

National Parks for all to enjoy

Background

In the UK there are 15 members in the National Park family, which are protected areas because of their beautiful countryside, wildlife and cultural heritage. National Parks welcome visitors and provide opportunities for everyone to experience, enjoy and learn about their special qualities.

nationalparks.gov.uk

Evidence shows how people from Black Minority Ethnic (BME) communities can feel disengaged from the natural environment.¹ While ethnic minorities make up around 10% of the national population, they represent only 1% of visitors to National Parks.²

There are a number of factors that explain these figures, including economic circumstances, language barriers, lack of transport and limited access to information. However, it's also the case that a lack of understanding and awareness among organisations working in the natural environment has led to further marginalisation of ethnic minorities from the outdoor landscape.³ Despite this, Natural England's Diversity Review did show that there is a desire among people from BME communities to engage with the countryside.⁴

The South Downs Society (SDS) seeks to encourage more diverse visitors to the South Downs National Park (SDNP), wanting to ensure that everyone can benefit from visiting cultural heritage sites and open spaces to help improve mental and physical wellbeing. The Society, formed in 1923, is an independent, member-led charity, one of Britain's earliest conservation organisations, originally known as The Society for Sussex Downsmen and is dedicated to the protection of the whole of the SDNP.

1. Black Environment Network, 2005. *Engaging Ethnic Communities in Natural and Built Heritage*. Lanberis: Black Environment Network.

2. Data from National Park annual visitor surveys, 2005-2007

3. Ayamba, M. and Rotherham, I. 2008. *A Handbook and Guide for Agencies Working with Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in South Yorkshire*. Sheffield: Tourism and Environmental Change Research Unit, Sheffield Hallam University.

4. See www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/outdoorsforall/diversityreview



The project

The South Downs Society works in partnership with various organisations to support and encourage BME communities to feel engaged with the special qualities of the SDNP.

The SDS provided support to Drinking Ginger during the creation of their *Independent Guide to Accessing the South Downs National Park*. Drinking Ginger is an organisation that promotes the National Parks and green spaces of England and Wales to adults and children from BME communities. The project brought together a group of people from urban BME communities to design and publish an independent guide to the area. The guide can be found here:

hlf.org.uk/our-projects/independent-guide-exploring-south-downs-national-park

In addition, the SDS was pleased to provide guided walks for Hampshire County Council's Access to Nature project. This community training weekend focused on BME communities in Hampshire.

The SDS also organised a series of short, public transport accessed, strolls for The Brighton Black and Minority Ethnic Community Partnership (BMECP). The aim was to bring increased awareness and confidence in enjoying the National Park, demonstrating the ease of access to attractive locations, as well as drawing attention to the appropriate preparation for walks and strolls in general.

“I mean it’s not every day you get the chance to experience something completely new, plus you get the chance to brag about it to your friends!”

Volunteer participant Drinking Ginger

The outcome

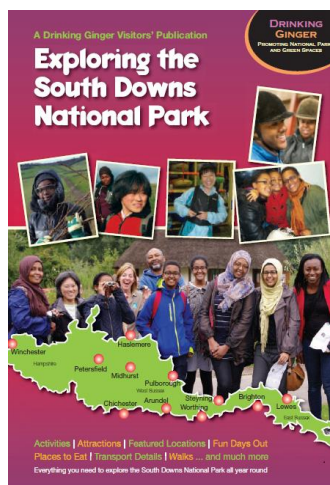
Drinking Ginger’s ‘Independent Guide to Accessing the South Downs National Park’ was created with support from the SDS.

The guide illustrated BME people engaging with the National Park’s places, people and heritage in order to raise awareness of the National Park to urban BME communities as a place in England to visit, learn about and enjoy as part of their own British heritage and culture.

Concentrating on the most accessible centres within the SDNP, such as Winchester, Chichester, Lewes and Brighton, a total of 68 volunteers visited attractions in the South Downs and wrote up their experiences, producing a lasting resource for anyone wanting to visit the region.

The heritage of the area was explored, as well as sustainable and affordable methods of access, and volunteers gained skills in project management, developing and editing the guide as a team.

An additional outcome is that the BMECP partnership now has the confidence to lead their own walk programme. The SDS makes its’ own programme of walks and strolls available to BMECP to encourage further engagement.



The future

National Park Authorities will work to build on existing successful programmes, including those that encourage and support under-represented groups; to forge partnerships in order to meet their aspiration of removing barriers that can inhibit those without access to transport from visiting National Parks.

[gov.uk/government/publications/national-parks-8-point-plan-for-england-2016-to-2020](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-parks-8-point-plan-for-england-2016-to-2020)

More recently the SDS has been working with Sussex and Hampshire Disabled Ramblers and the SDNPA to try and identify suitable routes for mobility scooters and trampers. Five routes have been identified although each would need some remedial work, particularly at gateways. Such routes form part of the 'Miles without Stiles' initiative.

Further to this the SDS now includes within its walks and strolls programme at least one monthly short stroll suitable for wheelchair users and the less agile. Such events are important for their socialising component as much as their recreational.

For more information, please visit: southdownssociety.org.uk
Tel: 01798 875073
Monday to Thursday, 09:00–13:00

The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) 2014–19 sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 11 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality.

This project successfully achieved the following PMP outcomes:

Outcome 5. Outstanding visitor experiences are underpinned by a high-quality access and sustainable transport network, supporting improved health and well being.

Outcome 6. There is widespread understanding of the special qualities of the National Park & the benefits they provide.

southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf

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