

DOWNLAND THYMES

NEWS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGER SERVICE ISSUE 81 | AUTUMN 2018



Volunteers stone carving with Graeme Mitcheson © Colin Carre

CARVING OUT STORIES

VRS stone carving © Jeremy Nason

WHILE PAUSING FROM A MORNING PULLING RAGWORT DURING A VRS DAY, SOMEONE MENTIONED STONE CARVING WORKSHOPS THAT WERE BEING RUN BY GRAEME MITCHESON AS PART OF THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE HEATHLANDS REUNITED SITE SCULPTURES.


I truly suspected the workshops had already taken place but through Katy Sherman a special Heathlands volunteer session was arranged on 4 July in the garden behind the National Park offices.

After a brief introduction, each of us started preparing sketches for our own designs. It wasn't long before we were standing by the work bench in the evening sun, chisel in one hand and hammer in the other as we outlined our work on 'A4' blocks of sandstone. Graeme had made it look easy to chip away the stone; however it was not so straightforward for beginners! As a consequence nearly all conversation stopped as we focused intensely on the blades of our chisels and hammered the stone away.

Pausing briefly to rest hands or eyes or to take refreshment that had appeared as if by magic, we were soon seeing our designs take shape with Graeme advising on technique or applying a little of his handiwork to refine our efforts. Soon it was time to stop and clear up. Each of us was able to stand back and admire our work – "not bad at all", "if only I had more time", "I would refine my design next time" but overall we had all created something special.

Thanks to Katy and Graeme for making such a super evening possible.

**JEREMY NASON,
VOLUNTEER RANGER**



Local community groups have been taking part in workshops with the artist Graeme Mitcheson who will be creating works linking seven heathland sites in the South Downs National Park.

The artwork has been commissioned as part of the Heritage Lottery-Funded Heathlands Reunited Project, a partnership project led by the South Downs National Park Authority.

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UPDATE FROM THE VOLUNTEERING TEAM



CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

This summer has seen some good news about new office accommodation and tool stores. In the East, a welcome return to Stanmer Park should again better facilitate the excellent work of staff and volunteers from the main site, not forgetting that some volunteers work from the satellite facility at Seven Sisters Country Park. In the Western Area, a welcome relocation of staff offices to Wallops Wood in Droxford, is preceding the creation of a much needed combined workshop and tool store; hopefully everything will be co-located there by the end of the year. An additional piece of good news here is that next door is Bowman's Brewery – perhaps an added attraction for some of you to visit the western side of the VRS!

The VRS Committee has confirmed a restructure of the Conservation Reserve into a 'ring-fenced' element of the South Downs National Park Trust. An advantage of this will be to promote these funds to the Park's partner organisations, taking on project leadership and using our volunteer effort to pursue projects delivering aspects of the Parks Partnership Management Plan.

Later this month, the second group of education courses for the year will be run, this time with the topic of birds and will be followed early next year with a new area of interest. These courses are for you and no matter how well you know the flora and fauna of the South Downs I'm sure you will learn something new by attending one of them – so please do support them and tell us of any more topics you would like.

Finally, I thought you would all like to know that Ian Hartle is well and that he really appreciated the farewell gifts that were organised for him – a framed South Downs Way vintage travel picture and books of his choice.

RON WILDER, VRS CHAIR



SINCE STARTING IN POST AS VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER IN LATE APRIL, I HAVE BEEN VISITING VOLUNTEER GROUPS, RANGERS AND PROJECT PARTNERS ACROSS THE NATIONAL PARK.

As a newcomer to the area and the National Park, it has been a case of comparing my own experience of volunteering (largely in London's oak woodlands, the chalk grasslands of the North Downs, but also stretching as far east as Romania) to that of the National Park. My first impression is of a wide, varied network of projects influenced greatly by the astonishing array of landscapes and their soils, habitats, fauna and flora and their functions.

I get a sense of a long-term relationship between many of the volunteers and the projects that you are involved in. There is a great feeling of ownership for many of you over the sites where you have been involved and strong connections with the people you have worked with. I see similarities with the kind of traditional land management that I've seen in Transylvania, where hay meadows are being lost due to agricultural abandonment and invading trees and

scrub, their richness of wildflowers and butterflies under threat – sound familiar? A recent UN report found that the most successful conservation initiatives have local people at their heart, and that is certainly true of the South Downs National Park.

Over the next five years we will be working through the Volunteer Strategy to work with people who are underrepresented in the National Park, finding ways for more young people to benefit from the great experience of being a volunteer, and to engage with the diverse cultures of people who live within and on the outskirts of the National Park itself.

But for now the main thing for me and the Volunteering Team to say is thank you to all our volunteers for the great work you have done and continue to do.

**DANIEL GREENWOOD, SDNPA
VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER**

One of the volunteering sessions Miku attended

© Miku Yabuta



INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER IN THE SOUTH DOWNS

I'M STUDYING ECOLOGY IN JAPAN AND AM INTERESTED IN THE CONSERVATION OF NATURE. PART OF MY COURSE INVOLVED STUDYING IN THE UK FOR A YEAR AND WHILE I WAS HERE I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE GOOD IDEA TO VISIT SOME NATIONAL PARKS AND TRY WORKING AS A VOLUNTEER.

In June I was lucky enough to join the volunteer team at South Downs National Park for five days and was impressed by how much people cherish its beautiful landscape.

Since starting my course in Japan, I have been conscious of the problems that Japanese National Parks have in terms of a lack of information available for people who want to work at them, and an imperfect system to accept volunteers. Therefore, one of my aims was to see how South Downs National Park supports volunteers and provides opportunities for them to protect the environment.

I will try to make use of my experience in the South Downs to help improve our system in



Japanese student Miku
© Miku Yabuta

Japan. A scholarship programme led by the Japanese government, with contributions from supporting companies, helped support my plan to learn from UK National Parks. I intend to write a report and give a presentation to convey what I have learned to students following the same scholarship, and also for those involved in environmental conservation organisations. I hope it will be an opportunity to think once more about how National Parks should be used and conserved.

Lastly, I am deeply grateful to Gemma North at SDVRS for helping to organise such a wonderful experience for me, and I would also like to thank everyone who gave me such a warm welcome, teaching me so much about the natural beauty of the South Downs.

MIKU YABUTA, INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND VOLUNTEER WITH SDVRS

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Many thanks to all of you who responded to our request for images of orchids and other downland flora discovered while out and about in the South Downs. We were inundated with some glorious photos – a selection of which you can see on page 4-5. I've added one of my own below.

If you have something further to share with us or think you would like to contribute a story to *Downland Thymes* about your local area in the National Park, or a narrative of one of your conservation tasks then please do get in touch. Is there a special walk or place you could recommend, or a favoured pub you could review, a local / natural history book or gadget that you think other volunteers may be interested in? As a guide 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 have some good images to go with it.

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

CHARLIE HELLEWELL,
EDITOR



Orchids at Noar Hill,
Selborne © Charlie Hellewell

PIDDINGHOE ORCHIDS

AFTER 11 YEARS AS A VOLUNTEER WITH THE EASTERN DOWNS TEAM I HAVE NOW MOVED BACK TO WARWICKSHIRE.

However in May last year, the work group carried out a task for South East Water (SEW) at their underground reservoir site at Piddinghoe, East Sussex. We completed an annual count of green winged orchids, led by Richard Dyer (SEW)

David Ellis, who unfortunately died in June 2017, and I exchanged some photos of the task. David was a very keen photographer

and contributor to the DT. The photos of the green-winged orchids were taken by David. The photo of the group laying out the survey area for the count was taken by me.

IAN WILDRIDGE, FORMER VOLUNTEER RANGER EASTERN DOWNS



Green winged orchid
© David Ellis



Piddinghoe orchid survey
© Ian Wildridge

HAIRY MALLOW SURVEY

In June I undertook a survey task with other volunteers led by South East Water (SEW) at Folkington Reservoir. The task was to count hairy mallow, and we were told that the reservoir is one of the only places in Sussex where this grows. I understand the survey is undertaken every year.

The task took place over two days (I did the first day) where we surveyed just over half of the area and counted approximately 6000 to that point. While undertaking the survey we also saw downland flora including pyramid and bee orchids.

MARTIN BRIDLE, VOLUNTEER RANGER, EASTERN DOWNS



Hairy mallow
© Martin Bridle

DELIGHTFUL DOWNLAND

Orchids and sheep
– Medley Bottom
nr Amberley
© Roger Townsend



ORCHIDS AND DOWNLAND FLORA.

The many scrub clearance tasks carried out by the VRS help these species to flourish but livestock grazing is even better. We've had some super images sent in by VRS members across the Park.



1. Common spotted orchid at Black cap – © Barney Cockerell

2. Common spotted orchid at The Holt © Paul Andersen
3. Marsh orchid at Misingford Meadow © Nevill Brooke

4. Yellow wort – Falmer Downs © David Brookshaw

5. Knapp weed and seven spot burnet moth © Shirley Brice

6. Narrow leaved helleborine at Ashford Hangers © Rob Seargent

7. Round-headed rampion on ramparts of Old Winchester Hill © Russell Cleaver



Tetragnatha extensa
© Terry Doyle

*Pterophorus
pentadactyla*
© Terry Doyle

BIO BLITZ

THE HOLT ESTATE, NEAR WINCHESTER, HAMPSHIRE

THE WINCHESTER DOWNS FARM CLUSTER IS ONE OF SIX SUCH CLUSTERS ACROSS THE NATIONAL PARK. THEY ALLOW INDIVIDUAL FARMERS TO WORK TOGETHER IN GROUPS TO BENEFIT THE BIODIVERSITY AND LANDSCAPE AT A SCALE THAT COULD NOT BE ACHIEVED WORKING ALONE.

A big part of this is engaging the local community, getting people to understand what farmers are doing for the environment.

A bioblitz is a survey event that draws in species experts and interested members of the general public to record as much wildlife as possible in a set area. This is an opportunity to explore and discover the incredible range of species that surround us.

The bioblitz held in June at the Holt Estate was really a pilot event. However it still attracted over 50 species experts and interested locals who were keen to learn, as well as some of our Volunteer Rangers. It was the first one to have been held on a private farm in the Winchester Downs Farm Cluster and was right on message in terms of community engagement,

education and for demonstrating the diversity of wildlife we have on a mixed arable, grassland, woodland farm that has been in High Lever Stewardship (HLS).

The bioblitz was a huge success and we will be planning an even bigger one next year. More than 600 species of flora, fauna and insects were recorded including a bat maternity roost.

On behalf of South Downs National Park Authority I would like to thank Southampton Natural History Society, Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre and Katherine & Ted Wake, the Winchester Downs Cluster group members who hosted the event.

**ROB NICHOLLS, SDNPA RANGER,
WESTERN DOWNS**



BIOBLITZ FROM A VOLUNTEER'S PERSPECTIVE

I was fortunate enough to join in the bioblitz that took place on 9 June 2018 at The Holt Estate near Winchester. The event was arranged by Rob Nicholls, Western Area Ranger, as it is one of the farms in the cluster, helping to improve the landscape for wildlife.

The idea of the bioblitz was to help to establish a baseline for various species of flora, fauna and insects. On hand were experts in ornithology, flora and bugs. We were split into groups, the size of which depended on who wanted to do what. The walks were of about 1-2 hours and covered as many different habitats as we could in the time. I took the chance to go on two insect walks and en route came across many different species of butterflies, beetles, flies and spiders some of which I captured on camera.

I look forward to being involved in the next Bioblitz.

TERRY DOYLE, VOLUNTEER RANGER,
WESTERN DOWNS



Woundwort shield bug
© Terry Doyle



Mating red damsel flies
© Terry Doyle

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THE CHATTRI WAR MEMORIAL



HIDDEN IN A HOLLOW IN THE DOWNS JUST NORTH OF BRIGHTON IS A SOMBRE REMINDER OF THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE INDIAN SOLDIERS MADE WHEN THEY JOINED AND FOUGHT FOR THE BRITISH ARMY DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR.

The site is just over a mile south of the South Downs Way yet it is likely that few walkers are even aware of this important and thought provoking testimony to the waste of human life during the Great War. The site only came into sight when I was 100 yards away. Given its position, it is possible that even local Volunteer Ranger colleagues may be unaware of its existence.

More than 800,000 Indian soldiers fought for the Allied Powers. During the four years of fighting, thousands of wounded combatants were brought to Britain to be treated in makeshift military hospitals. Three were established in Brighton; one was at the town's famous royal palace, the Royal Pavilion.

Happily, the great majority survived but 53 Hindus and Sikhs died and were taken to a remote spot on the South Downs to be cremated. The Chattri was built at the exact location where the funeral pyres were constructed.

The Chattri is a large dome shaped, marble building set

in well maintained gardens. As I stood beside this imposing building, reading the names of those who had died and the personal messages attached to the large number of wreaths arranged in front of the Chattri, I found it impossible not to be moved by the experience. It seemed especially tragic that these men had come from so far and that their country would become independent from Britain some three decades later. I also felt that it was a shame that the contribution to the war effort made by Indian soldiers was not more widely recognized.

More information about the Chattri can be found at chattri.org

ALAN JONES,
VOLUNTEER RANGER,
EASTERN DOWNS

For a circular walk around the Chattri use the Stanmer and the Chattri walks leaflet at southdowns.gov.uk/walking



SOLITARY BEES

WE ARE ALL FAMILIAR WITH HONEY AND BUMBLE BEES, KNOWN AS SOCIAL BEES AS THEY LIVE IN COMMUNITIES. HOWEVER, OF THE NEARLY 250 SPECIES OF BEES IN THE UK ABOUT 90% ARE NOT SOCIAL, THEY LIVE ALONE AND ARE KNOWN AS SOLITARY BEES.

These can be separated into two groups depending where they nest. This article is about the ground nesters, commonly called mining bees which account for about 75% of all solitary bees.



The life of female mining bees is very different from that of social bees. A queen honey bee can lay 2,000 eggs per day to create a colony of 50,000 worker bees to support her and offspring. In contrast, a female mining bee lays a total of 5-15 eggs in her lifetime, lives alone and gets no help feeding herself and offspring.

The lifecycle of mining bees begins when they emerge from their underground cells in the spring. The males emerge first, and when they find a female, die soon after mating. Not a bad but short life! The females have much more work to do.

After mating, females seek sites for their nest burrows. They construct five or more small cells to which they add a ball of pollen mixed

with nectar to each for the larvae to eat once hatched. Then they lay an egg on each food ball. The male eggs are laid in cells closest to the burrow entrance, so they can emerge first. The female then seals each cell with mud or leaf and dies soon after. The developing larvae eat the pollen and after about six weeks will spin a cocoon, pupate and eventually through metamorphosis change into a bee. The following spring the hatched bees emerge from the burrow to mate and continue the cycle.

Mining bees are not as effective carriers of pollen as honey bees, so they tend to spread the pollen around more plants making them fantastic pollinators. So, although solitary bees do not produce honey they are of vital interest to our farmers and ourselves as their pollination activity is responsible for at least 30% of our food.

Sadly, the solitary bee population is decreasing for many reasons including increasing use of chemicals in farming, fewer wildflowers and loss of suitable habitat for nests. This could have a serious impact on farming yields.

Solitary bees are not aggressive. The males have no sting and females will only sting if handled roughly. Learn to love them, we need them as an essential element of our food chain.

**ROGER KIERNAN VOLUNTEER RANGER,
SEVEN SISTERS**



Andrena helvola
mining bee © R.Kiernan



Images – A selection of mining bees spotted on the South Downs at Seven Sisters. Note: the females tend to have hairy back legs. © R.Kiernan



Western Area BBQ at Butser Ancient Farm



Photos © Jenny Deeman

ROMAN REVELS

– A WESTERN DOWNS TEAM SOCIAL

ON A BALMY SUNDAY EVENING IN LATE JUNE, THE WESTERN AREA VOLUNTEER RANGERS GOT TOGETHER FOR THEIR ANNUAL SUMMER BBQ AT BUTSER ANCIENT FARM WHICH IS SITUATED IN GLORIOUS, ROLLING COUNTRYSIDE AT CLANFIELD, HAMPSHIRE.

For those of you who are not familiar with this wonderful place, it is a unique experimental archaeology site with authentic reconstructions of buildings from the Stone Age, Iron Age, and Roman and Anglo Saxon Britain. There are also herds of rare breeds, including goats and sheep and four newcomers: piglets named after Roman emperors!

After a friendly welcome and update from site director Maureen Page, we were lucky enough to be shown around the recently refurbished Roman villa, complete with beautiful frescos and reproduced furnishings that transport the visitor back in time. It was all so compelling that two of us, Russellius and Paulus, who obviously fancied themselves as Roman patricians, were caught reclining on a couch as if they were expecting to be drip-fed grapes. Later on, we met the same two gracing the communal loo – too many grapes, perhaps?

After all that excitement it was almost a relief to return to 21st century, as the inviting aroma of the barbecue beckoned us. Thanks to the stalwart efforts of chefs Neville and Chris and the volunteers who provided a lavish spread, merriment prevailed as the sun sunk slowly over Butser Hill until the happy campers packed up their picnic chairs and boxes and reluctantly bid farewell.

We feel very lucky to receive a £200 budget, provided by the VRS funds, specifically to support social events which are a great opportunity to catch up with volunteers who you may not see that often and meet their partners, who are also invited. About fifty people attended this thoroughly enjoyable occasion this year.

VANESSA HARVEY, VOLUNTEER RANGER,
WESTERN DOWNS

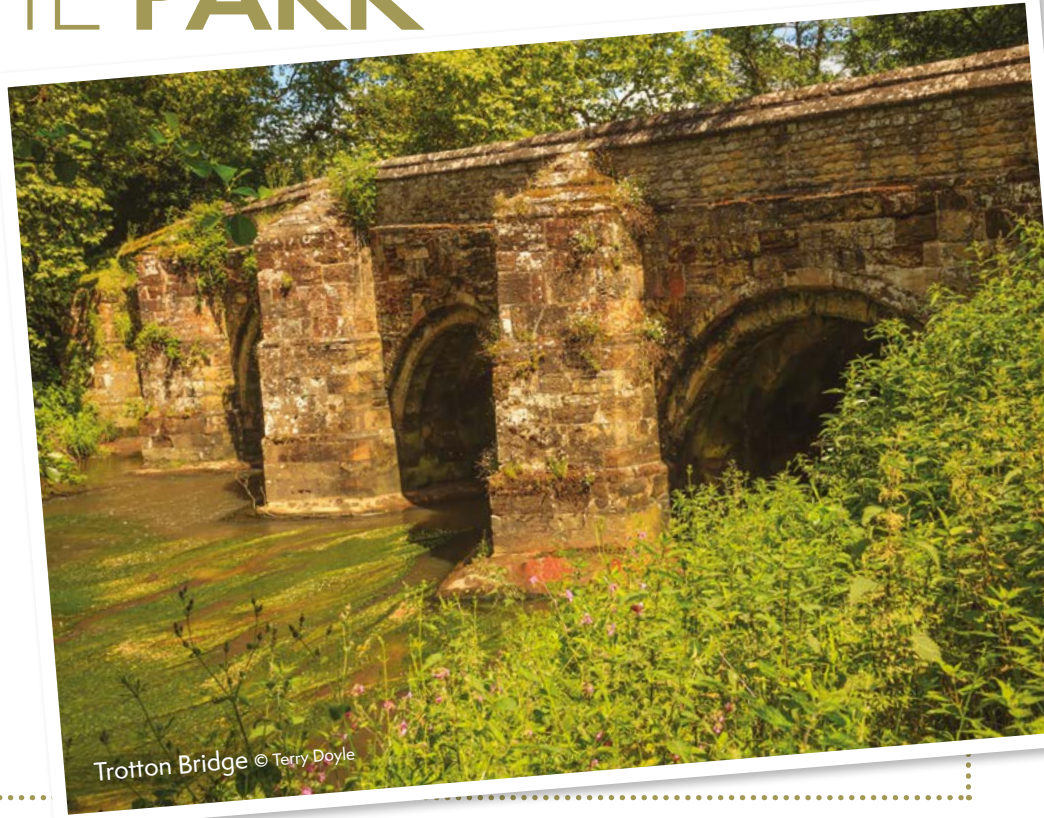
PIC IN THE PARK

TROTTON BRIDGE IS A SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENT

It was built about 1400 by Thomas, the first Lord Camoys, a soldier and diplomat, who was a commander at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415 and was appointed Knight of the Garter a year earlier. He held the Manor of Trotton, and owned other land in Sussex, Hampshire, Northants, Yorkshire and Bedfordshire.

Spanning the River Rother it now carries traffic on the busy A272 between Rogate and Midhurst. Due to it being a Grade 1 Scheduled Ancient Monument and so very narrow, access over the bridge is controlled by traffic lights.

TERRY DOYLE, VOLUNTEER RANGER,
WESTERN DOWNS



STEP ON TO THE SEAFORD HEAD COASTAL PATH

SEAFORD TOWN COUNCIL HAS OFFERED ITS SINCEREST GRATITUDE TO THE SDNPA VOLUNTEERS WHO, UNDETERRED BY THE SEARING JULY HEATWAVE, INSTALLED SOME MUCH-NEEDED NEW STEPS ON ONE OF THE ENTRANCES TO THE SEAFORD HEAD COASTAL PATH.

The volunteers worked with the Council's Head Greenkeeper to dig out and install natural looking steps, which have already been well received by the many walkers that frequent this area on a daily basis and now mean that the path can be used year round.

The footpath takes you from The View and Seaford Head Golf Course straight on to the coastal path; either taking on the exhilarating trek up Seaford Head or down to the very eastern end of the seafront.



Image caption: Seaford Town Council offers its thanks to the volunteers; David Ashton, Martin Bridle, Steve Brookman, Jennifer Butchers, Liddy Davidson, Aled Evans, Stephen Taylor and Mick Woolgar. Some of whom are pictured above.

SIMON LAMBERT, HEAD GREENKEEPER,
SEAFORD TOWN COUNCIL

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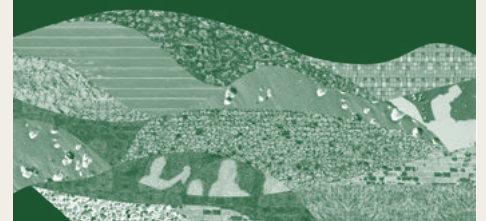
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YOUR REVIEWS

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.

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 NOAH'S ARK INN, LURGASHALL, WEST SUSSEX GU28 9ET

It's not a good sign when the first thing you hear in a pub upon entering is: **"Have you booked a table?"** For this feels less of a pub and more of a restaurant. And whilst the food is excellent, I felt its main virtue was the pub's setting: it stands in

front of the village green and cricket pitch, with the village pond and local shop/post office opposite. So, this is a note to all potential DT contributors, please don't nominate "gastro pubs" for our prestigious "VRS Trad Inn Award".

A COUPLE OF JOKES

A TOMMY COOPER FAVE

I went to the pub the other day and enjoyed a ploughman's lunch.....he was very angry

HERE'S ONE FOR THE HORSEY FOLKS

To Neigh...Or Not To Neigh. That Is Equestrian.

I asked the librarian if the library had any books about paranoia...She whispered: *"They're right behind you."*

CRIS SAVILL, VOLUNTEER RANGER, WEALDEN HEATH AND CENTRAL DOWNS



Fortunately, less than a mile away was a venue that was much more to my taste, so to speak.

THE BLACKDOWN DISTILLERY, LURGASHALL, WEST SUSSEX GU28 9HA.

Whilst this is clearly not a pub, and was once known as the Lurgashall Winery, it is now the Blackdown Distillery. The owner welcomed us in and showed us around. It is a working distillery which has a 'shop' attached. In about a year's time he expects to extend the premises to accept groups and tours, but for now, alongside the distillery, you can buy from a wide range of original spirits, meads

and mixers which are produced on site. The shop opens from 10:00 weekdays and you can guarantee a very personal service. They even mail out orders. Check the website for details. blackdowncellar.co.uk They also cannot win our Trad Inn Award, but it is still well worth a visit.

RUSSELL CLEAVER, VOLUNTEER RANGER, WESTERN DOWNS

CAPTION COMPETITION

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



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

"HONESTLY, THE LAND ROVER KEYS WERE HERE A MOMENT AGO."

JOHN WALTON,
WESTERN AREA VOLUNTEER



DID YOU KNOW?

CHURCHES WITH ROUND TOWERS ARE DISTINCTIVE BUT VERY UNUSUAL.

Many exist in East Anglia, but it is extremely rare to find round tower churches anywhere else. Nevertheless, three can be seen, quite close together in East Sussex, at Lewes, Piddinghoe & Southease. Why so? Why were round towers built, instead of the normal square ones? And why are they so rare?

No-one knows for sure, there are several theories, but it is generally recognised that in the areas where round towers occur in England there is little good building stone available, only flint. And all the existing round towers in England are made of flint. This is probably the key point: the odd shapes of flint do not easily lend themselves to construct corners, they are better used for building thick, even circular, walls.

This fact may help explain why round tower churches are so rare, but either way they remain delightful churches to visit, go and see one for yourself... Many date back to Anglo-Saxon times.

Above: Southease Church, East Sussex
Below: Piddinghoe Church, East Sussex

Both images © Jan Knowlson





© Anne Purkiss

SCRUB BASHING AGAIN?

THE SEASON OF SCRUB BASHING IS UPON US. ALONG WITH THE END OF SUMMER, BIRDS HAVE LEFT THEIR NESTS AND THE SOUNDS OF BRUSH CUTTERS AND LOPPERS CAN ONCE AGAIN BE HEARD FLOATING OVER THE DOWNS.

Scrub bashing is of course our most frequent task every year, but if you've ever spent much thought on why, as conservationists, we do more cutting-down than planting-up then please read on...

It's a popular theory that the whole of Britain was originally covered in forests. But this is rather too much of a generalisation, especially for the Downs, where the thin soils and thousands of years of grazing by animals has led to a flora that has been characterised by grassland. Indeed, many chalk grassland plants have evolved strategies to avoid being grazed, such as creeping grasses and dwarf thistles for example. But the gradual cessation of grazing over the last century has inevitably led to the widespread increase of woody plants, not just on downland but over much of lowland England too.

Consider the many commons we as volunteers have worked on over the last few years. Commons were once very valuable areas where local people could graze their own livestock but it's a rare sight to see animals on a common now. Trees have taken over. See Shortheath Common, for example, where volunteers of both the Western and Central Areas have often bashed scrub. Trees such as birch and pine are ominously dominant. And downland sites are under a similar threat. At Butser Hill, Oxenbourne Down, as its name implies, was once grazed by cattle, but today you'll find heavy scrub, not fine grasses.

So hence the need to reduce the invasion of woody species in favour of the chalk grassland (or heather, if it is a heath). How best to maintain it, in the absence of grazing

livestock, is another argument for another day. Meanwhile, send for the volunteers they can get stuck in. Give 'em leave to light a bonfire and they'll be as happy as Larry. John, get that brushcutter started!

**RUSSELL CLEAVER, VOLUNTEER RANGER,
WESTERN DOWNS**



Oxenbourne Down
© Russell Cleaver



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: **Mountain Warehouse, Clusons, JD Sports/ Millets/Blacks/Ultimate Outdoor, Goodrowes, Rohan, Roger Gunn and Southdown Bikes.** 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.



SCF RECIPIENT: MIDHURST YOUTH TRUST

With spectacular views across the National Park, the 16.5-acre Stedham campsite, run by Midhurst Youth Trust, feels like a small piece of heaven for anyone who loves to camp – but not just anyone gets to come here. The site, run as a community asset, is exclusively available for community groups and no matter how big or small the group is they get the entire site to themselves.

Whether they're young carers, guides or have social, emotional or mental health needs, the families and groups who stay here can run wild, build camps, climb trees and make as much noise as they like without worrying about the neighbours.

As all campers know, and despite the recent heatwave, sometimes it rains. When the Trust's old marquee wore out they decided to replace it with something more fitting to the site. Thanks to a £10,000 contribution from the South Downs National Park Authority's Sustainable Communities Fund (SCF) towards the costs of an excellent improvement to the camping site, this summer the campers have been taking shelter in a stunning new oak and slate structure.

Above: Anne Murphy and Colin Hughes from Midhurst Youth Trust



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PHEASANT FIELD

A HAY MEADOW



Strimming pulling and raking the hay meadow at Pheasant Field © Mark Scott

SUE MILNTHORPE AND PAUL ROBERTS BOUGHT LAG WOOD AND PHEASANT'S FIELD IN HASSOCKS, A FEW MILES NORTH OF BRIGHTON, BACK IN 2013. THEIR OBJECTIVE – TO MANAGE THEM FOR WILDLIFE!

Sue and Paul have reinstated management in the ancient woodland and have been restoring the wildflower meadow that was suffering from neglect and lack of management, ever since. This has involved reintroducing grazing (although this was unsuccessful due to dog attacks), managing the weed species, simulating traditional management through mechanical cut and collect and coppicing the blackthorn around the field for the brown hairstreak butterfly.

The VRS have been helping Sue and Paul with this since 2014. As a relatively new volunteer with the VRS, I really enjoyed the two days we had in May and July this year, helping Sue and Paul to restore their hay meadow. This involved a mixture of strimming, pulling and raking the field. Sue and Paul spoke with such enthusiasm about their diverse approach to the conservation of the meadow and Lag Wood. I found it interesting to discover that although ragwort is a poisonous weed that we pull

out, it also plays host to the caterpillar of the cinnabar moth which is considered a natural biological control for the invasive ragwort. Consequently any ragwort we found with caterpillars attached were left. It was during these sessions that I also found out that SDNPA itself doesn't own any land, we are a 'warden' agency working in conjunction with private landowners and partners.

**MARK SCOTT, VOLUNTEER RANGER,
EASTERN DOWNS (STANMER)**

**SOUTH DOWNS
VOLUNTEER
RANGER SERVICE**

**SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK**

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