

DOWNLAND THYMES



NEWS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE ISSUE 70 | WINTER 2015



CREATING A HOME FOR OUR BARN OWLS

WITH HEART-SHAPED FACE, BUFF BACK AND WINGS AND PURE WHITE UNDERPARTS, THE BARN OWL IS A DISTINCTIVE AND MUCH-LOVED COUNTRYSIDE BIRD.

Voted Britain's favourite farmland bird in 2007, the barn owl has occupied a central place in the nation's folklore.

The barn owl is on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, therefore the birds, their nests, eggs and young are fully protected at all times throughout the UK. However, fears about the decline in the barn owl population have been growing for many years.

The Barn Owl Box project, or BOB as it has affectionately become known, is a project which sets out the number of nesting sites and to increase awareness among farmers of the importance of maintaining rough grassland habitat for the barn owls' favourite diet of small mammals; field vole, mice and shrews.

The VRS have been central to making this project a success, helping rangers

to build and install nesting boxes and to retain rough tussock grassland around field edges and unused field corners. So far 220 boxes have been installed and we have worked with 95 farmers and landowners.

The farming community are full of enthusiasm for the project and it has really helped to build trust between the National Park and its land managers.

**"WE PUT THE BOX UP
AND THE BARN OWL
MOVED IN STRAIGHT
AWAY! IT SHOWS WE
MUST HAVE THE
RIGHT HABITAT ON
OUR FARM".**

Susie Corbett, Holden Farm, Cheriton

Nearly 50% of all the boxes have attracted resident barn owls and 10% have been used for breeding.

BOB is also a great way for children in the National Park to learn more about barn owls. Earlier this year students who are part of their school's Eco Club in a secret location in West Sussex watched as two chicks were ringed and weighed.

The project will work hard to continue to expand the network of farmers and partners engaged in 'protecting and promoting the barn owl'.

Main: Barn owl

© Bruce Middleton

Inset: School children watch as a barn owl chick is ringed and weighed

© SDNPA/Rebecca Saunders

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VOLUNTEERS
MAKE IT BIG

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



CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

Tempus fugit! It does not seem possible that we are now into Christmas festivities again, however, for volunteers it is the start of the much enjoyed "fire season"!

The VRS AGM was hosted this year in the Eastern Downs Area on a beautiful sunny September day in the Linklater Pavilion, Lewes. After the formalities we had a very informative SDNPA update by Andrew Lee, Director of Strategy & Partnerships, as well as a fascinating talk by Mike Scammell, Historic Buildings Officer – my thanks to them both for their time and support. During the morning session Andrew also kindly presented Long Service Awards with the outstanding candidate being Tony Bish who had completed 30 years in the VRS – quite exceptional. Well done as well to all those other volunteers for their 20 year and 10 year awards – a record year. Read more about the day on page 7.

Another event in which volunteers participated, at the invitation of Andy Gattiker, South Downs Way Trail Officer, was the National Trails Conference in Whitby hosted by Yorkshire Wolds Way. This brought together all national trails in order to share experiences across the UK with particular emphasis on working with volunteers. I look forward to the feedback from our delegates.

To end on another positive note I would like to congratulate Chris Page, Western Downs volunteer, for being given the National Parks UK's "Order of the National Parks" award (see page 5) which recognises his outstanding contribution to the River Meon Water Vole Release Project. The award also highlights, to a much wider audience, the excellent and varied environmental work undertaken by the SDNP.

Wishing you and your families a very Happy Christmas, I hope that 2016 may be another very enjoyable year in the VRS.

NEVILL BROOKE
VRS CHAIRMAN

UPDATE FROM THE VRS TEAM

OUR WORK ON WIDER VOLUNTEERING TOOK A SIGNIFICANT STEP FORWARD IN NOVEMBER.

On Saturday 7 November we held the first ever South Downs Volunteering Fair at the South Downs Centre in Midhurst. Eighteen groups from across the Western part of the National Park attended the event and the feedback from everyone who took part was really positive. Groups represented included the National Trust, Petersfield Museum and the Murray Downland Trust. To start the day we discussed ways that we could work together to deal with some of the challenges and opportunities we all face around communication and limited resources. We then opened to the public and, although the weather was horrendous, by the end of the day all the groups I spoke to had several new contacts for prospective volunteers. The atmosphere was great with lots of animated conversation between groups, as well as with people interested in volunteering. Everyone was keen that this shouldn't be a one-off, with competition over who should host the next Fair! We are also looking at how else we can support closer co-operation between groups who share so many aims.

To coincide with the Fair our new on-line South Downs Volunteering Map went live on the South Downs website. Complementary to the Fair, this will provide an on-going resource for information about groups working with volunteers both for potential volunteers and for the groups themselves. You can find the map at www.southdowns.gov.uk/volunteering-map. Please do spread the word about this new resource, particularly to other groups you think would be interested in appearing on the map. This web page also enables new groups to add their details and links to their website if they have one.



As mentioned in Update recently, we have been reviewing the clothing issued to staff and volunteers to rationalise things, use our money more efficiently and also consider how we should adopt the National Park Identity. The first items that we looked at were the fleeces used primarily for events (black for volunteers, mustard for staff) and the polo shirt, all of which are no longer available. For the fleece we were looking for something more practical; for the polo, something slightly tougher. Both needed to be affordable, in a colour which is in the 'palette' of the South Downs Identity but which will also be available for the foreseeable future; that is why navy has been chosen for both. The plan is to introduce the new items gradually, only providing a replacement when it is needed – except for wearing at events, where a new 'soft shell' jacket will replace the fleeces ahead of the new season next spring. The soft shell is much more windproof than the fleece; however it is no more resistant to damage by fire so it still won't form part of the outdoor practical volunteer ranger clothing issue. We will sort out an accompanying sweatshirt and consider whether we need to change any other items of issued clothing, and we will seek your views on possible changes.

All the best to you all; thank you for all your help during 2015. Have a great Christmas and New Year, I hope to see as many of you as I can before then.

IAN HARTLE, VOLUNTEER
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER



Right: Volunteering Fair flyer
Left: Ian Hartle, SDNPA
Volunteer Development
Officer

CELEBRATING FRISTON AIRFIELD'S ROLE IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR



Main: Keen car parkers
Right: Dressed in wartime
outfits people browsed
the displays
© Ian Wildridge



I HAVE LEARNED OVER THE COURSE OF SOME YEARS THAT VOLUNTEER RANGERS CAN BE ASKED TO DO A WIDE VARIETY OF TASKS BUT I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD BE A CAR PARK ATTENDANT!

This was all to do with an event which the National Trust organised on 5 September. The Trust had recently acquired a large area of land very close to Friston and East Dean, a few miles west of Eastbourne. During the Second World War this area was the site of an RAF airfield which played a significant role in air based operations against the enemy.

The South Downs volunteers had already undertaken a number of tasks (mostly fencing) at the site, and when we got the call from Lee Walther, National Trust Ranger based at Birling Gap, to help with a major event to celebrate the role played by Friston Airfield during the war, a number of us were more than happy to help.

When I was first told that we would be on car parking duty I imagined that I would have a relatively easy day, helping to manage a relatively small number of cars and that I would be back home by early afternoon. How wrong can you be!

The number of people who came surprised not only my expectations but also, I think, those of the National Trust professionals. When I had a break from car park duties, I was able to see how many things were going on: people dressed in contemporary dress were dancing to the sound of Glen Miller; others were on guided walks of the site including a visit to the recent archaeological digs; the Seven Sisters Trio were singing all the great popular songs of the time; even Dad's Army were there in full uniform and with rifles and machine guns. The highlight for many was the 15 minute display by a Second World War hurricane aircraft.

So perhaps it is not surprising that the event attracted some 1500 people and almost 1000 cars! This kept us all busy for most of the day. I was on "point duty" which I found surprisingly enjoyable. Others were involved in the much trickier task of guiding all these cars into allocated spaces in an orderly and manageable manner.

THE HIGHLIGHT FOR MANY WAS THE 15 MINUTE DISPLAY BY A SECOND WORLD WAR HURRICANE AIRCRAFT.

The East Dean and Friston Local History Group have published a booklet "RAF Friston – Diary of a Wartime Airfield" which is a very interesting read and includes extracts from contemporary diaries and log books.

The comments and smiles of the drivers and passengers as I pointed the way to the exit were very rewarding, as was the free beer offered to us at the end of the day by the local microbrewery!

ALAN JONES, EASTERN DOWNS
VOLUNTEER RANGER

TRANQUIL TIMES

Priors Dean
vineyard
© Russell Cleaver

HOW CAN YOU MEASURE THE VALUE OF PEACE AND QUIET IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK?

Well the Tranquillity Survey, which has been up and running for about a year now, is trying to do just that.

But as a volunteer regularly engaged in practical tasks as well as undertaking occasional other surveys, I hadn't noticed this latest survey until I received a follow-up email requesting more help. So, almost reluctantly I signed up for it, wondering if I'd regret it later. I was hardly an enthusiastic volunteer...

In hindsight I'm so glad I did. For this project proved a delightful way to discover and explore secret corners of the National Park.

In short the Survey uses volunteers to assess the relative tranquillity of 350 sites across the National Park. In each survey plot we are allocated, we must score between 1-10 for over forty

specific factors e.g. "how noticeable is vehicular noise" etc.

After starting in September I've completed about 15 individual surveys and I'm finding it very agreeable as it gives me a new way of looking at the landscape.

Not the least of its attractions is finding pleasant surprises en route, discovering 'hidden gems' if you will. For example, last week my wife and I set off to survey one plot along a byway some 2 miles south of Selborne when unexpectedly we came across a small vineyard. Well away from any road, yet sheltered by a wood, one small field of vines was tucked into a south-facing slope; no buildings around, just a leaflet box beside a five bar gate. This was Priors Dean Vineyard.

Now you'll have difficulty finding this place, Priors Dean is barely more than a church and a few scattered houses. It's about as remote as you can get in the National Park. Reading their leaflet gave us a lovely description of their wines and of the few places

you can buy them. So, needless to add, once we finished the survey we wound our way to the tiny village shop and Post Office at East Tisted to buy a bottle or two... (this shop turned out to be a charming discovery in itself).

That night with our evening meal we had a bottle of Priors Dean 'Classic Dry' to drink and, no lies, it was delicious. At £8.50 a bottle it was worth every penny. Check out their website for more details priorsdeanvineyard.co.uk

Consequently, undertaking this Tranquillity Mapping survey has been more enjoyable than I ever expected. Priors Dean hasn't quite proved to be the most remote place I have surveyed, nearby Colemore, which I subsequently surveyed a few days later, turned out to be the quietest, most tranquil place I have found as yet.

RUSSELL CLEAVER,
WESTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER
RANGER

"ORDER OF THE NATIONAL PARKS" AWARD: CHRIS PAGE

Chris Page, Western Downs Volunteer, is the first to receive this (new) prestigious National Parks UK "Order of the National Parks" award along with David Burden, former SDNPA Member. Being recognised for his outstanding contribution in the delivery of the River Meon Water Vole Release Project at a national level is a magnificent achievement and a wonderful advert for the VRS. Many congratulations Chris from all your fellow volunteers.

In very broad terms, Chris has a very multi-faceted role! By assuming the responsibility as the River Warden on the Meon Chris had nearly 50 mink rafts to build, install, maintain and

monitor. This involved liaison with relevant landowners, visits to raft sites along the River Meon and making recommendations to landowners for riparian management. Chris has also been heavily involved in the release of over 1000 water voles and pre and post surveys.

We salute your commitment and achievement Chris.

NEVILL BROOKE
VRS CHAIRMAN

Image: Margaret Paren presents Chris with his award at the National Park Authority meeting on 29 October 2015
© SDNPA



CLANFIELD ONLINE

The parish of Clanfield extends to the southern boundary of Queen Elizabeth Country Park and whilst the settlement has expanded somewhat these days, it retains the feel of an active village community. Clanfield Online is a manifestation of this, being a community website established eighteen months ago to bring local businesses, organisations and people in Clanfield together, and to promote local projects.

Most recently we sought the support of the SDNPA Volunteer Ranger Service (VRS) to provide the skills to help us enhance our roundabout in the centre of Clanfield, in particular to create an attractive focal point for wild flowers and bees alike.

We first persuaded a local Landscape Architect to design a special timber-framed flower bed for the site and then the VRS were able to fell and prepare

the Western Red Cedar timber planks from Fishers Copse near Privett, and to finally construct and plant out the bed.

Now that bulbs and plants are safely introduced to their new home it will take until next spring for them to show their true colours. But the best things in life are worth waiting for – especially plants that attract bees and butterflies.

The project was sponsored by Clanfield Online with support from The Southern Cooperative, but we would have been unable to move forward with this project without the enthusiastic support and assistance of the SDNPA Volunteer Ranger Service. Their team have been so helpful throughout – there were no problems, just solutions.

CHRIS DE MELLOW, CHAIRMAN OF CLANFIELDONLINE.COM



Top: Planting the bed
Below: Finishing the bed
© SDNPA

CHURCH FLOWERS



John Bates, Treasurer for St Hubert's Church, Idsworth met two Volunteer Rangers collecting seed from the flower meadow which now virtually surrounds the building. He was prompted to take these photos, commenting; 'This project has been a great success and greatly admired by all who use and visit the church.'

The church, which dates from 1053, sits in the middle of a field near the village of Finchdean. It has original Medieval frescos but little of the contemporary village that surrounded it remains. The wild flowers were planted with a local land owner funded by the South Downs National Park Authority. Open all year round, it is well worth a visit.

Images: © John Bates



VRS ANNUAL MEETING

THIS YEAR OUR AGM WAS HELD IN THE LINKLATER PAVILION IN LEWES AND HOSTED BY THE VRS EASTERN AREA.

Special thanks were given to Sue Jones and members of the National Park staff for helping its organisation and making it an interesting event for everyone concerned. The AGM was well attended by some 50 people many of whom were very grateful for the various direction notices posted along the woodland paths by Amanda Elmes and others, without these some may not have found the venue!

Nevill Brooke (VRS Chairman) reported on the year's events welcoming 180 new volunteers from the Secrets of the High Woods project as well as Alice Holt volunteers. He highlighted the growing involvement of volunteers in all areas of conservation support across the National Park. This was followed later in the meeting by a more detailed report from Ian Hartle, Volunteer Development Officer.

Following Alastair Stewart's (VRS Treasurer) review of the financial statements as at 30 June 2015, Nevill recommended that we should move to accounts based on a calendar year – this was agreed by the meeting.

Those present agreed that the officers currently in post should remain there for a further year of their term.

- Chairman – Nevill Brooke
- Treasurer – Alastair Stewart
- Secretary – Martin Cowell

Andrew Lee (Director of Strategy and Partnerships for the National Park) presented an executive update entitled "An Inspirational Landscape" illustrating the key initiatives the National Park is pursuing and the way in which volunteers are supporting them.

The formal business of the AGM was then closed by the Chairman and we moved on to the presentation of Long Service Awards. The first of these was presented to Tony Bish for an impressive 30 years of service to the VRS. Tony and fellow Seven Sisters Volunteer Ranger Graham Rutland are the first to have reached this huge milestone. 20 year awards were made to Karen Ingrams and Phil Luffingham and 10 year awards to Aled Evans and Les Bowden (collected on his behalf by Stephen Allberry). In all there were a total of 28 awards for '10 year' volunteers made this year: the highest number to date.

Mike Scammell, Historical Buildings Officer, gave us a fascinating talk about ancient buildings in the town of Lewes explaining the use of vernacular building materials and showing that builders have always been illusionists what with their use of "mathematical tiles" and "bungaroosh".

The afternoon activities included a couple of very enjoyable and interesting guided walks; the first around the historic town of Lewes by Mike Scammell and the second around the Railway Land Wildlife Trust reserve led by Lewes District Council Ranger Dan Fagan.

Presentation material from the day, including the financial statements, is available on the VRS intranet.

MARTIN COWELL, VRS SECRETARY

Top: 2015 AGM © Nevill Brooke
Below: Dan Fagan's Walk © Nevill Brooke





SPOTLIGHT

"JOB DONE! A NEW GATE
INSTALLED ON THE
SOUTH DOWNS WAY"



NAME:
Majid Muhammad

AREA:
I volunteer from Stanmer
in the Eastern Downs area..

NEW STARTER

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR FIRST DAY OR TWO OF VOLUNTEERING?

My first practical day of volunteering was Saturday 22 November 2014; I remember it as a wet, cold and muggy winter day!

The task leader for the day – Neil Doyle (Ranger – Brighton and Hove City Council) – had arranged to pick me up along with two other Volunteer Rangers at 10am from Stanmer Park main entrance. After an introduction he drove us all to the park toolstore/workshop to collect the tools for the day ahead (loppers, hand saws and hedge cutters) and he also gave me a pair of gloves. Thanks for those, they were very helpful during the task.

When all packed into the City Council Land Rover he drove us to a hilly area west of Stanmer Park called Wild Park, for a fence repairs/scrub management activity (although this was the official title of the activity I don't remember doing any fence repair as all we did was manage the scrub and hedge cutting).

When we arrived Neil handed us the tools and explained the task and the area as well as the associated risks.

It was all exciting to begin with; however by lunch time energy levels were getting a bit low, primarily due to the steep topography of the land and the weather. We had our lunch and then carried on for a while until Neil called it a day (about half one ish as I remember).

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THE VRS?

This is easy to answer; I looked at the SDNPA website and explored the work of the VRS. I saw that there are opportunities to get involved in the conservation of land, so as I was always interested in these types of activities I straight away got in touch and was soon after invited to the Introductory Day at the Midhurst office.

DO YOU HAVE AN UNUSUAL FACT ABOUT YOURSELF?

Now this is the difficult one still use the old Blackberry Bold 9900 (not sure if this is unusual? Ok another one then. Haven't got a Facebook account... is that unusual?? Not sure...). Ok the real one then: I don't know how to swim... tried real hard a few years ago. Took several lessons with Olympic medal ambitions and had to face the embarrassment of practising in the pool with fully swimming expert kids... then gave up finally. Not for me I guess.

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK?

I enjoyed the fence repair work with the National Trust on Black Cap, back in June this year. The weather was very nice, so can most certainly recommend this activity on a good summer's day.

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE IN THE EASTERN DOWNS.

When others hear that you are a volunteer in the SDNPA, they often ask: it's just scrub-bashing and litter-picking isn't it?"

Well, just looking back over the past three months (July–September 2015) we, the Thursday volunteers based at Stanmer Park, have been privileged to be involved in some pretty amazing and varied activities.

Where else could you experience such diverse tasks as working on a Medieval driveway, sharing space for a day with adders, orchard management, scything and brush-cutting, repairing Napoleonic flint walling, replacing gates and fences, collecting and sowing wild seeds, and meadow cutting?

All a far cry from 'just scrub-bashing and litter-picking'. And that's just in 3 months! In fact, in my 7 years with the VRS the variety of work and the experiences have been incredible.

Some years ago we were involved at the start of clearing the massive Medieval driveway on the Glynde estate and each year since

then, including this summer, we have been clearing vegetation to give wild flowers a chance to grow in future years.

One of our annual series of tasks is working with expert Peter May from Stanmer Orchard Group who, among other things, manages the orchards at Stanmer Park in Brighton. In July we were clearing the vegetation in the Old Orchard in preparation for 'Apple Day', a popular annual event which takes place at the end of September and which features 'all things apple' and a lot more besides. It was one of the opportunities some of our volunteers had to put recently-learned scything and brush-cutting skills to good use.

One of the perks of working on the South Downs is that we are fortunate to come face-to-face with local animal life – sheep, cattle and birds of prey being regulars, but there's also a variety of wildlife invariably just around the corner. On Markstake Common during a heath management task led by Thyone Outram, assistant Community Ranger with Lewes District Council, we struck lucky. We

had numerous sightings of adders on one of the paths during the day, despite our constant traipsing up and down. One in particular we thought had just had a good lunch but on closer inspection it was revealed that she was gravid (pregnant) and we hope she went on to produce a good number of young.

What has become an on-going task, not dissimilar to painting the Forth Bridge, is repairing and rebuilding the Napoleonic flint wall around the Stanmer Estate. Ranger Mark Hayward took on the mission a number of years ago and each year we spend a couple of weeks working on the project, having learned the skills of mixing and applying 'pug', boarding off sections for rebuilding, selecting facing flints, not forgetting to keep to the very technical lengths of string in order to keep each layer level.

We also work on stretches of the South Downs Way and recently, under the direction of Assistant South Downs Way Officer Ben Bessant, we replaced one of the gates and a section of fencing which is used by walkers and horse riders. A number of walkers passed us during the day, all interested in and really appreciative of the work we do.



With such a variety of tasks no wonder we all keep coming back week after week and year after year!

And best of all? It's rewarding, it's fun and it's free!

MARILYN MARCHANT, VOLUNTEER

Left to right: Royston Haines,
Marilyn Marchant, Steve Onions,
Chris Chandler, Bob Granger, Sue Rolfe
© Marilyn Marchant



SEVEN SISTERS ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

BIRLING GAP LIES AT THE EASTWARD END OF THE SEVEN SISTERS CHALK CLIFFS, WITH A CAR PARK BORDERED BY A TERRACE OF HOUSES FACING A NATIONAL TRUST VISITORS CENTRE.

This complex houses a cafe with sea views, a gift shop and display area, offices and a meeting room. Outside there is a specially designed garden, which Seven Sisters volunteers helped to create, planted with coastal and downland species and offering comfortable benches and a sheltered outdoor teaching area.

On 25 November 2014, on a dark winter’s evening, I went there to attend an initial meeting for people interested in volunteering for the Seven Sisters Archaeological Project (SSAP). The cafe venue was filled to capacity and I recognised fellow volunteers and National Trust staff.

The project aims to investigate and record the many historical sites within the area which span from Neolithic to World War

Two defences and before I left the premises I and many others had promised our support. It is funded as part of the National Trust’s Coast 2015 celebration. This is a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Trust’s Neptune appeal which has funded so many acquisitions and projects to protect our coastline from development and with the SSAP learn more about its history.

As a direct result I have already attended a Landscape Survey day school and put what I learned into practice. I enjoyed a Lithics Assessment day, learning more about collection strategies. Documentary Research and the recording of Oral History training has also enabled me to interview, share and record the memories of an Eastbourne resident who lived near Friston airfield during the war years.

I have been given some knowledge of Geo Archaeology and practical use of augur and mattock and in late April I learned about basic Excavation Methodology which should improve my technique on an SSAP ‘dig’ in early autumn!

The SSAP volunteers come from all walks of life and generations and in common with the tutors are friendly, enthusiastic and willing to pass on their knowledge.

Reminds me why I so enjoy being a Volunteer Ranger!

SHIRLEY BRICE, EASTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER

Image: National Trust volunteers opening a trench on Seven Sisters Baileys Hill
© Tom Dommett

“THE SSAP VOLUNTEERS COME FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE AND GENERATIONS AND IN COMMON WITH THE TUTORS ARE FRIENDLY, ENTHUSIASTIC AND WILLING TO PASS ON THEIR KNOWLEDGE.”

CLEARING THE SOUTH DOWNS WAY

In September the South Downs Way officers asked the VRS for help in clearing a section of the South Downs Way close to the River Meon, near Exton. The problem was a culvert underneath a path junction, which regularly flooded in wet weather. In some winters the Trail becomes impassable as it floods all the way to the river some 200 yards away.

So, our task was to discourage blockages by clearing vegetation beside the trail along the course of a winterbourne channel and also, if possible, to clear the culvert.

At first glance it looked more like a job for moles rather than vols...

But Ben Bessant, Assistant South Downs Way Officer, who met us on site, convinced us we needn’t go underground; we merely had to brush-cut the vegetation and remove the debris wherever possible to ensure that future water runoff could continue unhindered.

Previously he had liaised with the local farmer to improve this part of the South Downs Way. Overhanging trees had been thinned, fallen timber removed, and the farmer had promised he would continue

to clear the drainage channel further downstream closer to the river Meon.

But for now we had to tackle the more inaccessible parts of the channel near the culvert where machines couldn’t reach. And it was Ben himself who led the attack into the culvert, but fear not Health & Safety officers, he only went as far as rakes, saws and shovels could reach. Even so, it proved an effective foray – a blockage of branches and soil was successfully removed.

The rest of the day was spent cutting back 250 metres of vegetation between fences and the South Downs Way. All in all it was a challenging task: on arrival it had looked as if it would take days to complete so it was all the more gratifying to realise how much we had achieved by the time we had to depart.

It will be interesting to see how the winterbourne behaves in a few months time when the flooding season returns. But come storms or high water, the VRS will be on call again should the South Downs Way need us. Ben, find us a frogman suit...

GRAHAM WYNNE, WESTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER



Main: SDW finger post Top Right: SDW, team at work
© Graham Wynne

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.



THE HAWKLEY INN, HAWKLEY, NR. LISS, HAMPSHIRE, GU33 6NE

This inn has a comfortable interior that welcomes walkers, horse riders and all.

With its friendly staff serving a selection of 7 real ales and a regularly changing menu it's no surprise to learn that this Free House has won awards in 2015 from both Trip Advisor and Trivago.

The Hawkley Inn somehow manages to offer both an old-fashioned charm whilst appealing to the younger user too; rustic yet modern. I don't know how they do it but in this rather remote location the place is humming. And when I dropped in without booking one Sunday they still fed me with the best cranberry, bacon & brie toastie I'd ever had. Well worth going out of the way to find!

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.

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...
"CHRIS WAS DETERMINED TO RECAPTURE THE WATER VOLE, NO MATTER WHERE IT WENT..."
ROGER LACEY



PIC IN THE PARK

HIORNE TOWER, ARUNDEL, WEST SUSSEX, GRID REF. TQ 013081

Built in the 18th century this triangular, flint faced folly is said to be haunted.

The story goes that soon after it was built a lovelorn girl; made pregnant and then deserted by her lover; climbed to the top and threw herself off. Today it remains a striking hilltop tower in the Arundel Estate and you could easily imagine a girl's ghostly face peering at you from one of its windows as you pass closely by on a local footpath.

GIFT FOR CHRISTMAS

"THE ASH TREE" BY OLIVER RACKHAM
PUBLISHED BY LITTLE TOLLER, 2014. £15.00



The author is the most outstanding writer on historic ecology, woodland and trees of his generation.

"The Ash Tree" brings our attention to this very common, yet under-appreciated tree. Oliver Rackham explores the tree's place in our culture and our natural ecology and explains why it now faces such an uncertain future.

Rackham's reputation is of the very highest in ecology; his "History of the Countryside" (1986) is now the standard work on woodlands and the English landscape. Consequently this latest book is both to be celebrated yet at once regretted - for it was to be his last. He sadly died last February.

WEBSITES TO WATCH:

INTERNET SHOPPING FOR CHRISTMAS

For that Christmas gift that is a little unusual we recommend you look at the links below.

The first website features a product that makes good use of sheep's wool, which is of particular interest these days since so much UK wool has little economic value.

www.twool.co.uk

The second website features a wide variety of gifts from a host of smaller traders offering stocking fillers to larger items. You'll be sure to find gifts of interest from this website...

www.notonthehighstreet.com

CHRISTMAS QUIZ

- In the Victorian era why were postmen termed "Robins"?
 - The first Christmas stamps pictured robins
 - Postmen carried red bags
 - Robin Smith was then the head of the G.P.O.
 - Postmen wore a red uniform
- Father Christmas is said to bring gifts to good children, what do naughty children get?
 - Nothing
 - A lump of coal
 - An old shoe
 - A stone
- Which one of the following countries criminalised Christmas?
 - England
 - Scotland
 - Germany
 - Poland
- The 'traditional' American Santa Claus was created by a graphic designer as part of an advertising programme for which product?
 - Ford cars
 - Fisher Price toys
 - Coca Cola
 - Bourbon whiskey

What do you call an obnoxious reindeer?
RUDEolph!

What do you call a child that doesn't believe in Santa?
A rebel without a Claus!

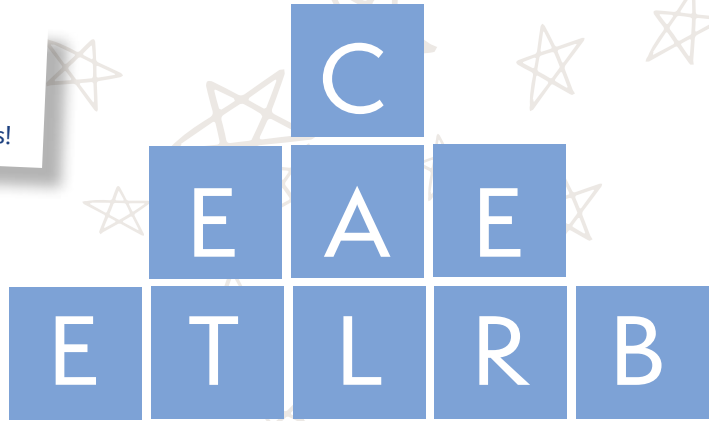
What do you call Santa's helpers?
Subordinate Clauses!

What do you call an elf that sings?
Elfis

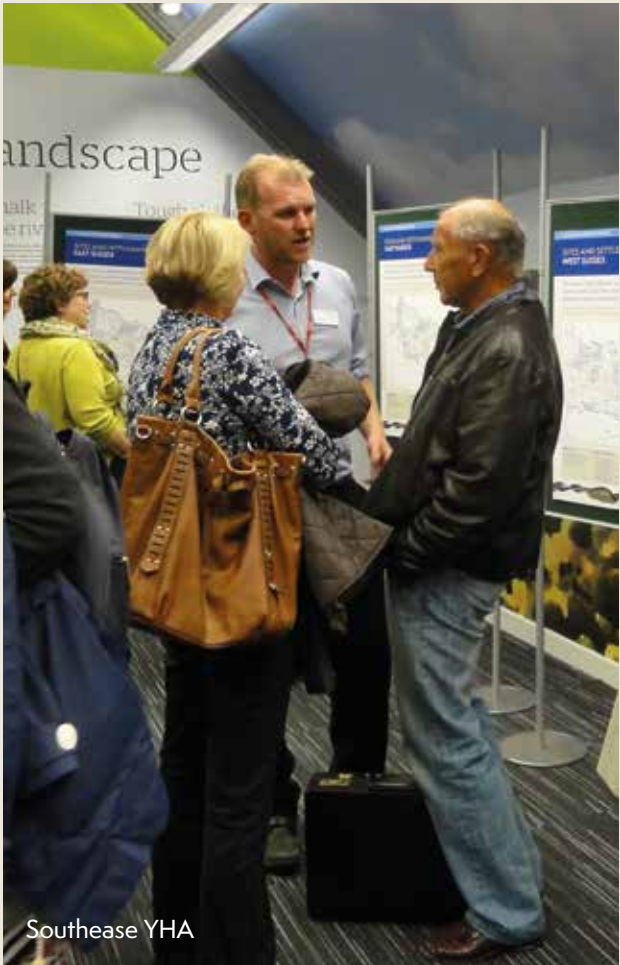
CHRISTMAS WORD PUZZLE

Moving from square to square, up, down, sideways or diagonally, find as many 4 (or more) letter words as you can. But no jumping letters! 16 words = good, 20 words = great, any more is excellent.

Look for one 9 letter word (which denotes what we do at Christmas) and also one 8 letter word (which could be a gift for a girl or lady)



Answers to the quiz and word puzzle can be found on page 16.



Southeast YHA

NATIONAL PARK IDENTITY

Since the new identity for the National Park was launched last year, it has gone from strength to strength and there are now nearly 30 partners using it across nearly 70 different projects. If you are in and around Winchester why not visit the new exhibition about the National Park at Winchester City Mill. You can also keep your eyes peeled for a striking looking bus or two.

The shared identity is a great way to promote the National Park and its special qualities, and provides a platform for us to work with our many partners.



Images © Carlotta Luke



DISCOVERY RIDES INTO THE HEART OF THE SOUTH DOWNS

The South Downs are a great place for cycling and in September over 100 people enjoyed a Discovery Ride of two to three hours relaxed pedalling into the National Park from Winchester, Shoreham, Peacehaven and Eastbourne.

Each ride had a different theme of discovery – from hidden histories and wildlife to taking better photographs or pond dipping for all

the family. By following leafy country lanes, bridleways and traffic free trails less confident cyclists felt at ease and able to discover the South Downs on their doorstep.

The rides were so popular a new series of Discovery Rides will launch next spring. To register for future rides please write to cycle.discover@southdowns.gov.uk



LOCAL PLAN

After months of preparation the eight weeks of the public consultation on the Local Plan: Preferred Options seemed to fly by. The first three weeks were spent with the Planning Policy team and Members travelling the length and breadth of the National Park with our mobile exhibition. We held five public roadshows, three Parish Council workshops and 19 key partner meetings and spoke face to face with over 600 people. Social media had a big part to play as well with our innovative short film (commissioned to give a simple fresh perspective on what our Local Plan sets out to achieve) reaching over 22,000 views through website, twitter and facebook.

All the team need to do is sit down and analyse all the feedback given to us. Early indications are that ground-breaking ecosystems services approach embodied in the draft Local Plan has been well received.

AN ORGANISATION FIT FOR THE FUTURE

As many of you will have seen through Update, we are currently looking at both the type of organisation the SDNPA needs to be as we move into this next phase of our existence, and at the budget for the next and coming years. It will be late January before we know the trickle-down effect on National Parks of the Defra cuts brought about by the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), announced at the end of November. As part of this process, Members have been looking at possible budget scenarios based on a range of different cuts, and also identifying priority areas of work focus for the Authority over the coming years. As part

of these discussions there has been very strong consensus that our support for the VRS and for volunteering in general is a core part of our business. Whatever the outcome of the CSR, we are committed to creating an organisation that can deliver through this next stage of our development. On 10 December the first stage consultation of this proposed relook at the organisation will begin. Please see the intranet for all updates and information on this ongoing process. By the time Downland Thymes is out, Andrew Lee will also have been to the latest VRS Committee meeting to talk about this issue.

Cycle skills

South Downs
Discovery Day

Cycle
maintenance

South Downs National
Park cycle ambassador

Qualified ride leader

COULD YOU BE A SOUTH DOWNS CYCLE AMBASSADOR?

Building on the Discovery Rides the SDNPA is launching a Cycle Ambassador programme. We are looking for willing ambassadors to attend a series of three training opportunities to improve their cycling ability and knowledge of the National Park.

Two elements are ideal for inexperienced cyclists. Cycle Skills is tailored for those who wish to improve cycling confidence on different surfaces and trails whilst a Maintenance class will give preparation advice and tips on attending to minor trail side repairs.

The third element is a South Downs Discovery Day where participants will learn about the special qualities of the National

Park: landscape, wildlife, heritage and culture and the importance of cyclist behaviour on the trails.

Each session will only cost £5 per person and attendees of all three elements will become 'South Downs National Park Cycle Ambassadors' who will be able to share their passion for cycling and the National Park whenever they jump on their bike.

Cycle Ambassadors who wish to deliver more for their community will be able to progress further and become a qualified Ride Leader, empowering them to deliver guided rides in the South Downs for local groups and providers in the future.

To find out more please write to cycle.discover@southdowns.gov.uk



VOLUNTEERS MAKING IT BIG!

As the UK's newest national park we still have a way to go before we become widely recognised. Having an identity for the National Park plays a key role in raising the profile of the National Park but it must work alongside real examples of what we are working to conserve, enhance and share and we need to show the difference our work makes. This June two of our volunteers, Ruth Holland and Ron Wilder took the time out, alongside Assistant Ranger Laura Deane, to take part in the filming of a piece by ITV's Countrywise.

It was an absolutely beautiful day on the Meon river, showcasing the National Park at its most beautiful. Having dragged their

heavy equipment down to the river the film crew were ready to go. Despite a sudden influx of noisy planes, they managed to film a fantastic piece with Ruth and Laura talking about the watervole release and Ron Wilder dragging them into the river itself to experience river fly monitoring. Even the watervole hit its cue!

The show finally aired on Monday 9 November and was great. The film crew said it was a really well organised shoot and because of that gave us more time than they had originally planned. A great example of staff and volunteers working together on behalf of the National Park. Thank you to Ron, Ruth and all the volunteers who have helped us with our media work this year.



"To be out working in this iconic landscape making a difference, is a very special privilege that I cherish. I get to see and experience such a varied and wonderful landscape that recharges my batteries instantly!

"It's always a pleasure to read, see or hear about the fantastic work that goes on to support and improve our dramatic landscape in the South Downs." - Ron Wilder

**RUTH JAMES, COMMUNICATIONS AND
ENGAGEMENT MANAGER**

Main: River-fly monitoring

Right: Action!

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ANSWERS TO THE CHRISTMAS QUIZ

Id. 2b. 3a. 4c.

Berate, Relate, Brace, Clear, Cleat, Elate,
Taler, Bear, Beat, Belt, Brat, Care, Ear, Lace,
Late, Leat, Race, Reat, Tale, Tare, Teal, Tear

ANSWERS TO THE CHRISTMAS WORD PUZZLE

9 letters: Celebrate 8 letters: Bracelet

SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER SERVICE

SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

Downland Thymes: News for the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service. Issue 70, December 2015. © 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.

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