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SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

South Downs News

WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **The power of dance** Discover how young people are connecting with this cherished landscape.
- **Response to national plan** Find out our thoughts on the new Environmental Improvement Plan.
- **Dazzling dark skies and dogs** Discover the winners of two popular photo competitions.
- **WIN A FAMILY TICKET!** Win a day pass to a splendid historic house and museum.

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

Nature dance connects people to National Park

An inspiring dance performance at stunning locations across the South Down is bringing people closer to nature through the power of movement.

“Echoes Within the Earth” follows two lost adventurers as they embark on a journey through the sights and sounds of nature.

Choreographed by the talented Chris Pavia, who became the first choreographer with Down’s Syndrome to make a dance piece for national touring, the work is inspired by Chris’ childhood experiences of woodland in the South Downs.

Chris worked with contemporary dancers Jonathan Mewett and Abbie Thompson, who performed a breathtaking duet to a live audience at Petworth Park, Seven Sisters Country Park and Gilbert White’s House and Gardens.

The initiative included a series of immersive workshops for young people, including pupils from Treloar School in Alton and children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

The live dances have now culminated in a beautiful short film, released today (1 Feb), that captures the dances and the profound impact they had on people.



The initiative has been spearheaded by Farnham-based Stopgap Dance Company, where Chris joined as a dancer 25 years ago and is now resident choreographer. The company has become



a global leader in creating dance opportunities at all levels for people with disabilities or neurodiversity.

Reflecting on the project, Chris, who lives in Guildford and is a MENCAP ambassador, said: “The National Park’s forests were inspirational to the choreography – the journeys through the trees felt like a new world to discover for me.

“The sounds of the trees were important – and at times, you think you are lonely but then you begin to play with the shadows, and you are drawn into and supported by nature.”

And Chris added: “I would like the audience to feel intrigued by the mystery of the trees and the surprise of the journey.”

Dancer Jonathan Mewett said: “It was a very collaborative process from day one and it was really special working with Chris.

It was interesting to see his process because he’d come in with an improvisation that he had filmed and from that we’d translate it on to our bodies.

“Each place we went to in the National Park was really welcoming. I think dancing outdoors just reminded me

how nice it is to be outdoors! It's so lost in busy people running around the city, but it's nice to have space and enjoy the sun."

Dancer Abbie Thompson added: "Chris has so many ideas which is wonderful to work with as a dancer."



The feedback from the workshops was full of praise and, following the release of the film today, Chris and his team are hopeful to be able to do more live nature-based performances in the future.

One participant of the workshop said: "I followed Jon's pathway, and I really enjoyed the fact it was an immersive experience. I loved that it was out in nature and that the music reflected the nature – you could almost hear the heartbeat of the trees."

Another said: "When people think of dance they often think of ballet, hip-hop or *Strictly*, but this brings a different element to it!"

One girl added: "When the dancers were apart, I thought that showed how distanced we can be from nature, but then we can connect back to it and join back up to our surroundings."

The project was supported by the South Downs National Park Authority, South Downs National Park Trust, Arts Council England, and the National Trust.



Anooshka Rawden, who leads cultural heritage at the National Park, said: "Some of the most special experiences we can have in the countryside are sharing that sense of discovery with others, and Chris has created an opportunity to do this

beautifully and sensitively through dance.

"Stopgap Dance Company and Chris have been such lovely and talented people to work with, and it's been wonderful to hear how people have responded to the performance, thinking about their own connections to nature and green spaces."

To watch the film and some of the performances visit Stopgap Dance Company's YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTSqMLIXun8>

Authority responds to Government Plan



The Environmental Improvement Plan was unveiled by Environment Secretary Dr Thérèse Coffey at a keynote speech last week.

Among the pledges are creating and restoring at least 500,000 hectares of new wildlife habitats across the nation. The plan also includes a new commitment to access green space or water within a 15-minute walk from people's homes, such as woodlands, wetlands, parks and rivers.



Responding to the plan, Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "Restoring nature, tackling climate change and access to green space have never been more important to this nation's future.

"National Parks are the lynchpin of these ambitious targets and that's why it is essential to include the resources to deliver these welcome pledges and protect fragile landscapes, such as Seven Sisters, which I'm pleased was included in Defra's announcement video.

"We now look forward to seeing the specific details of these pledges."

National Parks England, which represents the 10 National Park Authorities in England, has also responded to the Environmental Improvement Plan and **its response can be read here.**

The plan includes an extension to a successful grants programme supporting farmers in the South Downs National Park.

Farming in Protected Landscapes was due to end after three years in March 2024, but Defra has now confirmed that, owing to the success of the programme so far, it will provide additional funding until March 2025.

The Authority administers the programme in the South Downs National Park

Nigel James, Countryside and Policy Manager, who leads the farming team at the National Park, said: "The Authority has been able to support over 100 innovative projects over the past two years, including schemes to help farmland birds flourish and support farm diversification during this period of change. This announcement means we will be able to work with many more farmers to develop some really exciting projects."

Pawssionate about dogs and protecting wildlife!



More than 40kg of dog poo was collected as an intrepid charity walker trekked the 65-mile long Serpent Trail in the South Downs National Park.

Henry Rawlings collected hundreds of dog poos as he walked the beautiful heathland route that snakes its way through the National Park from Haslemere to Petersfield.

The four-day walk was in memory of his beloved Beagle-cross Alfie and has raised over £3,000 that will now be split between two canine charities – Canine Arthritis and Vetlife.

Henry urged dog walkers to bag and bin dog poo because of the harm dog faeces can do to heaths.

Heathlands make up just 1 per cent of the National Park and are one of the rarest habitats in the world, providing a home for a clutch of precious animals such as sand lizards, smooth snakes, silver-studded blue butterflies and Dartford Warblers.



Looking back on his adventure, Henry, 46, from Storrington, West Sussex, said: “Alfie enjoyed several parts of the Serpent Trail, particularly Lords Piece

and Ambersham Common, as it suited his mobility issues. I had planned to do the whole of it with him in 2020 over several weekends but Covid got in the way. When he passed away, I decided to do the trail in his memory and raise money for organisations that were close to both of us.

“I couldn't help but notice the amount of dog poo that had been left, so I decided to tidy those areas up. I thought collecting the dog poo would make the fundraiser a bit more of a challenge, as well as help protect the habitat.

“I lost count of the number of poos I scooped up but I reckon it was well over 40kg in total.

“I think not picking up dog poo is disrespectful to other people and the countryside. Not only is there the hygiene element, there are also health risks for humans and creatures alike. It's not difficult to pick and bag, and even take home if there is no bin available.”

And Henry added: “Aside from a shower on the Friday afternoon I got lucky with the weather. The main high point was meeting people on the trail, giving dog owners treats in Alfie's name and raising awareness of the two organisations.”

The National Park's Take The Lead initiative has been running for several years and has four simple messages:

- Keep dogs on a lead near livestock.
- Bag and bin your poo, any public bin will do.
- Protect ground-nesting birds by sticking to the paths, especially between 1 March and 15 September during the breeding season.
- Do not enter military training areas when the red flags are flying.

Olivia French, Engagement Officer for Heathlands Reunited, which is working to conserve and enhance the habitat, explained why dog poo is so bad for heathlands.

“Heathlands are an incredibly specialist habitat that have developed over thousands of years and are rarer than the rainforest,” said Olivia.

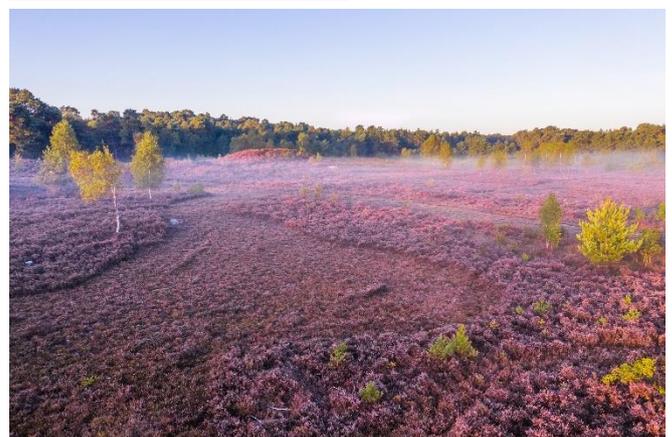
“It's actually the nutrient-poor soil that has led to this incredible biodiversity because there's not one single plant species that can dominate the landscape. Introducing an outside influence such as dog poo changes the nutrient profile of the soil and this can then have a harmful impact on this very fragile wildlife haven. When you have hundreds of these dog poos scattered across the landscape, you can imagine the cumulative damage this could cause over several years.

“Dog poo, in particular, contains bacteria that can be extremely harmful to grazing livestock such as Belted Galloways, which graze areas along the Serpent Trail to support conservation efforts. If there's no bin, the message is simple, bag it and take it home with you or dispose of it in the nearest public waste bin.

“As part of Heathlands Reunited, we want to help educate dog walkers that they can play their part in nature recovery by doing a very simple thing such as picking up dog poo.”

To donate to Henry's fundraising, visit <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/alfie-rawlings>

For more information about Heathlands Reunited visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/help-your-heaths/heathlands-reunited/



Stedham Common, a stunning spot along the Serpent Trail

New lease of life for historic dewpond



A weed-clogged dewpond, first established at Seaford Head in the late 19th century, has now been restored as a haven for wildlife.

Local volunteers from the Seaford Natural History Society, with support from Seaford Town Council and South Downs National Park, clocked up over 500 hours from May 2022, to reinstate the biodiversity value of the pond.

A grant from the Volunteer Conservation Fund (VCF) allowed the willing locals to improve the fencing, buy tools and safety equipment.

The real hard work involved extracting and controlling invasive weeds – New Zealand stonecrop and parrot's feather – which had taken over the pond.

The edges of the pond were then revealed, cleared of bramble and coarse grasses and a new surrounding path created.

With help from conservation charity Froglife, the busy teams created two hibernacula, as winter shelters for reptiles and amphibians visiting the pond.

Now, almost half the surface area is open water, where just a few months ago none existed. The pond is now providing fresh water for birds and grass snakes.

A recent wildlife survey at the dewpond recorded over 200 species, including the rare lesser emperor dragonfly nymph, which is the first UK record of its breeding.

The volunteers have formed a Friends Group to continue the pond management and further development, which will extend the ongoing benefits to local wildlife.



Paul Baker, from the Seaford Natural History Society, said "It is so rewarding to have completed the project successfully, and in particular to see its ongoing legacy, which will continue and expand on the original vision".

The Volunteer Conservation Fund is open again for a new round of funding until 31 March 2023.

For more information, please head to: www.southdownstrust.org.uk/vcf/

Mine's a pint! New tap room opens to visitors



Gilbert White made his name as one of the great pioneers of wildlife watching, but did you know he was also an accomplished brewer?

Gilbert White's Brewhouse, built in Selborne in 1765, was where Gilbert enjoyed experimenting with different brews. Fast forward two centuries and it was officially re-opened as a brewery in 2021, producing a range of bottled beers for sale at the museum.

Now visitors to the area will be able to enjoy a pint fresh from the tap as The Jubilee Tap opened its doors in January, just across the road from the brewhouse.

People will be able try the Gilbert White range of beers and the tavern will also stock other local beers and South Downs produce.

The bar was named the Jubilee Tap Room to honour the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the royal name reflects the venue's recent history, having previously been called the Queen's pub.

The Queens, or Compasses Inn as Gilbert White would have known it in the 18th Century, has always played an important part in village life. In the 1830s it was part of the Selborne Riots, and in Gilbert White's lifetime it was owned and run by White's friend and neighbour Timothy Turner. Just like White, Turner brewed beer at home using hops and other ingredients from the local area.

With the hard work of both Gilbert White's House & Gardens and Derek Warwick Developments, the ground floor of the old Queen's pub has been redeveloped into the Tap Room.

Khalid Aziz, Chairman of Trustees at Gilbert White's, said 'We have partnered with the Queen's developer to help breathe new life into the Queens building. We want to celebrate its heritage in a way that is beneficial and sustainable for the village and to continue the local brewing tradition.'

The brewery is currently run by volunteers from the Selborne area and they help to support the running of the Tap Room, making it a welcoming space for all.

Anooshka Rawden, Cultural Heritage Lead for the National Park, added: "The South Downs has a long history of brewing and the tap room is a wonderful addition to this popular visitor destination in the National Park. There's nothing quite like a beer from the tap in the company of friends and I think people will really enjoy this new venue that's oozing with historic charm!"

COMPETITION! Win a family ticket to museum



Selborne and its stunning surrounding landscape inspired Gilbert White's life-long investigation of the natural world, culminating in his world-famous book *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*.

A forerunner to Charles Darwin, Gilbert wrote of the earthworm:



"Earthworms, though in appearance a small and despicable link in the chain of nature, yet, if lost, would make a lamentable chasm... worms seem to be the great promoters of vegetation, which would proceed but lamely without them."

Today's delightful museum tells Gilbert White's story within the walls of his family home and garden.

The later extensions to the house host The Oates Collections, celebrating Frank Oates, explorer and naturalist, and Lawrence Oates, who was part of the fateful Terra Nova expedition to the South Pole.

The museum also includes a host of educational activities for the whole family to enjoy.

The National Park has teamed up with the venue to offer a family ticket entry to the museum (two adults and up to three children).

People signing up to the newsletter during February will be automatically entered into the draw.

Those who are already signed up can email "earthworm" to newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk before midnight on 28 February.

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



Initiative for children to explore South Downs



An exciting initiative has been launched for schoolchildren to explore the nature, history and culture of the South Downs.

Schools across Hampshire and West Sussex are being invited to take part in "Explorers of the South Downs", which will offer a range of fun activities for young people to connect with the natural world and learn about the National Park.

Children will enjoy an outdoor adventure and learn new skills, such as building a shelter, bushcraft, tree identification, bug hunting, mindfulness activities, environmental art, team building and photography – all focused on the landscape, culture and history of the South Downs.

The project is a partnership between So Sussex, a Sussex-based outdoor education organisation, the South Downs National Park Authority, and Friends of the South Downs, whose generous donation has made the project possible.

The aim is to support schools with a significant number of disadvantaged pupils and/or SEND places (Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities).

Emma Bruce, Youth and Community Engagement Officer for the National Park, said: "It's really exciting to be launching this brand new initiative to help connect young people with nature."



"We recently surveyed over 200 schools in the area and all of them believed outdoor learning was good for mental and physical health, while more than three quarters said it raised attainment in children. With Children's Mental Health Week coming up in February, we couldn't be announcing this initiative at a better time."

"The National Park is an education resource we want schools to use and enjoy. There are so many opportunities to learn in the great outdoors and that's what this scheme is all about – giving young people that connection with the environment that will hopefully last a lifetime."

Any schools interested should contact Caroline at schoolswithoutwalls@sosussex.co.uk or visit www.schoolswithoutwalls.co.uk for more information.

Homes take climate action to next level



A new net-zero-carbon development in the National Park is due to start this year and be completed by spring 2024.

The homes will be built on the site of the former Pells Church of England School in Lewes, providing 32 homes for affordable rent and shared ownership, including four Lewes Low Cost homes.

It comes after the proposals were approved by the National Park Authority.

The school closed permanently in August 2017 and the 0.9 hectare site is now owned by Raven Housing Trust, which is a registered provider of social housing.

As well as being Raven's second completely net-zero-carbon development, the Lewes development will be its first to be built using Modern Methods of Construction – a construction technique that generally delivers high-quality homes at a quicker rate.

Raven's Stephen Clements, assistant director of development, said: "We're thrilled to have exchanged contracts on the Pells development in Lewes.

"The site contributes further to our net-zero ambitions, and will provide a good number of affordable, modern homes in a time when a secure home is more important than ever.

"It's also very exciting to be developing the site using modular, modern methods of construction, impacting less on the local community during the build, and providing affordable, warm homes with lower bills for customers."

Tim Slaney, director of planning at the South Downs National Park Authority, said: "This is a high-quality development providing much-needed affordable housing for local communities within the National Park.



"The development's environmental credentials are significant and these zero-carbon homes dovetail with our priorities of nature recovery and climate action, as well as providing much cheaper energy bills to residents."

They will be built using Homes England funding, as well as Raven's own funds, in addition to £630,000 of funding provided by the National Park Authority. This pot of money comes from developer contributions and is ringfenced specifically to deliver new affordable housing schemes.

South Downs species: the narwhal of insects



Every month our **Biodiversity Officer Jan Knowlson** will be sharing her knowledge of some remarkable species you may see out and about as you explore the South Downs National Park. This month she shines a light on the bee-fly.

Dark-edged bee-fly *Bombylius major*

Habitat...

Woodland, farmland, heathland and calcareous grassland, as well as gardens and parks. You can often see them in good numbers near bare ground at the edge of paths, looking for solitary bee nests. I once got quite absorbed with a large number on the edge of the South Downs Way car park at Bo Peep!



Key features...

Bee-flies look rather like bees but are actually true flies. Its high-pitched hum may catch your attention before you see it. Having pupated over winter, dark-edged bee-flies usually start to appear in March, but people sometimes report sightings as early as mid-February. When they aren't buzzing from flower to flower, these sunseekers will often sunbathe on bare ground or dead leaves.

Often described as a "flying narwhal" because of its very long, straw-like tongue. In total, 10 bee-fly species live in the UK but the dark-edged is the most common. In the South Downs we also get the dotted bee fly *Bombylius discolor*.

Fun fact...

Bee-flies lay their eggs in the underground nests of solitary bees, dusting their eggs in the dirt before "flinging" them into the entrance of the nest. Once hatched the bee-fly larva then predate on the bee larva within!

Likes to eat...

The bee-fly uses its long proboscis to feed on nectar from spring flowers, such as primroses and violets.

Ecological importance...

Like bees, adult bee-flies are great pollinators, helping to maintain the diversity of plants and flowers, which in turn helps to provide food for wildlife and humans.

Conservation status...

Common

When and where to see...

From February to May at one of the woods, heaths, or farmland settings in the National Park.

Be sure to share your images of them @sdpna #SouthDownsNationalPark

Dazzling dark sky over regal ruins wins contest



A hauntingly beautiful photograph of one of Britain's most important Tudor homes on a starry night has won our astrophotography competition.

"Cowdray Cosmos", by Richard Murray, took the top spot in the South Downs National Park's astrophotography competition, which attracted almost 60 entries this year.

The image captures the Milky Way rising over Cowdray Ruins, in Midhurst, West Sussex, which was once a grand Tudor mansion that was visited by Henry VIII, Edward VI and Elizabeth 1. In September 1793, while undergoing repairs and refurbishments for the impending marriage of the 8th Viscount Montague, a devastating fire destroyed most of the property, leaving the ruins that we see today.

Meanwhile, a thought-provoking image called "Toad in the Road", by Peter Brooks, won the "Nature at Night" category of the competition.

The contest was judged by "Dark Skies" Dan Oakley, a Lead Ranger for the National Park, Steve Broadbent, Chair of Hampshire Astronomical Group, and Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority.

The competition celebrates the National Park's status as an International Dark Sky Reserve, which recognises the region as one of the best places globally to stargaze.

Commenting on "Cowdray Cosmos", Dan said: "It's such a well-framed image and shows what the landscape would have been like a couple of centuries ago. It's a great little chocolate box photo of the South Downs. This is right next to Midhurst, so to capture this shot is incredible."

Photographer Richard Murray, from Waterloville, Hampshire, wins a £100 prize. He said: "It demonstrates that you don't have to travel too far from town to enjoy the spectacular dark skies the South Downs National Park has to offer. The National Park has such a wide variety of

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beautiful landscapes and buildings to photograph and is truly a special part of the UK, both by day and night."



Runner-up in the main category, "South Downs Dark Skyscapes", was a stunning shot of the moon rising behind Beachy Head lighthouse, near Eastbourne. "Beachy Head Moonrise" was taken by Andrew Parker, who wins a £75 prize.

Vanessa said: "This is one of my favourite images because it's about being in the right place, at the right time, and has really relied on the human skill of taking a photograph. There's something about capturing a moment that I think is quite lovely."

The judges were wowed by the photography of a toad crossing a road near Cuckmere Haven, in East Sussex.

Dan said: "I like this image because it's a bit different. It sums up the theme of 'nature at night' and really highlights the fragility of nature."

Photographer Peter Brooks, from Eastbourne, picks up a £100 prize. He said: "I took this particular image to

highlight the dangers toads face when migrating back to their breeding ponds, I headed to the spot where I know a great number of toads cross after it had been raining,



"I then spent some time helping toads across the road safely. This is actually a designated toad patrol area."

Taking the runner-up spot for "Nature at Night" was "Reach for the Sky", an image bordering on the supernatural and taken by Carl Gough.

Vanessa said: "It's almost reminds me of 'reverse lightning' with the black forking up into the night sky."

Carl, from Littlehampton, West Sussex, wins a £75 prize. He said: "The most enjoyable thing about the photo is the experience itself."

A number of breathtaking images were highly commended by the judges. They were: "Spring Night at St Hubert's" by Alan Crossland, which shows the "Little Church in the Field" at Idsworth with the arch of the Milky Way; "Celestial Estuary" by Giles Smith, which shows the famous Seven Sisters; and "Hiorne Neowise" by Neale Thibaut, which shows the Comet Neowise hurtling through the night sky above the Hiorne Tower at Arundel.



Time-out with nature!



An innovative scheme to help people's wellbeing by immersing in stunning landscape and history has been launched.

Timescape will encourage people to take "time out" and get involved in nature-based arts and crafts, as well as enjoy walking trails in the tranquil surrounds of the South Downs. The project will be based at Amberley Museum in West Sussex and Butser Ancient Farm, near Waterlooville, in Hampshire (pictured above)

Twelve sessions will take place at each venue and activities will include printing, pottery, carving, weaving and felting – all inspired by the incredible heritage of the locations.

The sessions, which are free, will run at Amberley from February to July and at Butser from July to September.

Kate Drake, Health and Wellbeing Officer for the National Park, said: "We're really excited to launch Timescape for 2023 and offer these two wonderful venues for these wellness sessions.

"We know connecting with National Parks can do wonders for mental and physical health. The growing evidence shows that people who have accessed green spaces report a reduction in stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression and this is certainly reflected in the testimonials we've had from similar projects in the National Park.

"These Timescape sessions are particularly tailored for people who may be experiencing issues such as stress, isolation, loneliness, anxiety or depression, and we hope to hear from people right across the region. These venues are both bursting with history, so it's almost like stepping out of your busy life and being transported to another time when you visit them!"

The project, now in its second year, is part of the National Park's "natural health" strategy. The National Park's first Health and Wellbeing Strategy was published two years ago and include working with GPs, healthcare and community-based providers to deliver more opportunities for "green social prescribing". A GP or social prescriber may refer a patient for non-clinical services that boost health, such as walking or cycling in the South Downs, becoming involved in arts-based activities or surveying wildlife.

Anyone interested in taking part in Timescape can email kate.drake@southdowns.gov.uk

Referrals from healthcare providers and their client groups are also welcome.

Meet the apprentice...



For National Apprenticeship Week in February, we catch up with Gemma North, Assistant Ranger. Gemma successfully completed an apprenticeship before going on to become a fully-fledged ranger.

Can you tell us more about the apprentice role you did at National Park?

I undertook a Ranger Apprenticeship role at the South Downs National Park in September 2019. I had long wanted to become a Ranger and it gave me the opportunity to learn the skills and knowledge needed to make the career switch. I undertook a Work-based Environmental Conservation course at Sparsholt College, whilst also working for the SDNPA full-time as an Apprentice Ranger, getting the much needed on the job training. I was put on many role-specific training courses during my apprenticeship including off-road driving, chainsaw, brushcutter and first aid training. I undertook a lot of practical conservation work, helping to improve and maintain habitats across the South Downs such as chalk grassland, woodland and heathland, as well as undertaking many surveys for varying habitats. I was also given the opportunity to do short work placements with partner organisations including the National Trust, RSPB and Natural England, which gave me a good insight into different ways of working and the difference between reserves management and working for the National Park.

Why did you choose an apprenticeship at the South Downs National Park?

I had been working for the Park for five years in an admin role when I decided to undertake the apprenticeship scheme to career change to become a ranger. I'd discovered after just a couple of months of working at the SDNPA that I wanted to become a ranger through supporting its ranger teams in administrative tasks. The apprenticeship was a very good way for me to get into the field as I was at a stage in my life where I was unable to fund myself through another degree and dedicate enough hours to volunteering to be able to get into a countryside management role that way. The apprenticeship scheme enabled me to follow a dream of mine that I'd discovered five years earlier, and to be able to do it in the landscape where I first discovered my passion for countryside management! I had already developed a love for the habitats that I'd been supporting indirectly, so it made sense in my mind that this is where I wanted to learn the skills of the trade.

What do you think are the benefits of apprenticeships?

I think the biggest benefit of an apprenticeship is to be able to learn on the job. You are literally working the job you are training for, whilst still going through the education side as well. I feel that learning about things you're passionate about is different from actually working in that environment, and so it gives you a good idea if you

Winner of Take The Lead competition



We're delighted to announce that Marc Abraham OBE has picked this fantastic photo of Queen the black lab as the winning image of our Take the Lead photo competition.

The competition ran throughout January and we had scores of entries from across the South Downs.

Natacha Castro snapped this picture of Queen giving a masterclass of taking the lead while out on a walk from Firlie Beacon to Alfriston.

By being on the lead and giving the sheep a wide berth Queen is a shining example of how to be a responsible dog around livestock.

Becka Saunders, who helps to manage the Take The Lead campaign for the National Park, said: "Excellent work Queen and owners! – a hamper full of delicious doggy treats will be on its way to you very soon!"

We have loved seeing so many brilliant photos of your dogs out enjoying the South Downs so we couldn't help but pick a highly commended photo too.

Marc has chosen this stunning shot of two dogs enjoying the sunset at Summer Down, Devil's Dyke.

Congratulations to Kat Erina for capturing this lovely moment.

Becka added: "Thank you to everyone who took the time to enter this photo competition and is out there showcasing responsible dog ownership in the countryside. And a huge thank you to Crowders Aquatics and Pet Supplies and Dicky Bags for providing such brilliant prizes."

If you'd like to find out more about how to be a responsible dog owner visit

www.southdowns.gov.uk/take-the-lead.



really would enjoy the job day-to-day. It is also massively beneficial as you are working with experts in the field on a daily basis and so learn above and beyond what you could pick up in a classroom. For me personally, it was the only way I could afford to career change as well. It sounds cliché, but it has completely changed my life. I now do a job that I love and that I actively look forward to going to!

What were the challenges?

I will admit that I started an apprenticeship scheme a little later in life than you might normally – I was 33 at the time – and so going back to education and having to do homework and the like again was a challenge! I also quickly learnt that my physical fitness wasn't as up to scratch as I'd have liked and for the first three weeks I was coming home exhausted and falling asleep on the sofa after dinner! My body got used to it in no time though, and now I can't imagine going back to a desk job!

What was the highlight of your time in the National Park as an apprentice?

Honestly everything was amazing. Getting to learn new skills and knowledge, having a different "office" every day in the most beautiful landscapes, learning from some of the most knowledgeable people I've ever met – it was all incredible. The one thing that I loved the most though was the friendships I made with my two fellow apprentice rangers!

How did being an apprentice help you in your current job role?

I was incredibly fortunate to be able to apply for and successfully



get a role as an Assistant Ranger within the National Park at the end of my apprenticeship. The timing couldn't have fallen better for me as a couple of vacancies for Assistant Rangers came up at the right time. My role was in a different team than the one I had done my apprenticeship with, which I think has been massively beneficial as I have learnt different ways of working and have worked predominantly on heathland sites as an Assistant Ranger, whereas I was on chalk grassland mainly as an apprentice. I definitely would not have had the skills or knowledge to be able to do the role of as Assistant Ranger without undertaking the apprenticeship, so it has been invaluable.

What are your future aspirations?

I hope to progress in the future from an Assistant Ranger to a Ranger role, whether that is in the National Park or another organisation. I am still learning every day as an Assistant and developing the skills I need to become a Ranger. Since working as an Assistant Ranger, I have discovered a love and passion for heathland habitats, so would particularly like to progress in that direction if possible.

Things to do in the South Downs this February

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/



- Let the children get creative and share the love this Valentine's day in a crafts day at [Queen Elizabeth Country Park](#) on 13 February from 10.30am to 3pm. Each child will get the opportunity to make their own clay keepsake valentines decoration to either keep themselves or to share with another.
- An outstanding play inspired by the love letters of Russian playwright Anton Chekhov comes to Petersfield. Professional theatre company LynchpPin stages I Take Your Hand in Mine, by Carol Rocamora, at [Petersfield Museum](#) and Art Gallery on 15 February.
- Explore the skies with [Eastbourne Astronomical Society](#) on 25 February using telescopes to explore the craters on the moon. The Beachy Head Story Exhibition and Shop will also be open.
- Learn more about the [coastline around Beachy Head](#), Belle Tout, and Birling Gap in a new exhibition running from 25 February to 26 March. Using a range of media, the ceramicist Julie Snowball, with ceramicist and glass artist Dr Anthony McIntosh, aim to explore and interpret this monumental landscape.
- Why not enjoy a bus adventure in the National Park? Bus fares are capped at £2 by most bus companies until the end of March 2023 as part of a [special offer](#) funded by the Department for Transport.
- Head to The Pallant House Gallery in Chichester for an amazing exhibition [Sussex Landscape: Chalk, Wood and Water](#).

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. For a fast and direct response to your questions please email info@southdowns.gov.uk

Pic credits

P3 bottom right – Sam Moore; P6 bee-fly Elinor Newman.