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SOUTH DOWNS  
NATIONAL PARK

## South Downs News

# WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **A lasting legacy** Find out about our plans to plant almost 30,000 trees in memory of the Queen to honour her wonderful public service to the nation.
- **Buzzing news!** Discover how new wildflower corridors in the National Park are attracting more pollinators and helping nature bounce back.
- **Autumn adventures** Relax and unwind in the magical treescape of the South Downs.
- **Spooky South Downs!** Learn more about weird and wonderful folklore, myths and legends.

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

## New woodlands to remember the Queen

**More than 28,000 trees will be planted across the South Downs in memory of Her Majesty The Queen.**

As a lasting tribute for her dedication to the nation and its environment, scores of new trees will be planted to create new habitats for nature.

Over 12,000 trees were planted last winter and a further 16,000 are being put into the ground at various sites this coming winter as part of the Trees for the Downs and Queen's Canopy initiative.

A special commemorative elm tree will also be planted at Seven Sisters Country Park, in East Sussex.

Sonia Lorenzo-Martin, who oversees woodlands in the National Park, said: "These life-giving trees are a fitting tribute to the memory of her late Majesty and all her years of public service to the country."

"Trees provide clean air for us to breathe, enrich our soils and provide a vital habitat for so many birds, mammals and invertebrates. Planting more trees is a key component of the National Park's 'ReNature' drive to create more space for wildlife to flourish.



"Trees are also very beautiful and, just like the Queen did, bring joy to people of all ages and backgrounds."

Paying tribute, Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the National Park Authority,

said: "We are grateful for Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II's lifetime of dedication to the nation."



"The landscape of the UK, its rural communities, flora and fauna were particularly dear to the Queen's heart and we will dedicate ourselves to continuing her great legacy."

A book of condolences was available at the South Downs Centre in Midhurst for the public to write in during last month's mourning period.

One tribute read: "An inspirational, wonderful woman who has stood strong and given us strength through all the highs and lows.

"She will be missed."

## Pollinators bounce back



**The South Downs were buzzing with bees and beautiful wildflowers this year, thanks to the success of an inspiring nature project.**

Bee Lines is going from strength to strength, with the South Downs National Park Trust giving 11 grants in recent months to create new wildflower oases at farms, community fields, recreation grounds and road verges.

It comes after eight projects received funding last year and have now blossomed into beautiful areas for bees and butterflies to flourish. Early reports show biodiversity has increased significantly in the new wildflower patches.

Bee Lines launched three years ago to create a new network of wildflower corridors to help support bees and other pollinators.

These insects have been on a steep decline across the UK for several decades and are now under threat from climate change.

New planting will effectively create a “road system” for pollinating insects, allowing them to move through the landscape more easily. The community rallied round to raise £75,000 for the campaign.

Among the projects has been the transformation of a field at Sompting, West Sussex, to create a vibrant wildflower meadow.

Peter King, Director of Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust, said: “The funding from the South Downs National Park Trust has allowed us to create 2.5ha of wildflower meadows on Sompting Brooks.

“Since sowing the seeds, the field has seen exceptional growth and diversity of species. It’s too early to attribute any specific species or biodiversity increases specifically to this meadow habitat, however, we have recorded a 72 per cent increase in pollinator species using the site since the arable fields were reverted to meadow. We have also seen an overall species diversity increase of 98 per cent of monitored species, including birds, bats, reptiles, invertebrates, and small mammals. Overall species records from the site have increased from 179 to 624 since the project as a whole was completed.”

Meanwhile, wildflower corridors have been created at Sussex Meadow, a farm and holiday let business near Petworth.

Sophie Green said: “On quick glance we are noticing more butterflies in the patches with a greater range of species.”

Lewes Cemetery has also been transformed thanks to wildflower planting, with a recent survey finding a total of 55 different species of wildflower at the site.

Chris Bibb, who works at Lewes District Council as a consultant on green projects, said: “The wildflower seeding and plug planting was a great success and the variety of flowers has been popular with visitors to the Cemetery and butterflies, moths, bees and bugs alike.”

Although the £75,000 target has now been reached, the Trust is continuing to seek donations to help further wildflower projects.

Nick Heasman, who leads Bee Lines for the National Park, said: “It’s wonderful to see this wildflower planting making a significant difference to biodiversity and that effect can only multiply in future years as the habitat becomes more established. Bees are vital ecosystem engineers and it’s so important we try to halt and reverse their decline.

“This is nature recovery in action and a key strand of our overarching ReNature project to create new wildlife habitat in the National Park.”

Anyone interested in future rounds of Bee Lines funding should contact Miriam Swan at [grants@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:grants@southdowns.gov.uk) to be put on the notification list

To donate visit [www.southdownstrust.org.uk/beelines/](http://www.southdownstrust.org.uk/beelines/)

Plant conservation charity Plantlife is supporting the project by providing landowners with advice on establishing and enhancing wildflower habitats.



Sompting Meadow before Bee Lines



Sompting Meadow after Bee Lines

## “Reflecting on joyful times”

Writer in Residence Alinah Azadeh looks ahead to the new season after a busy summer of walks and events.



As we head into autumn and uncertain times ahead, I have enjoyed reflecting on a summer full of the joy of being able to share new work and open up our guided walking and writing sessions more publicly, together with fellow writers from our We See You

Now cohort.

Having had a difficult time recovering from Covid, I found this summer's collaborative activities extremely healing.

Exploring a spectrum of themes as we walked and wrote, including belonging, ancestry, change, loss and healing, we covered multiple sites; up and over Exceat Hill at Seven Sisters for the Renature Festival; high above Charleston Farmhouse for The Festival of the Garden with writers Georgina Parke, Razia Aziz, Nina Thaddeus and Georgina About. Freedom From Torture also used our writing prompts on solidarity and healing over the Seven Sisters on their annual fundraiser walk, as part of this year's Refugee Week theme.

Live readings are an important part of us developing new writing now, especially as it will be recorded and sit across the landscape from next spring on Listening Posts, thanks to a commitment from the Authority to further support next year. So I also really enjoyed also trying out work in more urban settings, such as a poetry night at Printer's Playhouse Eastbourne. It was a great compliment to the project to be nominated and shortlisted for a New Perspectives award for Campaign for National Parks.

I loved unpicking the archaeological findings of the Seaford Head cliff fall and working with filmmaker Chip Phillips to create “If You Can Imagine”, a short spoken word film on deep time, climate emergency and heritage loss, which features stunning drone footage. Part of the Seaford Head Archaeology project, it intersects with my own current research and new writing for We See You Now. As I am now sea swimming, Seaford has become an important focal point of my week and a version of this poem will be part of our Listening Posts trail next year. The first story there will be by the writer and educator



Dulani Kulasinghe, who is my guest on this month's Colour of Chalk podcast, **Not So Far Apart**. Expect moving work on climate change through her personal lens and to learn more about legacies of empire in the landscape,

including the WW1 Seaford Caribbean soldiers.

I am likely to go quiet this autumn and winter as I focus on writing, editing and recording with our group, but I plan to share updates on social media and offer a few preview launch readings, so please stay tuned! Thanks to everyone who joined us this summer, especially Jenny Wistreich, a Seven Sisters Warden, for her wayfinding...

## Big birthday for iconic site



**Rachel Guy, Reserve Manager at Kingley Vale, writes about a very special year at one of the most iconic locations in the National Park.**

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the designation of Kingley Vale as a National Nature Reserve (NNR), we've been celebrating the occasion in style.

Located just north of Chichester, Kingley Vale boasts the largest ancient yew forest in Britain, and perhaps one of the best examples in Europe.

Beneath the dense canopy, it's easy to see why humans have been enchanted by the site as it feels like you've entered another world.

The red branches of the trees, many over 500 years old, envelope you as you walk amongst them, all sound muted.

As you emerge from the forest, a wonderful mosaic of rare chalk grassland and scrub take over.

In summer, the site is alive with birds such as yellowhammer singing from the treetops, and insects buzzing through the grassland as they flit between the specialised flowers; birds-foot trefoil, salad burnett, scabious, to name a few.

Raptors take to the skies above the coombe and bronze age burial mounds; red kite, buzzard, peregrine falcon. Winter sees the dramatic weather swoop through the valley and overwintering birds take up residence.

This wonderful mix of habitats and history is what makes Kingley so special, and something worth celebrating.



## Relax in magical treescape



**The warmth of the sun may be waning, but the warmth of the autumn colours in the South Downs National Park is now in full swing.**

With more woodland by area than any other National Park in England and Wales, autumn is a delight in the South Downs and one of the most picturesque times of the year.

The many forests, woods and copses gleam with hues of orange, yellow and red as nature is busy preparing for its winter slumber.

It's the perfect time to connect with nature – an activity that doesn't cost the earth but will make you feel closer to it!

Keep the camera at the ready as the low autumn sun hits the landscape and radiates its beauty – and you could even win £250 by entering the National Park's annual photo competition.

Kate Drake, who leads health and wellbeing for the National Park, says: "As summer begins to fade away, it's easy to hunker down indoors and save our outdoor adventures for the spring.

"But autumn really is a magical time in the South Downs and a time to enjoy all the physical and mental health benefits of being outside in a beautiful space. Almost a quarter of the National Park is covered by woodland and half of this amazing treescape has been there for over 400 years.

"A woodland stroll is good for all the family and a chance to escape the daily treadmill of life without breaking the bank. It's also proven to reduce stress hormones in adults and children alike. If you want to go one step further with your woodland walks, forest bathing is a great option and has been found to lower blood pressure and depression while increasing energy levels.

"Wherever you go in the South Downs this autumn, breathe a little bit easier and soak up the fresh autumnal air and stunning sunsets!"

Here are Kate's tips for a memorable woodland walk in the National Park this autumn:

### **Stansted Forest, West Sussex**

With 1,200 acres of ancient woodland and a patchwork of different ages of coppice, Stansted offers a subtly changing landscape that is a feast for the senses in the autumn.

There are many footpaths and bridleways across the Stansted Park Estate, including the Sussex Border Path, offering opportunities to really soak up the calmness of the woods, all while admiring the timeless view of the historic Stansted House. The forest is very accessible by public transport, with Rowlands Castle railway station a five-minute walk away.

### **Alice Holt Forest, Hampshire**

This serene royal forest in Hampshire is situated some 4 miles (6.4 km) south of Farnham, Surrey. Once predominantly an ancient oak forest, it was particularly noted in the 18th and 19th centuries for the timber it supplied for the building of ships for the Royal Navy in Portsmouth. It's now planted mainly with conifers. The woods are ideal for just about everyone to enjoy some exercise.

### **Friston Forest, East Sussex**

This expansive beech woodland makes a perfect trip out for those who love exploring the countryside. With walking and cycling trails, great views of the Cuckmere and the sweeping South Downs, Friston Forest has something for everyone! Don't forget to make a pitstop at the National Park's new visitor centre at Seven Sisters Country Park – it's crammed with free, fun activities for the whole family and a grab-and-go kiosk for those must-have walking snacks! Buses run regularly from Brighton and Eastbourne to Exceat, so it's a great day-out if you want to leave the car at home.

### **Slindon Woods, West Sussex**

Slindon Estate is 3,500 acres of Sussex woodland, farmland, and downland, all divided by paths, hedges, lanes and tracks. You can explore the estate by 25 miles of public footpaths and bridleways, as well as over 900 acres of open access woodland. Take in the long wide views down to the Weald, along the Downs, and out across the coastal plain to the sea.

### **West Walk, Hampshire**

Covering over 800 acres, West Walk is the largest remaining fragment of the former medieval hunting ground, the Forest of Bere. Just a stone's throw from busy Fareham and Portsmouth, this forest includes a Miles Without Stiles route suitable for people with restricted mobility, including wheelchair users and families with pushchairs.



### **Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Hampshire**

Located just off the A3, this is one of the most accessible woodland sites in the National Park. Featuring 2,000 acres of open access woodland and downland, its crowning glory is Butser Hill, which at 271m is the highest point on the South Downs chalk ridge and offers some of the best views you'll find anywhere in the south of England. And, if you go down to the woods, you're sure of a big surprise...in the form of a beautifully-crafted giant's head! The incredible sculpture, made of woven tree branches, depicts Ascapart, a legendary giant from Hampshire folklore. It's the ideal spot for some forest bathing and quiet contemplation!

Entries for the photo competition close on 31 October. Find out more [here](#).

## Working to reconnect nature

**Dr Martin Wilkie, Conservation Biologist at Marwell Wildlife, writes about how we can help to build ecological resilience.**



Nature is incredibly adaptable and has amazing capacity to bounce back and respond to change, especially from human disturbance. In the conservation sector this is called 'ecological resilience'. It is a concept

we can all think about and build into wild spaces of our own, to some degree.

Building resilience across wild spaces can be achieved by even the smallest of natural areas. This is because it's not just about a single contribution to natural recovery, it's about collective areas and the network of ecological connections that can re-establish within and between them.

However big or small, allowing an area to recover for nature can be hugely beneficial for local wildlife and potentially more widely too. This could look like any number of things, such as relaxing pruning or mowing regimes for a season, thinking about wildlife corridors using hedges or bushes, creating wild spaces in out of the way areas (for example, unused parts of your garden) or even installing wildflower mats on a shed or garage roof to act as ecological steppingstones. The key is variability!

Adding a wide variety of different vegetation structures or a combination of ground and vegetation cover, which support varied native species or communities, is critical. The variability allows a mosaic of different habitats to recover, attracting a whole host of diverse flora and fauna. It also supports ecological relationships like pollination, disease regulation and predation. These relationships are strengthened by the connections and linkages with other nearby areas. The closer a cluster of wild spaces are, and the more of them, the less resistance there is for wildlife to move around and the higher the capacity for expansion. Imagine an electrical circuit board with lots of multiple connections – just gradually growing and becoming a lot messier!

For conservation managers, our work centres around accelerating the recovery of nature. We do our best to divert and minimise the impacts of human activities, but we can also help speed up the recovery process; allowing nature to take the lead. For instance, the projects we oversee at Marwell Wildlife help restore natural processes by managing invasive species in open grasslands, supporting native tree regeneration in ancient woodlands and creating new areas on heathlands for the seed bank to recolonise

The protected areas we manage are all connected, sometimes closely, sometimes not, but allowing ease of movement throughout the landscape is important. This is key for ecological resilience and will ensure adaptability and ability to resist or bounce back.

We can all do the same in our own small areas: those pocket-sized corners of connectivity for wildlife. They all make a difference and help build a stronger network for nature and people. How will you help to reconnect nature?

**Marwell Zoo competition – [click here for details!](#)**

## A first trip to the South Downs



**Earlier this year four young people from London and Birmingham visited the South Downs National Park for the very first time.**

The visit was organised by Kwesia, aka "City Girl in Nature", who runs her own outdoor adventure website, and was supported by the charity Campaign for National Parks through their brilliant New Perspective bursaries.

The quartet of Kwesia, Palmiro, Mera and Toheeb explored the different landscapes in and around Seven Sisters Country Park, which was a perfect venue for the visit with its varied and striking habitats including Friston Forest, the iconic coastline, the chalk hills and Cuckmere River. I warmly welcomed the team at Brighton train station and we rode on Bus 12 together to Seven Sisters where the filming took place.

As well as the film participants, the weather also played its part, with a mix of changing atmospheric conditions, from the stunning bright sunlight to the damp cool drizzles; shiny bright silver to dull deep blue cloud ceilings, all adding character to the final piece.

Kwesia's words about the film are profound and really resonate with me as the National Park's Engagement Officer.

She says: "Just a year ago I didn't know what a National Park was. This was my first time in the South Downs National Park. The landscape's ability to recover and heal is phenomenal. Stories of deep history, migration and movement which mirrors stories of my own communities. Nature speaks. My mind is at peace. Being on this journey of connecting with Mother Earth in so many different ways. I not only am exploring the world around me I'm, exploring myself."

The National Park is truly a place where people and place come together and seeing completely different perspectives on this place many know so well, shows how important it is to share different voices and experiences of our treasured landscapes. We've always been a National Park for everyone and long may this continue. We'll go on encouraging individuals, families and groups from all walks of life to find a "home away from home" in the beautifully-diverse natural spaces of the South Downs. Easy access, well-marked places, a lovely community presence, and easily accessible shops and facilities makes this one amazing National Park for all. Soon we hope to be able to share the work of another young New Bursaries winner, who has also chosen to base their exploration in the South Downs National Park.

Watch "[Moments in Nature](#)" here.

**Joshua Esan, Engagement and Events Officer**

## Energy-saving tips from town's climate group



**A Petersfield climate action group is encouraging people to live a more sustainable lifestyle as we head into the winter months in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis.**

This summer local charity Petersfield Climate Action Network (PeCAN) and Petersfield Town Council hosted the town's first ever eco fair.

Amelia Gabriel, organiser and project officer at PeCAN, said: "The eco fair was a huge success and we would like to say a massive thank you to everybody who came along to celebrate our planet and to raise awareness of the plight of climate change.

"Climate change is real and it is happening now and we are encouraged to see so many people from across our community with a passion for an eco-friendly lifestyle."

Meanwhile, PeCAN is also running The Petersfield Area Super Homes (PASH) project as a way for people to make their homes warm and comfortable while reducing their energy bills and their carbon footprint.

A professional retrofit coordinator visits your home and carries out an independent, impartial survey. Recommendations typically include loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, double glazing, solar panels, ventilation and finally, the possibility of ditching the boiler and installing a heat pump instead.

Although there is a cost associated with the plan, there are subsidies that you may be eligible for.

If you would like to find out more about a Whole House Retrofit Plan, please email [superhomes@petersfieldcan.org](mailto:superhomes@petersfieldcan.org) or visit [www.petersfieldcan.org](http://www.petersfieldcan.org)

PeCan's energy-saving tips:

- Limit use of the tumble dryer - using it three times a week costs around £54 a year.
- Replace inefficient light bulbs with LED ones and ensure you turn lights off when you're not in the room.
- Cover pots and pans when you're cooking and use your slow cooker.
- Turn down your thermostat - for every degree you turn it down you could reduce your energy bill by 4%.
- Choose thermal or heavy curtains to keep out draughts.

## Give 'em pumpkin to talk about this autumn!



**Would you like to pick your own special pumpkin this Halloween?**

The South Downs National Park has number of huge pumpkin patches that offer an enchanting experience for all the family this autumnn.

**Sompting Pumpkins** will be opening their field gates at Halewick Lane, offering crafts, tractor rides, local food and drink, and over 70,000 amazing pumpkins of all shapes, varieties and sizes.

At the end of October, any unsold pumpkins will be donated to local soup kitchens, used as animal feed or broken down to use on fields at the farm to increase soil fertility ready for growing more crops and pumpkins in the months ahead.

Caroline Harriott, a tenant farmer who grows pumpkins, said: "Conservation and environmental impact are taken very seriously at our Lychpole site where sustainable farming underpins everything we do."

Sompting Estate has installed a borehole that supplies most of the farm's water and planted large areas of wildflowers to attract bumble bees, other insects and wild birds. There are also fallow areas that encourage rare birds, such as the once almost extinct grey partridge.

Meanwhile, **Rogate Pumpkin Patch** returns for 2022, with pumpkin-themed outdoor events and spooky experiences such as Merlin's Wood and Dracula's Estate.



**Poynings Pumpkin Patch**, near Brighton, will also be offering opportunities to pick your own pumpkin.

## Spooky South Downs!



**The Downs are shrouded in a mysterious mist and there's a frightful chill in the air. Spooky season has arrived.**

With some of the darkest skies in England and an abundance of nocturnal wildlife, it's no wonder autumn and winter stir up a swirling cauldron of myths, legends, and folklore.

The hills and valleys harbour many a tale passed down the generations and some of these accounts are a little bit creepy!

So, for Halloween 2022, the National Park's very own storyteller Dawn Nelson shares 10 intriguing tales that are guaranteed to ignite the imagination.

The bard has also helped to produce three short videos, sharing some of her favourite lores of the landscape.

Dawn, who is Place and Interpretation Officer for the National Park, says: "Beneath the rolling downs, misty woods and ancient barrows are layers of voices. Humans are storytelling animals and the history of the landscape is woven into some really weird and wonderful stories.



"Our brains are geared to recognise the patterns and rhythms within stories and folktales which can help us to connect with the amazing heritage and nature in the South Downs.

"A big part of our work at the National Park Authority is connecting people to place and folklore is a great place to start. These local legends certainly add to the magic of the beautiful landscape, so I would encourage people to get out and explore this autumn and winter!"

### Tichborne, Hampshire

The Tichborne Dole still takes place to this day and is the tradition of giving a measure of flour to all those in the community who need it. The story behind it involves Lord Tichborne and his wife Lady Mabella. She would give alms to the poor every year but her husband did not agree with it. When she lay dying she made her husband promise to continue it. He said that he would give as much flour as the land she could walk on would give. She

dragged herself out of bed and crawled around 23 acres of land before getting back into bed and cursing her husband.

She said that if he did not keep his promise then one year there would be seven sons born and the next seven daughters. With the seven daughters the Tichborne name would die out. In 1796 the lord got fed up with 'too many beggars' and so stopped giving alms to the poor. The curse came true with several heirs dying and the house burning to the ground. The tradition was then reinstated and has happened every year since.

### Owslebury, Hampshire

Marwell Hall is one of the locations of the "Mistletoe Bride" legend.

A bride goes missing on her wedding night while playing hide and seek and people think she's run away. In truth she became stuck in a chest and could not get out, starved to death and died. She now haunts the hall.

### Chanctonbury Ring, West Sussex

This popular spot is reputed to be one of the most haunted locations on the South Downs. The beech trees that circle the ring were first planted in 1760. But long before it was the site of Bronze Age burials, Iron Age forts and a Roman temple. According to local stories, walking widdershins (anti clockwise) seven times round the ring will summon the Devil, ready to offer you a bowl of milk, soup or porridge in exchange for your soul.

### Upwaltham, West Sussex

Ol' Sary Weaver lived at Upwaltham and was a village wise woman in the 1800s. Local lore tells of her being a witch who could turn herself into a hare.

According to the legend, two country workers were resting under a hedge and when they saw a hare bounding along they had their suspicions it was actually an old woman from the village.

A stone was thrown at the hare's leg and the creature let out a screech. That night Ol' Sary Weaver was seen in the village hobbling to her cottage, struggling with the same leg.



### Mount Caburn, East Sussex

A giant called Gil is said to have walked the slopes of the hill, hurling his hammer from the summit. A nearby barrow that once stood on the site of the chalk quarry near Glynde railway crossing, was called 'Gil's Grave'. Other places bearing the giants name include Gil's Ridge near Crowborough and Gil's Lap in Ashdown Forest.



There are other stories of a silver coffin and a knight in golden armour at Mount Caburn.

For more spooky South Downs stories click [here](#).

## Things to do in the South Downs this October

Please follow the links as booking may be necessary. Find these and more events across the National Park and submit your own events at [southdowns.gov.uk/events/](https://southdowns.gov.uk/events/)



- Enjoy a [fascinating exhibition in Lewes](#) with “Stories seen through a glass plate: In their footsteps”. This exhibition, from the Edward Reeves Archive, sees historic photographs of Lewes and its people displayed on lightboxes throughout the town centre until 23 October.
- Visit a new exhibition at [Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft](#) from 22 October. Shōji Hamada: A Japanese Potter in Ditchling will explore how a young potter’s visit to a tiny village in East Sussex shaped the course of the craft movement in both Britain and Japan.
- Head to [Butser Ancient Farm](#) during the half-term holidays to learn about the turning of the seasons, known to our ancestors as Samhain. Discover more with a themed trail, handling sessions, and craft activities.
- Enjoy family fun at the Weald and Downland Living Museum which is running activities themed around [“Horrible Tasks of the Past”](#) during the half-term.
- Head to [RSPB Pulborough Brooks](#) during the half-term for a “Spellbinding Spiders” family Halloween trail.

## 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? Or would you like to pen your own article about why you love the South Downs? 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)

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