave Morgan to show us round some of their landholding in the area.

Ian Hartle
Volunteer Co-ordinator

The Shepherd's Hut



About 20 years ago Volunteer Rangers and staff from Sussex Downs Conservation Board restored the wreck of an old shepherd's caravan which was donated by a local farmer. For many years it was used at shows and displays. When South Downs Joint Committee wound up it had to be handed back to the farmer.

For those of you who don't know, the shepherd's hut (or caravan) is basically a shed on wheels, varying in design, originating it is believed in Yorkshire and dating as far back as the 1500s.

The hut was moved by horse to wherever the flock was grazing and provided the shepherd with protection from wind and weather at lambing time. It allowed him to stay with his flock night and day through the critical lambing season.

In it were the bare essentials for living including a bunk type bed with a straw mattress, a stove for heating and cooking, a shelf for cooking pots etc., a small cupboard for lambing bottles and medicines and a small chest or leather satchel for the shepherd's tools.

In September last year, Ian Hartle was looking for projects for the VRS to get involved in and the idea of restoring another shepherd's hut was put forward by one of the Eastern Area Rangers, Mark Hayward. At an

Eastern Area office meeting I was very pointedly asked if I thought it could be done and who I thought could lead a group of Volunteer Rangers to do it.

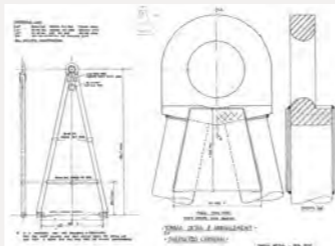
I must have an over-inflated ego or a screw loose, because I was then given a budget to work with and a list of interested Volunteers to contact.

Over the next two months they chained me to my desk and I spent my time, either on the phone, sending

out emails or on the internet researching shepherd's huts and trying to find a hut we could restore. I never found one, but did find out how popular they now are as garden ornaments, summer houses or for renting out as holiday lets, being sold for £10,000 and more.

At the beginning of October, I found a set of four cast iron wheels, a steering turntable and other metalwork on timber axles, up for auction on eBay. Jan Knowlson, one of the Eastern Area Rangers, successfully bid for them on her computer at home and got them ten seconds before the auction finished.

Going into 2012, we now had the basics to work with. Derek Bryne, a retired engineer drew up plans based on a hut at Seven Sisters Country Park and what we had purchased. He also came up with working



Design for a new towbar by Derek Bryne.

Photos: Danny Dennie

drawings for a blacksmith to make new ironwork to replace bits that were too far gone to re-use. Frank Parkinson, a retired carpenter from Eastbourne, worked out a cutting list for the timber we would need. Mark Hayward and I collected the wheels and axles from Hampshire and put them in the timber store to be stripped down and shot blasted.

By the end of January, I had removed all the ironwork from the timber beams and had it shot blasted and primed. They were then painted by Volunteer Rangers Peter Martin and Chris Chandler and moved from the timber store to the work shop.

After some discussion it was thought the original axles were probably elm but were too rotten to reuse. We could not source enough elm for new beams so we agreed to replace them with locally sourced green oak which was cut to size and routed to take the restored axle stubs and steering turntable. VR Chris Chandler got some new wooden parts turned by the woodcraft group which he is a member of.

At the beginning of February all the axle parts were collected together in the workshop and Peter Rolfe, Dave Nightingale, Stewart Penfound, Chris Chandler

and Peter Martin refitted the ironwork to the new beams, put the wheels on the stub axles and fitted the turntable to ensure everything fitted together and worked as it should.

By the middle of February, all the materials needed had been delivered and the restored axles were outside the workshop ready to have the floor frame fitted.

Frank Parkinson actually arranged to take seven days of annual holiday to work on the project full time. We started the construction itself on the 20th February. Peter Martin and Chris Chandler started cutting the mortice and tenons to the floor frame timbers in the workshop, while outside Peter Rolfe, Stewart Penfound and Dave Nightingale, all engineers, set about lining up the new axles and tying them together with temporary beams ready for the floor frame. At the same time Frank Parkinson, Bob Granger and I started setting-out and making wall frames.

In ten days, all the walls were up and insulated, the door and windows made, the interior cladding fixed, the roof beams set on and the curved corrugated roof sheets fixed. The hut, though not finished, was now

1. Front axle bought on e-Bay.
2. Axles, wheels and steering mechanism restored and reassembled.
3. Frank Parkinson assembling part of the wall frame.
4. Nicki Tulett, Natasha Stonestreet and Peter Martin (on the roof) paint the cladding.
5. Peter Martin, Stewart Penfound and Dave Nightingale during reassembly of the front axle and steering.
6. Dave Nightingale, Peter Martin and Frank Parkinson work on fitting the floor frame.
7. Derek Bryne, Chris Chandler and Frank Parkinson fit the external cladding.
8. The finished interior, complete with bed over shelving and a cage for lambs that need bottle feeding. Also medicine cupboard on the wall and small desk/table and chair.
9. The finished Shepherd's Hut.

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The Shepherd's Hut (continued)



We managed to get most of the Volunteer Rangers who were involved in building the hut together at the same time, on the hut's second public showing at the *Festival of Nature* in Stanmer Park in June.

Back row (from left to right):
Natasha Stonestreet,
Frank Parkinson.

Middle row:
Chris Chandler,
Dave Nightingale, Shirley Brice,
Derek Bryne, Peter Rolfe,
Marilyn Marchant.

Front row:
Peter Martin, Danny Dennie
(Project Manager).

Photo: Jo Glyde © SDNPA.

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watertight. At this point someone in their wisdom decided that, although the height inside the hut was as the original ones were, it was too low to be properly safe, so we needed to lift it by 100mm.

Fortunately, owing to the way it was constructed and the ingenuity amongst us, this was managed without too many problems.

The whole hut was then painted four times, mainly done with the help of Natasha Stonestreet, Marilyn Marchant and Jean Wooller along with Peter Martin – the only person, on a baking hot day, to volunteer to sit on a hot tin roof and paint it. All that was left for me to do was to cut and fix the fascia and end panels and fit out the inside.

Ian Hartle then asked “who do you think could write an article about the build?”

Now I know I have a screw loose!

Although at times, I might have looked a bit stressed, I must say how much I have enjoyed the experience of this project these last six months. Working with such a great bunch of people has been a pleasure. If I could have the same group, I would quite happily do it all over again.

Thank you all

Last but not least, I have to say thank you to Shirley Brice, one of the Seven Sisters Volunteer Rangers, who in league with *The Sussex Guild of Spinners and Weavers* organised the sourcing of local wool

which they then spun and knitted into a blanket for the shepherd's bed, which they kindly donated to us at the Sussex Nature Watch Show in Stanmer Park.

Danny Dennie Volunteer Ranger – Stanmer Park

“If I could have the same group, I would quite happily do it all over again.”

Obituaries

Ted Hurdle 1931 – 2012

Seven years ago, my family arranged a celebration party for my eightieth birthday. Ted Hurdle was among the family and friends present. I thanked him for being there and he said it was an honour. For us, the Volunteer Rangers who attended his funeral, it was an honour to be with his family and friends to share in his passing.

Most of us knew he had been involved in amateur wrestling for much of his life, initially as a wrestler, but soon as a referee and coach. What we hadn't appreciated was the huge contribution he had made and quite how much respect and affection were felt for him within the sport. He was President of the British Wrestling Association for many years, right up until he died. As an international referee he officiated at four Commonwealth Games and the 1980 Olympics in Moscow.

When Ted first joined the VRS in 1998, it was easy to see that he would be fun and a pleasure to work with, as was proved many times over. He was a very keen practical group Volunteer Ranger and also a Parish Path Ranger, treading many a mile to report on work to be done.

It was not long before various ailments were thrust on Ted, but he carried on with great courage; his family can take pride in the way Ted bore his suffering. For us, the VRS has lost a truly good friend. Ted has earned his rest.

Alan Holyoake

Volunteer Ranger
Seven Sisters Country Park



Ted – on the right, caught by April snow, while installing a gate with a group of Volunteer Rangers on Seven Sisters Country Park in 2008.

Diana ‘Fire Lady’ Sadler 1932 - 2012

I first met Diana Sadler at Heyshott Down seventeen years ago on her first task. When I expressed concern that as the only woman in the group she may feel a little intimidated, she replied with a wry smile, ‘Don't worry Cris, I don't mind being surrounded by men.’ That sense of humour and fun was always present; Diana was a quiet and gentle soul and a very capable Volunteer Ranger.

Already out on most Wednesdays, Diana volunteered as a Parish Path Ranger, eventually taking on the entire 50+ mile parish of Stoughton. It's also a very steep parish - as Diana told me, in places you need to be part mountain goat!

Diana's guided walks were always a treat. She would tell you about history and wildlife with a warmth which left you impatient for the next one, although Diana's busy life meant she didn't lead that many. From a farming background she had many skills useful on task, like animal husbandry and survey identification, not to mention making fire - if anyone could start a fire in heavy rain it was she, hence her VRS nickname.



Diana, out on a Wednesday task in 2003.

After being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease Diana came out less often and in April called to say she is retiring from the VRS. Diana told me that she had really enjoyed her time and all the fantastic places she had worked, as well as the friendships she had made. We planned a farewell do for her in June but sadly she died on 10th May.

Diana's life was celebrated at a busy service at St. Mary's Church Sidlesham. I knew that she volunteered with other organisations but was truly staggered by how many - she really was an amazing person.

We all miss Diana out on task and I offer my condolences to Diana's family.

Cris Savill

Volunteer Task Co-ordinator.



According to Cris, the Downs are always bright and sunny like this – even this summer!

Photo: Jan Knowlson

Platform One for the Chalk and Heath Line, stopping at Seven Sisters, Stanmer, Barnham, Singleton, Midhurst and Q.E. Country Park

Hello fellow VRs! And welcome to another hearty issue of the Downland Thymes. The news sheet you can read between meals, without ruining your appetite. It has been a bit of a strange summer with weeks of rain, a bit of sun, then a bit more rain. For me, I think I have been extraordinarily lucky with the weather and have only been out on task days when it has been sunny... What do you mean, I lie?!

Oh yes, there was that wettish day. I have a short memory – or is it selective?

Anyway, when you are at the meeting point it may be raining or the wind may be icy-cold but as soon as you're up on the heaths and downs it's sunny! Well that is my opinion and I am sticking to it.

There has been great work done on the ground this past year by South Downs Volunteer Rangers working across the National Park area. And to reflect this, the lead agents and staff have been singing your praises. The type of comments I get range from "we had a really great day..." "we achieved so much..." "we have finished that end of the scrub early..." "the site looks amazing..." to "the hard work the Volunteers put in was just fantastic..." "We're a small project so the VRS helps hugely with the work we need to do..." "the weather was not good at all but the commitment of the Volunteers throughout the day was excellent." That is just a flavour of how you are regarded. So, well done to you all.

I expect that as it is an Olympic year you are proud of what all the athletes have achieved. I am always proud of what South Downs Volunteer Rangers achieve. Keep up the good work.

See you soon,

Cris Savill

Volunteer Task Co-ordinator

VRS Team

South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service

Stanmer Offices

Stanmer Park
Lewes Road
Brighton BN1 9SE
01273 698256
vrs@southdowns.gov.uk

Ian Hartle

Volunteer Co-ordinator
07866 961548
ian.hartle@southdowns.gov.uk

Anne Bush

Volunteer Support Officer
07866 962736
anne.bush@southdowns.gov.uk

Cris Savill

Volunteer Task Co-ordinator
01243 811533
07866 961598
cris.savill@southdowns.gov.uk

Dan Cornell

Heathland Officer
01730 817945
07917 602380
dan.cornell@southdowns.gov.uk

Dan Oakley

Ranger – Western Area
02392 572619
07557 923843
dan.oakley@southdowns.gov.uk



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