



# SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

## WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month we are:

- Finding out about a scheme to **pilot the first boundary markers for the National Park**
- Discovering **why a Canadian flag was left on Stanley Common** and how it made its way home
- Learning why a group of **teachers might be looking for signs of dragons**
- Giving away **tickets to Fishers Farm**

As always please send your comments and ideas to us at [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk)

## SIGN OF THE TIMES

*Over the eight years since the South Downs was designated we've often been asked why there are no signs telling people that they've arrived in the National Park. But what would they look like? Bespoke signage that creates a sense of arrival at the UK's newest National Park is to be piloted in 19 locations around the South Downs this summer.*

Before we could consider putting up signs we first needed to develop an identity for the South Downs. Now this is in place we're looking forward to joining all 14 other UK National Parks in proudly signalling our presence to visitors and people who live here.

The 19 pilot signs will be placed at specially chosen locations at, or near, the National Park's borders – carefully selected as places in which there is a real sense of arrival in the National Park and each sign's size and design will be tailored to fit with that particular location.

"In a recent survey only 39% of people in the South East of England were aware that the South Downs is designated as a National Park\*," says Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive for the National Park Authority. "These signs are just one part of a strategy to increase awareness and add to its value as a destination to visit;



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for the quality of delicious local food and drink produced here; and as a landscape to be treated with care and respect."

The signs will help people know that they are in a unique landscape that has been designated for the whole nation and deserves special care and attention. Part of the aim is to positively influence people's behaviour – for example by encouraging visitors to stay longer and thereby support more businesses; and emphasise to dog walkers to keep their animals under close control.

*"In a recent survey only 39% of people in the South East of England were aware that the South Downs is designated as a National Park\*"*

The signs' design will be based on the South Downs National Park's shared identity. The different signs will be made either from iron or a mixture of wood and iron – reflecting the history of iron work in the South Downs during the 17th and 18th centuries and that the South Downs is the most wooded of any English National Park. The sweet chestnut wood to be used in the signs has been locally sourced from the Stansted Estate by English Woodlands.

With more than 2,000 points of entry or exit by road around the National Park's 600km border it will never be possible or desirable to sign them all. The National Park Authority will be reviewing the signs over the next year and, if they are thought to be successful, may consider introducing more in the future.

Watch this space for more news.

*\*A YouGov survey carried out in 2016 asked respondents whether, prior to undertaking the survey, they were aware that the South Downs went live as a National Park in 2011, 39% living in the South East of England were aware of this fact.*



## HAPPY BIRTHDAY NATIONAL PARK

*The South Downs National Park celebrated its 8th birthday on 31 March and we marked the occasion with eight breath-taking clips getting up close and personal to some special heathland wildlife.*

Lowland heath, one of the rarest habitats on Earth, was created more than 6,000 years ago when Neolithic man began to clear the forests. The acidic sandy soil couldn't be used for growing crops so was put aside for grazing. What emerged was a landscape of dry heath and wet bogs, and within the dwarf forests of gorse and heather lies a magical world.

Visit our website to see sand lizards, sundew, digger wasps and more [www.southdowns.gov.uk/eight-reasons-love-south-downs-heathland/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/eight-reasons-love-south-downs-heathland/)



## TEACHERS VENTURE BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

*It's a sunny afternoon in early spring and a group of teachers are crouched in a circle looking for signs of dragons. Nearby another group are learning to recognise a tree while blindfolded and in the valley below a third group are stamping on the ground to charm worms. If the laughter is anything to go by they are thoroughly enjoying the Our South Downs Schools' Conference.*

Fire starting, dissecting owl pellets and investigating the materials our homes are built from were also on the timetable for more than 100 delegates attending the Our South Downs Schools' Conference 2018, held at Amberley Museum & Heritage Centre.

This was the sixth annual conference organised by the South Downs National Park Authority to inspire and support teachers to use the special qualities of the National Park to enhance their curriculum.

"We know that contact with nature improves children's ability to concentrate and their self-discipline," says Jonathan Dean, Education Officer for the National Park. "And yet children in the UK have less contact with nature now than at any time in the past."

*"Academic ability becomes irrelevant ... pupils who might have written themselves off inside the class get the opportunity to shine in a different way."*





*Jogging on the spot can trick worms into thinking it's raining... A different way into a science lesson.*

"I've seen how children's resilience, motivation and concentration increases when they're learning outside," says Helen Porter, teacher, outdoor learning provider and author of new book *Educating Outside*. "Academic ability becomes irrelevant as different challenges present themselves and pupils who might have written themselves off inside the class gets the opportunity to shine in a different way. You see peers perceptions of each other change too."

The South Downs National Park is on the doorstep for more than half a million children and young people and the conference is just one part of our work to connect them with this incredible landscape. Our long-term goal is to inspire a lifelong commitment to enjoying, understanding and caring for the natural environment and support urban and under-represented groups to benefit from all that the National Parks have to offer.

Key note speaker Professor Justin Dillon, President of the UK National Association for Environmental Education kicked things off with a reminder that humans are naturally good at learning. He reminded everyone that the job of teachers is to sustain this natural curiosity.

As Helen Porter says: "You see how children love school trips. It is possible to take that enthusiasm and make it part of everyday learning. You can teach history, science, cookery... really elements of any subject can be taught outside."

In the afternoon Matthew Dampier, Headteacher of Droxford Primary School in the Meon Valley told the story of how embracing his schools' local environment has led to outstanding learning. One morning his pupils even arrived at school to find that the centre of the football pitch had been fenced off were told that it had been sold to raise money for new equipment, with plans to erect a telephone signal mast. The ruse sparked a day of discussion about development in special places before their pitch was returned unharmed



*Jonathan Dean and Helen Porter*

Between speeches, a range of workshops were led by expert outdoor education staff from organisations across the National Park such as the RSPB, the Weald and Downland Living Museum, Sussex Wildlife Trust and Amberley Museum. "It's amazing to see the energy in the groups as they bash rocks together to make sparks or shout their dragon poetry together into the sky," continues Jonathan. "If they're excited about being outdoors then their pupils will be too. This is always such an inspiring day and I'm looking forward to hearing stories of these lessons being used outside the classroom walls."

*"It is possible to take that enthusiasm and make it part of everyday learning."*

Find out more about the National Park Authority's learning resources on the Learning Zone  
<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/discover/learning-zone/>

Places on the Our South Downs Schools conference 2019 will be available from the autumn term, make sure that you don't miss out by signing up to our termly teacher's newsletter  
<http://southdowns.us9.list-manage1.com/subscribe?u=5290bcffce791585329f2512&id=33b14d4988>

*Educating Outside: Curriculum-linked outdoor learning ideas for primary teachers* by Helen Porter is published by Bloomsbury  
<https://www.bloomsbury.com/au/educating-outside-9781472946300/>

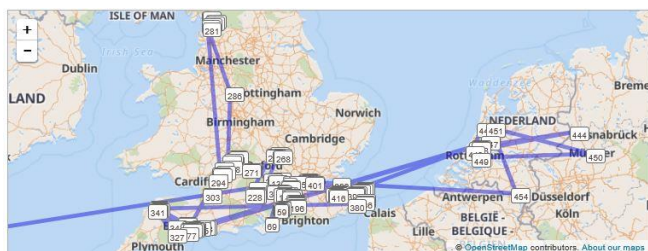


# FROM THE SOUTH DOWNS TO CANADA: THE STORY OF A GEOCACHE TREASURE

*A Canadian flag placed in a Geocache on South Downs heathland last May has travelled 14,655km to arrive 'home' to Alberta Canada. Along the way the flag has travelled through southern England, up to Manchester, across to the Netherlands and Germany before making it to Nova Scotia in Canada and then on to Alberta.*

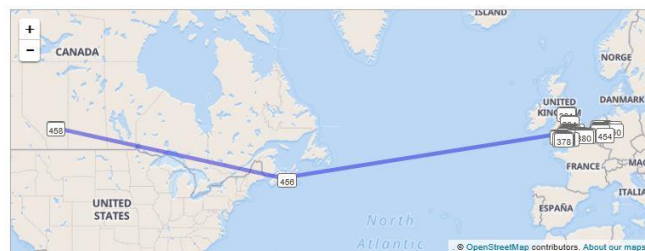
Student teachers from Chichester University placed the flag in a geocache on Stanley Common in West Sussex on 15 May 2017. The National Park Authority's Education Team worked with the teachers as part of a project looking at how geocaching could be used in the classroom (look out for resources coming soon to the South Downs Learning Zone).

The flag was chosen because the common was home to a Canadian Military Ground during the First and Second World Wars. The bare ground created by military manoeuvres and test explosions made an ideal habitat for the insects that do well on warm, sandy soils.



*The flag travelled all over southern England and took a trip to Manchester before heading over to the Netherlands.*

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*The flag continues its 14,655km journey home to Canada.*

Geocaching is a real-world treasure hunt that combines being outdoors, exercise and technology. Anyone can play, using the Geocaching smartphone app, GPS or a paper map, to seek out secret caches hidden by other players.

"There are now more than 2 million geocaches stashed around the world and thousands in the National Park," says National Park Education Officer Jonathan Dean. "This includes more than 30 caches that make up the South Downs GeoTour, designed to reveal hidden gems in the National Park along the way. If you find a 'trackable' treasure you log your discovery online and then move it to a different cache. This makes them tricky to find, and that bit more desirable, because they're constantly on the move!"

Since its release the flag has been logged 518 times on its 14,655km journey.

"The Canadian flag may now be too far away for a South Downs cacher but there are two other treasures placed by the teachers still within reach," continues Jonathan. "You might find a tiny birch broom, currently hidden in a cache near Midhurst, and there's a bundle of heather which was last recorded near Southampton. We're looking forward to seeing where they end up!"

*"You might find a tiny birch broom, currently hidden in a cache near Midhurst, and there's a bundle of heather which was last recorded near Southampton!"*

More information about Geocaching in the South Downs

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/geocaching/>

There are thousands of caches hidden across the South Downs, simply download the geocaching app and get hunting. For an extra challenge and the chance to earn a souvenir geocoin, try and complete the **South Downs GeoTour**.

To find a Geocache trackable you need to set up an account on the Geocaching website – <https://www.geocaching.com>





## HAVE YOU SEEN THIS PLANT?

*Himalayan balsam may look pretty but it's an invasive species which out-competes native species and, if left uncontrolled, will spread throughout our water courses and beyond. During spring and early summer National Park rangers and volunteers will be out working hard to clear it.*

The impressive sounding GB Non-native Species Secretariat (NSS) describes Himalayan balsam, *Impatiens glandulifera*, as a 'tall, attractive, annual herb with explosive seed heads'. It can grow to over 2m high and was introduced into the UK by the ornamental gardeners of the early 19th century at the same time as other, at-the-time exotic, species such as Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed. That's where the problem started.

Each Himalayan balsam plant can produce up to 800 small seeds which are light enough to carry up to 7 metres on the wind as well as in the water. With their 'exploding' seed heads it's not surprising that they soon made their escape out into the wild. Today the plant is widespread. In the National Park you're likely to spot it along river and stream banks or in damp woodland.

"The wide pink, trumpet-shaped flowers – also known as 'policeman's helmet', or 'Indian balsam' – smell sweet and are very attractive to pollinators – to the detriment of smaller native plants," says South Downs ranger Angela Ward, who works in the Wealden Heath area of the National Park. "And, because it dies back completely, over winter the banks are left bare and more susceptible to erosion."



*Volunteer rangers get to work clearing a large stand of Himalayan balsam*

Around this time of year you might spot National Park rangers and volunteer rangers out clearing Himalayan balsam – or as they put it 'balsam bashing'. "Because seeds migrate downstream we have to begin working right at a stream's source. This reduces the risk of plants re-colonising."

"The clearing season only lasts a couple of months" continues Angela. "We want to get as much removed during June and July before the plants start seeding. If we pull them out when they're in seed we risk spreading it further."

"In the longer-term the plan is to work with landowners to clear further downstream. It's going to take some time but we'll be back again next spring to start again."

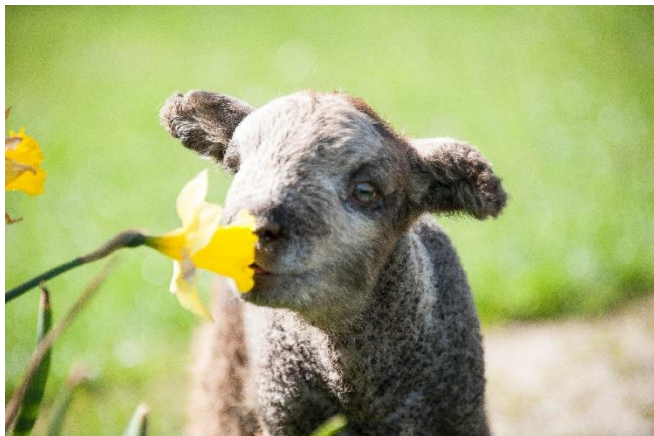
### How to spot Himalayan balsam

Himalayan balsam is listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which means that it's an offence to plant or allow it to grow in the wild. The GB Non-native species secretariat publish this useful sheet to help you identify it

<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/nonnativespecies/downloadDocument.cfm?id=33>

It's estimated that together invasive non-native species, such as Himalayan balsam, present a financial cost to the UK economy totalling some £2 billion. To tackle the problem the government need to determine where the plants are and you can help. Download the free PlantTracker app

<http://www.planttracker.org.uk/> to easily identify and submit photos and locations of 18 invasive plant species, including Himalayan balsam.



## WIN TICKETS TO FISHERS FARM

*There's a lot going on at Fishers Farm. The award-winning family day out includes a mixture of indoor play and outdoor adventure just outside the National Park at Wisborough Green. Among the*

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*animals you'll find sheep, goats, and chicken so spring time is a great time for lambs, kids and chicks.*

Thanks to the lovely people at Fishers Farm we have four tickets to give away to one person. Anyone who signs up as a new member of this newsletter during April will automatically be entered but to make sure our existing readers don't miss out you can also enter by emailing us at the address below before 30 April 2018.

To enter the draw email us with the subject 'Fishers Farm tickets' to [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk)

Terms and conditions apply, please read them at [www.southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/join-the-newsletter)

Visit Fishers Farm website  
[www.fishersfarmpark.co.uk](http://www.fishersfarmpark.co.uk)

## FIVE THINGS TO DO IN THE SOUTH DOWNS THIS MONTH

Find these & more events across the National Park and submit your own events at [southdowns.gov.uk/events/](http://southdowns.gov.uk/events/)



- Discover the **fantastic world of moths** at the Gilbert White Field Studies Centre
- **Become a dog ambassador** for your local heath
- Forage for **wild spring food** at Butser Ancient Farm
- Try out **Nordic walking** in the Meon Valley
- **Ride a vintage bus** at Amberley Museum



## ON THE GROUND

Don't forget to say hello if you spot our rangers and volunteers out working in the National Park. Here's a taste of what they achieved in March 2018.

- Created a scrape in a lesser-known corner of Heyshott Common and cleared encroaching birch and pine. **Woodlark, common lizard and snipe were seen investigating** the mown area as soon as it was cleared!
- **Enhanced the Bentley Station Meadow SSSI** working with Butterfly Conservation.
- Carried out six **feedback visits with landowners along the River Meon** looking at how to manage vegetation and the river for water voles.
- Attended bird identification training as part of the South Downs Farmland Bird Initiative and met with farmers in the Winchester Downs Cluster group to **advise on locations for lapwing plots and discuss lapwing surveys** of their land and adding their data to the SDFBI.
- Cleared invasive rhododendron and **felled pine trees from a Bronze Age barrow on Lavington Common**, a scheduled monument on the at risk register.
- **Continued the fight against invasive rhododendron** at Stedham Common, Ambersham Common and Midhurst Common and cleared invasive non-native bamboo from Botany Bay, Duncton, a rare chalk gill stream site.
- Completed laying an **80m section of hedge at Muddy Lane Binsted**



- Carried out **annual maintenance of Rother Walk**, including clearing fallen trees, fixing fingerposts and cutting back vegetation.
- Installed a **water trough to facilitate conservation grazing** at Pepperscoombe.
- Supported a community coppice group at Steyning with their first task; completed the 17/18 season's **coppicing for pearl bordered fritillary butterflies** at Church Copse; and coppiced for **drab looper moth and dormouse** at Graffham Downs.
- Installed livestock fencing at Rotherfield Park's meadow for grazing and completed fencing in Heyshott to enable **grazing of scheduled monument along the side of the South Downs Way**.
- Held **Dog Patrol weekends with NFU, Lewes District Council and Natural England** at various locations in East Sussex.
- Joined in **pole lathe training** at Amberley museum – the skills learned will be used in local woodland.
- **Planted 990 chalk grassland plug plants** to improve biodiversity at Lewes Cemetery Local Wildlife Site, with help from local school children and Burleys of Lewes.

[southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/on-the-ground](https://southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/on-the-ground)

## YOU SAY:

Do you have a story you want to tell about the National Park? A burning issue that you think needs to be addressed? Please let us know.



To submit a comment for our newsletter please email [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk). For a fast and direct response to your questions please email [info@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:info@southdowns.gov.uk)

Please note that only contributors who submit their full name and address can be considered for publication though we will not publish your full address. Please make it clear whether you are speaking on your own behalf or that of an organisation you represent. We reserve the right to shorten comments and edit where necessary.

## MOST ASKED...

Send us your questions about a particular area of work in the National Park.

Answering this month is: Amanda Elmes, Learning, Outreach and Volunteer Lead for the South Downs National Park



### I'M A YOUNG PERSON LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES. WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO OFFER?

We want young people to feel that they can make a difference in their National Park and are opening up more volunteer opportunities for young people through the National Citizen Service (NCS) as part of wider work by National Parks UK. This is very new for us, we only introduced it last year. Sign up to the NCS online at [www.ncsyes.co.uk](http://www.ncsyes.co.uk) to find your local provider and look for programmes running here in the South Downs.

### WHAT DOES THE OUTREACH PART OF YOUR ROLE COVER?

This is literally 'reaching out' to under-represented groups. People who aren't able to benefit from all the amazing things the South Downs has to offer. This might be because they don't feel that the National Park is something that they'd enjoy, that it's a place for 'other' people go to or because getting here is just that bit more difficult than for others.

These groups we're targeting include young people aged 16 to 24, people with disabilities, people who are socially disadvantaged and BAME communities. Part of my job is to see how we can put together projects that encourage more people to see the National Park as a place that belongs to them too.

There are some areas of high deprivation right on the National Park's doorstep. We have a travel grant available to any school within 5km of our border where more than 10% of children receive free school meals, and about a third of schools in this area are eligible. More than 2,500 children are now visiting the South Downs every year because of the grant. It's always oversubscribed so we're looking for ways to fund it.

### WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO SUPPORT TEACHERS?

We want to support teachers to use the National Park to bring their lessons to life – not just in obvious subjects like geography but across the whole curriculum. There are lots of resources on our learning zone and we've created a special South Downs curriculum by taking the national curriculum and annotating it to show opportunities to use the National Park to teach it. Our learning map will help you find providers within the National Park and our travel grant scheme (see above) can help get your class there.

Our flagship event is the Schools Conference which this year we expanded to include senior leadership and governors to support and encourage a whole school approach to learning outside the classroom (see separate story).

## NEXT MONTH: Cycling in the National Park

Alister Linton-Crook, South Downs National Park Cycling Officer answers – send your questions to [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk)





## RARE FIRST EDITION PRESENTED TO THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

A rare first edition of Eleanor Farjeon's *A Sussex Alphabet*, one of only 202 published in 1939, was presented to the National Park Authority on 22 March as the culmination of an inspiring project called the South Downs Alphabet. The book was generously given by Dr Peter Robinson of The Write House.

Read the full story [www.southdowns.gov.uk/rare-first-edition-presented-south-downs-national-park](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/rare-first-edition-presented-south-downs-national-park)



## SOUTH DOWNS RESPONDS TO CAMPAIGN FOR NATIONAL PARK REPORT ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT

A report from Campaign for National Parks, *National Parks for all: making car-free travel easier*, looks at the many ways people travel to and around National Parks and how they can be encouraged to make the most sustainable choices.

Read our response at [www.southdowns.gov.uk/south-downs-response-campaign-national-park-report-public-transport/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/south-downs-response-campaign-national-park-report-public-transport/)



## THE PRINCE'S COUNTRYSIDE FUND RESEARCH: RECHARGING RURAL

The Prince's Countryside Fund and Professor Sarah Skerratt from Scotland's Rural College are inviting anyone living or working in rural areas of the UK to contribute to new research. They want to find out the different ways in which the challenges of 'remote rural' are being experienced by people and communities across the UK.

Participants are encouraged to complete the survey regardless of their location in the countryside - whether they live and work somewhere traditionally seen as geographically remote, or places considered 'within easy reach' of towns and cities but that feel remote owing to a lack of connections, such as transport, broadband, or social links.

The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete and closes on 18 April 2018.

[www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk/research/recharging-rural](http://www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk/research/recharging-rural)