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Bringing the logs back home

All you Volunteer Rangers who have woodburners or open fires will understand the following dilemma...

You receive the rota for the next quarter and what do you look for first?

What dates am I down for?
Can I make them all?

What is the task?
Is it a 'tba' or is there a chance of returning with some wood?

Who is the ranger?
They are all good so no problem there.

Who are your fellow volunteers that day?
They are all also fine so no problem there... or is there?

Well yes there could be as, let's face it, one of the many perks of being a SDNP Volunteer Ranger is that you may be able to bring back the odd log or two to keep the home fire burning.

So, you look at the rota of volunteers and think 'Oh no! He has an open fire and she has a wood burner and he also often likes to have some wood too'. So you know, on that day, you will have little chance of some lovely ash to pop in your boot. We never argue about it of course as all volunteers are very polite to everyone.

Memento of hard work

Often we all end up with some little memento of our hard work but it does depend on the task – no logs if you are raking up cut grass rather than felling ash trees. There are also no logs if the land rover is full as it would not be prudent to leave the tools or volunteers behind rather than the wood!

The rangers are always very patient with our requests and sensible in deciding if we can bring any wood back to Barnham and we obviously don't argue or put down our tools in anger if the answer to our wood request is 'No room in the boot, sorry'.

All you wood burning people might be interested in an old woodman's poem I came across (see page 4).

By the way Cris, I'll send you a list of the volunteers whom I prefer not to be with on a wood cutting task...only joking!

Helena Lewis – Volunteer Ranger, Central Downs

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Top right: Taking home the odd log – an occasional perk of volunteering. © Helena Lewis.
Main photo © SDNPA and inset © Russell Cleaver



Chairman's Corner

This has been a busy year so far for your Committee. As I write this, the first of our education courses has taken place and, by the time you get to read June's *Downland Thymes*, most of them will have been completed! The take up for the courses this year has been good but not as good as last year, when we first started them. So, we shall be reviewing what we offer and will try to come up with some new ideas for next year – if any of you have suggestions please pass them on to your representative or, indeed, any of the Committee. Contact details are given on page 7.

Also, in recent weeks we have begun the first works for the Paul Millmore memorial projects – water points along the South Downs Way have started to be installed. Thanks to excellent work by Russell Cleaver we have doubled the funds available for this project with a generous grant from the Drinking Water Association.

Finally, some work has been done on reviewing our constitution. The survey conducted as part of this has, I think, given us the opportunity to engage a little better and provided some very useful opinions and comments from you. This year's AGM is on 19 July and the Committee will be proposing a revised constitution for your approval. Our AGM will be held in the new South Downs Centre in Midhurst (see page 14) and I really encourage as many of you as possible to come along and celebrate the new headquarters of our National Park. We will be treated to dinner and dancing so don't miss out.

Ron Wilder, VRS Chairman



Update from the VRS Team

I write this surrounded by boxes having just got a C minus in 'How to use the new phone system' – it's the first day for SDNPA staff at our new headquarters, the South Downs Centre in Midhurst. It brings together colleagues from buildings across Midhurst and Petersfield as well as one or two others like Cris Savill and I, who have been based in Area offices. A lot of effort has gone into making this new building as sustainable and efficient as it can practically be, something you can read more about later in this issue. If you want to come and see the building for yourself, there is a public reception area with some great new interpretation which is open in normal working hours throughout the week. Otherwise, come to this year's VRS AGM which will be held here on July 19. Get the date in your diaries!

Cris Savill is working on outdoor practical work programmes for July to September at the moment – the last ones he will put together before Area Rangers in Stanmer, Singleton and Midhurst take on this work and he starts his new role as Volunteer Support Officer. By the time you read this you will have received information about new contact phone numbers for Cris and I. Vicky will continue to work from Stanmer.

We will soon be asking people to help with several new areas of work over the next few months. These include:

- **helping** in the public information area of the South Downs Centre to talk to and assist visitors and local people who want to find out more about the National Park;
- **assisting** our Landscape Lead, Chris Fairbrother, who needs help carrying out an assessment of tranquillity across the National Park. The aim is to assemble evidence which can support the new Local Plan for the South Downs National Park and decision making on proposed new developments;
- **working** with the team from the 'Secrets of the High Woods' project (mapping archaeology hidden beneath the trees of the West Sussex Downs) who will be looking for help to 'ground-truth' features

found using aerial laser photography. The project will also need help with research, at project exhibitions and events, and in interviewing local people to record 'oral histories'.

Over the last couple of years, the VRS Committee of representatives has become more and more active in making things happen for Volunteer Rangers and feeding ideas and opinions into new work for the National Park. SDVRS Chair, Ron Wilder, is a member of the South Downs Partnership – a group of 'senior individuals from different sectors, all with an important stake in the future of the South Downs National Park'. Through the Committee he can feed your views into a forum which has real influence on the development of policy for the National Park. While some Areas are well represented others currently have no voice at all, so the Committee is keen to recruit new members from those groups. If you volunteer from Stanmer, Singleton or Barnham, and you'd like to be more involved in the future of the VRS and represent your colleagues, get in touch with Ron Wilder, me, or anyone else on the Committee to find out more. Contact details are given on page 7.

All the best to you all; I look forward to seeing as many of you as can make it at the AGM, if not before.

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



Public information area in the new South Downs Centre © SDNPA



Wellies, waders and willing volunteers

A report from one of our partners

Over the past four years or so, the South Downs Volunteer Rangers have been a regular presence at Shortheath Common, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) near Bordon in East Hampshire.

Volunteers attired to remove Himalayan Balsam plants from the stream.

Shortheath Common, managed by Hampshire County Council's Countryside Service, is a very special site for wildlife. Features of interest include a large valley mire with the best population of cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccus*) in the south of England, as well as a good number of field crickets (*Gryllus campestris*), an enigmatic but endangered species found at only a handful of sites in the UK. The South Downs volunteers have assisted with a range of projects to help look after this important site – all of them invaluable but not necessarily glamorous!

Scrub clearance

Scrub clearance – the staple activity of many a volunteer group – has formed a major part of the work of the South Downs volunteers when they visit Shortheath. The Monday group in particular are formidable; some members are qualified to use chainsaws and clearing saws, as well as pesticides to help stop regrowth of the cut stumps. The group has carried out extensive work in the mire at the site, restoring views that have not been seen for many a year. This work helps to stop the successional process from mire to wet woodland and benefits the unique mire vegetation, which includes sphagnum bog mosses, cranberry and sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*). Wellies

are a must, and I always tell people that you haven't really 'been' to Shortheath Common unless you've left with at least one foot soggy and smelling of mire! Scrub clearance is also carried out on dry areas where it has benefited the field cricket and other heathland and grassland-loving invertebrates, as well as rare ground-nesting bird species such as woodlark (*Lullula arborea*) and nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*).

Removal of Himalayan Balsam

Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), a relative of the busy lizzie, is invasive in many parts of the UK and has been found growing beside the Oakhanger Stream which borders Shortheath Common. While this plant has become well-established along many stretches of river in the local area, it is of the utmost importance that it does not become established in the important wet habitats found at Shortheath. The South Downs volunteers have gamely tackled the task of sweeping the stretch of stream adjacent to the Common each year to remove plants before they flower, preventing these attractive but menacing invaders from performing their trademark trick of flinging each of their 800 seeds up to seven metres in search of new places to grow. No

doubt the favourite part of the task is the requirement to wear very attractive chest-waders, which thankfully have been captured on camera for all to see (and featured in the caption competition *Downland Thymes*, December 2013!)

Revamping site signage and other infrastructure

The South Downs volunteers have also brought their wide range of skills and experience to a variety of other tasks, including replacing old, worn-out site signage and helping us to improve the security of the site by installing wooden posts or 'dragons teeth' at strategic locations.

The South Downs volunteers in Hampshire always bring with them a good selection of well-maintained tools, a diversity of skills and experience and, most importantly, an abundance of enthusiasm and dedication for looking after countryside in the South Downs National Park. We can't thank them enough for all of their hard work at Shortheath over the past few years and long may it continue!

Susanne Stoneman – HCC Countryside Ranger responsible for Shortheath Common

Update on Birling Gap



The storms of last winter gave a great battering to Birling Gap which, as readers of *Downland Thymes* will know, is where you'll find the newly created VRS garden adjacent to the cliff top café and cottages.

This garden, which Gabby Toft and other VRS members created, and which featured in the last issue of *Downland Thymes*, has recently seen a dramatic change to its surroundings. Fierce storms have eroded much of the sea cliff – leaving the garden only a few metres from the cliff edge.

Access to the beach had to be closed during the winter, after the storms caused damage to the steps, and during the cliff top works but this was restored just before Easter. It appears that only one of the remaining four cliff top cottages is still occupied – by a National Trust representative and his family.

There used to be eight coastguard cottages at Birling Gap and the last time a cottage was demolished was in 2002. The sun lounge part of the café, which was opposite the cottages, has been removed. However, the renovated part of the main building remains as a café, the new shop adjoining it is trading and a museum is being fitted out which will form an integral part of the complex.

The main part of the garden area, which is on the landward side of the commercial building, has been unaffected by the horrendous winter storms and is there for the public to enjoy. The chalk-filled gabions, tables and fish fence placed at the front of the café last year were designed to be easily

moved on this changing coastline, and have all been reused within the garden.

So how much has this dramatic change in fortune affected public appreciation of Birling Gap? Well, the television coverage has inspired many people to come and see the area so even though the site is much changed, visitor numbers remain high.

Christopher Hicks, Volunteer Ranger, Seven Sisters

*Top right: All that remains of the Birling Gap cottages. © Christopher Hicks
Above: Birling Gap café after the storms. © Christopher Hicks
Main photo: 2014 winter storms led to seven years' worth of erosion in two months. © Lee Roberts*



Come and learn the secrets of the heath

Petersfield Heath will once again be the venue for this year's *Secrets of the Heath* event which highlights the special importance of our remaining lowland heathland habitats.

On Saturday 30 and Sunday 31 of August 2014 this exciting event will feature re-enactment groups, story-telling, wildlife spotting and a host of other family activities designed to bring the history and management of the heathland to life.

Colourful characters dating from prehistory up to World War II will explain and demonstrate the part they have played in the creation of this now globally rare habitat. The story of our heathlands will be brought right up to date with an explanation of the current grazing management projects.

Petersfield Heath has proved an ideal location and this year's event will have exciting news of a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) project to understand and conserve the prehistoric barrow cemetery on the site which is set to take place over the next four years. Focusing on the excavation of and

research into this unique cultural heritage, this project will create new educational resources and opportunities for schools and colleges, as well as information for the general public.

Secrets of the Heath is supported by many of our partners from the 'Heathlands Reunited' HLF project including Sussex Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, the National Trust and Hampshire County Council.

Re-enactment groups will be among the attractions at this year's Secrets of the Heath © SDNPA

Logs to burn

Continued from front page...

Logs to burn! Logs to burn!
Logs to save the coal a turn!
Here's a word to make you wise
When you hear the woodman's cries.

Beechwood fires burn bright and clear;
Hornbeam blazes too,
If logs are kept a year
And seasoned through and through.

Oak logs will warm you well
If they're old and dry,

Larch logs of pinewood smell
But the sparks will fly.

Pine is good and so is yew
For warmth through winter days
But poplar and willow too,
Take long to dry and blaze.

Birch logs will burn too fast,
Alder scarce at all.
Chestnut logs are good to last
If cut in the fall.

Holly logs will burn like wax,
You should burn them green,

Elm logs like smoldering flax,
No flame is seen.

Pear logs and apple logs,
They will scent your room.
Cherry logs across the dogs
Smell like flowers in bloom.

But ash logs, all smooth and grey,
Burn them green or old,
Buy up all that come your way,
They're worth their weight in gold.

by Honor Goodhart, 1926



Waymarking the Way

South Downs Way (SDW) Officer, Andy Gattiker, is a hard man to find, especially when you know he could be anywhere along the 100-mile trail.

A good way to start, I thought, would be to ask a SDW Warden: 'Who?' they said. I explained. 'Never seen him' they said, 'least ways not this year. Try email.'

'I tried,' I said 'he never replied.'

'I phoned him once', another volunteer explained, 'I was told he was in Hampshire.'

Now fully intrigued and determined not to be put off, I contacted a friendly SDNPA Ranger who offered some sensible advice. Following our chat I sent off a detailed email listing items required for the waymarking of the South Downs Way which I had found to be missing. And, what do you know, it worked!

Arrangements were made online to meet up at the site and replace missing signs and broken fingerposts.

Inevitably, at the allotted time and place it poured with rain...but a large 4x4 rolled up laden with materials and equipment to install the necessary signs. And, who should be driving this but the man himself.

Being scientifically trained I of course immediately acquired evidence – photographs were taken. So if proof be needed, here is evidence for all to see, Andy Gattiker does exist and can be seen here leading a volunteer task with post tamper in hand. Who cares if it rained – atishoo!

A wet volunteer in the west

Above left: The elusive Andy Gattiker replaces a SDW sign © Russell Cleaver

Bats in the bedroom

With the weather getting warmer, you may be tempted to open your bedroom windows to get some fresh air while sleeping. But, beware, as you might be inviting in an unusual visitor: Picture the scene...

In the dead of the night you are woken by a fluttering noise coming from behind the bedroom curtains. Then, something starts zooming around the room and you are suddenly very awake. Here we go again...

'It's only a bat. It will probably fly off through the window again in a moment. We had better keep the lights out so as not to frighten it.'

'How can it do that with the curtains shut?'

'OK, I'll open them and the rest of the windows while I'm about it.'

'Perhaps it will get stuck in the curtains? Isn't it a kind of flying MOUSE?'

'Well, if we were in India it could be a flying FOX (*Pteropus giganteus*) or if we were in South America a VAMPIRE bat (*Desmodus rotundus*). But, as we are in the South Downs National Park, it's probably a little

pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*). Anyway, we're not allowed to touch it so let's make sure it manages to get out on its own.'

Fortunately, it did!

Bats are a protected species in the UK and the law about this is quite interesting. Apparently, you are not allowed to remove them from your property if they are found in an attic or uninhabited part of the house, but they can be removed (by a licensed handler) from rooms that people use regularly.

We never saw our visitor(s) properly – perhaps you might have better luck.

More information can be found at: www.bats.org.uk/pages/bats_repeatedly_found_in_house.html

Volunteer Batman, Western VRS



Pipistrelle bat ©National Trust/Keith Zealand



Where did you get that hat?

The first time I wore a uniform was nearly 40 years ago. That was when I was (briefly) a Park Keeper on Hampstead Heath. It was also the last time I wore a hat, Ycch! So, recently, I wasn't exactly thrilled when Rangers offered me a brand new bump hat or floppy hat, boldly embroidered with the SDNPA logo.

Uniforms, and how they should be bettered, have been a constant topic of conversation all my working life. As a young countryside ranger in the 70s, I felt it was desperately important to display the right image. You didn't want to look officious to the public, like a policeman, but neither did you want to appear like a local yokel. I wanted to dress 'country cool'. Black clothing was clearly out, so sludge-green became the uniform colour of choice – such is fashion amongst country folk.

Back then I recall peer pressure being in favour of moleskin trousers – 'they're definitely the best for working among thorns' – and thinking that the poor moles probably needed them more than I. But they proved too hot for comfort. Next it was waxed jackets which, to be truly weather proof, need regular waxing. Just the job, until the wife went shopping and found

the car seat covered in grease. It wasn't easy agreeing on outdoor clothing.

As for what should be worn on the head there was never a consensus. The first uniform hat I wore was a trilby – can you believe that? It remained mostly unworn, except when arriving at staff meetings and, even then, it was quickly removed. Later I remember one guy looked pretty cool in a wide brimmed hat like a gaucho. But as the years rolled by, the most anyone wore was the woolly, shapeless beany to keep the ears warm. It proved easier to avoid headwear than to agree on it.

Cool or comfortable

So it was that all the Rangers' meetings I ever went to seemed to descend into arguments about what the uniform should or shouldn't comprise. Everyone had their

own image of what they should wear.

These days I have to accept that no item of clothing is ever going to make me look cool. My highest ambition is to appear comfortable – and to avoid too many holes being burnt into my outer wear. (It is this latter point that gets my wife heated, 'You cannot wear that polo shirt again, it looks like a string vest!') But, I have to add that we are particularly well served by the SDNPA. As volunteers we are supplied with a range of clothing that would make volunteers in other Trusts or local authorities green with envy and for which I am truly grateful.

However, you can keep the Quangle Wangle hat, I feel uncomfortable in it.

Russell Cleaver – Volunteer Ranger, Western Downs

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Modelling the new embroidered floppy hat
© Russell Cleaver

Sussex Festival of Nature

The South Downs National Park is excited to once again be a key partner in the annual Sussex Festival of Nature, alongside Brighton and Hove City Council, Sussex Wildlife Trust and the National Trust.

Taking place in Stanmer Park, Brighton on Sunday 22 June 2014, this free family-friendly event celebrates the diverse habitats and unique landscapes of Sussex. Showcasing the conservation work of groups who protect and enhance the countryside, the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service will be key to the SDNP presence at this event.

It is hoped that this year's event will have a special significance because a decision on the bid for Brighton, and surrounding areas of coast and downs, to be designated a Biosphere Reserve is expected from UNESCO in mid-June. If successful, the Sussex Festival of Nature provides the perfect opportunity to celebrate this global award.

Free travel

In line with our 'Discover Another Way' campaign which encourages people to leave their car behind and travel more sustainably, festival visitors can download a voucher at www.southdowns.gov.uk/festivalofnature for free or half-price travel on several local bus services.

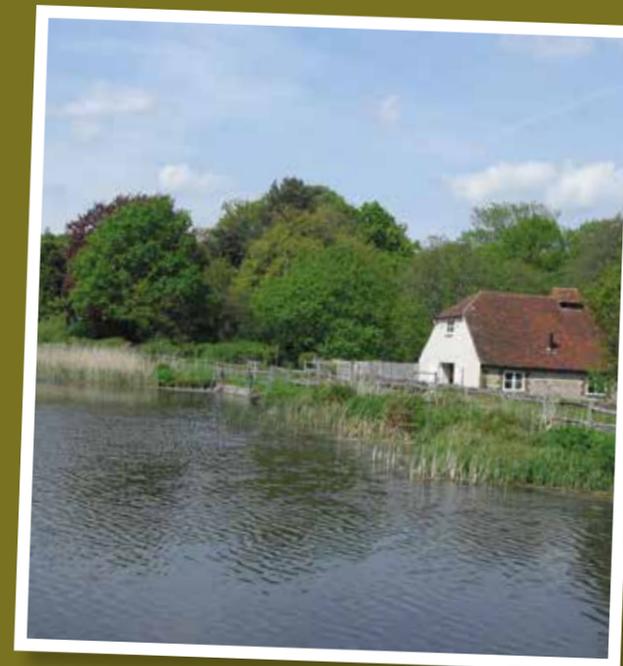
Sussex Festival of nature
bringing people and nature together



Get Involved

This year's event season has roughly 40 events and shows in the schedule and many of you have already helped out on the SDNPA stand. There are some great events on the list with new additions such as the South Downs Country and Farming Fair at Queen Elizabeth Country Park in Hampshire and West's Wood Fair in East Dean, West Sussex. Thanks as always to the many volunteers who make our attendance at these events possible. If you'd like to help out on our event stand take a look at the list of events SDNPA will be attending on the intranet under the Communications section and let Laura Warren, Events and Engagement Manager, know which ones you'd like to attend by emailing laura.warren@southdowns.gov.uk

Pic in the Park



Burton Mill Pond near Petworth
Grid Ref: SU 978180

Burton Mill Pond lies some three miles south of Petworth and was originally a 16th century hammer pond. Today it is a tranquil Local Nature Reserve. A minor road crosses the dam wall, beside which you'll find a small car park.

There are several footpaths you can follow that cross different adjacent habitats such as woodland, carr, wet and dry heathland and bogs, as well as another pond. This site is jointly run by West Sussex County Council and Sussex Wildlife Trust, but with a light touch – the interpretation is notably outdated. Interestingly, while we were there a contractor was installing an 'eel pass', a sort of bristle-bottomed wriggle tube allowing eels to migrate around the dam.

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).



Welcoming our new starters

In each edition of *Downland Thymes* we like to introduce you to some of our new starters. This month say hello to Charlotte McRae and Claire Braysher.

Charlotte McRae (left)

Area: I volunteer in the Seven Sisters area on Saturdays and Sundays.

My first day as a Volunteer Ranger: My first day was back in August 2013 and it was a really warm day. We were working at Birling Gap. To start with I was very nervous but was soon made to feel welcome by everyone and I had a fantastic time pulling ragwort. I really enjoyed it and from that day I knew I wanted to do as many tasks as possible.

How I got involved with the VRS: I contacted the Volunteer Rangers through the website. A few years back on a previous college course I had done some work for a member of staff on your team (Stanmer Ranger Mark Hayward) and was trying to find an email address for him to see if maybe there was anything I could get involved in. I never did find the email address but I found out about the VRS and it sounded interesting so I applied.

Unusual fact about myself: It's hard to pick just one! I would say the most obvious is that I absolutely love butterflies. My whole room is plastered in butterflies from stickers

to wind chimes and from the little light on the wall to curtains and bedding... it's all butterflies and I still hope to fit more in. I'm also totally petrified of snakes!

Recommended activity in the National Park: I love them all but I would have to say my favourite things to do in the South Downs are bird and wildlife watching.

Claire Braysher (right)

Area: I volunteer with the Tuesday group in the Midhurst region, primarily involved in heathland management and scrub clearance.

My first day with the VRS: My first task was clearing scrub at Hurston Warren near Pulborough, West Sussex. I remember it as an area of heathland, sloping southwards, overlooking the South Downs. It was July and the weather was lovely and sunny. I remember thinking what a privilege to be working in such a beautiful location with such a friendly and like-minded group.

How I got involved with the VRS: I was made redundant early last summer and spent some time thinking about what I really wanted to do next. I had a strong desire to work outdoors and learn more

about the natural landscape. I have always loved the South Downs – from running up and down the Seven Sisters as a child to walking the fabulous South Downs Way as an adult. So I was immediately drawn to the VRS which I discovered on the SDNPA website.

Unusual fact about myself: On the same day as I volunteer with the VRS, I play local league table tennis. So I have about three hours to refill my energy levels and to rest my right arm after sawing and lopping scrub, before another two and a half hours of smashing table tennis balls about. Rather bad planning on my part to schedule both on the same day but I do have a rest on Wednesdays!

Recommended activity in the National Park: A 12-mile walk that starts at Chantry Post car park on the South Downs above Storrington. It includes a section of the South Downs Way going east to Chanctonbury Ring before descending from the South Downs to the historic hill fort of Cissbury Ring and then down to the village of Findon before ascending the South Downs once again.

Pausing for breath on the South Downs Way



A favourite stopping point on the South Downs Way
© Anni Townend

As regular readers of *Downland Thymes*, or those of you who listened to *Ramblings* on Radio 4 last October, will know I love the South Downs and feel especially privileged to live here on the South Downs Way not far from Lewes.

One of my childhood dreams was always: 'When I grow up I want to live in a house from where it is possible to walk into the countryside without having to get into a car or meet people!' The former bit of the dream has come true while the latter is sometimes true and I don't meet anyone but, at other times, I do and it's great to come across fellow lovers of the South Downs, running, walking, strolling and, of course, riding bikes or horses.

The hill that rises 'up the downs' from where we live is quite steep and there is a point where I like to stop, pause for breath and look back. Not only can I look over where I have walked and to our house nestled in the bottom, but also far into the

distance over the rolling hills towards Lewes and beyond.

Behind me as I look over the land are the woods which, right now, are greening and full of the sound of birds. There are also clumps of beautiful primroses and daffodils still shining yellow. It's a walk that I never tire of and a land that is always changing – different crops are sown each year and, at the moment, some of the downland is being enjoyed by sheep and lambs.

From this point, having paused for breath, I walk on, usually 'up to the top' from where it is possible to see the sea in the distance and it is at this point that an even bigger breath can be taken – as the climb is done and the rest is fairly even ground. There is a steady walk to the left towards Lewes along the 'Juggs Road', or to the right towards the track that goes from Falmer to Woodingdean. Along this track there is the Nature Reserve, a steep hill down into more rolling downland and perfect picnic spots in the sheltered bottom which is another stopping place for me.

Reflecting on how I never ever tire of this walk up the South Downs and then back

down and home, has me realise that this regular walking of the same ground is not unlike – for me – being read a favourite story over and over again. Each time it is different and yet each time there is the same familiarity, the looking forward to different twists and turns in the tale and, depending on the reader or teller of the story, different intonations and emphases. And so it is with the walk and these favourite stopping points to pause for breath.

Anni Townend, South Downs Way Warden, Eastern Downs

I never ever tire of this walk up the downs and then back down and home, it has me realise that this regular walking of the same ground is not unlike being read a favourite story over and over again.

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.



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 White Hart Inn,
South Harting, West Sussex
GU31 5QB

Geoff Payne, a volunteer in the Wealden Heath area, sent us his recommendation for a pub in South Harting.

'This hostelry, The White Hart Inn, has been renovated and renewed and is now owned by Upham, the small Hampshire brewery. It is a popular pub in the heart of the village which provides excellent food and service, as well as offering a good range of Upham's beers.

Come and try them.'

Book reviews



'The New Sylva'
by Gabriel Hemery
and Sarah Simblet,
(Bloomsbury), £50

This year is the 350th anniversary of John Evelyn's seminal *Sylva: or a Discourse of Forest*

Trees and the Propagation of Timber in His Majesties Dominions. It was first published in 1664, during the reign of James I st.

It was not only the first serious book on trees and silviculture, it was the first book published by the Royal Society, of which Evelyn was a founding member. It also became the classic reference book for the management of trees and woodland in Britain, being reprinted regularly over the next three centuries.

Consequently, to mark the anniversary of this remarkable book, the Silva Foundation supported the creation of *The New Sylva*, not merely to update the original but also to encourage sustainable woodlands and

promote good stewardship of trees.

The New Sylva harks back to the original in its content and the way the book is structured, but it is also entirely modern in dealing with today's scene. Recent concerns are depressingly familiar, e.g. the effects of climate change and man's impact on biodiversity, but it is not all bad news. For example, the book reveals that Europe is the only region in the world that has an expanding forest area.

This book's scope is enormous: it moves from ecosystems to the husbandry of woods and their products, and then deals individually with our native trees. It also finds room for specific issues such as Ash Dieback Disease and, last but not least, this book, unlike the original, contains superb, detailed illustrations.

The New Sylva is no coffee table book for the chattering classes; it is a scholarly review for anyone genuinely interested in trees. At £50 a copy it is not cheap so ensure your local library gets one – it is well worth dipping into.



'A Slow Passion: Snails, My Garden and Me'
by Ruth Brooks,
(Bloomsbury), £12.99

This book is also published by Bloomsbury but couldn't be more different.

When Radio 4 launched its search for BBC's Amateur Scientist of the Year, nobody expected a grandmother writing about snails would be the winner.

This is a delightful read, one that poses a genuine scientific query: do snails have a homing instinct?

The book starts with the author growing up in the post-war era and depicts her rising interest in nature – something that perhaps a lot of us volunteers can relate to.

There is much to enjoy in this warm and witty book. Who would have thought that snails could be so interesting? But for Ruth it is clear they provided the path into the whole ecosystem of plants and animals.

I promise that if you read this book you'll never look at this common garden pest in the same way again.

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 March edition:



'Graham took the instructions "to get stuck in" rather more seriously than was intended.'

John Walton – Volunteer Ranger, Western Downs



Recommended website

Natural History Museum

The Natural History Museum website is well worth browsing for anyone involved or interested in countryside matters.

The website is huge but we particularly liked this specific page as it provides neat little videos, as well as photos and written information – it's also particularly helpful if you want to identify a particular piece of flora or fauna:

www.nhm.ac.uk/natureplus/community/identification?fromGateway=true

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-newsletter



Staff move into the South Downs Centre

May 2014 marked a new milestone not only for the historic town of Midhurst but also for the National Park Authority when the majority of its staff moved into the South Downs Centre at Capron House.

Up until this time many of the South Downs National Park Authority staff had been distributed across rented office space in five buildings in Petersfield and Midhurst.

Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: 'We're very proud to have moved into the South Downs Centre. As well as being a new home for the National Park Authority, the Centre includes a community hub and an exhibition about the National Park for visitors. We are also in discussion with Chichester District Council to whom we have offered space to operate their tourist information work.'

Based in the north wing of Capron House and the Memorial Hall in Midhurst, the South Downs Centre is helping to preserve two Grade II listed buildings and restore them to the highest possible level of sustainability. This has been a complex undertaking as both buildings were in need of significant repair and upgrading.

We are absolutely delighted that we have been able to reach our ambitious target of a BREEAM accreditation of "Excellent" at design stage and our goal is that the South Downs Centre should become a beacon of sustainability in the National Park.'

Official opening

The fully refurbished building will officially open to the public on 27 July at a special open day which will include behind the scenes tours of the building. However, visitors are already able to discover more about the entire National Park and its special qualities via a new exhibition area in the South Downs Centre which is currently open during office hours.

The Community Hub will be managed by Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice Bureau and will start operating in summer 2014. Bookings for the Memorial Hall conference centre will officially open on 1 June 2014.



As you know, the South Downs National Park Authority also has an important staff presence at three other sites: Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Stanmer Park and Singleton. Active discussions, in partnership with the owners of these sites, are now taking place about the future development of these locations, and how they link with the South Downs Centre as the primary hub for the Authority.

Paul Millmore Library

The Paul Millmore library is situated on the ground floor of the South Downs Centre and is an internal reference-only library for staff, members and volunteers. An online list of available books and resources will be posted on the intranet soon. If you have any items which you would like to donate to the library please contact Rebecca Saunders, Internal Communications Officer: rebecca.saunders@southdowns.gov.uk

Take the Lead' Campaign

Searching out responsible dog walkers

A new campaign to promote responsible dog ownership was launched in May with a competition to identify the 'faces' of responsible dog walking in the South Downs National Park. Four winning owners and pets will walk away with a professional pet photo shoot and photo book worth £200 as well as six months supply of dog food from local, ethical manufacturer, Arden Grange.



New research by the National Park Authority shows that over 90 per cent of dog walkers in the South Downs are frustrated for themselves or others when they see people not picking up after their pet or not having their dog under proper control. Meanwhile, more than 95 per cent believe that the reputation of responsible dog owners and their dogs is unfairly damaged by the actions of a minority.

Witnessing, or seeing the aftermath of, horrific dog attacks on sheep and wildlife can be very upsetting. Along with bags of dog mess left hanging from trees, these sights can ruin the experience of being out in the National Park for those who are following the countryside code.

To help overcome these issues, the National Park Authority wants to celebrate the people who do put their dogs on a lead around livestock; who keep them in sight and under control at all times; who respect wildlife; and who train their dogs correctly so that all users can enjoy the National Park. The aim of this competition is to find positive role models who can *Take the Lead*, set an example to other dog walkers and influence the behaviour of the irresponsible few.

Take the Lead has been endorsed by The Kennel Club. Caroline Kisko, Communications Director for the Kennel Club, said:

"The Kennel Club campaigns to promote responsible dog

ownership and works with local authorities by helping them organise fun and educational dog event days where the public can learn about all aspects of responsible dog ownership, including access for dog walkers, cleaning up after your dog and the importance of training and microchipping.

It is really good news that the South Downs National Park Authority is proactively encouraging responsible dog ownership. The *'Take the Lead'* campaign is a fantastic opportunity for local dog owners to get invaluable information."

Entrants to the competition were asked to submit a photo and a paragraph to the South Downs National Park Authority's Facebook page explaining how and why they were 'taking the lead' in the South Downs this spring. Visit our facebook page to see the entries – www.facebook.com/sdnpa

Four winning dogs and their owners will, in addition to their prizes, be invited to be film stars and take part in short documentary style films showing them enjoying the beautiful South Downs and talking about responsible dog walking.

For more information about *Take the Lead*, to see a humorous animated campaign film and the short documentaries (once they're made) visit:

www.southdowns.gov.uk/takethelead.



Left: Cuckmere river on the left and Charleston reed fen to the right. @ Anne Katrin-Purkiss/SDNPA

Right: Charleston reed fen's lush habitat nestled below the South Downs. @ Anne Katrin-Purkiss/SDNPA

Making the difference

Volunteer work on the Charleston reed fen

Situated in the Cuckmere Valley is a small, nine-acre area known as the Charleston reed fen. Reed fen is an area of reed bed where the water level during the summer months is at or below the ground surface – generally much richer in wildlife than reed swamp which is normally inundated throughout the year.

Until very recently it was owned by the Arnold Land Trust, c/o Eastbourne College, which was named after a headmaster at the college, E C Arnold who had the foresight in 1928 to purchase the land as a nature reserve.

The college allows this reed fen to be managed by the Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS), for which we are grateful as it is a piece of very important habitat, designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Until a few years ago, the Society organised regular conservation work parties in many areas in Sussex, and the reed fen was one of the most popular. The work included coppicing

willows, cutting reeds and doing general maintenance work such as making sure it was secure from unwanted visitors, either human or the cattle which graze the adjacent fields. As the people attending these conservation work parties aged, the more strenuous work tended to not get done and the size of the work parties diminished to a level which was unsustainable. Work was stopped in all areas except the reed fen where just one work party a year from the Society still visited the site.

However, the area needed more work than that. The SOS turned to the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service for help and they responded brilliantly. We started with the Tuesday Group and then, for reasons I cannot remember, worked with the Thursday Group which is still visiting and seemingly enjoying it! Because they undertake conservation work every week, they know exactly what they are doing and can pace themselves to go on all day if required.

The groups come twice a year at the moment and their work has made an

enormous difference to the work we can do, which means the habitat is improving all the time. Masses of blackthorn have been cleared after treatment and much bigger areas of willow are able to be coppiced than was possible before. I can honestly say, on behalf of the SOS, that the reed fen would not be viable without the help we get from the South Downs Volunteer Rangers. Long may it continue.

Tim Parmenter on behalf of the Sussex Ornithological Society

'The Sussex Ornithological Society turned to the South Downs Volunteer Rangers for help and they responded brilliantly.'



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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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