



DOWNLAND THYMES

NEWS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE ISSUE 76 | SUMMER 2017

ME ON THE MEON



THIS YEAR, THE START OF SPRING COINCIDED WITH US MOVING INTO BRITISH SUMMERTIME AND SO IT WAS THAT THE VRS GROUP GATHERED IN THE CENTRE OF EAST MEON VILLAGE IN GLORIOUS SUNSHINE.

After the obligatory health and safety talk and reassurance that our first aiders had covered what to do in the event of drowning in nine inches of water, we started a lovely wet task.

We were helping the Wild Trout Trust continue their work on improving the River Meon. They have been working on alleviating the concrete channel in the centre of the village to create more of a natural, meandering flow in the river. Their previous plans have worked well but they found an even better way to improve the river. Large pieces of sliced oak have been placed in various places along the river and bolted down to keep them secure. The position of the wood then diverts the flow of water to meander along the river, which was immediately noticeable.

We also moved eight tons of stones in wheelbarrows and deposited it along each side of the river. Those people with waders and wellingtons, without holes in them, gallantly went into the river to spread the stones. Later there will be the planting of aquatic vegetation into the stones to make it more attractive to wildlife.

All in all, a satisfactory task working in glorious sunshine made a welcome change from our winter work of scrub clearing and burning. Our thanks go to Andy Thomas of the Wild Trout Trust in particular.

JENNY DEEMAN, WESTERN AREA VOLUNTEER

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- Left:** Wading
in the river
© Jenny Deeman



CHAIRMAN’S CORNER

It is a privilege to again be representing all of you as Chair of the VRS, this being my second term following one in 2011–2014. However, unlike my last spell as Chair, this time we have a new Committee structure following your enthusiastic support for the recommendations of the Review Group, led by Tony Mobbs, so you will see on page 3 the details of my fellow committee members. Please do not hesitate to make contact with us if you have any ideas or concerns about your volunteering, no matter what role you undertake.

I must also pay tribute in this piece to the sterling work that the three committee retiring officers have made over the past three years. Martin Cowell has kept us all on a straight course as Secretary, Alastair Stewart has ensured that our money has been well spent [although we could spend more – any ideas please?] and Nevill Brooke has been a tower of strength as the Chair – thank you all for such good work and commitment to the VRS.

Looking to the future, I hope that you will get to see something of the new Committee at your Area update meetings, which I hope will be well supported by you all. These update meetings have been a regular occurrence in the Western Area for over three years and are an excellent way to meet others who volunteer on a different day in your Area and also to hear about what the National Park Authority (NPA) is doing and where it is going in the future.

Of course, this publication is also an excellent way of getting to know what is going on but I know that the editorial group are always looking for new articles from all the Areas so please do think of writing in with topics that you have been discussing around that mid-morning cuppa out on task.

It is strange to be writing this article knowing that when you get to read it there will be a new government – with its new priorities but hopefully the important work of the NPA will continue unaltered and importantly our contribution to its work will increase not only in diversity but also in intensity because only by involving more and more people in its work will the National Park achieve its 2050 Vision.

RON WILDER, VRS CHAIRMAN

UPDATE FROM THE VOLUNTEERING TEAM



CONGRATULATIONS TO HELENA LEWIS AND THE VRS COMMITTEE; THIS YEAR’S AGM WAS A GREAT SUCCESS. WITH NO LESS THAN THREE OPTIONS FOR WALKS ON A LOVELY SPRING DAY, WE WERE SPOILT FOR CHOICE.

Wiston Estate’s Head Forester Toby Askew’s walk around the Wiston Estate was deservedly popular, following his fascinating talk on his work. Toby has kindly agreed to run one of our Lunch ‘n’ Learn sessions at the South Downs Centre in Midhurst in early July, so if you weren’t able to make the AGM, you have another chance – keep an eye out in the weekly *Update* newsletter. The AGM also provided the opportunity to thank 20 volunteer rangers who have given

up their time for the South Downs for 10 years or more and to present them with Long Service Awards. See Helena’s article on page 3 for more on the AGM.

At the beginning of April we were all sorry to say goodbye to Sarah Brett, who decided to leave her role as Volunteer Support Officer with the SDNPA. Sarah returned from maternity leave in February, but realised quite quickly that work and family arrangements weren’t working well together. I am sure that those of you who know her will want to wish her all the very best for the future.

The good news is that Gemma North, who looked after most of Sarah’s work from last June until her return, has taken on the role again from the beginning of May, so it’s really good to have her back.

The Volunteering Development Plan has been taking shape over the last couple of months and we will be asking for your feedback on proposals soon.

All the very best to you all.

IAN HARTLE, SDNPA VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

.....
Main: Between them, this group of volunteer rangers have given 200 years to the South Downs © Ian Hartle
Inset: Ian Hartle

AGM REPORT

ON SATURDAY 25 MARCH OUR VRS AGM WAS HELD IN AN ATTRACTIVE ISOLATED VILLAGE HALL ON THE WISTON ESTATE IN THE CENTRAL DOWNS NEAR STEYNING.



I had been asked last August as the central area VRS committee rep to organise the AGM – venue, speaker, afternoon walk – oh and yes, an alternative option for those non-walkers!

Having finally found this small hall, ideal as it would easily hold the usual number of attendees and it had character with amazing views of Chanctonbury Ring, next I sorted the talk. Toby Askew, the Wiston head forester was a little reticent when asked if he would give a talk. “On what?” he said. “Whatever you are passionate about” I replied. “Woodland and trees” was his reply. So that was what we were treated to and very interesting it was too, especially as his slides had reorganised themselves when put on the laptop so he had to keep cool while finding the right one to talk about.

The final number of attendees was 66, the largest number for years, so my anxiety rose as the numbers increased, firstly chairs, then parking, then cups, then adequate toilet facilities, then signs on the dangerous entrance etc, etc. However, with the sun shining we gathered outside (no room inside!) for coffee admiring the views before Nevill summoned us inside to hear his Chairman’s report on last year’s projects and courses. He encouraged us to log into the volunteer section of the SDNPA intranet site for up to date information. Then Alistair’s treasurer report showed that we have a strong budget so please start identifying interesting and creative projects which can be funded, such as the West Meon Nature Reserve Project. Also, we should use the discount schemes as, with 500 volunteers, we are able to obtain good discounts. (See page 15).

Tony Mobbs then explained clearly the new VRS Committee structure and how it came about. The main reason is that the SDNPA has undergone restructuring so we followed suit and now will have just four committee members, (no more area reps but up to two non-voting members, if required) and two SDNPA officers.

Meetings, paperwork and travel will be reduced as most will be done online. The main responsibilities of the new committee will be:

- Projects – liaison between volunteers and SDNPA
- Resolving volunteer concerns not resolved at area level
- Organise the AGM
- Manage VRS funds
- Enhance the volunteering experience

The following committee members were then elected:

- Chairman – Ron Wilder (Western Downs)
- Secretary – Alan Biddlecombe (Western Downs)
- Treasurer – Andrew Williams (Wealden Heaths)
- Volunteer Experience – Mike Ellis (Western Downs)

Finally Margaret Paren, NPA Chair, talked of the future plans and pressures on the SDNPA and thanked us all for our work over the year and how much the SDNPA appreciated it. Long service awards were given out and after lunch a few keen walkers climbed up to Chanctonbury Ring, while others continued to hear Toby Askew expand on woodland management while visiting two estate copses – a sweet chestnut and an oak copse. Another group had an interesting visit to Steyning church and museum.

All in all, a most satisfactory AGM with the bonus of afternoon excursions to enjoy.

HELENA LEWIS, CENTRAL DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER



.....
Main: Enjoying the sunshine.
Inset: Toby Askew
© Helena Lewis

KINGLEY VALE NNR:

VOLUNTEERS HELP RETURN THE DEVIL'S HUMPS TO THEIR FORMER GLORY!



A well earned rest
in front of a barrow.

© Steve Walker

Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve (NNR), near Chichester in West Sussex, contains one of the finest yew forests in western Europe, including a grove of ancient trees which are among the oldest living things in Britain. It also has superb chalk grassland and is one of the most important archaeological sites in southern England, with 14 scheduled ancient monuments, including Bronze Age burial mounds.

The NNR lies within the South Downs National Park and covers 150 hectares of chalk grassland, scrub, mixed oak and ash woodland, and ancient yew forest. The Reserve is a steep sided coombe (dry valley), the top of which offers stunning views of the surrounding area, including across to the Isle of Wight.

For more information, please look at the Natural England webpage: naturalengland.org.uk/kingleyvalennr

FOR THOSE VISITORS WHO MAKE IT TO THE TOP OF BOW HILL, IT IS HARD NOT TO BE AWESTRUCK BY THE SIGHT OF THE FOUR BRONZE AGE TUMULI RUNNING ALONG THE PLATEAU.

These mounds, also known as The Devil's Humps (or the Kings' Graves) are some of the most impressive round barrows surviving on the South Downs. Numerous myths surround them, the best being the final resting place for Viking leaders defeated by the men of Chichester.

For centuries the grassland around the burial mounds was kept short and open by sheep and other grazing animals. However as grazing ceased after the war, scrub started to creep in, notably around the two north-eastern tumuli (bowl barrows) which until recently had become partially obscured by gorse. On the back of the Secrets of the High Woods project we are now making renewed efforts to clear this scrub and try and restore the mounds to their former glory.

However, as many of you will know scrub clearance is a slow and thorny task! For this reason we enlisted the help of the South Downs VRS, notably the Friday group (pictured enjoying a rare tea break!) who have spent many a day hacking through gorse and hawthorn. We've also had help from the SDNPA rangers and the Phoenix Futures 'Recovery Through Nature' volunteers.

The work will continue throughout the winter season as we continue to clear scrub to the south and thereby restore some of the mounds' original views out toward Chichester. We will also be re-instating the old grazing regime which will not only keep the scrub at bay but also help to encourage the chalk grassland that once covered this area.

STEVE WALKER, KINGLEY VALE NNR RESERVE MANAGER



The opened view over
Chichester and surrounding area.

© Steve Walker

WARNING:
GRAPHIC
CONTENT

THE MURDER STONE

EN-ROUTE TO A RECENT VRS WOODLAND TASK AT CLARE'S COPSE NEAR HAMBLEDON, HANTS, WE PASSED A SMALL UNASSUMING HEAD STONE, KNOWN LOCALLY AS 'THE MURDER STONE' PLACED NEAR THE ENTRANCE TO THE WOODS. IT COMMEMORATES A PARTICULARLY GRUESOME CRIME THAT OCCURRED HERE OVER 200 YEARS AGO. THE STORY GOES...

In the late afternoon sun on Wednesday 21 August 1782, James Stares, a 46 year old rural labourer, walked from his home in Soberton to Hambledon via a bucolic lane known as Cams Hill. He had arranged to meet a local man in The New Inn pub to collect payment for some recent labours. After pocketing his wage in the bar, he enjoyed a convivial evening drinking with the male company. Late in the evening as he prepared to leave he was joined by a young blacksmith, John Taylor, who lived in the hamlet of Hoe Cross. John said that as he was also going home via Cams Hill they should walk together for company and safety – so, after the farewells they made their way home through the warm night...

Early the following morning a group of labourers walking along Cams Hill on their way to work found an alarming scene. What looked like a large pile of bloody rags, on closer inspection, was found to be the battered corpse of a male. Several of the group remained at the scene while the others ran to Hambledon to raise the alarm.

A couple of hours later a group of parish officials and local men inspected the scene. Organised and regulated policing as we know it didn't come in for another half century or so; but these rural, part time

officials, were still a force to be reckoned with. Although they had never heard of crime scene examination, forensic recovery or the judicial rules of evidence, they were practical, intelligent men fortified with the zeal of protecting their own community and loved ones. They could make logical and balanced assumptions and operated under various statutes, in particular Common Law, which gave them the right to force entry and seize individuals suspected of a crime. In addition they would have been armed with cutlasses and staves, and possibly firearms.



The Murder Stone

The corpse was examined and was found to have extensive lacerations to the face and head. He had been brutally beaten. His throat had then been cut laterally but this had apparently not been deep enough to stop him screaming or calling for help, so a vertical cut had been made from his chin to his upper sternum, presumably to destroy his vocal chords. There was no money on the body and his metal buttons and shoe buckles had been taken. Someone in the group identified the corpse as James Stares. Nearby was a broken, blood covered, thick wooden pole, variously described as a 'broom stick' or 'walking stick', which was recognised as having been in the possession of the blacksmith John Taylor the previous evening.

Some men were detailed to take the body of James Stares to his home village of Soberton while the remainder descended on Taylor's small smithy at Hoe Cross. John

Taylor denied any foul play claiming that he and Stares had walked together a while and parted ways for their respective destinations. The smithy and adjacent cottage were searched and, although nothing stolen from the body was found, secreted behind the forge a blood spattered rural worker's long white smock was located. These smocks were hand stitched and often made by family members so could be quite individual. Taylor denied any knowledge of the smock, but any lingering chance of convincing the officials of his innocence evaporated when they administered an evidential coup de grace. They had his mother identify the smock as belonging to her son. She gave this statement probably knowing she was sending her son to the gallows; but such was the gravitas of the incident and her fear of the community's collective reaction, that she felt compelled to condemn him.

Taylor never admitted guilt but was swiftly convicted of murder by a jury of his peers at the local assizes and publicly hung shortly afterwards. It is not recorded what happened to the broken-hearted mother whose evidence helped convict her own son. The devastated Stares family buried their loved one in Soberton village church where his gravestone can be seen to this day. They then paid for a memorial stone to be erected at the murder site and although it's inscription has been lost with time one source states it began, "Let future generations know..."

Why did an apparently respectable member of a small, close knit rural community commit such a violent unprovoked deed? We will never know for certain; but these people were the same as us and, as we can see from our own times, the combination of avarice and alcohol can lead many astray.

(My thanks to the Stares family and the Hampshire History website. The stone is a grade 2 listed monument number 146450).

MARTIN PARCELL,
WESTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER

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Doug and Emmanuel with a
copy of Downland Thymes
© Doug Jones

SCRUB-BASHING IN GHANA

THE LAST EDITION OF DOWNLAND
THYMES PROVED TO BE VERY
POPULAR 3,000 MILES AWAY IN
WEST AFRICA – PARTLY DUE TO
THE FASCINATING ARTICLE
ABOUT SPIDERS!

SDNPA Member (and occasional volunteer)
Doug Jones had taken a copy “to read on the
flight on the way there” – but had then shared
it with villagers in rural Ghana as a way of
helping some of them improve their English.

“They are always interested in reading British
publications”, explains Doug, who is a Trustee
of a small Buriton-based charity helping
communities in the far north of the country’s
Central Region. “But the story about spiders
really caught their eye.”

And, amidst his work to help improve
local schools and sanitation, Doug was
able to lend a hand with some tropical
scrub-bashing.

Virtually every family has a small plot of
land – and they face a constant battle
to cut back weeds and other unwanted
species from around their cocoa trees,
pineapples, bananas and other produce.

They set off into the bush early in the morning
with little more than a machete and a pair
of wellington boots – worn despite the 38
degree heat and incredible humidity. “There’s
not a lot of regard for health and safety issues
when their machetes are in action”, said
Doug, “but the wellington boots are essential

because of the numbers
of poisonous snakes!”

“Their cocoa crop is their one money-
earner of the year and it is vital that they are
constantly ensuring that nothing is competing
for any nutrients or water. Everything grows
very fast when the conditions are right and
it is common to see scores of people out
scrub-bashing. Not quite the same
as on the South Downs, but some
surprising similarities!”

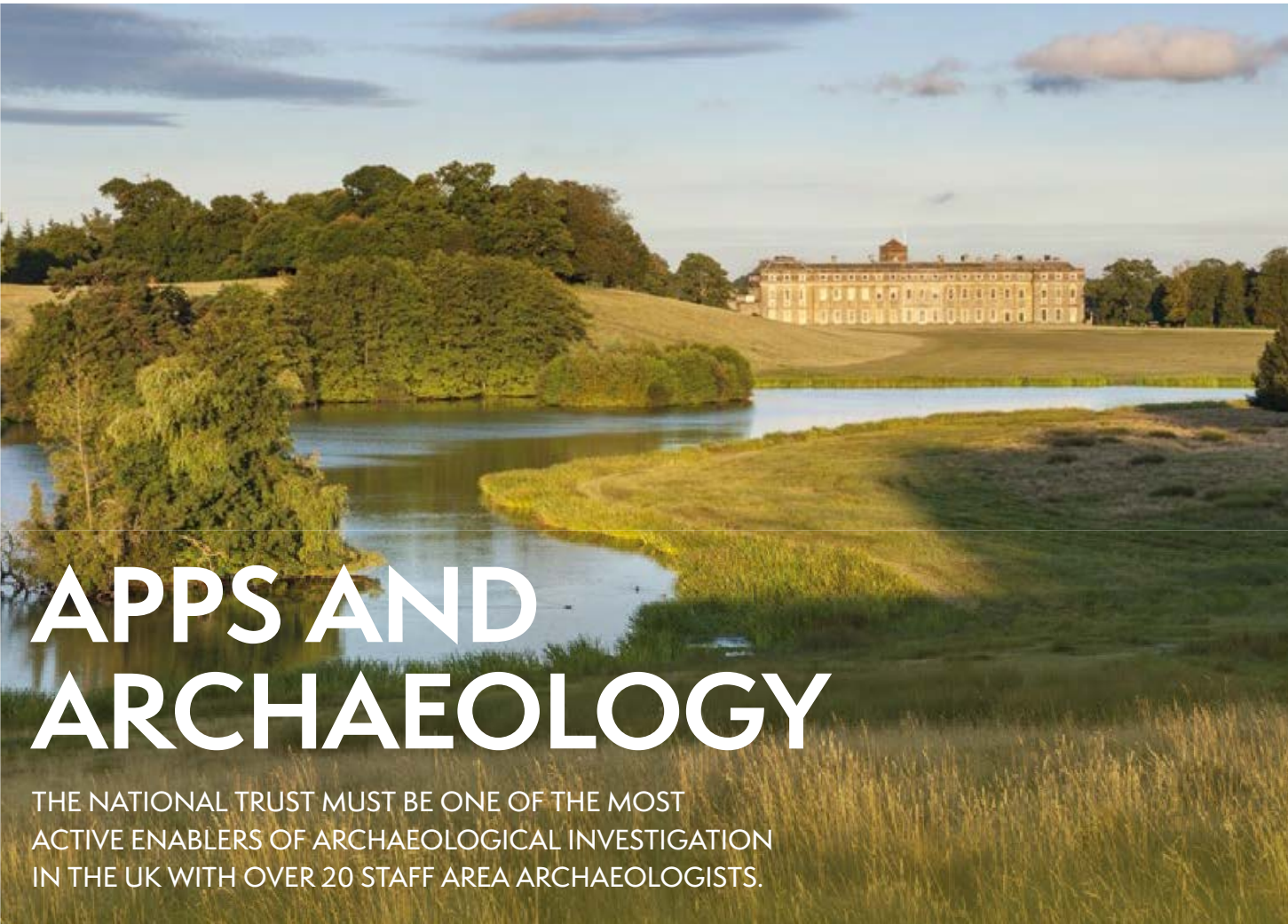
To find out more about Buriton’s link with
Dominase, visit [buriton.info/buritons-
village-village-link-dominase](http://buriton.info/buritons-village-village-link-dominase)



Cocoa pods
© Doug Jones



Emmanuel scrub bashing
© Doug Jones



APPS AND ARCHAEOLOGY

THE NATIONAL TRUST MUST BE ONE OF THE MOST
ACTIVE ENABLERS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION
IN THE UK WITH OVER 20 STAFF AREA ARCHAEOLOGISTS.



The ‘Park Explorer’
App represents the
public interface
culmination of
the three year
Petworth Park
Historic Landscapes

Archaeology & Archival Research Project led
by Tom Dommett, the Trust’s Archaeologist for
West Sussex & The South Downs. Clasp
your smart phone or tablet, you can wander
in the Park accessing the various installed
hotspots and swiping Near Field Contact
technology location triggered hieroglyphs
to access animations, videos, and digital
reconstructions of the demolished lost
buildings and surroundings of the various
periods before Capability Brown and his
predecessors.

As you can appreciate, this facility reduces
the need to place a large number of obtrusive
information boards in the landscape, and as
the Trust nationally has many such landscapes,
the possibilities to further research their
antecedents and make them available to
visitors in the future is immense. It also enables
the visitor at whatever level of interest and
itinerary time constraints, to access as much of
the information available as they want.

We conducted a customer survey over the
August to October 2016 period of visitors
to the House and Park which has been most
interesting, as during daylight hours the
public has full free access to the Park for
outdoor activities which this facility enhances
considerably. This in turn has informed a
development of the original ‘Park Explorer’
App and its accompanying information
leaflet which is now available. The other
very positive aspect of this initiative is that
it has brought together many members of
all the Archaeological Societies & Local
History Groups in its catchment area
to achieve a common goal with strong
community involvement.

This also helped encourage the same type of
involvement in the subsequent South Downs
National Park’s ‘Secrets of the High Woods’
Lidar based archaeological landscape project,
between Arundel & Rowlands Castle, of the
forest covered areas of the South Downs.
Neither project would have been possible at
this level without Heritage Lottery and other
external funding support.

JOHN CRANE, VRS CULTURAL
HERITAGE RANGER & NATIONAL
TRUST VOLUNTEER ARCHAEOLOGIST.

Main: Petworth House and Upper Pond
© National Trust Images/Andrew Butler

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MY SPECIAL SPOT

THIS TIME IT'S HELENA LEWIS'S TURN TO TELL US ABOUT HER 'SPECIAL SPOT' IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK...

Like Nevill in the last edition of *Downland Thymes*, I have also selected two special spots. One is just below Lancing Ring and the other is here, at Truleigh Hill, together I have lived at these locations for over 40 years.

I live right on top of the Downs at Truleigh Hill and enjoy the most splendid views. My favourite time is probably early morning, on a good day I can see the Isle of Wight in one direction and deep into the Weald in the other. I love the big skies with the clouds scudding across, while the hang-gliders float above Devil's Dyke.

WHAT EFFECT DOES THIS SPECIAL SPOT HAVE UPON YOU?

I love the sense of permanence and calmness you get here; the landscape has evolved over centuries. It will always be here. I don't mind the aerials and man-made features, they make you better appreciate the natural beauty of the countryside. I'll enjoy watching a kestrel

hovering and skylarks singing, so when a tractor motors past it's just a more modern part of the agricultural scene.

HAS YOUR VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE INFLUENCED YOUR VIEWS?

I've been a volunteer for about 30 years, and I love sharing the Downs with fellow volunteers, who may often know more than I. And we still go on tasks to locations I'm not familiar with. I enjoy the camaraderie and friendly banter, you never stop learning, or laughing. I now know more about wild flowers and butterflies than ever before.

DOES YOUR SPECIAL SPOT EPITOMISE SOMETHING ABOUT THE NATIONAL PARK?

This area of the Downs is the narrowest part of the National Park. So, at Truleigh Hill you can easily see across it in both directions, great uninterrupted views along the coast and also inland. And I can just as easily visit

a wide variety of cultural features, from Iron Age hillforts to WWII radar stations.

DO THE ARTS HAVE ANY SIGNIFICANCE FOR YOUR SPECIAL SPOT?

Whenever I hear Vaughan Williams, 'The Lark Ascending', they are always my skylarks here! And I sometimes think of Sussex folk songs too, for a while ago, when I went hedge-laying with Tom Parry near Washington there was an opening ceremony for a large, sculptural waymark, accompanied by these folk singers. It was lovely and we just happened to be hedge-laying nearby. Lastly, there is a humble, quirky feature lying very close to us. A little touching memorial to someone's pets that died in the 1930s, just a few steps off the South Downs Way. All these cultural references make this spot very special to me.

HELENA LEWIS,
CENTRAL DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER



Netting in place
© Sarah Upfield

DEEPS COPSE: THE RESTORATION OF AN ICONIC WOOD

I AM DELIGHTED TO REPORT THAT THE ACTIONS OF THE SOUTH DOWNS VRS HAVE BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN HELPING TO RESTORE AN HISTORIC HAMPSHIRE WOOD THAT IS KNOWN TO HAVE EXISTED SINCE 1600.

Deeps Copse is an ancient oak woodland of 13.2 hectares that lies on the south-west boundary of the National Park, not far from Marwell Zoo. The wood contains the remnants of a ditch and bank boundary and for centuries has been historically coppiced. However, in the 20th century, after many years of neglect it was acquired by a timber company who removed many of the large oak trees; leaving a great deal of consequential damage to the woodland floor and existing coppice.

To save this wood, my father acquired it from the timber company in 1997 and created a Trust to manage it. Subsequently there has been a continual programme of restoration. The purpose being simply to aid conservation and restore habitats. Rides have been established to provide access to all areas of the wood and a third of the area (including much of the ash and birch) has been coppiced and the canopy thinned to encourage sunlight to reach the woodland floor to stimulate coppice regrowth.

However, recently we've found it increasingly difficult to carry out this extensive programme on our own. We realised we couldn't maintain the necessary rate of progress. So, a couple of years ago we approached the South Downs National Park to see if there was any way they could help us with the conservation work.

Happily, their response was very positive and Nina Williams the Forestry and Woodland Development Officer came over. She assessed the need for support and suggested that the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service could be involved. Since then the Western Downs volunteers have visited each autumn and spring. Their assistance has provided a variety of work, for example, tree felling and coppicing; cutting back of overgrown and weak hazel coppice; using the cut brush as a barrier to discourage the deer eating young hazel shoots; as well as netting of coppice coupes with deer fencing.

Because of this VRS support it has been possible to reinstate a full management plan for the wood. A pattern of coppice restoration can now be planned, developed and managed into the future. This greatly and much appreciated contribution to the preservation of this ancient woodland is only possible because of the hard work of the volunteers.

Consequently, I would like to thank the SDNPA and you all for the amazing and dedicated work you do for us and the wood, it is very much appreciated. Quite simply we couldn't have restored the wood without you.

SARAH UPFIELD, DAUGHTER OF GRAHAM CROSBY, OWNER OF DEEPS COPSE.



Hard at work and smiling!
© Sarah Upfield

Instagram:

MY PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

ENCOURAGED BY A PHOTOGRAPHER FRIEND I STARTED TO USE INSTAGRAM. SHE SUGGESTED THAT I THINK OF IT AS A WAY OF KEEPING A PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNAL. ONE YEAR ON AND I AM AN ENTHUSIAST!

Mainly my photographic journal captures my love of the beautiful rolling Downs, the fields, the sheep and the cows and the first leg of a 7 mile stretch of the South Downs Way that my partner, Richard, and I have the good fortune to look after as South Downs Way Wardens.

We do this first leg of the walk from our house nestled in #littledown pretty much twice a day with our black Labrador. The house is one of two built by the army for land girls working at the nearby farm in World War Two.

When I first moved in and started to clear the garden I came across a couple of old fence posts with cream embossed acorns on a dark brown background. Only a few years later when we cleared an overgrown bank of brambles did we discover to my joy that the old South Downs Way had actually run through what is now part of our garden.

Delighted by this discovery I was determined to keep it as a walk way - indeed to have done anything else would have felt very wrong! It is only a small part of what once upon a time must have wound along the bottom of #littledown from the A27 up the Downs to where it would have joined Jugg's Road stretching across the top with wonderful views of the sea and the rolling Downs.

I imagine that it was rerouted at the time that the two houses were built on the track which runs from The Newmarket Inn up under the railway bridge. Only a few years ago the path was rerouted completely

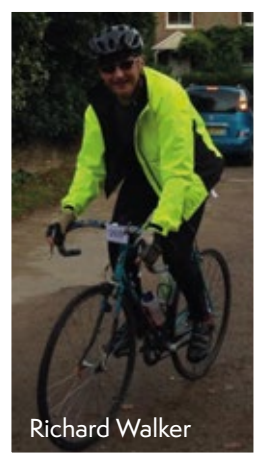
and now runs from Housedean Farm over the farm bridge, along the side of the A27 and through a lovely copse from where it joins the path up to the top of the Downs.

It is one of the easiest parts of the South Downs Way to access by bus via the number 28/29 (brightonandhovebuses.co.uk). For campers there is a wonderful campsite at Housedean Farm (housedean.co.uk) where at the height of summer you can buy ice cream. For walkers, cyclists, horse riders and dogs there is a water tap on the wall outside the farm gate. For walkers coming by car it is possible to park at The Newmarket Inn (newmarketinn.relaxinnz.co.uk) to enjoy a refreshing drink and a bite to eat before setting off up the Downs. They also do accommodation.

This is one of my most favourite times of the year on the South Downs - these are just a few photographs from my photographic journal showing just how glorious the South Downs Way is! The hedgerows are truly springing into life, the trees have a lovely green, fresh, untouched by wind and rain look to them, the birds are singing, the sheep and their lambs can be found grazing and frolicking, and the cows with their calves are back out from their winter quarters enjoying the grass and the sunshine!

To follow me on Instagram search [annitownend](#) and [#littledown](#) for more photos.

ANNI TOWNEND,
SOUTH DOWNS WAY WARDEN



WHAT HAVE I DONE?

I HAVE BEEN A FAN OF CYCLING FOR MANY YEARS AND AFTER QUITE A FEW YEARS ABSENCE, GOT BACK INTO IT A FEW YEARS AGO.

Now those of you who know me, know that I work in Newhaven and living in Littlehampton means that I have quite a daily commute. So, when I decided to cycle to work one day last year, many thought that I was mad. The round trip ended up being 57 miles and although I arrived at work fully energised, I got back home pretty knackered.

Ironically, that weekend, I saw an advert online offering the chance to participate in a charity bike ride from London to Paris in July 2017, helping to raise money for the Alzheimer's Society. The route covers over 300 miles in four days and coincides with the arrival of the Tour de France the day afterwards. I was sold!

My father-in-law was suffering from this horrendous affliction and I thought that this would be the

perfect opportunity to help raise money for this cause and also meet a great bunch of people (nearly as good as my friends in the VRS). One condition I had was that I needed a new bike to replace my 25 year old vintage steed.

Needless to say, I have now signed up for this challenge and am well into my training programme, racking up as many miles as I can get away with at the weekend. I am trying to raise sponsorship and have a target of £1500 which I have nearly reached but any more will be gratefully received. If anyone would like to sponsor me, please go to my "Just Giving" sponsorship page at: justgiving.com/fundraising/Richard-Walker40#

RICHARD WALKER, CENTRAL
DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER

NEW STARTER



I started volunteering last June and worked with the Stanmer group until very recently. As I live in Hailsham there is less travelling with the Seven Sisters venue but I still like to join the Stanmer group when I can.

The first day I volunteered was a hot one! I was out with Jan and the volunteers were Bob, Brian and Soo. We were path clearing and a sea of nettles awaited us, I don't think my arms stopped 'fizzing' for two days!

I started volunteering as I have lived near the South Downs all my life and never cease to be amazed and inspired by them. I love being outdoors and helping to maintain what we are so lucky to have, encouraging both wildlife and people to enjoy it is reward enough.

I work as a midwife at the County in Brighton and my shift work makes my volunteering somewhat erratic! This is not the first volunteering I have done; I love to travel and have done voluntary work as a midwife/trainer in Tibet where I worked in the Himalayas with the nomadic yak herders. I then spent a year in Cameroon, West Africa in 2013 training health professionals and local people in maternal health, my next venture is to spend some time in India.

My favourite activity in the National Park is to do nothing! Life is such a rush and slowing down and taking in the sights, smells and sounds of the fields, woods, coastline and hilltop views is heaven. I also love having the family dog for company and watching him dive into bushes and bound around joyfully which shows me that he loves it as much as I do!

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 BRUSHMAKERS ARMS, UPHAM, HAMPSHIRE, SO32 1JJ

01489 860231 thebrushmakersarms.co.uk

After moving to the western area of the South Downs in January, and soon realising I'd be inundated with excellent local pubs, I decided to start with the closest one according to my OS map. 40 minutes walk across the fields later I found myself in the beautiful village of Upham. The Brushmakers Arms is run by a very welcoming Nicky on the bar, and Reece (Head Chef) in the Kitchen. The food is traditional, hearty and interesting, using lots of local produce and there are great ales from Upham, Cheriton and other local breweries. Three months later I've brought all my visiting friends here, and Nicky now knows my regular – a pint of the lovely Meon Cider!

CHARLOTTE WRAY,
ASSISTANT RANGER, WESTERN AREA



TRADITIONAL
INN AWARD

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.



DID YOU KNOW?

Literally beneath the National Park is a lost cycle track. Down(s) underground, as it were...

For in 2009, a disused tunnel on the old Meon Valley Railway near Privett was used to create an amazing ramp complex for BMX bikes. The sports company 'Nike' spent thousands of pounds and brought in top US riders just to make a one-off "Tunnel Jam" promotional video. Today it is still there but locked away and largely unknown.

To see their video, Google: 'Privett tunnel bmx'



Above: The tunnel in use

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...

"HEY WAIT FOR ME, DOES ANYONE KNOW WHERE WE ARE!?"

GEOFF MITCHELL – TUESDAY GROUP EAST



BLUEBERRY, PECAN AND WALNUT MUFFINS



(makes approx. 16)

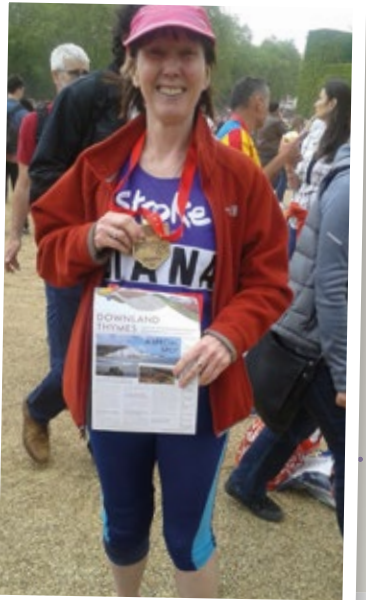
INGREDIENTS:

- 275g plain and/or wholemeal flour
- 2tsp baking powder
- 1/2tsp salt
- 1tsp cinnamon
- 2 large eggs
- 75g golden caster sugar
- 170ml milk
- 110g marg/butter (melted and slightly cooled)
- 1tsp vanilla extract
- 140g blueberries
- 100g pecans and walnuts – finely chopped (leave some whole pecans for decoration)
- Demerara sugar for decoration

METHOD:

1. Sift the flour, baking powder and salt into a large bowl.
2. In a separate bowl mix the eggs, sugar, milk, melted butter and vanilla extract.
3. Sift the dry ingredients into the egg mixture.
4. Quickly fold the dry ingredients into the wet ones (need to do this in about 15 secs).
5. Fold in the blueberries and chopped nuts, again with minimum stirring.
6. Spoon the mixture into muffin paper cups placed in a muffin tin.
7. Place a whole pecan on top of each muffin and then scatter the top with demerara sugar.
8. Bake on a high shelf for 25 to 30 mins at 200° C (based on a conventional oven).

DIANA JORDAN,
VOLUNTEER WESTERN DOWNS



Also: see photo of Diana at the London Marathon, holding the Downland Thymes.

She ran it in 4 hours 2 mins, raising over £720 for the Stroke Association.

Congratulations!



© SDNPA/Mischa Haller

LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY
FOR THE PLACE YOU LOVE

By leaving a gift in your will to the South Downs National Park, you can help ensure that it can be enjoyed by everyone, for ever. If you are interested in leaving a legacy to the South Downs National Park Trust please contact james.winkworth@southdowns.gov.uk

WE'RE NOT JUST
A PLACE, WE'RE
A CAUSE

AS THE UK'S NEWEST NATIONAL PARK THE SOUTH DOWNS SERVES THE BUSIEST PART OF THE UK – WITH 2 MILLION PEOPLE LIVING WITHIN 5 MILES – WHILST DEALING WITH THE CHALLENGES CAUSED BY CLIMATE CHANGE.

With so many demands on it, it can only exist through the support of those who love it.

The South Downs National Park Authority is currently in the process of setting up a brand new independent charity – The South Downs National Park Trust. The Trust will take a Park-wide approach to protect this extraordinary place for future generations, working in partnership with community based organisations, for the benefit of the National Park and the people for whom it was created.

But we can't do it alone. By making a donation to the South Downs National Park Trust, you can help ensure that our beautiful and inspirational landscapes and communities can be enjoyed by all, forever.

We will soon have more information and donation facilities up on the South Downs National Park website. In the meantime, if you are interested in finding out more about the charity, please contact James Winkworth on james.winkworth@southdowns.gov.uk

SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES
FUND

Can you help the National Park Authority identify suitable projects for funding? Do you know of any community based projects in the National Park that are in need of support? Please contact Mark Rose (01730 819219 or grants@southdowns.gov.uk) to see if your project would be eligible for support through the Sustainable Communities Fund.

The National Park Authority grant scheme is still accepting applications after six years of grant giving and over £1,000,000 allocated to non-profit, community based projects which support the National Park's objectives.

The fund supports a wide range of projects – some examples from last year are:

- New pond dipping platform at Sussex Wildlife Trust's site at Woods Mill, Henfield

- New beekeeping apiary for Meon Valley Beekeepers
- Archaeological digs by Meon Valley Archaeology and Heritage Group
- Interpretation at Droxford Church
- Creating a nature reserve at old West Meon Railway Station for West Meon School and the wider community
- Supporting an outdoor learning shelter at Botany Bay
- Bike and workshop upgrade for Bespoke Biking Community Interest Company in Winchester
- Supporting a tour of The Four Men production which is based on the Sussex landscape and delivered by the Conn-Artists theatre group



- Working with Berwick Church to establish a marked walking route and accompanying leaflet which takes in several churches and other points of interest in the Cuckmere Valley
- Supporting the Parishes Wildlife Group in Kirdford and Wisborough Green to undertake wildlife surveying and other conservation activities
- Helping Butser Ancient Farm learn how to create Roman Shoes for demonstration purposes to preserve this ancient technique in the South Downs
- Supporting Gilbert White's House in delivering an exhibition of sculptures based on famous authors and poets who were inspired by the Downs – Jane Austen, Edward Thomas etc.

Please visit southdowns.gov.uk/scf or contact Mark Rose for more information.

Main: Pond platform restoration © Doug Jones
Inset: Community archaeology in the Meon Valley © Meon Valley Archaeology & Heritage Group

An inspiring documentary about the wildlife and people of the South Downs National Park

SOUTH DOWNS
ENGLAND'S MOUNTAINS GREEN

Presented by Peter Owen-Jones

Available now on **amazon**

BIG WAVE PRODUCTIONS LTD
SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

DISCOUNTS FOR
VOLUNTEERS

You'll be pleased to know that several retailers are offering discounts on the sorts of things you'll need in the countryside. The VRS has successfully negotiated discounts with: **Blacks, Cotswold Outdoor, Cycle Surgery, Millets, Runners Need, Snow+Rock and Ultimate Outdoors.** Simply present your VRS photo identity card at the time of your purchase – or use an online discount code. The discount

amount varies, but is not available in conjunction with any other discounts or offers and is subject to terms and conditions.

Please visit the Volunteer section of the intranet for full details.

If you don't have an ID card, or have lost, damaged or mislaid it then please email VRS@southdowns.gov.uk for a replacement. The weekly *Update* email includes an intranet log-on that you can use if you don't already have one.



DISCOVERING DEWPONDS

THERE ARE FEW FINER SIGHTS ON THE DOWNS THAN A FULL DEWPOUND, PERHAPS BEING USED BY SHEEP – THEIR ORIGINAL PURPOSE – OR MANAGED AS A WILDLIFE HABITAT.

These man-made features are of uncertain age, but for centuries at least they have been essential water sources for the flocks of sheep that graze the downland pastures in a landscape that is otherwise devoid of surface water because of the porous chalk. They are not, as the name suggests, filled by dew but from rainwater, however the dewpond name, evocative of the Downs, has stuck.

The traditional dewpond was made with a flint base, sometimes layered with straw and given a waterproof lining of clay. But there are also many concrete examples more suited to watering cattle which can damage the clay ones.

The April 2017 image in the BBC's Countryfile calendar is a wonderfully artistic shot of the dewpond to the west of Ditchling Beacon, this is my own rather more prosaic equivalent of the same site (with accompanying sheep!).

Since late last summer I have been working with the Midhurst-based research team and the Eastern Area Rangers to deliver a project surveying dewpond sites across the whole of the National Park, updating data from previous surveys (the last carried out 10 years ago), with a view to identifying dewponds for restoration. As well as pouring over old OS maps from the 1870s onwards, using Google Earth and other sources, the initial survey work has involved much walking on the Downs, venturing to more remote areas that I had never previously visited, and in the process, enjoying the rich historic and cultural footprint that is to be found in the landscape.

The initial survey in the Eastern Area of the South Downs has identified c.280 dewpond sites, of which about one third are either in good condition with water or otherwise in a reasonable state, c.40% have gone from the landscape (usually ploughed up) and the

remainder are in various states of being overgrown. Here's a fine example of a large concrete one, by the South Downs Way on Balmer Down, which with a bit of love and attention could support sheep and improve the biodiversity in this area which is near woodland.

There's a long way to go yet, more detailed site-specific survey and biodiversity assessment input is needed, priorities agreed and no doubt funding for restoration secured. The project will gradually move west, through the different landscape of the High Woods, and into Hampshire.

So next time you are out and about on the Downs, keep a look out for a dewpond site – and you never know, you may find yourself helping to bring it back to life in a year or more's time!

DAVID RIVIERE, VOLUNTEER RESEARCHER

Main: Dewpond west of Ditchling Beacon
© David Riviere

Inset: Concrete dewpond on Balmer Down

**SOUTH DOWNS
VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE**

**SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK**

Downland Thymes: News for the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service. Issue 76, May 2017. © 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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