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# Downland THYMES

**News for the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service Issue 61, Aug-Sept 2013**

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## Going native at Birling Gap

Something exciting is happening on the cliff top at Birling Gap: Eastern VRS teams have been beavering away to make an interpretation garden. The garden will showcase our beautiful native chalk downland plants and will be used as an educational tool to raise awareness of native species.

### Driftwood sculpture

Driftwood collected from the beach and hauled up the steps, with much puffing and groaning, has been transformed into dramatic garden sculptures rippling across the garden like waves on the shore or the soft curves of chalk downs.

### Banking with Kew

Each border in the garden will represent distinct habitats found locally. Native plants that thrive on the shingle beach, species that brave the cliff edge and species that thrive together to form our incredible chalk grassland will all tell their story. We are even trying to represent the paradox of rare chalk heathland... Tricky!

We are receiving some fantastic support from the experts at Kew. Stephanie Miles and her team have advised us and the Millennium Seed Bank based at Wakehurst Place are growing some unusual plants appropriate to our location, such as Moon Carrot and Round-headed Rampion.

Other native plants have been locally sourced from Colin Reader of Wild Flower Meadows and Lawns, who seems completely unfazed by my challenging plant requests! It's great to know that the plants have a local provenance.

### Fish mesh and gabions

Local sculptor Christian Funnell, or Iron Man as he is affectionately known around here, has crafted a beautiful new barrier to protect visitors from falling over the cliff. We can now enjoy our National Trust coffee and cake in a spectacular cliff-top setting, with Christian's delightful metal fish swimming across our sea view!

Iron Man has also been at work building metal cages – Gabions – which the volunteers have filled with a chalk flint sandwich to evoke the cliff edge. These structures divide the seating area into more private sheltered areas for eating. They are planted on top with Thrift, Rock Sea Lavender, Wild Thyme and Biting Stonecrop.

### Outdoor classroom

A walled area at the rear of the garden is being transformed into a multi-functional seating space.

Inspired by the spiral ammonite form, the design incorporates a long wrap-around bench. This and other benches around the garden are being made by Ron Wells and his crack team of volunteers!

We have chosen to use Elm from the Cuckmere valley, which has been the victim of Dutch elm disease and will now be reborn as beautiful sculptural seating. Well done volunteers for all of that bark stripping!

Building this garden has been an amazing journey for me. I would like to say a huge thank you to all of the volunteers who have made the design come to life. Without your tremendous effort, skill and tenacity, through rain, wind and snow, this garden would still be just an idea in my head. You have made it happen, and it is a special place that everyone can enjoy. Well done team, I am so proud of you!

### Gabby Tofts, garden designer and volunteer, Eastern Downs

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*Volunteers hard at work building the new garden at Birling Gap. ©Gabby Tofts*





# Chairman's Corner

I had thought we might have a different Chair writing this piece, but due to a recurring illness, Nick Egerton has unfortunately had to resign. The VRS committee have therefore asked me to continue as Chair again this year.

I'm pleased that this year the Committee has moved forward with several initiatives seeking to benefit as many members as possible. The project to run our own ecology courses, using instructors from Sussex Wildlife Trust, has been extremely popular and well received. We will continue with other courses and seek to include some weekend dates in the future as well. These courses are thanks to the hard work of Russell Cleaver and Alastair Stewart of the Western Downs.

The Committee also decided to allocate funds to each individual area, for volunteers to spend on group activities they themselves wanted to organise. This funding is possible because some of our activities have attracted donations from appreciative organisations and individuals.

We would love to receive and consider applications for the travel fellowship fund, but so far we have received very few enquiries about how to claim it. The fund is for VRS members to help subsidise visits to other National Parks to see how they do things and then tell us about it.

Of course we can only provide services like this if the Committee has active volunteers who are willing to undertake such organisational tasks. So, if you like what we have been doing, please think about standing as a Committee member for your volunteer area.

**Ron Wilder, VRS Chairman**



# Update from the VRS Team

It has been a long time coming, but at the end of June we held the first of the new Introductory Training days for recently recruited Volunteer Rangers. 26 VRs came along to the days, including four of the Mosaic champions. We are reviewing the feedback from those sessions and planning how we will update the day before the next session in late October/early November. Thanks to those of you who have got back to us. From what I have heard so far, I think we will probably look to broaden the coverage of the day a little next time and approach more of our colleagues and/or partners to help deliver the day. We are planning to run three of these days each year from now on. We are also looking at other training packages we can put together to run on a regular basis and it is likely that one of the first of these will be looking at supporting 'public facing' volunteers – those attending events and people who talk to the public on behalf of SDNPA in other situations.

As I write, the new staff/volunteer intranet has just gone live. The look and feel of the system seems much improved and the scope for adding new material and functions is enhanced, although initially the content

of the pages is broadly the same as before. I look forward to more of the new facilities we have talked about being rolled out over the next couple of months.

You should all have received information about the draft South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan and the consultation process going on between now and 16 September. I would encourage you to get involved in this process: look at the draft plan and feed back your comments and views through the management plan survey. For more information, see the News from the Authority page in this issue of Downland Thymes.

Finally, the VRS AGM and get together on Saturday 20 July was a really excellent day and, as always, both informative and enjoyable. Thanks to both Margaret Paren and Trevor Beattie, SDNPA Chair and CEO, for coming along to talk to Volunteer Rangers. Thanks also to the Hampshire VRS Committee members for putting together the event and to Vicky Wakefield-Jarrett for co-ordinating attendance.

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

# Long service awards

Congratulations to all of those who received long service awards at this year's VRS AGM.

From left to right: Volunteer Rangers Jean Hicks, Nick Darby, Mike Rowe and Pam Craggs with SDNPA Chair Margaret Paren (centre) and their silver badges for ten years work with the VRS.



The Noar Hill walkers managed to find over 5 different species of wild orchid and numerous butterflies and moths on the reserve.



Pyramidal Orchid at Noar Hill.



Margaret Paren and Trevor Beattie answer questions during the business part of the day held in Gilbert White's House Field Studies Centre.



VRs had the chance to visit Gilbert White's House during the day at Selborne.

# News from this year's AGM

This year's AGM was hosted by the Western Downs at Gilbert White's House in Selborne, Hampshire, on 20 July.

During the day, annual accounts were approved and I was elected to be Chair of the VRS Committee again this year. Next year, the Committee will review the VRS Constitution – all volunteers are encouraged to contribute to this.

As part of the event, I highlighted achievements of the year and confirmed that the very successful ecology training sessions would continue. I also thanked Phil Belden for his stalwart support of the VRS and for securing substantial donations from the closure of the SDJC accounts.

Following VRS business, Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the South Downs National

Park Authority, gave a short talk praising the work and value of the VRS to the National Park and Margaret Paren, Chair of the Authority, joined him to answer questions.

Following the AGM, a very interesting and illuminating talk on the life of Gilbert White was given by Rosemary Irwin, Chair of the Trustees at Gilbert Whites House. After lunch, volunteers split into groups to take a self-guided walk, visit Gilbert White's House and Gardens or go on a guided walk of nearby Noar Hill Nature Reserve, led by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.

**Ron Wilder, VRS Chairman**



# Pic in the Park

## The return of Ratty

© Elaina Whittaker-Slark



Little is known of this huge flint structure, though reputedly behind it once stood a thatched luncheon house. If so, there is nothing left to suggest it. Nore Folly remains a majestic oddity, probably as curious today as when it was built some 250 years ago. This folly is just one of a number you can find in the South Downs National Park.

Interestingly, there is a website where you can find many more follies. Search for "Follies – Google earth" and you can see lots of follies all over the UK. If you are fond of a folly in the SDNP, please email **dt@southdowns.gov.uk** with a photo and a map reference. We can then feature more follies in a future issue.

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Nore Folly, near Slindon West Sussex. Grid ref SU 960090

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).

## Here's the story so far for the largest water vole reintroduction programme in the UK.

When did you last hear the distinctive 'plop' sound of a water vole entering the water as you walked along a river bank? For anyone walking along the River Meon, that would have been at least 5 years ago; before the water vole disappeared following predation from the American non-native mink.

The River Meon runs for 49 kilometres (of which 33kms are within the SDNP boundary), rising just south of the village of East Meon and running west towards West Meon, before turning due south again towards the coast and entering the sea at Titchfield Haven. A typical Hampshire chalk stream, it is used extensively for fly fishing and provides a high quality habitat along the majority of its length for the likes of the water vole.

The original project started in 2009 with the objective of controlling mink from the area in preparation for water vole reintroduction. Local landowners attended

the first series of workshops and were issued with rafts.

The raft is the primary weapon in the fight against mink, and it comprises of a large floating platform with a tunnel on the top. Inside the tunnel is a cartridge containing a permanently wet pad of clay which picks up the footprints of any small mammals passing through the tunnel. When regular inspection of the clay indicates a mink has passed over the raft, a live trap is then inserted into the tunnel to capture the mink. We currently have 30 rafts in operation, moving towards our goal of a raft on every kilometre of the river.

This network of rafts is supported by a team of eight South Downs volunteers, monitoring progress with bi-monthly phone calls to landowners and regular visits to collect, repair and return rafts. A number of volunteers have also been trained in surveying and water safety, so they can

carry out the necessary surveys to confirm habitat suitability and to monitor progress.

To date, the last mink was caught in February 2012 at the first release site. So with 12 months clear; the go ahead was given to start reintroduction of water voles. As many of you may have seen on either national or local TV, the first release of 200 animals took place at Titchfield Haven in the last week of June. This will be followed by a further 250 animals in August. This release heralds the start of a reintroduction programme, with releases planned for each of the next 3 years between April and September.

The programme involves close collaboration between a number of partner organisations, with volunteers working closely with members from The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, SDNPA, The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, The Environment Agency, Hampshire County Council, local fly fishing clubs and The Derek Gow Consultancy.

Now with the reintroduction well underway, we look forward to the return of the sights and sounds of water voles along the banks of the River Meon.

**Chris Page, Volunteer Ranger, Western Downs**



© Russell Cleaver



© Chris Page



© Chris Page



© Elaina Whittaker-Slark



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Budgets update

It may have slipped the attention of volunteers, but we currently have approval to spend cash from our own VRS area budgets. It can even be spent on social activities! This is the direct result of the November 2012 VRS Committee meeting, when my proposal to allocate specific funds annually to each of the four National Park areas was approved.

In any year, if volunteers in an area receive specific donations or earn income for work undertaken, 50% of those monies can be spent by the volunteers concerned on items of their own choice. The rest of the monies remain in the overall VRS 'pot'. If an area does not receive any such income or donations during the year, a sum of £150 will be allocated to that area to spend instead (e.g. Central Downs for 2013).

Why are we being so generous with our funds? Our intention is to try to spend some of the VRS largesse for the benefit of all volunteers. Also, over the last few years our funds have grown and we have no need to retain a large cash surplus.

So, as of last November, the VRS Committee agreed we should spend area budgets on anything that benefits the National Park and its volunteers. Each area can decide how they spend their money, and the volunteers must agree on what they want. For example, social events, specialised tools and bespoke training courses or talks are just some examples of things that can be funded.

The VRS Committee member for each area must apply to the VRS financial sub-committee for approval. The members are: R. Wilder, VRS Chair; N. Brooke, VRS Treasurer; N. Egerton, Central Downs representative; S. Allberry, Weald & Heath representative and C. Hicks, Eastern Downs representative. Every claim must be backed up by an invoice and/or receipt, and payment is then made by a VRS cheque.

The chart below shows the sums accrued in each area that is now available to spend (correct as of July 2013). Please support us by suggesting ideas to the VRS Committee and help spend this money!

Nevill Brooke, Hon. Treasurer, South Downs VRS

Area	£	Comments
Eastern Downs	319.00	Available
Wealden Heaths	160.00	Available
Central Downs	150.00	Available
Western Downs	375.00	Balance
	Less 125.00	Summer social
	250.00	Available

Huge windfall for VRS

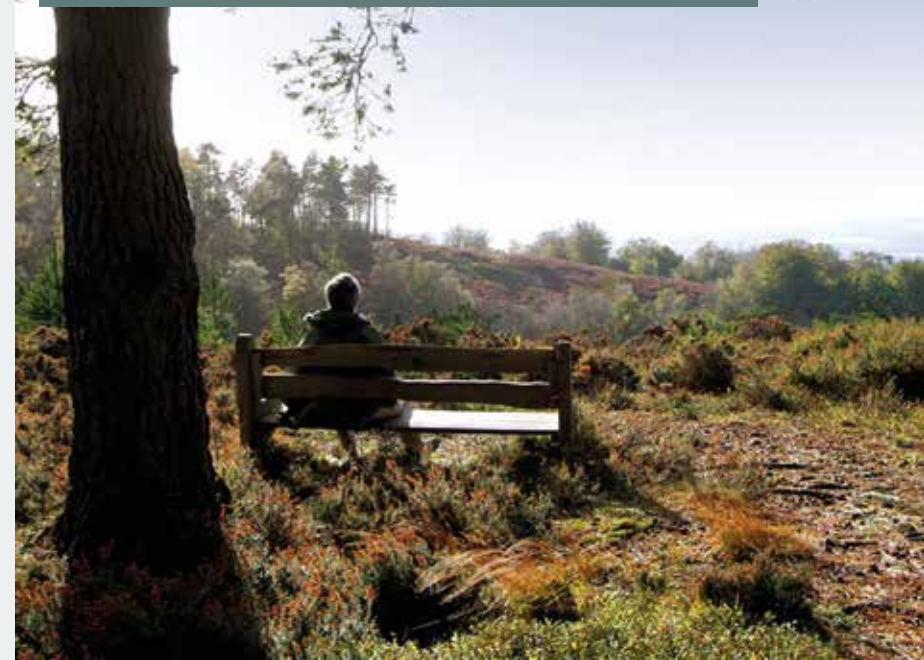
Christmas has arrived early for the South Downs VRS! Thanks to persistent hard work by Phil Belden, SDNPA Director of Operations, it has just been announced that the VRS coffers are to be swollen by a staggering £30,000. In short, following the formal wind-up of the South Downs Joint Committee, there was a surplus remaining, so Phil approached the contributing authorities to ask if they would consider allocating their surplus portion to the VRS, to 'protect, conserve and enhance the South Downs'. As a result, Natural England, Adur, Arun, Brighton & Hove, Chichester,

Eastbourne and Mid-Sussex councils donated their share to the VRS.

This is wonderful news for the VRS, so the challenge is now for the VRS Committee, with input from all Volunteer Rangers, to decide how best to utilise these funds. If we are creative we might even be able to use this money as matched-funding to achieve even more! So please get your thinking caps on – the VRS Committee needs your ideas!

Nevill Brooke, Hon. Treasurer, South Downs VRS

Know Your Downs



Blackdown

Do you ever wonder what there is to explore in other parts of the National Park? There's so much to see and do that it's hard to know where to start! This Know Your Downs feature will share some of the South Downs' secrets with you, and in this edition, we're looking at Blackdown.

Blackdown, just south of Haslemere, is the highest hill top within the South Downs National Park, peaking at 919 feet (280 metres) above sea level. The famous panoramic view over the Park is seen best from a place named the 'Temple of the Winds' on the southern side of the hill.

People have been living on Blackdown since the mesolithic times and an old sunken track runs from Haslemere to the summit, called "Pen-y-Bos" which may have meant 'the end of the cattle trail'. Also situated on this hilltop is a large Bronze Age burial mound.

Blackdown had a telegraph station built near its summit, one of seven which were used strategically from 1796 to 1816, to enable messages to travel via Semaphore quickly from London to Portsmouth and back again for the Admiralty of the British Fleet.

Lord Alfred Tennyson, who was Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom during much of Queen Victoria's reign, fell in love with Blackdown and built Aldworth House just below the summit in 1868.

In 1967 a Spanish airliner crashed into the hill side killing 37 people including a young British actress named June Thorburn. Thorburn was most famous for her role as the Fairy Queen in the film 'Tom Thumb'.

Today most of Blackdown is owned by the National Trust as it was donated to them by W.E. Hunter back in 1948. Over the last ten years, with help from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Wealden Greensand Heath Project, the National Trust has brought back the lost heath to the top of the hill and fenced it in to enable traditional cattle grazing on the site. Consequently biodiversity has doubled in rare species and the open views are once more visible.

Blackdown is visited by numerous walkers, cyclists and horse riders, who go there to look out on the wonderful patchwork quilted landscape of the South Downs National Park with its woods, hedgerows, fields and hidden villages.



# Welcoming our new starters

## Hannah Grimes



**Area:** I volunteer with the Sunday Midhurst group.

**My first day with the VRS:** Coppicing chestnut on the Cowdray Estate to create habitat for the Pearl Bordered Fritillary.

**How I got involved with the VRS:** I used to do conservation volunteering at university and I really enjoyed it. After finishing university I got a job working in a laboratory and I moved to Pulborough. I got fed up with being stuck inside all day and wanted to get out in the countryside and meet new people. I had a look on the internet and found out about the VRS. It was one of the few groups that offered weekend tasks and I thought it would be a good way to get to know the South Downs better.

**Unusual fact about myself:** I studied geography and geology at university. I then got a job at the University of Surrey in their Nutrition department, researching the use of fish oil supplements for the management of cardiovascular risk. This

# Conundrum

“The camel is the only animal that cannot swim – because its balance is wrong, so that its head goes under water and it drowns”.

.....

Ref. Everybody's Pocket Companion compiled by A. Mercer, M.R.S.T – ca. 1935.

I came across this statement in an old booklet the other day and it set me thinking, so I posed the question “what is the only animal that can't swim?” to a group of volunteer rangers when we were travelling out to task in the Land Rover.

Lots of life experience and some weighty intellects were present, I thought. But after the initial stunned shock and some embarrassed squirming about in seats (this question clearly confirmed that I was more than a little strange), they decided to humour me with a few suggestions (not all rude). However, it soon became blindingly obvious that no-one had the answer!

In each new edition of Downland Thymes we'd like to introduce you to some of our new starters. This month, say hello to Hannah Grimes and Geoff Ferguson.

involved analysing lots of blood samples. I now work as a Laboratory Technician in their Microbiology department, looking at bacteria and fungus all day.

**Recommended activity in the National Park:** Walking the South Downs Way near Bignor. Great views of both the North Downs and the sea on a clear day.

## Geoff Ferguson



**Area:** I volunteer on Thursdays at Seven Sisters.

**My first day with the VRS:** I went out with the group to Arlington Reservoir where a new fence was being woven and some scrub cleared; it was a case of mucking in and learning some new skills. The group were very welcoming to a newcomer and I enjoyed it so much I returned. The agency we were working for handed out a late Christmas present of shortbread, and I thought 'If this is what it is like every week, I might as well sign up!'

**How I got involved:** I returned to Eastbourne from Pembrokeshire in 2006. Initially when I tried to join I was told only

office jobs were available, but I didn't want that. I saw an article in the Eastbourne Herald in December about the group so I contacted Anne Bush to see if volunteers were needed. Whilst in West Wales I did some work for West Wales Wildlife Trust; I helped look after one of their reserves at West Williamston as a volunteer. I have become more interested in this work over the years as my elder daughter is a Senior Ecologist specialising in Bats.

**Unusual fact about myself:** Probably my mixing of heavy rock music with rambling with Beachy Head Ramblers whilst finding time to support Eastbourne Borough FC and running two allotments – time management is important!

**Recommended activity in the National Park:** Being a member of Beachy Head Ramblers, I am bound to say rambling. There are so many vistas, from the Seven Sisters to walking in Friston Forest to Lullington Heath, then again along the Ouse taking in Rodmell, then up Itford Hill to Beddingham and Mount Caburn. So many walks, so little time!

- verification but the best I could come up with is:
- Camels (at least dromedaries) CAN swim;
  - Humans don't swim instinctively, they have to be taught;
  - Large primates (gorillas, orang-utans) may be able to float but can't swim, but most monkeys can swim;
  - Giraffes and kangaroos can swim;
  - Most armadillos can't swim (but one species can), nor can pangolins, anteaters and aardvarks (their body armour weights them down);
  - The jury seems to be out on hippos.

PS. Please do not attempt any empirical testing.

P.P.S. Elephants can't jump (but who would want them to anyway?)

**Martin Cowell, Volunteer Ranger, Western Downs**



# Silver-Studded success

Chapel Common, situated between Rake and Liphook in the far west of Sussex, is a regular work site for volunteer rangers based at Midhurst. Work tasks include scrub clearance and in the summer, ragwort clearance. The site has developed into a very good heathland site, with a healthy colony of Silver-Studded Blue butterflies.

The Silver-Studded Blue, which is on the wing in June and July, is a red data list species i.e. amongst the most threatened of British butterfly species. The excellent work carried out by conservation volunteers has been hugely beneficial to the colony, making available a significantly larger potential breeding area as a result of clearance work.

The Silver-Studded Blue has a very interesting life cycle. The butterflies lay their eggs at the base of emerging heather plants. The caterpillar hatches out and feeds on the heather. It also develops a symbiotic relationship with black ants: The caterpillar secretes honeydew from a gland on its back which feeds the ants, and in return, the ants protect the caterpillar. The caterpillar pupates either on the ground or within the ant's nest.

When it hatches into a butterfly, the Silver-Studded Blue crawls to the top of the heather plants and pumps up its wings in the sunshine. Only the males of the species are blue, the females are brown. The average life of the butterfly is estimated at only 3-5 days, although it can live for longer.

The butterfly definitely has breeding on its mind when it emerges. It is an extremely sedentary species, often not moving more than a few metres from where it hatched. It is also very low-flying, so will not normally

fly over any natural barriers. The result of this is that it is very site-bound, and unlikely to naturally colonise any new heathland sites. Lowland heaths are extremely vulnerable to attack from colonising species such as birch, gorse and scots pine which can quickly infiltrate a site and rapidly shade out and ultimately destroy the heather.

The Chapel Common site has shown improved population numbers despite the tough weather conditions of the last two summers. With continued active management by the SDNP and its volunteer rangers, numbers will hopefully continue to improve for many years to come. Endangered butterflies are a good indicator of the health of a site, because of their demanding habitat requirements. Detailed population monitoring provides a measure of the success of the conservation work undertaken.

For more details about the life of British butterfly species, visit the Butterfly Conservation web page.

PS. The 2013 season has kicked into life with reasonable numbers of Silver-Studded Blues being seen.

**Arthur Greenwood, Volunteer Ranger and butterfly enthusiast, Wealden Heaths**



Top: Volunteers relaxing during a day's work;  
Middle: Male Silver-Studded blue;  
Bottom: Female Silver-Studded blue.





# The river flying squad

In June, a number of Western Downs volunteers, area team staff, anglers and conservationists learnt about monitoring the health of water courses. The chalk stream of the river Meon at Warnford provided the perfect backdrop, with waders, nets and microscopes as the tools for the day.

Invertebrates of rivers provide the essential component to river ecology and the species and numbers act as indicators to the health of the river.

Nationally launched in March 2007, the Riverfly Partnership promotes and manages the Riverfly Monitoring Initiative. They run a one-day workshop where they train attendees in a simple monitoring technique which can be used to detect any severe perturbations in river water quality.

The monitoring scheme, used alongside routine monitoring by the Environment Agency, ensures that water quality is checked more widely and action is taken at the earliest opportunity should any issues be detected. It also acts as a deterrent to incidental polluters.

The aim of this recent workshop was to train a group of supporters on the river Meon, with the VRS complementing the work of others by becoming guardians: addressing the 'gaps' and carrying out



monthly health checks on a specific patch of water. The long-term objective is to work with stakeholders to extend this activity to the upper Rother and others parts of the South Downs National Park.

We were lucky to be joined by Dr Cyril Bennett, the pioneer of this work who has just been awarded an MBE for his dedication to river conservation. He is also known as 'the man with two labs': one being his faithful dog, and the other is a science lab that he hand-built in his van!

**Nick Heasman, Area Manager, Western Downs**

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From top: Riverfly monitoring aka messing about in the water; Small invertebrates including fresh water shrimps olives and a bullhead fish; Riverfly monitoring training workshop. © Nick Heasman

# The road to folly

Not long ago I drove along the A272 towards Winchester: I was on the hunt for a curious circle of stones. I had heard that a circle of stones existed near Bramdean as a sort of folly, but it was now lost under weeds. I felt rather foolish, stopping by the roadside to look for rocks, but once I arrived I found it worth the visit.



The story I heard was that a small sarsen megalith had been constructed here by a Colonel Greenwood in the 1830s. It is said that the Colonel had been advised by doctors to take up more exercise for his health, so he transported stones by wheelbarrow to build himself a megalith.

However, what I discovered was difficult to decipher: just a lot of big rocks hidden in undergrowth. But here began an idea for a VRS project to reveal a lost nineteenth century folly.

Western Area rangers were supportive of the idea that volunteers could undertake this project, but it took them a while to convince both the local parish council and landowner that we would enhance the site.

At last we obtained approval, and upon arrival our plan was to clear the stones of undergrowth and make them more visible for modern travellers along the A272. They needed a lot of clearance; several stones had been dislodged by a large hazel, which needed the caress of a chainsaw to release it.

Once revealed, we found eighteen large stones lying in rough groups. They appeared to form perhaps five mini-cromlechs or megaliths, two remaining intact. We saw that the stones themselves lay upon a circular platform about 8 metres in diameter. It looked as if the surrounding land had once been quarried, leaving these large stones prominent. For what purpose the stones were originally placed here was impossible to guess. Idiosyncratic and certainly useless, they bear all the hallmarks of a genuine folly. The good Colonel must have been a very eccentric one.

But to try and reassemble even one of the fallen cromlechs was sadly out of the question. Besides needing the landowner's permission, these stones are heavy. Reconstruction work would require health and safety approval, so we left that argument for another day.

**Russell Cleaver, Volunteer Ranger, Western Downs**

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From top: The stones before, during and after clearance. © Russell Cleaver



# Following in the footsteps

Continued from page 5 of May's edition of Downland Thymes.

## Part two of two

King Guthrum seized Chippenham and used this as his base from which to try and destroy the Wessex forces. Many who lived in Hampshire fled to the Isle of Wight, at that time populated by Jutes.

Alfred was proving himself to be an intelligent and resourceful innovator with firmly held Christian beliefs, able to inspire those loyal to him. He clearly understood many of the Vikings' tactics which included the use of their ships to conduct lightning raids, the pillaging of monasteries, nunneries and churches for wealth and horses, their use of hostages for ransom and their demands of payment of 'geld' to be left alone.

Despite his chronic ill health (now believed to be the inflammatory bowel or Crohn's disease), Alfred mobilised his troops, adapted the tactics of his enemy and waged guerrilla warfare against his enemies. In May 878 he fought Guthrum at Edington (Wiltshire) and chased the Danes back to Chippenham. After a siege of two weeks, Guthrum surrendered to him under terms demanded by Alfred. These required that Guthrum be baptised a Christian and the ceremony was conducted at Wedmore in Somerset when

Alfred undertook the role of his godfather. The treaty known as the Peace of Wedmore allowed Guthrum to retire to live in the East Anglia region.

Alfred understood that the pillaging of monasteries by the Danes had robbed his kingdom of historically important written manuscripts and about this time he determined to learn Latin. He achieved his aim and was able not only to read and write in Latin but to translate many acquired Latin manuscripts into his own language. He used the knowledge that he gained to try and improve the laws of his kingdom, to support the recording of important matters in the Anglo Saxon Chronicles and to improve the lot of his people.

Divisions of land into Shires had started before Alfred's reign and he began to encourage local government and the formation of 'burhs'. He consolidated the defences of his kingdom by fortifying key areas along its borders of land and sea. Often the burhs were on previously developed sites, improved by throwing up mounds, building turf covered ramparts and on occasion, erecting palisades of wood. Some re-used Iron Age fortifications or the sites of Roman forts. At Lewes, the fortification was built on a promontory with a simple ditch and bank.

All these defences were funded by giving free plots of land to settlers who were then required to cover the cost and subsequent defence of the works. The system was based on 'hideage'. The hide was a unit of measurement of the amount of land needed to support a family and varied according to the quality of the land in a particular area. In general, one man was needed to defend and maintain one hide of 1.26 m (about 4 ft). For every acre breadth of wall, 16 hides were required. There were 33 burhs in total, spaced about 30km (19 miles) apart and including Southampton (150 hides), Porchester (500 hides), Lewes (1300 hides) and Hastings (500 hides). Present day Lewes was a burh recorded as Laewe in the Burghal Hideage.

Defence of these burhs required about 25,000 men, garrisons known as the Burgware. Alfred also had a field army (fyrd)

of between 4,000 and 5,000 men (Thegns) – effectively an army of about 2,000 at any time. He developed a rota system so that half of his fyrd were allowed to till their land whilst the other half provided a rapid reaction force.

Sporadic hostilities between Saxons and Danes continued, and in 886 London was claimed from Danish occupation and agreement was reached that the country be divided into two zones. The Danes would rule the east and the north under Danelaw and the Saxon Law would hold for the south and west. By now, the northern boundary of the Kingdom of Wessex stretched from the Severn Estuary to the River Thames and included London.

During his reign, Alfred organised a trained cavalry, re-thought battle plans and vastly improved the Wessex fleet to form what eventually became the British Navy. In 896, with nine new ships, his men began to win some coastal sea battles. One of these was in the Solent, and resulted in the Danish marauders having to beach their boats at the mouth of a river and flee for their lives.

He also established schools and promoted learning and literacy whilst assembling a recognised legal code and Anglo Saxon law. His Christian beliefs were unwavering and around 888 he built Shaftesbury Abbey, the first religious house for women only, and installed his youngest daughter Aethelgifu as the first Abbess of a Benedictine Nunnery.

He died on October 26 899 aged 50, and was succeeded by his son Edward the Elder. Initially buried at the Old Minster, Winchester, his bones were later disinterred and re-buried in Hyde Abbey, but they were lost when it was destroyed during the reformation.

His many achievements still have a bearing on our lives and it is good that he may have enjoyed so many areas in the green and pleasant land of the SDNP where we follow in his footsteps! He merits his unique English monarchy title of Alfred the Great.

**Shirley Brice, Volunteer Ranger, Seven Sisters Country Park**

# Your reviews

This section is all about sharing reviews 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](mailto:dt@southdowns.gov.uk) with a picture and up to 100 words description.



**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.

Shepherd and Dog, The Street, Fulking, Henfield, West Sussex BN5 9LU

The Shepherd and Dog pub is a great place to stop in for refreshments if you're out and about near Fulking. The owners recently launched their own brewery (visit [www.downlandsbrewery.com](http://www.downlandsbrewery.com) for information) and you'll find plenty of freshly prepared and locally sourced food on the menu. With gnarled oak beams, wobbly walls and an inglenook fireplace, it's a cosy place to while away a few hours.

**Downland Thymes Editorial Team**

## Book Club

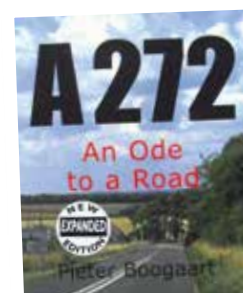
'A272, An Ode to a Road' by Pieter Boogaart

This book is not new, it was first published in 1999 and has since been subsequently revised and updated. It is well worth reading as it is now regarded as somewhat of a cult classic.

The book is ingeniously set out and summarises the road, its features, follies and fellow travellers within ten miles north and south as it travels from East Sussex to Winchester. And thus it covers most of the National Park. It delivers much more than the dreaded words 'guide book' would suggest – the author wittily describes the many quirks of history, buildings,

landscape and people that inhabit the area we know, live and volunteer in. And it also mentions the follies we feature in this issue of the Downland Thymes.

**Russell Cleaver, Volunteer Ranger, Western Downs**



## Caption competition

Can you create a witty caption for this photograph? Email your ideas to [dt@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:dt@southdowns.gov.uk)



In the next issue we'll publish the winning caption, judged by the editorial team. 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.

**Our winner from the May edition:**



"The tough woodland camouflage shorts Jim had ordered were not as expected".

**Graham Wynne, Western Area Team**





# News from the Authority

## Organisational restructure and the VRS

If you were at the VRS annual meeting, you will have heard that the National Park Authority has just started a staff consultation into an organisational restructure.

The current staff structure was put in place to meet the needs of the organisation during its initial start-up phase. Since the formation of the National Park, the Authority has been developing various policies and planning for the future of the South Downs, and now the Partnership Management Plan is in consultation, we're moving towards a new delivery phase: where we embed these policies and turn ambitious projects into reality. The proposed staff restructure is aligned to this delivery programme, so that teams can work more collaboratively and efficiently.

In terms of volunteering, we have taken on board your feedback from the VRS review, and there are a few key changes for you to be aware of:

1. The proposed new structure will include a dedicated officer who will work strategically to coordinate the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service across the National Park, as well as promoting the diversification and development of volunteering in the future.

2. This strategic function will be supported by day-to-day management from the four area teams at a local level, allowing volunteers to build stronger relationships with their local rangers, with tasks and projects directly managed in the local area.

3. The new structure recommends a centralised admin function for the organisation, which will include the VRS, which should mean that issues such as uniform procurement, collating of task reports, organising training etc. will be dealt with by a dedicated officer backed up by a central admin team, rather than out in the areas or through a chain of requests.

The roles of Volunteer Coordinator and Volunteer Task Coordinator are not in the proposed new structure, but there will be a new post of Volunteer Development Officer. The Volunteer Support Officer will become part of the Corporate Services team, and there will also be a new assistant ranger post in each of the Area teams, to support the team with the day-to-day VRS

management. For now it should be 'business as usual' for the VRS, as the old structure will continue until the staff consultation is completed and the various posts have been filled. However, please bear with us during this transitional time, as these proposed changes will have an impact on some individuals within the organisation.

The consultation will run until the beginning of September and it is planned that the new structure should be in place towards the end of the calendar year, probably by late November 2013. We appreciate that you may have concerns, or you may wish to take this opportunity to tell us your ideas about the future of the VRS. Please send your comments to **VRScomments@southdowns.gov.uk**. This inbox will be monitored by Human Resources, who will share your responses with me and the Senior Management Team as part of the restructure process.

**Phil Belden**  
Director of Operations

## South Downs wins HLF funding to uncover secret history

Plans to uncover the history of the South Downs National Park using airborne laser technology (Lidar) and local communities on the ground have won £661,800 funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

While the South Downs is famous for Iron and Bronze Age monuments such as Cissbury Ring and Winchester Hill, more than 17,000 ha of the National Park lies under ancient forest, meaning that almost nothing is known about the ancient history of this area. 'Hidden landscapes of the High Woods' will survey the most densely wooded area between the river Arun and the A3.

Anne Bone, who leads on Cultural Heritage at the South Downs National Park Authority said: "This is the first time that the area under the trees will be mapped in such detail. Lidar technology fitted in a small plane will direct a laser at the ground and measure the reflected light. This data will then be analyzed to create a 3D map showing all the 'lumps and bumps' under the trees.

"In the final stage we will be working with local archaeologists and community groups to investigate these sites further.

I'm sure the VRS members will be key to this part of the programme, helping us to carefully clear sites on the ground and allowing us to discover the secret history of the area".

She adds: "There are a few aerial photographs of this area which open a tantalising window into the South Downs' hidden past. There is so much that we don't know about the history of the people who lived here and if we don't know what's there how can we protect it for the future?"

With 38,000 hectares of woodland, the South Downs National Park has a greater area of tree coverage than any other National Park in England and Wales. This varies from ancient yew forests to modern plantations, but nearly half of the woodland (45 per cent) is classed as ancient or semi-natural woods meaning that the land has been under constant tree cover for more than 400 years.

The project will be led by the South Downs National Park Authority, in partnership with Chichester District Council and with the support of West Sussex and Hampshire County Councils.

## Chair re-appointed and new Deputy Chair elected for SDNPA

Margaret Paren OBE has been re-elected as Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority, for the third year, at a full meeting of the Authority on Tuesday 18 June 2013. Norman Dingemans was appointed as Deputy Chair at the same meeting following a vote by all Members. The two roles became effective immediately for a period of one year.

Margaret Paren OBE was elected Chair of South Downs National Park Authority at the Authority's inaugural meeting on 20 April 2010. Margaret's working career was spent in Whitehall, mainly in the Ministry of Defence but also with spells in the Cabinet Office and in the National Audit Office. After taking early retirement she became involved in local community activities and the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) and from 2001 she was heavily engaged in the South Downs, both as a campaigner for the National Park and as a member of the South Downs Joint Committee.

Norman Dingemans was brought up in Steyning where his father was a local GP and before the designation of the National Park was a long-standing member of the South Downs Joint Committee. He completed a full career in the Royal Navy followed by fifteen years in Investment and Healthcare businesses. He has been a District Councillor for Arun since 1995, was Leader of the Council from 2002 to 2006 and is presently Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and Cultural Development.



# Getting to know you!

Each issue we meet one of the South Downs team.

## Name:

Allison Thorpe

## Job title:

Access and Recreation Strategy Lead

## What does your role involve?

I am responsible for pulling together the access, recreation and sustainable travel sections of the draft Partnership Management Plan. Over the last eighteen months or so I have been working with local highways authorities on projects funded through the Dept. for Transport's Local Sustainable Transport Fund. The

programme of works is all about making it easier for National Park visitors to travel more sustainably by walking, cycling or using public transport. We have also recently won a bid for more funds for cycle routes in the National Park.

## How might volunteers be involved in your projects?

There are many opportunities for the VRS to get involved in access and sustainable travel work. Last year the VRS worked with the Hampshire CC Rights of Way team to make substantial improvements to some of the bridleways in the Bishops Waltham area, making them more accessible for all users.



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

It's too difficult to answer with just one recommendation! Right now I would say take a walk that finishes at a pub, then sit outside and drink in the view along with your favourite tipple.

*In the next issue, we'll be interviewing Anne Bone, Cultural Heritage Strategy Lead. If you'd like to ask Anne a question, email [dt@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:dt@southdowns.gov.uk)*

## Obituary – Alan Holyoake

I first met Alan in the autumn of 1995; we joined the VRS at the same time and attended our training together.

In the early years, there weren't too many Rangers on the Eastern Area weekend rota, so we worked together almost every month. I was always pleased to see Alan's name on the same rota; he was always so cheerful, up-beat and friendly and he was guaranteed to make me laugh with his home-made jokes. Sometimes we talked about his wartime and service memories. Clearing a path on Lullington Heath together, we discovered a World War II grenade, which Alan recognised immediately, calling an immediate halt to the day. Driving home later, I saw the bomb disposal squad heading for the site.

Alan worked many more days each month than the one day we were expected to; I know there were years when he put in more time than a full-time staff member! However, latterly, Alan had to give up the weekend rota, saying that the physical tasks had got the better of him – although he had continued well into his 80s! He carried on with his daily litter picks and other jobs around Seven

Sisters Country Park right up until he died.

Many Volunteer Rangers attended his funeral. I know I shall really, really miss him. He was a shining example of someone 'whose like we will never meet again'.

### Karen Ingrams, Volunteer Ranger, Seven Sisters weekend group



*Alan at Seven Sisters Country Park, where hundreds of fish died during the heatwave of 2003.*

## Love it or hate it...

... Tell us your thoughts about Downland Thymes. What new features would you like to see? Which articles did you like? Would you prefer to read it online?

Downland Thymes is put together by an editorial team, made up of SDNPA communications team members, the VRS team and Russell Cleaver from the VRS Committee. We'd love to hear your views, so please send your feedback to [dt@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:dt@southdowns.gov.uk) or to [russanne.cleaver@gmail.com](mailto:russanne.cleaver@gmail.com)

If you'd like to download a copy of Downland Thymes, visit the National Park website: [www.southdowns.gov.uk/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-ranger-service](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-ranger-service)

## South Downs

Volunteer Ranger Service



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