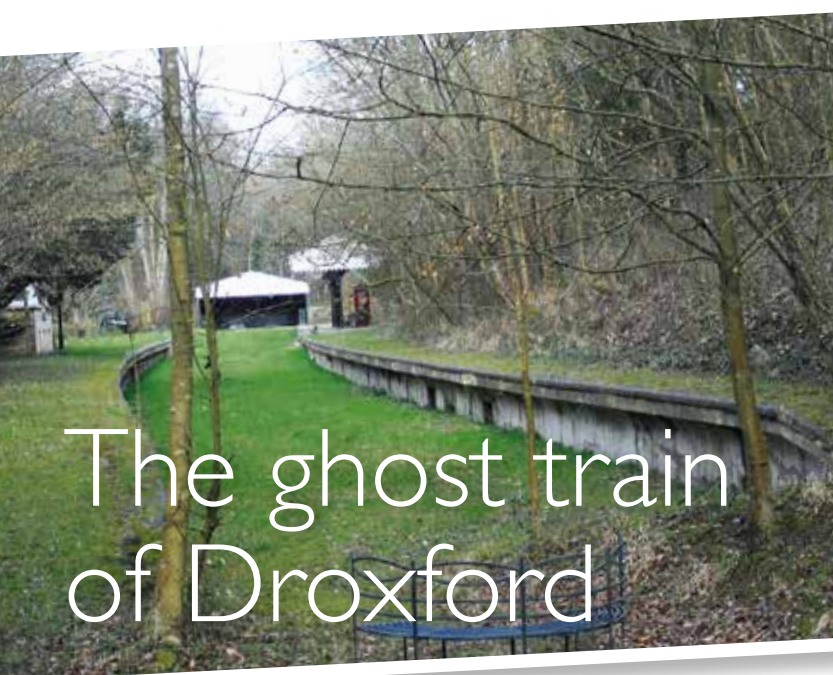


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Downland THYMES

News for the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service Issue 60, May-July 2013



The ghost train of Droxford



Curious locals watched the skies as smoke started to rise from Droxford station on the Meon Valley Line. They thought: "There hasn't been a steam train along here since the '50s".

If they had dared to look more closely, they would have seen a roaring (sorry...carefully controlled) fire tended by a scurrying band of volunteer rangers, piling it high with scrub and the brash of trees cleared from the trail nearby.

This is all part of a cunning plan worked out in harmony with Hampshire County Council's rights of way team to improve the Meon Valley Trail (now a designated bridleway) between Wickham and West Meon.

To date, the platform masonry at the north end of Droxford station has been revealed. Earlier, part of a sign was found with just a 'D' and 'FOR' remaining. This turned out to be the old platform sign saying 'DROXFORD for Hambledon'.

Work by South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service at the station's south end will clear the old railway cutting and sidings to let in light and encourage reversion to a small area of chalk downland habitat where visitors to the trail can gather. So, why would visitors want to gather at this spot? To find out more read on...

The Meon Valley Railway (MVR) railway opened in 1903 and ran between Alton and Fareham following the course of the River Meon. These towns were thriving and becoming important railway junctions. A growth in tourist traffic was anticipated to the Isle of Wight, and the Admiralty wanted to improve the strategic movement of troops and equipment to the South Coast.

The line was single-track with dual track only at stations. No expense was spared as public roads crossed the line on bridges either over or under the railway, even where this required extensive earthworks such as at Droxford station. There was a viaduct over the river at West Meon and a tunnel at West Meon and at Privett.

Sadly, the expected levels of passenger traffic never materialised and military use remained light. So, in 1955 (before the 'Beeching Axe') the MVR was closed to passengers although goods services were retained on part of the line until 1968.

Three stations survived (Droxford, East Tisted and Privett) and are now used as

private houses. They were some of the finest rural stations of the late Victorian period, built of brick in a mock Tudor style, with Portland Stone mullions and gables, stained-glass door windows and tiled interiors. The lavatories were in outbuildings styled like Chinese pagodas.

Droxford played a crucial role in the D-Day operations. On Thursday 2 June 1944, Churchill, Eisenhower and other allied leaders met in a special train at Droxford Station (which had the longest siding in southern England) close to a deep cutting to provide some cover in case of an air raid. Here, final planning decisions were made for Operation Overlord. Furthermore our illustrious chairman, Ron Wilder, has a personal connection with it all! Ron's father was flying Halifax bombers at the time and on 3 June he and others flew a weather reconnaissance flight out over the Atlantic. The data collected was used to form the weather forecast that Eisenhower and Churchill were given, and it resulted in the D-day landings being delayed by 24hrs, from 5 June to 6 June. More information can be found at <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/ron.strutt/rrcor3.html> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meon_Valley_Railway.

Martin Cowell,
Volunteer Ranger, Western Downs



Chairman's Corner

I hope you enjoy this first issue of a new, revitalised Downland Thymes. I want us in the South Downs VRS to be at the forefront of what can be achieved by volunteers in the National Park. For the future there are many ways we can diversify the volunteer output: we could expand our practical conservation tasks; we can seek new ways of volunteering and we can play our part in a wider collaboration of volunteering bodies across the South Downs.

I'm also pleased that we are progressing other initiatives such as the water taps project in memorial for Paul Millmore. And there are plans to give you all, in each area, some of our VRS funds to spend on your own volunteer activities. These initiatives are some of the things that the VRS Committee has recently developed and I hope we can deliver more. We are a lively and proactive committee and we now have some vacancies. Please get in touch if you wish to join us.

This leads me to my final point: We have a particularly interesting AGM due this year on 20 July in Selborne, it is your chance to be heard and to influence how we move forward.

Ron Wilder, VRS Chairman

Update from the VRS Team

After more than ten years working with the VRS, Anne Bush left SDNPA for early retirement at the end of March, with a quiet pub lunch in Ditchling. Thanks to the many of you who contributed to leaving presents for her; together with contributions from staff, we managed to collect a fantastic £330! This bought travel vouchers, which will go a long way towards something like a city break – she has done a few of these over the last few years. With a couple of VR groups sorting out their own gifts for her too, she left knowing how much she was appreciated by us all.

Anne's departure has of course had a big impact on our work, but that is starting to ease, because as of 29th April, we have been joined by Vicky Wakefield-Jarrett, who will be with us for six months. This will give us time to decide what sort of long-term post we most need to help support you all. Once Vicky is up to speed, she will deal with most of what Anne did. We'll get her out of the office over the next couple of months to meet you – she studied archaeology, so she's used to getting her hands dirty!

This is the first time I've written this column not knowing exactly what the rest of Downland Thymes is going to look like. Many thanks to VR Russell Cleaver for gathering most of the volunteer content for this edition and also to Carrie Hulse and Jo Glyde from our Communications team for managing some input from the NPA and pulling everything together. I hope you enjoy the new 'feel' of this newsletter. Do let us know what you think and keep those contributions coming.

One of the last jobs Anne did before she left was to distribute the new sweatshirts to VRs from the outdoor practical groups, so you can stop wearing the old green ones now! You're welcome to keep them and use them for other things, but please take off



Our new starter Vicky Wakefield-Jarrett

the old Volunteer Ranger badge. We'd also ask you not to wear your fleeces on task days with a fire, or at least not without something like a wax jacket over it to protect it.

The content of the volunteer section of the NPA intranet is slowly being added to and we can add lots more when the new intranet facility is up and running in a month or so.

Some of you are aware that for a number of reasons I have had to further delay the first of the new introductory training days. I will now be running these in early July and will let all of you who need that day know dates as soon as I can. More positively, during the year to March 2013, we organised more additional training for Volunteer Rangers than ever before, with almost £10,000 of the NPA's VRS budget being spent on driver training, first aid, brushcutter training, flintwalling and water safety, as well as two evening history lectures – do let us have feedback on those.

All the best to you all. I look forward to seeing you at the AGM in July.

Ian Hartle, Volunteer Co-ordinator, South Downs National Park Authority

Attend our VRS AGM

A date for your diary: the Annual General Meeting for the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service will be held at The Gilbert White House's Field Studies Centre (Selborne, Hampshire, GU34 3JH) on 20 July 2013.

Do come and join us on the day. As well as our AGM there will be a presentation about the world famous ecologist Gilbert White, then after lunch you can take the chance to take a look around this historic venue (for free), or go on

a guided walk at Noar Hill, a downland site famous for its wild orchids. We expect to finish at approximately 3.00pm to 3.30pm.

This is an advance notice, final details and bookings for the AGM will follow in due course.



© Rob Nicholls



Wildflower Seed Harvesting

During September 2012, the Western Area VRS put their new wildflower seed harvester into action, collecting seed from the top of Butser Hill and at a privately owned site near South Harting.

We waited until September because we particularly wanted to collect ripe cowslip seeds, which are needed by the Duke of Burgundy butterfly. Once collected, the material is dried on tarpaulins before sieving to remove excess chaff.

The seed was spread over several sites, but most of the work was carried out by National Trust volunteers at a restoration field of great strategic importance. The field links Selborne Common and Noar Hill, two Special Sites of Scientific Interest. The map by Chris Webb, National Trust Warden, shows the work carried out by the Selborne Association Grassland Restoration Project. The National Trust has been spreading local green hay on parts of the site for two years, and there has been good establishment of Cowslip.

The work will expand the population of the Duke of Burgundy Butterfly from the Hampshire and Isle of White Wildlife Trust's Noar Hill reserve. We already know that the population is doing well, as a pair were seen at Selborne Common in Spring 2012 – for the first time since the '70s.

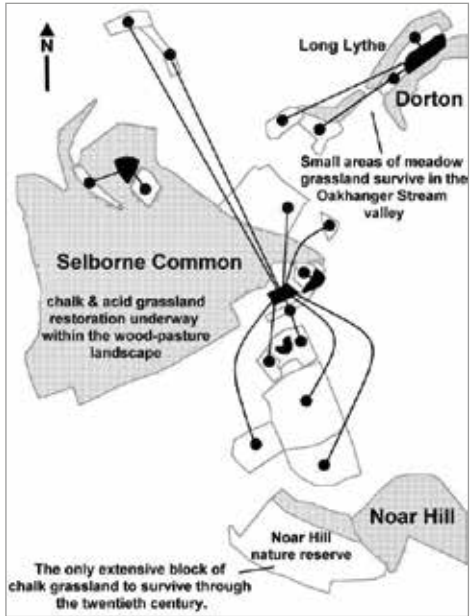
However, the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service seed harvesting efforts have increased the scale and speed of the work being carried out by the National Trust, so it's a great team effort.

Work like this aims to repair some of the 97% loss of species-rich grassland that has occurred in the UK over the last century. Importantly, as it is brush harvested locally, it protects local plant genetics – rather than buying in European seed which will have different characteristics.

Since last Autumn, the VRS has also felled trees and cleared scrub at Selborne Common, opening up a glade which creates a vista looking back across the restoration field towards Noar Hill.

This year, the VRS AGM will be held in Selborne at the Gilbert White Museum (see inside front cover for details). This gives us the opportunity to make a visit to Noar Hill in the afternoon, so that more members of the VRS can admire its newly improved flora and, if the sun allows, its butterfly population as well.

Rob Nicholls, Western Area Ranger, South Downs National Park Authority



Flower images © Nick Heasman

Your reviews

In this brand new section we'll be pulling together reviews about all of your favourite things. Tell us about books you've read, pubs you've visited, tools or gadgets you've used or even websites that you'd recommend to other volunteers. Email your reviews to dt@southdowns.gov.uk with a picture and up to 100 words description.



The Flower Pots Inn, Cheriton, Hants. SO24 0QQ

As soon as you walk into this pub you feel comfortable. We had been out for a midday walk so were muddy and hungry when we arrived, but felt immediately at ease here. Both the interior and the food are simple yet fine, and as for the ale, they brew their own excellent beer on site. I recommend the Pots Ale: at 3.8% it tastes great and is not too strong if you're out to enjoy a walk.

Russell Cleaver, Volunteer Ranger, Western Downs

Volunteers, please send us your reviews of pubs that you think deserve a Traditional Inn Award. We're talking about good old-fashioned public houses, rather than gastro pubs or themed inns. We want to know about places where you don't need to take your boots off before crossing the threshold! Send us a photo and 100 words to explain why the pub you nominate should be recognised.

Silky Saw

Before I joined the VRS I had spent years grumbling about bow saws and pruning saws when they snagged and made hard work of simple cuts. Yet in the VRS I heard of a magical product that made light of such work. And so I recently bought my own Silky Saw. It gives a remarkably clean cut. Mine is a F180, it folds and fits well in the pocket or hand and its 7.5 inch blade is all you need for coppicing hazel. At £19.25 (online) it's not the cheapest saw, but it is definitely the best.

Russell Cleaver, Volunteer Ranger, Western Downs



GREAT GADGETS

Following in the Footsteps

Part one of two

When finishing a VRS task with the thought that 'you can see where we have been', have you ever wondered who was there before us?

One person who undoubtedly walked in areas where we work and who helped lay the foundations of our present day lifestyle may spring to mind. Unlike many younger people, you probably remember the name of the only King of England to be known as 'The Great' and the myth or legend of the burned cakes which has come down to us over hundreds of years? There is much more for which that king should be remembered and the South Downs National Park lies within his Kingdom of Wessex.

Aelfred or Alfred was the fifth and youngest son of Aethelwulf (Noble Wolf), King of the West Saxons, and his wife Osburth. He was born in 849 at Wantage and is the thirty second Great Grandfather of our present Queen Elizabeth. His father was widely respected for his Christian beliefs, the defence of his kingdom and for his charitable efforts. He made a pilgrimage to Rome before Alfred was five, and again when he was about eight years old he was sent to visit that city. Possibly as a result of those visits he was introduced to the scholarship of the day and became well educated, in addition to excelling in martial pursuits.

He was used to the sporadic fighting between the various small kingdoms of that time and the raiding parties of the Vikings. Boundary battles were frequent and the Kingdom of Wessex in the South West of England expanded to include Surrey, Sussex and Kent. Concerned about the problems which would arise if he was succeeded by an immature child and to avoid sibling rivalry, Aethelwulf decreed that the order of succession would be from eldest to youngest son. Despite the fact that he had to resolve problems with his eldest son Aethelstan by dividing his kingdom with him, this order of succession was maintained after he died in 858.

Throughout England there were frequent battles against the Danes and by 867 they had overthrown the kingdoms of East Anglia, Northumbria and Mercia, but were still opposed by the West Saxons. In 868 Alfred married sixteen-year-old Eahlswith, a noblewoman of the Gains, and they had three daughters and two sons.

In 870, Guthrum, leader of the Danes, invaded Wessex with some success. During the last months of 870 and the early ones of 871, Alfred fought alongside his only surviving brother Aethelred, now King of Wessex, in at least nine battles against Guthrum. Disaster struck on the 22 March 871, when they were defeated in the Battle of Merton. Aethelred was killed and Alfred became King. Hostilities continued and although his forces defeated the Danes at the Battle of Ashdown, their frequent and destructive raids devastated Wessex and by 877 Alfred was forced to withdraw to the Somerset marshes where the incident of the burned cakes may have occurred. Legend has it that when fleeing alone, he sought shelter in a peasant's hut. The wife was busy and unaware of his identity, so she asked him to ensure that the cakes baking on her fire did not burn. His mind was on more serious matters and he was berated by her when he failed in his task! The story also lives on in the commonly known name of the black, spherical fungus *Daldinia concentrica*: 'King Alfred's cakes'.

Shirley Brice, Volunteer Ranger, Seven Sisters Country Park

Look out for part two of 'Following in the Footsteps' in the August edition of Downland Thymes.



AELFREDUS
MAGNUS

A message from Anne

Dear all,
I would just like to say a very, very big THANK YOU for all of the emails, presents, good wishes and cards I received on my retirement.

I was totally overwhelmed by everyone's generosity. My main present was a gift voucher to spend with travel agents Thompson or First Choice. I shall think of you all when I'm on holiday and let you know where I decide to go – perhaps I'll take my Downland Thymes with me!
I haven't had a chance to miss you all yet (I know that will come) as I've been busy helping friends to lamb their flock of 42

ewes. It's many years since I lambed my own sheep, but it's a bit like riding a bike – you don't forget – and there is such a sense of achievement in helping to deliver healthy lambs.
I shall keep abreast of everything going on in the VRS and hope to see you sometime.
Best wishes
Anne Bush

**South
Downs
Volunteer
Ranger
Service**

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Kingley Vale

Kingley Vale was one of the first National Nature Reserves in England and a favourite site of Sir Arthur Tansley, the first Chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council, who is remembered by a memorial stone above the central combe. Chiefly known for its ancient yew forest, the reserve is also designated for its chalk grassland and its chalk heath. The northern extension of the reserve is on Forestry Commission land and it is heavily wooded.

The ancient yews in the grove at the foot of the combe are iconic, with mighty central trunks up to five metres round with heavy branches arching down and layering like cathedral arches. Local legend links their planting to the defeat of Viking raiders in the late 9th century, which would make them over 1,000 years old.

The chalk grassland avoided the plough during the Second World War by offering itself for target practice. Live mortar shells still turn up with some regularity. This means that the main chalk grassland flora lives on, and orchids and butterflies benefit. As elsewhere in the South Downs, the loss of grazing has meant an increase in encroaching scrub and ash. Over recent years sheep have been introduced at times in an attempt to keep the sward close cropped.

The reserve has a rich archaeological treasure, from the prominent Bronze Age barrows through to Iron Age and Roman remains, then up to the secret bases of saboteur units preparing for a possible German Invasion in the Second World War:

As volunteers on the reserve, we mostly get involved in scrub clearance. Natural England has been removing a number of large ash trees to create linked glades and to help the spread of butterflies. There is also a fair amount of work to be done with regards to maintaining the fences. The reserve hosts a large herd of fallow deer and these beasts don't respect fences like sheep seem to. Volunteer sheep lookers also play a vital role. Without their help, reserve manager Katherine Birch would not be able to put sheep on the site.

The land around Kingley Vale is intensively farmed and, as elsewhere, more and more land is being transferred from pasture to arable. The photographs are from our last visit, clearing scrub on the South East facing slope of the Northern extension. It is important to maintain a buffer zone of chalk grassland between the yew woods and the farm land, and we get a chance to burn up some brambles and dogwood.

Stephen Allberry,
Volunteer Ranger, Midhurst



Know Your Downs



Lancing College Chapel

Repeatedly described as the Cathedral of the Downs, Lancing College Chapel dominates the landscape to the north of the A27 and across the Adur Valley.

The largest school chapel in the world is an architectural masterpiece of the gothic revival, with soaring columns and a wealth of stained glass, carvings and tapestries.

Lancing College, a co-educational English independent school was founded in 1848 by Nathaniel Woodard. Woodard's aim was to provide education based on sound principle and sound knowledge, "firmly grounded in the Christian faith". Lancing was the first of a family of more than 30 schools founded by Woodard (others include Hurstpierpoint College and Ardingly College).

The foundation stone of the college chapel was laid in 1868, but the chapel itself was not finished in Woodard's lifetime. In fact, the chapel remains unfinished. It stands at about 50 metres (with foundations going down 20 metres into the ground), but the original plans called for a tower at the West end which would raise the height to 100 metres. One reason that the chapel ended

up as high as it did was that Woodard insisted that it be built to its full height at one end first, so that even if he died before completion the height could not be cut down to save money. The chapel is built in the English gothic style of the 14th century, with 13th century French influences. It was designed by R. H. Carpenter and William Slater, and is built of Sussex sandstone from Scaynes Hill.

In 2011 to celebrate the 200th birthday of Nathaniel Woodard, the Friends of Lancing College announced that the chapel will be completed with a porch designed by the late Alan Rome, a former architect at the chapel. This comes 143 years after it's construction began. Construction will begin as soon as sufficient funds (around £3 million) are available.

The Chapel is open Monday to Saturday between 10am and 4pm and Sunday and Bank Holidays between 12noon and 4pm.

All services are open to the public.

Welcoming our new starters

In each new edition of Downland Thymes we'd like to introduce you to some of our new starters. This month, say hello to Alastair Stewart and Anne Asha...

Alastair Stewart



Area: Western Downs.
My first day with the VRS: Scrub clearance on Triumph Down, close to Queen Elizabeth Country Park.

How I got involved: After taking early retirement I joined several local groups, and having spent my career in banking this was frequently as either the Treasurer or accounts examiner. Through one of these groups I met Ron Wilder (VRS Chair) and Roger Lacey, both of whom were proud of and clearly greatly enjoyed their work with the VRS. Because I wanted to balance a lot of desk-based accounting work with something more physically active, in the autumn last year I joined the Western Downs Thursday group and now also participate in the recently formed Tuesday group.

Unusual fact about myself: I led the design and subsequent implementation of the UK's first live radio station exclusive to a major UK bank, going from first thoughts to broadcasting in just seven weeks. The station now plays in almost all branches of that bank and the idea was quickly taken up by some of its competitors. I dealt personally with all of the early customer feedback from customers, both good and bad. One customer was particularly impressed that, in reaction to his complaints of loud and intrusive music, I travelled across London in my lunchtime to visit his branch and hear it for myself – and consequently turned the sound down!

Recommended activity in the National Park: Petersfield Musical Festival – eight days of concerts organised by volunteers, held every March in the town since 1901. It showcases a wide range of music, from full orchestras and choirs to top jazz and other celebrity musicians, with two concerts given specially by children from local schools.

The festival was one of the very first of its kind in the UK and over the years has attracted many well-known and respected conductors and musicians.
Useful tip learnt through the VRS: Never try to pick up a piece of wood if you are already standing on it!

Anne Asha



Area: I volunteer on a Tuesday or Thursday with the Eastern Downs Stanmer Park group.
My first day with the VRS: My first task

was clearing scrub from the Downs overlooking Breaky Bottom vineyard near Rodmell. It was on a cold and wet day in January, but I had a great day – completely the opposite of what I had been doing in my working life.

How I got involved with the VRS: I have friends in the Lake District who are Volunteer Rangers with the National Park Authority and I always liked the sound of what they did. Late last year I investigated whether I could do something similar in the South Downs National Park, having resigned from full-time employment last September. I spoke to Anne Bush, who set up the day for me.

Unusual fact about myself: I have been keeping bees in my garden for the last three years. This is the first year I have done all of the work myself and there has been an awful lot to learn. The honey tastes marvellous and although last year was in general a bad year for honey, the previous year the bees produced 50lbs of it!

Recommended activity in the National Park: Any one of the circular walking routes from Devil's Dyke, ideally having taken one of the buses from the city centre – open topped in the summer. If you are coming from outside the area, parking is free for National Trust members.



A very muddy task

Central area weekend volunteers are a hardy bunch. On Sunday 17 March, we turned up at Barnham station prepared for action, but half expecting the task to be called off. We soon realised that when West Sussex Ranger Darren organises a task, a slight 'precipitation' falling from the skies is no problem...

The plan was to re-install wooden footpath steps up a steep muddy bank at Fittleworth and to replace a broken stile at the top of the bank with a metal kissing gate. 'Easy', I hear you say!

However with a weather forecast of heavy rain all day (two black blobs as I recall it on the met office site!), we all donned our waterproofs and got stuck in immediately. 'Stuck in' is a suitable description, as we fell into a quagmire as we descended from the land rover, while putting on our waterproofs.

The ever efficient Darren, paperwork done, unloaded the tools while we set to work immediately. Richard was in charge of steps, while we kept slipping and sliding past him to dig out old posts and make new holes for the gate. No chatter or admiring of views, but heads down, squelching around each other, we finally finished the steps and gate by 1.30pm.

At this point, soaked to the skin, we did not stop for lunch. Instead we headed home quickly for a hot bath, a strong drink and to clean mud off of everything! We felt satisfied that despite battling against the elements, the job was well done.

Let's hope that the steps and the gate have not been washed away by now. Despite nursing aching muscles the next day, we'll all turn up again come rain or shine in future. This volunteering is addictive, isn't it?

Helena Lewis, Volunteer Ranger, Central Downs

The Song of The Chainsaw

Oh the old Sussex songs by Hilaire Belloc
much loved
You never can 'ear 'em no more

No, you never can 'ear 'em.
You never can 'ear 'em.
You never can 'ear 'em, no more.

But still sung they are, full lustily, throat-sore,
By the hedgelayers, whilst laying and threshin'.
But you never can 'ear 'em (some say it's a blessin')
You never can 'ear 'em no more.

For in the world of sonority,
Throughout the cosmology,
The petrol engine is law.

And you can never quite 'ear 'em.
(You'd not want to be near 'em)
On account of the chainsaw's roar.

Ian Runcie, Volunteer Ranger, Eastern Downs



Pic in the Park

The oldest oak in the South Downs National Park, the Queen Elizabeth Oak, is named after Queen Bess who reputedly sheltered under it when she visited here in 1591. It is now designated by the Tree Council as one of 50 special trees in the UK, in recognition of its place in our national heritage.

Queen Elizabeth Oak, Cowdray Park, nr Midhurst, grid ref. SU 91 3227

In every issue we will display a new 'Pic in the Park'. So send in a photo of a quirky corner, special place or hidden gem that you think would suit this feature. Just email dt@southdowns.gov.uk. Please also supply a succinct description of 50 words and give details of its precise location, such as its grid reference or post code, so we can state where to find it (please note, it must be publicly accessible). Our first photo is located fairly centrally.

Caption competition

Can you create a witty caption for this photograph?
Email your ideas to dt@southdowns.gov.uk



In the next issue we'll publish the best captions. We'll also be looking for more photos for future editions of Downland Thymes, so send us your funny photos of volunteers at work or play.

News from the Authority



Give something back. Take nothing but pictures.

The South Downs National Park's photo and short film competitions are now open and this year we're challenging you to capture an image or shoot a film which tells the story of how people who love, live and visit the South Downs today value and care for it.

From leaving the car behind and taking the bus; to growing and enjoying amazing local food; or supporting a community event: the judges will be looking for photos and films that not only capture great stories but also inspire others to get out and get involved.

The winning photographer will receive £250, second place prize will be £150 and third place will be £50. The winning short film maker will receive £500, second place prize will be £300 and third place will be £150.

Find out how to enter at www.southdowns.gov.uk/photofilmcomp2013



Top left: Long Man of Wilmington by Joan Barham. Top right: An Avenue of Horse Daisies by John Wigley. Above: Looking to Lewes by James Ringland.

Have your say...

The South Downs National Park Authority is currently developing a Partnership Management Plan in close collaboration with all those who have an interest in the National Park, its protection and development. This Summer, it's time to tell us what you think...

The aims of the Partnership Management Plan are to outline strategic long-term plans for:

- **a thriving, living landscape.**
The protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the National Park, including its biodiversity and cultural heritage;
- **people connected to places.**
The promotion of opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the area's special qualities; and
- **a sustainable future.**
The encouragement of sustainable forms of economic and community development.

The first Partnership Management Plan for the South Downs National Park will run from 2014-19. Although the work is being led by the National Park Authority, the policies will be implemented by many organisations and individuals from across the South Downs.

Formal consultation on the plan will take place from late June to September. To find out more, or to have your say on how the park's landscapes, people, wildlife and economy will be managed, visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/about-us/management-plan



Shipwrights Way opens

In March, new sections of the Shipwrights Way trail in East Hampshire were declared open by Damian Hinds MP.

The project began in 2009 and was made possible through a partnership between East Hampshire District Council, Hampshire County Council, the South Downs National Park Authority, the VRS and the Forestry Commission.

The route traces the historic track taken by those bringing logs from Alice Holt Forest to Portsmouth Dockyards for shipbuilding. This is reflected in the name, Shipwrights Way. Currently about 47 of the 50 miles are completed, including an unbroken 40-mile stretch from Liphook to Portsmouth. It's expected that the trail will be finished in 2014.

Mike Deadman, a Walk Leader from Walking for Health, says: "The new kissing gates and landscaped paths mean we can walk in areas that had previously been inaccessible muddy patches only used by cattle".

Local artist, Richard Perry, has taken inspiration from workshops held in the communities along the Shipwrights Way to help him 'tell the story of the landscape' through several sculptures. Located along the route, they each will have a Quick Response code (QR) which allows you to link online to a variety of information about history and wildlife.

South Downs View

Want to know more about partnership projects and some big achievements across the National Park? Pick up your copy of South Downs View, launching mid May, from your local area office.

Get out and about this summer

The South Downs National Park events season is just kicking off. If you'd like to come along or help out manning the National Park stand, please email info@southdowns.gov.uk for the latest events programme.



Getting to know you!

Each issue we meet one of the South Downs team.

Name:

Ayla Forbes

Job title:

NIA (Nature Improvement Area)
Project Administrator

What does your role involve?

My role is to monitor and report on the progress of the NIA project. I keep a close eye on the finances to make sure we are spending according to our budget, collect and collate update reports from our partners, arrange workshops and visits for partners and Rangers and get out and about in the Downs to have a look at the work being done for the project.

What is the NIA?

The NIA is a £3m project, including £608,000 funding from Defra, to conserve, enhance and reconnect the ecological

network of the Downs including the flora, fauna, soils, geology and hydrology of the chalk. It also aims to connect local communities and businesses with the chalk landscapes and value what the Downs brings to us. The project brings together 29 partners including the Volunteer Ranger Service, Brighton & Hove City Council, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and Butterfly Conservation. It's an exciting and ambitious project and we hope you will see a real difference on the ground in terms of improved and newly created habitat for invertebrates and butterflies such as the Duke of Burgundy.

How might volunteers be involved in the project?

In the first year our volunteers contributed 424 days to NIA related tasks. Volunteers are very important to the delivery of the NIA and we plan to use their muscles and enthusiasm on future NIA tasks.

**What's your recommended activity in the South Downs National Park?**

Walking across the Downs at different times of the year and taking in its beauty, diversity and tranquillity.

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In the next issue, we'll be interviewing Allison Thorpe, Access and Recreation Strategy Lead. If you'd like to ask Allison a question, email dt@southdowns.gov.uk



Obituary – Alan Williams

Alan was the last of the original recruits to remain an active member of the VRS. Joining at the first of two public meetings held in Lewes during 1981, he worked with the outdoor practical work groups until the late 1990s. He continued as a Parish Path Ranger, monitoring Public Rights of Way and also put a lot of time into helping look after the herd of Exmoor ponies purchased by the VRS (now owned and managed by the charity Sussex Pony Grazing and Conservation Trust). The first Volunteer Ranger to serve for twenty years, he received his Gold Long Service badge on top of the Downs overlooking Firle, while on a visit to check the ponies. He finally retired from the VRS and

several years ago moved from Alfriston up to Oxfordshire to be closer to his family, where he died in late February.

For Phil Belden, SDNPA Operations Director, who worked with him in the early days of the VRS, he was: "the original VRS Committee – a critical friend, who had a real commitment to the future of the VRS and a passion for the Downs. While a measured and thoughtful man, he always made sure his views were clearly heard and understood".

**Ian Hartle, Volunteer Co-ordinator,
South Downs National Park Authority**

South Downs
Volunteer Ranger Service

South Downs
National Park

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