

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Photo competition returns!** For our 15th birthday, we want you to share photographs showcasing your favourite things about the South Downs National Park – and you could win £250!
- **National Walking Month** Discover ideas for trying something new this walking season.
- **Toadally tremendous!** Learn about the iconic amphibian that's bouncing back from the brink.
- **Explore Cuckmere Haven** Win a free e-bike experience in this breathtaking location.

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

Win £250 as photography competition returns!

Everyone has their favourite spot (or spots!) in the South Downs!

It might be admiring the dramatic chalk cliffs at Seven Sisters, wandering through the misty autumn woods at Ebernoe, poppy fields amongst the lush verdant hills, or immense views of coast and country from Butser Hill.

The South Downs National Park is full of iconic gems that make for great photographs – from the stunning landscape, to the awe-inspiring wildlife, to the majestic old buildings and street scenes.

As the National Park is celebrating its 15th birthday this year, people are being invited to photograph some of their favourite things about the South Downs – whether that be locations, views, towns and villages, heritage, food and drink, or whatever the imagination can think of!

The prizes for the competition, **Three cheers for 15 years: South Downs favourites**, will be £250 for first place, £150 for second place, £75 for third place and £50 for fourth place.

As always there will be a separate wildlife category, with a £150 prize for the best shot and £75 for the runner-up image.

The youth competition returns this year for budding young photographers – with categories 10 years and under and 11 to 17. Young photographers are being



challenged to snap an amazing shot of their favourite aspect of the South Downs National Park. The prize for 10 years and under will be a family ticket to Marwell Wildlife, while the winner of the 11 to 17 category will win a GoApe adventure for two.

One of the prizewinners, to be picked at random, will also receive a bonus prize of a place on a workshop with the Royal Photographic Society's Landscape Group.

The judging panel has a line-up of acclaimed photographers, including Howard Klein, who sits on the Royal Photographic Society's Landscape Committee, Rachael Talibart, Finn Hopson, and Carlotta Luke. Claire Blow, Deputy Editor of *Outdoor Photography*, returns to the panel, alongside Jan Knowlson, Biodiversity Officer for the National Park, and Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the National Park Authority.

Beautiful benches are unveiled



Four bespoke oak benches with landscape-inspired inscriptions have been unveiled at a beautiful dew pond near Eastbourne.

The new benches at Warren Hill will provide a place for gathering, as well as rest and reflection, for people of all ages and abilities, allowing appreciation of the surrounding landscape and stunning views across Eastbourne and the Seven Sisters towards the sea.

The benches have been designed and carved by sculptor Will Spankie, with inscriptions written by Lewes-based artist and writer Alinah Azadeh, who was the National Park's Writer in Residence at Seven Sisters from 2020 to 2023.

The project has been led by Towner Eastbourne, with support from the South Downs National Park Authority, East Sussex County Council and the Eastbourne Downland Group.

As well as offering breathtaking views and a variety of habitats to explore and learn about, there is significant archaeology near the dew pond, with evidence of human activity dating back to the Stone Age.

Each bench has been inscribed with a text written by Alinah Azadeh - entitled 'To the North', 'To the South', 'To the East' and 'To the West'.



Sara Cooper, Head of Collections and Exhibitions at Towner Eastbourne, said: "It's been fantastic working collaboratively with artists Alinah Azadeh and Will

Spankie to bring the project to fruition. We've been fascinated to learn more about the positive impact that being in nature has on mental and physical health, and are pleased to contribute to providing a site where people can gather, exercise or just sit and enjoy views of this amazing landscape; a critical factor in helping to enhance mood and reduce stress.'

Lady Antonia Lucas, of the Eastbourne Downland Group, said: 'Warren Hill is a lovely safe, accessible location for rest and reflection, a picnic or even to bring a sketchbook to record the brilliant views over the town and the Downs.'

Howard said: "Many of my fellow members of the Royal Photographic Society's Landscape Group enjoy the diverse range of photo opportunities offered within The South Downs National Park. The coastal photography is varied: from waves at high tide to exploring the foreshores at low tide, with big vistas and more intimate abstracts, plus the long views from the clifftops - my personal favourite being the view from Hope Gap. Inland sees similar variety, with downland from Lewes to Brighton & onwards, with woods, farmland, some delightful villages, chapels and pubs."

Carlotta, who is based in Lewes, said: "I am so excited about this year's theme celebrating 15 years of our amazing South Downs National Park. I can't wait to see your photos showing us what you love most about the Park. I know we will get gorgeous iconic shots, but surprise us, too! I want to see unexpected aspects of the Park captured in beautiful photographs, so send us what you've got!"

Finn, who is based in Brighton, said: "I'm looking forward to seeing photographs taken across the full length and breadth of the National Park, pictures that celebrate everything this amazing landscape has to offer. I want to be surprised by new ways of seeing familiar places, or unique pictures of somewhere off the beaten track. There is so much to discover out there, and I can't wait to see what this year's competition brings."

Claire said: "I'll be looking for images that speak of a deep connection to the special places and wildlife of the South Downs, whether you've trained your lens on a famous view or a favourite hidden corner of the National Park. I can't wait to see all the wonderful shots celebrating the South Downs National Park's 15th birthday!"

The deadline for entries will be midnight on **Friday, 31 October, 2025**.

The winners will be announced in January 2026 and there will be a public vote for the People's Choice winner with a prize of £100.

Enter the competition and find terms and conditions at www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/photo-comp/



Try something new for National Walking Month



May is National Walking Month and a good time to celebrate its simple joys!

Whether you're looking for an hour-long stroll with a breathtaking view or a work-up-a-sweat ramble up and down some hills, there are hundreds of walks to enjoy in the South Downs National Park.

While any walking is good for us, walking in glorious green spaces surrounded by nature has its very own restorative powers for both mental and physical health.



Kate Drake enjoying an uplifting walk in the National Park

Kate Drake, Health and Wellbeing Officer for the

National Park, explains: "We've all heard that walking is great for those feel-good endorphins and the heart and lungs, but fascinating new research is shining a light on electrical activity in the brain and showing that time in nature improves focus, attention and memory. Because we evolved in nature, nature is where our brains operate the best!"

One of the most invigorating things you can do is trying something new and what better time than National Walking Month? We may all have our go-to walks and picnic spots, but why not try something a bit different?

Here are five ideas for trying something new:

Walk the lesser-trodden path

With 3,300km of footpaths, bridleways and byways, the South Downs National Park has the biggest rights of way network of any National Park.

We're famous for honeypot sites such as Birling Gap, Seven Sisters and Devil's Dyke, but there are plenty of lesser-known locations that offer breathtaking views and tranquillity in abundance.

One of your new adventures could be the Heathland Sculpture Trail. Inspired by stories from communities and drawing upon sources as diverse as the poet Tennyson and a 394-year-old local map, seven bespoke stone

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carvings – including a lizard and a curious "Sheep Pig" – are now dotted around some of the most beautiful locations in the National Park.

Why not make a summer adventure by slowly trying to find all of the heathland sculptures? To help you out, we've created some videos offering clues on how you can find them all. Find out more [here](#).

Another trail less trodden is the Downs Link, near Shoreham. Connecting the South Downs to the North Downs, the Downs Link follows two disused railway lines and crosses the Surrey Hills and Low Weald.

With a train station at Shoreham, it makes for both a perfect start point and end point. Intersecting at times with other paths and trails, you can choose to make quick diversions, including to the top of Truleigh Hill near Steyning and Bramber. The view from the top of the hill provides views out to both the English Channel and the breadth of the central South Downs.

Try a dawn or dusk walk

What better way to start your day than an orchestra of nightingales, songthrushes, robins and chiff-chaffs!

Watch the sunrise and enjoy your first cuppa of the day with a warming flask of tea or coffee.

Did you know morning exposure can boost serotonin production, helping you feel calmer and happier for the rest of the day?

While getting up at the crack of dawn is not everyone's idea of fun, you'll be rewarded with pure tranquillity and the most stunning views of the landscape in the "golden hour".



Equally as magical is the last hour before darkness and a dusk walk offers the opportunity to see that signature warm glow cascading across the landscape. Did you know that walking at sunset can activate melatonin and help you get a better night's sleep?

Forest bathe

A quarter of the South Downs National Park is woodland – more treescape by area than any other National Park in England and Wales.

So you're spoilt for choice for forests and woodland to escape to for a bit of zen time.



The simple method of being calm and quiet amongst the trees, observing nature around you while breathing deeply can help both adults and children de-stress and boost health and wellbeing in a natural way. Find out more and discover more ideas for National Walking Month [here](#).

Toadally awesome news!



Their distinctive rasping call can be heard up to a mile away, earning them the reputation as the UK's loudest amphibian.

Now the natterjack toad, long associated with British folklore, is making a remarkable comeback in the South Downs National Park after battling back from the brink.

Natterjacks were once widespread across the heaths of southern England, but habitat loss and climate change had reduced their range to a single site at Woolmer Forest in Hampshire. They are considered locally extinct in Sussex.

A reintroduction programme started at nearby Blackmoor in 2021 and the latest survey has recorded breeding natterjacks, with 28 toadlets counted. It's the first time that natterjack toads have been recorded breeding at Blackmoor in 50 years and represents a significant increase in their territory.

The comeback has been made possible by nature recovery work at Blackmoor, led by the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) and supported by the South Downs National Park Authority, Natural England and partners. Over the past decade shallow ponds have been created and heathland has been restored through the introduction of cattle grazing, producing perfect conditions for natterjacks to return.

Jack Harper, from ARC, said: "We are delighted that everyone's hard work is beginning to pay off and that the future of this fascinating species is looking brighter in the region. This is a great first step to recovering the species within the National Park and a good blueprint for future reintroduction efforts. Thank you to all those involved!"

Olivia French, Heathlands Project Team Leader for the National Park, said: "This is a wonderful success story for nature recovery and shows that wildlife can thrive if given half a chance.



"With a breeding population at Woolmer and now Blackmoor as well, the future for natterjack toads is certainly looking brighter than it was. This area is the last heathland bastion for this iconic species and extending their habitat range is a big step forward in stopping the species becoming locally extinct."

High Court action is taken



A prison sentence has been narrowly avoided after a woman was taken to the High Court for repeated planning breaches in the National Park.

Lara Kim Deroubaix was sentenced to four months in jail, suspended for four years, after ignoring a planning injunction to remove a caravan that had been illegally placed on agricultural fields at Long Road, Soberton, Hampshire.

The conviction comes after a long-running enforcement case – led by the South Downs National Park Authority and Winchester City Council – dating back to 2018.

The Authority initially secured a High Court injunction that forbade Ms Deroubaix from siting a caravan or mobile home for residential purposes at Long Road, Soberton. This was subsequently breached, leading to National Park Authority having to pursue the matter through the courts for a second time.

The High Court heard that she was given three written warnings and a verbal reminder for the second breach. During proceedings, Ms Deroubaix apologised to the court for her actions.

Sentencing Ms Deroubaix, Judge Dunne KC, sitting as a Deputy High Court Judge, said that she failed to heed numerous warnings by the officers and that she knew of the injunction. Judge Dunne awarded the South Downs National Park Authority its costs, to the sum of £14,945, in bringing the proceedings.

Tim Slaney, Director of Planning, said: "Court action is not something we choose to do lightly and is often a last resort for us.

"The National Park is a very special landscape that has been designated for the benefit of the entire nation because of its natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage.

"Without a planning system that everyone adheres to, it could be harmed by any number of illegal developments and would cease to be a special place for people to live, work and enjoy.

"This enforcement case is an example of strong partnership working and we're very grateful to Winchester City Council for their support."

Meet the youth ambassador



Young people are passionate about nature, climate and the environment – perhaps more than any generation before them.

Our Youth Ambassadors fulfil a crucial role of

ensuring that young peoples' voices are heard across the South Downs National Park, with our partners and wider networks. This month we meet Max.

Why did you sign up as a Youth Ambassador?

I have grown up just around the corner from the South Downs and have spent so much of my childhood and young adult life within it. I saw this as a golden opportunity to inspire other young people to care for nature and the South Downs in the same way that I do.

What activities/tasks do you get involved with in this role?

So far my time as a Youth Ambassador has included an educational walk and talk in the Queen Elizabeth National Park. The event was aimed at bringing young people together through nature where I myself made new friends. It was an amazing chance to connect with other young people.

Do you have a favourite place in the National Park?

My favourite place has to be Devil's Dyke. It is only an hour's walk from my house where I can stroll through the rolling hills of the South Downs before reaching Devil's Dyke itself.

What three tips would you give someone your age to help them get out into nature more?

1. Do some research! It can be easy to think there are no fun walks or adventures to be had around you but you might be surprised. A quick google search could give you many different walks and areas of nature to visit, even if it is the local park!
2. Talk to your friends and family. Many of my walks have been with my mum, so why not see who wants to join? Chances are, some of your friends and family will want to go out into nature too.
3. Start small. Try and spend more time in your garden if you have one, or in your local park. In doing so, you may feel more connected with nature and be more determined to broaden your horizons. If not, that is not a problem at all! By spending time in your garden or local park, you will feel the benefits of surrounding yourself in nature.

Taking action for nature



Communities in the National Park are coming together for a week-long celebration of things we can all do to tackle climate change and protect nature.

Great Big Green Week takes place from 7 to 15 June across the UK and will see communities, schools, and businesses join together in a wave of action to protect the planet.

The idea is if everyone swaps one thing it will add up to make a huge difference – whether that be to swap throwing away unloved items for giving them a new lease of life, swapping skills with another organisation, or swapping an unloved area in your street for a wildlife space.

Here in the South Downs a bumper week of events is taking place in Arundel, led by the Greening Arundel community alliance.

Activities will include allotment tours and learning how to grow your own food, plastic-free picnics, dawn chorus walks, moth mornings, and community litter picks. There will also be the chance to learn about how to have a “greener wardrobe”.

Every day at Officially Organic, there will be a 25% discount on an organic alternative for your current skincare products.

The celebration follows two years of dedicated work by local volunteers, who have to helped to transform public areas in the town by creating areas for plants and wildlife.

Both sides of the 120m pathway from the train station have been transformed with native hedgerow plants and wildflowers. Sixty six bird nesting nests have been installed across 38 locations, including the Town Hall, and a “House Martin tower” has been erected in a community orchard.

Among the latest plans are creating a community allotment and food forest.

To download the events programme for Arundel click [here](#) or see their [Facebook page](#) for updates.



Farm hosts first festival



An immersive day celebrating the intersection of food, farming and the natural world is taking place next month.

On Saturday, 7 June Westerlands, near Graffham, will host the very first South Downs Food and Nature Festival.

The 800-acre estate is one of a number of South Downs landowners that are pioneering regenerative farming – a holistic approach to agriculture that looks to regenerate depleted soils and bring back biodiversity.

The unique event will bring together visionaries, farmers, writers, and wild food experts to explore bold ideas and practical solutions for a more sustainable future.

As well as a host of talks from leading speakers, there will be immersive nature experiences and farm tours, lunch with a view, Q&As, and a sumptuous “feast by woodfire” farm-to-fork dinner to round off the day.

Oliver Hancock, Chief Earth Officer at Westerlands, said: “Climate and nature friendly farming is at the heart of everything we do.

“Over the last few years, we have been shifting purposefully towards a regenerative farming model, balanced with a strong desire to reverse biodiversity loss. Positive results are already being observed through the year, especially with increased numbers of birds of different species, often a good barometer for overall farm health.

“Our vision is that by 2045, Westerlands will be widely recognised as an exceptional example of a West Sussex pasture-based, regenerative farming system that has played a lead role in the restoration and healing of both nature and people.”

The festival takes place from 10am to 10pm. Buy tickets at www.westerlands.com/events/south-downs-food-nature-fest



Win e-bike hire at Cuckmere!



There's nothing quite like experiencing the landscape with the wind in your hair and the feel-good endorphins of pedal power.

Cuckmere Cycle Company is located a beautiful converted granary barn close to the National Park's Seven Sisters visitor centre at Exceat. Overlooking the Cuckmere Estuary, with several trails starting right from its door, the shop is perfect for exploring the Seven Sisters cliffs, Cuckmere Haven, Friston Forest (*pictured above*) and the picturesque villages of Alfriston, Litlington, Wilmington, Jevington and East Dean.

We've teamed up with them to offer a free e-bike experience for two people for two hours, giving you the chance to explore this stunning area on two wheels.

People signing up to the newsletter during May will be automatically entered into the draw to win the e-bike experience. Those who are already signed up can email “riding a bicycle is the closest you can get to flying” to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 31 May.

Sign up to the newsletter [here](#) and see competition T&Cs [here](#).

Calling all comedy lovers!

Epic Comedy are offering two pairs of tickets for their forthcoming comedy night being held at the South Downs Centre in Midhurst.

The event on Saturday, 14 June is being headlined by Angela Barnes, who has appeared at *Live At The Apollo*, *Richard Osman's House of Games*, *Mock The Week* and *Russell Howard's Good News*. Angela will be supported by Amy Mason, Dave Chawner and host Paul Cox.

People signing up to the newsletter during May will be automatically entered into the draw to win the e-bike experience. Those who are already signed up can email “I love to laugh” to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 31 May.

Sign up to the newsletter [here](#) and see competition T&Cs [here](#).

Things to do in the South Downs this May

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/



- Visit the **garden at Bignor Park**, Pulborough, on 13 May to explore the extensive 11-acre grounds and see some magnificent views of the South Downs. The walled garden has been replanted with herbaceous borders and the Dutch garden has a new central obelisk and planting including climbing roses, salvias and echinaceas.
- Rewind to the 1940s for a thrilling weekend of nostalgia and living history at **Amberley Museum's Home Front Weekend**, taking place on 17 and 18 May. Experience the sights, sounds, and stories of the Second World War as the Museum is transformed into a vibrant wartime encampment. Featuring authentic WW2 vehicles, uniforms, and equipment, this immersive event will bring history to life for visitors of all ages.
- Head to Petersfield Museum and Art Gallery for its new exhibition "Everyday Objects", which starts on 20 May. One of the best-known artists of his generation, Michael Craig-Martin (b.1941) has been celebrated worldwide for his conceptual artworks that are instantly recognisable. The prints include depictions of headphones, lightbulbs and trainers and invite the viewer to consider the transitory items that fill the world around us.
- Stansted Park, near Rowlands Castle, is hosting a series of outdoor plays at its Walled Garden Elizabethan Theatre. On 30 May The Three Inch Fools present a largely historical, always hysterical, "**The Most Perilous Comedie of Elizabeth I**".
- **The National Park's ReNature Festival** returns from 22 June with a week of events and activities across Sussex and Hampshire. The festival is a chance to learn more about the unique biodiversity of the South Downs National Park and also learn about things we can all do to help nature recovery. Full details and the programme will be in next month's South Downs News.

Pic credits

P1 Joe James; P2 Dick Hawkes (left); P2 right Cameron Brown; P3 Emma Varley; P4 left Steph Horn.