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Downland

THYMES

News for the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service Issue 63 March 2014



Storm damage on the South Downs

The January storms this year were more ferocious than usual, causing a lot of damage from windblown trees.

The Volunteer Ranger Service hasn't been used in the most difficult areas but we have had a role to play in assisting our partners to clear paths and repair the associated damage to woodlands or other sites.

Remarkable damage

On some of the wooded scarp slopes of the Downs, e.g. the East Hampshire Hangers, the resulting damage caused by fallen trees has been remarkable to behold.

When a big beech, weighing many tonnes, is blown out of a steep slope it can drop a long way before hitting the ground, where it shatters on impact with the force of an explosion.

Downhill havoc

More often than not when one such giant goes downhill, it breaks up other trees and causes havoc. This creates problems on steeply sloping ground where it is difficult to work. In such cases the trees are not cut up – they are simply left where they fall and, if necessary, we just clear the paths. Then, bearing in mind the size and weight of some of the fallen timber, the main issue is to check that broken stumps and stems remain stable – so they can't roll onto the path or endanger passers-by. If needs be, winches are used to haul fallen limbs to where they can be left more safely.

Fortunately some trees fall uphill, which are much easier to clear!

Blocked paths

A common occurrence, following such storms, is that at the foot of the Hangers you often find fallen trees that have toppled into the adjacent fields or blocked paths. In such instances, liaison is required with local landowners in order to get access to the trees to cut them up. This is rarely a problem and the storms this winter have been so severe that people have all mucked in together to remove the obstacles.

There is, however, a silver lining to all this havoc: it gives us the opportunity of obtaining free firewood...

Russell Cleaver – Volunteer, Ashford Hangers NNR

Main image: A Forester cuts up the maple.

Top right: Cutting the way to a fallen giant.

Bottom right: One big beech down, creating havoc.



Chairman's Corner

We've had a very turbulent winter, that caused much trouble, and many of you will have been involved in helping our National Park communities get life back to normal in the aftermath. This is one of the things the VRS can do to help in addition to our regular programmed work. I hope that in future we can do more to respond to these local troubles but, for now, thank you for your efforts.

If not already in circulation, you will soon be getting details of this year's VRS organised educational courses. These are excellent events and are an invaluable way of improving your knowledge of the South Downs landscape. We have taken on board your suggestions, so this year there will be some weekend courses and, in order to stretch the VRS budget a bit further, we will be asking for a modest financial contribution from those attending.

I'm also pleased that planning is progressing on our Paul Millmore memorial activities (see back page). We also need to think about some future projects that can be financed through the significant donation that the VRS has received following the closedown of the SDJC accounts. Please pass any suggestions to your VRS Committee Representative.

This brings me to another important point which is that we have several vacancies on the Committee. In fact, many of you have no representative to whom you can address your views – so how about 'volunteering' just a bit more and joining the Committee? This especially applies to the Stanmer and Central Area groups.

Finally, I hope to see as many of you as possible at the new South Downs Centre in Midhurst for this year's AGM in July – details to follow.

Ron Wilder, VRS Chairman



Update from the VRS Team

Welcome to the first edition of *Downland Thymes* of 2014. We have been busy focusing on delivering and improving our introductory training.

With Cris Savill's role changing from Volunteer Task Co-ordinator to Volunteer Support Officer, I've recently started work with the Area Managers and with Cris to plan how the transfer of responsibilities to Area staff – for creating and managing outdoor practical work programmes – will happen and when the process can start.

To help manage the VRS day-to-day activities, a new Assistant Ranger is being recruited in each of the four Area Teams. As they won't be in post for several months, we need to look at what we can usefully progress in the meantime. We're all keen to make sure that the transition for those Volunteer Rangers affected is as smooth as possible and that everyone knows who is going to be doing what. There will also be changes to the work that both Vicky and I are doing, so we'll keep you up-to-date with these as they are planned.

By the time you read this, I will have had a first meeting with Rebecca Bennett, the Project Officer for the 'Secrets of the High Woods' LIDAR project. We've talked a little about this in the last two issues and the meeting should produce some good ideas about how you and new Volunteer Rangers will be able to support the project. Using laser technology in aerial photography, 'Secrets of the High Woods' seeks to make very significant additions to our knowledge of the archaeology on the Downs in West Sussex. With so much woodland cover, we're pretty sure there's a lot to find, currently hidden in the trees.

In November, we ran another Introductory Training Day for new Volunteer Rangers. We had reviewed and updated the content of the day, looking at the feedback from the first two that we ran in late June and we are doing that again in preparation for the next

one on March 9th. We will always ask for and review feedback after training sessions that we run, although I hope that the Introductory Day will be reasonably well bedded in after the course in March and we can focus more time on developing other more specific training that can support you in your work. VR Russell Cleaver (when he's not gathering articles for *Downland Thymes*) is organising more wildlife training this year, on behalf of the VRS Committee. Last year's training was very well received by everyone and I would encourage you to get on one of these if you can – information should have gone round during February.

As always, thanks to you all for your time and sweat (with minimal blood or tears hopefully!) over the last few months.

Ian Hartle, Volunteer Development Officer, South Downs National Park Authority



LIDAR can look through the trees covering large areas of the West Sussex Downs, to see the ground surface features underneath. This is the view looking East of Heyshott Down along the crest of the Downs. © Natural England

Arctic convoys: Volunteer Ranger honoured



The 'worst journey in the world' (Winston Churchill)

The temperature is somewhere around -20°C, the deck you are standing on is covered with ice, and if you touch any part of the frozen metal superstructure with an ungloved hand, your skin will stick to it. Massive waves are crashing about you, your vessel is lurching from side to side and up and down as the wind buffets you with a glacial howl. Oh, and on top of all this, men in aircraft, ships and submarines are trying to find and kill you.

These were the conditions faced by sailors in the Royal and Merchant Navies on the Arctic convoys of World War II. Peter Tucker was one of them. Now long retired, and a twenty-year veteran of the South Downs Volunteer Rangers, Peter joined the Royal Navy in March 1939 at the age of 15, with the rank of 'Seaman Boy 2nd Class'. Over the course of the next six years, he saw action in the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, the Far East – and on the Arctic convoys, delivering essential supplies to support the Soviet Union's war effort.

On 26th June 1944, Leading Seaman Tucker was awarded the DSM – the Distinguished Service Medal – for his 'leadership and outstanding skill and enterprise shown in HMS 'Wild Goose', in an operation carried out by

the Second Support Group in the Atlantic in the course of which six enemy submarines were sunk within ten days.'

But it would be another 69 years before Peter – and the other survivors of the Arctic convoys, including my father, Alec McCreedy – received a British medal for their bravery in facing the twin enemies of the weather and the Germans, north of the Arctic circle. Even then, they received their medals not in official ceremonies, but through the post. Fortunately, for both Peter and my dad, local officials were not content to let the matter rest there.

Peter was given a reception in the Assembly Rooms, Chichester, and awarded his medal by the Mayor of Chichester; Alec attended a special ceremony in Stafford, where he and 17 other Arctic veterans were given certificates by the Lord-Lieutenant of Staffordshire, to display with their medals.

As Jeremy Clarkson said, at the end of his recent programme about Arctic Convoy PQ 17, it was: 'About bloody time!'

Karen McCreedy, Volunteer Ranger – Central Downs and Wealden Heath Sunday group

Top: Peter Tucker waited 69 years for his medal.

Bottom: Alec McCreedy receives his certificate from the Lord-Lieutenant of Staffordshire.



Wet Scrub, Good Grub

Stanmer and Seven Sisters weekend Volunteers celebrated Christmas at the Half Moon Pub next to Plumpton College on the 15th December. However, before we got to sit down and enjoy what was a superb and very filling meal, we had some hard work ahead of us. We were tasked with clearing scrub from a section of Novington Hill.

Novington Hill is the scarp slope facing the Half Moon and, on a good day, the views from the top extend easily to the Weald. In medieval times monks from Lewes dug a large cross into the hill side. It is still visible by looking down on it from the top of the cross if you know where and what to look for. Encroaching scrub, such as hawthorn and brambles, has started to obscure it and I certainly was not aware of its presence in the hillside, despite knowing the hill well from surveying there for my degree. The eventual hope is to clear the scrub so that the cross is made much more visible,

as well as bringing to light an otherwise hidden part of local history.

We assembled in the Half Moon car park and ascended into thick low cloud which enveloped the top of the Downs, making the journey across to the site something of a mystery tour. The scrub clearance progressed nicely with the addition of help from Ian and Vicky. However, less than hospitable weather soon set in. As the low cloud cleared it was eventually replaced by torrential rain. And by torrential I mean the sort of rain that comes down in sheets rather than drops. All credit to the volunteers and staff who continued to battle on clearing the scrub while hoping in vain that the rain would stop, or at least lighten up. In the end it was decided to finish the task early and head straight for the pub – I can't say there was any arguing with that! Sopping jackets, jumpers and accessories were discarded and left to drip pools of water around chairs in favour of a pint, a hearty

meal and a chance to warm up by the heater. Although the weather tried its best to put a dampener on the proceedings, I feel more than confident in saying that by the end, and with full bellies, all of the volunteers enjoyed their day. On a final note, many thanks to the SDNPA staff for organising the event and the meal.

Sarah Brotherton – Volunteer Ranger, Eastern Area



VR Mick Woolgar feeds the fire on a scrub day at Seven Sisters Country Park.

Scrub bashing and bonfires

Shirley Brice, a volunteer ranger in the Eastern Region, describes some of the delights of scrub bashing – having been there, seen it and done it!

Becoming a Volunteer Ranger inevitably leads to an apprenticeship in the gentle (?) art of scrub bashing and, in consequence, to the complexities of lighting and encouraging a bonfire of the results.

Two-match fires

There are those among us (including lead Rangers) who prefer to delegate the latter task and there are those among us who are suspiciously successful at igniting damp newspaper and kindling with a maximum of two matches. I make no libellous allegations regarding what hides beneath the damp paper! Some task leaders accept that Volunteer Rangers (VRs) usually exert adequate control over the burning wood

while others insist on overseeing refuelling in parallel layers.

Be careful near said fires but bear in mind that the numerous small burn holes on fleeces, shirts and jackets quickly identify an experienced VR. It is wise to tread carefully if you have a bonfire expert in your team and, if so, ALWAYS ask permission before you chuck anything on to the fire... Hmm!

Gradients

Scrub bashing falls into several categories which take account of different sites, a range of unwanted plants and the weather. Working on a gradient is never easy and often there are additional pitfalls in the shape of camouflaged rabbit holes and the

stubs of previously bashed stems. Grateful thanks to the Rangers who diligently paint such stumps with bright coloured growth resistant fluid. Such gradients are often very slippery and on any site it is always a bonus if the bonfire site is close by, down wind and level with the bashing site... Dream on!

Malignant intent

It is surprising how quickly one can recognise malignant intent in the scrub before you. Top of my list in the anti-personnel stakes must be blackthorn, with gorse a close second and bramble pushing its luck. Accept that blackthorn can penetrate leather gloves and work trousers and that gorse prickles aim for loose necked shirts, pockets and inner cuffs! Thank goodness for gauntlet gloves, eye protection and finding a new bladed bow saw and sharp loppers. If you enjoy conflagration and dancing on travelling flames, pile on the gorse... Wow!

Weather

Did I mention the weather? Anything from heavy rain, snow, ice, gale force winds and sunshine (in that order)... Ah well!

Shirley Brice – Volunteer Ranger, Eastern Region

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VR Richard Bosworth is the human interest in this view across the Cuckmere Valley from Winton St. near Alfriston. © Ian Wildridge



Roger May, a member of the Chichester canal volunteer team, spent a few days with his team in 2012 laying a fine hedge in South of England (SOE) style that became something else all together.

Canal-side hedgelaying

After days of hard work, it was unfortunate that the local kids discovered their efforts and started using the stakes as javelins and they all ended up in the canal (the stakes, not the kids).

To make matters worse, the canal preservation funds for 2013 were not looking healthy, due to projects elsewhere, and stakes and binders are expensive.

A rethink was required. Perhaps adherence to the South of England (SOE) style was not strictly necessary, so I and another member of the South of England hedgelaying society, have developed a pragmatic style, which it is hoped may form the basis of a national canal-side style, perhaps with applications for volunteers elsewhere. There are estimated to be some 2000 miles of canal-side hedge in the UK. Towpaths are mainly looked after by volunteers, most of whom are not very familiar with hedgelaying.

Canal-side style

This canal-side style needed to be:

- cheap
- low (the surrounding countryside needs to be on view to the folk on the barges).
- easy and quick (for inexperienced volunteers)

Photos from the early 20th century exist showing newly laid hedges in a free style using live stakes (crops). The layers presumably used the material available within the hedge in front of them, rather than importing stakes and binders from elsewhere. The hedges look strong and well built. There is therefore nothing new about 'our' style and we understand that the crop and pleach style, as the live stake style has been called, is still practised in parts of Wales. Consideration of the Dutch style suggested that binders may be simulated by live trunks laid at the height of the top of the hedge.

Improvising

So off we went, improving and improvising as we went along. The idea was to produce a style which was quick and easy for volunteers, while remaining aesthetically appealing. We have now laid some 200 metres of canal-side hedge with good results. We are not constrained by style



Hedgelaying in progress beside the canal.

rules and use material from the hedge as we see fit.

Generally, we lay the pleachers as in the SOE style and leave approximately every 5th or 6th trunk as a live stake. We pleach the stake at 3 feet or so and lay it on top as a binder usually, but not always, in the opposite direction to the pleachers. We think this creates a bit of tension within the hedge and may therefore increase its strength. Its main purpose is to hold down the pleachers and maintain a height of between 3ft and 3ft 6ins. Larger trees are frequently left as standards, as is currently encouraged by DEFRA, and we have used laterally pleached branches from the standards as binders. If the hedge is too thin we add a cut stake or two, or use crooks. There is nothing to stop us reinforcing the live binder by weaving in suitable branches as required. We do not expect the binders to live but we shall see what has happened in a year or two. The main criterion is wildlife preservation and,

with the farmer's permission, we place the frith between the hedge and the adjacent fence for hedgehog use, but this is likely to remain a local variant.

Pleasing results

So far, we have used only traditional tools and the hedge is getting laid much more rapidly than we would be able to achieve using the SOE competition rules. It costs nothing except our own time, which pleases the Canal Trust. It is a low hedge but the height can be varied at will. We are very pleased with the result and will be looking to bring our efforts to the attention of other canal trusts and possibly to other bodies, eg National Parks, where volunteer groups may be faced with miles of untended hedgerow and inadequate funds.

Ian Runcie – Volunteer Ranger, Eastern Area

Mind the Gap

Perched on the edge of the chalk cliffs at Birling Gap, the National Trust site is under development, the new cafe and shop are open and an exciting new visitor centre, part funded by the South Downs National Park Authority, is being fitted out ready for the spring.



The garden, built beautifully by volunteers, has also undergone some changes since our last update (see *Downland Thymes*, Aug/Sept 2013). I won't say it's finished, because, as you horticulturists know, a garden is never 'finished'!

The tiny plug plants that we planted last spring have done surprisingly well. We kept cutting back top growth to imitate the action of rabbits and allow healthy roots to establish. We were ably assisted in this by actual rabbits, who took the job very seriously and gave us the authentic, chewed off, stumpy look we were aiming for!

We did need to water almost every day during the summer. However, this is a one-off, only needed in the

first year when the plant roots are not yet established.

The outdoor classroom has been constructed by volunteers using recycled materials. For example, the existing rubber-covered paving slabs, which were originally despised, have now been re-used to create the ammonite shaped path and other pathways around the site. Proof once more that up-cycling is not only money saving, but can also inspire creative design solutions.

See Trevor and Gill Richards in photo 3 opposite, wiring the final logs in. This bench is also an Insect Metropolis; do you think the thousands of students that visit every year will mind sharing the space?

As we put the finishing touches to this end of the

garden in January 2014, disaster struck at the cliff-end of the site. A small tornado and spring tides combined to demolish a huge chunk of the cliff face right by the conservatory section of the cafe.

For the third time since it was made, the moveable fish mesh barrier has to be pulled back. The gabion cages in this photo have to be dismantled ready to be re-used further back. Although we knew this would happen in time, it is rather sad that we only had one year to enjoy this space.

Let's make the most of this magical place while we still have it.

Gabby Tofts, garden designer and Eastern Downs volunteer



Opposite page: Volunteer Rangers creating an outdoor classroom to form part of the new interpretation garden at the National Trust's Birling Gap.

1. Borders are filled with plants that represent local habitats.

2. A fish-mesh barrier protects visitors from the cliff edge.

3. Trevor and Gill Richards wiring-in logs under seating alongside the ammonite shaped path.

4. Timber planks rise and fall in shapes that reflect the curves of downland.

Image on page 6 © Ian Wildridge; images 1 to 4 © Gabby Toffs.

Glynde Drove

Such a good day
When past and present meet
In place of quiet peace
Blue sky above fields and
hedgerows green.

Such a good day
As we break the almost silence
With tools to clear an ancient track
Trod by man and beast for who
knows now how long?

Such a good day
For hum of news exchange
As still we labour on
Sustained by goal in mind as long
lost views appear.

Such a good day
For birthday greetings
Coffee and good cake
Laughter, warmth of friendship and
job well done!

**Shirley Brice – Volunteer
Ranger, Eastern Region**



Laughter, warmth of friendship and job well done.



Tip in his favourite flowerbed.

Fox in the garden

I've had foxes in my garden over several years, the latest has been given the name of Tip – due to the exceptionally large white tip on his tail. This year he has taken up favourite positions in the garden including a flowerbed some 20 feet from my patio door, a spot in front of my garden shed or simply draping himself over the shed roof.

I don't feed Tip although he does help himself to clean water which is always available in the garden for birds. Last year, as a cub, he brought 13 toys into the garden which included gloves, blanket, soft dolls, a wind-up guinea pig and a clockwork mouse. The latter I wound up and wedged some clay in front of it so that on touch it would spring into life and surprise him.

I understood that foxes are mainly carnivores but, how wrong can you be, he has now stripped my low Victoria Plum tree so thoroughly that we are not the best of friends.

Chris Hicks – Volunteer Ranger, Eastern Region

Butterfly Conservation

a word from one of our partners

As the Reserves Officer for the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Branch of Butterfly Conservation, I am responsible for managing and maintaining three nature Reserves – two on chalk downland and one an SSSI semi-ancient woodland. This is challenging to say the least, especially given that I am only employed for 22.5 hours a week!

How do we cope with the continuous and relentless scrub management that is required? The answer is that we have to rely heavily on volunteers to undertake these tasks. Work-parties are planned for the winter months where volunteers who are new to practical tasks are shown how to use hand tools safely. The reasons for carrying out tasks are explained as well as how specific management of certain habitats benefits Lepidoptera, which have particular requirements.

Organising and co-ordinating groups of volunteers can be very time consuming, which brings me onto the reason for writing a few lines – and that is to extol and praise the virtues of the SDVRS.

Skills

I have been very fortunate over the last few years to have worked alongside the excellent VRS. You have brought the skills and the necessary training – ranging from first-aid cover to brush-cutter and chainsaw use – as well as the practical skills to repair and replace fences and the ability to carry out any type of habitat management. You are prepared to tackle any task in all weathers, and do so with good cheer and a positive attitude.

Bentley Station Meadow had suffered a lack of management over the years and it was the SDVRS who first came to Bentley and began the creation and widening of the rides that has already influenced the number of butterflies recorded on transect

in the meadow. For the first time since transect records began in 1998 on this site, the Silver-washed Fritillaries recorded there last year exceeded the Hampshire average across all sites! Well done the VRS!

Higher numbers

Similarly, Morn Hill, a site of open chalk downland, had become heavily invaded with scrub. Again the volunteer rangers cracked on, and once more the butterflies are benefiting from this active management, with higher numbers recorded on transect in 2013 – and this was not just down to it being a particularly good year for butterflies.

When Butterfly Conservation took over what was formerly known as the Old Allotments in 2012 (adjacent to its existing nature reserve at Magdalen Hill Down), the South Downs Volunteers came out in force to cut sycamore, and reduce the privet and bramble that were encroaching on the best part of the site – the remnant chalk grassland.

The SDVRS Western Downs group has transformed parts of our reserves and I cannot thank you enough on behalf of Butterfly Conservation for all your concerted efforts and skills. Sometimes I marvel at how lightly I get off – all I have to do is to make a cake!

Jayne Chapman, Reserves Officer, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Butterfly Conservation



Left: Magdalen Hill Down butterfly reserve following blackthorn removal.

Above: Western Area volunteers at Bentley Station Meadow butterfly reserve.



© Neil Hulme

Butterfly: what's in a name?

When you are next crouched on your knees trying to get at the base of a vicious old thorn bush that you are carefully extracting so as to improve the habitat of an endangered butterfly, such as the Duke of Burgundy, you might wonder where that odd word 'butterfly' comes from.

Old and Middle English suggest it is a mutation of butor (beater), describing the beating motion of the wings, and 'fly'. However, Middle German translates to 'butter-licker' and modern German to 'milk-thief'. Whereas the Middle Dutch translation seems to suggest that the beasts excrete butter! The ancient Greek word for butterfly means the lofty 'soul' or 'mind'. In Russian the word also means 'bow-tie', which is a bit prosaic or 'grandmother' which is decidedly strange. So, take your pick.

There is quite a lot of symbolism associated with butterflies including 'butterflies in the stomach' which most of us will have experienced at some time or other. And then, of course, we may describe someone as having a 'butterfly mind' because they have a tendency to flit about from one subject to the next touching on each only briefly.

In Japanese culture a single butterfly is seen as the personification of a person's soul or even a herald of love. But beware, large numbers of butterflies are taken as a

distinctly bad omen! In Chinese culture, two butterflies flying together symbolise love. In the Philippines, by contrast, a black butterfly or moth is seen as a harbinger of death (rather more to do with being black I think). Some people say that when a butterfly lands on you it will bring you good luck but, apparently, there is a tradition in Devonshire of killing the first butterfly you see because otherwise you are in for a year of bad luck!

Whatever the name, or whatever they have come to symbolise, there is no doubt that butterflies are beautiful creatures and are one of the joys of volunteering in the wonderful South Downs National Park.

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

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Inset: Duke of Burgundy butterfly.

Main image: Silver-washed fritillary.



Welcoming our new starter

In each edition of *Downland Thymes* we like to introduce you to some of our new starters. This month, say hello to Kevin Reilly.

Kevin Reilly

Area:

Singleton Group – Portsmouth contingent.

Favourite day:

Burning scrubland, which disconcerted me as I enjoyed setting the fires just a little too much!

How I got involved with the VRS:

Having spent my school years in rural Warwickshire, I have always had an affinity for the outdoors.

Unusual fact about myself:

I was one of the British Fencing coaches who ran the preparation's area for the international athletes at the Olympics 2012. Two of my 'preps' won gold.

Recommended activity in the National Park:

Looking down onto the fog gathered in Kingsley Vale, during the winter months.

Meon Valley Railway

(the story continues)

In *Downland Thymes* May 2013, we described an earlier VRS task of clearing part of the old Droxford Station platform. Here we feature a similar task at the nearby remnant station of West Meon along the same disused railway line.



Top right: Chief Executive Trevor Beattie with a wild bunch of Western Area volunteers.
Top left: Starting work at West Meon station. Bottom: Work nears completion.



In January 2014, members of the Western Area of the SDVRS met with Rangers from Hampshire County Council Rights of Way team to carry out clearance at the old West Meon Station.

This station forms the northern terminus of the Meon Valley trail which stretches for 17 kilometres from Wickham in the south to West Meon in the north. The trail was established after the railway line closed in 1955, and passes near many picturesque villages in the Meon Valley including Exton, Corhampton and Meonstoke, where there are three parish churches within a mile's walk; the oldest, Corhampton, has Saxon stonework foundations.

The weather was not kind to us and we had to put up with downpours of rain, hail storms and high winds. But we are nothing if not resilient... and waterproof. The task for the day was to start on the clearance of plant growth that has hidden the platforms at the station since the line closed.

Once the workplace was set up, the merry rasp of the chainsaw and the insistent buzz of the brushcutter were soon to be heard. Next up, the all-important fire, much needed to keep the area tidy as well as to warm the workers.

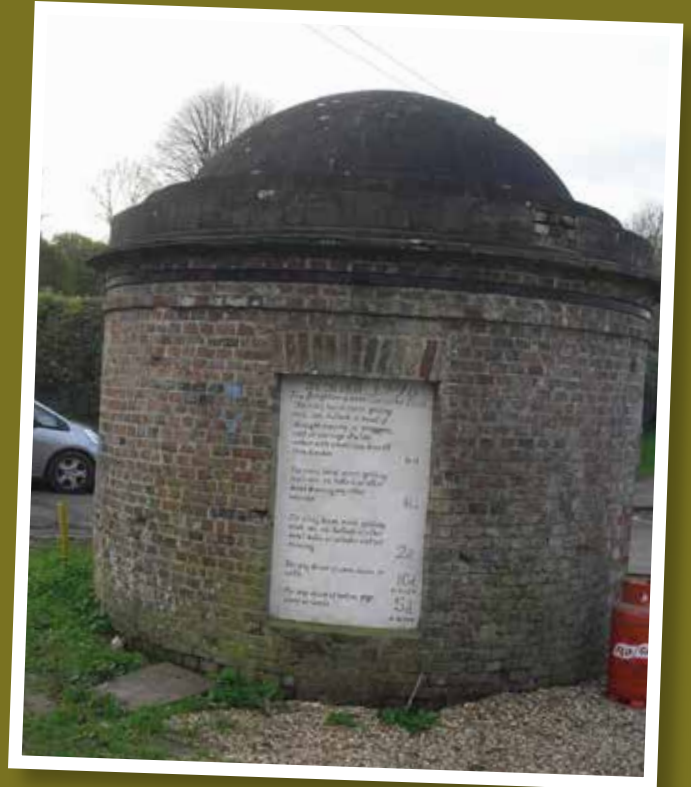
Platform revealed

It is always a surprise to see how much difference a few dedicated souls can make in a very short time. What was once a veritable jungle of tangled bramble, clematis, dog rose, ash and sycamore soon revealed a bed of leaf mould, underneath which lay the platform. So the next task was to slice off the debris with a shovel and reveal the platform edge. People in the past had taken up the bull-nosed bricks that were on the very edge of the platform and left a corrugated pattern of mortar along the length of the platform. But the outline of the platform was soon revealed and the track bed cleared of most of the smaller trees. Enthusiastic bow saw, lopper and billhook work soon reduced the fallen trees to manageable lengths for the fire. A thoroughly satisfying, if slightly damp, task.

In February we again returned to the Station site to continue clearing the platform – and were joined by Trevor Beattie, the SDNPA Chief Executive, who got stuck into the task (see photo). Fortunately the weather smiled upon us for this second visit and Trevor enjoyed his stay. He was also able to inform us that the National Park, along with partner Hampshire County Council, has obtained additional funding to further improve the Meon Valley Trail. So, later this year, the Trail will benefit by having two new bridgeway bridges installed as well as sections of improved surfacing.

Terry Doyle – Volunteer Ranger, Western Downs

Pic in the Park



Ashcombe Toll House, in a lay-by close to the A27 near Lewes.
Grid Ref: TQ 390093

This odd, circular brick building is a relic from the age of turnpike roads.

It originates from 1820 and probably fell into disuse once the local turnpike trust was wound up in 1871. This building was first 'restored' in the 1950s. Today it boldly states the toll fees of 1770, but looks out of place and forlorn, standing beside a burger van and squeezed in between the dual carriageway, a minor road and the railway.

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).

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, of up to 100 words, to dt@southdowns.gov.uk with a picture.

TRADITIONAL INN AWARD



The Swan Inn, Lewes

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 Swan Inn, Lewes, BN7 1HU

Volunteer Barney Cockerell tells us: 'This is my favourite pub in Lewes. It's away from the centre of town so not as popular as some Lewes pubs but there's a big car park so it makes a good base for walking. It's also at the end of Juggs Lane, which leads down from Kingston Ridge, so ideal for people taking a diversion off the South Downs Way or walking over from Brighton/ Woodingdean. It also has by far the nicest garden of any pub in Lewes.'

In winter, a roaring log fire greets you and the lovely old building has a very cosy feel to it. There's always Harveys Best and at least one other seasonal beer on tap. The food is very good and, I think, most reasonably priced. And behind the bar there is a very good selection of music on vinyl.

I think it's everything a pub should be – relaxed, friendly and welcoming.'

Recommended website: **getamap**

Chantal Laurent, a Volunteer Ranger from the Wealden Heaths area, recommends the really useful, OS Getamap website, which is an online ordnance survey map programme covering all of Great Britain.

You can access this for free, to search for places/grid references, and plot walking routes. And if you subscribe for £19.99 a year, you can print out A4 size maps of routes that you have plotted. It calculates the mileage and the expected time to walk, cycle and jog the route (using Naismith's rule). And you can save your plotted routes to print out at a later date. Although I do still use/buy normal printed maps, this is great for planning one-off walks when you don't want to buy a map. I last used it to plot out our walking route for a 7-day hike along the Offa's Dyke path in Wales.

www.getamap.ordnancesurveyleisure.co.uk

EASTER JOKE



The professor's wife asks her husband:

'Could you please go shopping and get me an Easter Egg, and if they have avocados, buy six.'

A short time later the professor comes back with six Easter Eggs.

The wife asks him, 'Why did you buy six Easter Eggs?'

He replied, 'They had avocados...'



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.

English lesson of the day: complete vs. finished

No dictionary has been able to adequately explain the difference between COMPLETE and FINISHED. However, in a recent linguistic conference held in London, attended by some of the best linguists in the world, Samsundar Balgobin, a Guyanese, was declared the clear winner.

His final challenge was this:
Some say there is no difference between COMPLETE and FINISHED.

Please explain the difference between COMPLETE and FINISHED in a way that is easy to understand.

Here is his astute answer:

'When you marry the right woman, you are COMPLETE. But, when you marry the wrong woman, you are FINISHED. And when the right one catches you with the wrong one, you are COMPLETELY FINISHED!'

His answer was received with a standing ovation lasting over five minutes.

Our winner from the December edition:



'Some volunteers were less than impressed when, after the restoration of a medieval, multi-seat loo, one volunteer decided to give it a full and proper test.'

**William Russell – Volunteer
Ranger, Western Downs.**

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

SDNPA news

Launch of the **Partnership Management Plan**



Many people, organisations and networks in, and around, the National Park have helped to shape the new Partnership Management Plan and will now be involved in its delivery.

At the end of January we launched our new Partnership Management Plan with a whistle-stop week of three events which involved one Minister, two local MPs and, predictably, quite a lot of rain! We were joined at the Ministerial event in Stanmer Park by one of the Stanmer-based VRS groups. Many thanks to the group for coming along and agreeing to wear very attractive blue shoe covers!

The Plan has been a joint venture from the start. Many people, organisations and

networks in, and around, the National Park have helped to shape it and will now be involved in its delivery. Volunteers, both within the VRS and in other organisations across the National Park, will have a key role to play in its implementation. The Delivery Framework at the back of the report lists over 100 outcomes already and this part of the Plan will be expanded as more projects come on line. The VRS is listed as a key partner in a number of the areas of delivery including the South Downs Way and Rights of Way.

.....
Top photo: Lord de Mauley MP, Minister responsible for National Parks, and local cyclists at launch event for the new Partnership Management Plan.



The plan sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 11 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality. It focuses on where we all believe partnership action can make a tangible difference over the next five years.

The goal of the Plan is to stimulate local action, influence the major streams of public and private investment into the National Park, and align with the policies and programmes of other public bodies. It will, of course, drive the Authority's own business and operational plans, and provides the starting point for the development of the policies in our Local Plan.

Local Plan consultation

The first stage of the Local Plan Options and Community Infrastructure Levy consultation has begun and will run until the end of April. The Local Plan will work alongside the Partnership Management Plan to guide development within the National Park.

Events season!

Events season is almost upon us and Laura Warren has been busy working with the area teams to whittle down a list of over 70 possible events to around 40. You can find a list of the events which the SDNPA will be attending on the intranet under the Communications section. Thanks as always to the many volunteers who make our attendance at these events possible! Please come out and help again this year.

Shared identity – thank you

Finally, a huge thank you to Alastair Stewart and the other volunteers who have and are continuing to contribute to the development of the shared identity for the National Park. You can find out more about their input in Alastair's article in the right-hand columns and I hope we will be able to feed back more on this in the next edition of *Downland Thymes*.

**Ruth James – Communications
& Engagement Manager**

A shared identity for the National Park

How do you encapsulate everything that is the South Downs National Park in a simple way that means the same not only to everyone who lives, works and plays in the park, but also to visitors, potential visitors and others throughout the UK and beyond? At the end of January a few of us volunteers attended a SDNPA 'Shared Identity' meeting to find out more.

It is a big question but the National Park, and its many stakeholders, need to be able to share and deliver such a simple, common message. It's not about coming up with just another logo or slogan, but with something, be it a picture or written or spoken words, that instantly means 'South Downs National Park' – not the administrative Authority that runs it, but the National Park itself in all its beauty and diversity. Yes, this something will be used by the Park Authority but its real value will be in its wider adoption e.g. on signage, by companies trading within the National Park, by transport companies on their vehicles and livery, by holiday advertisers and by local groups and associations.

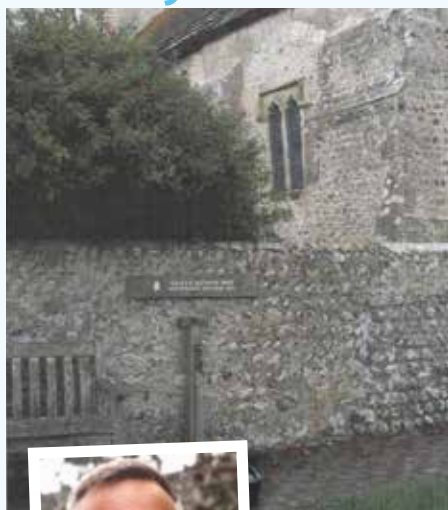
In a series of workshops the National Park's members and stakeholders, including a number of Volunteer Rangers, began the process of defining what that

message might be. In busy and genuinely consultative events, participants undertook a number of exercises designed to draw out opinions, for example, evaluating whether various photographs of landscapes, activities and communities fitted with individual perceptions of what 'the National Park' actually is.

The results of those workshops were shared back with members and stakeholders at group sessions in January and further feedback and opinions were gathered. These are being used to drive the next phases of the work, which will see the information gained being distilled down into some firm proposals for members to consider. The results of all this hard work are planned to be shared shortly in spring 2014.

**Alastair Stewart – Volunteer
Ranger, Western Downs**

Projects in memory of Paul



Last year, VRS Chairman Ron Wilder sent a note to all volunteers mentioning that VRS funds had been boosted by many donations received in memory of the late Paul Millmore, the founder of the Volunteer Ranger Service. The precise amount now stands at £2130.

After due consideration the VRS committee decided to initiate two separate projects in Paul's memory.

1. Ensure that there are adequate fresh water taps and troughs along the entire South Downs Way (SDW) trail.

Andy Gattiker, SDW National Trail Officer, made contact with all SDW Wardens asking them to survey the whole trail by looking at the condition of existing taps/ signage and to recommend where new taps/troughs might be considered. This survey came up with 14 potential new tap sites and improvements to existing sites. Six of these have been prioritised by Andy:

- Hampshire: Lomer Farm, Sustainability Centre, Queen Elizabeth Country Park,
- West Sussex: Littleton Farm,
- East Sussex: Seven Sisters Country Park, Birling Gap.

A lead Ranger was asked to carry out any landowner liaison for each site as well as to liaise with their VRS committee representative in order to identify a

volunteer to help project manage the specific task. Most of this work has now been completed, but there is still a gap for the Littleton Farm site where we are short of a person or people to help co-ordinate the work. So, please consider volunteering as it is our objective to involve VRs at all these sites (contact Andy at: andy.gattiker@southdowns.gov.uk Tel: 01273 625242).

If funding and willingness allows, then other sites identified in the initial survey could also be taken forward in the future.

In addition, an application has been submitted on the committee's behalf to the Drinking Fountain Association for a grant of £2000 as this would greatly increase the amount of work that could be accomplished – we expect a decision in March or April.

2. Erect an Interpretation Panel on Southease Bridge

Paul Millmore played a key role in the £1.7m restoration of the Grade II listed Southease Swing Bridge over the river Ouse which was re-opened in November 2010.

In recognition of his important involvement, the VRS committee decided, subject to agreement with external bodies such as the Environment Agency, to fund an interpretation panel as a memorial to Paul. Ian Hartle and Stephen Sibbald are currently working with all parties concerned as well as investigating whether any matched funding might be possible.

It is planned that actual installation work will begin shortly in a few sites and be incorporated into the relevant area's task programme. Thank you to those VRs who are helping their lead Ranger manage these various projects, but please can I again appeal for volunteers to put their names forward for the Littleton Farm site (see above). Finally, our overall thrust is, wherever possible, to try and obtain matched funding so as to ensure the memorials to Paul will be significant and long lasting.

Nevill Brooke, VRS Treasurer

Top left: One of the drinking taps along the South Downs Way; Paul Millmore. Top right: Southease Bridge, site of a new interpretation panel.

South Downs

Volunteer Ranger Service



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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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