



# DOWNLAND THYMES

NEWS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER SERVICE ISSUE 78 | WINTER 2017



## STORM BRIAN TASK



Despite the day starting with heavy rain showers and the forecast for more of the same along with high winds, a hardy group turned up at Stanmer for the weekend's task. After checking the forecast again and discussing options, we still decided to head out in the hope we might at least manage to get some scrub cleared before lunchtime without getting soaked,

### SDNPA VOLUNTEERS ARE A TOUGH BREED AND STORM BRIAN WASN'T GOING TO PUT US OFF.

blown away or forced to give up as the weather got worse.

The task was to clear an area of scrub just the other side of the A27, between Mile Oak Farm and Truleigh Hill. Fortunately the site was on the northern side of the slope so we were protected from the worst of Storm Brian.

We cut back an area of bramble at the bottom of the slope and several isolated hawthorn bushes on the steeper top part of the slope to stop the spread of scrub up the slope. This will help to create more space for grassland species.

Luckily, the heavy showers didn't materialise and we only had to dive for shelter once and even that didn't put the fire out. We almost managed lunch in the sunshine too.

Despite the usual scratches and thorns from cutting and dragging the hawthorn, given the initial forecast, which didn't look as if we'd even get started, it turned into a good day's work. Towards the end of the afternoon we were even treated to a glorious full rainbow.

CLARE EVANS, EASTERN DOWNS, VOLUNTEER RANGER

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Main: Double  
rainbow  
©Clare Evans

Inset: Bonfire  
©Clare Evans







## CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

Goodness, doesn't time fly! The clocks have changed and I'm writing the Christmas message for *Downland Thymes*, another year has passed and we have done so very much. We started the year with a survey to you all asking about the new VRS Committee structure. I'm pleased this was so well supported by you and led to the changes at the AGM in March. The Committee is now leaner but the essential work remains, we have officers to carry out the specific tasks and we get on with things without lengthy debate. We have also successfully held meetings by video conferencing, enabling us all to stay at home yet be in discussion on tablets or computers to agree VRS actions.

The year has also seen us extend the range of discounts being offered to volunteers by local businesses, full details of which are on the Intranet. I am pleased that the Area Update Meetings are now being held for outdoor practical volunteers in each Area. It is a crucial opportunity for us to engage with Rangers and Leaders on topics and be kept abreast of issues facing the National Park. I hope that something equivalent will also be in place soon for all other supporting volunteers, no matter how they contribute.

Our education courses have continued with River Ecology, back by popular demand, and Cultural Heritage, planned for early next year. The Committee are always seeking new ideas for this initiative, along with any other things you would like to try. Please continue to complete the Volunteer Attitude Survey. It is a vital tool for us to communicate with you and for your comments and desires to be considered. I intend to give you a full update on the survey's findings and the actions that will flow from it at the AGM on the morning of 17 March 2018. It will be at The Pavilion in Petersfield, with thanks to the Mayor of Petersfield who is providing this facility for us in recognition of the work the VRS have carried out on Nature Reserves around the town. More details will be published in due course, along with some activities for you to consider exploring in the afternoon.

In the meantime I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year. Thank you all for the hard work you have done and the support you have given to the VRS.

RON WILDER, VRS CHAIRMAN

## UPDATE FROM THE VOLUNTEERING TEAM



Central Downs Volunteer Rangers pictured with SDNPA Ranger Simon Mockford, during a summer visit to Winter works sites. © David Gibson, Volunteer Ranger Central Downs

Following the popularity of the regular update meetings between rangers and volunteer rangers (VRs) in the western downs, the other areas have been convinced to try them too.

I went along to an Eastern Downs meeting earlier in the year and in early October had the chance to say a few words at a get together of the Central Downs staff and VRs, in Singleton Village Hall. It was great to see and hear about some of the projects that you have been involved with and particularly the benefits of winter work that can be seen once summer comes.

Gemma North and I spent two days in Buxton early in October, meeting Volunteer Co-ordinators from the other UK National Parks to share ideas and best practice. This is an annual meeting and to illustrate the increasing importance of volunteering and volunteers to the National Park 'family', for the first time, all 15 National Parks were represented.

One of the most important common themes that we all seem to be looking at was how do we attract and facilitate people to have a go at volunteering in our National Parks who currently don't or can't easily?

This is one of the three major themes in our Volunteer Development Plan, so it was really useful to be able to hear about what others are working on. We also got to talk to people from the John Muir Award, Duke of Edinburgh Scheme and even the Probation Service.



The draft Volunteering Development Plan has now been reviewed by Area teams and other staff working with volunteers and by the time you read this a second draft should have been presented to our Community, Outreach, Volunteering and Education (COVE) Programme Board for review. Volunteer Rangers will have a chance to feed back on it shortly.

Finally, could I make a general plea to those of you going out with the outdoor groups, particularly when you're with partner organisations, to help make sure that Task Report Forms are completed and passed on to the Area team by Task Leaders, so we've always got a record of who has done what. If the report doesn't come back, we don't know what work you've done, how much time you've given, or have a clear picture of what is being achieved.

Thanks to you all for the massive contribution you make to the National Park. I hope to see many of you during December, but in any case I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and New Year.

All the very best,

IAN HARTLE, SDNPA VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER



## WHAT'S IN A NAME? STEPHEN'S CASTLE DOWN

© Rob Nicholls, Western Area Countryside Ranger

THE UNUSUALLY NAMED STEPHEN'S CASTLE DOWN LIES ABOUT A MILE NORTHEAST OF THE VILLAGE OF UPHAM, NEAR BISHOPS WALTHAM.

It is a regular location for the VRS to engage in their favourite activity of scrub bashing. Nowadays, the most danger you are likely to encounter there is a gang of marauding, delinquent heifers but this was not always the case. The top of the steep slope affords wide and distant views on a clear day which partly explains the origin of the name. King Stephen, crowned in 1135, erected a fortification or earthworks on the down which was, of course, Stephen's Castle and evidence of this has been identified in aerial photography. But why was it necessary for King Stephen to erect a fortress here and why did he need such long and clear views?

Nearly 900 years ago and only some 70 or so after the Battle of Hastings, securing the throne of England was no mere straightforward matter of succession. Henry I was juggling maintaining power in both England and France, and it was following his victory at the Battle of Bremile in Normandy that a ship carrying a party of 300 victorious revellers back to England struck a rock and sank, drowning almost all on board including William, the Prince of Wales. This incident became known as *The White Ship Disaster*, so grave were its implications for the security of the realm.

Henry named his daughter Matilda, wife of Geoffrey Count of Anjou, as his heir but this did not go down well with the powerful barons, who disliked her as she was "married to the enemy" and was "haughty, proud and overbearing". Instead the barons supported the claim of Stephen of Blois (Henry's nephew and Matilda's cousin) that Henry I had changed his mind on his deathbed, considering that the

"preservation of order" overrode his daughter's stronger claim to the throne and had granted Stephen succession.

Stephen's coronation hastily took place but Matilda was not prepared to take this lying down and there followed a 19 year long civil war known as The Anarchy, where neither side could find the resources to defeat the other, with battles taking place in many locations and fortifications being erected or strengthened. What happened in the end? Eventually, in 1153, the Treaty of Westminster was drawn up, allowing Stephen the throne for life. In reality life turned out to be less than a year and Matilda's son Henry II was crowned in 1154, so you could say that Matilda won in the end.

*During The Anarchy, Matilda escaped from Devizes Castle disguised as a corpse dressed in a shroud and bound to a bier. Later, while imprisoned at Oxford, she was lowered down the wall by ropes during a heavy snow storm.*

*One person's haughty, proud and overbearing could be another's gutsy and brave!*

VANESSA HARVEY, WESTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER

There are lots of intriguing place names in the National Park. If you think you know the origins or story behind one of them please get in touch at: [dt@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:dt@southdowns.gov.uk)

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

As many of you may know, Becka Saunders, the regular editor of *Downland Thymes*, is now on maternity leave after delivery in September of her best project yet – baby Bobbie! You will be pleased to know that mother and daughter are doing very well.

Until Becka returns I will be taking the reins of editing the *Downland Thymes* newsletter and have been fascinated by the variety and breadth of the content we have received this edition. Huge thanks to all our contributors!

What makes *Downland Thymes* such a special and successful publication is that it is written by volunteers for volunteers. However this does mean that we are very reliant on volunteers supplying us with articles for each edition.

So, if you think you have something interesting to share with the other volunteers in the National Park for future editions then please email any contributions, including photos where possible, to [dt@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:dt@southdowns.gov.uk)

It just remains for me to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



CHARLIE HELLEWELL, COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER



# TREE ID QUIZ

HOW GOOD ARE YOU AT IDENTIFYING TREES IN WINTER?

Match the pictures of winter twigs to their leaves below. All these are of common trees you can come across while scrub bashing, but no shrubs are included (i.e. no hazel). Neither is there ash, hawthorn or silver birch – for if you cannot identify these in winter by now then surely, you've not been opening your eyes while on task.

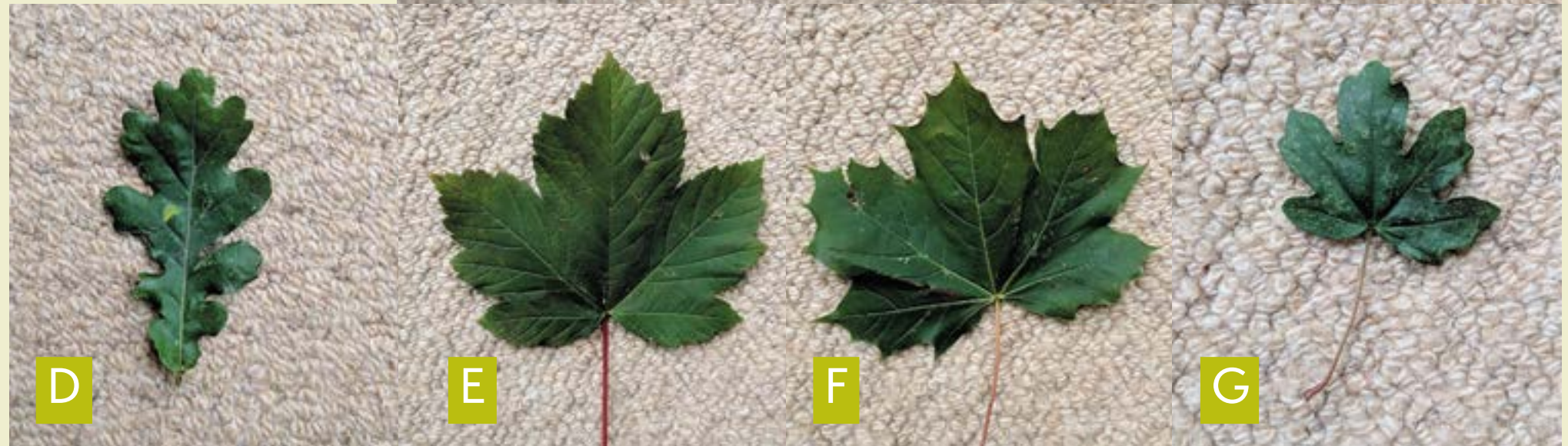
To give you help I include here the names of the seven trees you must differentiate between:

- OAK
- FIELD MAPLE
- SALLOW (PUSSY WILLOW)
- BEECH
- SYCAMORE
- NORWAY MAPLE
- LIME

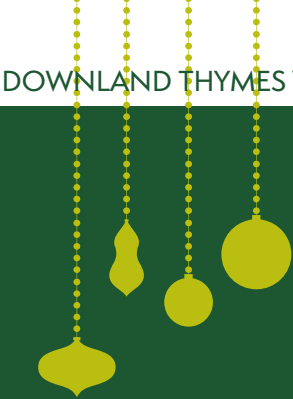
Award yourself a bonus point if you correctly identify between the sycamore and norway maple.

To answer, state the name, number and letter in order, such as: "oak 1g". Solutions are on the back page

RUSSELL CLEAVER,  
WESTERN DOWNS  
VOLUNTEER RANGER







# NEW STARTERS

## WHICH AREA DO YOU VOLUNTEER FOR?

I volunteer for the VRS, based in Stanmer Park.

## CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR FIRST DAY OR TWO OF VOLUNTEERING?

The sessions have so far taken place in and around Stanmer Park, Lewes Golf Course and at Anchor Bottom – a valley behind the former cement works near Upper Beeding.

## HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THE VRS?

This work is supporting my college course, Countryside Management at Plumpton College. The days are very well organised and there are always sufficient breaks as reward for the hard, physical activities including lopping, raking, sawing, strimming and scything.

There is a feeling of satisfaction when watching the fire continuously crackling away as we keep piling on more branches. Everyone has been very welcoming and lots of good humoured banter contributes to a relaxed, easy going atmosphere. I've enjoyed the experience so far, and look forward to many more productive days in the outdoors!

## WHICH AREA DO YOU VOLUNTEER FOR?

I volunteer for the VRS, based in Stanmer Park.

## CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR FIRST DAY OR TWO OF VOLUNTEERING?

My first day was a very gentle introduction – access land surveying at Devil's Dyke – although parts of the lower escarpment were wet, steep and slippery. And I wonder why we finished off with a pint in the Devil's Dyke pub? The next time was good old scrub bashing on a farm near Jevington, before I moved on to the more technical tasks of coppicing and flintwalling in Stanmer Park.

## HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THE VRS?

My friend Richard Holkham is a veteran VRS member and asked if I'd like to join him. So I did – a welcome replacement for the daily walk to and from Preston Park station, enjoying the prospect of being out in areas of outstanding beauty, and a desire to contribute in a small way to the local community.

## DO YOU HAVE AN INTERESTING OR UNUSUAL FACT ABOUT YOURSELF?

I am the Honorary Secretary of the BBC, no not that one but the Brighton Badminton Club!

## RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK?

My wife and I love Mount Caburn (an annual BBC walk and pub lunch) and also the Fulking Escarpment. I have now had some months of varied activity – two or three times a month, grandparent duties permitting – and whilst I know that the summer and autumn months will be a honeymoon period, I have not been disappointed! I am in awe of the technical abilities of the seasoned VRs most of whom I will never hope to match, but in any event I do revel in the tranquillity of mind emptying labour!



# A WORD ABOUT RAKING

ONE OF THE DELIGHTS OF WORKING WITH THE SDVRS IS THE OPPORTUNITY IT PROVIDES TO COME INTO CONTACT WITH OLD COUNTRYSIDE SKILLS AND LEARN ABOUT THE LONG FORGOTTEN TERMS USED. DICK COLE IMAGINES THE DISCOVERY OF SOME OLD HAND WRITTEN NOTES IN HIS DICTIONARY OF THE SUSSEX DIALECT...

In early September the Wednesday Group were out helping Hannah Thompson at Slindon. We were set to raking up grass and weeds in Stoney Field as part of the National Trust's organification programme.

Naturally we were using traditional tools, wooden rakes especially. We got to talking about the names of the bits. These are relatively easy to discover in reference books like R.A. Salaman's *Dictionary of Tools* but what of the words that describe the actions used? Who knows what they are? Where are they recorded?

We mused on these things as we worked. There was the action of raking itself, what was that called, what of the roll of material you gathered up surely that had a name? How were the loads measured?

Back home I continued to muse and searched out my copy of the Rev W.D. Parish's *A Dictionary of the Sussex Dialect*. I drowsed after a good supper and my book fell open. The light across the page showed the indent of some words on the page. Written in a fine spidery hand the words seemed to say:

.....  
"...Saw old A at Fittleworth [and] talked of hay making. A said he was sc[yth]ing the lower field. When pressed he said twelve scrapings equal a roll; four r[oll]s made a heave and th[ere] was thirteen heaves to a load... [w]ent on to tell t[ha]t it was only in Sussex that thirteen was a load in 'ampshire it were only 12 and in Kent it were 16. I demanded why this difference A said it was the weather."  
.....

Hmm... could these be the words we had been searching for earlier in the day?

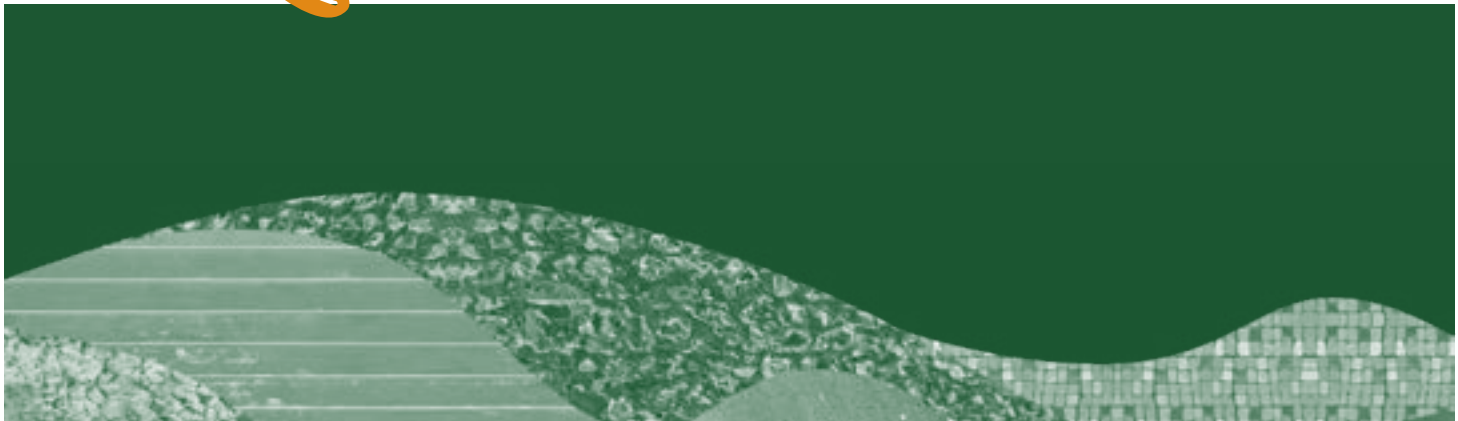
Thump... My book dropped to the floor and I woke with a start. I picked it up and thought only the faintest impression remained. Had I been dreaming? There must have been local words for these tasks. Where can we find them? No sign of them in Robert Macfarlane's *Landmarks*. Perhaps there is a project here for our Cultural Heritage Volunteer colleagues. There must be lots of other South Downs words we need to capture.

For example, who knows what a "Luddick" is? My grandmother used to describe when "Old Mrs Cowstick went a terrible luddick on the ice." The Rev Parish makes no reference to it and my copy of *Sussex as She was Spoke* says it's "something which has fallen down" – not quite the meaning my grandmother would have understood.

Let's start collecting words now. Don't let us just dream! Let us discover how to capture these special words.

DICK COLE, CENTRAL DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER

Of course there is the work that our own Cultural Heritage Volunteers have done on oral histories as part of the *Secrets of the High Woods* project. In addition a click onto the British Library web site leads one to their *Survey of English Dialects* which includes some from Sussex. There's an interesting one from East Harting with mention of Uppark and one from Horam in East Sussex which mentions Mowing and harvesting wheat but not hay. Both well worth listening to.







Stephen Allberry  
© Russell Cleaver



Black Bridge at Rogate, Central Downs.  
© Stephen Allberry

# MY SPECIAL SPOT

THIS FEATURE OCCURS IN EVERY ISSUE OF DOWNLAND THYMES AS WE INTERVIEW SOMEONE WITHIN THE NATIONAL PARK TO TALK ABOUT A PLACE THAT IS SPECIAL TO THEM.

THIS MONTH WE TALK TO STEPHEN ALLBERRY, A LONG-TIME VOLUNTEER IN THE CENTRAL AND WEALDEN HEATHS AREA, WHO TELLS US ABOUT THE LOCATION OF HIS FAVOURITE WALK.

Do you have a favourite walk or special spot in the National Park? Tell us about it [dt@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:dt@southdowns.gov.uk)

I grew up a country boy in Cheshire and when I obtained a job in the south, I looked to move, and it was the area around Rogate that I found particularly attractive. I liked the variety of landscapes that existed south of the Weald towards the sea, and then found the Rother valley. Soon after I arrived in 2003 I found a path that crossed the river, so I suppose you could say my Special Spot is the Black Bridge at Rogate.

### WHAT IS IT ABOUT YOUR SPECIAL SPOT YOU FIND SO INTERESTING?

I like the connectivity of everything in the landscape. I would never say I knew much about the science of ecology, but coming here I realised it was the variety of habitats and the relationships between the land, the wildlife and man that fascinated me.

### SO, DOES THIS AREA HAVE CULTURAL OR HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE FOR YOU?

Most certainly, historically the Black Bridge was once a small, stone bridge on a rural lane. The story goes that back in World War II a Canadian tank tried to cross it but crushed it instead. And what you find today is merely a wooden bridge on a footpath. When we were still undertaking Rights of Way work I went out with SDNPA ranger Dan Cornell several times to maintain it by replacing planks etc.

### THEN YOUR VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE HAS INFLUENCED YOUR CHOICE OF SPECIAL SPOT?

Yes, when I retired in 2005 I was looking for something to fill my time and I met Penny, the then ranger for the AONB. She recruited me to work on Rights of Way with other volunteers.

Looking back, these really were the 'good old days'. But later, the West Sussex County Council dispensed with our services when we became a National Park so our volunteering was directed elsewhere. However, a tree subsequently fell beside the bridge which then had to be closed. Eventually, perhaps two years later, the bridge was replaced and I could return to my regular circular walk again.

### DOES YOUR SPECIAL SPOT EPITOMISE SOMETHING ABOUT THE NATIONAL PARK?

It does. At a human scale, it's the winding paths and small bridges that resonate historically with me. So I find this path and the Black Bridge epitomises the National Park. No doubt other small-scale corners of the countryside will be special to others. By working as a volunteer I've been privileged to visit all kinds of off the beaten-track places, that visitors rarely find. Consequently, there must be many similar small, special places that speak loudly to others.

STEPHEN ALLBERRY, CENTRAL DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER

# WASP DRAMA ON CASTLE HILL

A PEACEFUL AUTUMN DAY ON CASTLE HILL, NEWHAVEN. ONE OF OUR NUMBER, WHOM WE SHALL CALL D, WAS BRUSH CUTTING IN A GORSE THICKET. THE REST OF US WERE SCATTERED ABOUT OVER AN ACRE OR SO. SUDDENLY A LOUD CRY WAS HEARD AND D CAME RUNNING OUT OF THE THICKET SURROUNDED BY A CLOUD OF WASPS, HAVING CUT RIGHT THROUGH THEIR NEST.

He was trying in vain to get the brush cutter harness off. We were reluctant to approach him through the crowd of wasps but managed to pull the harness off him without getting stung. The wasps were only interested in him. He ran about a bit and discarded most of his clothes which were full of wasps.

This turned out to be the best thing he could do as the wasps crowded round the clothes on the ground. The ranger considered this to be due to a pheromone released by angry wasps, which had accumulated on the clothes.

After removing the last few wasps from inside his pants the volunteer sat down and soon keeled over due to the pain. The stings must have been in three figures but there was no sign of a dangerous allergic reaction. We gave him some Ibuprofen tablets and half carried him down to the nearby car park, whilst calling the ambulance.

A paramedic duly arrived and set up an intravenous paracetamol drip – a very effective form of the drug. While receiving this D suddenly began to shiver violently and uncontrollably. Was he infected in some way and developing septicaemia?

It was soon realised that he was dropping his temperature. The drip was going in fast and was pouring cold water into a vein thus reducing his core temperature and his abdomen and arms were exposed full of swollen stings which were radiating heat. Not to mention running round near naked on Castle Hill on what was not a warm day. A few coats thrown over him soon relieved the problem.

He was taken to the Royal Sussex Hospital where he soon felt much better and was sent

**The Song of The Chainsaw**  
(best read in a Sussex accent...)

Oh the old Sussex songs by Hilaire Belloc much loved  
You never can 'ear 'em no more

No, you never can 'ear 'em.  
You never can 'ear 'em.  
You never can 'ear 'em, no more.

But still sung they are, full lustily, throat-sore,  
By the hedgelayers, a-layin' and threshin'.  
But you never can 'ear 'em (some say it's a blessin')  
You never can 'ear 'em no more.

For in the world of sonority,  
Throughout all cosmology,  
The petrol engine is law.

And you can never quite 'ear 'em.  
(You'd not want to be near 'em)  
On account of the chainsaw's roar.

Ian Runcie

home with oral pain killers and steroids. The rest of the crew moved to a nearby site but not a lot of work was done for the remainder of the day.

IAN RUNCIE, EASTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER

**Learning points:** As a counsel of perfection anyone doing any cutting should have a full view of what they are cutting into. If the wasps really go for you throw modesty to the wind and get your kit off. Keep any medical victim warm.

**More info:** [blog.pensoft.net/2015/12/03/call-for-arms-and-stings-social-wasps-use-alarm-pheromones-to-coordinate-their-attacks](http://blog.pensoft.net/2015/12/03/call-for-arms-and-stings-social-wasps-use-alarm-pheromones-to-coordinate-their-attacks)



# MEET YOUR NEW ASSISTANT RANGERS



**NAME:** REBEKAH SMITH | **STARTED:** MARCH 2017  
**AREA TEAM:** CENTRAL DOWNS

**Major Projects:** I've been involved in lots of practical habitat management with our VRS teams. I spent the summer surveying open access land furniture, assisting at events and I ran a fencing training week in July. There is lots more practical work coming up this winter and I'm currently organising a coppicing training week that will be happening later this month. It's been great fun learning about a new area of the country and getting to know the South Downs.

**Where I've come from:** Before I started with the SDNP I worked with Natural England first as a trainee then as a Seasonal Warden at the East Dartmoor NNR.

**Favourite food:** Nachos

**Interests:** Out and about walking and exploring the countryside and birdwatching; Farlington Marshes being my local patch. I also train in ju-jitsu.



**NAME:** CHRIS LICKLEY | **STARTED:** AUGUST 2017  
**AREA TEAM:** WESTERN DOWNS

**Major Projects:** I'll be working with our regular volunteer groups on practical conservation tasks and also helping to conduct surveys of water voles on the River Meon.

**Where I've come from:** Most recently I was working with Hampshire County Council where I helped to manage important sites along the south coast and also raise public awareness of overwintering coastal bird species.

**Favourite food:** Anything curried.

**Interests:** Playing piano, complaining about my football team (Southampton!), table tennis, Hampshire pubs.



**NAME:** JASMINE OWEN | **STARTED:** SEPTEMBER 2017  
**AREA TEAM:** EASTERN DOWNS

**Major Projects:** I have taken on the management of the wonderful Seven Sisters VRS group. I have been assisting the Rangers in their projects and tasks and in the near future, I will be taking on the management of certain sites and leading practical conservation tasks with the VRS groups.

**Where I've come from:** I previously worked as an Assistant Ranger with Lewes District Council and prior to that I had a conservation internship with the RSPB based at Arne, Dorset.

**Favourite food:** HUMMOUS (on everything!)

**Interests:** any wildlife watching (particularly bird watching), long-distance running and jewellery making.

## PIC IN THE PARK

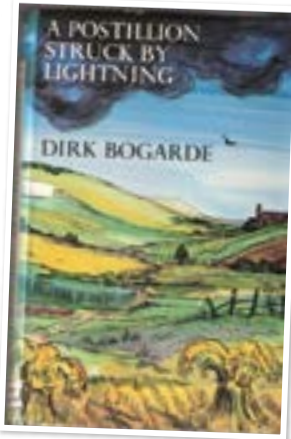


### LULLINGTON CHURCH – THE SMALLEST CHURCH IN THE PARK?

Dirk Bogarde, who was a well-known actor in the '1950s, came every summer during his childhood in the 1920s to a rented house next door to the church. His family were quite well to do and lived in London. I believe his Mother would arrange the flowers in the church. I read a book of his many years ago, which mentioned this. I think it was called *A Postillion Struck by Lightning*.

On a more personal level, my own parents who were also Londoners (but not "well to do") loved Lullington church. After they moved to Sussex, they would always take any visitors they had to see the church and we went with them several times. Mum always claimed (without foundation!) that it was the smallest church in England. My understanding was that the present church is the remaining part of a larger church which originally stood there. Whenever we have been there, we have never encountered anyone else

and we have been able to enjoy the beautiful views in peace and tranquillity. Shortly after my dear Mum died, Barry and I walked up to the church, accompanied all the way by a black cat. The cat stayed with us all the time we were there and then came with us back down the path. It certainly made me think!



**JOSIE HOBBS, EASTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER**

## TOO MUCH SCRUB BASHING MAY START INFLUENCING YOUR DREAMS...

### DREAM TASK – VOLUNTEERING ON HIGH...

Unusually my two daughters accompanied me on this task. It appeared to be getting dark as the fleet of Landrovers set off. After a rather hazardous journey to our destinations the Landies each peeled off along different paths in a landscape which reminded me of nothing less than the foothills of the Himalayas.

We came to a stop on a high plain and I was proud to be one of those chosen to use a brush cutter. I strapped myself in and checked the pressure hose attachment.

Holding the brush cutters at arm's length in the left hand and the other arm held aloft in true Superman style we started the brush cutter's propellers and, with perfect precision, shot up into the night sky, confident that the brush cutter computer would direct each of us to our allotted position.

We were grim faced and proud, for our task tonight was an important one. It had befallen to us to clean the isolated cages of the famous Himalayan Guinea Pigs.

**IAN RUNCIE, EASTERN DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER**



Dream image  
© Heather Hartle



# 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](mailto:dt@southdowns.gov.uk) with a picture.



## THE RAM INN, FIRLE

Nr Lewes BN8 6NS  
01273 858222 [raminn.co.uk](http://raminn.co.uk)

In the small 'estate' village of Firle, the Ram is a lovely place to stop following a walk over Firle Beacon or along the 'Old Coach Road', a Byway (BOAT) which follows the footslopes of the Downs from Alfriston to the back of the village. Most of the village is owned by Lord Gage and his family, who live in Firle Place, the grounds of which lie adjacent to the village. Parts of the 18th century house

(with 16th century origins) can be visited during the summer months, but there are year-round great views of it from footpaths crossing the grounds.

The pub is charming, comfortable and welcoming with a choice of fine beers gathered from several Sussex breweries, as well as a good range of wines.

IAN HARTLE, SDNPA VRS  
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

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.

## I THINK WE'VE FOUND SANTA!



Jon Cawte, Eastern Downs,  
Stanmer Volunteer Ranger  
© Paul Harmer

## SPICED ARANCELLO

Need a different gift idea? Find some decorative bottles and try this super-easy Christmas liqueur.

Makes about 2.5 litres. Takes 15 mins plus two weeks standing time.

### You will need:

- Decorative bottles (remember to sterilise first if re-using).
- Spices : 1 cinnamon stick, 2-3 Cardamom pods and 1 vanilla pod
- 1 litre bottle of vodka
- 600g caster sugar
- 5 large oranges
- Kilner style jar(s) or similar to use while mixture is standing
- A few extra oranges, cinnamon sticks, cardamom and vanilla pods to decorate when bottling.

Zest the oranges and add with the spices and vanilla pod to the vodka in a sealed jar. Leave for a week and turn it upside-down daily.

After a week dissolve the sugar in 500ml of boiling water and add to the vodka mix. Leave for another week, regularly shaking or rotating the jar.

Strain into sterilised bottles, discarding the peel and spices and store in a cool place until required at Christmas. Just before giving add some fresh spices and peel into each bottle to decorate. Will keep bottled for 6 months.



## CAPTION COMPETITION

CAN YOU CREATE A WITTY CAPTION FOR THIS PHOTO?  
EMAIL YOUR IDEAS TO [DT@SOUTHDOWNSGOV.UK](mailto:DT@SOUTHDOWNSGOV.UK)



The winner of last edition's caption competition was...

"I THOUGHT THIS WAS MEANT TO BE A SECRET MEETING!"

RON WILDER, VRS CHAIRMAN



## DID YOU KNOW?

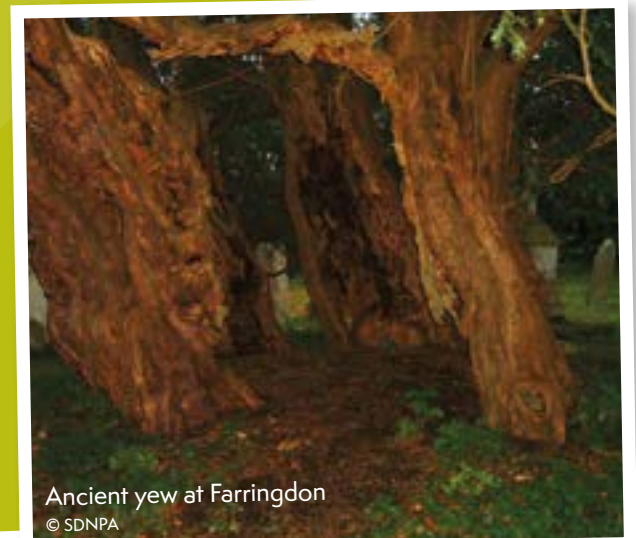
### THE OLDEST LIVING ORGANISMS IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK, ARE NOT SOME OF OUR ELDERLY VOLUNTEERS, BUT ANCIENT YEW TREES – SOME OF WHICH ARE OVER 2000 YEARS OLD.

Experts cannot determine exactly how old the most ancient specimens are since they are all hollow, nor how long they will survive, partly because many yews regenerate themselves from internal, aerial roots.

The oldest trees don't grow in ancient woods like Kingley Vale, but are found surviving in historic churchyards. We know yews once

grew in pagan holy places, and that the first churches were deliberately built at such sites to convert local people to Christianity. Hence the church was often planted beside the yew, not vice versa.

You can find three examples of ancient yews at: Farrington, Hampshire.; Iping, West Sussex; Wilmington, East Sussex



Ancient yew at Farrington  
© SDNPA





SDNPA Ranger Matthew Dowse showing NPUK Delegates the incredible view, both east and west, from The Trundle © Laura Warren

# SHOWCASING THE SOUTH DOWNS

NATIONAL PARKS UK CONFERENCE 2017

In the last DT issue I mentioned that I had been invited to attend the 2017 National Parks Conference, hosted by our own Park Authority at the end of October.

This was a very stimulating and inspiring gathering of senior representatives of all 15 National Parks, along with Conservation Boards and other bodies. It was a very busy but most enjoyable programme of visits and presentations that displayed all the best things of our cherished South Downs and highlighted the work that the SDNPA is doing. We saw the outstanding work that is going on with farm cluster groups, heard of the practical issues facing farming today and were challenged in debate to consider alternative ways of supporting the agricultural sector when we no longer have to follow the EU Common Agricultural Policy.

During a full day of touring the South Downs delegates experienced the landscape through visits to both the scarp and dip slopes of the Downs. We walked amongst the Heaths at Iping, where the Wealden Heaths volunteers were busy with an enormous bonfire, enjoyed experiences at cultural

heritage sites, such as Gilbert White's House and the Weald and Downland Living Museum, and savoured the wonderful food and drink that we create across the National Park. I was struck by the enormous enthusiasm that everyone who we spoke to had for the work of the Park Authority, from farmers to tourist attractions, from food and drink producers to nature reserve managers, all of whom has a great passion for our beautiful landscape.

We visited the Centurian Way, the former Chichester to Midhurst Railway, which is being sequentially cleared and resurfaced to provide a safe and sustainable multiuser trail into the Park. Similar to the Meon Valley Trail but the scale of work required is so much larger and landownership may still have complications to be overcome. Nevertheless, in fullness of time I see this project as one which could well be supported in some way by the VRS; as indeed could some of the other routes the National Park aspires to create.

However, the highlight for me was a morning of presentations and discussion on the conference theme "National Parks for the Future", led by Julia Bradbury and



Sussex Wildlife Trust's Jane Willmott showing delegates volunteering tasks at Iping Common © Ruth James

including Prof Ian Bateman, an environmental economics advisor to the Government and Adam Philip-Phillips, an inspirational young man involved with Mosaic Youth Engagement. These discussions challenged the established way National Parks have been managed and who they appeal to, seeking to drive greater enjoyment of the landscape by everyone in society, opening up possibilities for those who would never consider a day out in the countryside – how do we get them to come and join in! It is obvious to me that much work needs to happen here and in some small way I think there is a role for volunteers to get alongside this and help to introduce a wider cross section of people into enjoying our South Downs. Other delegates enjoyed a tour of the Eastern area of the National Park including Devil's Dyke, Ridgeview and Seaford Head.

RON WILDER, VRS CHAIRMAN

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

THE UK'S NEWEST NATIONAL PARK SERVES ONE OF THE BUSIEST PARTS OF THE UK, WITH 2 MILLION PEOPLE LIVING WITHIN 5 KILOMETRES.

### 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@southdownstrust.org.uk](mailto:james.winkworth@southdownstrust.org.uk)

As more people use and benefit from the National Park, it is coming under increasing pressure and can only be conserved through the support and care of those who love it.

The South Downs National Park Authority has just launched a brand new independent charity. The South Downs National Park Trust will work with partners to enhance and protect the South Downs National Park for future generations to enjoy.

The Trust works in partnership with the Volunteer Ranger Service, who last year donated



© SDNPA

over 6000 days, helping to preserve our precious landscape.

If you would like to make a financial donation you can give generally, allowing us to prioritise urgent projects in need of support, or give to a specific

appeal such as our *Mend our Way* appeal, funding urgent improvements on the South Downs Way. Make a donation to the South Downs National Park Trust by visiting our website [southdownstrust.org.uk](http://southdownstrust.org.uk)



## SOUTH DOWNS NEWS WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

From volunteers' work on the ground, how communities are benefitting from the SCF fund and different ideas for enjoying the National Park to the UK National Parks Conference and the recent South Downs Health & Wellbeing Conference. Every month South Downs News brings diverse stories about the South Downs and the work of the National Park Authority and partners straight to your inbox.

Sign up now at: [southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter](http://southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter)

## 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: **Clusons in Petersfield, Rohan, 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](mailto: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.



# COPPICING AT ARLINGTON RESERVOIR

Cutting the stakes and bindings

© Ian Wildridge

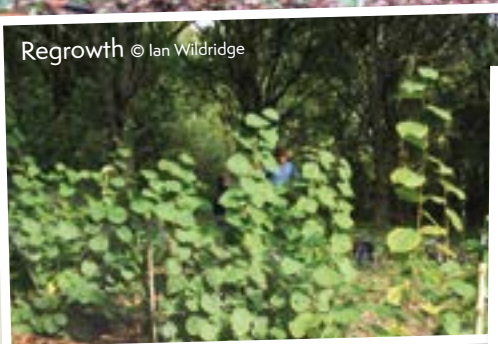
IN MID OCTOBER OUR SEVEN SISTERS TUESDAY GROUP WAS WORKING FOR SOUTH EAST WATER AT ARLINGTON RESERVOIR.

Coppicing in the wooded area around the reservoir seems to be one of our annual tasks. We cut down the stakes and bindings as materials for repairing the dead-hedging on pathways around the reservoir. The dead hedging tasks usually take place a few weeks later.

Here are some photos of the coppicing task in October and a photo of the regrowth from last year's coppicing. Also to complete the picture, photos of the dead-hedging task which we did in January this year.

IAN WILDRIDGE,  
EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGER

Regrowth © Ian Wildridge



## WHY DO WE COPPICE?

Coppicing is a traditional woodland management technique practiced for thousands of years, and can be the ultimate sustainable land use type.

Coppicing provides materials for a huge variety of uses, from pea sticks, to charcoal, to traditional thatching spars, to fence posts and construction timbers, and even a truly sustainable fuel for our heat and electricity.

By continuously creating new gaps in the canopy, and managing these on a long term rotational cycle, not

only are the products generated over the long term, but the associated benefits to wildlife from the continual creation of new glades and wider forest rides, mean that woodland ecosystems find a happy balance too. Indeed there are many species that have evolved to rely on the coppice cycle in many woods, and it is great to see this vital practice alive and well in the South Downs Landscape.

ANDY PLAYER, SDNPA WOODLANDS,  
LANDSCAPE & BIODIVERSITY LEAD



Dead hedging © Ian Wildridge

**SOUTH DOWNS  
VOLUNTEER  
RANGER SERVICE**

**SOUTH DOWNS  
NATIONAL PARK**

Downland Thymes: News for the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service.  
Issue 78, December 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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