



DOWNLAND THYMES

NEWS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE ISSUE 73 | AUTUMN 2016



THE HEATHLAND HIT SQUAD

**SOME OF YOU MAY HAVE HEARD OF THIS INFAMOUS GROUP. YOU CAN
TELL BY THE NAME THAT WE ARE NOT A GROUP TO BE MESSED WITH...**

The 'Hit Squad' operates out of the Midhurst Depot under the management of the Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT), but we share our role with the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA). Our main activities are as heathland specialists on SWT sites and those managed by the SDNPA.

Anyone who has worked on heathland will know that there is a substantial focus on removing stuff that we don't want growing there. Unfortunately there are a number of plants that love the sandy soil and grow like weeds at every opportunity. So we spend a huge amount of our time cutting and pulling some or all of the following – birch, rhododendron, old gorse, young pine trees etc. For a treat we sometimes dig up ragwort as well. In short we are the replacements for cattle, in the old days. But much better fed!

So it is with some delight that, from time to time, we are actually allowed to build something.

Back in April we paid a visit to Midhurst Common, a site we only visit occasionally, where we helped a group of local volunteers to replace a bridge across a peaty pool. The path is part of the Serpent Trail and the bridge has been due for replacement since slightly after the Bronze Age, so it was a pleasure to help out.

We obtained materials from the County Council (it is a right of way). Having debated for some time where to put the support frames (and with the inspiration of coffee and cake) we went for a slightly new path and for a bridge twice the length of the previous one, to span both the pools and the muddy edges. We adjusted the gaps between the planks of the bridge to ensure that no one with high heels could cross it safely. Narrow-pawed dogs should be fine.

Of course it took a lot longer than this suggests as these things have to be done very carefully. Finally we played a fanfare for the first walker to cross the bridge, much to her surprise and embarrassment!

More recently we were also called upon to rebuild stone walls which are the facing on old banks that probably mark boundaries on Pound Common and Woolbeding Common. This involved some tricky construction skills after digging out the old walls as well as digging around the area to find buried sandstones. It is a little like building a traditional dry stone wall but leaning in at an angle to the bank. Volunteers with skills at jigsaws are particularly welcome as we need to avoid overlarge gaps for the water to get into.

We finished the day by looking admiringly at our work – tarnished only by the fact that there are miles of these walls that still need restoring. We'll never be out of a job!

**GRAHAM AULT, WEALDEN HEATHS
VOLUNTEER RANGER**

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**Main: Building
the bridge as
part of the
Serpent Trail.**

© Graham Ault

Tell us your story. Email your Downland Thymes articles to the editorial team dt@southdowns.gov.uk



CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

At the time of writing my confidence expressed in the summer *Downland Thymes* that we would have a "sunny English summer" was certainly misplaced. The most inclement weather in June dented the on-going VRS task activities across the National Park, but it has also shown that volunteers are hardy folk and always game to "give it a go"!

With the new SDNPA restructure now in place I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate the four new area Lead Rangers on their appointments and to wish them every success. It is an exciting time for them as well as for the VRS as we continue to evolve and enhance our close working relationships in the best long term interests of the National Park. So the VRS Committee's recent appointment of a Review Group is part of the work in establishing long term modus operandi. Thank you to all those VRS members who replied to the Group's recent survey on the future role of the VRS Committee for their useful ideas and input which has provided some valuable data.

We have now completed our 2016 VRS funded Education Courses (the fourth year running that we have done so) for VRS members – four were run in total with two each at Stanmer and the South Downs Centre, all receiving very positive feedback. I am particularly grateful to Ron Wilder, VRS Committee member, for the really excellent job he did in arranging tutors as well as for undertaking all the detailed administration behind the scenes. So Ron, from all who attended, a very big thank you for your commitment and hard work.

Finally, a reminder that there are other funding opportunities available to VRS members, namely

- The Conservation Reserve
- Travel Fellowship

Please refer to the guidelines on the Volunteer section of the SDNPA's Intranet for more information about these.

NEVILL BROOKE, VRS CHAIRMAN

UPDATE FROM THE VRS TEAM



WITH THE DEPARTURE OF PHIL BELDEN (SEE JUNE'S EDITION OF DOWNLAND THYMES) AND NOW CRIS SAVILL FROM THE SDNPA, IT REALLY FEELS LIKE THE END OF AN ERA FOR THE VRS.

Cris played an important part in the development of the VRS, working with Phil in West Sussex as a volunteer ranger from 1989 and being employed to support volunteers from 1997. He also worked closely with Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Officer Alison Tingley in East Hampshire to create the Hampshire group of the VRS in 1999.

Thankfully Cris remains a volunteer ranger and he recently came along with Phil to a small gathering of current and former volunteers who go back to the early years when Phil regularly led practical tasks. The five current volunteer rangers there together boasted 147 years of commitment to the South Downs through the VRS. If the two other volunteers still active from those days had been able to come along, that total would have been 207!

The VRS has a great history, but its future looks even brighter. You now have a fantastic group of people in the VRS Committee helping to shape what the VRS can do for its own members as well as for the South Downs National Park. Organising education events for volunteers; gathering or writing content for *Downland Thymes*; actively managing the money that you hold; improving and expanding online content for volunteers; organising the annual get together and AGM

and representing the VRS on partnership bodies – the VRS Committee achieves an awful lot in addition to maintaining an active and considered dialogue with SDNPA staff. However, all this extra work is done by a small group of people and the load could definitely be spread more widely. It wants to do things even better, but also make sure that the active role of the Committee can be sustained. It is therefore carrying out a review of its structure and aims. Please take any opportunity to feed into that and also seriously consider how you might contribute to some of the things the Committee is providing for volunteer rangers.

Following the SDNPA restructure, we are working with area teams and other supervisors of volunteers to see how we can make best use of the changed resources to support you. We'll keep you updated on any changes that might affect who you contact for different aspects of support like clothing, expenses etc.

As always thanks for your dedicated hard work and enthusiasm.

IAN HARTLE, SDNPA VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Above: Devil's Dyke, West Sussex
© Anne-Katrin Purkiss

Hairy Mallow survey
© Patrick Austin



HAIRY MALLOW IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK IS HOME TO A WIDE RANGE OF RARE SPECIES. THESE INCLUDE INSECTS LIKE THE WART-BITER CRICKET AND THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY BUTTERFLY, BUT ALSO A NUMBER OF RARE PLANTS INCLUDING THE NATIONALLY RARE HAIRY (OR ROUGH) MALLOW (*ALTHAEA HIRSUTA*).

It was first recorded in Britain in 1792 at a site in Cuxton, Kent where it still appears alongside other rarities such as meadow clary (*Salvia pratensis*) and broadleaved cudweed (*Filago pyramidata*). Hairy mallow is more commonly found in the Mediterranean region and south west Asia. In Europe it is found in many areas including the southern coastal regions of France, central Spain, the Balearic Islands, Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily, Malta and the Italian peninsula, European Turkey, and the Black Sea coasts of Bulgaria, Romania, and the Ukraine. In Asia its distribution stretches from the Levant to Turkestan. It is clear then that here in Britain the species is at the northern edge of its range and is reliably found at just a handful of sites.

The plant thrives in open, sunny conditions with low levels of competition from other

species and generally flowers in mid-June. The shallow soils of a South East Water owned covered reservoir near Eastbourne provide the ideal conditions for hairy mallow and approximately 70 other species. However, its arrival at the site is something of a mystery. When constructed the reservoir was covered with the chalk used to excavate it with no foreign topsoil introduced. Consequently there is no suggestion of an alien origin. One theory is that seeds, which remain viable in the seedbank for long periods, may have been transported to the site from a former chalk pit near Cuckmere Haven where the species was last recorded in 1958.

As a result of its scarcity hairy mallow is protected under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act and it is an offence to intentionally pick, uproot or destroy any

plants. The population at the South East Water site (a Site of Special Scientific Interest [SSSI] since 1987) has been closely monitored since 1994 under the auspices of the Plantlife 'Back from the Brink' project. Since 2005 the monitoring work has been led by South East Water ecologists with help from the South Downs Volunteer Rangers. Since 1984 when the species was first identified at the site (approximately 80 to 100 individuals) numbers have fluctuated but have shown an increasing trend – in 2014 South Downs volunteer rangers helped count almost 250,000 plants. However, the sensitivity of the species to the vagaries of the British climate was reflected in a 2015 count that failed to turn up a single individual! Happily in 2016 approximately 37,500 individual plants were counted thereby confirming that the site remains a stronghold for this species in the United Kingdom and that management plans implemented by South East Water to ensure the conservation of the species are proving to be successful.

DR PATRICK AUSTIN, ENVIRONMENT OFFICER, SOUTH EAST WATER

IT REALLY IS REMARKABLE HOW MANY DIFFERENT SURVEYS GET UNDERTAKEN ACROSS THE NATIONAL PARK BY VOLUNTEERS OVER THE COURSE OF A YEAR. THE DATA WE RECORD IN TURN FEEDS THE RESEARCH THAT OFFICERS AND PARTNERS CARRY OUT.

SURVEYING THE SCENERY

You may recall that earlier this summer the media widely reported new evidence of pre-historic field patterns discovered in the South Downs. Well guess who did much of the surveying on the ground to provide this information?

Yup, it was us – in this case, volunteers in the Secrets of the High Woods project. But this was only one survey we've been involved in (albeit one of the biggest).

So I thought I'd do a survey of surveys – just to give you an idea of the sheer variety of topics we've studied in order to supply data to others. Many surveys are modest in scale but nevertheless provide much needed information – I can't pretend to have included all.

See the photographs and the list to the right. Which ones did you get involved in?

RUSSELL CLEAVER,
WESTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER



Butterfly survey
© Nigel Symington



Meon Valley Trail © SDNPA



Dark Skies survey © Chris Nesbit



Secrets of the High Woods © SDNPA / Anne Purkiss

River-fly monitoring © Sarah Wilder



Harvest mouse survey
© SDNPA/Laura Deane

SURVEYS UNDERTAKEN BY VRS VOLUNTEERS, SEPTEMBER 2015-2016

- **Secrets of the High Woods:** in-depth archaeological study revealing levels of pre-historic farming hitherto unsuspected across a section of heavily wooded landscape in the South Downs.
- **Harvest mouse:** recording presence and density of harvest mouse nests in the Selborne area.
- **Farmland birds/lapwing:** Park-wide monitoring of bird species in farmland habitats, also specific lapwing surveys.
- **River Meon and Rother water vole latrine/mink raft:** monitoring the presence and breeding success of water voles, as well as the absence of mink.
- **River Meon river-fly:** monitoring levels of key insect indicator species at intervals along the river – also now in the River Rother (see article on page 11).
- **Climate change:** recording plant species at Old Winchester Hill (one of 37 sites nationwide). A long term monitoring network studying effects of climate change on vegetation led by Natural England.
- **Chalk grassland:** a Park-wide survey to monitor undesignated chalk downland sites.
- **Hairy mallow:** on a single site in East Sussex, monitoring the presence of this nationally rare plant (see article on page 3).
- **Butterfly:** surveying several transects occurring in West Sussex and East Hampshire focussing on the silver-studded blue. The data gathered will assist habitat conservation.
- **Access Land signs:** monitoring replacement needs for signs, waymarkers and site furniture.
- **South Downs Way:** monitoring the condition of the National Trail to inform repair needs.
- **Meon Valley Trail:** reporting on the condition of the 10 mile resurfacing undertaken last year.
- **Dark Skies:** street light/ house light survey to aid assessment of levels of light pollution throughout the National Park.
- **iTree Petersfield:** recording trees, shrubs and hedges to inform research into the benefits of vegetation in the urban environment.
- **Dutch Elm Disease (DED):** supporting East Sussex County Council's DED control programme by identifying diseased trees for removal.
- **Tranquillity:** measuring the relative levels of tranquillity across the entire National Park.



NEW STARTER

**WHICH AREA DO YOU
VOLUNTEER FOR?**

Western Downs based out of Queen Elizabeth Country Park, both outdoor practical Volunteer Ranger and South Downs Way (SDW) Warden.

**CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR
FIRST DAY OR TWO OF
VOLUNTEERING?**

A pleasure and varied. My first few days have been diverse and interesting (not to mention the varied weather conditions). From planting a new hedge and placing floats for water vole monitoring at Tichfield Haven (partly on my uncles land by coincidence), through to surveying the SDW from Butser Hill to Deans Farm to monitor the state of the trail and its furniture. The ranger team and volunteers have all been very friendly and helpful – specially the ranger team whom I have been bombarding with questions! I have managed to complete the VRS training day and am looking forward to getting involved in more tastings. The choice of projects is great and if only I had more time I'd be involved in them all.

**HOW DID YOU GET
INVOLVED WITH THE VRS?**

I have been involved in conservation as a career path for 20+ years, but most of that time has been spent in

the tropics of Africa, Latin America and Asia. Now more than ever I want to help with conservation and preservation of the UK landscapes and wildlife. Living in the South Downs I was drawn to working with the National Park in any way I could and this seemed like the most useful and progressive way of adding what time I can spare to the cause. I made my enquiries and was encouraged enthusiastically, the rest is history.

**DO YOU HAVE AN
INTERESTING OR
UNUSUAL FACT ABOUT
YOURSELF?**

I have had an interesting and varied career including expeditions around the globe in pursuit of conserving and exploring the wild places of the world. I was in the military reserves for many years and now spend my employed time in Africa and Asia leading an anti-poaching programme specifically focussed on the preservation of big cats (tigers and lions mainly).

**RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY
IN THE SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK?**

Running and mountain biking on the SDW and associated footpaths and bridleways – a great way to explore and feel the freedom the South Downs can offer.



STEPPING UP

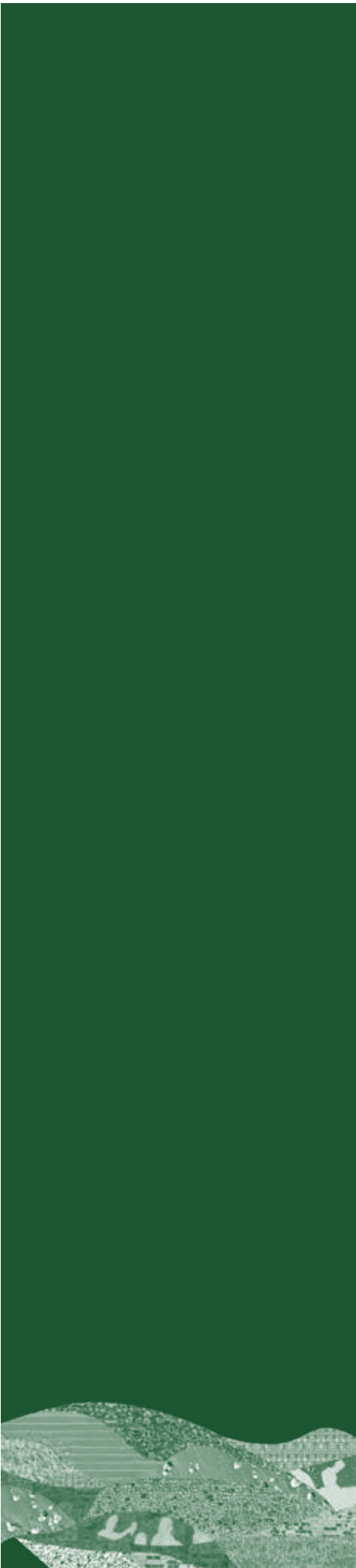
The Western Downs Tuesday and Friday teams recently completed steps up a steep bank on Sheet Common, and they made a great job of it. On behalf of Sheet Parish Council, and all the walkers along the path, I want to thank the South Downs Volunteer Rangers who took part, along with Hampshire County Council Rights of Way team.

ALAN BIDDLECOMBE, WESTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER.



Main: The completed steps
© Alan Biddlecombe

Inset: Building the steps
© Alan Biddlecombe



FAME AT LAST

Viva Lewes is a free monthly magazine for households, businesses and venues in the Lewes and Kingston area, producing 11,500 copies every month. Their August 2016 edition was themed 'Into the Wild' and for their photography-led feature they interviewed the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service to showcase their work in the local area, asking them 'What's the wildest place you've ever been?' Journalist Lizzie and photographer Cammie accompanied the Seven Sisters Tuesday group to France and Short Bottom Local Wildlife Sites near Alfriston and took these rather lovely photos of the team at work.

FAY PATTINSON,
SDNPA EASTERN DOWNS RANGER



Main: The Hill Climb
Right: Lizzie interviewing

All photos © Cammie Toloui
cammietoloui.com



BOB LEWIS



MICHAEL HAIZELDEN



FAY PATTINSON



DAVID ELLIS



TIM SQUIRE



RICHARD BOSWORTH



A DIFFERENT VOLUNTEERING VIEW

I AM AN INDOORS VOLUNTEER. THERE, I'VE SAID IT, NOT ONE OF THOSE RUGGED TYPES WIELDING A BILLHOOK OR HAMMERING IN GATEPOSTS, I WORK IN THE OFFICE AT THE NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY.



I am definitely not the longest serving volunteer but give or take a month I have been involved with the South Downs Joint Committee (SDJC) and then the National Park Authority since October 2006. I wanted to work for an organisation that looked after the environment and I was so lucky to find the SDJC.

Having only recently moved to Sussex from London it was a brilliant introduction to be able to work in an organisation that knew where all the best countryside was and I got to know the Downs by helping to catalogue and digitise the vast collection of photographs the organisation kept. I knew exactly what the Trundle was like before I'd even found my way there.

Being an 'indoors' volunteer has meant a varied and interesting life amongst paper and pictures, I haven't just ploughed a single furrow. I began by working on the digitisation of planning data which was great work. It might not sound it but the chance to look through the mad, bad and dangerous blueprints for new housing was tremendous fun. There was the plan for a big house where the architect had even found time to include the location of their grand piano. Or the couple with more money than sense who intended to demolish the grand house they had just purchased and replace it with an identical one, with only the interior re-modelled to suit their exclusive needs by Prince Charles' favourite architect. With that work dwindling I went on to cataloguing those photographs and then the large library the SDJC then possessed.

I now work on the Paul Millmore Library in the South Downs Centre and love looking at the antiquarian books that outline the highways and byways of old Sussex. There are some wonderful stories of smugglers, highwaymen and the landed gentry in hiding. I had no idea it was customary to make your will before embarking on the perilous coach journey from London to Portsmouth since ambush and murder were not unheard of. I'm also back with planning again, organising files, checking on planning applications as well as working for Comms. At the moment it's that time of year when I get to work on the events that populate the summer calendar in the National Park, from the Milland Fair to photography sessions at Pulborough Brooks.

I'm not choosy who I work for though and will take on any work if I have the time. Most recently I've been working to market our recent geocaching scheme with guesthouses and restaurants, talking to all sorts of individuals about their businesses. Plus, I am fortunate enough to work with such a lovely bunch of people. Can every organisation be like this? Office life is not for everyone certainly. Having been a teacher which is a very active sort of job, sitting in a chair all day still seems strange but I'm not doing it full time so that's okay!

BEN BRUCE, INDOORS VOLUNTEER
.....
Left: Ben in the South Downs Centre library
© SDNPA/Rebecca Saunders



LOVELY EXCUSE FOR A PADDLE

AFTER ALMOST TWO YEARS OF MONITORING THE INVERTEBRATES ON THE RIVER MEON EVERY MONTH, ONE WOULD ASSUME THAT IT MAY BECOME A ROUTINE ACTIVITY BUT MYSELF AND SUE, THE 'FONTLEY CREW', NEVER CEASE TO BE AMAZED AT NOT ONLY THE VARIETY OF CREATURES IN THE WATER BUT ALSO BY THE BACKDROP THAT NATURE PROVIDES AROUND US.

Now that we are in our second year of monitoring activities we are recognising the reoccurrence of events within the lives of the amazing creatures that reside in the river. This is most noticeable with the 'stars' of the invertebrate species and we both have our favourites. I am always impressed by the increase and decline of the prehistoric looking May fly larvae, whereas Sue prefers the cased caddisfly larvae. She always marvels when they wrap themselves in hundreds of tiny gravel particles to create an amazing funnel like structure like a cloak made of precious gem stones.

To complement our initial training we have been lucky to receive training development during the year which was organised by Elaina, Lead Ranger in the Western Downs. This involved meeting the other monitoring

teams who have different river beats either above us, below us or on other rivers within the National Park. A most fruitful exercise to discuss best practice and make sure we are all striving to achieve the same test criteria. As a bonus we also had instruction from Matt Owen-Farmer, the original instigator of the system and he has trained all the teams in the South Downs. Also Ben Fitch, from the Fisheries Agency, who came as a guest speaker and gave us a very interesting insight about how the national monitoring system is conducted.

If you are interested in taking part in the monitoring programme and can spare a couple of hours a month we would thoroughly recommend it. The training is enjoyable and not in the slightest bit intense, all equipment required is issued and Elaina

will endeavour to allocate you a piece of river which is convenient for you. Not only are you helping to gather information on the health of the national waterways but you will be truly amazed by ever changing displays of what lives in your own special bit of the river.

The only downside is that it is highly likely that the appeal of a bit of 'skinny dipping' on a hot summers day will be heavily influenced by the thought of swallowing a mouthful of water containing 50 gammarus river shrimp, 25 blue winged olive larvae and half a dozen caseless caddis fly!

JOHN ROWE, WESTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER
.....
River fly monitoring on the River Meon
© SDNPA/ Nick Heasman

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



HAMPSHIRE BOWMAN, DUNDRIDGE LANE, BISHOPS WALTHAM, HAMPSHIRE, SO32 1GD

This is an unspoilt free house serving real ale, real cider and real food, in a rural location near the south-west border of the National Park. Evidently it began life as a coaching inn in 1700 but when it burnt down in Victorian times the present building was built.

The Hampshire Bowman is a delightfully old-fashioned pub that promotes itself as dog friendly and mobile unfriendly. It's been a stalwart in the CAMRA good pub guide for over 25 years. As its name suggests, archery butts are located beside the pub. In the 1970s the then publican's wife was a member of the British Olympic team. Nowadays you can join the club, or more likely, simply enjoy a 'swift one' at the bar instead.

Left: Bill at the bar. Volunteer Bill McCordle samples the local ale – strictly for the benefit of *Downland Thymes* readers...

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.

WANTED

INQUISITIVE VOLUNTEERS

Do you like discovering new places? Do you like delving into history? Do you like finding a cosy pub and putting your feet up in front of a roaring fire?

If you answered yes to any of the above then this is the job for you! *The Downland Thymes* team are looking for at least one volunteer from each area of the National Park to help uncover the best pubs, the most interesting landmarks, the fascinating books and much more. You don't need to be a professional writer, we can help with that, all you have to do is get out into the Downs and discover its hidden gems. Please email dt@southdowns.gov.uk stating your interest and volunteering area.

PIC IN THE PARK

FIRLE TOWER, FIRLE PLACE ESTATE, TQ 4809 0712

This tower can be clearly seen from the South Downs Way and passing walkers may be forgiven for thinking it is nothing more than a folly (as I did for many years). But, in fact, it was built by the third Viscount Gage in 1819 as a game-keepers cottage and placed at the top of a small hill so that the game-keeper could signal to the keeper of Plashet deer-park at Ringmer, which also belonged to Lord Gage.

The flint faced tower is three stories high and is now a private residence.

ALAN JONES,
EASTERN DOWNS
VOLUNTEER RANGER



CAPTION COMPETITION

CAN YOU CREATE A WITTY CAPTION FOR THIS PHOTOGRAPH? EMAIL YOUR IDEAS TO DT@SOUTHDOWNSGOV.UK

The winner of last edition's caption competition was...

"THAT WOULD BE PERFECT FOR AN OWL BOX IF WE JUST MOVE THE TREE 2 METRES TO THE LEFT"

PAUL AND AMANDA HILLYARD



TREE IDENTIFICATION APP

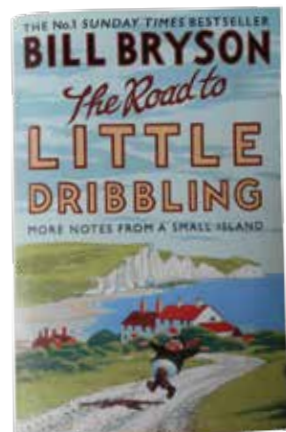
The Woodland Trust offer a Tree ID app which you can download for free. Simply go to the link below and download the app which helps you to identify trees using bark, twigs, leaves etc. Well worth browsing!

woodlandtrust.org.uk



BOOK REVIEW

THE ROAD TO LITTLE DRIBBLING BILL BRYSON.
BLACK SWAN £6.75. PAPERBACK 2016



Bill Bryson's latest bestseller is virtually an update of his earlier *Notes from a Small Island* (written over 20 years ago) but it's none the worse for that. It's another hilarious read of his travels about the country illuminated by the many absurdities, and charms, he experiences in Britain today. The book ends with his attempt to describe why and what it is about his adopted home that he loves – and much of this involves our countryside. There's much to enjoy in this very readable book.

You can tell from the cover illustration that this book strongly features the South Downs. Chapter two focuses on the Seven Sisters and chapter nine begins in East Hampshire. In the very last page he even thanks Margaret Paren and Nick Heasman for their help, so what favours did you bestow upon him Nick?

RUSSELL CLEAVER,
WESTERN DOWNS
VOLUNTEER RANGER

INTERNATIONAL DARK SKY RESERVE

HUMANS NEED HEATHS BUT NOW THE HEATHS NEED HUMANS

HEATHLAND – AN OPEN LANDSCAPE NORMALLY ENJOYED THROUGH WALKING, EXERCISING THE DOG, BIKE RIDING, BIRD WATCHING OR SIMPLY SOAKING UP THEIR MAGNIFICENT VIEWS.

With a coconut aroma from the gorse in spring and its pleasing purple colour, heathland is the perfect place for a stroll in the sunshine. A rare treasured habitat where we can get a sense of peace from the outside modern world.

Heathland covers just one per cent of the South Downs National Park, mostly separated into 'islands' where isolated plants and animals are far more vulnerable to local extinction. The Heathlands Reunited Project, led by the National Park Authority, aims to expand and improve existing heathland, as well as creating new sections, to cover an area greater than 1,200 football pitches.

While the project focuses on restoring, expanding and reconnecting threatened heathland habitats, its purpose is also to enthuse and inspire people to visit them, learn more about them and use them responsibly and sustainably. The project will run across five years working with 11 partners on 41 heathland sites.

The Heathlands Reunited team has now formed and the project is up and running. The team comprises of Bruce Middleton, the Project Manager, who is also responsible for implementing the management and maintenance plan across the project area. Katy Sherman, the team's Communications

and Engagement Officer who will concentrate on the delivery of community engagement through campaigns, events and interpretation, and Emma Stanbury who will be providing administrative support, keeping the team organised!

The project has a range of different volunteering opportunities available. If you are interested in getting involved keep an eye out for the expression of interest form which will be emailed round shortly. If you complete the form and return it, we will know to send you more information about future volunteering opportunities for the project.

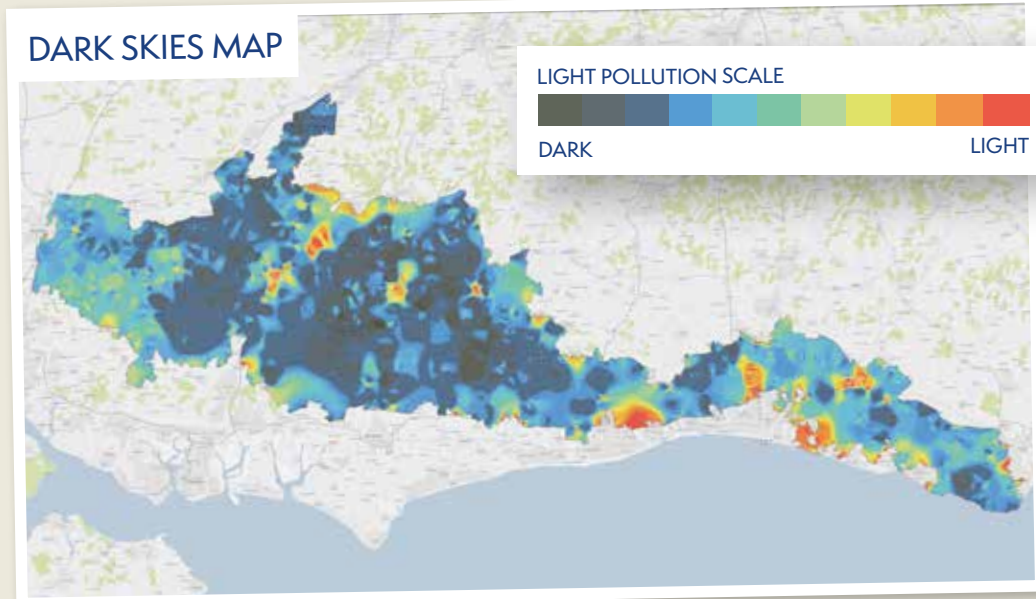
In May 2016 the South Downs National Park became the world's newest International Dark Sky Reserve (IDSR). We think our star-studded skies are as valuable as our beautiful rolling landscapes and, with properly dark skies in the South East of England under threat, this is a statement that the skies of the South Downs are worth protecting.

WHERE ARE THE SOUTH DOWNS' SKIES DARKEST?

This map shows the darkest skies in the South Downs.

Next spring we are planning to hold our first Dark Skies Festival and we will need help from volunteers to make this happen. If you are interested in being involved please email laura.warren@southdowns.gov.uk

DARK SKIES MAP



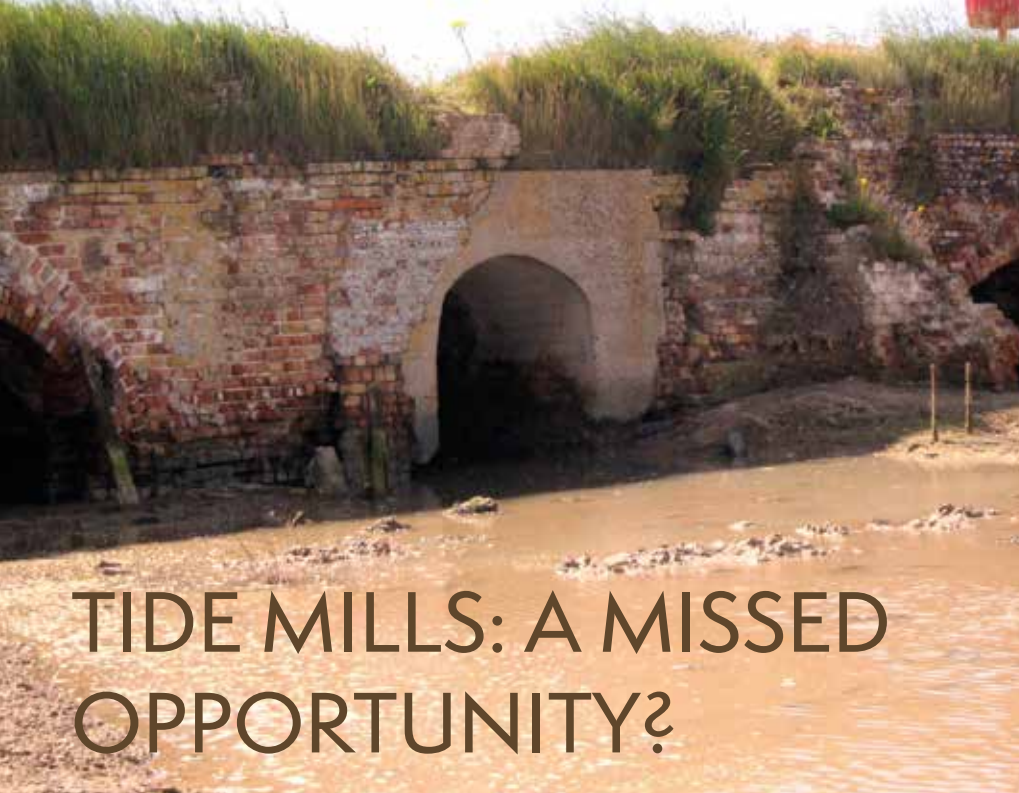
WHAT DOES INTERNATIONAL DARK SKY RESERVE STATUS MEAN?

- The South Downs National Park is the second IDSR in England and the 12th in the world. With two million people living within five km of the National Park our new reserve will be one of the most accessible in the world.

- There are approximately 2,700 streetlights in the National Park. Local lighting authorities have been replacing these over time to comply with Dark Sky standards.
- More than 25,000 individual measurements had to be taken to map the night skies quality across the South Downs – thanks to all the volunteers who helped with this mammoth task. 66 per cent of the National Park has Bronze Level Skies.

In the future the South Downs National Park Authority will use its role as a planning authority to protect the dark skies above the National Park as well as the landscape on the ground. Draft policies for the South Downs National Park's Local Plan include specific lighting requirements that developers will need to meet.

For more information, visit southdowns.gov.uk/dark-night-skies



TIDE MILLS: A MISSED OPPORTUNITY?



OPPOSITE THE TIDE MILLS SITE, WHICH IS OFF THE A259 BETWEEN NEWHAVEN AND SEAFORD, THERE IS A NEW HOUSING ESTATE BEARING THE LOGO OF A WINDMILL. AN INCONGRUOUS CHOICE, FOR IT WAS TIDE MILLS WHICH PUT MANY OF SUSSEX'S WINDMILLS OUT OF BUSINESS, ALTHOUGH THERE WAS A WINDMILL ON SITE USED FOR LIFTING.

The Stanmer volunteer group visit Tide Mills regularly, clearing vegetation growing on the access road. We also clear the ruined station master's cottage. Access is via a pedestrian level crossing leading from small car parks. The bulk of the hedges are bramble and we set to with a combination of brush cutters, shears and sometimes a scythe. It is a popular task with the added interest of industrial archaeology and the rare ecology of the vegetated shingle spit on the site. Ringed plovers nest on the beach, purple sandpipers have been seen there and even the large blue butterfly. Families and dog walkers pass by and many thank us for our work. Quite why some of the latter leave small black plastic bags for us to discover is puzzling.

The Ouse used to take a sharp turn to the left just before reaching the sea at Seaford. When the course was changed and the river discharged at Newhaven in 1730 the old channel was turned into a tide mill. It was dammed and the channel allowed to fill

during high tide. At low tide the retreating water ran three undershot mill wheels, housed in arches under the dam. A village grew up occupied by the workers. It had a village shop, a blacksmith's and a station, also serving Bishopstone, with a branch line going into the mill. The branch track can still be identified and the station platform is still there, looking rather lost. The mill closed around 1893 and it has since been holiday homes and a Canadian military barracks. The forerunner of Chailey Heritage hospital, a Marconi radio station and a World War One seaplane base were all once stationed there. The dwellings were condemned in the late thirties and the few remaining residents were forcibly removed in 1940.

The 19th century saw the most renowned owner of the mills, one William Catt, who became a consultant in tide mill building and continued the enlargement of the channel into large pools, still identifiable today. He ran the village, was authoritarian and enforced

a curfew on his men. At the mill's peak the waterwheels ran for 20 out of 24 hours driving 16 pairs of grind stones. This amount of clean energy would be a great renewable energy programme. However I understand that relatively recent changes at the embankment in Newhaven harbour have resulted in greatly reduced flow in the channel, and that these changes would apparently require prohibitively expensive building works to reverse. A missed opportunity methinks.

The Friends of Tide Mills also keep the place tidy and record the bird life.

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Left: The arches at Tide Mills
Right: Vegetation and shingle at Tide Mills

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Downland Thymes: News for the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service. Issue 73, September 2016. © SDNPA.

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.

Design: The Way Design (0648)

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