Case Study

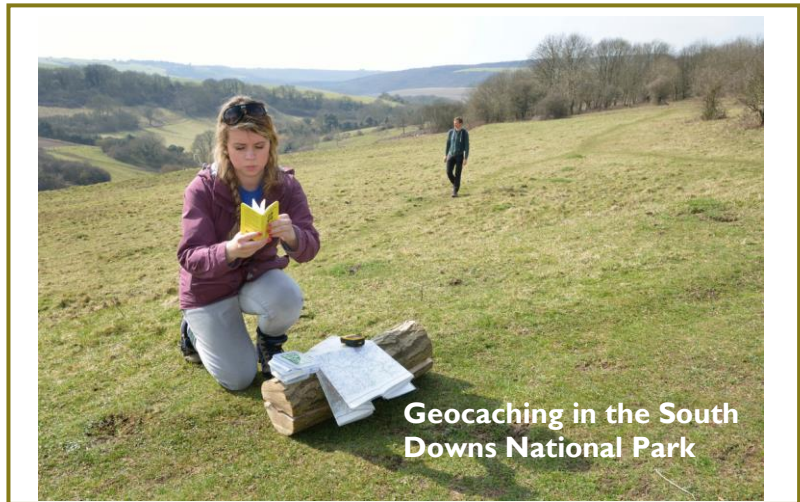## South Downs National Park GeoTour

Background

The South Downs National Park GeoTour is England's first GeoTour, and an exciting way to discover the hidden gems of this special landscape. The tour was launched on 31st March 2015 and comprises 30 geocaches placed at strategic points across the SDNP.

Geocaching is a high-tech treasure hunt which combines being outdoors, getting exercise and using technology.

Participants download a free Geocaching smartphone app or a GPS and then look for secret caches in cleverly disguised locations including on the back of interpretation panels, under benches, in hollow logs and false stones.

The model of the GeoTour is a sustainable one. The initial SDNPA investment of £6,100 enabled us to create the GeoTour, design and manufacture the coins and host the tour on Geocaching.com website. The ongoing outlay is the annual fee payable to host the GeoTour on geocaching.com which makes it visible to the public. This fee currently costs £1,250 per year. Hosting fees will be covered by business fees annually and sales of the GeoCoins.

The development of the GeoTour was led by a cross-department team including Education, Communications, LSTF, Tourism, Operations and South Downs Way. This group will consider the project evaluation and look at the next steps for development of the tour and the ongoing management of it.

Geocaching in the South Downs National Park

The project

Background information is included on each of the geocaches giving people increased knowledge and understanding of the locations, wildlife, history and other special qualities of the areas they visit.

The GeoTour caches are gateways to discovering other caches and places to eat and stay in the National Park. In order to maximise our wider approach to sustainable visitor experiences bonus points can be collected by:

1. Travelling sustainably:
    *   1 point per bus/rail journey to a cache
    *   1 point per bike ride – only accepted for caches accessible by bike

2. Enjoying local food and staying longer:
    *   1 point per lunch or dinner
    *   2 points per overnight stay

3. Conserving and improving the environment:
    *   2 points per conservation event

The aim is to complete part or all of the tour to earn a silver or gold GeoCoin:

15 geocache codes + 10 bonus codes = a silver GeoCoin
30 geocache codes + 20 bonus codes = a gold GeoCoin

There are currently 19 businesses signed up to the GeoTour, each paying £25 per year for inclusion on the passport and promotion via geocaching.com and SDNPA webpages and social media.

> ## "Outstanding. Some of the best caches and best locations I have had the pleasure to visit.

Badcats, Geocacher

The outcome

Since the launch of the GeoTour, 2,792 finds have been logged and 413 favourite points awarded. This is a very high level of engagement to date and the favourite points are particularly good as only premium geocachers are able to give these out and they are limited to one favourite point for every 10 caches they find. To date, there have been 11 silver and 11 gold coins claimed by 13 individuals.

In addition to this engagement, five Cache-In Trash-Out (CITO) conservation events were held this year. These were based at Devil's Dyke, Kithurst Meadow, Selhurst Park Road, Monkmead Wood and Midhurst. The events included litter picking, chalk grassland conservation and Himalayan Balsam bashing and were a really great way of engaging geocachers in putting something back into the landscape that they enjoy. We are looking to develop monthly events with partner organisations to enable this audience to continue to volunteer on a site specific basis where an intensive work party is needed.

Comments by geocachers have been very positive.

A geocache treasure trove

The future

The first year of the SDNP GeoTour has been hugely successful in terms of public participation and feedback. We have also been delighted with the number of businesses that have signed up so far and are looking to continue to develop this aspect.

The model of the GeoTour is a sustainable one. The initial SDNPA investment of £6,100 enabled us to create the GeoTour, design and manufacture the coins and host the tour on Geocaching.com website.

The project has generated assets in the form of GeoCoins. We currently have 530 coins in stock which are retailed at £6 per coin giving an asset value of £3,180.

Future hosting fees on geocaching.com will be covered by annual business fees and sales of the GeoCoins.

https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/?s=geocache

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