



SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

Welcome to the newsletter for the South Downs.

Send your comments and ideas to us at newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk

TREE WITH CHARACTER WINS PHOTO COMPETITION



'A gnarled old gentleman with twisted limbs' and an 'unruly veteran being judged by the neighbours' are two ways that judges of the South Downs National Park photo competition describe the 2016–17 winning picture.

The stunning detail in the black and white shot by Bill Brooks was taken in the Capability Brown-designed grounds of Petworth Park in West Sussex. The judges unanimously agreed that it was a perfect fit with this year's competition theme of 'Building the Landscape' and awarded Bill the £250 prize.

Nick Heasman, competition judge and Countryside and Policy Manager for the South Downs National Park Authority, said:

"Capability Brown and his wealthy clients knew that they'd never be able to fully appreciate the results of his work. They were creating a legacy for the future. Though it may appear unruly this tree has been shaped by people over time into something incredible – captured with great effect in this picture."

Bill Brooks said:

"I took this shot in February 2016 at a time of year when the intricate branch structure of this majestic tree was still clear against the cloudy skyline."

In stark contrast second place went to a bold and very modern image by Isaac Kennedy contrasting the derelict industry of Shoreham Cement Works against the green rolling hills of the Adur Valley. Isaac wins second prize of £100.

Steve Watkins, competition judge and Editor of *Outdoor Photography Magazine*, said:

"There is so much to say about this photograph, it has immediate and graphic appeal. You could almost be in

a church. There is so much skill in how this picture was taken and the story it tells of enduring landscapes and the temporary nature of a building – which only existed to mine and exploit the chalk these hills are made from.”

Isaac Kennedy, said:

“Since a young child I’ve past the Shoreham Cement Works and always wondered what it would be like to venture inside. A little older now, I decided to follow my curiosity and, with the owner’s permission went in to the building. I was not disappointed. The way the evening light hit the top floor was magical.”

Third place has been given to what appears at first glance to be a very classic downland panorama. But the frozen park is again the work of Capability Brown at Petworth Park. This time taken by Robert Maynard who wins £50.

Finn Hopson, competition judge and professional photographer, said:

“This is an exquisite shot with so much going on. It’s a journey of a photograph with your eyes wandering the scene in the same way your body would stroll through it.”

Robert Maynard, said:

“It was a frozen morning in early January 2016 and I was heading to Petworth Park on a beautiful scenic morning. I had never seen so many humps on the grass and with a backdrop showing the trees on the hill I captured a beautiful park. I am pleased to win third place for the composition.”



Vote for people’s choice

Now the judges have had their say it’s time for everyone else to vote for their favourites from the top six shortlisted pictures. Choose your favourite and the winner will receive £100.

www.southdowns.gov.uk/photo-competition-201617-the-peoples-choice/



A27: BREAKING THE BOTTLENECK

Whether you’re a motorist in and around the South Downs or a dedicated user of public transport you will probably be aware of the various proposals put forward by Highways England (HE) to increase capacity on sections of the A27.

Some argue that these are necessary to make journey times more reliable and improve safety. But the Government’s 2013 announcement of investment to clear the infamous bottlenecks and improve stretches of road between them were met with a mixture of cautious welcome and dismay from locals. The former have been hearing similar promises since the 1960s and the latter argue that a better solution would be to invest in the public transport network.

The A27 enters and leaves the South Downs National Park no less than ten times as it runs north of the downs in East Sussex and along the coastal plain of West Sussex. This means that any schemes to widen it, create new sections of dual carriageway or make new junctions could have a big impact on our nationally designated, protected landscapes.

When considering the potential impacts of the A27 on the National Park we have to look at the big picture – the cumulative impact - not just each scheme in detail.

“We need Highways England to consider all the evidence from the start,” says Andy Beattie, Countryside and Policy Manager who has been leading on the National Park Authority’s response to the A27. “Previous experience has taught us that if the special qualities of the South Downs aren’t flagged up when schemes are first thought of it’s much harder to get them taken seriously at a later stage.

“For example, it’s good news that after a lot of discussion and putting forward our detailed evidence, Highways England has decided not to bring forward proposals for a northern route for the A27 around

Chichester. This would have cut into the National Park and caused irreversible and unacceptable damage.”

There is no room to be complacent though. Andy and colleagues, including specialists in landscape, access, design and heritage, have been looking at Highways England’s plans for the A27 from Lewes to Polegate – a route which currently twists and turns with the landscape at the very foot of the chalk scarp.

“There are some good ideas amongst the proposals – for example, creating an off-road route for walkers, cyclists and horse riders – but the junction designs look more suitable for a suburb than villages in a National Park,” continues Andy. “Crossing from north to south to get to the downs from the weald could be made much harder if the road is widened. But it’s the three options for a southern bypass at Selmeston, eight miles east of Lewes, which are most alarming.”

One of the proposals includes creating nearly 4km of new road through an undulating mediaeval landscape. The work would include six cuttings, five embankments and the loss of a 1km tree belt, 1.35km hedge and 1.9ha woodland. Andy believes that wildlife, views and tranquillity would all suffer unacceptable damage.

Even the alternative option using the current route would create issues: “Building up the levels of the road and cutting through hillsides to flatten out the undulations will result in increased speed and negatively impact both views and noise levels. We have also reminded Highways England of the ‘major development’ test. The National Planning Policy Framework makes it clear that any schemes proposed must prove that there really are no alternatives with less impact on the National Park’s special qualities.

“With new technology and learning from other schemes, more could be done to improve traffic flow and safety while reducing the impact and these options should be fully considered. We’d really like to see more imaginative solutions which look at how the A27 links with the local road network.

“Past evidence suggests that the majority of traffic on the A27 is local and that bottlenecks lead to congestion at peak times both on the trunk and tributary roads. If this is still the case, there’s a high risk that proposals will cause irrevocable damage to the National Park and do no more than move congestion to another nearby location, making the present situation worse.

“I’d like to see more investment into finding new ways to encourage people to reduce non-essential car journeys, travel at different times and have access to more reliable trains and buses and dedicated cycle routes. We’ll continue to work with all the agencies and authorities involved in bringing forward these proposals, calling for them to have regard to their duty

to understand and mitigate damage to the National Park’s special qualities at the highest level.”

www.southdowns.gov.uk/a27-breaking-the-bottleneck/



IS YOUR COMMUNITY DARK SKY FRIENDLY?

Whether it’s a park, a playing field or a meadow, there is almost certainly a local spot near you where you can see the stars on a clear night.

Over the past year South Downs Ranger Laura Deane, has been working with local organisations and communities to get more of these spots named as official Dark Sky Discovery Sites – places where local people, visitors, schools and groups know that they can go to enjoy the night sky.

We asked Laura for her top tips on how to find and protect the dark skies in your parish, village or community:

- **Find your site.** Becoming a Dark Sky Discovery Site (DSDS) can be a very simple process. Your site needs to have reasonably dark skies, be a public space with good viewpoints and have an area of 100m². There needs to be somewhere for people to park and access for wheelchairs and, most importantly, you need permission from the landowner to use it.
- **Measure the darkness.** Official Dark Sky Discovery Sites are classed as "Orion" sites or "Milky Way" sites. On the former you should be able to see the seven main stars of the Orion constellation with your naked eye. For the latter, sites need to be much darker so that you can see the Milky Way with the naked eye. The International Dark-Sky Association (darksky.org) recommend several apps you can download to get a rough measurement but you will need a Sky

Quality Meter (SQM) to get an official measurement – contact us if you’ve found a site and want to confirm it.

- **Get support.** Find your local astronomical society to see if they’ll support your application or plans. Most will be listed on the Southern Area Group of Astronomical Societies (SAGAS) website www.sagasonline.org.
- **Get permission.** Getting permission from the landowner can sometimes be tricky – not everyone wants to encourage night time access to their land – but if the site is owned by the parish or community who’s members would like to apply, then it becomes much easier.
- **Check out other sites.** One of the newest sites in the National Park is on Iping Common, a Two Star site owned by the Sussex Wildlife Trust. If you’re looking for inspiration it’s hard to imagine a better spot.
- **Think big.** Alternatively your town or parish could apply to become an International Dark Sky

Community (IDSC). This is a more complicated process as you need to prove exceptional dedication to preserving the night sky. Your community will need to work together to implement and enforce good outdoor lighting, be committed to dark sky education and show that local people really support the application.

Since the National Park became an International Dark Sky Reserve in 2016 we’ve had one parish show an interest in becoming an IDSC. Meanwhile we hope that applications for new official DSD Sites will reopen in 2017. If you want advice or help with any work with dark skies please get in touch and please join in the first ever South Downs Dark Skies Festival from Friday 10 to Sunday 26 February 2017.

www.southdowns.gov.uk/is-your-community-dark-sky-friendly/

FIVE THINGS TO DO IN THE SOUTH DOWNS THIS MONTH



- Take off to the Tim Peake exhibition at the Novium in Chichester.
- Turner's watercolours come to Petworth.
- Get ready for the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch at Pulborough Brooks.
- Learn how to create your own entomology collection at Gilbert White’s Field Study Centre
- Explore accessible Miles Without Stiles routes across the South Downs.

Find these and more events and activities across the National Park at www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/events/

YOU ASK...

Send us your questions about a particular area of work in the National Park.

Answering this month is:

Phillippa Morrison-Price, Lead Ranger for the SDNPA



YOU ASK

Do you think dog walkers should be banned from the National Park?

PHILLIPPA ANSWERS

Obviously not! Responsible dog walkers are very welcome here. We always encourage people to follow the countryside code and run our own campaign called 'Take the Lead' highlighting the importance of keeping

dogs under control. We want owners and dogs to enjoy the National Park whilst respecting its wildlife, farmers and their livestock.

I've had to speak to farmers whose sheep have been attacked and I'm not sure people appreciate how traumatic it can be for them – not to mention the loss to their livelihood.

Read more of Phillippa's answers at www.southdowns.gov.uk/you-ask-phillippa-morrison-price

NEXT MONTH: We embrace the dark side

Are night skies worth the effort?
Should you have to change your lighting?
Send your questions for 'Dark Skies' Dan Oakley to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk



YOU SAY

Do you have a story you want to tell about the National Park? A burning issue that you think needs to be addressed? Send it to us at newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk

Please note that only contributors who submit their full name and address can be considered for publication though we will not publish your full address. Please make it clear whether you are speaking on your own behalf or that of an organisation you represent. We reserve the right to shorten comments and edit where necessary.

ON THE GROUND

Don't forget to say hello if you spot our Rangers and volunteers out working in the National Park. Here's a taste of what they achieved in 2016.



- In January they **found 528 harvest mice nests** during a seven day survey at Selborne.
- In February they laid more than **400 metres of hedge at Saddlescombe Farm** near Devils Dyke.
- In March they **removed invasive trees on Harting Down** Site of Special Scientific Interest.
- In April they **trained volunteers to carry out riverfly monitoring** on the rivers Meon and Rother in order to complete water quality testing.
- In May **Alfriston Long Burgh was removed from the Heritage at Risk Register** following work to improve its condition.
- In June **362 water voles were released into the River Meon** around Droxford with help from

landowners, staff, partners and volunteers. 70 pupils from Meonstoke School helped with the feeding and checking of the voles in the pens.

- In July **barn owl boxes were checked and owlets ringed** for monitoring.
- In August they teamed up with National Trust volunteers and Milland Parish to **cut and rake Cartersland Green wildflower meadow** for the community.
- In September they **cleared 25 bin bags of invasive New Zealand pigmy weed** removed from a Site of Nature Conservation Interest pond.
- In October they **coppiced to support the pearl bordered fritillary butterfly at Rewell Wood SSSI**.
- In November they **constructed and installed 'cages' to protect rare juniper bushes** from browsing livestock and deer.
- In December they **cleared scrub from a tumuli in Bishopstone and replaced two stiles with a kissing gate**.

See more at www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/on-the-ground



TAKE THE DARK SKIES PLEDGE AND WIN A TELESCOPE!

In 2016 the South Downs National Park became the 12th International Dark Skies Reserve in the world.

Take the pledge to enjoy and care for our dark skies and be in with a chance to win our South Downs Dark Skies Appreciation Kit.

www.southdowns.gov.uk/is-your-community-dark-sky-friendly/



TASTE THE LANDSCAPE

Perhaps it's too soon to start planning our summer holidays but SouthDownsFood.org have ideas for foodie breaks in the National Park that have got us daydreaming about spring weekends.

www.southdownsfood.org/delicious-breaks-in-the-south-downs-national-park/

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Please sign up to receive this newsletter as an email.

www.southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter/