

Case Study

Learning in the South Downs – supporting a student placement from Sparsholt College

Background

Jordan is studying for a degree at Sparsholt College, which is a Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) college located at Sparsholt near Winchester, Hampshire. The college covers countryside-based subjects including Agriculture, Engineering, Fishery Studies, Equine Studies, Forestry and Woodland Management, and Sport and Outdoor Education (www.sparsholt.ac.uk).

When he was volunteering at the Fernhurst Furnace event (www.fernhurstfurnace.co.uk) Jordan met local South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) ranger Dan Cornell; Jordan asked Dan if it would be possible to join the SDNPA for a work experience placement as part of his degree course.

Work experience placements are an important part of career progression and provide opportunities for students to find out more about our work and our projects.

National Parks (NPs) are great environments to work in ...

- Beautiful settings in protected landscapes
- Staff who want to make a difference and have a passion for their work
- Proximity to the great outdoors - enjoy it through both work and play



Enjoying a walk in the bluebell glade

The project

Jordan undertook his three week placement in April 2017.

The work at the SDNPA is varied and so are the skills and expertise of both environmental and office based staff, including roles such as rangers, ecologists, archaeologists, education and volunteering, planning and sustainable development, interpretation, access and transport, tourism and recreation, and forestry and estate management. There are also staff covering corporate services such as finance, facilities management, admin, press and publicity, HR and IT.

Together Dan and Jordan developed a work programme that would give Jordan a broad experience of the National Park. This included:

- A tour of the South Downs Centre and introduction to staff and their roles.
- Undertaking landscape management tasks with the South Downs Volunteers Ranger Service including Himalayan Balsam pulling and rhododendron clearance.
- Carrying out access surveys of land sites as part of SDNPA statutory duties.
- Attending the annual South Downs Ranger Conference, networking with rangers from a wide variety of organisations from across the National Park and learning from expert guest speakers and machinery demonstrations.
- Participating in staff meetings, gaining insight into the day to day workings of the ranger team and learning how partners manage local landscapes.

“Being on work placement with the SDNPA was an excellent experience as it gave me the opportunity to meet many like-minded, conservation oriented individuals, and to get an excellent insight into the inner workings of a large organisation, and the role of the South Downs Rangers within.”

Jordan, Sparsholt College student

The outcome

As a student studying for a career in conservation the aim was for Jordan to gain a better understanding of:

- The statutory role of National Parks (<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/purposes-duty/>)
- The wider role of a ranger in a National Park
- A holistic approach to viewing the landscape, recognising the inter-linkages between nature conservation, climate change, creating a sustainable economy, preserving the heritage, and supporting a thriving rural community.

Jordan stated:

“I have learned how to better work as a part of a larger team, and to gain from their experience. The range of tasks allocated to me on this placement helped me to expand my practical skills, and better the skills I already had. I also learned how considerably different the operations are between a governmental body such as the SDNPA and the Non Government Organisations that I am more accustomed to working with. The entire experience was very enjoyable, primarily due to the friendliness and welcoming attitude of the SDNPA staff and volunteers.”

Dan Cornell reflected ‘I find having a student placement a very rewarding experience, it makes us evaluate what we do and why, both as an area team and an individual. On a personal level it is very satisfying to help the students with their career and rewarding to be able to inspire them with tasks and projects that we’ve been working on.’

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 6: There is widespread understanding of the special qualities of the National Park and the benefits it provides.

[southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf)

The future

Work placements are a positive undertaking for the SDNPA. They provide students interested in future employment in this sector with a unique opportunity to gain a wider insight into the day to day roles and responsibilities of National Park staff.

Participating students positively raise awareness of the work that SDNPA staff undertake amongst their peers and within their local communities.

For more information on work related learning including work placements and work experience with the SDNPA please contact:

<http://learning.southdowns.gov.uk/learning/work-experience/>



Volunteer scrub clearance at Ambersham common

January 2018