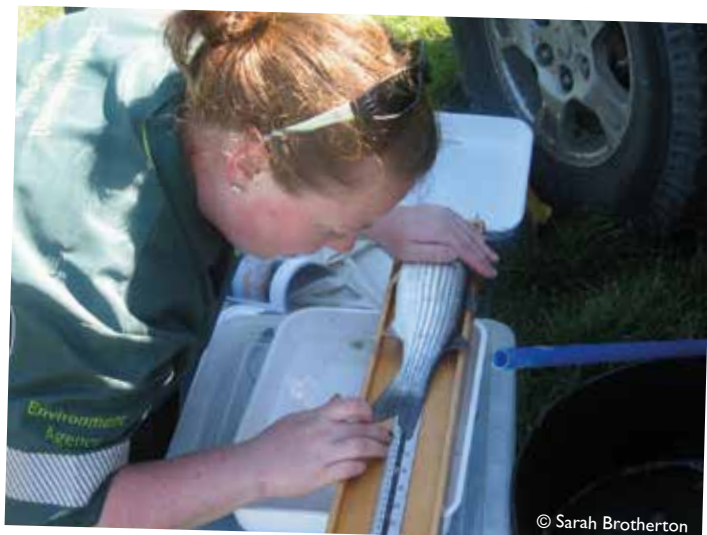


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News for the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service Issue 62, December 2013



Left: The team carefully brings in the first net at low tide on the Cuckmere Estuary. Above: Sarah Healy from the EA measures the biggest catch of the day – a thick lipped mullet.

Saving Cuckmere's Fish

The Cuckmere River Estuary bustled with activity in June and September as two small-fish surveys were carried out. Fish are key indicator species of the ecological health of estuaries and Volunteer Rangers were able to take part in this important work.

This was the first monitoring of small fish on the Cuckmere River Estuary at Seven Sisters Country Park for five years. Such surveys give an estimate of fish populations that, if monitored regularly over time, can be built up into a database of abundance and frequencies of different species.

I took part in both surveys, while Volunteer Ranger Alan Jones also participated in June. The surveys were conducted jointly by SDNPA, EA (Environment Agency) and IFCA (Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority).

Seine nets

The monitoring involved taking two surveys at low tide and then at high tide using seine nets in different locations, to provide a snapshot of the richness of fish species in

the estuary. The seine net was taken out into the river in an arc, with the bottom of the net dropping to the river bed via a weighted lead line. The net was then carefully hauled in by hand keeping the lead line on the river substrate, thereby scooping up all fish and other aquatic animals within the net area. IFCA staff were kitted out in drysuits to enter the water and set the nets, while Alan, myself and EA staff helped bring the nets in and quickly ready them for the next survey which was done 15 minutes later.

Identified and measured

Each 'catch' of fish was put into a separate bucket and then identified and measured by members of EA and IFCA, before being released back. In September, I got to test my

fish identification skills as I also measured and identified some of the netted fish. At low tide the catch consisted of juvenile flounder, sand goby and juvenile sea bass – a species of conservation concern due to collapsed stocks in recent years. At the high-tide catch, mullet, sand eels and herring were also netted. The September survey yielded much larger numbers of fish, especially at the low-tide surveys. Although I'd often seen large fish in the estuary, until now I had no idea they were probably mullet.

I found the surveying thoroughly interesting which led to an enjoyable day. I learned new skills and gained an understanding of some of the work both the EA and IFCA carry out. One of the highlights for me was seeing sea gooseberries, a type of comb-jelly, netted in June. Although they were not counted in the survey, their multi-coloured luminescence made them fascinating to watch as they moved round the buckets.

Sarah Brotherton – SDNPA VRS



Chairman's Corner

Welcome to this special, festive issue with its Christmas quiz, Cracker type jokes and even a Christmas Tale. I'm sure you'll enjoy it. I'm also pleased to welcome our new editor, Fiona Eadie, who will project manage the Downland Thymes in future.

However, it's sad that this issue carries news of the death of Nick Egerton, last year's Vice-Chair and a long-time stalwart of the VRS. Our thoughts and sympathies go out to Nick's wife Marion and family. Sadly, this leaves the Central Downs Area without any VRS Committee representation and we also have other vacancies, so please do consider whether you yourself should apply and so help us keep the VRS a vibrant and inspiring organisation.

The New Year will see us all involved with making a start on the provision of water points along the South Downs Way, in memory of our founder Paul Millmore, and we intend to continue the highly successful programme of training courses, including weekend dates. We will also be involved in the launch of the SDNPA Partnership Management Plan, which includes several important policies and projects directly linked to our volunteering work. When it's released, do read it and see where your efforts can contribute to the future of the South Downs. It's a living document, especially within the Delivery Framework, so do make suggestions for further development.

So, have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and, since I'm sure you'll really enjoy this issue, why not contribute an article for the next edition, which is due out in March.

Ron Wilder, VRS Chairman



Update from the VRS Team

I recently visited the New Forest for the annual gathering of National Park Volunteer Co-ordinators. While much of the time was spent round a table, we had a really interesting visit out to meet staff and volunteers working on the National Park Authority's Heritage Mapping project. An aerial survey using lasers in a technique called LIDAR has been carried out, enabling the creation of maps showing hundreds of potential archaeological sites hitherto hidden in woodland. Volunteers and staff are now going out into the Forest to look at these sites in more detail and establish whether they merit further investigation. Is that lump on the map a possible burial site, or just a pile of logs?

If this sounds familiar, it's probably because we talked about a similar project for the wooded West Sussex Downs in the last issue of Downland Thymes. We have now recruited a LIDAR Project Officer to take the project forward. When the aerial survey is complete and the maps have been produced – towards the end of 2014 – we will start the process of 'ground-truthing' the features that the survey shows. This will form a significant new area of work for Volunteer Rangers and is likely to take years to complete. We'll keep you up to date with how the project develops.

We are continuing to work with our Comms team to add content and facilities to the volunteer section of the staff and volunteer intranet. You can already upload pictures and documents to the area, and we will be adding to the structure and content over the coming weeks and months. If you haven't looked recently, do.

The Learning section of the South Downs website now contains an interactive map showing outdoor education providers across the National Park. We are going to produce something similar for organisations which involve volunteers, and this should

be available by the spring. The map will help organisations recruit volunteers and find other groups with whom to share or exchange skills and resources. The SDNPA would like to become a 'hub' for volunteering in support of the National Park and this will be a significant first step. Groups will be able to add and maintain their own information, so it will be easy to keep accurate and up-to-date. The VRS will be on the map and we will contact the 170 organisations found in the audit of volunteering in the Park that was done last year. If you volunteer with another group, that you think could benefit by being on the map, do let us know.

Thank you all for the huge amount of effort you have put in to work for the National Park this year. A number of festive get-togethers have been organised, so I hope you have a chance to get to one of them. Have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

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



Volunteers in the New Forest use iPads and their GPS facilities to match aerial map information with what's on the ground.



Visiting the Seed Hub established on newly acquired farm land.

Seeds for the future

Volunteer Ranger tasks are diverse. This year I helped collect cowslip and fairy flax seeds with South East Water Ranger, Tracey Younghusband. Sunshine and downland granted us reasonable success in finding seeds to be cleaned and stored temporarily at the Millennium Seed Bank at Wakehurst Place in West Sussex prior to being scattered over the infill of trenches carrying new pipe work.

Wakehurst Place is the country estate of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and houses the Kew Millennium Seed Bank – a project which focuses on plants facing the threat of extinction and those of most use for the future. Seeds are saved and conserved and, so far, 10% of the world's wild plant species have been successfully banked.

In August I had the opportunity to attend an interesting and informed day workshop at the Seed Bank to discover more about the important work undertaken there. Ian Parkinson, Conservation Manager, and his colleagues gave us talks and then a tour to see how seeds from all over the planet are received, inspected, cleaned, identified, recorded and preserved.

It was clear from the many facts and figures supplied in understandable terms that this is a particularly important and valuable programme with world wide significance

and interest. It was a revelation and privilege to see such painstaking work by a dedicated team which includes scientists, technicians and volunteers.

After lunch we walked through newly acquired farm land to see the Seed Hub and rows of plants grown from preserved seeds. Then on to Wakehurst's Bloomer's valley with frequent stops to view newly seeded plots and discuss methods of regeneration and the continual quest to achieve best practices. Finally, a practical demonstration by volunteers working in farm buildings to recover seeds from mown vegetation.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable day and my sincere thanks go to all of the Kew team who made it possible.

Shirley Brice – Volunteer Ranger, Seven Sisters

Flailing around the Downs

Scrub bashing is a thankless task and any plan to ease this work is welcomed by Western Downs volunteers. So when, earlier this year, we heard that rangers decided to help us by getting a 4-wheel drive Polaris Missile we thought, 'okay, but is our next task on the moon?'

Moreover, once our missile was acquired it seemed immediately to disappear, into outer space we imagined...

No, it had two flat tyres.

Strangely, what appeared next, off the back of a lorry, was a large mechanised flail.

'Oh really?' we said.

Then, mysteriously, the Polaris returned – Ranger Rob said it had now been fitted with bullet proof (Kevlar) tyres.

'Oh oh! Now we are getting worried', said the volunteers 'what sort of task are you preparing us for?'

We thought we might be issued with space suits or even body armour next... we were flailing around for answers.

But all too soon we were out flailing around the Downs instead.

For, of course, our Polaris turned out to be a large type of ATV (that's an All-Terrain Vehicle, sonny).

And, with the Polaris pulling the self-powered flail, it was soon chewing up bramble and dogwood and spitting it out at an impressive rate. It is a big noisy beast but even 'Scrub Cutter' John had to admit it left him stranded, whilst Russ 'the Hook' looked on aghast holding his hand tools.

Scrub cutting looks to be a far easier task from now on.

A Western Downs Volunteer



The Polaris with flail in tow.



A Christmas Tale

(somewhere in the South Downs near you...)

Mole was over at Toad Hall taking tea with his old friend. Many years had passed since their adventures together – he, Toady, Ratty, Badger and all. ‘I just wondered, Toad, what’s happened to us?’ said Mole. ‘I do miss all the fun we used to have together. Where’s everybody gone?’

‘Well old friend, you know that Otter ran off long ago – waters poisoned by pesticides drove him away. And Badger? Always a recluse, when he heard rumours of badger culls further west he shut his door, burrowed deeper and now ignores any visitor to his neck of the woods. Dear old Ratty is a sad loner. He was really fond of a lovely young vole called Sienna until she got caught by some murderous American Mink so now he’s broken-hearted. No matter that that damned Yank has since been imprisoned and gone, Sienna and the other female voles

on the river have all disappeared. Ratty is distraught. You know what a romantic soul he is. Only you and I seem to be up and doing much these days. Mind, it’s not the same. I was passionate about motor cars once, remember? Bentleys, Jowetts, Armstrong Siddley Sapphires. But how can you get all misty eyed over a Toyota Prius? Phooey!’ Toad grimaced and spat out his tea (never one with the best table manners, Toady).

‘Well we’ve got to do something to get ‘em all back, Toad. Everything’s so tame now. Even the Wild Wood is not wild

anymore. No adventures with stoats to speak of. Instead we’ve got South Down Conservationists and Volunteer Rangers. Now do they sound as if they’re into wild parties, debauchery and pitched battles? I miss all that...’

‘Tip top idea, old fruit! Let’s do it! We’ll have a Christmas party right here in Toad Hall. I’ll start planning straight away...’

And so it was decided. Despite Mole’s disparaging remarks, Toad made a few contacts and managed to get some green-wellied volunteers to help clear the Himalayan Balsam that was choking his riverfront. A path was laid from the river to the banqueting hall – with a brand new blue plaque commemorating the famous Battle of Toad Hall. Meanwhile some friendly blackbirds had airmailed Otter and Badger and got them to promise to return

to their former haunts. Christmas was coming and all was set. Only lonely Ratty was the one friend that they’d failed to lift out of his depression.

‘What are we going to do, Toad?’ asked Mole forlornly. ‘It won’t be the same without his cheery whiskers about the place.’

Just then there was a bustling about on the river and, would you believe it, Ratty emerged – water dripping from his fur, his eyes shining and he actually started a jig on Toad’s front lawn.

‘What ho you fellows! Heard the news? Two hundred and fifty young voles released along the River Meon and numbers still rising. Whoopee! Merry Christmas!’

A & R Cleaver – Volunteer Rangers, Western Downs

Pic in the Park



The Church in the Woods (or Gypsy Church), Bramdean Common, Hants. Grid Ref SU 632292

This rustic tin chapel is hidden in a wood about 100m from a road that passes through Bramdean Common. It was built in 1883 at the behest of the local rector so that ‘the commoners, charcoal burners and gypsy itinerants who use the common are able to attend a church’.

It is remarkable that the church survives intact. Behind it there are a few graves, still occasionally tended, amongst the wider wood and common, which today lacks both commoners and charcoal burners. The Church is reputedly still used and visited by gypsies, but I’ve only ever found it locked and unused. But it stands quietly atmospheric amid the oak and birch, probably much as it has ever done.

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).

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VRS training 2013



Volunteer Rangers out in the woods
with Sussex Wildlife Trust's Petra Billings.

During 2012 the VRS Committee agreed that volunteer training should be improved. Consequently, we carried out an online survey in order to set up our own training courses in downland and woodland ecology. Following the results of the survey, the Committee organised six courses for volunteers who had indicated they wanted to take part.

Since we, the VRS, have our own funds we were able to offer these courses at no cost to participants. But then we had to find a way of implementing such training. Since nobody on the VRS Committee offered to organise the project, I was 'volunteered' by the Chairman; thanks Ron! Now what do I do?

Sussex Wildlife Trust

Fortunately, soon after inviting tenders from several training bodies, the Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT) replied with the type of courses we were looking for, and were the cheapest!

Then came the hard part – how to match volunteers with a choice of courses, dates and locations that were convenient. Given the fact that more volunteers applied than there were courses available, this appeared a formidable task. Thankfully Alastair Stewart, a fellow volunteer in the West, is a wizard with IT (well he is compared to me!) and he offered to help.

To cut a long story short, the training programme we came up with worked a

treat. We were especially fortunate that the two trainers that the SWT supplied were not only professional ecologists; they were also both excellent communicators.

Success and benefits

Of course there were mishaps, one venue was locked, another had parking restrictions, and our database of volunteers turned out to be incomplete. But overall, for our first venture into training fellow volunteers this was a remarkable success.

Interestingly, one unexpected benefit to the project didn't seem so at first. Since we only used a few venues, many volunteers had to travel miles to reach their course. However on arrival, what they found was a friendly social interaction between volunteers from across the National Park, sharing the same interest. An unforeseen benefit amidst an even wider success.

So, for next year's training programme, look out for an email soon...

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



**Jolly on the
salty sea**

It took two attempts to get a Western Downs boat trip around Chichester Harbour organised. The first booking, in the summer, was cancelled at the last minute due to a fault on the boat's solar powered motors. Were we jinxed? We did however still proceed with plans for a meal at the pub. It turned out to be a beautiful evening so it was disappointing not to be able to jaunt around Chichester Harbour checking out the local flora and fauna.

Our next attempt in September was more successful, although fewer people were able to make it. The boat trip itself was lovely, a little chillier than the evening in August would have been, but still very enjoyable.

The silent running of the boat was a treat and the commentary was knowledgeable but not intrusive. We were able to wander about the boat and use the binoculars provided. Tea, coffee and chocolate were made available at a small cost.

It was a surprise to me that ospreys, on their migration paths, are regular visitors to the harbour and that there is a resident seal population. Unfortunately we saw neither!

However plenty of other bird life was visible, enough to keep our keen bird watchers busy. Returning to Itchenor jetty silently just as darkness fell was most atmospheric. (The solar power is inaudible; it is stored in batteries and is therefore available when there is no sun.) The lights on the boats, buoys and shoreline as we travelled back up the harbour added to the whole experience.

Our trip was followed by a 100-metre dash up the road to reach the Ship Inn for dinner. Unfortunately, when I had pre-ordered my meal choice it had been a hot day in August. Consequently I chose seafood salad and a crab salad main. On a chillier night in September I regretted it! Especially as others were tucking into lamb rump, fish and chips etc. But the service was excellent as was the beer, so everyone had an enjoyable time.

Another good task achieved by the volunteers of the Western Downs!

**Graham Wynne – Volunteer
Ranger, Western Downs**



Top: View over
Chichester Harbour.

Left: Aboard the solar
powered boat.

Welcoming our new starters

In each edition of Downland Thymes we'd like to introduce you to some of our new starters. This month, say hello to Ella Rolf and Lin Channon.

Ella Rolf



Area: I volunteer with the Stanmer Tuesday group.

First task: We were cutting bramble and other overgrowth to widen the South Downs Way at

Housedean near Lewes. It was a fun day with great views of the Downs.

How I got involved with the VRS: A friend's Dad is a Volunteer Ranger and they suggested I join, to get the work experience I need for my Animal Care course at Plumpton College.

Unusual fact about myself: I am related to an Olympian. Double Gold medal winner Kelly Holmes is my Mum's cousin. I've met her a few times and she's really nice.

Recommended activity in the National Park: Walking over the open paths of the Downs behind Brighton can give some lovely views of the hills and down to the sea – without the sounds of cars!

Lin Channon



Area: Western Downs. Because of my shift work I cannot commit to any one day, so it's a rolling attendance of Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays.

My first day with the VRS: We made a concrete base for one of the 20 sculptures by artist Richard Perry that will be placed along the Shipwrights Way. I had a go at all tasks including digging out the earth base for the concrete, sawing wood for the shuttering, mixing concrete, pouring it into the newly dug hole and finally screeding the top to make it look pretty. It was hard work, but I think the most difficult task was resisting the

temptation to write 'LIN WAS HERE' in the newly finished wet concrete!

How I got involved with the VRS: After a lovely walk in Queen Elizabeth Country Park, I picked up one of the free newspapers in the Visitor Centre and saw an advert for the Volunteer Rangers. I love being outdoors and this seemed like the perfect way to meet new like-minded people and maybe learn some new skills while giving something back to the countryside that I love so much.

Unusual facts about myself: I work 12 hours a day as a Security Supervisor in a busy control room watching cameras, answering phones and responding to alarms, so getting outside in the fresh air is very precious to me. I have just returned from two weeks trekking and wild camping in the High Atlas mountains in Morocco, one of the most challenging things I have ever done. At times it tested my fitness and sureness of foot to the limit. I remember traversing a tiny scree path with a sheer drop to one side of me; the wind was gusting quite fiercely and my knees were shaking but I had to do it as there was no turning back. My guide held onto my rucksack and encouraged me inch by inch; if I had slipped he would have gone with me.

Recommended activity in the National Park: I have not walked the Shipwrights Way yet; it starts in ancient woodland at Alice Holt Forest near Farnham and runs across the South Downs to the sea at Portsmouth. A mere stroll at 60 miles, it's definitely on my tick list. Then there are the mountain biking trails in Queen Elizabeth Country Park; as easy or difficult as you want. I've had a bash at the difficult – did you not hear me screaming?

I love listening to the radio early in the mornings. One of my favourite programmes is 'Ramblings', featuring walks usually presented by Clare Balding, on Radio Four. Little did I know that one day in October this year I would actually feature in the programme.

Walking on the Radio with John McCarthy



Above: Anni Townend with John McCarthy (left) and Ian Lock. Main picture: Enjoying Anni's favourite walk.

At the end of one of these 'Ramblings' programmes, listeners were invited to email in if they had a walk that would be of interest. So I did...

Walk chosen

I received the quick auto-reply thanking me for my interest and thought that might be it! However, this was followed up by an email saying that the producers were interested and inviting me to write some more about myself and why I love the walk that I do.

After my reply they responded with a phone call saying that the walk and my story all sounded really lovely and that they wanted it in the programme; the only thing was that Clare wasn't going to be doing all of the walks, so would I mind walking with a guest presenter, John McCarthy?

Not only did I not mind, I was delighted.

The producers and I exchanged further emails, set the date and agreed that, whatever the weather, we would be walking. I invited my friend, colleague and fellow South Downs Way Ranger, Ian Lock, to

walk with me. Ian, like me, loves the South Downs and looks after a six-mile stretch.

So it was that one very wet and windy October morning we – John, Ian, Karen the producer and I – met in my kitchen and set off up the Downs.

Up into the Downs

Since the actual South Downs Way used to run through what is now our garden, we were able to walk out and along the edge of the valley before heading up to Juggs Road. So began my favourite walk, which used to be a hidden track, the way people carried the fish in jugs to Lewes on donkeys. We climbed up to the top where you can gain superb views towards Seaford in the East and Brighton to the West.

And so we continued, walking and talking and enjoying each other's company. Right now there are mainly sheep grazing at the top of the downs. The seasons change, in summer the fields of barley and wheat are like a green sea in the wind and I never tire of walking up to the top and along and back

again. I feel very fortunate to live here and that I and my family have enjoyed so many years on the Downs.

We ended our walk back at my house and talked some more – about how this all began when I responding to that 'Ramblings' invitation to listeners, about the passion for sharing stories and conversation, and about how glad we all were to have met that day. Of course when I tell the story of walking with John McCarthy everyone asks: 'What is he like?' or 'Do you mean The John McCarthy?'... I do and he is lovely, a delight to talk and listen to; warm, friendly and kind. It was a privilege to walk with him.

Our conversation and walk was broadcast on Thursday 24th October on Radio Four at 15.00 and repeated again on 26th October at 06.00. You can catch it on the BBC iPlayer or go to the Radio Four website for the podcast. It will be available indefinitely.

Anni Townend – Volunteer South Downs Way Warden, Eastern Downs





A Bridge in Burpham

Owing to a task being cancelled, Darren Rolfe of West Sussex County Council quickly bagged the Stanmer Wednesday volunteers for day one of a two-day job replacing a bridge over an Arun tributary near Burpham. Quite an adventure for our group, who are generally working much further east and consider ourselves lucky if we get out of Brighton!

As we had to arrive on site at about 10.15am, the day started early with no leisurely coffee and a chat at Stanmer first.

I worked with the West Sussex volunteers. Our first job was to dismantle the new bridge, which had been delivered in a made-up form about half a mile away from the site, and number the parts for reassembly. When the Stanmer gang arrived, they started clearing over-grown scrub and the old bridge.

Once the new bridge was dismantled it was then transported to site on Darren's trailer, which would have been easy, except for the fact that the sides were still in one piece – including the heavy beams on which the whole bridge was supported. These did not

fit in the trailer and had to be balanced on top supported by volunteers, with some of the larger, or should I say stronger, members of the Stanmer group walking along side. At the railway crossing they had to be unloaded and walked through an underpass beneath the railway, which was too low for the vehicle, then reloaded on the other side; quite an operation. We know how the people who built Stonehenge felt now.

However, when the bridge arrived on site, the Stanmer gang had already cleared the scrub and moved the old bridge, minus sides and handrails, to one side so we could still cross the stream but the site was clear for the new bridge.

The next job was mixing concrete to extend the foundations on the banks because the new bridge is larger than the old. The cement mixer went over on the old bridge and was plugged into Darren's generator but only after both kettles had been boiled for tea and coffee... note to others who take out volunteers: Darren not only makes tea for us but proper ground coffee and he provides a wide selection of biscuits too!

Those not involved with the concrete, got on with clearing scrub on the paths approaching the bridge and enjoying views over the Arun to South Stoke.

Once the concrete was set we then placed the sides of the new bridge across the stream and secured them together, ready for Darren and his people to finish the next day. We left site at around 5pm, after a long but very interesting and satisfying day.

Barry Linfield – Volunteer Ranger, Stanmer

Top left: Bridge work in progress.

Top right: The new Burpham bridge in place.

VOLUNTEERS – a poem

I'm a Volunteer I work in the National Park,
But some of my colleagues treat it as a bit of a lark.
Some are made of sugar and can't possibly get wet,
Some stand and gossip, you can't beat a good old chat,
Some must stay clean can't possibly get dirty.
Then there's the clock watchers, they sit down before
everyone else, and get up after all others have started
Again.

There are also Rangers who do it, just so they can say "I volunteer".
So who does that leave?

It leaves all the hard working Volunteers that turn up on their
given day,
No matter what the task or the weather.
It leaves all the Volunteers that at the end of the day go home,
cold, wet,
And hungry and cream crackered,
BUT, these are the Volunteers that go home totally satisfied that
they have done a good day's volunteering.
All of us fit into one of the above, some of us more than one, but
some of us need to change!
Just sayin.

An Eastern Downs volunteer

Christmas puzzles

Cris Savill

Christmas Word Puzzle

E B E
R T C
L E A

You have to rearrange these letters to form 9 separate words but each word has to be of a different length. The first must have 9 letters, then one by one the other words get a letter shorter each time. So the last, ninth, word is a single letter.

Then, using all your words, create a sentence (or two) to include them all.

(Note, you can find plenty of short words, but there are very few 7, 8 and 9 letter words.)

Answer (a much easier puzzle!) You will find one such sentence on page 12, from where you'll be able to work out the nine words I used. But there are various other solutions you could create.

10 Christmas Cracker puns

- Q. How do sheep greet each other at Christmas?
A. Merry Christmas to ewe!
- Q. What is an ig?
A. An Eskimo's house without a loo!
- Q. What did the cow say on Christmas morning?
A. Moooooey Christmas!
- Q. What never eats at Christmas time?
A. The turkey, it's usually stuffed!
- Q. What happened to the man who shoplifted a calendar at Christmas?
A. He got 12 months!
- Q. What is the difference between the Christmas alphabet and the ordinary alphabet?
A. The Christmas alphabet has Noel!
- Q. What do you get if you eat Christmas decorations?
A. Tinselitus!
- Q. Who looks after Santa Claus when he is ill?
A. The National Elf Service!
- Q. Where do Santa's helpers go when they are poorly?
A. An elf farm!
- Q. How does Good King Wenceslas like his pizza?
A. Deep & crisp & even!

Christmas Quiz

1. Bing Crosby sang 'I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas', but who wrote the song?
2. Which famous actor was born on Christmas day?
a) Fred Astaire; b) Humphrey Bogart;
c) Ronald Reagan
3. Which one of these stars died on Christmas Day?
a) James Stewart; b) John Wayne; c) Charlie Chaplin
4. In Dickens's 'A Christmas Carol' what is the name of Scrooge's ghostly former partner?
5. Where is it always winter but never Christmas?
6. In which single year in the 20th Century did three Kings reign?
7. Which King climbed a skyscraper in 1933?
8. Which would NOT have been eaten at Christmas in medieval times?
a) swan; b) peacock; c) turkey; d) goose
9. Christmas Island is situated in which ocean?
a) Atlantic; b) Pacific; c) Indian; d) Southern
10. Which three conifer species are truly native to Britain?

A recent study found that the average Briton walks about 900 miles a year. Another study found that Britons drink, on average, 22 gallons of alcohol a year. That means that, on average, Britons get about 41 miles to the gallon. (Makes you proud to be British).

Answers overleaf

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 with a picture and up to 100 words description.



Volunteers, if you know of a pub that deserves this award, please let us know. 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 explaining why the pub you nominate should be recognised.

The Harrow Inn, Steep, Petersfield, GU32 2DA

Near Petersfield, within a few miles of each other, are two remarkable pubs both renowned for being difficult to find, serving good ale and food and being old-fashioned and wonderfully unchanged. Probably the most famous is 'the Pub with No Name' (aka the 'White Horse') GU32 1DA, but the little Harrow Inn pushes it very close. Locals always argue over which is the better. Since the latter is less well known it gets the vote here.

'Unchanged' is certainly the appropriate epithet for the Harrow Inn as the pub has stayed in the same family for generations without any noticeable alteration (even to its outside toilets!). And they don't take credit cards. But the quality of its beer, its good food and its service remain excellent.

Gadget review: MD 812 Moisture Meter

For those using log fires or wood burners this winter, why not buy yourself a Christmas present? A moisture meter is a very handy aid to check whether the logs you use are seasoned enough to burn.

Simply prodding the prongs on this gadget into a log and pressing the button gives you a digital read-out of the moisture content. Any number below 20% is acceptable. You can buy this online from £11.99. It is hand-sized and I found it better to use than a smaller Stihl model.



Christmas Word Puzzle, example sentence: "Don't berate me, I found your real gold bracelet. Put a pot of treacle on the table at once and let us celebrate." Quiz answers: (1) Irving Berlin, (2) Humphrey Bogart, (3) Charlie Chaplin, (4) Jacob Marley, (5) Narnia, (6) 1936, (7) King Kong, (8) Turkey, (9) Indian, (10) Scots pine, juniper, Yew.

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 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 Aug-Sept edition:



'The Wellie-Tubbies take a short break from filming'.
Mike Rowe – Volunteer Ranger, Central Downs and Wealden Heaths

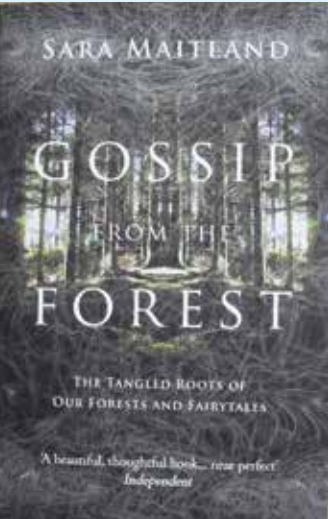
Love it or hate it...

...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 or to russanne.cleaver@gmail.com

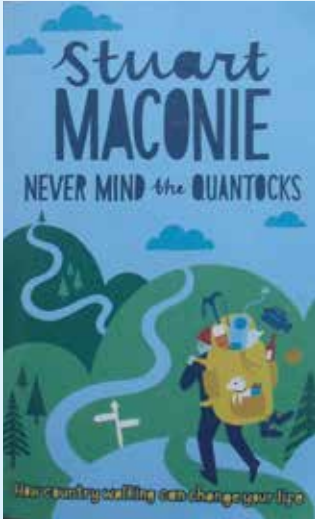
If you'd like to download a copy of Downland Thymes, visit the National Park website: www.southdowns.gov.uk/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-ranger-service



Books for Christmas

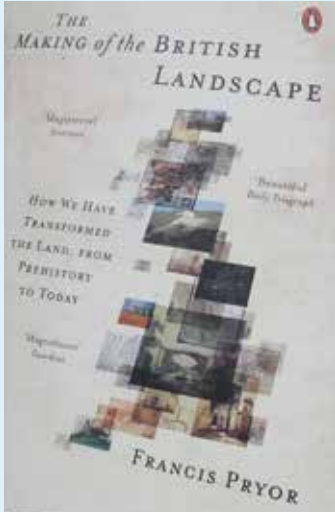
'Gossip from the Forest' by Sara Maitland (Granta) £9.99

This is an unusual book that explores links between ancient woods and fairy tales. Neither old-fashioned nor childish, it is beautifully written. In complementary chapters the author illustrates a depth of ecological knowledge, and then creates a modern take on traditional tales.



'Never Mind the Quantocks' by Stuart Maconie (David & Charles) £10.99

The well-known journalist and broadcaster presents a collection of essays on the people, places and moments he's experienced while exploring the country on foot. Modern both in tone and layout these are short and humorous stories from a writer who knows his audience is mostly urban based.



'The Making of the British Landscape' by Francis Pryor (Penguin) £14.99

With a nod to the W G Hoskins classic 'The Making of the English Landscape' of 1955, this book not so much updates it, as supplants it. This is no lightweight coffee table book; Dr Francis Pryor provides the scientific and archaeological rationale to reveal a modern appraisal of how our landscape evolved from the prehistoric to the present. Furthermore, as the author was once a regular on 'Time Team' he knows how to spin a yarn; so while it is a meaty tome, this is a very readable book.

Creating an identity for the National Park

One of our greatest challenges is to let people know that we are in fact a National Park – a unique place to be enjoyed and protected by resident and visitor alike.

As the newest National Park and one situated in a very busy part of the UK, we are working on two key projects that will aid understanding, enjoyment and respect for the SDNP. The first of these is the development of a shared identity.

Shared identity

Rather than a corporate brand for the Authority, the aim of this project is to raise the profile of the National Park itself and

to provide the many people, businesses, communities and organisations who live and work within it with an identity that they can use alongside their own. As one of the most public facing groups working in the National Park, the Volunteer Ranger Service not only has a huge role to play in the development of the identity, but also in its use and rollout.

In November, we held two staff/volunteer workshops run by the consultants Hidden Britain to begin drawing together the story

of the National Park. This story is going to be used to develop the new identity and brand. The workshops went down really well, with volunteers and staff thoroughly enjoying the chance to play 'Snog, Marry, Avoid' with the special qualities...

The goal is not simply to have a logo, but an identity comprising a whole toolkit: a brand, a broader look, imagery, tone and language etc., designed to be used by charitable organisations, businesses, producers, communities and other partners from across the National Park in order to add value to what they do.

A huge thank you to all the volunteers who took part and stayed afterwards to help tidy up. Volunteers who attended came mainly from the Western and Eastern ends of the National Park and I would really like to encourage volunteers from the Central area to get involved. There will be a chance to contribute through an online survey over the coming weeks.

Interpretation

The second big project is the interpretation at the new South Downs Centre. We awarded the contract at the end of October and are now working on plans to convey the National Park and its special qualities in engaging ways in a relatively small space. The consultants hired, Fitzpatrick Woolmer, have already come up with some great ideas that include ingenious mapping, and high-tech and low-tech solutions that should appeal to young and old.

Most importantly, they understand the need to bring the National Park into the building – its sights, textures, colours etc. We will also be looking at the rest of the building and the Memorial Hall to make sure that we use every opportunity to capture the National Park for all who will use the South Downs Centre: not only visitors but also staff, volunteers and members.

Ruth James – Communications & Engagement Manager



Volunteer rangers taking part in the Farming and Wildlife course at Queen Elizabeth Country Park.

Farming for wildlife

Last October, 17 Volunteer Rangers from the Western Area, joined by two from the Midhurst Team, attended a course on Farming and Wildlife at Queen Elizabeth Country Park (QECP). The day consisted of a very informative talk by Peter Thompson, Farmland Biodiversity Advisor with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, followed by a visit to a local farm. Nick Heasman was with us throughout the day, providing additional expertise.

The informal morning session at QECP covered subjects including the crops grown and their uses, the different types of grassland, a bit of agricultural history, pesticides, fertilisers, cultivations, arable flora and some animal species associated with farmland and reasons for their decline. We also looked at measures farmers can take to help wildlife, including those funded through the

government's Environmental Stewardship schemes.

After lunch, we drove a short way to Lower Farm, East Meon. Farmer George Atkinson is really enthusiastic about wildlife on his farm and was one of the finalists in the RSPB/Telegraph 2013 *Nature of Farming Award*. He is also in Higher Level Stewardship so we saw examples of wildlife-friendly stewardship options alongside conventional farming.

Many thanks to Peter Thompson and George Atkinson for a really enjoyable and worthwhile day, which was very well received by all who took part. You can read more about it and other farming and wildlife related matters at Peter's blog: www.freshfromthefield.blogspot.co.uk/

Caroline French – Volunteer Ranger, Western Downs



Architect's drawing of the new South Downs Centre.

Long Service Awards

I had a very rewarding Sunday out recently, meeting up with three VRS weekend groups across the length of the National Park. I had a chance to hear about some of the things going on with them and even managed to do a bit of scrub clearance, but the main aim of the day was to give Long Service awards to Volunteer Rangers.

At the start of the day I visited a group doing path clearance in Cradle Valley, south of Alfriston, and gave Matt Fry his solid silver ten-year award badge. After cutting down a few small hawthorns to keep my hand in, I headed West to join Volunteer Rangers on task in Rewell Wood, north of Arundel, to help celebrate VR Peter Tucker's eightieth birthday. By a happy coincidence, Edna Zammit

had joined the group for the day, so I was also able to present her with her badge for ten years as a Volunteer Ranger. After cake and a very small glass of something fizzy, I continued my journey West, joining the Western Downs Sunday group at Morn Hill near Winchester. There, I made my final delivery of the day, presenting Terry Doyle with his ten-year award. It was great to get out to see you all and to be able to give some small tokens of appreciation for all the work that you have done with the VRS.

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

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From top: Terry Doyle (in boiler suit) with his award; Matt receives his ten-year award.



Obituary: Nick Egerton

20/2/1944 to 24/8/2013

I first met Nick nearly ten years ago, trying to find somewhere to park his bike at the Wednesday group's pick-up at Chichester station. Thereafter, the sound of creaking and squeaking regularly heralded Nick's arrival.

Nick seemed quiet but he was no shrinking violet, serving as a member of the VRS Committee for over six years. In fact, had his recent illness not prevented it, he would be our chairman today.

More recently our group has met at Singleton, too far for Nick to cycle and therefore a chance for him to ride in his splendid Land Rover Safari. Nick's off-roading skills – honed while working as a medical missionary in Africa, where he met his wife Marion – meant he was called upon to drive us up into the wilds. What a great privilege it was to ride with Nick at the helm, climbing majestically up tracks and through glades with all four wheels scrabbling for grip – days on the savanna seemed to return.

Nick and Marion were regular attendees at Fishbourne Parish Church, Nick becoming a Lay Reader.

As a licensed deer stalker he was called upon at times to help deal with distressed deer, particularly at Kingley Vale where he was also a volunteer sheep 'looker'.

Even as illness took hold, Nick still came out and his skills as a fire-lighter proved legendary. One of my lasting memories will be of the bearded Nick, trusty staff in hand, standing Moses-like, watching as we messed up the fire he had conjured out of damp twigs and bits of old candle. His 'raft-system-for-wet-ground' is now standard for Wednesday group fires – a fitting memorial to a great chap. He will be missed by both staff and volunteers.

Dick Cole – Volunteer Ranger, Central Downs and Wealden Heaths Wednesday Group



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Nick Egerton (left) and David Gibson with celebratory cake the day after the confirmation of a South Downs National Park in March 2009.

South Downs

Volunteer Ranger Service

South Downs
National Park

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

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