

SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Green wellness** Discover more about a range of social prescribing projects that are helping people with physical and mental health issues.
- **Breathtaking bird's eye view** Find out more about an initiative that is shining a spotlight on all the lumps and bumps in the ground – and the amazing archaeology hidden within!
- **Halcyon days of heather** Discover the joys of September at heathlands.
- **Competition!** Win a family day-out at Lewes Castle or Fishbourne Roman Palace.

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

Health and wellbeing in wonderful green spaces

“It’s so good for the soul”

Just one of the dozens of positive comments from a busy summer of wellbeing sessions that have connected scores of people with the amazing wildlife, history and landscape of the South Downs National Park.

A range of groups have reaped the rewards of getting out into stunning beauty spots, including carers, people dealing with loneliness, isolation and mental and physical health issues, as well as healthcare staff working in the NHS and voluntary sectors.

Sessions have included conservation work, tree identification, pottery and art making, mindfulness, and, of course, walking.

Kate Drake, Health and Wellbeing Officer for the National Park, said: “It’s been a busy and rewarding summer for the National Park’s health and wellbeing work.



“National Parks have often been described as the ‘natural health service’ and the positive testimonials we have received from participants really reinforce just how



Pottery making at Butser Ancient Farm in Hampshire

beneficial green spaces can be for mental health and wellness. Something as simple as going for a walk in a National Park can be incredibly restorative.

“None of the work we do would be possible without the fantastic range of partners and providers from across the community who help deliver these sessions. Green social prescribing supports people’s non-clinical needs and, while it’s still in its infancy, I think it’s an area that will continue to grow and National Parks will have a big part to play.

“Everyone should have access to green space, whether it be a local park or a National Park, for the numerous mental and physical health benefits.”

Among this year’s projects are:

New art shuttle launches



A new hop-on-hop-off minibus will link Towner Eastbourne, Charleston, Seven Sisters Country Park and a new arts venue in Lewes.

The Sussex Art Shuttle is the first of its kind in the region, allowing visitors to Turner Prize 2023 at **Towner Eastbourne** to easily get out and explore some of the area's other major attractions.

Turner Prize 2023 opens at Towner Eastbourne on 28 September, featuring the works of the four shortlisted artists – Jesse Darling, Ghislaine Leung, Rory Pilgrim and Barbara Walker.

At the same time, nearby Charleston – the former country home of Bloomsbury artists Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell – presents 'David Hockney: Love Life', featuring his rarely-seen early drawings.

September will also see Charleston launch a brand-new location in central Lewes, with a major exhibition exploring the fashion of the Bloomsbury group.

The new bus route, operated by Cuckmere Buses, will link up all three arts venues via a spectacular route that takes in the iconic Seven Sisters cliffs, Cuckmere Valley and the picturesque villages of Alfriston and Litlington, where guests can hop off to enjoy a range of food, drink and independent shops, as well as the amazing visitor centre and shop at Seven Sisters Country Park.

The service launches on 15 September and will set off four times a day (Friday to Sunday) from Towner Eastbourne, reaching Charleston and Lewes in under an hour

Joe Hill, Director and CEO, Towner Eastbourne, said "It's a fantastic opportunity to explore the wider region and see some of the best culture Sussex has to offer this season"

Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the National Park Authority, said: "A day-out in the countryside by bus can be a real family adventure, helping the environment and removing the stress of trying to find a parking space. This new bus service is a great way to explore the National Park this autumn and discover its incredible landscape, natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage."

Read more about the Sussex Art Shuttle, including route and timetable information at www.sussexmodern.org.uk/artshuttle

- Timescape Residency – Sessions have been run from Amberley Museum in West Sussex to learn about cultural heritage and traditional artisan techniques. Meanwhile, at Butser Ancient Farm in Hampshire, people have been learning a variety of techniques, including cordaging, making willow bird feeders, raku clay, felting, weaving, and pottery. An exhibition of the work will be taking place this autumn.

- Wellbeing sessions have been delivered to staff working at MIND, NHS, Alzheimer's Society, Carers Support and the RSPB. Opportunities for staff to connect to nature included mindful walks and making and creating artwork.

- Walks and creative workshops at Pulborough Brooks, delivered in partnership with Worthing-based Creative Waves, a community arts group.

- Guided ranger walks and learning about nature identification at Church Copse, near Worthing, and heathland nature walks at Iron Hill, near Liphook.

- Wellbeing sessions for carers and families needing extra support at Seven Sisters Country Park, including nature spotting, mindfulness and creating bird feeders.

- Working with West Sussex Carers Support to support carers' wellbeing. This is a 12-month project working with Wild Gathering CIC, supporting connection to green and blue spaces in West Sussex. This project provides carers with respite from their caring responsibilities through mindful walks and creating artwork.

Feedback from participants has been glowing. One said: "I loved learning about trees and spending time in the woods. So good for the soul."

Another said: "The session was wonderful. Having time for myself and learning about butterflies and insects was so special. I loved being mindful and seeing the beautiful views."

Mental illness accounts for 23 per cent of all ill-health in England and affects more than one in four of the population at any time. With over 50 per cent of the population living within one hour's travel of a National Park, the National Parks can support measures to help improve health and wellbeing objectives.

For more details on the National Park's work, including information for healthcare professionals, visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing



Conservation work at Church Copse near Worthing

A new view of the old



A motte and bailey castle (centre) on Edburton Hill

Breathtaking aerial imagery has shone a spotlight on the incredible archaeology of the South Downs National Park and how our ancestors have shaped the landscape.

Historic England has used aerial imagery to map hundreds of archaeological sites dating from Stone Age times over 5,000 years ago to the Second World War.

The area studied covers 192 sq km north of Brighton.

Meanwhile, an interactive map has been produced that encourages people to discover and connect with the landscape and learn about its remarkable past.

“Downs from Above” is one of 18 projects being delivered as part of the Changing Chalk partnership, which aims to engage communities to connect with the cultural heritage of the National Park. The partnership is led by the National Trust, supported by a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant and funding from People’s Postcode Lottery, with the National Park Authority as one of the partners.

Tom Foxall, Regional Director at Historic England, said: “From the echoes of Neolithic ceremonies to the upheaval of the Second World War, these archaeological sites contribute to the unique character of the South Downs. They have been brought together in our new interactive map using aerial sources and archive research.”

Gary Webster, National Trust Heritage Officer and lead for the Changing Chalk Downs from Above project, said: “Utilising aerial photos, both old and new, and lidar images from laser scans, the Downs from Above mapping can give us a unique way to understand our Downs, and our heritage on them. Not only are new features being discovered, but the true character of existing features are being recognised for the first time.

“This new data is a great resource, both for amateurs and experts alike, to get onto the downland and really see what is just below their feet.”

Historic England’s aerial investigation team analysed more than 9,500 aerial photographs as well as recent airborne laser scans (lidar) – a technique that uses an aircraft-mounted laser to build a 3D digital elevation model of the

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ground below – to locate, identify and map marks in the landscape which represent the thousands of years of human activity.

Among the archaeology photographed are ancient burial sites from the Neolithic (4,000 BC to 2,200 BC) onwards. These barrows can be found dotted across the Downs, although most are sited along the northern ridge. These early cemeteries often developed over many centuries, and in some cases acted as a focus for burials as late as the early medieval period (AD 410 to 1066).

Evidence of historic dew ponds – man-made drinking pools for animals – have also been found, including a dried out pond at Streat Hill.

Chalk extraction and lime burning have also left their mark on the landscape. Offham, to the north of Lewes, operated a large chalk pit from 1809 to 1890. At its peak of production, Offham Chalk Pit had four lime kilns, which processed the chalk into lime which was transported away by river.

Anooshka Rawden, Cultural Heritage Lead for the National Park, said: “Downs From Above is a powerful testament of what has been lost, and what has the potential for restoration in terms of revitalised, expanded habitats and landscape character in the context of the biodiversity crisis. This initiative celebrates the heritage of the South Downs, as well as demonstrating the potential to inform its future.”

Download the [full report here](#) and check out the [interactive map here](#).



A dry dew pond at Streat Hill



Prehistoric enclosures at Woolstonbury Hill

Station is stepping stone



A new integrated travel map has been unveiled at Seaford railway station to signpost walking, cycling and bus routes.

The improved onward travel information is designed to help passengers explore the town and explore the South Downs National Park with its iconic views of the Seven Sisters chalk cliffs.

The map on the station platform highlights places to visit and how to reach them. There are also leaflets with a smaller version of the map and additional information for visitors.

The leaflets are available on request from the station ticket office and Seaford Town Council/Tourist Information offices at 37 Church Street.

New images showing the iconic chalk cliffs welcome people to the area and encourage visitors to use Brighton & Hove Buses for the next stage of their journey.

Seaford is at one end of the Sussex Downs Line in East Sussex with stations from Brighton to Seaford.

The map was unveiled last month at a special ceremony at Seaford station attended by funders, partners and supporters.

Seaford town crier Peter White welcomed guests to the launch. He said: "Use the train and bus or walk or cycle. There's more to see and it's better for the environment."

The project was led by Southeast Communities Rail Partnership, which works to connect people, places and opportunities to their railways.

Emily Summers-Mileman, Interpretation and Place Officer for the National Park, said: "Seaford railway station is such a wonderful stepping stone into the National Park and this project has really enhanced the information and resources we're offering visitors.

"There are so many opportunities to travel sustainably in the National Park, whether that be by walking, cycling, taking the bus or train, and we want to spread the word about how accessible this treasured landscape is for everybody."

Halcyon days of heather



Stedham Common in September

Our lowland heaths are amazing any time of year with their mosaic of heathers and gorses, pine, birch and oak woodland edges, rolling sandy hills, bogs and ponds, supporting a vast array of wildlife, much of which is rare and specially adapted to life on the heaths.

This time of year, however, the blooming heather has to take pride of place, at least for me. I love seeing and smelling the carpets of multi-hued purple flowers and seeing all the insects feasting on the blossoms.

There are three native species of heather on these heaths: ling or common heather, bell heather and cross-leaved heath.

The bell heather has been in flower since June, and is usually a bright purple/magenta, with larger flowers that look like bells grouped at the end of the stem (hence the name).

Cross-leaved heath flowers are a similar size to the bell heather flowers but a paler pink, and the leaves and stem a paler blue-green.



Ling or common heather usually makes up the majority of heather plants, with feathery green leaves and smaller flowers than the other two heathers. The flowers vary in colour

from nearly white, through a spectrum of lovely pinks and lilacs. On a warm day, the smell from the flowers can be glorious!

Now is the perfect time to get out and explore these wonderful plants that are so important to our heaths.

Please remember to stick to the paths and take care of this very special habitat which is rarer than rainforest.

Elinor Newman, Assistant Public Engagement Ranger for Heathlands



On yer bike! New facilities open

Ranger diary: Ethan's viewpoint



Ethan Purdy, Assistant Ranger for the Western Downs in Hampshire, writes about his love of the natural world and how nature needs space to thrive.

When I was a boy in the South Downs, I was drawn to everything that was wild.

Tired, nerve shaken and over civilised I found disappearing into the woodland, was like going home. That nature was a necessity. I would wander afoot, I was content. Each night, I had nothing to do but look and listen; to see and hear how smooth and changeless the world became.

How indifferent it was to my presence. Stars would wheel overhead, in our renowned dark sky, and I would ponder on some of the deeper questions my young head could muster. Alabaster cloud mountains would greet me in the morning, a canvas to the sunrise.

'Do what you love, and you never have to work a day in your life.' Confucius lived in rather a different world to ours, but his words still ring true.

Stood in a woodland in the rising dawn, with the mist clinging to the floor like a whisper. Similarly, at the end of the day as you quietly stalk around a heathland, straining your ears for nightjars in the gathering gloom. It's hard to disagree that as rangers, it's exactly that we get to do; nearly every day.

Within one working day, a ranger may wear many hats... from speaking to landowners and liaising with them, to inspiring future generations doing engagement, working with our tireless volunteers or physically keeping paths and architecture open for the public use. You are a guardian to the space that is entrusted to your care.

It's often easy to sometimes feel a certain ownership in your own right, to the landscape which stretches out from the coast to the hilltops of our National Park. From boy to man, my office has become the very landscape which I escaped to for solace and inspiration. Of all the work environments I could have picked, I think I've done alright.

The views out of all of our office windows are a home for many families other than our own. Each forgotten corner is home to something. And often, it's those most forgotten corners that harbour the most life. A hedgerow in a back garden and a vista of heathland can equally be important for something, or at the very least, it may be all they can get. It's a big ask to change our world at large, but it's the small things we do, with great intention, that make the change we need in this world.

We are a progressing society, and there is a need for more room for more people. However, within this, there's a space for more than just us. When we inhabit spaces, nature can take a backseat, so it's a hope of mine that we can all do our part to stand up for the cracks and crevices, empty walls and the dried-up ponds; to make nature.

Re-nature 😊



There's nothing quite like the thrill and freedom of mountain biking in a beautiful country setting.

Queen Elizabeth Country Park, between Petersfield and Waterlooville in Hampshire, now boasts four new tracks for mountain bikers.

The four new tracks consist of:

- A mini wheels track for children on balance bikes or first pedal bike
- A mini wheels skills area offering a chance for young riders to experience the basics of off-road riding
- A mountain bike skills area consisting of a short trail for beginners and intermediate riders to develop their skills
- A mountain bike coaching area to support riders to develop their skills

The project has been possible due to £250,000 of funding from Hampshire County Council, British Cycling, Sport England, South Downs National Park Authority, and additional support from East Hampshire District Council.

The aim is to attract new people to off-road cycling, especially those who are traditionally less likely to take part in the sport, including women.

Councillor Russell Oppenheimer, Hampshire County Council's cabinet Member for countryside and regulatory services, said: "The location is already well used by experienced cyclists, and the new tracks are specially designed to encourage even more people to enjoy off road biking, especially children, families or anyone who wants to try off-road biking in this beautiful setting for the first time. We hope this will help people to build their confidence and skills at their own pace in a supportive environment."

Alister Linton-Crook, Cycling Project Officer for the National Park, added: "It's great to have purpose-built, safe, segregated trails for people to experience off-road biking and develop skills."



Celebrating young art talent



The winners have been announced for a fun art competition celebrating Midhurst.

Schoolchildren were invited to create artwork that showcases the things that inspire them about the bustling market town in West Sussex.

A central point in the National Park, Midhurst is the home of the South Downs Centre, as well as the famous Cowdray Ruins, one of England's most important early Tudor houses that was visited by King Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I.

The name Midhurst was first recorded in 1186 as Middeherst, meaning "Middle wooded hill", and 800 years later it is still a place where wildlife habitats of woods and heaths exist harmoniously close to its busy centre that has lots of independent shops.

Supported by the National Park Authority, the competition was part of this year's MADhurst celebrations showcasing creative talents in the town.

The winners were:

Brodie Beckerson: 7 years and under

Bethany Beckerson: 7 years and under (*pictured above*)

Elosie Sutherland: 8-12 years

Herbie Tetlow: 13-16 years (*pictured below*)

Congratulations to them all!



Big boost for nature recovery



Ancient chalk reefs that are home to seahorses, a meandering river and a nature reserve with over 250 species of plants will benefit from a major funding boost.

Around 12,000 hectares of land from Seaford to Eastbourne, in East Sussex, will benefit from government funding for nature recovery work.

The focus of the project, led by Natural England, will be across several locations, including the Cuckmere River, Seven Sisters cliffs and chalk reefs in the Beachy Head Marine Conservation Zones.

It includes an ambitious plan to extend the National Nature Reserve (NNR) at Lullington Heath. This "super NNR" will bring a collaborative approach to managing the existing reserve to enhance nature for generations to come.

There will also be a focus on creating and restoring a mosaic of habitats across this varied landscape, from the wildflower chalk grasslands, the meandering Cuckmere River, and the wooded slopes of Friston and Eastbourne Escarpment, linking in with the wider farmed landscape.



Focusing initially on the rare wart-biter cricket, found in only six sites across Britain, and the short-snouted seahorse, the project will work with partners to boost populations of these rare species.

Jim Seymour, Sussex Kent area manager for Natural England, said: "We're excited to launch this Nature Recovery Project here in East Sussex focusing on how nature can improve life's most vital needs.

"These include clean water, nutritious food, space for physical and mental wellbeing and a more resilient environment to call home."

East Sussex is one of six projects taking a share of £7.4m of Defra funding. Rare heathlands in the nearby Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will also benefit, creating better habitat connectivity with heaths in the South Downs that are home to rare birds and reptiles.

Thank you for the inspiration



Writer Alinah Azadeh looks forward to the “Walk The Chalk Festival” and bids farewell after three years as the Writer in Residence at Seven Sisters Country Park. Thanks for all your hard work and inspiration Alinah!

September is the final month of my three-year writer residency at Seven Sisters Country Park & Sussex Heritage Coast. Thank you everyone for all the support, it's been a huge honour to work across this exquisite landscape and to curate and co-write a collection of new stories and poems that now has a legacy for several years through our listening posts project **We Hear You Now**. Thanks to all the brilliant writers, the National Park Authority and Arts Council England.

We have some wonderful live events coming up! We are part of **Walk the Chalk Festival** from 20 to 24 September with a free, creative programme, mainly at Seven Sisters Country Park and including the launch of new work and self-access creative writing guides! Booking is essential for most events – **[check them out here](#)**.

My final performance on-site will be on the evening of Sunday 24 September as part of Katy Beinart's Re-enchanted installation and the closing event for Walk the Chalk at the Pump Barn and Exceat Hill, at Seven Sisters Country Park.

You can also visit Lewes now to find a celebration of my residency and art as part of **Windows of Wonder**, part of **Artwave Festival** and *Wonder*, an exhibition at Fitzroy House in October, where I will be performing South Downs-inspired poetry with Razia Aziz on 21 October for **The Wonder Sessions**.

You can visit Lewes Climate Hub from 16 to 30 September and you can sit and listen to our climate-focused stories and then try some creative writing as part of their **Climate Justice season**. Finally, grab your copy of the SDNPA-supported **Covert Magazine 03**, on the theme of the South Downs, published by Writing Our Legacy – I have written the introduction.

Thank you everyone, and see you on the Downs somewhere soon....! Alinah

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY Win a free family day-out!



Did you know that Lewes Castle is a Norman Castle built after the Battle of Hastings by supporters of William the Conqueror?

The 950-year-old fortress has played a key role in the development of the town and today offers breathtaking 360-degree views of the South Downs.

The venue is owned and run by **Sussex Past**, which manages a number of venues in the South Downs area, including the Long Man of Wilmington and Fishbourne Roman Palace, near Chichester.

The palace is the largest Roman residence north of the Alps and dates from 75 AD.

The National Park has teamed up with Sussex Past to offer a free family visit to either Fishbourne Roman Palace or Lewes Castle & Museum.

Two adults and up to four children go free, valid on one day at one heritage site of your choosing. Prize must be redeemed by 30 November 2023.

People signing up to the newsletter during September will be automatically entered into the draw. Those who are already signed up can email “Dolphin Mosaic” to **newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk** before midnight on 30 September. Sign up to the newsletter **[here](#)** and see competition T&Cs **[here](#)**.

Amazing free outdoor experiences for young people!

Calling all 16 to 25 year olds (or if you know them!)

A series of free National Park activity days are taking place for young people to join in conservation work and gain valuable experience for their CVs.



If you'd like to be put on the mailing list to be notified of new Youth Action events coming up **[simply sign up here](#)**.

Things to do in the South Downs this September

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/



A September walk at Chapel Common, near Liphook

- A new exhibition [“Treasures of Chawton House”](#) opens on 13 September and includes never-before-seen items and the recently discovered Jane Austen manuscript.
- [Eastbourne Walking Festival](#) celebrates its 10th birthday this year with almost 50 guided walks. The festival runs from 15 September to 24 September.
- Head to [Butts Brow](#), Willingdon, for a chance to find out more about the local archaeology and ecology. From 10am to 4pm on 16 September, visitors can have a go at chalk carving using flint and natural dyes, find out how flint tools are made, make their own felt and get hands on with archaeology found in the area.
- See a historic water wheel and hands-on exhibits in a beautiful riverside setting at the Coultershaw Heritage in Petworth. Over the weekend of 16 and 17 September, people can embark upon a riverside adventure and explore the River Rother by taking part in the “Wind in the Willows” nature trail.
- Come and marvel at the inspiring engineering of our historic beam pump, waterwheel and water fountain before admiring the 21st century state of the art water turbine making renewable energy. Families can embark upon a riverside adventure and explore our beautiful location alongside The River Rother by taking part in our Wind in the Willows nature trail.
- A new exhibition starts at [Petersfield Museum and Art Gallery](#) on 19 September. The exhibition presents a survey of one of today’s leading contemporary artists working in ceramics. Through his objects and drawings, Nicholas Lees (b.1967) investigates the uncertainties of boundaries between forms and space.
- Discover wild foraging and how it can benefit your health and wellbeing at [Compton Down](#), near Winchester. The walk, organised by CPRE Hampshire, takes place on 23 September and places must be booked.

Pic credits

P1 Mandie Molyneux; P2 Right Thomas Broadhead; P3 Historic England; P4 Right Sam Moore; P6 Right Sussex Wildlife Trust; P7 Right Sussex Past