

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Tremendous!** As 2023 draws to a conclusion, well over 23,000 trees are going into the ground to bring a boost to local wildlife and helping to create climate resilience in the future.
- **Festive walks** It's the most wonderful time of the year, but can also be rather chaotic! We bring you some ideas on how to enjoy this tranquil winter wonderland with some serene walks.
- **Christmas country park** The magic of Yuletide comes to Seven Sisters.
- **THANK YOU** We offer thanks for all the volunteers who have gone the extra mile this year.

As always, please send your comments and ideas to us at newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk

Major tree planting brings big boost for nature

More than 23,000 trees are being planted this winter across the South Downs National Park to help wildlife flourish and increase resilience to climate change.

Scores of trees are going into the ground at 20 new sites across Sussex and Hampshire.

It's yet another big step forward as the Trees for the Downs campaign edges closer to its target of planting 100,000 trees across the region. The initiative was launched exactly four years ago and this new phase of planting will mean well over 60,000 new trees across 114 different sites.

The tree planting is restoring those lost to pests and diseases, including Ash Dieback and Dutch Elm Disease, as well as creating new habitat for wildlife and amenity value for local communities. The trees are a mixture of disease-resistant elm trees and native species, such as oak and black poplar, and sites include schools, farms, recreation grounds and historic parks.



The planting has been made possible by generous donations from the public and businesses to the



South Downs National Park Trust, the official independent charity for the National Park. A boost came from The American Express Foundation's grant to National Parks UK, part of which went to Trees for the Downs and meant 5,000 trees could be planted. American Express colleagues also provided volunteering support.

Around £230,000 has been raised so far and further donations will mean even more trees can be planted.

It comes as research from the Woodland Trust shows one third of all woodland species in the UK are in decline and one in 10 is at risk of extinction.

Nick Heasman, a Countryside and Policy Manager for the National Park, said: "Our treescape supports a wealth of wildlife, from rare insects, to nesting birds and complex fungi. They also give us air to breathe, with a single mature tree producing enough oxygen in a year to sustain 10 people."

SDNPA welcomes Government pledge to match their ambitions with resources needed to deliver

The National Park Authority has responded to a Government announcement about potential extra funding for protected landscapes and the creation of a new National Park.



Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "We welcome today's pledge by the Government to match their ambitions for nature with new, adequate resources. An investment in National Parks and

Protected Landscapes is a great first step to delivering on the Government's plans for nature announced today.

"As the UK's newest National Park, we know that a new National Park, adequately funded with additional funding is great news for nature and people. We stand ready to use our experience to mentor and provide support to the new National Park."

"Our ambitious ReNature Campaign is delivering nature everywhere, for everyone through securing an additional 13,000ha, or 33% of land managed for nature by 2030. Since its launch in 2021, 5,573 ha of land has been secured or managed for nature – 42% of the 13,000ha target. The SDNPA has been working hard with our partners and communities since 2019 to deliver on the full aspirations of the Landscape Review. Working directly in partnership with landowners on the ground we have launched our ReNature Credits – demonstrating how green finance can both scale up and speed up nature recovery in a way that is good for nature, provides nature-based solutions to climate change and supports a thriving rural economy."

"We have been working hard together as a protected landscape family to help achieve net zero and, in the South Downs National Park, we have been investing in supporting communities to cut emissions, and trial new sustainable and nature-based solutions."

Trevor added: "We welcome a commitment to continuing the fantastic work of the Generation Green project, where as part of the Access Unlimited Coalition, the National Park family helped provide more than 115,000 opportunities for young people to connect with nature, many for the very first time. Over the last two years alone the SDNPA has enabled more than 12,000 schoolchildren to be able to connect with nature and the great outdoors through our Outdoor Learning Grant, shared the wonder of our dark night skies with more than 600,000 people, and created new accessible routes and opportunities so that everyone to experience the National Park.

"We look forward to working with Defra on the details of what today's announcement means to furthering the South Downs National Park's innovative and ambitious work for nature, climate and people."

"However, our wonderful trees are under unprecedented threat from an ever-increasing number of pests and diseases, as well as climate change. They're under threat from climate change, but trees are also part of solution as the ultimate carbon capturer. The entire woodland ecosystem plays a massive role in locking up carbon, including the wood, roots, leaves, soils and associated plants.

"Increasing the number and diversity of our native trees, and carefully introducing new species into the landscape, is going to be a big help in responding to all these threats and also helping to reverse biodiversity loss.

"By the end of this winter, we'll have planted over 60,000 trees as part of Trees for the Downs and it's something we can all be proud of. None of it would have been possible without the support of local communities and businesses who have gone the extra mile to give back to nature and I'd like to say a big 'thank you'.

"Trees for the Downs is a key part of the National Park's inspiring ReNature drive, which is seeking to create thousands of hectares of new wildlife havens to help nature bounce back and it continues to go from strength to strength."

A batch of trees were delivered to Woodingdean, near Brighton, and the community helped to plant the trees. Clare Millett Hopkins,



Chair of Woodingdean Wilderness Group, said: "It's been a lovely opportunity to bring everyone together, of all ages, to plant the trees and support our wildlife and build an appreciation for our natural environment."

Cllr Chris Corcoran, from Twyford Parish Council, in Hampshire, said: "Trees for the Downs raises the profile, ensures we are planting the right trees in the right places and it supplies the 30 trees we need."

Trees for the Downs has been made possible with special thanks to: The many individuals who have donated, American Express Foundation, Aspinal of London, The Boltini Trust, Chalk Cliff Trust, Friends of the South Downs, Higgidy, Jude's, Nyetimber, South East Water, Southern Co-op and Willmott Dixon.

During National Tree Week, a number of American Express colleagues, based at the company's Brighton and Burgess Hill offices, rolled up their sleeves to help with coppicing and hedgelaying at a site near Lewes.



To donate to Trees for the Downs click [here](#).

To make an application for potential tree planting next year, visit this [webpage](#).

Embrace the tranquillity of the South Downs



It's the most wonderful time of the year – and can also be one of the most stressful.

The sting of the Christmas rush, the biting cold, travelling long distances and relentless multi-tasking to ensure the big day goes to plan are enough to leave anyone feeling a bit frazzled.

But there is an antidote to this hubbub – the amazing tranquillity and serenity of the South Downs National Park.

With 3,300km (2,050 miles) of rights of way, the South Downs offers so many opportunities to escape the rush and enjoy uplifting walks with loved ones.

Kate Drake, health and wellbeing officer for the National Park, is offering a selection of stress-busting, endorphin-boosting walks across Hampshire, West Sussex and East Sussex.

It comes as a report by the Office of National Statistics revealed an estimated 1.1 million fewer people across the UK gained health benefits from spending time in nature in 2022 compared with two years earlier during a pandemic peak. However, while people are spending less time in nature than they did three years ago, overall the population is spending more time outdoors than they did a decade ago.

Kate said: "Christmas is such a magical time, but we all know the run-up can be quite stressful as we all rush around to get everything ready.



"This beautiful National Park is on the doorstep to well over 2m people and is such a great way to escape into a peaceful winter wonderland this festive season.

"There are many neuroscience studies showing that green environments are associated with a reduction in stress, improved mood, more positive emotions and decreases in

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anxiety and rumination. Growing evidence is also showing that walking in green spaces can even be good for powers of imagination and problem-solving!

"So wrap up warm, pack a few mince pies and head out with your family and friends for a Christmassy walk that is guaranteed to leave you feeling revitalised and ready for more celebrations!

"As always, leave no trace and do keep dogs on leads around livestock."

Here are some of Kate's suggestions for walks over the festive season:

Hampshire

Old Winchester Hill



As the hedgerows sparkle with festive red berries, Old Winchester Hill is a stunning spot for a stroll over the holidays. Jaw-dropping views across fields and out to The Solent make it a great spot to explore the ramparts of this Iron Age hillfort.

Butser Hill

What better spot to blow away the cobwebs than atop of Butser Hill? Situated just south of the picturesque market town of Petersfield, this beautiful site sits within Queen Elizabeth Country Park and on a clear crisp day has 360 degree views stretching out across the Weald and all the way to the English Channel. For some tasty treats to keep the cold at bay, head to Butser Roundhouse Café at the top of the hill which is open Thursday to Sunday.

St Catherine's Hill

With its historic streets and magical Christmas market, Winchester sits at the western end of the South Downs National Park and is a great city to visit in December. Combine a peruse of the stalls with a walk up St Catherine's Hill. This gem of a nature reserve is a fabulous place to work off the festive indulgences, whether you stroll along the flat riverside path or climb the steps to discover the Iron Age hillfort and gaze out across the twinkling cityscape.

St Hubert's, Idsworth

Taking in the unique 'Little Church in the Field' and a perfect festive lunch spot in front of the open fire at The

Red Lion in Chalton, [this walk](#) has everything a yuletide stroll in the countryside needs. Wind your way through rolling Hampshire downland, leaving time for pausing at the top of the hills to take in the quintessential English countryside.

West Walk, near Fareham



If you're on the hunt for an easy access route this Christmas season, have a peek at West Walk.

With hardy surfaced paths winding their way between tall pine trees and a fun adventure woodland play area for the children, this is a perfect spot for a merry stress-free day out in the woods. Check out the National Park's Miles Without Stiles route here - [West Walk loop – Forest of Bere](#).

West Sussex

Harting Hill

With beautiful views out across the Weald, Harting Hill is a lovely place for a festive family stroll or a longer hike with friends, before dropping into Harting Village to visit the pub or coffee shop. With a paid National Trust car park, there are benches just a short way away for those who would like to just sit and take in the scenery!

Iping and Stedham Common, near Midhurst

Sandy paths, misty mounds and berry-laden hedges can be found on Iping and Stedham Commons in West Sussex. For those with mobility scooters this easy access route makes for a joyful jaunt in this special heathland landscape. Check out [Iping and Stedham Commons easy walk](#)

Haslemere

Discover the highest hill in the South Downs National Park at Black Down – a commanding view at 280m. It's situated just outside picturesque Haslemere which will be alight with Christmas lights at this time of year. This 8-mile walk is a great way to work off the festive food while enjoying a section of the 65-mile long distance route, The Serpent Trail. Check out [Haslemere to Fernhurst circular walk](#)

Cissbury Ring

This stunning site, just north of the coastal town of Worthing, is one of the jewels in the crown of the South Downs National Park. On a clear day you can



see all the way to the Seven Sisters beyond Brighton and as far as the Isle of Wight. Explore the largest hill-fort in Sussex with this circular walking route - [Cissbury Ring circular](#)

Arundel

With its gothic style castle and cosy shops, Arundel is a must visit during the festive season. Before exploring the historic town's nooks and crannies, try this bracing walk

up over Arundel Park before returning alongside the tranquil River Arun. Check out [Circular walk from Arundel to South Stoke](#)

East Sussex

The Chattri, near Brighton

Suitable for class 3 all-terrain mobility scooters, this easy access route to the peaceful Chattri war memorial makes for a thoughtful afternoon escape. Starting at the picturesque Jack and Jill windmills, enjoy the breathtaking views out across the Sussex Weald before working your way along a section of the 100 mile South Downs Way National Trail. Find out more here: [Easy access walk to the Chattri Memorial](#)

Ditchling Beacon to Devil's Dyke



Try this seven-mile linear hike along the crest of the South Downs and soak up the history of these two Iron Age hill forts. With buses from Brighton

serving both the start and the end, this route is a great way to escape the sofa, work off the extra indulgences and leave the car at home. Check out [Ditchling Beacon to Devil's Dyke](#)

Alfriston and River Cuckmere

Explore the historic village of Alfriston and the winding River Cuckmere on this circular stroll. Remember to look for the chalky White Horse of Litlington carved into the hillside, and enjoy a multitude of over-wintering birds that spend Christmas on the Cuckmere meanders. Find out more at [Alfriston and River Cuckmere circular](#)

Stanmer Park, Brighton

With Bronze Age barrows, a picturesque church, rolling downland and intriguing woodlands, Stanmer Park on the edge of Brighton is a perfect spot for a family day out in the Christmas holidays. Make time to pop into the One Garden café for some festive treats. [Stanmer Park circular walk](#)



Lewes Rail to Ramble

Adorned with lights and festive décor, historic Lewes is a great town to visit over the Christmas period. Try this Rail to Ramble Lewes route for a 6 mile wander through the surrounding countryside, before heading to one of the many cafes or pubs for a festive tippie. [Lewes Rail to Ramble circular](#)

For more walks head to the National Park's [walking hub](#).

Hedge to connect two National Parks



An inspiring project to connect the South Downs National Park and the New Forest National Park with a green corridor of hedgerows has begun.

The countryside charity, CPRE Hampshire, launched its flagship project The Hampshire Hedge on the Compton Farm estate just outside Winchester.

Ecology students from the University of Sparsholt were joined by over 80 invited guests to enjoy a day of hedge planting and see demonstrations of the ancient craft of hedge laying.

The project has received funding from National CPRE Hedgerow Heroes project, The Linbury Trust and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The three-year project that will connect the two National Parks with a network of hedgerows forming a green corridor of new and restored habitat. The hedgerow is planned to wind its way for about 14 miles (22km) through the central Hampshire parishes and link woodlands, meadows, local nature reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

Hampshire is unique in that it has two National Parks and three National Landscapes (formerly AONBs) in its boundary, making up over 40 per cent of its land area.

Ellie Banks, CPRE Hampshire hedgerow project officer, said: "It is great to be starting the planting element of the project, our target is to plant three miles of new hedging this year, which is 25,000 whips going into the ground this winter."

More than half of England's rural hedgerows have been lost since 1945.

Chris Lickley, Ranger for the Western Downs, added: "Myself and Assistant Ranger Ethan led on the hedge planting for the day, instructing how to plant for a dense, stock-proof hedge and explaining the benefits of planting a native, species-rich mix to attract the most wildlife and provide corridors to link fragmented habitats."

The magic of Christmas comes to Seven Sisters!



A Christmas extravaganza is coming to the visitor centre and historic barn at Seven Sisters Country Park for an action-packed weekend of festive fun.

With mince pies and mulled wine aplenty, the visitor facilities are being transformed into a winter wonderland of gift stalls, Christmas crafts and activities, choir singing and locally-produced fare for all the family to enjoy.

The celebrations take place from **10am to 4pm this weekend, 9 and 10 December**, and admission is free.

The Christmas market will feature 27 stalls in the visitor centre and pump barn, while 14 stalls will be at the Salthouse Farmhouse, which will be hosting the choral performances on the Sunday. People will be able to enjoy locally-crafted South Downs beer and wines from the special bar area. The Sunday includes the opportunity to make your own stunning Christmas wreath in a pre-bookable workshop.

As well as stocking up on gifts for loved ones, the weekend is also an opportunity to find out more about the South Downs National Park. The National Park's events and engagement team will be on site, offering tips on places to visit over the festive season and sharing stargazing tips to help people make the most of the International Dark Sky Reserve.

People can also learn more about the amazing geology, history and wildlife of Seven Sisters and try out one of the free audio trail adventures in the country park.

Claire Onslow, who manages Seven Sisters Country Park, said: "This is only the second Christmas for us in the newly-refurbished visitor facilities, so we're really pulling out all the stops this year to bring on the festive cheer and showcase the country park.

"So, wrap up warm and let's celebrate the most wonderful time of the year! I know we're all dreaming of a white Christmas, but if we don't get it, the stunning Seven Sisters will still be as white as ever!"

Volunteering in the winter



With the change of seasons comes a distinct shift in the profile of a ranger's work and in turn the activities of our wonderful volunteers.

If the faraway first green flushes of spring felt like a reward for the travails of the previous winter, then summer has been a time for planning: monitoring the success of past projects and refining preparations for new ones.

From a habitat management perspective, autumn and winter is when our volunteers are extra busy.

The National Park's volunteers come from all walks of life and every volunteer, no matter how much time they can give, is an integral part of conserving and enhancing this treasured landscape. Ultimately, it's all one big National Park family of working towards a common goal – helping nature thrive and keeping the South Downs a special place for everyone to enjoy, now and in the future.

While the focus of summer could be counting butterflies and poring over wildflower keys, winter sees a shift in focus to coppicing, hedge-laying and tree planting.

Autumn and winter are the season for helping our woodland habitats. Managing woodland for produce as well as biodiversity gives a real sense of achievement, whether coppicing hazel or felling conifers to restore plantations on ancient woodland sites.

Well-ordered piles of stakes and binders for use in hedge-laying projects, chestnut fencing materials or cord-wood stacked up to be processed for charcoal or firewood are a joy to behold, and it's satisfying to know that the light streaming through the opened canopy will bring new life in the spring.

Rangers and volunteers alike often get asked what it's like working outdoors in the cold and wet of winter, and the truth is they love it! In practice they can usually avoid the most extreme weather and the crisp, fresh autumnal mornings offer some of the finest sights in the South Downs: the russet hues of the changing leaves on Ebernoe Common, or a temperature inversion over the Arun valley.

From a wildlife perspective, highlights of winter volunteering include the drama of the deer rut, the vibrant colours of woodland fungi such as amethyst deceiver, chicken of the woods and fly agaric, and epic starling murmurations. There's always something interesting to spot, and the variety brought by the change in seasons is one of the things that makes a volunteer's role so interesting and enjoyable.

Regular volunteering can be incredibly rewarding and help physical and mental well-being.

With lots of outdoor-focused organisations looking for volunteers there's something out there to suit everyone, regardless of your age or fitness level. If you're interested in volunteering for the South Downs National Park, finding out more about our Youth Action programme for young people aged 16-25 or learning about how to micro-volunteer, have a look at the volunteering section on our website [here](#)

Five Quick Ways to Volunteer this Winter

Litter pick – whether it's off the pavement on your morning commute, pulling it out of the hedge on a dog walk or doing a beach clean while enjoying a seaside stroll, picking up litter when you see it can help ensure wildlife don't ingest any harmful substances and can help prevent microplastics entering the soil system.

Feed the birds – with berries thinning out and other food sources reducing, birds are on the hunt for more sustenance. If you have an outside space put out more feeders during the colder months and make sure to break any ice on ponds, or pots of water to offer a drink. If you don't have an outside space try a window feeder.



Record what you see – using an app like **iNaturalist** to record the wildlife you see throughout the winter months can help scientists to monitor species, and can be a great way to feel more connected to the nature around you whether you live in the countryside or a city.

Rights of Way Monitoring – if you spot a broken stile, fallen tree or any signs of damage to fences or signs while out exploring the countryside, take a moment to report the issues to the relevant local highways authority. This takes only a few minutes but helps ensure everyone can enjoy the countryside safely.

Help the little things – bugs and beetles, ladybirds and moths, bees and butterflies, and many more little creatures need a home and safe space to hide away from predators. Have a go at making a bug hotel, however big or small, these insect homes provide welcomed shelter and warmth.

As 2023 comes to a close, we'd would like to say a big THANK YOU to all the volunteers who make such a wonderful contribution to protecting and enhancing the South Downs National Park.

Design Awards return!



Previous winner Ditchling Museum

An exciting awards scheme to celebrate outstanding and innovative design in the South Downs National Park returns bigger and better than ever.

After a five-year break, the prestigious South Downs Designs Awards are back with an extended line-up of categories.

The awards celebrate high standards of urban, architectural and landscape design, as well as promote creativity and understanding of the National Park through design.

The South Downs National Park has one of the most unique built environments within a protected landscape in the UK. As Britain's most populated National Park with over 118,000 residents, it spans 15 different local authority areas across three counties and has four bustling market towns. It boasts 167 conservation areas – more than any other National Park in the UK – as well as 18 distinctive landscape types, over 1,000 designated spaces for wildlife and well over 5,800 listed buildings. Dealing with around 5,000 planning cases a year, the National Park is one of the country's top 30 busiest Planning Authorities.

Tim Slaney, Director of Planning at the South Downs National Park, said: "The South Downs is such a special place and, since the National Park was created 13 years ago, we've seen some incredible and innovative design projects come to fruition, so many of them paying homage to this treasured landscape.



"Good design is an integral part of good planning and contributes to the long-term vitality of our local environments and communities.

"These awards are about celebrating exceptional projects past and present, as well as looking ahead to the future and investigating new ideas for development in the National Park. The competition is wide open and we're looking forward to seeing the breadth of nominations."

The categories will be:

Residential – includes completed extensions, single buildings, small and large housing developments, and visitor accommodation.

Non-residential – includes completed commercial, industrial, farming, infrastructure, recreation, and leisure developments.

Conservation – includes completed historic parks and gardens, historic buildings, monuments, as well as excellent craftsmanship.

Future projects – includes projects that celebrate distinction in unbuilt projects on paper and the potential for positive contribution to the National Park, its communities and the planet.

Winners will receive a specially designed trophy, beautifully hand-carved in South Downs oak by acclaimed West Sussex-based sculptor, Alison Crowther. All the shortlisted entries across the four categories will be put forward to a public poll and the project with the most votes will win the People's Choice Award.

Nominations will open on 1 January, 2024 and finish on 30 April. The shortlist will be announced in the summer of 2024, with a glittering awards ceremony taking place in the autumn. People will be able to nominate by visiting www.southdowns.gov.uk/designawards

Thank you for taking the time to read the National Park's newsletter this year. We hope you have a joyful and restful festive break and look forward to seeing you in 2024 for more exciting news, updates, events and activities from your National Park.



Pic credits:

Christmas greeting – Larry Van Howe, P1 AK Purkiss; P3 Becca Saunders; P4 Jamie Fielding; P5 right Andrew Horner; P6 (robin) Corinne Kozok; P7 ATS Heritage.