

DOWNLAND THYMES

NEWS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE ISSUE 79 | SPRING 2018

PLASTIC POLLUTION



AS WELL AS BEING A VOLUNTEER RANGER I ALSO
ORGANISE A MONTHLY LITTER PICK ON THE BEACH
AT CUCKMERE HAVEN.

This beautiful estuary has a major problem with litter which I divide into two groups – the 'picnic' litter left behind by some of the thousands of visitors who use the Park and 'marine' litter which washes in on the tide and disfigures the river banks and overtops the banks at high tides or in stormy weather.

Huge amounts of broken plastic items and discarded fishing gear pollute our shores causing a hazard to wildlife both on land and in the sea. Plastic pollution of our seas worldwide is finally getting some airtime (for example, on Blue Planet 2) and recently featured locally on BBC South East Today when they came to highlight the extent of the problem in this famous and beautiful iconic place.

Every April for the last 10 years we have been fortunate to have help from a huge group of Geocachers litter picking on a CITO (Cache In Trash Out) event. Very many thanks to them and to other individuals who help. It always makes a difference.

Join us for our monthly litter pick at Seven Sisters Country Park. Meet by the tool-sheds at 09.50 on the first Monday of the month (Tues if Bank holiday). We litter pick for about two hours, often followed by coffee at the Saltmarsh Café. Wear sturdy footwear but all other equipment provided. See you there!

KATE FRANKLAND, VOLUNTEER
RANGER, EASTERN DOWNS



WHAT WE CAN ALL DO:

1. Try to use less plastic, especially single-use plastic.
2. Lobby manufacturers to change their products. eg supermarkets to supply non plastic cotton bud sticks. The plastic sticks easily get through sewage filters and out into the marine environment.
3. Lobby the government to reduce or prohibit single-use plastic items. The 25 Year Plan for the Environment highlights the need for action.
4. Help to clean up where you can. Take part in a **#2minutebeachclean**

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Main: Seven Sisters beach
© Ann Katrin Purkiss

Inset: SDNPA Ranger Fay Pattinson on SE Today.
© Kate Frankland



CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

Spring is upon us and the days have lengthened. It is a time that we can seek to expand our volunteer days into some new and interesting tasks – speak to your team to see what is available. In this issue we have the VRS survey results and the actions that are proposed to address the issues identified. Keep abreast of updates in DT, at your Area meetings and also at this year's AGM, on Saturday 17 March in Petersfield. The results have also informed other work we are engaged in with the SDNPA in drafting a Volunteer Development Strategy for 2018-2023, you will hear more of this from Amanda Elmes at the AGM.

We are sad not to have Ian Hartle still working with us after 21 years with the VRS. Paying tribute to all the work that he has done is not easy as Ian has done so much and we wish him well for the new challenges he has decided to embark upon. He has seen the VRS grow and flourish not only with the SDNPA but also with the Joint Committee before we had a Park. I was therefore pleased to be able to present him with his 20 year Long Service Award just before he left. Thank you very much for all your generous donations towards a leaving present which we will present shortly.

I would like to remind you all of the VRS funds available for you to make use of. Firstly, there is an annual grant of up to £200 available for you to use within your Area or specialist project group to spend on social or similar activities such as a BBQ. Secondly, there is a Travel Fund, which could subsidise the cost of a visit to another National Park, to see how other volunteers carry out their work – Brian & Joan Wignall visited the Pyrenees last year using this and will tell us about it at the AGM. Finally, we have the Conservation Reserve, with over £24,500 to contribute towards Conservation Projects in the Park that involve us as volunteers. If you have any ideas on how you would like to see this money spent please do get in touch. Let's try to use this money for some good causes in the landscape and get the VRS name and recognition out into our wider communities.

RON WILDER, VRS CHAIRMAN

UPDATE FROM THE VOLUNTEERING TEAM



CHANGING OF THE GUARD

IT WAS WITH SADNESS THAT WE SAID GOODBYE TO IAN HARTLE JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

Ian has worked in the South Downs for 21 years supporting volunteers and developing volunteering opportunities. In his time here he has supported a dramatic broadening of the volunteering offer within the SDNP, created a wider network of volunteering organisations, developed an interactive volunteering map and hosted the first ever South Downs Volunteering Fair.

Ian said "The VRS has been an absolutely huge part of my life for the last 21 years; I have always felt deeply honoured to have worked with and for such a fantastic bunch of people and I will really miss that."

We are now in the process of recruiting a new person to take on the role of Volunteer Development Officer and I look forward to introducing them to you shortly.



Thank you to everyone who completed the VRS Satisfaction Survey – this is an important way of tracking the 'health' of the VRS and ensuring the SDNPA and Committee continue to provide the best possible support. Mike Ellis has summarised the key findings and presents the action plan for moving forward later in this edition. We are looking forward to working with the VRS Committee on taking forward these opportunities in the coming months.

The VRS survey action plan has been incorporated into the Volunteer Development Strategy for the SDNP. This strategy will set our ambition in delivering and supporting volunteering opportunities both through the VRS and Park-wide organisations. The VRS Committee have kindly inputted into this. Similar work is already underway on: Landscape & Biodiversity, Cultural Heritage, Walking & Cycling, Learning & Outreach, Health & Wellbeing, Rural Economy and Tourism. These strategies will underpin the work of the SDNPA in its delivery for the next five years and will form the basis for the Partnership Management Plan delivery plan.

AMANDA ELMES, SDNPA LEARNING, OUTREACH & VOLUNTEER LEAD

Finding a safe bonfire site among dry reeds can be tricky
© Ron Wells



CHARLESTON REED BEDS

THE OPPORTUNITY TO HELP THE SUSSEX ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY (SOS) WITH ITS MANAGEMENT OF CHARLESTON REED BEDS IS ALWAYS A POPULAR TASK WITH THE EASTERN AREA VOLUNTEERS.

The site, some 8/9 acres, lies in the Cuckmere Valley opposite Charleston Manor and the Western edge of Friston Forest and is part of the Seaford to Beachy Head SSSI. Strictly speaking it comprises reed fen as the water table is, for most of the year, sub-surface, but the dominant plant is Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). However, it's bounded on all sides by dykes, criss-crossed by ditches and includes a number of small ponds created by SOS. After periods of heavy rain the distinction can seem academic to anyone clad in official issue ranger boots!

The area is interspersed with a mixture of, mainly, Common Osier, Goat Willow and some fierce thickets of Blackthorn. Left unchecked they would rapidly become dominant and contribute to the drying out of the site, already a problem as a result of the valley water levels being kept lower than in the past. This would have a drastic effect on the extraordinary number of bird species it attracts.

Although Blackthorn provides autumn and winter thrushes with food the site is more valuable as a stop-over and breeding area for migrating warblers. At least 11 species of warbler have been recorded including Cetti's, Icterine and Grasshopper. To eradicate the more invasive Blackthorn, control consists of standard 'scrub-bashing' and also coppicing the comparatively innocuous willows which provide perching for the warblers.

The site is equipped with several nets and the Society conducts an extensive ringing and recording programme. A great pleasure in working there is that one of the approved ringers is usually present and we have the opportunity to see some striking examples of bird life at close quarters. Recent ones include the Water Rail, a shy and seemingly modestly plumaged bird which, at close hand, reveals subtle colour variations, and a Goldcrest, so tiny it hardly seemed capable of being handled let alone surviving a winter. The gentle skills of the ringers during the netting, ringing and recording process are very evident, the birds being docile and apparently quite unaffected by the handling and attention.

Over Sussex as a whole only some 65 hectares of reed beds survive. The condition of the wider SSSI in which those at Charleston sit is almost all classified by Natural England as 'favourable' (71.90%) or 'unfavourable-recovering' (27.22%). They are well-placed to go on providing an invaluable habitat, long may they continue.

Note: With thanks to Tim Parmenter (SOS) for much of the background information. Further information on reed beds generally, and Sussex, in particular, can be found at biodiversitiesussex.org/reedbeds.html

RON WELLS, VOLUNTEER RANGER, EASTERN DOWNS

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The challenge of putting together a newsletter like Downland Thymes is that it depends on you the Volunteer Rangers to submit stories, photos, reviews etc. As you well know the National Park covers a wide area so there should be plenty of scope for content which might educate Volunteer Rangers about other areas of the Park. Is there a special walk or place you could recommend, or a favoured pub you could review, a local book you have read perhaps or some photos you have taken that deserve sharing? Is there an area which has an interesting name that could be researched for our "What's in a name" feature?

We would welcome words and/or pictures on anything that you do as a volunteer, or that may be of interest to other Volunteer Rangers. As a guideline, we prefer an article to be no more than 500 words long, but it could be as few as 50 or even less if you've got a couple of good photos.

As you may know Russell Cleaver from the Western Downs VRS provides a wonderful support to the editorial team pulling stories together for DT. We are still looking for someone similar in the east. Please get in touch if you think you might be interested.

The **deadline** for submitting articles for the June edition is **24 April**. Please send submissions to dt@southdowns.gov.uk.

CHARLIE HELLEWELL, EDITOR



AUTUMN 2017 VOLUNTEER SURVEY – RESULTS AND ACTIONS

Volunteers having a break (Christmas task) © Tim Squire

WHEN I JOINED THE VRS COMMITTEE LAST YEAR AS ‘VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE OFFICER’ I HAVE TO ADMIT I WASN’T SURE WHAT THE OVERALL VOLUNTEER’S EXPERIENCE WAS. IT THEREFORE SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA TO RUN A SURVEY AND FIND OUT! AS IT TRANSPIRED, SUCH SURVEYS HAD PREVIOUSLY RUN IN 2007 AND 2012 AND IT MADE SENSE TO USE THESE AS A STARTING POINT FOR OUR LATEST 5-YEARLY SURVEY.

The questions and survey process were subsequently discussed and agreed by the VRS Committee and SDNPA staff with just over half the resulting questions being identical to those used in 2012.

In total, 183 people responded to the 33 question survey – representing about 40% of all volunteers from across the National Park. That’s a pretty good response rate and thanks go to all of you who took the time to give feedback.

The results of the survey have given us insight into what’s working for volunteers and what needs to be improved. As you will read later in this article, we’ve started to identify a series of actions off the back of this survey with the aim of further enhancing the experience of volunteering for the National Park.

Most importantly, the overall level of satisfaction among volunteers is high – the highest scoring question of all being, ‘Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with the South Downs Volunteer Service?’ (see chart right).

WHICH QUESTIONS PROVIDED THE MOST POSITIVE RESULTS?

A. Those questions that received the most positive response in the survey included questions on Health and Safety (50% of respondents thought H&S information at the start of task was appropriate, the National Park’s appreciation for volunteers work (52% felt appreciated) and the numbers of volunteers who read the Downland Thymes (58% always read Downland Thymes).

WHICH QUESTIONS GENERATED THE LEAST POSITIVE FEEDBACK?

A. The Ranger’s introduction to new volunteer’s practical work (only 32% thought very effective – see chart far right), the local communities’ appreciation of volunteer work (49% had a middling score) and the effectiveness of the Introductory Training Day for new volunteers (only 27% thought very effective).

Clearly these examples are just a snapshot of the results, for those interested we’ll publish a report with all the 1–5 rated questions from the 2017 VRS Survey (along with the 2012 comparators) on the SDNPA Volunteer Intranet site.

As you’ll appreciate, there’s little point in conducting a survey and analysing the results if we aren’t going to take actions that aim to

improve everyone’s satisfaction in volunteering for the Park.

To that end, a small team consisting of Amanda Elmes (SDNPA Learning, Outreach and Volunteer Lead), Charles Winchester (Ranger, Wealden Heaths Area) and Mike Ellis (VRS Committee, Volunteer Experience Officer) are consulting and taking ownership for the actions following the survey.

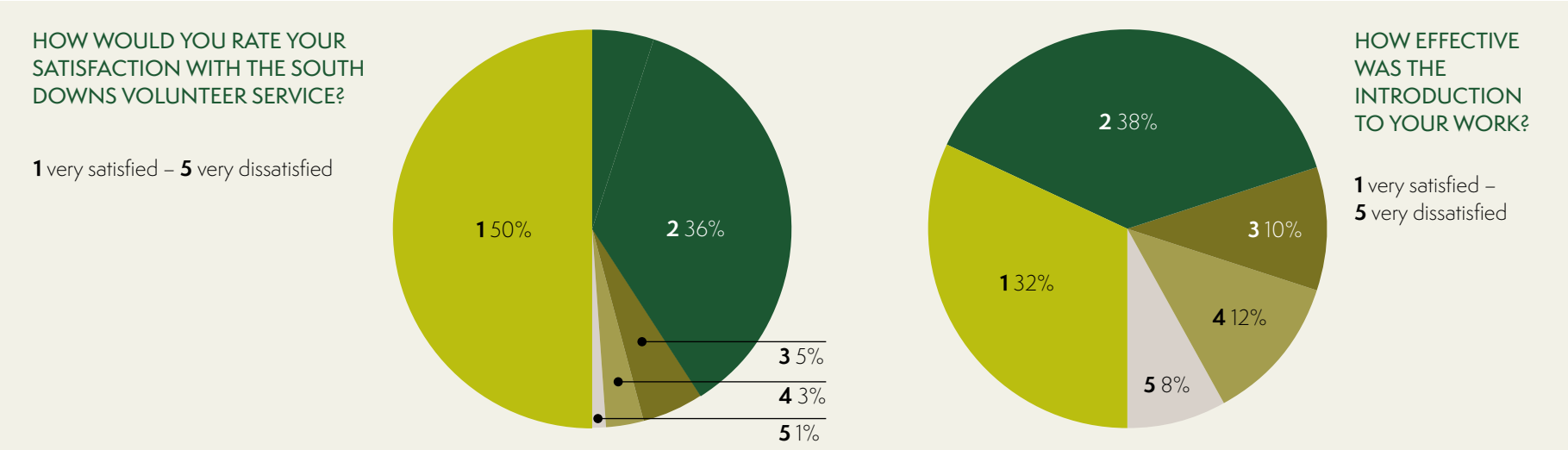
A DRAFT LIST OF ACTIONS INCLUDES:

- Increase consistency across the Park in introducing tasks to volunteers
- Increase diversity in the task opportunities for volunteers
- Encourage partners, communities and landowners to provide feedback on volunteer activities.
- Create more opportunities for senior SDNPA managers to connect and thank volunteers for their efforts.
- Establish and publish ‘entitlement criteria’ for practical/technical training courses
- Enhance the Introductory Training Day
- Use the survey feedback to further inform the Downland Thymes editors of those topics of future interest and suggestions for improvements
- Investigate the means of providing more education courses for volunteers utilising the resources available through the Park Authority.
- Enhance the visibility/profile of the VRS Committee

A full action plan with owners and timescales is available on the Volunteer section of the Intranet.

Running this latest survey really has been a most useful exercise and many thanks again to all of you who contributed. We now have lots of tangible data with which to work, enabling us to make improvements to VRS volunteering before the next survey comes about in 2022.

MIKE ELLIS, VRS COMMITTEE, VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE OFFICER





NEW STARTERS

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR FIRST DAY OR TWO OF VOLUNTEERING?

The first day I volunteered started off wet and we were scrub clearing on a very steep hill at Anchor Bottom. The low clouds soon dispersed to give a warm, sunny day revealing a fantastic view across the Adur Valley. Next I was coppicing in Tottington Woods and somehow we managed to disturb a swarm of midges. I was itching for days after!

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THE VRS?

I have always lived in the close vicinity of the South Downs and wanted to do something worthwhile to preserve our wonderful countryside, whilst learning more about the habitat and conservation work.

DO YOU HAVE AN INTERESTING OR UNUSUAL FACT ABOUT YOURSELF?

Having worked for the same financial services industry since leaving school, I made a life-changing decision to leave in the summer and do something completely different. The date I left was exactly 37 years to the date I started and I've not regretted it once.

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK?

My favourite activity in the National Park is walking and in particular the South Downs Way from Jack and Jill Windmills at Clayton to Ditchling Beacon – the views are magnificent and you can see for miles in all directions.

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CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR FIRST DAY OR TWO OF VOLUNTEERING?

Fortunately I have started with mainly lovely winter weather plus an interesting and wide range of activities in my first few weeks – clearing fir trees and birch, coppicing, and hedge laying. I have met some interesting colleagues, kept in check by highly capable and sociable staff.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THE VRS?

With a general interest in natural history and of the outdoors, I intended to help with SDNP once I had more spare time. I was further encouraged by my colleague Barry Keen who is already a volunteer.

DO YOU HAVE AN INTERESTING OR UNUSUAL FACT ABOUT YOURSELF?

I know the stunning South Downs Way quite well, having walked it twice from Petersfield to Brighton on the Trailwalker event, held each July.

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK?

I look forward to developing greater expertise in rural activities, to better understand the work and problems of the SDNP and to appreciate the changing seasons from a much closer perspective.



Dave after (almost) completing restoration of his 1936 MG TA Midget © Pat Nightingale

OBITUARY DAVE NIGHTINGALE

DAVE NIGHTINGALE WAS A SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER, BASED AT STANMER, FOR THE BEST PART OF 15 YEARS. HE WAS ALSO A LIFE-LONG DEVOTEE OF VINTAGE AND CLASSIC CARS, AND REGULARLY ARRIVED AT STANMER IN HIS GREEN 1950S MG MAGNETTE.

In his youth he had been a keen runner and fell walker and following a degree in mechanical engineering he worked at the Ricardo Engineering Consultancy firm in Shoreham. The onset of dementia forced his retirement from the VRS just over a year ago. His health declined last autumn and he sadly died on 26 November 2017. His funeral in December was attended by many of his friends from Stanmer.

I first got to know Dave back in the early 1970s, when we used to meet at a monthly

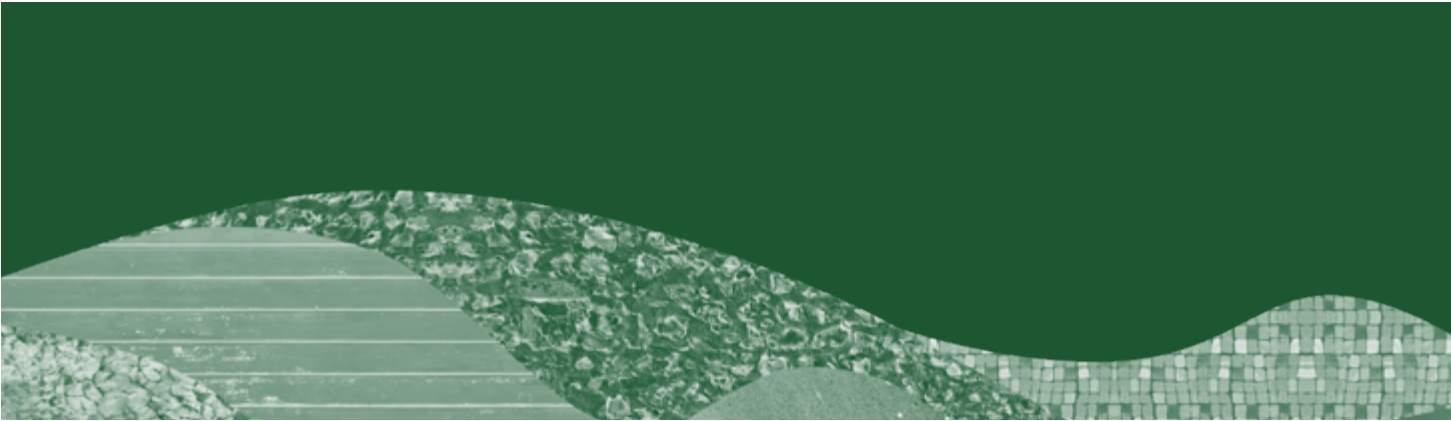
MG gathering at The Black Horse near Horsham. We both had 1930s MGs that were off the road and “being done up”; a process that took both of us the best part of four decades.

Once I bumped into him on the seafront at the end of a London to Brighton MG run. He was looking a bit worn out, but when I asked him if it was because he’d driven down in his Magnette, he said no, it was the result of helping to shift a car that had been abandoned up on the Downs. He told me he

was a South Downs Volunteer Ranger and that was one of the many things they did to help keep the Downs the way we all love to see. As a result of that conversation I joined him (and a great bunch of other volunteers) clearing scrub, maintaining footpaths, repairing gates and stiles etc.

Farewell Dave, and thanks for your enthusiasm and friendship over the past 40 plus years.

STEWART PENFOUND
VOLUNTEER RANGER, EASTERN DOWNS



SECRETS OF THE HEATH UNCOVERED

IN A QUIET ROOM DEEP IN THE HEART OF THE SOUTH DOWNS CENTRE IN MIDHURST, THREE PEOPLE SIT COMFORTABLY AROUND A SMALL TABLE, CHATTING. THE RECORDING DEVICE ON THE TABLE SEEMS PURELY INCIDENTAL, AS THE TWO VOLUNTEERS EASE THEIR INTERVIEWEE INTO RELATING STORIES OF THEIR LIFE ON THE HEATHLANDS OF SUSSEX.



This is just one of the numerous interviews that have taken place since the autumn when I started as Cultural Heritage Volunteer Co-ordinator with the Heathlands Reunited project.

The tail end of 2017 flew past as I got to grips with the unfamiliar structure of my new work place, put together administrative systems and organised training sessions – all with the help of wonderful, long suffering and very helpful colleagues.

As we launched into 2018, 18 Oral History volunteers hit the ground running, on a mission to track down heathland stories of the South Downs National Park.

Ten of the volunteers have visited the homes and workplaces of people living and working on Black Down, Graffham, Iping and Stedham, Lavington, Shortheath, Wiggoholt and Woolbeding, to record

their voices describing events and experiences in their past.

The other eight volunteers have delved into the depths of museums, record offices, libraries and the internet to draw out the past of those heathlands through photos, newspaper cuttings, parish records, drawings, maps and stories.

Together we have created a database of oral history interviews, which will be held in the West Sussex Record Office for public access long into the future, and also in the South Downs National Park Authority's archive of heathland stories.

Initially these stories will be used to inspire an artist to create interpretations on those seven heathlands to celebrate their rich cultural heritage and engage people in their history. In the future the information from this project will become a resource for

SDNPA's Education Team to use at school visits, lectures and talks.

Once sufficient stories have been gathered from the initial heathlands, volunteers will focus on the other 34 heathland sites.

It is so important to capture stories from the heathlands before they disappear. Only by doing this can we truly understand and appreciate how important the heaths of the South Downs have been in the past and how we can help preserve and maintain their fragile biodiversity.

MARY SAUNDERS,
SDNPA CULTURAL HERITAGE
VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

Inset: Oral History volunteers Jean Hicks & Tony Mobbs interviewing Steve Cleverly from Chichester District Archaeology.
© Mary Saunders

THE FRUITS OF FARM CLUSTERS

LAST AUTUMN, THE WESTERN AREA VOLUNTEERS AND RANGERS SPENT AN AREA GET-TOGETHER AT THE HOLT, AN 800 ACRE FARM NEAR UPHAM, HANTS.



After a morning sharing news about progress in the Western Area, Rob Nicholls our ranger and Winchester Farm Cluster facilitator, introduced us to how the SDNPA encourages groups of farmers to work together for the benefit of the landscape and environment. Then, owners Ted and Katherine Wake, invited us to tour the farm to see how wildlife conservation complements their farming activity.

The farm is 40% woodland and the rest is pasture, arable and wood pasture where Devon cattle and Wiltshire Horn sheep were grazing. We were led along a tree-lined track where to the east was an arable field, recently harvested. Beside the track clumps of nettles had been left for butterflies; tufts of grass, suitable for harvest mice nests and shelter during cold weather, had been encouraged to line the field.

Along the south facing field boundary a swathe of maize had been planted to provide seeds and cover for game birds during the "hunger gap", when overwintering birds are unable to find enough food from hedgerows and field. We could see this was supplemented by corn provided from the pheasants' seed hoppers. In front of the maize a broad band of land had been sown with a mixture to provide seed and nectar for birds, bees and other pollinators. We saw millet, chicory, borage, mullein and kale among the mass of greenery which is visited by members of the finch family. These thickly sown plants also provide an important refuge for invertebrates and small animals in harsher weather and are re-sown every two years.

Before turning to walk along the field margin, we were shown pasture in which Rob had earlier spotted some orchids; in due course, cattle will be released into the field to break up the soil, after which it will be sown with wild flowers.

In our walk-through, we were shown woodland suffering from ash "die-back", where now sycamores were being encouraged as a replacement. The owner is relying on natural regeneration of seedlings of various species to improve the woodland margins, an important source of cover and food.

Overall we were given an interesting insight into the beneficial interaction between a farmer and rangers of the National Park. From a personal perspective, I found it an enlightening experience to see, first hand, the benefits of the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme both as a taxpayer and a conservationist.

MALCOLM WALFORD, VOLUNTEER
RANGER WESTERN DOWNS

Above: Western Area volunteers at The Holt, led by Ted Wake a member of the Winchester Downs Farm Cluster and Western Area Ranger Rob Nicholls
© Charlotte Wray



Garden view over Bishopstone © Josie Hobbs

HOW LUCKY AM I? FOR 32 YEARS, BARRY (MY HUSBAND) AND I HAVE WOKEN UP EVERY DAY TO A BEAUTIFUL VIEW ACROSS THE FIELDS TO BISHOPSTONE, A LOVELY LITTLE VILLAGE TUCKED AWAY BEHIND SEAFORD, EAST SUSSEX WITH FIRLE BEACON IN THE BACKGROUND.

St. Andrew's church is thought to date from the 8th Century and may well be the oldest in the county. Tales abound of martyrs, saints and their bones and smugglers – I believe there's a secret passage which runs under the manor house!

The present village hall was once a Victorian school and every time I go in there I can almost see the long skirted teacher, warming herself in front of the fire, while the rows of eager faced pupils sit facing her trying to stop their teeth from chattering with cold! There was also a small post office, now a house, which supplied day to day essentials. Larger items would have been brought into the village by vans from Newhaven and Seaford.

During the summer, we love the village fetes. They are jolly, sociable occasions, with all the usual stalls, games and exhibits with the musicians of Seaford Silver band playing in the background. It was warm and sunny for the August fete and Barry and I walked the

grandchildren over to the village and had a lovely time sitting on hay bales on the green watching the Punch and Judy show, eating ice cream cornets.

Without doubt, the time I love Bishopstone the best, is at Christmas. The church is always beautifully decorated evoking an undeniable atmosphere of Christmas past. At the traditional carol service I always think of the people who have stood in that very place over hundreds of years celebrating Christmas just like us. It really is a truly spiritual and magical occasion.

If you visit Bishopstone, continue through the village down to Norton, then turn left up the hill and left again to make your way back. On the way, you will experience the beautiful tranquil countryside of Sussex and lovely sea and harbour views at the top of the hill. Happy days!

JOSIE HOBBS,
VOLUNTEER RANGER, EASTERN DOWNS



SCARED IDENTITY?

With regard to South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) uniforms for Volunteer Rangers you can never win, some will like one design, whilst others will prefer another. I've spent a career in countryside management and one thing I've learnt is that uniforms for rangers are always an item of concern that will lead to controversy.

More recently, the SDNPA Shared Identity has been a feature of volunteer comment. Most visible on the sides of our land rovers and vehicles, many will agree it looks very attractive. The same image is also placed on our publications, as can be seen on the cover of this magazine. And whilst this has clearly been a success, some volunteers have been less convinced on how well the Shared Identity works when rendered in a single colour, as a linear form, on the backs of volunteers' polo shirts. "It's just a bunch of squiggly lines" grumbled one volunteer.

But I've now seen a new, revised design which I think will have a lot more impact. It certainly has much more bite than the original, but will it be controversial? See what you think...

RUSSELL CLEAVER,
VOLUNTEER RANGER
WESTERN DOWNS



Top: "Scared identity" © Russell Cleaver

Above: Shared identity on SDNPA jacket © Laura Warren

MEDHURST MEMORIAL

This poem was originally written as a submission to the South Downs Alphabet book project in 2016 and is another lovely example of the potential "story" behind a local landscape feature – this one a row of cast iron monuments remembering the Medhurst family from 1828–1884 in the Church of St Anne, Lewes.



Above: Frank, Reuben & Naomi Medhurst © Michael Scammell

Medhursts

The Medhurst family assert an individuality in death
They may have lacked in life. The row of graves,
Lined up, are marked with rusted iron.
Stunted, studded, railway station name plates, in stubborn
Non-conformance to the headstones that surround them.
The cast letters on the plates proclaim a sturdy Christianity,
Samuel, Ruth, Boaz, Reuben, two Philadelphia's –
The names, too, stand out in these unbibled days.

With a start, you realise that the shorter plates
Embody shorter lives. Margaret, Reuben, Benjamin,
The second Philadelphia and Samuel all died in infancy.
God gave, then swiftly took away.
Did the biennial, melancholy climb behind a little coffin
Up St Anne's Hill, shake their parent's faith,
Or did they view it as a test, their cross to bear?

This is the Medhurst's earthly terminus.
Uncompromising iron dates record that
Samuel and Philadelphia would witness all their offspring
Reach this grassy destination before they, in turn, alighted.
These spiky, rust-brown iron plates serve them well,
Fervid, ferrous monuments to life and grief.

MICHAEL SCAMMELL,
SDNPA CONSERVATION OFFICER

PIC IN THE PARK

CHURCH TOMBSTONES CAN OFFER FASCINATING SNIPPETS OF LOCAL HISTORY. SOME CAN BE POIGNANT, OTHERS MAY EVEN ILLUSTRATE A MORAL TALE.

This pic of a tombstone illustrates just such a case, it dates from the early 19th Century. It concerns a George Lewis who reputedly often ignored the Sabbath Day and worked instead. But eventually he earned his just reward, since a limb from the tree he was attempting to saw off apparently fell upon him and caused his death.

Look carefully and you'll see all the elements of the story are pictured in stone to this day, close to the door of The Church of Our Lady, Warnford, Hampshire, where all parishioners, and visitors, can see it and be warned...



© Russell Cleaver

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 with a picture.



© Russell Cleaver

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.

THE BRIDGE INN

Amberley, West Sussex, BN18 9LR
bridgeinnamberley.com

As you open the door, you notice the flagstone floor and welcome from the bar. The Bridge Inn is also a dog friendly pub that is clearly well used by the locals. The beer on tap serves Sussex ale as well as guest beers, whilst the dinner menu offers interesting dishes as well as the usual pub fare. We tried a Tunisian stew that was a lot tastier than it sounds. Their car park is a bit small so try to visit off peak if you go by car. It's worth a trip.

RUSSELL CLEAVER,
VOLUNTEER RANGER, WESTERN DOWNS

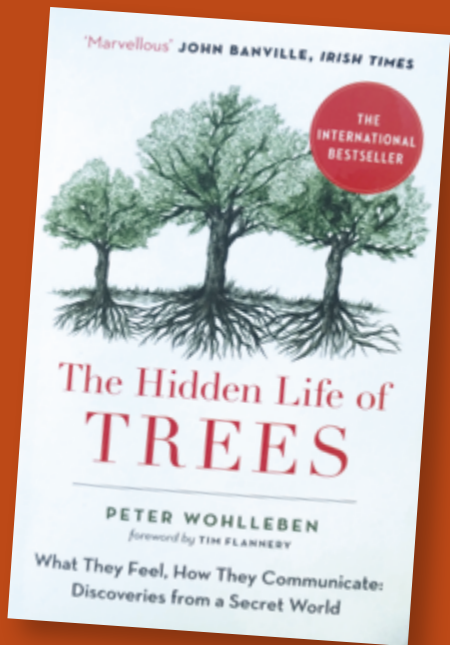
BOOK REVIEW

"The Hidden Life of Trees"

by Peter Wohlleben, Pub. William Collins, paperback 2017 £9.99

A fascinating book which explains that trees have an underground social network that enables them to communicate with each other. This isn't some long-haired fantasy; the book refers to recent scientific discoveries about how trees communicate via their roots and a network of fungal mycorrhiza.

The book reveals trees as organisms which share nutrients with their neighbours and how they combat being grazed. And, as the author is a German forester, I also picked up that beech trees in central Europe live twice as long as they do in the UK. So, it's a book written by an experienced arboriculturist who knows his stuff. If you're interested in trees, you'll love this book.



DID YOU KNOW?

NATIONAL NATURE RESERVES WERE ESTABLISHED TO CARE FOR SOME OF OUR MOST SIGNIFICANT HABITATS, SPECIES AND GEOLOGY.

As such they provide the UK's highest level of protection for nature conservation. Nine such reserves are found within the SDNPA, six are managed by Natural England (NE), two by Hampshire County Council (HCC) and one by Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT).

EAST SUSSEX

- Castle Hill, 47 hectares. Chalk Grassland (NE)
- Lewes Downs (Mt. Caburn), 49 hectares. Chalk grassland & Bronze Age hillfort (NE)
- Lullington Heath, 62 hectares. Chalk heath & grassland (NE)

WEST SUSSEX

- Ebernoe Common, 76 hectares. Wooded common (SWT)
- Kingley Vale, 160 hectares. Yew forest (NE)

HAMPSHIRE

- Ashford Hangers, 147 hectares, Wooded scarp slope. (HCC)
- Beacon Hill, 40 hectares. Chalk grassland (NE)
- Butser Hill, 231 hectares, Chalk grassland (HCC)
- Old Winchester Hill, 63 hectares, Chalk grassland & Iron Age hillfort (NE)



Alistair Stewart, Volunteer Ranger with the Western Downs Team has got in touch with his inner Norman spirit by creating this superb illustration of volunteering efforts in the style of the Bayeux Tapestry. Have a go – Historic Tale Construction Kit: github.com/htck/bayeux

CAPTION COMPETITION



CAN YOU CREATE A WITTY CAPTION FOR THIS PHOTO? EMAIL YOUR IDEAS TO DT@SOUTHDOWNSGOV.UK



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

"JOHN WAS DISGUSTED AFTER LOSING THE PARKING PRIZE AGAIN"

ROGER LACEY, VOLUNTEER RANGER, WEALDEN HEATHS



© Tim Squire

EASTERN AREA WEEKEND VOLUNTEER CHRISTMAS TASK 2017

A Christmas tradition is for SDNPA Rangers to take out the Volunteer Rangers on a big task and treat them to lunch to thank them for their hard work during the year. We gathered together 39 of the weekend volunteers who go out from Stanmer and Seven Sisters to work together on Black Cap near Lewes. This is an important chalk grassland site managed by the National Trust. Hannah Pickard, the NT Ranger, was very impressed with the large amount of slash and burn the volunteers managed in the morning. I'm sure the Chalkhill Blue butterflies will love it there in the summer. We then enjoyed a lovely festive meal at the White Horse in Ditchling.

TIM SQUIRE SDNPA RANGER, EASTERN DOWNS



HELP NEEDED TO MEND OUR SOUTH DOWNS WAY!

WHETHER YOU'VE SPENT TIME VOLUNTEERING ON THE SOUTH DOWNS WAY, OR ENJOYING IT IN YOUR FREE TIME, YOU'LL KNOW HOW POPULAR OUR 100-MILE NATIONAL TRAIL IS.

Twenty thousand people walk, cycle or ride the complete trail each year and millions more will explore sections of the trail.

Fifteen thousand pairs of boots, 10,000 tyres and 800 hooves travelling the length of the trail each year cause a lot of wear and tear. Existing funding allows us to make most repairs but there are a number of significant projects which, because they are on more remote sections of the path, are too expensive to

tackle using existing funds. Each year, as the erosion and mud gets worse, they get more damaged and become harder to fix.

Last October the new South Downs National Park Trust launched the 'Mend our Way' campaign calling for people who love the South Downs to help raise £120,000 to mend four broken sections at Old Winchester Hill, Millpond Bottom, Plumpton Plain and Hyden Lane.

'Mend our Way' is part of the national 'Make a Million' initiative, run by the British Mountaineering Council, which seeks to raise £1,000,000 for some of the UK's most treasured trails. Look out for South Downs Way Volunteer Warden Terry Doyle who stars in this campaign film made by the BMC mendmountains.thebmc.co.uk/portfolio-item/south-downs-way

Find out more and pledge your support at southdowns.gov.uk/mendourway

IT'S NOT ALL SCRUB BASHING!

WE THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO SEE WHAT YOUR COMBINED EFFORTS HAVE ACHIEVED IN THE NATIONAL PARK. IN DECEMBER THE AREA RANGER TEAMS INCLUDING MANY OF YOU VOLUNTEER RANGERS...

- Carried out scrub clearance for butterflies at important chalk downland sites near Winchester to maintain a stronghold habitat for the rare Duke of Burgundy butterfly; at Noar Hill which will enhance habitat for both the Duke of Burgundy (image right) and brown hairstreak; and with Butterfly Conservation Sussex at Steyning Bostal chalkpit which will benefit butterflies such as Adonis blue.
- Helped to lay a hedge at Stedham Campsite, owned by Midhurst Youth Trust, and introduced Lord Gardiner, the Minister for National Parks, to the process.
- Carried out surveys along the Serpent Trail to see what work will be needed to maintain the trail and manage invasive rhododendron.
- Organised and attended a training day with Historic England on archaeology in the landscape and assessing the condition of Scheduled Monuments.
- Finished assessing scheduled monuments at risk or vulnerable on the Heritage at Risk Register and identified where volunteers can help improve conditions and carried out ongoing maintenance of the Scheduled Monument at Cloth Farm.
- Ran a corporate volunteering day for UK power networks on Iping Common.
- Installed a barn owl box in Findon Valley.
- Pruned trees on the Centurion Way, carried out coppicing at Church Copse and tree felling at Graffham Down.
- Led a 'Cache in, trash out' litter-picking event for Geocachers at Graffham Down.
- Worked with the farmer and Natural England to secure grazing of Exmoor ponies on Firle escarpment SSSI to help control tor grass.
- Carried out site visits with Natural England at the eastern end of the National Park looking at site management and where we can work in partnership to improve the condition of chalk grassland.



To see more On the Ground reports go to southdowns.gov.uk/on-the-ground

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: 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 for a replacement. The weekly Update email includes an intranet log-on that you can use if you don't already have one.

JOIN THE SOUTH DOWNS NEWSLETTER

Want to know more about what was happening in your National Park?

Sign up for our monthly newsletter for the latest South Downs news, stories, ideas for days out, competitions, to hear about our ranger and volunteers' work and much, much more...

southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter



Alistair Stewart enjoying volunteering at Boomtown Fair 2017.

© Ruth James



“EVENTS, DEAR BOY, EVENTS”*

EVERY YEAR SEES A HUGE NUMBER OF FETES, SHOWS AND OTHER EVENTS WHERE THE NATIONAL PARK'S STAFF, MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS SPEND THE DAY ENGAGING WITH THE PUBLIC. FOR THE LAST FEW YEARS I'VE BEEN COMPLEMENTING MY CONSERVATION TASKS WITH DAYS AT SUCH EVENTS.

Why do I do it? Is it because of Purpose 2 ('To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public') or the Management Plan ('We want everyone who lives, works or visits to enjoy, understand and then get actively involved in looking after the National Park')? Well, yes, they are a factor but I take part mainly because it's fun and hugely rewarding to work as part of an invariably happy team sharing a common enthusiasm.

This year I've been involved with six events – the Green Fair at East Meon's Sustainability Centre, the Gilbert White Nature Festival at Selborne, Winchester's Criterium and CycleFest, Boomtown Fair near Winchester, the Alresford Show and Blackmoor's Apple Event.

It usually means an early start, to find the pitch and then either carry gazebos and materials to site or position and unpack the Events Van, whose contents vary according to the type of event and reflect competing demands from other venues. We have old favourites, like the giant jigsaw, animal skulls, badge and sash making, and a feely box – complete with (clay filled) 'dog poo' bag. But for summer 2017, events and engagement manager Laura Warren introduced Virtual Reality headsets with amazing 360 degree vistas of popular spots around the National Park. There isn't a VR scrub bashing experience yet but I remain hopeful.

The most unusual event for me in 2017 was the Boomtown Fair in July, where the National Park made its debut appearance. Held

over three days on the Matterley Estate just outside Winchester, it offered a huge range of live music on stages set in a dozen eclectic 'districts' spread across a vast acreage. With more than 60,000 people on site it provided great fun and an exciting – if initially muddy – opportunity to engage with a younger audience. It was a successful first visit so plans are already being made to return in 2018.

**ALISTAIR STEWART, VOLUNTEER RANGER
WESTERN DOWNS**

**If you'd like to get involved with some of the many events across the National Park then please contact the Comms Team
comms@southdowns.gov.uk**

*reputedly the reply given by Harold Macmillan when asked what he feared most in political life.

**SOUTH DOWNS
VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE**

**SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK**

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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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